

QUO VADIS  **S**

**CIVIL
SOCIETY**  

IN EUROPE'S

**NEIGHBOUR-
HOODS?** 

Quo Vadis Civil Society in Europe's Neighbourhoods?

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Introduction:

**Quo Vadis
Civil Society
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hoods?**

Although distinct in their historical, political, social, cultural and economic characteristics, the geographical proximity of the European Union's (EU) neighbours – both eastern and southern – and their significant geopolitical role demand a more efficient level of synergy and cooperation across various sectoral issues. As such, the EU has embarked on a large-scale effort to enhance its actorness externally and to engage the neighbouring states more actively in regional cooperation frameworks. The EU launched the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in 2004, seeking to support and foster stability, security and prosperity beyond the EU's borders. The ENP largely shifted a centre-periphery format of relations with the neighbours towards a new form of regionalism embedded in mutual interdependence and greater ownership of the cooperation policies. Furthermore, the substantial review of the ENP in 2015 proposed a more enhanced cooperation framework, with a tailored approach to partner countries and more efficient partnerships, given that, first, the majority of the neighbours faced numerous challenges and, second, the normative power of the EU itself has been significantly diminishing.

Within these formats of cooperation, the EU has always paid particular attention to the role of civil society (EC 2017, 5; EC 2015, 6; Commission of the European Communities 2008, 14), considering the role civil society has in the diffusion of values, strengthening societal resilience, promoting democratic and market-oriented reforms, good governance, human rights and sustainable development. Overall, according to the Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy, civil society is defined as one of two 'key players in a networked world' (EEAS 2016, 8;18). The EU provides various support schemes for national and local civic initiatives, and capacity-building, as well as for activities jointly conducted between civil society organisations (CSOs) from the neighbouring countries and from the EU member states, to stimulate the transfer of knowledge and experience.

Against this backdrop, the 10th International Neighbourhood Symposium (INS) on 'Youth Empowerment, Civic Engagement, and Sustainable Development in Europe's Neighbourhoods', held on 11–17 December 2020, brought together experts and practitioners to assess the role of civil society in these difficult times, marked by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic across the eastern and southern neighbourhoods of the European Union. For the first time since its inception, the INS was held virtually, thereby reflecting the need to adapt to today's challenges.

Hence, the INS was structured around five panels, which addressed various themes related to civil society in the EU's neighbourhoods, mainly COVID-19 and CSOs, youth empowerment, gender dynamics, intercultural dialogue, and sustainable development. Each of these panels was facilitated by an invited speaker with expertise in the field, whose contribution was

followed by active discussions involving the many participants. Together with their facilitators, the participants sought to develop recommendations on how to enhance the role of the civil society in the neighbouring countries, bringing different perspectives from their home countries and their own professional and/or personal experience.

The results of these discussions were further developed in a series of papers which are included in the present report entitled 'Quo Vadis Civil Society in Europe's Neighbourhoods?'. The five papers present case studies, which bring empirical evidence from a number of neighbouring countries. These contributions illustrate how civil society in the region operates in various domains, what general and specific challenges it faces, how it manages to increase its capacity and efficiency, and what could be done to strengthen its role and overall impact.

Cristina Rigman's contribution reveals the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on CSOs. Her paper provides a reflection-based analysis that is built upon the direct observation of CSOs involved in various projects in 2020. In particular, the analysis is structured around six development areas, including governance and legal compliance; operations and management; human resources; financial resources; programmes and service delivery; and external relations and advocacy. Accordingly, the author argues that 2020, the year of pandemic, has substantially affected the CSO's resilience, increased vulnerability, and highlighted the need to find novel and creative solutions to improve the flexibility and adaptability of the CSOs.

In turn, Michael G. Kavuklis focuses on the challenges and prospects posed by the COVID-19 pandemic vis-à-vis the empowerment of youth in the EU's neighbourhoods. Given the country-to-country differences in terms of youth policies, the needs and expectations of the young vary, as argued in the paper. However, there are challenges common to young people across different countries of the region. They include demographic problems; different approaches to the definition of youth; unemployment and financial (in)dependence; difficult historical contexts; discrepancies at the level of cultural perceptions; communication gaps; limited access to resources; political participation and ownership of the empowerment process.

In her analysis of gender dynamics, Agapi Kandylaki reflects on why gender politics and promoting gender equality are essential, and on how civil society can contribute to reconstructing gender dynamics. Focusing on the regional context, the paper highlights the role of the social dialogue in increasing the visibility of the issues related to gender equality, in fostering behavioural change while transforming gender stereotypes.

Similarly, dialogue appears to be central in the paper of Stefanos Vallianatos, who approaches the intercultural interactions and civil society by looking at the public diplomacy – cultural diplomacy – cultural relations triad. While reflecting on the peculiarities of intercultural dialogue 'on the ground', he refers to the important role the EU plays in the enhancement of

dialogue in the regional context. Furthermore, various actions that aim at empowering civil society and at increasing the dynamics of the intercultural dialogue are suggested, including the role of intercultural competences and education, advocacy, and active cooperation with the media and academia.

Finally, Stefan Cibian explores the macro-challenges encountered by communities in their engagement with the sustainable development goals (SDGs). Empirically, his paper brings evidence from the countries of the Black Sea region, providing details on their approaches to achieving the SDGs. The paper highlights the progress and the challenges encountered by cities in the Black Sea region in their engagement with the SDGs. These include hyper-centralisation; the policy-making culture; data scarcity and a limited research infrastructure; societal characteristics; and SDG-related challenges. The author argues that all of the countries in the region have made efforts towards meeting the SDGs, although the cities in the Black Sea region are still in the early phase of engaging with the SDGs and the environment. For instance, the level of political will is not always up to par and the communities' understanding of sustainability and its benefits is sometimes lagging behind.

Each of the contributions concludes with policy recommendations, which were jointly developed by the authors and the 10th International Neighbourhood alumni and participants, as a result of the INS panel discussions. Overall, these recommendations provide some examples of the possible ways to strengthen the role of civil society in Europe's neighbourhoods. Our hope is that this report provides some food for thought and action in this ever-growing and crucial discussion and debate on how to strengthen the role of civil society in Europe's neighbourhoods in today's challenging context.

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CRISTINA RIGMAN

CSOs and the Covid-19 Pandemic

"In the middle of every difficulty lies opportunity"
(Albert Einstein)

The COVID-19 pandemic marks a turning point in many aspects of our lives, civil society organisations included. By civil society organisations (CSOs) we refer to organisational structures which are voluntary, transparent, independent, self-governing, non-profit distributing, private and non-ornamental, performing one of the following functions: values guardian, social innovation, community building, social capital development, rights and expression role, advocacy and problem identification (Salamon 1999). According to a 2021 report of the European Economic and Social Committee (Tageo et. al. 2021, IV), the impact of the pandemic on CSOs is characterised as having ‘profound impacts that may harm their capacity to continue playing their central roles in delivering services, advocating for the rights and protection of the most fragile, while safeguarding participatory democracy and civic debate’. Some of the difficulties this report has identified include the lack of stable funding streams, inadequate legal frameworks, and the limitations in terms of skillsets and access to equipment that would allow CSOs to take full advantage of the ongoing digital transformation, while leaving no one behind. The report’s authors thus ask for ‘future reflection and bold political decisions to make sure that CSOs’ capacities are maintained and strengthened in the post-COVID-19 recovery phase’ (Tageo et. al. 2021, IV).

True to their assumed role of complementing the limited capacities of the state to address societal problems, in many countries CSOs have started immediately to collect donations and direct resources towards the national health systems overwhelmed and caught off-guard in terms of vital supplies by the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, in Romania, by the end of April 2020, some 80 CSOs had managed to collect donations and purchase medical equipment and supplies, which were distributed to several hospitals across the country at a total value of 13.95 million Euros (Dincă 2021).

Although not many studies and analysis looking carefully at the impact of COVID-19 on CSOs are currently available, the subject is expected to be thoroughly investigated in the coming years, given that changes are required to ensure that CSOs continue to operate effectively and fulfil their mission. This paper provides a reflection-based analysis drawing upon the direct observation of a civil society activist, engaged in several CSO-led projects during 2020, without claiming representativity. The reflection will be guided by six main organisational development areas: Governance and Legal Compliance, Operations and Management, Human Resources, Financial Resources, Programmes and Service Delivery, External Relations, and Advocacy.

Governance and legal compliance, operations and management

The Governance and Legal Compliance of CSOs has never been an easy task. However, the context of COVID-19 has made it even more difficult, especially with regard to formalising decisions that require registration with state authorities, and the reliance on originally signed documents during face-to-face meetings. The failure to update the governance structures results in significant difficulty for the Operations and Management of CSOs, including ineligibility for several funding programs, thereby further extending the impact of the pandemic on their ability to operate. Many CSOs are constantly operating on the edge with regard to meeting all the legal requirements due to their limited resources. Complying with new rules and procedures, remote working patterns and protection measures have added an extra burden on their capacity. Flexible governance procedures were required to adapt swiftly to the new operational reality, but changing the already existing procedures was very difficult since the process was dependent on face-to-face interactions. Large CSOs with complex internal structures, branches and multiple locations have faced more challenges in adjusting their decision-making processes compared to small local CSOs. In a crisis context, the transparency of CSOs becomes more and more relevant. As CSOs gather donations and provide support to health systems, major transparency is required to build credibility and maintain trust among the general public, already affected by conspiracy theories about the virus' origins and very distrustful of their government's communication approach and crisis management.

