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ANALYSIS OF THE WORK OF THE COUNCIL FOR COOPERATION BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND CIVIL SOCIETY IN 2022



Analysis of the Work of the Council for Cooperation between the Government and Civil Society in 2022

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Introduction

One of the priorities of the Civic Resource Center (CRC) and the Macedonian Center for International Cooperation (MCIC) is the creation of an enabling environment for civil society development. The models for cooperation between the Government and civil society organisations (CSOs) contribute to the improvement of the environment in which civil society operates. Taking into account the experience of the countries in the region, MCIC advocated for the establishment of a Council for cooperation of the Government with civil society, by promoting the idea of the need for and the importance of an active intersectoral platform that will discuss and affirm the key needs for the civil society development and will contribute to the establishment of an enabling environment for its operation.

The Council for Cooperation between the Government and Civil Society, established in 2018, is an advisory body to the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia for the promotion of cooperation, dialogue and civil society development. This body represents the highest form of participation, when CSOs' representatives jointly work with government representatives on certain issues of interest to civil society. The purpose of the Council is to influence the trust between civil society and the state and to lead and initiate changes and an enabling environment for civil society organisations.

The analysis provides a brief overview from the beginnings of the idea to create the Council, the establishment of the Council and its functioning until the end of 2022. Special focus is placed and detailed elaboration of its functioning in 2022 and the implementation of the Council Work Program for 2022. Despite the significant role of the Council in the civil society development, due to the reduced cooperation of the Government with CSOs and the Government adoption of decisions that undermined the Council and its function, the members of the Council coming from CSOs started boycotting the work of this body in March 2022. It is particularly important for CSOs and other stakeholders to become more familiar with the boycott of the work of the Council by CSOs' representatives which began in March and continued in 2023, therefore the analysis tries to give a detailed chronological overview of the boycott but also the effects it has.

The intention of this publication is to contribute to the improvement of the work of the Council, as the highest body of a mixed composition with a mandate to initiate and discuss policies important for the entire civil society. Considering that ensuring effective work of the Council is an important task, we hope that the highlighted good practices in the work of the Council so far, as well as the perceived shortcomings, will provide guidelines for its improved functioning.

The analysis is intended for all stakeholders from the civil society sector, primarily for the Council members, but also for all other CSOs as well as the Government. More broadly, the analysis is important for encouraging the interest and the trust of the civil society in the Council work, as well as increasing their proactivity to engage with initiatives and proposals.

This analysis should also be an incentive for fulfilling the commitment of the Government and the state institutions for civil society development specified in the current Government Strategy for cooperation with and development of the civil society 2022-2024, for ensuring the continuous operation of an independent, representative, operational and effective Council for cooperation between the Government and civil society.

1. The Road to Council Establishment 2014 - 2017

The country committed to cooperation with and development of the civil society through four strategic documents starting in 2007. Within the framework of the first Strategy for cooperation of the Government with the civil society sector 2007-2011 (hereinafter referred to as the Strategy), the need for establishing a Council as a mechanism for cooperation was not explicitly mentioned¹. However, a certain direction was given, that the Government will aim at ensuring a specific institutional commitment to nurture comprehensive and better relations between the state and civil society.

In the second Strategy for cooperation of the Government with the civil society sector (2012-2017), the need to establish an advisory body for the promotion of cooperation, dialogue and civil society development was explicitly emphasized². In the Strategy, the Government recognizes the need to involve the civil society more actively in defining policies and to contribute to a continuous and open debate on the needs for civil society development. For this purpose, the Government has foreseen strengthened institutional cooperation and increased participation of CSOs in defining priorities for cooperation and development, through an advisory body. The body was supposed to be established in cooperation and consultation with CSOs, thus, a series of activities were foreseen, starting from consultations and preparations for the Council based on good practices, up to the development of internal acts. In 2013, with financial support from the EU through the Technical Support for Civil Society Organisations (TACSO) project, the first comparative analysis of the existing advisory mechanisms was prepared and contained a proposal for a Council model, and the proposal was discussed at a two-day discussion with 85 participants³.

In accordance with the Strategy measures and activities, the Government made the first step in 2014, with the preparation of a proposal for the establishment of a Council for the promotion of cooperation, dialogue and civil society development. A call for consultations with the CSOs was published for the draft text at the end of November 2014.

After the consultations, the initial text of the draft decision was amended in January 2015, and it contained problematic provisions that make it impossible to establish a council that is in accordance with the principles of representativeness and legitimacy. In the new proposed decision, it was foreseen that a special commission formed by the Government would carry out a procedure for selecting the council members from the CSOs, instead of this being done publicly and by the organisations. In addition, a majority of representatives from state administration bodies, as opposed to CSOs' representatives, was foreseen. Finally, despite the fact that the president of the council, according to good practices, should be a representative of the civil society, the new provisions stipulated that he/she should be elected by the General Secretariat (GS) of the Government.

75 CSOs reacted to these changes to the initial text of the proposed decision with specific requests and proposals and the adoption procedure was "frozen" for a period of one year.

¹ Strategy for Cooperation of the Government with the Civil Sector 2007-2011, Government of the Republic of Macedonia, available at: https://www.nvosorabotka.gov.mk/sites/default/files/Strategija_za_sorabotka_na_Vladata.pdf (accessed May 15, 2023)

² Strategy for Cooperation of the Government with the Civil Sector: 2012-2017, Government of the Republic of Macedonia, available at: https://www.nvosorabotka.gov.mk/sites/default/files/dokumenti/strategija_2012-2017.pdf (accessed May 15, 2023)

³ Two-day conference was organised in June 2013 within the EU funded project Technical Assistance to Civil Society Organisations (TACSO).

In 2016, the process of establishing the Council was reopened. The General Secretariat of the Government presented the draft text of the Decision on the establishment of a Council for cooperation with and development of the civil society sector (hereinafter the Decision) to the CSO⁴. After only two working days after the amended text of the Decision was presented, it was adopted at a regular session of the Government on 17th May 2016⁵. Consequently, the Government did not allow CSOs to submit comments and opinions. This situation led to the joint reaction of a group of 93 CSOs.

A total of 93 organisations sent an official letter to the Government expressing concerns about the functionality and work of the Council for several reasons:

- absence of quality consultations;
- majority of members being from state administration bodies;
- adoption of the Decision at the height of the political crisis and with a technical government;
- short term and imprecise technical details for the selection of candidates without a process monitoring mechanism.

There was no feedback from the Government to the CSOs' reactions and on 23rd May 2016 the General Assembly of the Government announced a public call for the election of 13 members from associations and foundations for the Council for Cooperation of the Government with the civil society sector. The results in almost all areas in which CSOs' representatives were elected to the Council were problematic, because the profile of the selected candidates, as well as the portfolio of their organisations, was not appropriate for the given areas (civil society development, culture, etc.). Furthermore, the selected candidates were supported mainly by organisations with which they closely cooperate in the same field, despite the fact that they do not have experience and contribution in the specific field (for example, in the field of civil society development the candidate with the most votes was the president of the Kayaking Federation of Macedonia, supported by the votes of other sports federations, such as: karate, boxing, badminton, etc. However, the selected candidates were never officially confirmed by the Government, and thus the Council was not officially established until the end of 2016.

Part of the CSOs that previously made a public reaction to stop the process for electing civil society representatives in the Council organized a consultative meeting where the content of the decision was discussed, and the various opinions and attitudes were harmonized to establish a functional Council.

