

## News from the CIVICUS European Regional Office

### CIVICUS in Europe Seminar Zagreb, Croatia, 23 February, 2002

by *Stuart Etherington*  
*Chair, CIVICUS European Board*  
*Member, CIVICUS (Global) Board*

On 23 February the CIVICUS European Regional Office organised a successful international event which brought together over fifty delegates in a one-day seminar held in the Croatian capital. The event was an opportunity for European CIVICUS members to meet and exchange ideas, experiences and concerns with organisations from Central and Eastern Europe. Organisations were present among others from Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Macedonia, Romania, Slovenia and Yugoslavia. Zagreb provided the ideal setting for civil society representatives to learn about CIVICUS and its European activities, and to discuss issues around the evolving relationship between government and civil society, as well as to debate the role, scope and diversity of civil society in Europe.

Croatia, as our host, provided an example from the region of the process of development of a Compact which now governs relations between government and civil society in the country. Representing the Croatian government, Ms Cvjetana Plavska-Matic, Head of Office for Co-operation with NGOs, outlined the process of consultation and co-operation between the Croatian government and civil society organisations, a process which also involved local authorities and businesses. She cited the English and the Estonian Compacts as examples used in the development of the Croatian framework for partnership between government bodies and civil society organisations.

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The presentation of a draft document aimed at exploring the notion of a *European civil society*, indeed whether there is such a thing, and the ensuing discussion, highlighted the cultural, linguistic, political, economic and geographical diversity of Europe as a region, and the inherent challenges in defining the nature of civil society in Europe. The initial discussions held in Zagreb will form the basis for a further elaboration of this theme, and will provide CIVICUS with an opportunity to explore both the similarities and the differences in civil society engagement across the region, thereby contributing to CIVICUS' role in increasing the understanding of citizen participation in Europe. This initiative will also be a topic for discussion at a satellite CIVICUS event to be held in Brussels on 3 June, 2002, during the Annual General Assembly and Conference of the European Foundation Centre.

In Zagreb, participants were invited to the next meeting of the Building Bridges of Democracy programme which aims to foster the exchange of experience of citizen action through a series of mobile conferences held on board a boat, in key locations along the Danube. This follows the first meeting on this theme which took place in Vienna (Austria) and Bratislava (Slovakia) in 2000 and 2001. The next meeting will be held in Budapest (Hungary) on 28-30 June, 2002.

The meeting in Zagreb highlighted the great challenges and opportunities faced by civil society actors in an expanding Europe. With 10 new countries from Central and Eastern Europe expected to join the European Union in the coming years, and the ongoing development and reconstruction of South-Eastern Europe, the continent is undergoing an unprecedented transformation. This has huge implications for civil society organisations across the region striving for participatory democracy, solidarity, civil dialogue and co-operation. In this context, CIVICUS has an important role to play in promoting an enabling environment for civil society organisations across Europe, and in supporting and fostering their richness and diversity.

We would like to thank Ms Cvjetana Plavska-Matic, Head of Office for Co-operation with NGOs and the CIVICUS member organisations in Croatia for their kind hospitality thereby contributing significantly to the success of the meeting. ■



## An Open Debate: European Civil Society or Civil Society in Europe?

Civil society actors today often face the difficulty to define their role and their relationship towards other structures and actors of society; and towards each other. At the request of CIVICUS in Europe in his recent exercise civil society expert Andrew Crook explores the roots and nature of civil society in a European setting. The piece has been first made available at the recent CIVICUS in Europe meeting in Zagreb (23 February, 2002).

The paper intends to provide a definition of "Europe" (both geographical and cultural) and "civil society" and argues that common features of European societies (existence of basic democratic institutions, the respect of basic rights, etc.) form basis of the relevance of the term "European civil society" with obvious differences resulting from varied cultural, economic and political traditions.

He sheds light on some of the key question of civil society in Europe: What are the most fitting and relevant features of European civil society? What is the best practice for civil society to form its relations with the state and business in view of varied local traditions? How to retain the independence of civil society from other parties while closely co-operating with them?

The paper is intended to form the basis of a discussion on the nature of European civil society initiated by CIVICUS in Europe. If you would like to have a full copy of the draft paper or share your ideas on the topic please contact [europe@civicus.org](mailto:europe@civicus.org). ▶

### Welcome on Board!

We would like to welcome our new CIVICUS members from Europe who decided to join CIVICUS during the Zagreb seminar:

Civic Initiatives, Yugoslavia

Education for Organisations in the Civil Sector, Croatia

Nonprofit Information and Training Center, Croatia

It is hoped that discussions like this will generate firm theoretical basis of nonprofit activity thus resulting in the better recognition of nonprofit work.