Human resources

Furthermore, most of the CSOs are understaffed when it comes to their Human Resources. This is mostly due to limited financial resources and a consciously assumed effort to direct most of the resources towards programmes and services; this is also due, at times, to the limitations in the human resources' share of expenses imposed by different funding schemes or donors. Investment in sophisticated human resource management procedures has never been very high on the priority list of CSOs. Access to equipment and digital facilities has proved critical to allowing CSOs to continue their operations after the initial lockdown measures imposed by the authorities in the early spring of 2020. Even if CSOs had adequate equipment and internet connections, their beneficiaries many times did not, or were located in areas with limited or no internet coverage, thus making it very difficult for CSOs to continue their usual programmes and services. Adjustments were required and many CSOs did not have the skills and mindsets required to implement such adjustments. Many of their efforts were made even more difficult by the limitations faced by the most vulnerable that they served. Taking part in an online programme or receiving online assistance in efficient ways

require much more than just a device and an internet connection: it requires an open mindset, acceptance of the circumstances and willingness to do things in a different way, all of which require time to become effective. For many CSOs, having their staff on paid leave with their wages subsidised at 75 %, as many of the public institutions and businesses have done during the first lockdown, was not an acceptable option due to the specificity of their budgets and expenditure type, placing an extra layer of work-related stress on CSO employees.

Financial resources

The Financial Resources of CSOs have been significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The immediate impact on the funding of CSOs may be identified in the limited donations and sponsorships which were redirected, by the CSOs themselves, towards the national health systems under tremendous duress due to the virus and the limited available specific supplies. Membership based CSOs have chosen to waive membership fees, to help their members affected by the crisis, while much project-based funding required heavy bureaucracy to allow for the relocation of funds. Among the areas where CSOs needed immediate financial support were access to equipment and remote communication facilities. A study conducted in Austria revealed that a majority of CSOs lost at least one stream of revenue during 2020 and experienced a cost increase in their service delivery, with most organisations reporting a very negative impact on their finances recorded among volunteering organisations (Meyer et. al. 2020). The same trend was recorded by the EESC study, which showed that 30 % of CSOs expected lower revenues in 2020 and 42 % expected higher costs for their service delivery. The main source of cost increase is expected to come from the required investment in IT, physical equipment and connection facilities, as well as from the significant increase in demand for their services (Tageo et. al. 2021, VI).

Many states have put together special support measures to cover the significant economic loss due to lockdowns and restrictions put in place to fight the virus, but many times CSOs have been excluded from such support schemes. Countries like Moldova, Armenia, Bulgaria, or Turkey have excluded CSOs from the support schemes either directly or due to business-tailored eligibility criteria, while CSOs in Kosovo have been included in the fiscal benefits packages devised by the government, providing support to cover rent and salaries for up to two months. CSOs in Romania have mobilised to conduct sustained advocacy, so as to have CSOs become eligible for state support for partial salary coverage during the state of emergency (ChildPact 2020). Some donors have acted swiftly to provide dedicated funding schemes to enable CSOs to continue their operations, vital service delivery and humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable deeply affected by the crisis. These include, inter alia, the Central European Initiative Fund, Black Sea Trust, the European Commission, the European Youth Foundation, UNICEF, USAID and the Oak Foundation. Although in Azerbaijan, for instance, some funding has stopped since the start of the outbreak (ChildPact 2020).

Programmes and service delivery

The most affected area for CSOs is definitely that of Programmes and Service Delivery, in direct connection with the limitations and the loss of financial resources, as well as also due to a significant increase in the demand for services and the number of eligible recipients. One consequence of the COVID-19 crisis is the fact that it has extensively exposed many limitations and vulnerabilities of our societies that were easier to ignore or disregard during pre-pandemic times. We were all aware of the inequalities in our societies, but it was not until the appearance of the COVID-19 restrictions that we became aware of their full extent, when the numbers of children and families without access to the internet became known in the context of online schooling. We all knew that there was domestic violence in our societies, but it was not until we were all required to stay at home that we became painfully aware that the victims had been in lockdown with the aggressors for weeks. We were all aware that there were homeless people and even children living in the street, but it was not until we were all required to stay at home that we realized the actual impact of not having a home. These are just a few of the existing vulnerabilities that the COVID-19 context has exposed in their real dimensions, which has made more people aware of their true impact on the most vulnerable. Some of the systems, procedures and rules upon which our societies are based have long required an update to prepare for the digital future, but it was not until the COVID-19 restrictions that decision-makers became aware of the importance of the digitalisation of the public services, interconnectedness of various data bases, and the level of digital skills of the public employees that could have made crisis management much more effective and user friendly should they have already been in place before the COVID-19 pandemic entered our lives.

All these vulnerabilities have made the programme and service delivery context more difficult for CSOs. Reaching out to the most vulnerable has been very difficult in the absence of updated information on who is vulnerable and on how to get by, in the absence of devices, reliable connections and basic digital skills. Travel restrictions have hit hard the mobile services that many CSOs were providing in rural or remote areas, where no local capacities exist within public administration, and local CSOs are rare or non-existent. All in-person services were temporarily stopped, until ways of remote delivery approaches were defined, and the requisite logistic arrangements were made. On top of the discomfort of the uncertainty experienced by everyone at an individual level, employees of CSOs have had to deal with additional layers of distress due to the emotional attachment and responsibility assumed when serving the most vulnerable. A comprehensive description of the various sources of distress experienced by CSO workers, as well as the difficulties experienced by the service users from Austria can be applied more universally:

Not only did the restrictions impose many forms of stress onto the most vulnerable in society, but also indirectly onto the CSO employees working with these people. Daily structures and routines, key ingredients in social work, had suddenly dissolved. If at all possible, their

restricted capability to cope with and adapt to new technologies created non-acceptance among the target group in many cases; e.g. people with disabilities or those suffering from dementia in the case of wearing masks. Group therapies and services could not be carried out any more due to physical distancing requirements. As personal contact is important for an effective and humane delivery of social services to the target groups, CSOs had to cope with an additional layer of psychological stress during the lockdown and the following period (Meyer et. al. 2020, 81).

External relations and advocacy

March 2020 brought the challenges of meaningful External Relations and Advocacy of CSOs to a whole new level. CSOs have found ways to communicate and connect their efforts in order to collect donations for the health system and stay in contact with their service users. Innovative ways to conduct advocacy on relevant topics have also been advanced, as public institutions have also seen an increase in the use of digital communication tools. Among the key concerns for CSOs, as emergency situations have been declared in most countries, have been the limitation of rights and transparency requirements of public decision making and spending. While some rights' limitations were clearly serving the fight against the virus, some were not as easy to justify in connection with the pandemic and seemed to be taken to provide a safety net to the public institutions rather than to serve the fight against the virus. These included unnecessary limitations of the right to access public interest information or waivers from transparency with regard to public contracting procedures.

The rights of children to education were among the most affected. The limitations of the system were very clear with regard to a significant number of children without access to the internet and suitable devices. But even where children had access to the internet and devices, several limitations also apply. For instance, the wide variety of applications available are not necessarily user friendly, require assistance from adults, who are not always digitally skilled, and pose storage and compatibility issues, let alone the limits of the digital skills of teachers, which proved insurmountable in some situations, deepening the difficult access to education for even more children.

The rights to adequate care of people with disabilities have also been severely affected. Many do not have the mental or physical ability to use digital devices to continue access to basic services in the absence of the direct face-to-face support they used to receive before the lockdowns. The right to physical integrity of so many women and children has been severely affected by the lockdown, living with their aggressors or in inadequate living conditions, deepening their vulnerability to unacceptable levels. Online safety became a huge issue for all the children who were increasingly present online due to the relocation of schooling in the digital environment, as well as due to the limited skills or capacities of their parents or tutors

to adequately supervise the time children spend online. Increased incidences of violence against children were reported during 2020 in Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, Serbia, Azerbaijan, Romania, Bosnia and Herzegovina (ChildPact 2020), while cyber-bullying has also been on the increase. Loss of jobs or a decrease in income has brought an exacerbation of poverty and deprivation, affecting already vulnerable families and deepening the in-work poverty rates.

All these aspects have led to an increased need for psychological support for children and families, for the disabled and the elderly, generating an enormous pressure on CSOs providing services in these areas. The shortage of trained professionals in social assistance and care, psychological support, counselling and rehabilitation is becoming more and more acute among both private and public service providers, requiring advocacy and policy interventions.

Conclusions and recommendations

The COVID-19 pandemic marks a turning point in the way the social fabric is designed, and one can only hope that CSOs will play a significant part in redefining the social fabric of our societies, to ensure more equality and inclusiveness for all vulnerable peoples and communities. Some of the recommendations we make based on the yearlong crisis experience include:

1. Increased consideration of CSOs as dialogue partners for governments and the inclusion of CSOs in all the recovery and resilience support schemes that governments are developing.
2. Local capacity building to ensure basic services can be provided as close to the service users as possible, so that they are not affected by mobility limitations.
3. Increased access to digital devices and adequate internet connections to cover all vulnerable people.
4. Increased levels of digital skills and digital services among public institutions and public servants.
5. Revised procedures for association and legal requirements for CSOs, to enable their functioning in similar times of crisis.
6. Adjusting funding procedures at private and public donor level to allow increased flexibility and adaptability to disruptions.
7. Revising the structure of funding to CSOs to allow significantly higher administrative/indirect expenses, including staff salaries, as opposed to focusing on direct expenses and travel and events expenses.

8. Extended civil engagement in the form of local association membership, donation and volunteering, to ensure sustainability of local CSOs.
9. Increased media focus on showcasing volunteer support and exposure to positive news that may help the population increase its engagement in CSO activity and cope better with the distress and isolation caused by the crisis.