The key changes proposed were:

- increasing the number of members from CSOs;
- raising the level in the administrative hierarchy of representatives from state administration bodies;
- increasing transparency and accountability during the selection of CSO's representatives;
- comprehensiveness of the areas from which CSOs' members come.

The establishment of the Cooperation Council was reaffirmed after a longer standstill, i.e. in July 2017, when the Unit for cooperation with NGOs under the General Secretariate organised a meeting with CSOs that followed the process of establishing the Council and continuously offered changes and additions to individual decisions from the existing decision to establish the Council. After the meeting, the Unit was tasked with conducting an electronic consultation process for the final text of the Decision for establishing a council. The joint efforts of the civil society sector resulted in the

acceptance of most of their proposals in the final text of the decision.

⁴ Source: <https://www.nvosorabotka.gov.mk/?q=mk/node/63>

⁵ Decision on the establishment of a Council for Cooperation between the Government of the Republic of Macedonia and the civil sector, Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia no. 98/16, available at: <https://www.nvosorabotka.gov.mk/sites/default/files/dokumenti/odlukaSovet982016.pdf> (accessed May 15, 2023)

Based on Article 6 of the Decision, the Unit announced in December a public call for the selection of 16 members of the Council from associations and foundations. The process of selecting members from the civil society sector started on 21st December 2017. Within the set deadline, applications from 52 candidates were received. However, out of them, only 32 organisations had proposed candidates with complete documentation and met the organisational and individual criteria. The process of selection of CSOs' representatives was assessed as transparent and accountable.

Two CSOs' representatives attended the opening of the received documents and the counting of votes. Namely, the Unit approached the representatives of civil society organisations from the informal initiative consisting of over 89 organisations and from the IPA mechanism, who were actively involved in providing comments and solutions during the long period of the Council establishment.

The Council for Cooperation between the Government and Civil Society (original name Council for Cooperation with and Development of the Civil Society Sector) was established by Decision of the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia on 13th April 2018⁶, based on Article 3 of the Decision on the Establishment of a Council for Cooperation with and Development of the Civil Society Sector⁷.

2. Basic Characteristics and Competences of the Council

The Council for Cooperation between the Government and Civil Society is an advisory body to the Government for the promotion of cooperation, dialogue and civil society development in the country. The Council is composed of a total of 31 members who are appointed by the Government and have a mandate of 3 years. Fifteen of them are employees of the state administration bodies and 16 members are proposed by the organisations registered according to the Law on Associations and Foundations (LAF). The basic document that defines the work of the Council is the Decision on establishing a Council for Cooperation between the Government and Civil Society⁸.

The tasks that the Council is required to perform are defined in Article 2 of the Decision, namely:

1. Monitors and analyses public policy that affects the environment in which civil society develops.
2. Proposes initiatives for adopting new or amending the existing regulations to improve the legal and institutional framework for the operation of organisations;
3. Gives an opinion on proposals for laws, strategies, programs and other legal acts that relate to or affect the development and the functioning of civil society in the following areas: civil society development, democracy and the rule of law, promotion and protection of human rights and anti-discrimination, economic and sustainable development, science, education and lifelong learning, youth, social protection and child protection, protection of marginalized persons, gender equality, health protection, environmental protection, sports and EU integrations and policies;
4. Implements awareness-raising activities to promote a culture of cooperation and partnership by establishing a structural dialogue of civil society with the Government;

⁶ Decision on the appointment of members of the Council for cooperation with and development of the civil society sector, "Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia" No. 66/18

⁷ Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia" no. 98/16, 164/17 and "Official Gazette of RNM" no. 97/19, 116/21.

⁸ Decision on the establishment of the Council for cooperation with and development of the civil society sector, Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia no. 98/16, 164/17, Official Gazette of RNM no. 97/19, 116/21, available at: <https://www.nvosorabotka.gov.mk/sites/default/files/%D0%9Edlukata%20za%20Sovetot%20-%20precisten%20tekst%202019.pdf> (accessed on May 15, 2023)

5. Participates in the preparation and monitors the implementation of the Strategy for cooperation of the Government with the civil society and the Action Plan for the Strategy implementation, by reviewing quarterly reports on the progress of the Strategy implementation;
6. Gives an opinion on an annual level for the implementation of the Strategy for the cooperation of the Government with the civil society, after receiving reports/analyses/evaluations from the General Secretariat - organisational unit for cooperation with the NGOs;
7. Participates in monitoring and analysing the organisations' involvement in the policy creation process in the following areas: civil society development, democracy and rule of law, promotion and protection of human rights and anti-discrimination, economic and sustainable development, science, education and lifelong learning, youth, social protection and child protection, protection of marginalized persons, gender equality, health protection, environmental protection, sports and EU integrations and policies, through the submitted reports on consultations carried out by the state administration bodies and gives recommendations for its promotion;
8. Implements the procedures for nominating and selecting CSOs' representatives in working groups for development of public policies, commissions, committees, advisory bodies and other forms of participation at the request of the Government and state administration bodies or at organisations' request and initiative;
9. Makes proposals in the planning of the areas and specific priorities for financing the activities of the organisations from the Budget of the Republic of North Macedonia, based on sector analysis done by the competent state administration bodies;
10. Reviews the annual reports of the Government and the state administration bodies on the funded programs and projects of the organisations and makes recommendations;
11. Considers proposals submitted by organisations and takes positions on issues related to the enabling environment for organisations;
12. Adopts an annual work plan;
13. Adopts an annual report on its work for the previous year that is published on the website of the General Secretariat-organisational unit for cooperation with the NGOs and submits it to the Government and the public for information.

The administrative and technical work of the Council is carried out by the Unit for Cooperation with Non-Governmental Organisations of the General Secretariat of the Government. The agenda, materials for individual items of the agenda and the minutes of the sessions are regularly published on www.nvosorabotka.gov.mk in the Council section.

3. Overview of the functioning of the Council until 2022

The Council held its constituent session on 16th April 2018. During the first term, i.e., from April 2018 to June 2021, the Council had an intense and dynamic period of holding sessions, with a total of 32 sessions or about 10 sessions per year. During this period, the Council reviewed 63 materials, of which 38 were proposed and/or prepared by the Unit for Cooperation with Non-Governmental Organisations under the General Secretariat of the Government, five were proposed by a member of the state administration bodies and 20 were proposed by members from the organisations⁹. In the first mandate, the Council

⁹ Report on the work of the Council for Cooperation with and Development of the Civil Society Sector for the period April 2018 - June 2021, available at: https://www.nvosorabotka.gov.mk/sites/default/files/Dopolnet%20Izvestaj%20Sovet%202018-2021_0.pdf (accessed May 15, 2023)

established five working groups that worked on the drafting of the Rules of Procedure of the Council; a proposal for amending and supplementing the Decision on the establishment of the Council; Council's communication plan; Proposal-model for the inclusion of civil society organisations in the EU negotiation process; Identifying proposed priorities for financial support of CSOs from the Budget of the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia in 2020, methodology and criteria for the distribution of funds.

One of the competences assumed by the Council, although at that time it was not regulated by the Decision on the Council establishment, was the nomination of representatives of the civil society sector in advisory and working bodies. With the Rules of Procedure for amending the Rules of Procedure of the Council for Cooperation with and Development of the Civil Society Sector No. 38-22/1 of 4th July 2019, the procedure for nominating representatives of the civil society sector in advisory and working bodies is regulated. During the first mandate, the Council nominated 53 CSOs' representatives in 16 advisory and working bodies.

