



**BULGARIAN CENTER FOR NOT-FOR-PROFIT LAW (BCNL)**

6 Dobrudja str.  
1000 Sofia, Bulgaria  
tel./fax: (+359 2) 981 66 17; (+359 2) 988 81 66  
e-mail: [info@bcnl.org](mailto:info@bcnl.org)  
website: [www.bcnl.org](http://www.bcnl.org)

**Suggestions on the Operation of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society  
Forum**

as a response to the Invitation for written contributions published on 21.10.2009

*Prepared by the Bulgarian Center for Not-for-Profit Law (BCNL), Bulgaria*

The Bulgarian Center for Not-for-Profit Law (BCNL) is an organization working to provide legal and policy support for the development of civil society, public participation and good governance in Bulgaria. Our goals include improving the legal but also financial framework in which civil society organizations operate as the framework is an important condition for the free operation and development of civil society in a country. In addition, we are currently organizing a fellowship program for CSO representatives from the Black Sea countries. During their stay at BCNL, fellows prepare a research on the CSO legal framework in their home countries. The research will provide a basis for comparison of the CSO framework in each Black Sea country. We are also planning to organize a regional meeting of NGO law experts in April of 2010 to discuss the most important issues that arise from the researches and to share experiences.

Based on our observations, we believe that in addition to supporting the EaP platforms, the EaP CSF should put a separate focus on the situation of civil society organizations (CSOs) in each of the EaP countries. This is very important because there are a number of issues related to the legal framework in which CSOs operate in each country, there are problems with participation in decision-making and also problems with funding for the civil society sector. These are important issues for the democratic development of the countries but usually governments have no interest in addressing them (and very often it is the government that tries to create obstacles to the normal functioning of civil society organizations). Therefore, unless the Forum addresses these issues, they are not likely to be addressed.

For these reasons, BCNL proposes that a special working group is created dealing with the CSO legal framework and other sectoral problems CSOs have in the EaP countries. The working group can meet on a regular basis and consist of representatives of the EaP countries and EU member states, as well as representatives of EU institutions. Such a working group can have discussions on specific issues and prepare expert opinions, which can then be presented to the EU. The EU, on the other hand, based on the working group's opinions can make specific recommendations to the EaP governments. The creation of the working group will be important because it will address issues which should be brought up at potential discussions between EaP countries and the EU but they will certainly not be brought up by the governments.

We suggest that the EU covers the expenses of all members of the working group and supports their regular meetings. The working groups might in addition undertake research/mapping of the CSO legal situation in individual countries in order to have a better basis for its recommendations.

We hope you will consider our suggestion and there will be interest on behalf of EaP CSF for implementing it. In case you need further clarifications or you want to discuss the idea, you can contact Luben Panov at [luben@bcnl.org](mailto:luben@bcnl.org) or tel: (+359 2) 981 66 17.