The year 2020 will definitely be remembered as the year of resilience, especially among the CSO movement. Many discussions regarding resilience were held during 2020, and plans for increased resilience have been drafted. While this has been a solid strategy to bring CSOs through 2020, it is not at all the long-term solution that will make CSOs stronger and more effective. It is time that CSOs open up a meaningful and extended dialogue on how the social space will be redefined, what their role will be, and how they will get ready to adapt to whatever is coming. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic will eventually fade away and we will see that the CSOs that will not only survive, but thrive in the new wave of normality, will not be the strongest ones nor the biggest ones, but the most adaptable ones. CSOs have to find creative solutions to invest in making their people, systems and procedures flexible and agile so as to embrace and adapt to the high levels of uncertainty and change that will be occurring over and over again in the future.

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MICHAEL G. KAVUKLIS

Youth Empowerment in Europe's Neighbourhoods* : Challenges and Prospects in a Post-Covid-19 Era

Youth empowerment is recognized internationally by both states and international organisations as a key element in building strong and sustainable democracies. With reference to young people, stakeholders recognize them as the bearers of hope towards more inclusive, more adaptive, more innovative communities. Thus, actual youth participation in decision-making and in active citizenship are crucial to improve our way of living.

Youth empowerment is almost always approached in two ways: 1) to create strong, independent, skilled, willing and participating individuals out of young people; and 2) to consider youth as a vulnerable group among the population in need of protection and specific actions. Both approaches target the countering of certain realities that young people face today. The aim of this paper is to describe the current situation of youth in the region, isolate the challenges faced by young people and propose a series of policy recommendations.

General challenges faced by youth

When studying the young as a vulnerable group inside the general population, there are certain aspects to be taken into consideration:

1. There is a need to enhance the consciousness of the group's members, support their efforts to become strong, independent individuals, to be self-aware of their condition and to be able to pursue the improvement of the quality of their lives.
2. Each community must develop its acceptance of the vulnerable group and allow it to become active, while the group itself has to be open to inclusion and to being a part of something greater, an integral part of their community.
3. The vulnerable group has to be supported, even protected; and solutions to its members' basic needs have to be promoted, while their views and demands have to be allowed for.
4. As with any vulnerable group, its members, apart from the personal skills and capabilities mentioned above, have to be able to attain a level of income security, in order to ensure a certain level of quality of life.

* For the purposes of this report, we define the European Union member states as 'Europe'; and as 'neighbourhoods', we refer to the states included in the European Neighbourhood Policy (both Eastern and Southern), where statistics and data are usually sufficient to support the findings and conclusion of the report.

5. Every vulnerable group is judged against certain general perceptions and, sometimes, is even assigned certain stereotypes. This leads to a set of limitations imposed on its function as a part of the community and some societal rules that are expected to be followed.

To counter these challenges and their consequences, youth empowerment should aim, respectively, to:

1. provide young people with education, support, training and skills to become independent and promote their feelings of self-confidence.
2. inspire and support young leaders to become the voices of youth, to get actively involved and engaged in the inter-communal and inter-generational dialogue and community process. As a result, young people will become an integral part of their community, early on, participating in and owning part of the solutions that affect both the group and the overall community.
3. develop a series of institutional and social tools, including government agencies, public watchdogs, voluntary organisations, unions, etc. that will create and sustain resources required for young people to be firstly provided with the proper protection coverage and, secondly, to be heard and represented in the decision making and social processes.
4. equip the young with the proper set of skills that will make them successful executives and entrepreneurs, achieving the desired income security and ownership of their produced outcomes.
5. combat stereotypes associated with age and reverse norms and social expectations for young people that are irrelevant in terms of their development as individuals.

Challenges specific to the youth of the region

Young people of the region, apart from their generic challenges faced as a vulnerable group, have to deal with a series of actual problems and facts that restrain their development and equal opportunities. Furthermore, in a region like the EU and its Neighbourhoods, which includes more than 50+ countries spread around two seas, where three continents meet, the youth challenges and, thus, the expectations regarding their empowerment vary.

Demographics

It is a known fact that the population in the developed world is constantly ageing. There are many more young people in the ENP-East countries in the EU, both in absolute numbers and as a percentage of the population. (Eurostat: Statistics Explained)

Furthermore, UN projections exhibit a further pessimistic tendency with the EU's population getting significantly older over the next decades; a trend that will also affect the EU's neighbouring countries. However, the median age of some countries, like Egypt or Jordan, will be almost half the median age of certain EU countries like Germany, Italy, Spain, or Greece (Appendix A).

This results in further challenges, given that countries with a low median age usually have a larger ratio of their youth population depending on the active work force, while the higher median age countries have a larger ratio of the older people depending on the active work force. For example, while in EU and ENP-East countries the young people (under 15) that are dependent corresponds to 20–30 % of the working-age population (15–64 years old), in North African and Middle East neighbouring countries, the ratio is usually 40 % or more. Concurrently, the dependent old population ratio for the same group of countries is close to 30 % for EU and ENP-East countries while for ENP-South it is usually less than 10 % (Ritchie and Roser 2019).

Apart from challenges like employment and financial independence, the demographics of the region imply different social structures and different expectations from youth in its sub-regions, which further expand the vulnerability of the group.

Definition and perceptions of youth

Depending on the scientific approach of the term 'youth', e.g., anthropological, sociological, political, and economic, there are various definitions of youth as an age group. Most of them are inclined to define youth as those including teens and young adults, mainly referring to the ages 15–17 and 18–29 respectively. Some set the latter upper limit at 24 (usually workforce related references, like ILO or labour statistics from Eurostat) or push it up to 35 or even 40

years of age (usually political/partisan definitions). Most international organisations consider the first two groups (15–17, 18–29 years old) as a definition for youth, making them also applicable to their youth programmes. Although this definition will be mostly accurate in a global context, the regional approach might differ. Social, cultural, financial, and legal actors make the definition of youth more flexible when studied at both regional and national level. Europe and its neighbourhoods almost present a uniformity when referring to adulthood being reached at the age of 18; therefore, the division of youth into two groups <18 and 18< is valid, although the upper limit of 29 may not always be applicable in reality.

The first age group, 15–17, or teens, are, or should be, more protected as a group, given the fact that they are considered children, receiving special protection by both international and national laws, and are still considered dependent citizens. However, in small percentages (with the exception of Mauritania, at 17.4 %) there is still child labour present within Europe's neighbourhood.¹ The second age group is in fact the most vulnerable, since its representatives are legally considered adults, with all the rights and obligations this entails, including the lifting of all provisions and protection they received as children.

Young people under 18 remain a vulnerable group on its own, within the framework of youth empowerment, with the main aim being to provide them with education and skills to become active and sensitive adults. However, their livelihood and quality of life is dependent on their parents/families and vastly covered by international law and international organisations that work closely on their support and protection.

For the purposes of this report, the analysis will further be focused on the 'emerging adults'² and their support, development and empowerment. Even though the economic situation of the young will be explored later in this report, the economic realities of each country affect how we perceive youth, who we assign under this group, and how many people we actually work for through empowerment. Especially in the Western World and compared to previous generations, young people study more, enter the labour force later, and create families later still. This implies that they turn from 'emerging' to 'fully-fledged' adults later. The proposed period of 'emerging adulthood' features the concepts of identity, instability, self-focus, feeling in-between one's adolescence and adulthood, and exploring possibilities,³ which reflecting the first section above, almost correspond to the challenges faced by the members of a vulnerable group.

¹ ILO measures child labour in the following countries: Albania, Algeria, Armenia, Belarus, Egypt, Georgia, Jordan, Mauritania, North Macedonia, Occupied Palestinian Territory, Serbia, Tunisia, and Ukraine. Source: SDG indicator 8.7.1. Proportion of children engaged in economic activity and household chores (%), Downloaded from ILOSTAT. https://www.ilo.org/shinyapps/bulkexplorer57/?lang=en&segment=indicator&id=SDG_B871_SEX_AGE_RT_A. Last update on 28.03.2021.

² The terms 'emerging adults' and 'emerging adulthood' derive from the work of psychologist Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, with his research starting in the US in 1995 and published in 2000 onwards in multiple articles and books.

³ A summary of Arnett's findings may be found in the review 'Emerging Adults: the in-between age' by Christopher Munsey, <https://www.apa.org/monitor/jun06/emerging>

Combating these challenges has to do with the quality of life and the financial independence of youth, which as a condition per se, is not achieved, if ever, at the same age all around the region. As shown in the next chapter, for many countries, including the whole European South and East, financial independence is achieved after 25 years of age and, often, closer to 30. If we consider these measurements as averages, there is a large portion of people well above 30 that have yet to complete their transition to ‘fully-fledged’ adults and, as a result, are to be considered members of the vulnerable youth group. Since major social statistics and cultural references usually show us that Europe’s South (EU Mediterranean countries) have similar social characteristics and even values to their southern and eastern neighbours (the third Mediterranean countries), it is safe to assume that similar financial dependence on the parental house exists in the neighbouring countries. Taking this into consideration, we propose that in order to holistically study youth and its problems, we have to include at least people up to 35 years of age in our scope, in order to successfully reflect the actual conditions in many countries of the region. Otherwise, we have to reflect and admit that we have large groups of people between 30 and 40 that have failed to successfully transit from ‘emerging’ to ‘fully-fledged’ adulthood, and there is no actual consideration of them at all.

Unemployment and financial independence

Youth is considered one of the most vulnerable groups of the population with reference to unemployment and the risk of poverty. However, a vast majority of the young unemployed are still studying at school, college or university or are active in a training capacity; although not active members of the working population, they are still active citizens. Thus, measuring or concentrating our analysis simply on the Employment Rate might be misleading as regards the actual employability of youth or its actual contribution to society.

Consequently, the term NEETs has been coined to describe the part of youth that is Not in Employment, Education or Training. Being a NEET person means usually that there is little to no access to actual education and training and the environment does not favour employment. Data suggests that very few young people actually are NEETs by choice, while they most often face financial, social or even racial barriers to finding a job or to enlisting in education or training programmes. According to the latest available data for each country, EU countries have relatively low percentages of NEETs among their young population, ranging from 4 to 15 %, while the neighbouring countries start from 15 % (Israel) to more than 35 % (Jordan). In most of the countries of the South, in the Balkans and in the Caucasus, NEETs are a quarter or even one third of the total young population (Appendix B).