In March 2021, the General Secretariat of the Government announced a public call for the selection of 16 members of the Council for Cooperation with and Development of the Civil Society Sector from civil society organisations. Applications from 26 candidates were received at the call before the deadline, of which four candidates did not submit complete documentation and were not eligible. The number of votes received for the registered candidates varied from no votes received to 21 votes for one candidate. Due to no candidates or no votes received, the open call for selection of Council members from

Low interest among civil society organisations for nominating candidates for Council members as well as for voting for the registered candidates. The open call for selection of members was re-announced three times (the first time for five areas, the second time for two areas and the last time for one area). Two candidates were elected to be Council members with only one vote each from CSOs. In the field of environment even on the third open call, there was only one candidate who did not receive a single vote for support.

associations and foundations was repeated in May for five thematic areas (agriculture and rural development; media and information society; environmental protection; sports; and EU integrations and policies). The open call for selection of Council members from civil society organisations in the area of environment and EU integration and policies was announced for the third time in July. The second mandate of the Council began with work without a member from CSOs in the area of the environment and for this area there was a new call (fourth) for selection of a member in November 2021.

The inaugural session of the second composition of the Council took place on 15th September 2021. By the end of that year, this Council composition had conducted three sessions.

4. The work of the Council in 2022

4.1 Structure of the analysis

The analysis of the work of the Council for Cooperation between the Government and Civil Society refers to the period January - December 2022. The work of the Council in 2022 is based on the Work Program of the Council for Cooperation between the Government and Civil Society for 2022¹⁰, which was adopted by the Council members at the third Council session held on 26.12.2021. The analysis considers the functioning and work of the Council, according to the main acts, i.e. the Decision, the Rules of Procedure and the Work Program for 2022 that regulate its existence and operation.

¹⁰ Work program of the Council for Cooperation between the Government and Civil Society for 2022, available at: <https://www.nvosorabotka.gov.mk/sites/default/files/Donesena%20Programa%20Sovet%202022.pdf> (accessed May 15, 2023)

The data for the analysis of the work of the Council are based primarily on the available minutes and materials published on the website of the Unit for Cooperation with NGOs from the Council sessions as well as the activities carried out by the Council. Furthermore, other materials were collected through desk research from available analyses, such as the Report on the Enabling Environment for Civil Society Development 2022, within which an online questionnaire for monitoring the enabling environment for 2022 was implemented, to which 218 organisations responded. Interviews were conducted with representative from the Council and the Unit for Cooperation with NGOs at the General Secretariat of the Government. For easier organisation and better analysis of the data on the Council operation in 2022, it is reported according to the table that is part of the Council Work Program for 2022.

4.2 General overview

In 2022, the Council held four sessions with a total of 13 items on the agenda and reviewed nine materials, of which four materials were proposed by Council members from CSOs, one was proposed by a member from state administration bodies and four materials were proposed by the General Secretariat of the Government – Unit for Cooperation with NGOs.

Based on the agenda items of the Council sessions, a notable focus has been directed towards the promotion of state funding for CSOs (5 items on the agenda). Namely, this topic stood as the primary catalyst behind the decision of the Council members from CSOs to initiate a boycott of the Council operation in March 2022.

Furthermore, attention was paid to issues related to the Council operation, through the adoption of the annual report on the Council work, development of the Communication Strategy and the Communication Plan of the Council.

On the fifth session (17.03.2022), the Council members representing the CSOs started a boycott of the work of the Council until the Government makes a decision on the Proposed Program for financing the program activities of associations and foundations for 2022. The Council sent several requests to Government officials at the highest level but without success. Until the end of 2022, the members of the Council from CSOs remained in boycott even though they held two meetings (Thematic meeting in April scheduled prior the decision to boycott and urgent session about the Decision on the criteria and the method of distribution and use of funds for financing the program activities of associations and foundations from the Budget).

It should be pointed out that in 2022 several issues and challenges in the operation of civil society organisations were raised at the Council sessions and efforts were made to resolve them, but unfortunately the efforts were not very successful. So, at a Council session, the problems that organisations have when registering real owner and the information about attacks and delegitimization of CSOs were discussed.

4.3 Implementation of the Work Program of the Council for Cooperation between the Government and Civil Society for 2022

The work program of the Council, adopted by the Council members at the third Council session held on 26.12.2021 is the first work program of the Council and is a good basis for improving the effectiveness and transparency of the Council work. The program contains three overall objectives and six specific objectives with a total of 20 expected results. Out of these expected results, three (15%) were achieved in 2022, three (15%) were partially achieved, and the remaining 14 results (70%) were not achieved.

The majority of executed activities were initially scheduled for the first quarter of the year, signifying that the Council adhered to its Work Program. However, the boycott of the Council operation, which commenced in March 2022, significantly contributed to the limited progress achieved in terms of implementing the Council Work Program.

Overall objective 1: Efficient and effective impact on government and sectoral policies related to the environment in which civil society develops.

The largest number of implemented or partially implemented activities are for the first overall objective.

According to the minutes, in 2022 the Council did not hold a single session where the implementation of the Strategy for Cooperation with and Development of Civil Society 2022-2024 was discussed, although according to the Work Program the issue should have been reviewed quarterly and the members should have made recommendations for greater efficiency and effectiveness in implementing the goals and activities from the Strategy and the Action Plan. The Unit for Cooperation with NGOs electronically sent to the Council members the reports on the implementation of the Action Plan of the Strategy for the first and second quarters of 2022 and asked for an opinion on the Draft Report on the progress in the implementation of the Action Plan for the implementation of the Strategy of the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia for cooperation with and development of civil society 2022-2024 and achieving the strategic and operational goals in 2022.

Although the working group for amending the Law on Associations and Foundations was active in 2022, in April the Unit had a call to CSOs to contribute to the drafting of amendments to the Law, at the end of the year there were online consultations on the Law, and in November the Assembly voted to amend the Law at the proposal of a group of MPs, however, according to the minutes of the Council sessions, the item on the status of the consultation process for changes to the Law was not on the agenda of any of the four sessions in 2022, and it was not even mentioned under other issues. Of course, it is taken into account that the Council is on boycott since March 2022.

During the first two sessions of the Council (before the start of the boycott), several issues related to the enabling environment for civil society, initiated by other CSOs, were on the agenda. The fourth session discussed the Information on attempts to delegitimize the civil society sector and the harmfulness of hate speech and violence on civil society and human rights activities. The information was adopted by the Council and forwarded by the Unit to the Government and was reviewed at the 34th session of the Government (held on March 29, 2022). During the fourth and fifth Council sessions it was discussed about the problem faced by a number of CSOs that did not register the final owner in the Central Registry within the deadline. Several members of the Council held meetings with the relevant state institutions and made efforts to resolve the issue.

At the sixth thematic session of the Council, the Information on the situation regarding the provision of social and health care by CSOs was discussed. According to the conclusions of this session, the Unit submitted the Information to the Government, and it was reviewed at the 55th Government session (held on 28.06.2022).

Overall Objective 2: Strengthening the partnership in the processes related to the European integration

Within this objective, the Program emphasizes the inclusion of CSOs in the EU accession negotiation process. Although the Work Program foresees the activities to start in March, according to the minutes, the Council did not implement activities to achieve this objective in 2022. In September 2022 the Government passed a Decision to establish a structure for negotiations for the accession of the Republic of North Macedonia to the European Union¹¹, and the Secretariat for European Affairs in

¹¹ "Official Gazette of RNM" No. 200/22

November announced a public call for registration of all interested CSOs for consultations on the accession negotiations process of the Republic of North Macedonia to the European Union.