### Excerpts from the draft paper "European Civil Society or Civil Society in Europe?":

"... most informal discussion of civil society typically assumes both that there is 'something' which can be called civil society in virtually all parts (nations) of the world *and* that the features of civil society vary considerably from place to place. ... the *sphere* of civil society is present in all European nations but that the *characteristics* of civil society vary from place to place."

"It may be said that the presence of civil society is implicit in a culture with the existing broad features. But these features are, precisely, sufficiently broad to leave a good deal of room for differences between civil society as exemplified in different nations. That should not be surprising given the differences in culture between the nation states and indeed within countries."

"The distinguishing feature of civil society is that (unlike those directly involved with politics or the economy i.e. businessmen or politicians) its actors do not seek directly to control either the economy or the state but rather to influence them." ■

### CIVICUS Dates for your Diary

*Brussels, Belgium, 3 June, 2002*

CIVICUS Satellite Event during the Annual General Assembly and Conference of the European Foundation Centre

*Budapest, Hungary, 28-30 June, 2002*

Third Phase of the Building Bridges of Democracy Programme under the title „Bridging Civil Society through Regional Co-operation" in the form of a boat trip on the Danube.

If you would like to have more information or interested in attending please contact the CIVICUS European Regional Office: [europe@civicus.org](mailto:europe@civicus.org).

## News from Europe

### **EU-NGO Relations: Opportunities Not to Miss**

In recent months new opportunities have risen for civil society in Europe to tighten co-operation with the European Union and its institutions. The Future of Europe debate was started in 2001; the White Paper on European Governance was released (July 2001); and currently – in line with the decisions of the Laeken Summit – a platform of discussion is being set up in the form of a Forum open for NGOs (abreast the Convention with MPs, government officials from member and applicant states discussing the future of the EU.

The last two major documents published by the European Commission are dated from 1997 (Communication from the Commission of the European Communities on Promoting the Role of Voluntary Organisations and Foundations in Europe, ref.: COM(97) 241 final) and 2000 (Commission Discussion Paper: The Commission and Non-Governmental Organisations: Building a Stronger Partnership, ref.: COM(2000) 11 final), thus the above developments seem to mean a new opening of the EU's intention to co-operate with civil society organisations, and with its citizens.

The further expansion of EU-NGO relations creates the chance for NGOs to be taken even more seriously than before, improve their ability to lobby for their causes and goals they represent, and also to the benefit of the EU. Gaining on the momentum we should take these new opportunities seriously and be part of them actively.

In this process of co-operation initiatives also come from NGOs. E.g. the European Citizen Action Service, a Brussels-based member of CIVICUS, has been instrumental in commenting the White Paper and argued for a compact or framework agreement between the EU Institutions and NGOs (e-CIVICUS No. 141.).

On a practical note: the European Commission is still waiting for comments on its White Paper on European Governance till 31 March, 2002.

### Further reading:

Future of Europe debate online: [europa.eu.int/futurum/conothbis\\_en.htm#osc](http://europa.eu.int/futurum/conothbis_en.htm#osc)

White Paper on European Governance online: [europa.eu.int/comm/governance/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/governance/index_en.htm)

### **Nonprofit Laws in the Making**

In recent months the issue of nonprofit laws seems to have become more prominent agenda points for discussion in a number of countries, which process has been speeded and fostered also by the International Year of Volunteers in 2001. There are new developments regarding legislation of nonprofits, among others, in Poland and Hungary with the difference that the act in question is the first of its kind in Poland, while in Hungary a proposal would amend the already existing nonprofit law to recognise and benefit volunteers and volunteer work.

Poland desperately needs an act on public benefit and voluntary work. There is no law to regulate such issues as government - civil society relations and the legal status of volunteers. A few years ago the Polish NGO community had worked out a draft law which was put forward for discussion to the Polish government in December 2001.

Polish NGOs have been waiting for such a bill to be passed and the latest version of the draft is in line with their expectations. "The job hasn't finished yet, but we look forward to the government's action" said Jacob Wyganski from the Forum of Non-Governmental Initiatives. He was also pleased that Jerzy Hausner, Minister of Labour has taken up the project. These developments bring closer the realisation of the Polish nonprofit law.

To read more on this issue please visit: [www.fip.ngo.pl](http://www.fip.ngo.pl)

The Hungarian nonprofit law had been enacted in 1997. Since then it went through a number of modifications and currently an amendment proposal is being prepared with the co-operation of experts, NGOs and government officials to legally recognise volunteer activity. Tax allowances are also sought by proposing to modify fiscal regulations for different expenses related to volunteer activity (e.g. travel, accommodation, etc.) to become tax deductible. Because of the different ▶

viewpoints expressed further harmonisation of the proposal is foreseen.