Another important metric to be considered is the partial dependency of youth on the parental household. Especially in Europe, where such metrics exist, we can see three main tendencies, taking into account when young people leave the parental household. Young people in Northern countries tend to leave home closer to the age of 20, while in central Europe it is

around 25, and in South and Eastern Europe, including certain enlargement countries, they leave home closer or even over the age of 30 (Appendix C). The main reasons usually posed for such a delay in leaving home are income insecurity, and financial dependence on the parental household, as well as social and cultural customs.

The historical context

To examine the needs and specificities that youth empowerment has to follow to be successful, one has to be aware of and understand the historical context in which today's youth was born, has grown, and lives. Considering those between 18 to 29 or 35 years of age, we are referring to the majority of the Millennials⁴ and the older part of Generation Z.⁵ Within the last 35 years, at the regional level, we have lived through the following:

1. the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War;
2. the further integration and expansion of the European Union and the adoption of the Euro;
3. the 9/11 terrorist attacks and more than a decade of major terrorist events in the western world;
4. the creation of the World Wide Web and the transformation of means of communication and changes in lifestyle, from technological developments like social media, instant messaging, remote business, etc.;
5. the Arab Spring and the instability in Libya and Syria, resulting in massive refugee waves and the dislocation of millions of people;
6. the Russia-West ongoing *bras de fer*, with the annexation of Crimea, the unrest in the Caucasus, and the gas and pipelines wars;
7. the decade long financial crisis starting in 2007–2008;
8. the COVID-19 pandemic; not to include smaller scale or bilateral crises that occasionally stall the process towards a peaceful, fairer world.

Returning to the stereotypes that are attributed to youth, today's young person has not survived a World War, has not participated in, or lived through the great social struggles and revolutions of the 1960s and 1970s, as it is usually accused of by older generations. All these major events have affected how the international system functions over the past 80 years

⁴ The term Millennials refers to those people born between the 1980s and the mid-1990s.

⁵ The term Generation Z refers to those people born between the late 1990s and the early 2010s.

and resulted in the main international human rights movements and awareness that are still points of reference today. However, today's youth, especially throughout its adulthood, has never experienced a stable reality, a certain and prosperous future. Moreover, its very identity was challenged, with stereotypes becoming more hostile, and social structures and financial earnings established in the previous decades were reversed.

Cultural perceptions and gap in communication

When referring to the cultural perceptions of the youth in the region, we are referring to perceptions based solely on age as a factor. Young adults face different expectations and social obligations throughout the region, even those within the same country. Those norms may also vary based on gender; e.g. in certain communities, younger women are expected to start a family as early as possible, or immediately after finishing school or college, or they are expected to abandon their careers in order to start a family.

As described above, the European north expect their young people to become financially independent early in their adulthood, while in the south, they are accommodated in the parental household even after the age of 30. Furthermore, the technological advancements with which the Millennials and Generation Z have grown up, along with the new ways of communicating they brought, make them socially distant in the eyes of previous generations that refuse or are unable to keep up. Despite the multiple crises faced during their lifetime, today's youth is still measured against stereotypes that are decades old.

The intergenerational gap in communication and perception alienates youth from the rest of society. Conventional methods of political dialogue and process popular among the older age groups are of no use or even totally irrelevant to today's youth across the region. The young discuss, debate, talk, communicate through new technologies, new emerging platforms, that older groups do not use or are not even aware of. Although the pandemic put teleconference tools like Skype, Zoom, Teams and Meet in the lives of all, young people prefer TikTok, Discord and other instant messaging or exchange platforms to communicate.

Access to resources / Ease of mobility

The European Union is considered the largest economy in the world and includes some of the most advanced, developed, and progressive democracies around the globe. Most of the member states have national youth strategies, while the EU has its own programme (under the Erasmus+) providing funding for youth projects. We should mention the relevance of the EEA and Norway Grants, a strong financial tool for European countries. Additionally, through organisations like the Council of Europe, the OSCE and the OECD, ENP — East partners have access to a whole other array of resources and projects, including expertise and funding.

On the other hand, the majority of ENP – South countries lack direct or effective national strategies for youth, or specific regional-oriented projects,⁶ with the exception of the Anna Lindh Foundation and the Union for the Mediterranean, which, however, both rely heavily on the European Union’s funding as well, or the various other EU and EU/CoE led/funded youth programmes. There are various foundations from more developed countries (public or private sector) that act in the ENP – South countries, but not in an organised and coordinated way, and not always with the same agenda and projected outcomes. There are also regional plans, like the African Union’s African Youth Charter, Youth Decade Plan of Action, and the Malabo Decision on Youth Empowerment, that however target the whole African continent and do not include the Levant countries.

Much as in the case of funding, the European Neighbourhood region presents the same duality concerning mobility. In general, and irrespectively of financial means, citizens from the European countries (Enlargement and ENP-East), and therefore youth and youth facilitators, require no visa or obtain visas much easier for travel within the Schengen area than their ENP-South counterparts.⁷ These three levels of access to resources and easy mobility, work as a serious obstacle to substantial relations and the integration of youth work at the regional level.

Political participation

Although throughout the region, youth suffrage is set at close to 18 years of age, the age of eligibility is not always the same. The actual representation of youth in decision making bodies at the national level is extremely disproportionate to the actual size of the population group they represent. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the global trend shows that the percentage of Members of Parliament (MPs) under the age of 30 is just 2.2%, while that of MPs under the age of 45 is just 28.1%. As of 2018, only Norway, Sweden, Finland, Montenegro, Austria, Italy, Tunisia, Romania, Denmark, and Malta have more than 5% of their single or lower chamber MPs under the age of 30. Only Ukraine, Finland, Romania, Norway, Sweden, The Netherlands, Italy, Montenegro and Georgia have more than 30% of their single or lower chamber MPs under the age of 40. For upper chambers, the data available are even worse. Furthermore, among young MPs, gender inequality is also evident, usually in terms of 60%–40% in favour of male MPs (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2018).

Although it was not feasible to acquire accurate and comparable data for a sound sample of regional countries for the other levels of government, most of the international and regional reports on youth point out that youth participation in the decision-making process at communal, municipal, and local government levels is at best problematic, even among EU member states (OECD 2020; OECD MENA n.d.).

⁶ Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Libya, Syria and Tunisia have no youth policies in place, while Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and Palestine do. <https://www.youthpolicy.org/nationalyouthpolicies/>. Also: OECD MENA Governance Programme, 'Seven Key Findings from the Youth Governance Survey'.

⁷ Of the ENP-East, three countries: Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia or 68% of the area's population receive visa-free status, while for ENP South, only Israel or 3% of the area's population, has a similar status. Furthermore, visa applications from ENP-East countries are approved at a rate of 97%, while visa applications from ENP-South countries are approved at a rate of 71%. Source: <https://statistics.schengenvisa.info/>

Ownership of the empowerment process

An important factor in the success of any empowerment process is the feeling of ownership of the process on behalf of the beneficiaries. In the previous section, we have already established the lack of representation of youth in the decision-making process at all levels of government. A similar trend is observed within organisations working with youth and those running youth programmes. Although there are programmes that call for and fund youth-led projects, the majority of youth-related projects are run by people that are not peers of the beneficiaries.⁸ This is not always a negative aspect, but total control of the operation, methods and content of empowerment projects, if combined with the rest of the challenges mentioned above, may result in irrelevant or low impact outcomes.

Conclusions and recommendations

Having briefly analysed the status of young people in the region and the main challenges they face, along with setting up the basic foundations on which any youth empowerment project has to be built, considering the various aspects of the region like intercultural trends, geopolitical tensions, and financial realities, this report has tried to define and describe the youth of today. Certain compromises had to be made during the analysis, like not including gender, religion, progressiveness or even the democratic nature of institutions in each country, which affect the whole population, including its youth. Our target was to concentrate on the age factor and youth per se, and not to segmentalize this vulnerable group other than at the national or subregional level.

We have further to take into account that the COVID-19 pandemic has introduced new challenges and possibilities. Live events, in situ actions, field projects, and mobility have been limited or suspended for almost 18 months now. Major international programmes and their projects have been adjusted to the new reality, new deadlines, or in some cases, have failed and have been cancelled. While new methods of communication and new technologies have been imposed on the general population by necessity, there is still a lack of personal contact, personal exchange, and personal experience, including the beguiling aspect of travelling and shared activities which are at the core of any international exchange project.

The post COVID-19 era will surely be a revised version of the previous situation, with the enhanced use of technology, hybrid events, and, for a time, further restrictions and obstructions to youth mobility across the region, due to the health regulations imposed.