Overall Objective 3: Improving the financial sustainability of civil society organisations

Most of the discussions at the Council sessions in 2022 centred around achieving the first result of this overall objective. The non-adoption by the Government of the Proposed Program for financing the program activities of the associations and foundations for 2022 of the General Secretariat of the Government was the main reason for the members of the Council from CSOs to decide to boycott the work of the Council. However, focusing on the achievement of this result led to stagnation in the achievement of the rest of the results of this overall objective, primarily the reform of the state funding of CSOs. The working group for the reform of the system of state funding for CSOs, established with a Decision of the General Secretariat of the Government at Council initiative, held several meetings in 2022. This working group submitted to the Ministry of Justice, for the Law on Associations and Foundations, draft provisions on State Support of Organisations and on the Fund for Support and Development of Civil Society.

Table 1: Level of achievement of the objectives of the Annual Work Program of the Council

Result	Topic/Question to be considered at Session	Number of Sessions	Time Frame	Achievement status
Overall objective: Efficient and effective impact on government and sectoral policies related to the environment in which civil society develops				
Specific objective: Ensuring efficient and effective monitoring of the implementation of the Government Strategy for Cooperation with and Development of Civil Society and the Action Plan 2022-2024				
Conclusions and recommendations for greater efficiency and effectiveness in implementing the goals and activities of the Strategy and Action Plan	Quarterly report on the implementation of the Government Strategy for cooperation with and development of civil society, with Action Plan 2022-2024 (General Secretariat, organisational unit for cooperation with CSOs)	3	May, August, November	Not achieved (The Unit prepared and submitted electronically to the Council members reports for the first and second quarter of 2022, which have not been discussed by the Council)
Specific objective: Normative and institutional improvements of the environment in which civil society develops				

Opinion/recommendations on the improvement of the legal framework for associations and foundations and on the quality of consultations with civil society organisations on the proposed amendments to the legislation	Status of the consultation process on the amendments to the Law on Associations and Foundations (Ministry of Justice)	1	March	Not achieved
	Draft Law on Amendments to the Law on Associations and Foundations (including a discussion of the provisions for organisations with the status of public benefit and related tax reliefs) (Ministry of Justice)	1	June/September	
Conclusions and recommendations for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the work of the Council for Cooperation between the Government and Civil Society	Report on the work of the Council for Cooperation between the Government and Civil Society for 2021 (General Secretariat organisational unit for cooperation with civil society organisations)	1	February	Achieved (The report was discussed and adopted at the fourth session on 10 th February 2022)
	Proposal-program for the work of the Council for Cooperation between the Government and Civil Society for 2023 (General Secretariat-organisational unit for cooperation with civil society organisations)	1	December	Not achieved
Conclusions/recommendations for funding civil society organisations providing social and health services	Information about the status of the legal framework and practices of financing civil society organisations that provide social and health services	1	April	Achieved (Thematic session held on 06.04.2022)
Conclusions and recommendations on issues related to the enabling environment for civil society	Discussion on proposals of civil society organisations on issues related to the enabling environment for civil society		if needed	Achieved (10.02.2022) (17.03.2022)
Specific objective: Increased participation of civil society organisations in the process of creation and monitoring of public policies				
Adopted Council Communication Plan	Proposal-plan for the communication of the Council, with a plan for consultation with civil society organisations (working group of the Council)	1	January	Partially achieved (17.03.2022) (Within EU project, a Communication Plan for the Council was drafted, but it was not adopted by the members)

Conclusions and recommendations for the advancement of the consultation process and the participation of civil society organisations in the policy creation	Report on the consultation process during the preparation of draft laws, use of ENER and other mechanisms for cooperation with civil society organisations in 2021 (Ministry of Information Society and Administration, General Secretariat, organisational unit for cooperation with civil society organisations)	1	April	Not achieved (The Unit prepared an annual report that has not been discussed by the Council. The report was reviewed by the Government on 18.10.2022.)
Opinion/recommendations on the by-law for the participation of civil society organisations in the policy-making process	Draft by-law for the participation of civil society organisations in the policy-making process, which also contains provisions for the inclusion and selection of civil society organisations in working groups (General Secretariat-organisational unit for cooperation with civil society organisations)	1	September	Not achieved
Nominating civil society representatives in advisory bodies	Public call and table with registered candidates for participation in advisory and working bodies of the Government and state administration bodies (General Secretariat-organisational unit for cooperation with civil society organisations)		if needed	Partially achieved (Two persons have been nominated for a working group at the Ministry of Political System)
Overall objective: Strengthening the partnership in the processes related to the European integration				
Specific objective: Involvement of civil society organisations in the process of accession negotiations with the European Union				
Adopted recommendations for the general structure, openness and inclusiveness in the accession negotiation process with the EU	Proposal of a new structure for accession negotiations with the European Union (Secretariat for European Affairs)	1	March	Not achieved (On 5 th September 2022, the Government passed a Decision on the establishment of a structure for negotiations for the country's accession to the EU, which was not discussed at the Council)
An adopted model for the participation of civil society in the EU accession negotiation process	Proposal-model for the participation of civil society in the EU accession negotiation process (Council working group)	1	June	Not achieved
Adopted recommendations for the proposed rules of procedure and the quality of participation of civil society organisations in the Sectoral Working Groups	Proposed rules of procedure for the work of the Sectoral Working Groups (IPA 2014-2020) (Secretariat for European Affairs)	1	March	Not achieved

Organised consultative meeting (thematic session)	Consultative meeting with the donor community (EU and other donors) for coordinated support of the enabling environment for civil society	1	March	Not achieved
Overall objective: Improving the financial sustainability of civil society organisations				
Specific objective: Improvement of the system of state funding for civil society organisations				
Adopted recommendations for improving the quality of the program, the open call and other documents related to the planning of funds from the Budget of the Republic of North Macedonia for 2022 intended for financing the program activities of associations and foundations	Open call for financial support of associations and foundations for 2022 (with application form and project proposal) (General Secretariat-organisational unit for cooperation with civil society organisations) Proposal-program and Open call for financial support of associations and foundations for 2022 (Ministry of Political System and Inter-Community Relations)	1	January	Partially achieved (activities implemented to achieve this result)
Conclusions and recommendations for timely and quality monitoring and reporting on the implementation of funded programs and projects of civil society organisations	Report on the implementation of the Program for financing the program activities of associations and foundations for 2021 (General Secretariat-organisational unit for cooperation with civil society organisations)	1	April	Not achieved (On June 20, 2022, the Unit electronically submitted the Draft Report to the Council members for their opinion. The report was reviewed by the Government at the 72nd session held on 23 rd August 2022.)
Conclusions and recommendations on the quality of reporting on the overall public funding of civil society organisations in 2021 and recommendations for the reform of the state funding system for civil society organisations	Report on the financing of program activities of associations and foundations by the Government, state administration bodies and local self-government units in 2021 (General Secretariat-organisational unit for cooperation with civil society organisations)	1	May	Not achieved
Opinion/recommendations on the concept of reform of the state funding system for civil society organisations	Concept proposal for the reform of the state funding system for civil society organisations (with identified laws and by-laws to be adopted) (Working group of representatives of competent institutions and civil society organisations)	1	October	Not achieved (The working group for the reform of the state funding system for CSOs has prepared a proposal for provisions to change the Law on Associations and