The Hungarian nonprofit law can be found at:  
[www.europeanhouse.hu](http://www.europeanhouse.hu)

Note: During the International Year of Volunteers 2001 lawmakers in France, Germany, Spain and the UK have passed pro-volunteer legislation, while new laws have been proposed also outside Europe: in Argentina, Colombia, Ecuador, Madagascar, Mozambique, Nepal, Senegal and Tanzania.

## Upcoming Events

### Globalisation, Growth and (In)Equality

The 5<sup>th</sup> annual conference of the University of Warwick's ESRC Centre for the Study of Globalisation and Regionalisation will invite scholars and practitioners to consider themes including the relationship between globalisation and growth, structures of inequality, redistribution; the role of the state, market, civil society and global governance in promoting a more equitable globalisation.

Date: 15-17 March, 2002

Venue: University of Warwick, UK

Organiser: The University of Warwick's ESRC Centre for the Study of Globalisation and Regionalisation

Tel.: (44-24) 765-24633

E-mail: [denise.hewlett@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:denise.hewlett@warwick.ac.uk)

Internet: [www.csgr.org](http://www.csgr.org)

### VIIth Euromed Civil Forum

The Euromed Civil Forum will bring together social players from the entire Mediterranean region and from the European Union: non-governmental organisations, universities, research institutes, the media, trade unions, local and regional authorities, etc. This Forum will take place a few days before the Fifth Council of Foreign Affairs Ministers of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership ("Barcelona V").

Date: 12-13 April, 2002

Venue: Valencia, Spain

Organiser: The European Office of the Foundation for Solidarity and Voluntary Work of the Valencian Com-

munity (FSVVCV)

Contact: José Papí, Head of Office, FSVVCV

Tel.: (32-2) 640-1259

E-mail: [fsvcv-eu@global-eu.com](mailto:fsvcv-eu@global-eu.com)

Internet: [www.solidaridadvoluntariado.com](http://www.solidaridadvoluntariado.com)

### Foundations for Europe: Science and the Citizen - EFC's 13th Annual General Assembly (AGA) and Conference

During the last decade or so, traditional definitions of science have become blurred by the exponential growth of new technologies and the progressive dismantling of what were once perceived as insurmountable barriers to human knowledge. It is not acceptable to leave to scientists alone the decision on how knowledge of the human being should be used to shape our social future. We must ask who owns science the scientists or the public at large? The key question for foundations is surely: how can we broaden the scope of our expertise and involvement to play a full and responsible role in the discussion at this important intersection of science and social policy?

Date: 3-5 June, 2002

Venue: Brussels, Belgium

Organiser: European Foundation Centre (EFC)

Contact: John Richardson, Chief Executive, EFC

Tel.: (32-2) 512-8938

Fax: (32-2) 512-3265

E-mail: [aga@efc.be](mailto:aga@efc.be)

Internet: [www.efc.be](http://www.efc.be)

There will be a special CIVICUS in Europe satellite event during the conference on 3 June, 2002 in the morning. For further details please contact the VCIVICUS European Regional Office at [europe@civicus.org](mailto:europe@civicus.org).

### "Civil Society Driving Development: Experiences and Future Prospects" 2<sup>nd</sup> ECA NGO Assembly

The conference will be a follow-up to the 1<sup>st</sup> ECA NGO Assembly held in Vilnius, Lithuania in 2000 with the purpose of promoting the World Bank's efforts for greater interaction with civil society. The ▶

conference will take account of the work done since and discuss, among others topics, poverty alleviation and social development, good governance and anti-corruption and NGO capacity building and public participation. The Assembly will be attended by representatives of major international non-governmental and governmental organisations.

Date: 14-16 June, 2002

Venue: Belgrade, Yugoslavia

Organiser: World Bank Europe and Central Asia Region NGO Working Group

Tel.: (7-812) 320-4841

Fax: (7-812) 312-38 87

E-mail: [wb-eca-ngo-wg@yandex.ru](mailto:wb-eca-ngo-wg@yandex.ru)

Internet: [www.developmentgateway.org/subsites/eca](http://www.developmentgateway.org/subsites/eca)

### **“Parents’ Role in Girls’ Education: Experience Sharing Between Parents from the North and Parents from the South” International Congress**

Despite efforts to ensure equal opportunity in schooling during the past ten years through national plans of action, the fact today remains: fewer girls than boys attend school and those who do experience less academic success than their brothers. The conference aims to identify new measures to be included in national action plans to promote equal treatment in education.

Date: 24-27 June, 2002

Venue: Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso

Organiser: International Federation for Parent Education (IFPE) and Burkina Faso National Union of Secondary School and University Student Parents’ Associations (UNAPES-B)

Contact: Mr Idrissa Traore, UNAPES-B

Fax: (226) 314-926

Internet: [www.parentsforum.org](http://www.parentsforum.org)

## **Member Profiles**

### **Civic Initiatives**

#### **Yugoslavia**

Civic Initiatives Center for training, development and information for NGOs was founded in Belgrade, Yugoslavia for the purpose of empowering and develop-

ing a sustainable third sector in Yugoslavia. The Center’s activities include education, technical support, professional advice and distribution of information for NGOs.