Taking this into consideration and given the analysis of the challenges experienced by youth in the region, the following recommendations could be followed up on:

⁸ It was not possible to obtain viable data on the age of all those actively involved in youth projects. Officials aged 18–34 represented 26% of the total staff of entities in charge of youth affairs in 2019, in OECD countries. OECD. 2020. Governance for Youth, Trust and Intergenerational Justice: Fit for all generations? Highlights. <https://www.oecd.org/gov/governance-for-youth-trust-and-intergenerational-justice-c3e5cb8a-en.htm>

1. All youth projects should aim and focus on solutions that address multiple challenges. For instance, the development of self-confidence should be combined with leadership skills; leadership skills should be combined with entrepreneurial and other skills that may be capitalised in the market later, etc.
2. Any Youth Empowerment strategy has to make provisions and even provide solutions that will assist youth in their transition to fully-fledged adults, by mainly preparing them to enter the labour market. There is a need for advanced internship programmes, targeted voluntary exchanges in the likes of the European Solidarity Corps or even its expansion to include ENP countries, using new communication methods and methods of training to reach the NEETs.
3. Although it is not always possible to fully assign to youth the organisation of a project, especially ones that entail vast logistical aspects, the youth should be included in the creation of the contents and outcomes of each project. By involving young people in project design and implementation, the project will be more relevant to them and also promote youth ownership of the project.
4. Ensure less bureaucratic procedures for the creation of youth-led projects, equip the young to manage such programmes in order to become more self-reliant in their responsibilities. Bureaucracy is a great burden for the inexperienced, but also for small voluntary organisations outside the large urban areas. Actions like the decentralisation of the funding procedure and entrusting part of it to civic society or local stakeholders, outside the standard governmental channels, will provide better access to youth in general, and to youth workers. Furthermore, targeting the training of young people in managerial skills will provide them with useful skills, boost their self-confidence and strengthen their sense of ownership.
5. Support projects that make young people active advocates for their local communities. Apart from developing the personal skills of the young person, if carefully handled, this will also raise his/her status among the local community. This process will facilitate the emergence of young leaders and may aspire them to pursue more active roles in the policy and decision-making bodies of their local and national governments.
6. Support youth mobility across the region, by making provisions that will allow the young and youth workers from the South to travel more easily to Europe, in order to share experiences and expertise with their northern counterparts.

7. Inspire Youth with a specific target and multi-year term commitment. The United Nations Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, aka the 17 UNSDGs, is a unique communication tool to inspire young people to dedicate themselves to a measurable and tangible cause, along with others of their generation, stakeholders, NGOs, governments and the private sector, in a global effort that may be exercised locally, nationally and regionally.

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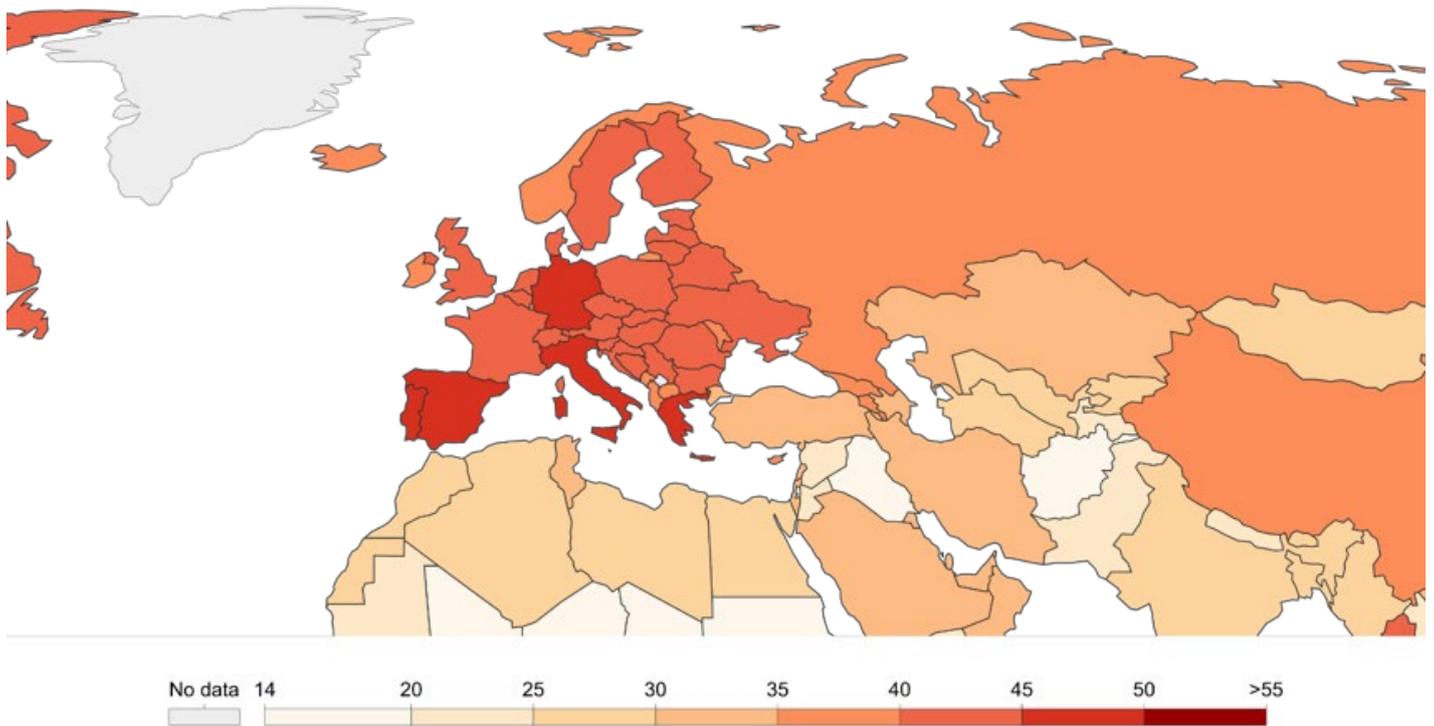
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Appendix A.

Median age maps for 2020 and 2050

Median Age, 2020

The median age divides the population in two parts of equal size: that is, there are as many persons with ages above the median age as there are with ages below the median ages.



Source: UN Population Division (Median Age) (2017)

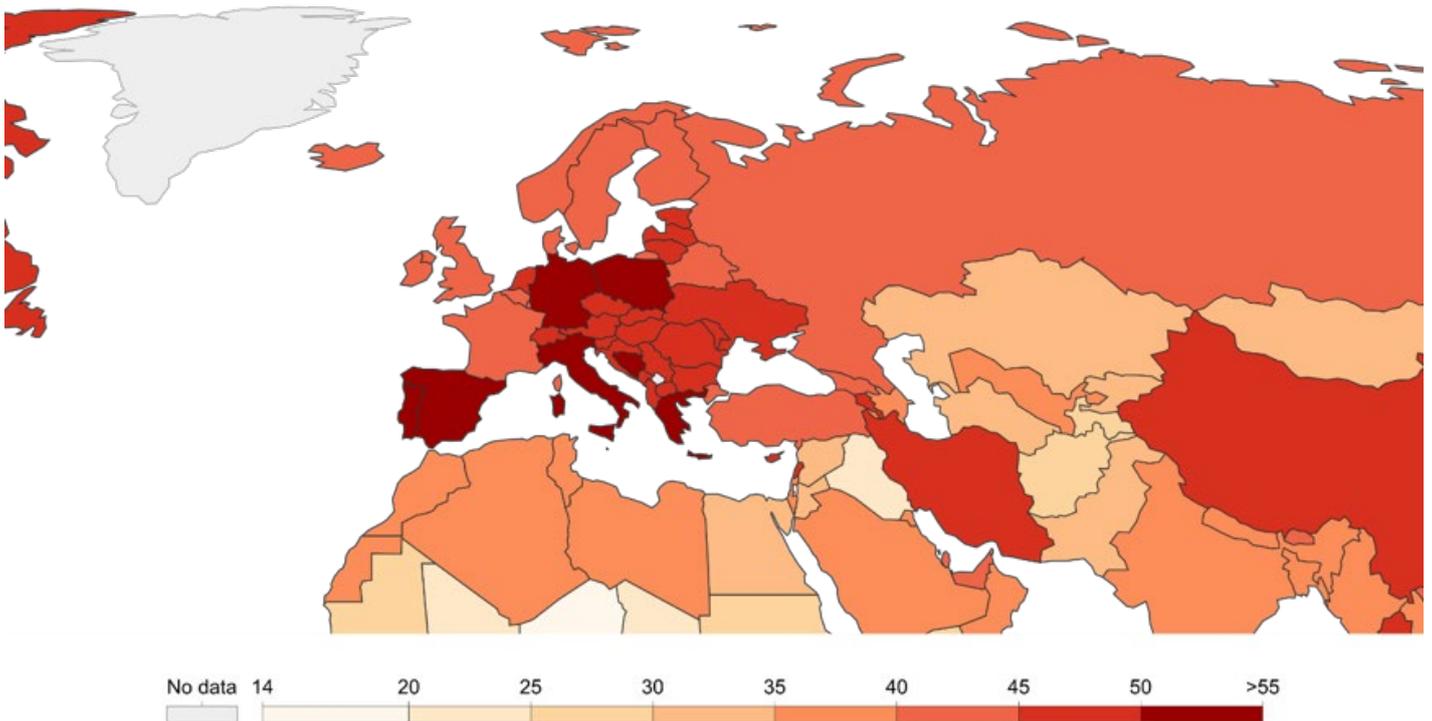
Note: 1950 to 2015 show historical estimates. From 2016 the UN projections (medium variant) are shown.

OurWorldInData.org/age-structure • CC BY

Source: Our World in Data. Age Structure. <https://ourworldindata.org/age-structure>

Median Age, 2050

The median age divides the population in two parts of equal size: that is, there are as many persons with ages above the median age as there are with ages below the median ages.