				Foundations with two headings: State support to organisations and Fund for support and development of civil society)
Conclusions and recommendations on the specific priorities for financing activities of civil society organisations from the Budget of the Republic of North Macedonia for 2023 year	Proposal-program for financing the program activities of associations and foundations for 2023 (General Secretariat-organisational unit for cooperation with civil society organisations)	1	December	Not achieved (No funds are foreseen in the Budget of the General Secretariat for 2023.)
Specific objective: Adoption of the legal framework for facilitating donations to civil society organisations				
Opinion/recommendations for improving the legal framework for donations and sponsorships in public activities	Draft Law on Amendments and Supplements to the Law on Donations and Sponsorships in Public Activities (Ministry of Justice)	1	June/September	Not achieved

4.4. Content of the Minutes from the Council Sessions

In the Rules of Procedure of the Council, Article 25, paragraphs 1 to 5 determine the manner of keeping the minutes and what they should contain, as well as the rights of the Council members. Namely, the Unit prepares the minutes from each session, covering the statements of the Council members. The minutes should contain name of the chairperson, names of present and absent members, agenda, statement for adoption i.e. amendment of the minutes of the previous session and conclusions for each item of the agenda, reasons for postponed items of the agenda by stating the proposer, time and place of holding the session and other issues related to that Council session.

The Unit fulfils its obligation to keep the minutes in a manner prescribed by the regulations. They prepare appropriate minutes from each session, which contain the statements of the Council members and follows the content and the elements provided for in it. Regarding the duration of the sessions, out of the four sessions, only the minutes for the seventh session contain the end time of the session, while the minutes for the previous three sessions do not contain that information. The minutes together with other accompanying materials are regularly published on the website of the Unit.

On the Unit website, in the Nominations section¹², it is stated that at the fourth session of the Council, two representatives from the Council were appointed to participate in the working group for the preparation of the Proposal-Program for financing program activities of associations and foundations for 2022, however, this information is not part of the minutes of the fourth session of the Council, and in the minutes of the fifth session of the Council, these two members are requested to report on their participation in the working group. The Unit informed that the nomination was made online by the members, however this should be included as information in the minutes of the next Council meeting in order to have better transparency of the whole process.

¹² <https://www.nvosorabotka.gov.mk/?q=mk/node/99>

During each Council session, the conclusions per agenda item contain various assigned responsibilities, mostly for the Unit. During the four Council sessions, a total of 12 responsibilities were assigned to the Unit for Cooperation with Non-Governmental Organisations under the 13 items on the agenda. According to the available information, all these duties were carried out by the Unit. There was one responsibility assigned to several members of the Council from the state administration bodies and two tasks for the members from CSOs. It is not possible to see from the minutes whether the members from the state administration bodies have fulfilled their responsibilities. Also, at the fifth Council session, the Council members were required to submit written comments on the communication strategy and the communication plan of the Council, but due to the start of the boycott, it cannot be determined whether this obligation was fully fulfilled by the Council members.

Within the minutes of the Council sessions, information is available about the way of implementing the provisions in the Rules of Procedure related to proposing the agenda and preparation of materials. Thus, at the fourth session (10th February 2022) it was stated that the Network of Civil Society Organisations for Protection against Discrimination provided information about attempts to delegitimize the civil society sector and the harmfulness of hate speech and violence against CSOs and human rights activities. The minutes of the same session contain details on the way of organising and coordinating with other relevant stakeholders (associations that are providers of social services, relevant ministries) for organising the thematic session of the Council.

4.5. Attendance at Council sessions

The Council members have the right to attend a Council session and to be invited properly and in a timely manner. For their possible absence, it is necessary to inform the President of the Council in a timely manner and to determine a person who will attend the session on their behalf, without the right to vote. Of course, the member can submit his/her opinion and proposals for materials to the president in writing, before the beginning of the session¹³.

In 2022, the presence of the member at Council sessions was not an issue. Percentage wise, 32% of the members participated in all four sessions, 42% participated in three sessions, 10% participated in two sessions, 13% participated in one session and 3% did not participate in any session. Regarding the members from civil society organisations, six members participated in all four Council sessions, six members in three sessions, two members in two sessions and two members in only one session. The members from civil society organisations did not assign a substitute for participation in the Council sessions. There was a lower attendance of the Council members from the state administration bodies, i.e. four members participated in the four sessions (of which one sent a replacement for one session), seven members participated in three sessions and one member did not participate in any session in 2022. Members of the state administration bodies rarely sent replacements, i.e. only in one of the four sessions did they send one replacement. Annex 1 contains the detailed table with the attendance of the Council members in 2022.

4.6 Involvement of External Persons in the Work and in the Council Sessions

External persons who are experts in certain areas may take part in the work of the Council at the proposal of the president or a Council member, for the purpose of giving opinions on the issues that are on the agenda of the session¹⁴.

A total of 10 different external persons attended the thematic session of the Council, of which the largest number (8) were CSOs' representatives, one representative from state administration bodies and

¹³ Pursuant to Article 14 of the Rules of Procedure of the Council for Cooperation between the Government and Civil Society.

¹⁴ Pursuant to Article 10 of the Rules of Procedure of the Council for Cooperation between the Government and Civil Society

one representative of donors. Two representatives from state administration bodies who are not regular members of the Council participated in the seventh session.

Almost all sessions were attended by four representatives of the Unit for Cooperation with NGOs.

4.7 Termination of Membership in the Council

The membership of the Council members representing CSOs can be terminated at a personal request, absence from three Council sessions within a year, working contrary to the provisions of the Law on Associations and Foundations and the Rules of Procedure of the Council, not fulfilling the conditions defined in Article 5 paragraph 2 of the Decision on the establishment of the Council and due to end of mandate. Representatives from public administration bodies may cease to be Council members if their status as an employee ceases or there are changes in their work tasks¹⁵.

At the end of 2021, the membership in the Council of the CSOs' representative for the area of gender equality ended at her request, which was validated at the third Council session (23.12.2021). At the very beginning of 2022, the Unit conducted an open call for selection of a new Council member. Three members from the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Internal Affairs have also been changed.

According to the minutes from the Council sessions, absence from three Council sessions in 2022 was registered for two Council members, i.e. the representative from the Ministry of Culture (he did not participate at any of the four sessions) and the Council member representing CSOs in the area of environment.

4.8 Working bodies within the Council

The Council has the authority to establish and dissolve working bodies (groups) as needed. These bodies are on voluntary basis comprising Council members¹⁶, and external members appointed by the Council, although the external members do not possess voting rights¹⁷. Within the formed working group, a coordinator is chosen, vested with the authority to represent the Council before other state administration entities, civil society organizations (CSOs), and other pertinent subjects within the scope of the working body's jurisdiction. However, prior notification to the president is necessary before speaking on these matters.

In 2022, no distinct working bodies (groups) were formed within the scope of the Council work. Additionally, any previously established working bodies did not convene any meetings throughout the year.

4.9 Informing, involving and consulting stakeholders

The communication and the coordination of the Council members representing CSOs are given as an obligation within the Rules of Procedure in Article 13, where in paragraph 5 it is stated that they have obligation to inform, include and consult the stakeholders in the area they represent about the work and the conclusions of the Council through structured new or ongoing forms for dialogue of the civil society with the Government.

