

Civil Society and State in the Process of Social Transformation

Objectives

The goal of this project is to elaborate an objective and standardized index system in order to measure the relations between state and civil society in regions which are either at the genesis or in the process of democratic transition.

Background

Besides being one of the most important components of democracy, civil society can also be one of its most fragile elements. As the ICDT has observed, the underdevelopment or the lack of active civil society in countries that have gone through democratic transitions in the recent past can cause serious problems. While politicians usually support and bolster civil society in the first phase of democratic transitions, the majority of them rather see it as a disturbing factor after the consolidation of democracy, which inevitably results in the weakening of its political and legal support. At the same time, the institutionalization of civil society and its gradual inclusion into decision-making can be observed, showing that the state is not capable to run the society alone. Civil societies tend to assume tasks that traditionally belonged to the state's scope of action. In this context, the division of labor between state and the civil sphere, and governmental and non-governmental organizations alters, resulting in a strengthened co-operation between both sides.

Project

In the initial phase, a group of experts coming from the Western Balkans assessed the basic knowledge of the political, legal, economic, social, and cultural context in which civil societies function in different countries of their region. Their role was to discuss and set the basic principles and methodology of the project and to elaborate a draft index system measuring the relationship between state and civil society. Based on this methodology, the index system is being tested and will be compared in various target regions. As a result of this complex program, a standardized yet flexible evaluation system measuring state-civil society relations will be elaborated. Governments and international organizations are likely to follow these assessments, which will result in more efficient civil society policies and serve as base for further research on this topic.

Donor:	Hungarian Ministry for Foreign Affairs
Duration:	November 2008 –