Source: UN Population Division (Median Age) (2017)

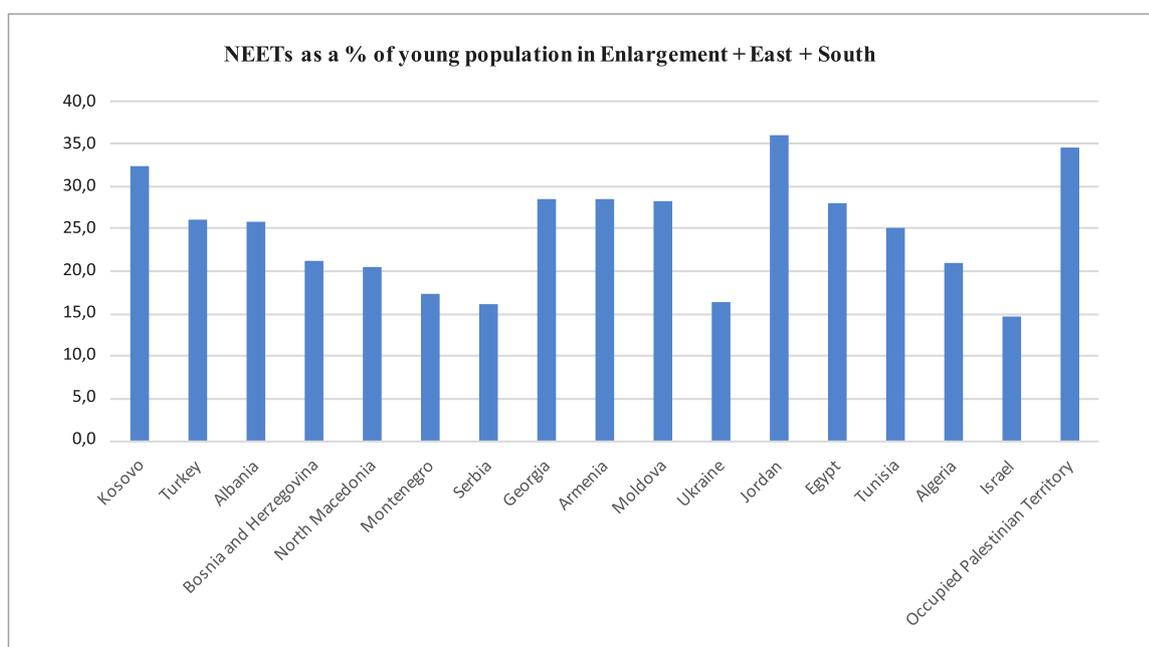
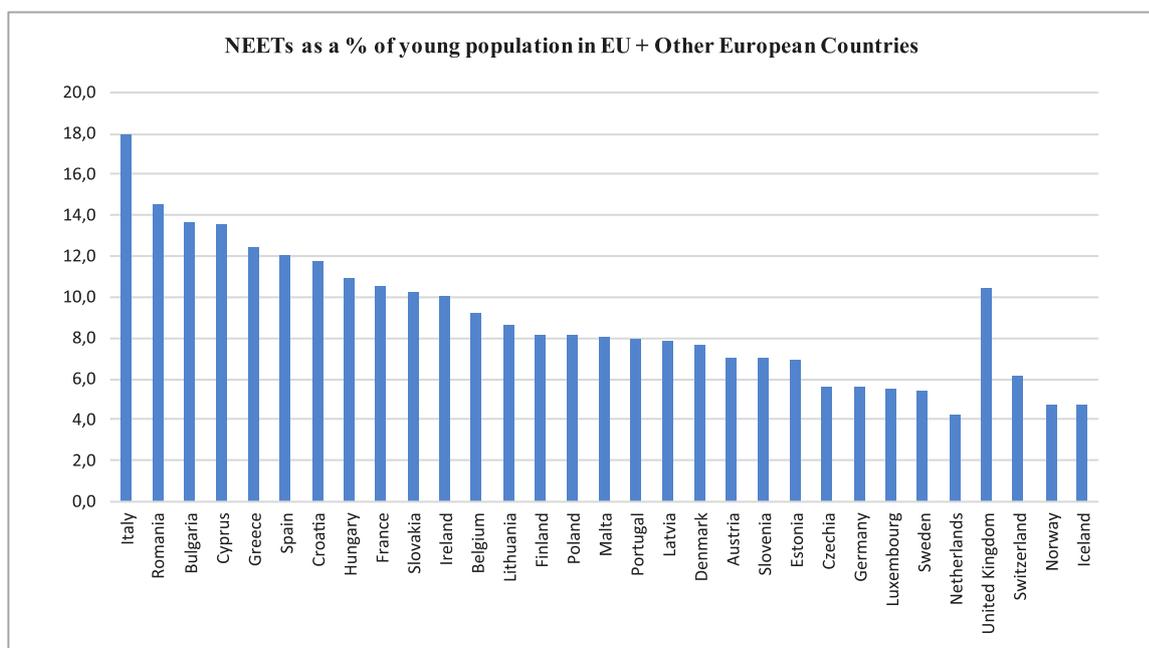
Note: 1950 to 2015 show historical estimates. From 2016 the UN projections (medium variant) are shown.

OurWorldInData.org/age-structure • CC BY

Source: Our World in Data. Age Structure. <https://ourworldindata.org/age-structure>

Appendix B.

NEETs as percentage of the population

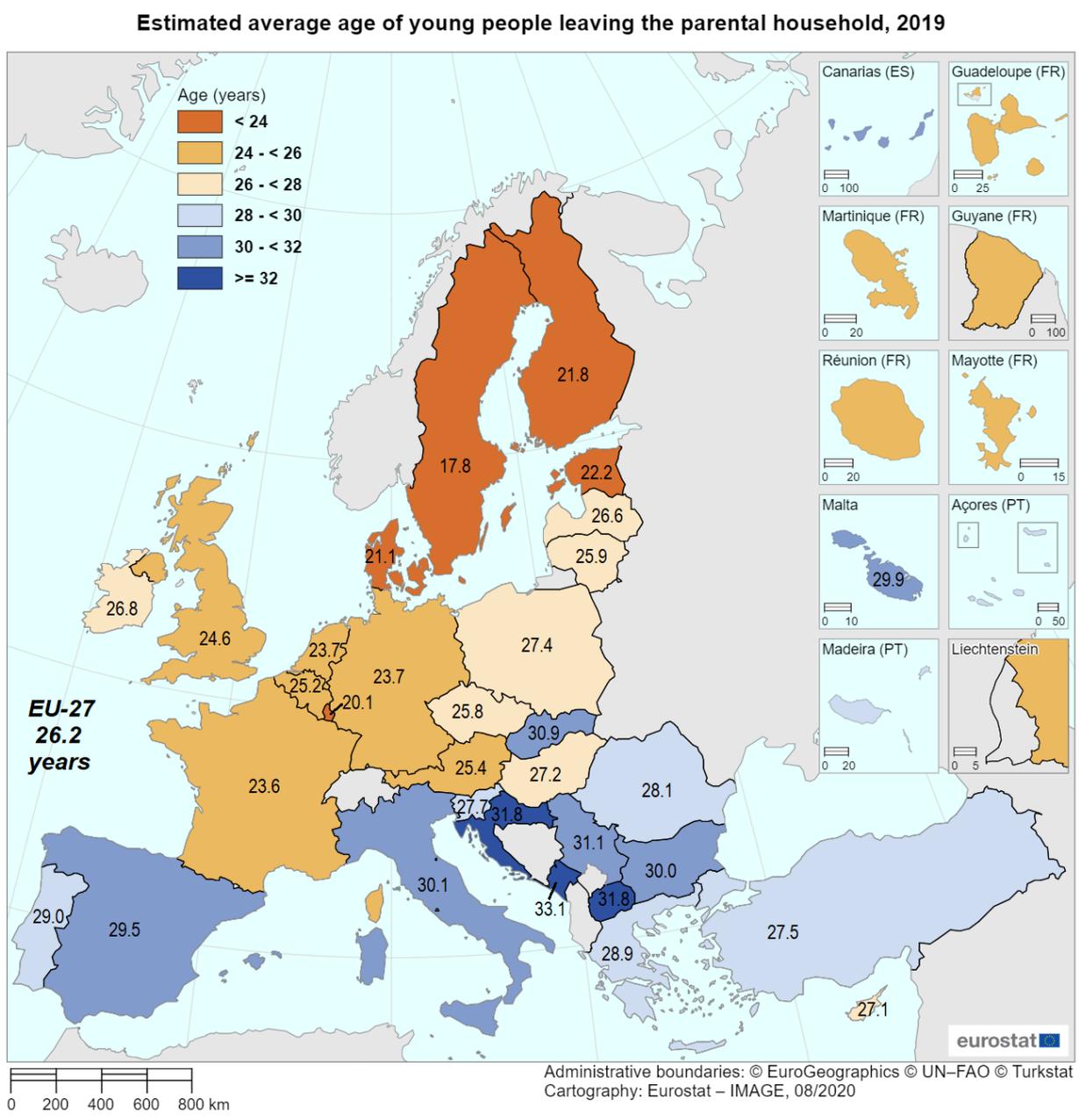


Source: Based on data from ILOSTAT: SDG indicator 8.6.1 – Proportion of youth (aged 15–24 years) not in education, employment or training (%) – Last update March 28, 2021.

https://www.ilo.org/shinyapps/bulkexplorer54/?lang=en&segment=indicator&id=SDG_0861_SEX_RT_A

Appendix C.

Estimated average age of young people leaving the parental household, 2019



Source: Eurostat (online data code: yth_demo_030)

Source: EUROSTAT, https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=yth_demo_030&lang=en

AGAPI KANDYLAKI

Gender Dynamics

Gender equality, the promotion of human rights, equal opportunities and, most particularly, the right to a 'violence free' and 'respectful' life for women and men are essential elements for the citizens' well-being in today's liberal democracies. This paper inquires into why engendering politics and promoting women's rights and gender equality are essential and how civil society can contribute to reconstructing gender dynamics.

Why is gender an important issue? The feminist perspectives

Gender is a term widely and frequently used in the academic literature and in popular references; although one should not take for granted that we always have the same understanding of the term. Chancer and Watkins (2006, 17), for example, argue that the meaning of gender is likely to vary depending on the context where it is used. They thus provide three distinctive ways of defining gender from a sociological, anthropological and historical perspective. Historically they claim that gender can be viewed as 'a group of ideas, to some of which historians have agreed for decades, while others have been evolving and grew out of a broad social movement concerned about women's (and men's) freedoms' (Chancer and Watkins 2006, 17).