Candidates who were nominated for membership and were selected have also proposed plans for communication and coordination with stakeholders in their motivational letters in one section. Out of

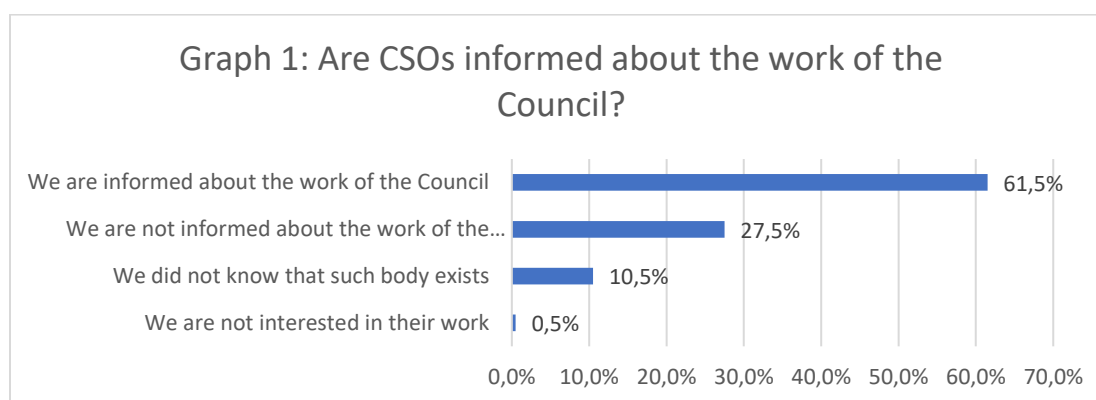
¹⁵ Pursuant to Articles 15, 16 of the Rules of Procedure of the Council for Cooperation between the Government and Civil Society

¹⁶ Pursuant to Article 26 of the Rules of Procedure of the Council for Cooperation between the Government and Civil Society

¹⁷ In accordance with Article 27 of the Rules of Procedure of the Council for Cooperation between the Government and Civil Society

the reviewed 16 motivational letters of the Council members representing CSOs, five members did not foresee a plan for communication and coordination with the stakeholders. In the case of 11 members, numerous proposals were given, including principles, activities and channels of communication and coordination with the stakeholders. Part of those suggestions are: creating a mailing list and a plan for their inclusion. However, we have no additional information, from the minutes, whether the members engaged in implementing these activities from their motivation letters. The impression is that the numerous proposals for communication and coordination within the motivation letters of the members of the Council are implemented at a slow pace.

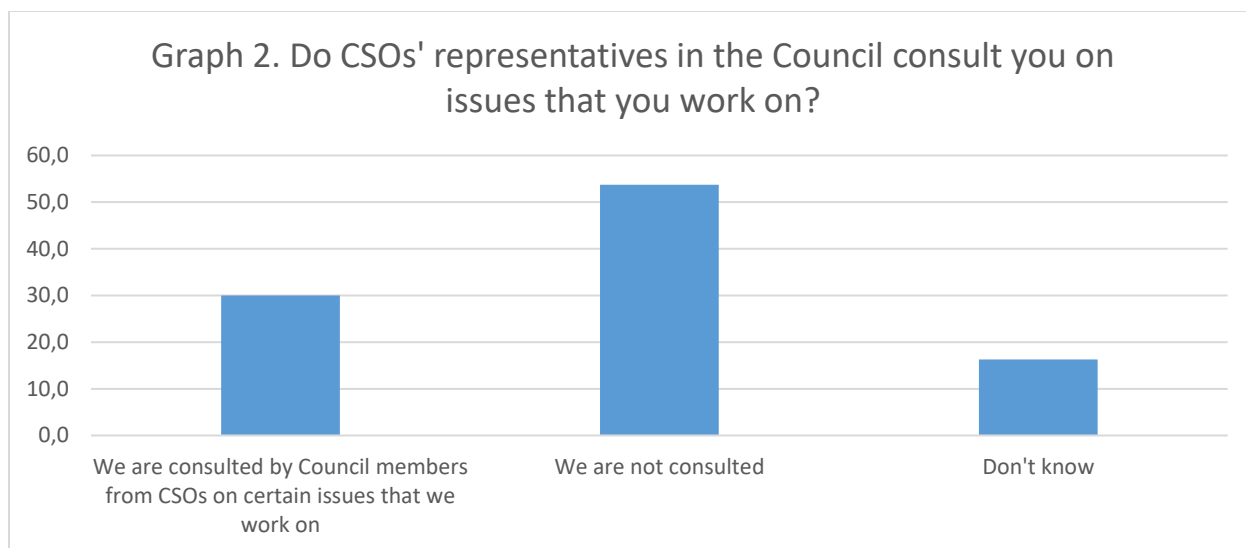
The analysis is limited in terms of information sharing and communication of individual Council members with other organisations from the respective area of operation. However, in terms of obtaining a general picture of CSOs perception about the Council, this analysis uses the results of the questionnaire conducted for preparing the Report on enabling environment, which was answered by 218 CSOs. The results confirm that awareness about the Council's work prevails among CSOs. Namely, slightly less than two-thirds (61.5%) of the civil society organisations that responded to the questionnaire are informed about the work of the Council. While 27.5% are not informed about the work of the Council and 10.5% did not know that this body exists.



Compared to the 2019 situation, there is an improvement, i.e. 43.9% of the organisations that answered the questionnaire in 2019 were informed about the Council work, 31.8% were not informed and 21.1% did not know that the Council existed.

However, less than half of the civil society organisations recognize the Council as a relevant body for cooperation with the Government, i.e. according to the answers to the questionnaire, 36.2% of the organisations consider that the Council for Cooperation between the Government and Civil Society is a relevant body for cooperation and influence in creating policies for civil society development, 17.4% do not consider the Council a relevant body for cooperation, and 46.3% do not know/have no opinion.

Furthermore, the responses of the organisations to the questionnaire indicate insufficient consultation efforts by the Council members. Namely, out of the organisations that are aware of the Council existence (134 organisations), more than half (53.7%) stated that the Council members from civil society organisations do not consult them on issues related to the areas of their work.



Some of the recommendations that the civil society organisations gave to improve the information sharing by the Council are: more frequent information by e-mail; access to more information about their work and role; organising joint coordination and information meetings every 3/6/9 months; talking with physical presence; the need for greater transparency in the Council operation; more frequent announcements on the website or through the Civic Resource Center, about the opportunities for cooperation with the Council for Cooperation between the Government and Civil Society.

Within the EU-funded project Technical Assistance for improving the enabling environment for civil society organisations in the Republic of North Macedonia, proposals were made for the Communication Strategy of the Council for Cooperation between the Government and Civil Society 2022-2024 and Communication Plan for 2022. These proposals were discussed at the fifth session of the Council (17.03.2023)¹⁸ and it was decided for the Council members to submit their comments electronically. However, after the decision of the Council members representing CSOs to start with the boycott of the Council work, this activity was stopped.

Under the same project, a Brochure¹⁹ and a Video²⁰ for the Council were prepared, and the Council members were informed about this by the Unit at the fourth Council session (10.02.2022). However, it is not possible to see from the minutes whether there was a discussion, conclusions and tasks for further dissemination of these promotional materials to CSOs and the general public in order to promote the work of the Council.

4.10 Publicity of the Work of the Council

The Government, through the Unit, provides conditions for the Council work. Namely, the Unit has the obligation to provide administrative support and prepare sessions, prepare minutes from sessions, annual report on the work of the Council for the previous year, maintain an electronic database with data on the Council work, publish the agenda and the minutes from the sessions, ensures financial resources for the implementation of the activities and the visibility of the work of the Council and other matters²¹.