### **Goals of the Center**

1. Making information accessible:
  - Collecting and classifying material
  - Daily forwarding of material relevant for users
  - Providing premises for training and education
2. Encouraging the use of information:
  - Assisting users in their search for relevant information
  - Providing material for trainings
  - Offering information and different services
  - Developing paths to potential users
3. Preparing materials:
  - Processing, translation and preparation of training materials
4. Strengthening of links with other organisations:
  - Developing contacts between organisations working in related fields
  - Identifying other sources of information

There is a room in the Center with the capacity of up to 50 persons for trainings, workshops, meetings, conferences. NGOs can use this room free of charge.

### **The Center’s Activities include:**

- Making internet and e-mail accessible for NGOs without a computer
- NGO Library with over 200 titles and other written material relevant for non-profit organizations.
- Organising Education and Training on issues of the role of NGOs in society; strategic planning; fundraising; leadership; conflict resolution and negotiating
- Assistance in project writing and fundraising
- Managing an NGO Database on domestic and foreign NGOs to help establishing contacts and partnerships
- Publishing books and other materials and its NGO bulletin “The NETWORK”
- Exploring the needs of the NGO sector to promote ►

better training and education  
- Co-operation with other Centers domestic and foreign.

Contact: Civic Initiatives - Gradanske Inicijative  
Address: Vljakoviceva 17  
11000 Belgrade, Yugoslavia  
Tel.: (381-11) 334-3011  
E-mail: [civin@gradjanske.org](mailto:civin@gradjanske.org)  
Internet: [www.gradjanske.org](http://www.gradjanske.org)

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### **National Council for Voluntarism in Israel (CVI)**

CVI is a frame organization for volunteering actions of singles and volunteering organizations. CVI represents the volunteering movements in Israel.

#### **Background**

- The volunteer movement of organisations and individuals constitutes an important part of developed societies.
- Volunteer activity in Israel is instrumental for social integration, absorption of newcomers and enhancement of quality of life in general.
- Special groups of society, such as disadvantaged youth, elderly, immigrants, require volunteers assistance, beside the government services.

#### **Goals of CVI**

To cultivate public awareness in volunteering, to identify the needs and to form matching plans, including training in volunteer leadership. These actions of the council are made possible through CVI's role as a link between the government and local authorities toward volunteer organisations.

#### **Programmes**

- Encouraging people to be effectively involved in volunteering for the benefit of the community
- Helping and guiding government offices to integrate volunteers in their activities
- Helping and guiding voluntary organizations to integrate in welfare operations of local authorities
- Provide guidance and education on the national level

- in volunteering in high schools and universities
- Unique activities of CVI include ad hoc solutions in border line settlements
- Selecting twelve volunteers eligible for The President Volunteer Award on an annual basis
- Granting Prime Minister Shield for cultivating and developing voluntarism to volunteer leaders
- "Wholeheartedly for the Community" special programme for people in need
- Representing the State of Israel in international forums dealing with volunteering. Maintaining relations with similar organisations abroad
- Other activities in line with 2001 International Year of Volunteers provisions

Contact: Baruch Levy, Chairman,  
Matti Weill, Director, CVI  
Address: Po.Box 20428, Tel-Aviv 67012, Israel  
Tel.: (972-3) 561-4144  
Fax: (972-3) 561-3343  
E-mail: [voluntry@zahav.net.il](mailto:voluntry@zahav.net.il)

### **Mosaic**

#### **What is a Non-Governmental Organisation?**

Read this article prepared for the UNESCO Encyclopaedia of Life Sciences on the different structures, types of NGO coalitions and how NGOs relate to social movements and civil society.

Internet:

[www.staff.city.ac.uk/p.willetts/CS-NTWKS/NGO-ART.HTM](http://www.staff.city.ac.uk/p.willetts/CS-NTWKS/NGO-ART.HTM)

#### **From the Reader**

Dear CIVICUS,

Here is a worthwhile suggestion for your newsletter:

Following the 11 September attacks the Alliance for a Responsible, Plural and United World ([www.alliance21.org](http://www.alliance21.org)) proposed a working forum for the construction of peace under the banner "to understand, so we can act." ►



Their online forum is moderated and translation is provided in English, French, and Spanish. Anybody can join, even in the course of the debate (summaries of the debate are provided on a regular basis).

I am a participant in PAX FORUM and would like to encourage other CIVICUS members to participate.

In solidarity,

Vicente García-Delgado (Esq)

Individual Associate, CIVICUS (USA/Spain) ■

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If you have any comments, proposals or would like to contribute to the *EuroCIVICUS* newsletter please contact us:

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