From a sociological perspective, gender is considered as 'socially constructed', as opposed to 'sex', which refers to nature. Simone de Beauvoir's argument that 'one is not born but rather becomes a woman', as well as the references to social and cultural interpretations, illustrate the 'enormity of gendered social constructions' which are portrayed in the terms 'masculine and feminine', 'in a world of binary oppositions' (Beauvoir 1974). Butler (1990) believes that the dichotomy between 'femininity' and 'masculinity' 'is gendered at its core', and she claims that 'these binary categories in and of themselves provide a linguistic vehicle' through which women's 'othering' is maintained, among others. Within this framework, Kessler and McKenna's (1978, cited in Chancer and Watkins 2006, 22) original work on transsexualism argues that 'it may be easier today to see that particular individuals have both masculine and feminine features, but we still see gender as dichotomous'. Similarly, West and Zimmerman (1987, cited in Chancer and Watkins 2006, 22) in their classic paper entitled 'Doing gender' underline the 'complex of socially guided' expressions of what is considered to be the 'nature of masculinity and femininity'.

From an anthropological perspective, two theories have been particularly influential in trying to explain why 'female' is considered as 'the second sex', and why gender divisions have been developed historically. One of these theories was presented by Ortner (1974, cited in Chancer and Watkins 2006, 23) in her essay 'Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?'. Based on her interpretation of the available anthropological evidence, she claims that 'all known societies have made a basic distinction between nature and culture that comes to be associated with a corresponding bifurcation between femininity and masculinity'. She further forms a provocative argument, linking culture and nature inextricably by claiming that 'women are placed at a disadvantage because they are associated with a natural world'. Ortner (1974, cited in Chancer and Watkins 2006, 23) exemplifies by referring to the reproductive, childbearing and lactation roles of women; she has identified historical parallels in the caring roles of women and the historical subordination of nature to culture. An older but highly influential theory based on anthropological evidence is that of Frederick Engels, presented in his work 'The origin of the family, private property and the State'. He claimed that women's secondary status has always existed and argued that women's oppression 'coincided and grew gradually alongside the development of human history of private property relations' where '...women were viewed as men's properties' (Chancer and Watkins 2006, 26).

Another way of defining gender and explaining women's disadvantage against men is through the history of feminism(s), i.e., from post-structural to psychoanalytic, liberal to radical, Marxist to socialist and ecological to cultural and black feminism. Liberal feminism has its roots in the 18th century American and French Revolutions. However, it was not until the 1970s and the second wave of feminism that the term liberal feminism started to be associated with activists and thinkers such as Betty Friedan, the writer of the 'Feminine Mystique' who became the first President of the National Organization of Women (NOW). Liberal feminism brought into discussion women's inequality, namely pay disparities, occupational segregation, workplace discrimination, childcare, education, marriage and divorce. The Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) against women's discrimination in the 1970s, the erosion of women's rights and the slogan 'Equal pay for equal work' have been attributed to liberal feminism and criticised for failing to incorporate and address the different experiences of black women. According to Walby (1990, 2), although in Britain the classic debate within feminist analysis is between Marxist and radical feminism; in the US, it is between radical and liberal feminism (Mitchell 1971; Eisenstein 1981, cited in Walby 1990).

Radical feminism is another dominant discourse; its philosophy and activism, distinguished by its analysis of gender inequality in which men as a group dominate women as a group and they are the main beneficiaries of women's subordination (Walby 1990, 3). This refers to a system of oppression called 'patriarchy'. The main argument developed is that personal experiences have social and political connotations (Ibid). Radical feminists contributed to a social structural analysis of male violence against

women, and put forward the question of why the state does not act to protect women from being victimised. They claimed that male violence against women is common, as it is one of the results of patriarchal control over women and that 'they have made significant attempts to prevent male violence and to assist women who were subjected to it' (Walby 1990, 146). Given that most people continue to be socialised globally through values based on domination and violence rather than diversity and respect; and at the same time militarisation, terrorism and religious extremism are closely associated with increasing violence against women, it is apparent that 'the violation of women's rights is located at the heart of the current crisis' (Symington and Sprenger 2004, 3). Furthermore, the current COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated gender inequalities like no other crisis before, and as the UN Secretary General has warned, it could reverse the limited progress that has been made on gender equality and human rights (United Nations 2020). The implemented social distancing policies have led to an increase in domestic violence, unemployment and work exploitation worldwide. Women as individuals continue to be devalued, discriminated against and abused, therefore it is essential to continue engendering policies and simultaneously lobbying to ensure that women's rights are included in sustainable development.

The role of civil society and NGOs is essential for the observation, researching, recording and analysing of unequal and oppressive gender dynamics. Simultaneously, working towards social change and for the development of a more equitable and inclusive society (where relationships between men and women are more respectful and less violent) has been the main purpose of feminism since its inception in the late 19th and early 20th century.

Feminist movements are supposed to be some of the largest and most dynamic social forces, which have achieved legal equality and women's rights in many countries (Symington and Sprenger, 2004). However, what has been achieved may not be constant as far as the global challenges signal. Taking this into account, there is a need to be more proactive, more effective and more innovative in order to reflect on how changes for a more just, respectful, inclusive and equal society may be brought about. Furthermore, there is a need to remain more committed to collective action through civil society, in order to promote women's rights and sustain gender equality.

One cannot address gender dynamics without referring to the importance of feminism(s). Feminism(s) are both philosophy and theoretical tools of understanding and analysing society, in order to identify and tackle discriminatory attitudes. Feminism(s) are also 'activism' incorporating movements fighting for women's rights, equal opportunities for all and against any disadvantage and oppression of women. This is an umbrella term including political, cultural and economic movements, struggling to establish the institutional framework to secure and promote equal rights and legal protection for women.

Feminism emerged as women's activism when the 'Suffragettes', the first-wave feminists, started fighting for their right to vote in the United States and the United Kingdom. The American first-wave feminism ended with passage of the 19th Amendment to the US Constitution in 1919, granting women voting rights. This first-wave feminism also promoted equal contract and property rights for women, opposing the ownership of married women by their husbands.

Since the 1970s, the second-wave feminism has introduced many varieties of feminist perspective: i.e., post-structural and psychoanalytical, liberal, radical, ecological and cultural feminisms, as well as Marxist, Socialist and Black feminist thought. These feminist ideas have expanded from the promotion of rights (Liberal feminism) to the central concept of patriarchy (radical feminist theory) and the 'key to male dominated societies which is the control men have on women's bodies' (Chancer and Watkins 2006, 33). 'Body integrity and autonomy', 'the right to abortion and reproductive rights, including contraception and prenatal care, as well as protection from domestic violence, sexual harassment and rape' were the core of the second-wave feminism during the 1960s and 1970s (Drucker 2018). The second wave has also referred to the women's liberation movement for equal legal and social rights, for instance, 'workplace rights including maternity leave and equal pay' (Drucker 2018). The radical feminist shared motto that 'The Personal is Political' referred to the belief that a woman's voice not only reveals personal traumas and experiences of discrimination and oppression, but also brings up social, cultural and political connotations and clarifies 'how their personal lives reflected sexist power structures' (Drucker 2018). In Friedan's 1963 challenging and most influential book 'The Feminine Mystique', women are shown as victims of false beliefs which required them to find their identity through husbands and children (which resulted in a loss of women's identities).

Gender dynamics in a regional context

Women's equal participation is essential to establish a resilient and sustainable democracy and yet 'women represent only 14 % of ministers and 16 % of Parliamentarians of the Eastern European Partnership' (Barseghyan 2020). Although women, as stated in the same source, have a quantitative representation in politics, this is not converted into qualitative participation in the decision making process, despite the absence of legislative obstacles for women to be elected (Barseghyan 2020). The socio-economic and cultural context in the European eastern neighbourhood, as well as gender dynamics and equality between men and women may differ between various states.

According to the Global gender gap report 2020, issued by the World Economic Forum, 'gender gaps across Eastern Europe and Central Asia are relatively evenly distributed: 21 of

the 26 countries in this region have closed at least 70 % and the top-ranked country (Latvia 78.5 %) is 16 percentage points higher than the lowest-positioned Tajikistan (62.6 %), which is a significantly smaller difference than that observed in any other region' (World Economic Forum 2019). Gender gaps in regard to educational attainment are small (above 94 %) and in relation to health and survival the gap is even smaller 97%, with the exception of Albania, Armenia and Azerbaijan (World Economic Forum 2019). In Lithuania and Latvia, over 74 % of women are in the labour market (World Economic Forum 2019), while Ukraine and Moldova have especially low rates of women's labour force participation (Barseghyan, 2020).

Georgia is the first among European Neighbourhood countries to have a female president, while in five countries (Belarus, Latvia, Georgia, Poland and the Russian Federation) at least 40 % of the senior roles are held by women (World Economic Forum 2019). In Georgia in particular 'women account for a significant proportion of the poorest; for example, women comprise the bottom 40 % of the income distribution, and female-headed households are overrepresented among the poor. Although overall poverty levels dropped from 42.7% to around 20 % between 2010 and 2015, they remain among the highest in the Eastern Europe and Central Asia region' (Asian Development Bank 2018).

It has to be noted that Gender issues have never been the focus in either the European Neighbourhood policy or the Eastern Partnership. The first time gender was mentioned officially is in the Riga declaration of the 2015 Eastern Partnership summit with one small sentence: 'Gender equality is a promising new area of cooperation'. In the 2017 Brussels declaration of the Eastern Partnership summit, gender issues had a more distinct role. In the document, women's empowerment takes on an economic dimension (Asian Development Bank 2018).