The Council sessions are public, and the Council should provide information to the public about the sessions and the Council work through the presence of media representatives at the Council sessions,

¹⁸ The agenda with materials for the fifth session of the Council are available at: <https://www.nvosorabotka.gov.mk/?q=mk/node/70>

¹⁹ Brochure: Council for Cooperation between the Government and Civil Society - DIALOGUE AND STRENGTHENING

²⁰ Video: Council for cooperation between the Government and civil society

²¹ Pursuant to Article 30 of the Rules of Procedure of the Council for Cooperation between the Government and Civil Society

in accordance with the regulations for internal order; publishing press releases; presenting the reports and decisions of the Council and other materials discussed at the sessions²². According to the Rules of Procedure, the sessions can be closed, partially or completely, which should be decided by the majority of the Council members, with majority of votes from the total number of organisations.

On the Unit website, there is a special section for the Council with general information about the Council, documents, agendas, minutes, reports from the Council work and other relevant materials. In 2022, agendas, meeting minutes and agenda item materials were published regularly. Information on the date and agenda for holding sessions is publicly available on the Unit website. Furthermore, few days after holding the Sessions, draft minutes are also published.

5. From an Active Council to a Boycott

At the end of 2021, the Council gave a positive opinion on the Proposal-Program for financing the program activities of associations and foundations for 2022. However, this Program was not adopted by the Government, because there were no funds for this purpose under the budget of the General Secretariat for 2022. According to the minutes of the fourth Council session (10.02.2022), the member of the Council from the Ministry of Finance informed that "the funds in the budget of the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia for 2022 under budget line 463-Transfers to non-governmental organisations are allocated for the Red Cross of the Republic of North Macedonia. Bearing in mind that the Budget of the Republic of North Macedonia for 2022 and the Law on the Execution of the Budget for 2022 have already been passed, reallocation of these funds is not possible, that is, funds for civil society organisations can be requested during a possible Budget rebalance."

The Council members considered that there is no legal rationale and basis for this allocation of funds and insisted that the Program for financing program activities of associations and foundations for 2022 be put back on the agenda of the Session of state secretaries. The Council members raised the question why the good practice for financing CSOs, which was established in the last decade, was abandoned, taking into account the positive experiences from previous years of allocating funds in a transparent and accountable manner with the participation of the Council in this process. Dissatisfaction was particularly expressed among the members that the Council was neglected in this process and was not consulted at any point.

At the fourth Council session, the members decided to submit a Request for reviewing and adopting the Proposed Program for financing the program activities of associations and foundations for 2022 to the President of the Government, the Office of the President of the Government, the General Secretariat of the Government and the Minister for Finance.

Despite the expressed views of the Council members, at the fifth Council session held on 17.03.2022, the Ministry of Political System and Inter-Community Relations submitted the Proposal Program for financing the program activities of associations and foundations for 2022 to the Council for opinion. The Council considered it and decided to give an opinion after the Government determines the final position on the Proposal-Program for financing the program activities of associations and foundations for 2022 under the General Secretariat of the Government. The response from the Ministry of Finance and from the Office of the President of the Government indicate that there will be funding for associations and foundations only the legal entity that allocates these funds is changed. All this opened a new discussion about the needs for this change and the non-transparent attitude of the Government towards this issue, as well as the disregard of the Council's requests.

²² According to Article 28 of the Rules of Procedure of the Council for Cooperation between the Government and Civil Society

At the same session, the members decided to send a new Request to the President of the Government for consideration and adoption of the Proposal-program for financing program activities of associations and foundations for 2022 and a request for a meeting. At this stage, the Council decided to

At the fifth Council session, the Council members representing CSOs decided to boycott the work of the Council and informed the public through a press conference held on 24th March 2022.

go public by sending an announcement to the public and holding a press conference. At the press conference, the Council members representing the civil society organisations requested for Budget rebalancing to secure funds for the implementation of the Proposed Program for financing the program

activities of the associations and foundations under the General Secretariat of the Government for 2022. They conveyed that, unless this action was taken, they would initiate a boycott of the advisory body's operations. At the press conference, it was emphasized that the Council firmly disagreed with the suspension of the procedure to adopt the Proposed Program for financing the program activities of the associations and foundations under the General Secretariat of the Government for 2022. This course of action by the Government was deemed to disregard the past established practice of consultation with the Council and civil society organisations during decision making processes, which is contrary to the Government commitments as outlined in its Work Program 2022-2024, especially concerning the creation of conducive environment for CSOs' operation and the state funding reform for civil society organisations²³.

Although during the boycott, the Council members convened a scheduled thematic session on 06.04.2022. At this session, the members reaffirmed their decision to continue boycotting the Council work until funding from the Government budget was allocated for the implementation of the Proposed Program for financing program activities of associations and foundations for 2022. Further on, the members decided to send a written notification to the President of the Government, the Minister of Finance and the Secretary General of the Government, articulating the intent of the Council members representing civil society organisations to sustain the boycott until adequate funds were allocated in the Government Budget for implementation of the Proposed Program for financing the program activities of associations and foundations for 2022. This letter, dated 20th April 2022, marked the third instance of written communication from Council members to the highest echelon of the government, urging the resolution of the issue. Within the letter, a request was reiterated for a meeting with the President of the Government, where the Council's requests would be presented for consideration.

On 27th September 2022, the Government adopted a Decision on the criteria and method of allocation and use of funds for financing the program activities of associations and foundations from the Budget of the Republic of North Macedonia²⁴, which stipulated that the funds for this purpose shall be provided within the budget of the Ministry of Political System and Inter-Community Relations. The adoption of this Decision effectively nullified the prior Decision²⁵ from 2019 which provided for the allocation of funds from the budget of the General Secretariat. Immediately after, on the proposal of the Ministry of Political System and Inter-Community Relations, on 4th October 2022, the Government adopted a Program for financing the program activities of associations and foundations for 2022. The Program contains the priority areas of the Proposed Program for financing the program activities of associations and foundations for 2022 conditionally supported by the Council at the 5th session (17.03.2022) and the priority objectives contained in the Proposed Program for financing the program activities of associations and foundations for 2022 proposed by the General Secretariat, after a

²³ <https://epi.org.mk/post/20699>

²⁴ Official Gazette of RNM no. 210/22

²⁵ The Decision on the criteria and procedure for the allocation of funds for financing the program activities of associations and foundations from the Budget of the Republic of North Macedonia, Official Gazette of the RNM no. 277/19

consultative process with civil society organisations and supported with a positive opinion by the Council at the 3rd session (23.12.2021). The funds that were allocated in 2022 through this Ministry amount to 14.5 million denars, which falls short of the initial budget of 20 million denars designated to be allocated to CSOs under the General Secretariat.

Despite being in a state of boycott, the Council convened an urgent session on 6th October 2022, with the newly adopted Government Decision as a topic of discussion on the agenda. At the session, it was concluded that the Decision was enacted without prior consultation or opinion from the Council. This action was viewed as undermining the role of this advisory body as the main form of dialogue between the Government and civil society. Moreover, the very necessity of the Council existence was brought into question by this development. During the same session, the Council members took the decision to extend an invitation to the Prime Minister, the First Deputy Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister for European Affairs, the Minister of Finance, the Secretary General of the Government and the Secretary of the Legislation Secretariat. The aim was to convene a public meeting for open dialogue on these pressing matters.

Until the end of 2022, the President of the Government did not respond to the request, the public session of the Council was not held with the presence of government representatives at the highest level, and the Council members representing CSOs remained in the boycott.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

6.1 Conclusions

The Government of the Republic of North Macedonia did not consult with the Council for Cooperation between the Government and Civil Society when making key decisions pertaining to state funding. By making decisions related to state funding of CSOs without prior consultation and opinion from the Council, the Government undermined the function of this advisory body as the main form of dialogue between the Government and civil society. The Government not only ignored the requests and appeals from the Council members to respect their opinion on the Proposed Program for financing the program activities of associations and foundations in 2022, but also passed an even more radical Decision to transfer the funds from the budget of the General Secretariat to the Ministry on Political System and Inter-Community Relations. The funds allocated through this Ministry are lower than originally planned in the budget of the General Secretariat. The reform of the state funding of CSOs is not progressing, and conditions are not being created to fulfil the Government's commitment to gradually increase state funding for organisations, a share of 20% of the total CSOs' revenues in 2022, 25% in 2023 and 30% in 2024.

The Council work program for 2022 serves as a good basis for more effective Council operation. The work program develops good practice for better planning of the Council work, amplifying accountability and transparency, and improving engagement and consultation with the civil society organisations.

The Council partially implemented the Work Program for 2022. Over the course of the year, the Council held four sessions devoting most of the sessions to issues important to civil society, with the key priority being related to state funding for CSOs. The Council opened space and raised questions and challenges in the CSOs' operation that were proposed by the organisations. However, due to the initiation of the boycott by Council members from civil society organisations, the Council partially implemented the

Council Work Program for 2022 and did not implement a series of activities aligned with the priorities outlined in the Strategy for Cooperation with and Development of Civil Society.

The Council members attended the sessions regularly. Percentage wise, 74% of Council members participated in three or four sessions in 2022. The attendance is lower among the members from the state administration bodies. There is an insignificant turnover in the membership of the Council, although it is higher among the members of the state administration bodies. In 2022, no new working bodies were established within the Council.

The organisations are informed about the Council work and less than half of them recognize the Council as a relevant body for cooperation with the Government. The Council has not adopted a Communication Strategy and a Communication Plan. Awareness about the work of the Council prevails among CSOs, i.e. 61.5% of CSOs are informed about the work of the Council. However, around one third of the organisations (36.2%) perceive the Council as a relevant body for cooperation and influence in creating policies for civil society development. The organisations believe that the Council members from CSOs do not consult them enough on issues related to the areas of their work, i.e. 30% of the organisations stated that they are consulted by the Council members.

The Unit for Cooperation with Non-Governmental Organisations at the General Secretariat of the Government appropriately performs the administrative and technical work of the Council. The Unit diligently keeps the minutes as stipulated in the Rules of Procedure and fulfils the responsibilities assigned during the Council sessions. It consistently publishes the minutes along with other supporting materials on its website.

6.2 Recommendations

The Government decisions should be made through a broad consultative process, including the Council and the civil society organisations. The Government should fully recognize the significant role of the Council as a representative advisory body and the civil society organisations as partners in the policy creation process.

The enactment of secondary legislation to safeguard the functioning of the Council is necessary. The conditions, the decision-making procedures, and the duration of the boycott should be regulated by the acts for establishing the Council. Government decisions must not hinder the operations of the Council, which could have a domino effect on the enabling environment for civil society development.

The Government should remain committed to its Strategy for Cooperation with and Development of Civil Society. The Strategy unequivocally outlines the Government's commitment to ensure the continuous operation of an independent, representative, operational, and effective Council, to work on improving the state funding system for CSOs and increase state funding for CSOs – a progression from the present sum of around 10 million Euros to over 30 million Euros in the 2024 budget.

The Council should persist in preparing an annual work program and operating in alignment with the adopted program. Council members from CSOs are encouraged to actively engage in timely consultations with other organisations while formulating the annual program. Additionally, they should communicate the adopted program to these organisations afterward, enhancing transparency in their operation and promoting the involvement of CSOs in the Council work.

The Council should work more on increasing visibility and trust. The Council should adopt the Communication Strategy and the Communication Plan and make efforts to consistently implement them. The Council should inform, consult and involve CSOs continuously about the decisions it takes, which have an impact on the work and development of the civil society. Materials prepared for and from the work of the Council should be fully disseminated among civil society organisations and the public.

The Council should continue the good practice of establishing working bodies, particularly for matters linked to the Strategy highlighted themes, and facilitate the involvement of pertinent civil society stakeholders external to the Council in these working bodies. The Council should actively promote participation from diverse civil society contributors (civil society organisations, grass-roots organisations, informal initiatives, activists) extending beyond the Council members from CSOs, in both the Council work and its working bodies.

The Unit for Cooperation with Non-Governmental Organisations at the General Secretariat of the Government should continue to perform the administrative and technical work of the Council in accordance with the Rules of Procedure.

Annexes

Annex 1: Attendance of Council members in 2022

Member of the Council	4th Session (10.02.2022)	5th Session (17.03.2022)	6th Session (6.4.2022)	7th Session (6.10.2022)
Jasminka Angelova, Ministry of Internal Affairs	+	+	+	-
Bojana Bosilkova, Ministry of Justice	+	+	+	Mira Dimishkovska participated
Rozika Bojadzieva, Ministry of Finance	+	+	+	+
Elizabeta Todorova, Ministry of Economy	+	+	+	+
Kristina Petrova, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management	-	+	-	-
Slobodanka Anchevska, Ministry of Health	-	+	-	-
Biljana Trajkovska, Ministry of Education and Science	+	+	+	-
Lidija Shterjov, Ministry of Labor and Social Policy	-	+	+	+
Eli Chakar, Ministry of Local Self-Government	+	+	-	+
Ljuljim Selmani, Ministry of Culture	-	-	-	-
Sasho Sekulovski, Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning	-	+	+	+
Gordana Gapic-Dimitrovska, Ministry of Information Society and Administration	+	+	+	+

Hristina Koneska Beroska, Secretariat for European Affairs	+	+	-	+
Sanela Hadžibulić, Ministry of Political System and Relations among Communities	+	-	+	+
Gordana Cekova, Agency for Youth and Sports	-	+	+	-
Fani Karanfilova Panevska, Open Society Foundation - Macedonia	+	+	+	+
Snezhana Kamilovska Trpovska, Macedonian Center for International Cooperation	+	+	-	+
Urania Pirovska, Helsinki Committee for Human Rights of the Republic of Macedonia	+	+	-	+
Nikica Kusinikova, Konekt Skopje	+	+	+	+
Dimitar Nizmanovski, Youth Education Forum	+	-	-	-
Zoran Ilieski, Coalition of Youth Organisations SEGA	+	+	+	-
Jasminka Friščić, Association for Emancipation, Solidarity and Equality, Skopje	+	-	+	+
Daliborka Zlateva, Association of people with cerebral palsy and other disabilities Veles	+	+	+	-
Marija Sazdevska, Association for the Advancement of Gender Equality Akcija združenska Skopje	+	+	+	+
Andrej Senich, Association for the support of people living with HIV - Together stronger Skopje	+	+	+	+
Liliana Jonoski, Rural Coalition Kumanovo	+	+	+	+
Tijana Ana Spasovska, Jadro-Association of the independent cultural scene	-	+	+	-
Nikola Dodov, Association for Encouraging and Promotion of Informatics Association of IT Students Skopje	-	+	-	+
Sashka Kocevska, Movement of environmentalists of Macedonia Veles	+	-	-	-
Dragica Kostadinovska, Association multi-ethnic organisation for international cultures Mozaik Meik Skopje	+	+	+	-
Ardita Abazi Imeri, European Politics Institute Skopje	+	+	+	+