Gender inequality, discrimination, oppression, sexual harassment and abuse are phenomena occurring worldwide; however, the EU's role is critical for the development of a legal system that can promote the prevention of violence and discrimination. Thus, the ratification of the Istanbul Convention's statement of 'Preventing and Combating Violence against women and domestic violence' by Eastern neighbourhood countries is essential.

With this aim in mind, a project was launched in 2020 for the 'Promotion of Women's and Feminist initiatives for the ratification of the Istanbul Convention and Counteraction against anti-gender initiatives in the region', under the lead organisation of the Centre of Women's perspectives in Ukraine, with the co-operation of NGOs in Armenia (Women's Resource Centre), in Georgia (Women's Political Resource Centre), in Belarus (Organization of Popular Education), in Moldova (Mothers of large families and women – entrepreneurs of Gagauzia, Vesta) and in Azerbaijan (Women's Association for Rational Development) (Civil Society Forum, 2020).

The International Labour Organization (ILO, n.d.) has reported that during the Soviet period, although there was legislation which guaranteed equal opportunities, the tendency was for women to occupy more 'feminine' positions, spending more time on children's upbringing, being provided with state benefits.⁹ Concurrently, men were expected to be the breadwinners and occupied higher positions, although a quota of 30% was also allocated to women. During the period of transition after the collapse of the Soviet Union, in order to support their families many women had to leave the formal sector and to work in the informal black market, poorly paid and without social protection. In most of the countries of the region, women's salaries are still 60–80% lower compared to men. In addition, women are discriminated against in the labour market either openly or secretly (ILO n.d.). Coupled with the decline in women's participation in decision-making processes and politics, as well as with low women's representation (around 10%) in national parliaments, this reveals worrying conditions of inequalities. Against this background, the International Labour Organization aims to support states and organisations to bring gender equality into practice, by promoting social dialogue and engendering policies, supporting women's entrepreneurship and broadening strategic management on gender equality. A number of projects aiming to enhance gender equality were introduced in the European neighbourhood in the early 2000s, for instance, ones aiming to encourage women's entrepreneurship in the Caucasus (2003–2004), to develop gender strategy in Russia (2002–2003), and to promote gender equality in Georgia (2004–2005), etc. (ILO n.d.).

More recently, UN Women and UNFPA, in close cooperation with the European Union, have introduced a three-year regional programme for governments and civil societies in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, 'to challenge deeply ingrained stereotypes, increase men's involvement in domestic work and childcare and engage potential perpetrators to prevent gender-based violence' (European Commission 2020).

Challenges and progress with regard to gender dynamics

How could we contribute to real behavioural change and put an emphasis on transforming gender stereotypes? The ratification of the Convention of the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against women (CEDAW) and that of the Istanbul Convention against women's violence have been essential steps.

Moreover, social dialogue is critical to promote and defend women's rights and equal opportunities, to challenge gender stereotypes vis-à-vis childcare and housekeeping. Men's

⁹ The Soviet legislation is claimed to guarantee equality in the labour sphere (ILO. Gender equality).

involvement in parenting and their encouragement, as well as their sharing in household routines is a challenge to change. This could be partially achieved by introducing social security benefits that may increase men's access to parental leave.

Promoting prevention and early intervention projects to deal with sexual harassment, abuse and to tackle gender violence is of great significance. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women adopted by the UN National Assembly in 1979 defined a series of measures to end discrimination against women in all forms which are compulsory for those states which accepted the Convention, to promote gender equality, prohibit and ensure protection from discrimination against women, and ensure equal access and equal opportunities in public life. The Convention is the only human rights treaty which considers 'the importance of culture and tradition in shaping gender and family roles and relations and affirms women's rights to acquire, change or retain their nationality and that of their children' (CEDAW 1981). It is therefore expected that countries which have ratified the Convention need to take legal measures to comply with the Treaty obligations and assess the progress with a national report submitted every four years

The Istanbul Convention, the Council of Europe's Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence is 'the first tool in Europe to set legally binding standards specifically to prevent gender-based violence, protect victims of violence and punish perpetrators' (Jurviste and Shreeves 2020). The Convention, which was introduced and signed by most EU member states in 2011. and was ratified by all member states by 2019 (with the exception of Poland which ratified it in 2015, but recently announced its intention to withdraw), defines and criminalises violence against women, and promotes measures for preventing violence and protecting women from becoming victims, while it obliges states to keep records and relevant research data. The Convention extends the recognition of violent crimes on a cross border spectrum and it also acknowledges violence towards asylum seekers and migrants. It recognizes sexual violence and abuse against boys and men, and it considers the social construction of gender roles.

Conclusions and recommendations

Civil society plays an important role in social change and gender dynamics. Social dialogue contributes to increasing the visibility of the issues related to gender equality via different tools, including social media, publications and various art performances (for instance, art exhibitions, theatre or movies, etc.). These tools may contribute to the recognition of the social construction of gender roles, stereotypes and discrimination activities. As awareness develops, discrimination and inequalities may be prevented and tackled. The enhanced cooperation between governmental organisations, academia and civil society could significantly contribute to the visibility of gender equality issues. Tackling sexist attitudes and

beliefs can thus be made possible. Engendering policies by including gender issues in the newly introduced legal frameworks is essential. The ratification of the Conventions against Violence and Abuse (CEDAW and Istanbul Convention) along with the introduction of severe legislation to prevent and tackle violence, and most importantly the organising of social dialogue events and forums to increase awareness and challenge patriarchal mentalities, leading to discrimination and inequalities, is of highest importance.

Gender dynamics is a prerequisite for equal and just civil democracies, but it is also of paramount importance during the current immigration and refugee crisis, and it has been significantly highlighted under the COVID-19 pandemic, which has made the need even more evident to tackle discrimination and inequalities.

Engendering policies should therefore start by including in school curriculums the teaching of subjects on gender issues, as education is the key to inclusion, to promote equal opportunities and to challenge stereotypes and patriarchal mentalities.

Volunteerism within the universities, aiming to organise social dialogue actions to enhance gender awareness, and prevent and tackle sexual harassment, violence and discrimination, may also significantly contribute to the increasing of community awareness. Art is a useful tool in social dialogue. Most importantly, civil society should take a vital role in moves towards developing people's awareness, promoting women's rights, tackling discrimination and abuse and preventing all violence, including sexual violence.

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STEFANOS VALLIANATOS

Intercultural Dialogue and Civil Society:

a Policy, a Practice, a Tool

The Mediterranean basin, historically, has been a crossroads of cultures and civilisations, as well as a theatre of operations and confrontation between major powers and empires. This has implied an interaction, be it of military, commercial, or human nature. From a different perspective, the Mediterranean Sea has also been perceived as a frontier, one that divides the Western (European) world from that of the Arab and Islamic one, whereas the nation-state framework has further exacerbated divisions between the societies in the region. With regard to the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood, a political and ideological divide re-enforced a similar condition, notwithstanding cultural differences.

The rise of the EU's prominence and the post-Cold war emerging framework, on the one hand, and the regional and domestic dynamics and developments in its Southern and Eastern Neighbourhood on the other, have established a new reality where the countries of the European Union re-emerged as the preferred migration destination from the Southern and Eastern Neighbourhood, and from the Mediterranean countries, including Sub-Saharan Africa and other parts of the Middle East and Eastern Asia. This could be attributed not only to the EU's geographic proximity but also to its political and social charm; i.e., economic prosperity and well-developed institutions and practices of liberal democracy, including those of human rights. Meanwhile, the countries of the E.U., in order to maintain their high living standards, also due to their low birth rate and, therefore, ageing population, have been in dire need of 'new blood', provided by immigration, especially (yet not exclusively) by skilled youth. Meanwhile, the emerging expansion of the EU's policies and interests, including globalisation per se, has immensely increased the interaction and relations between the EU and its neighbours, at all levels and domains, including the virtual space.

Hence, the co-existence with the 'other', i.e. the non-Western European in origin, does not take place any more only within the Western European societal fabric (the outcome of migration), but also in parallel to it, away and in the in between space: the implementation of exchange and co-executed programmes and activities, the attractiveness of the educational opportunities and studies that Western European institutions provide, but also in cyber space, as a community and a communication domain, all of this established an interaction different in nature and scope, and usually, a non-permanent presence within the E.U. of these populaces.

Yet, such relationships, developed through traditional means (and other EU policy tools, like, initially the Euro-Arab Dialogue, the Mediterranean and the Renewed Mediterranean Policy, but also the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership¹⁰, although the latter did lay the foundations for a new focus), whose emphasis tended to be on the political, security, economic and commercial

¹⁰ European Commission, 'Strengthening the Mediterranean Policy of the European Union: Establishing a Euro-Mediterranean Partnership', supplement 2/95 to the Bulletin of the European Union, Luxembourg, EC, 1995.

domain, proved insufficient to treat the new challenges that emerged¹¹ and to build bridges that would allow a more sustainable and peaceful coexistence, based on an understanding of each other and accepting diversity as a creative force rather than an abnormality. Historically overburdened, Euro-Mediterranean rapprochement had to face new challenges and threats, including Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, and xenophobia in general, radicalisation, and other forms of extremism, as well as pressing human rights failures, poor democratic performance, etc. Against this backdrop, there was a need for a new approach that would complement the existing mechanisms and would be applied through culture and civil society.

Key notions, pillars and actors

While culture as the domain of a specific ministry applying relevant policies is more domestically oriented, it has also served as a bridge between states. Therefore, culture is a part of the diplomatic practice. Considering this, the key notions related to culture in the diplomatic domain, i.e., public and cultural diplomacy, and cultural relations, are instrumental as far as intercultural dialogue is concerned. The EU National Institutes for Culture (EUNIC, an independent initiative, established to collectively coordinate and enhance the activities of the national cultural institutions of, primarily, the E.U. member states worldwide), which advocates for a prominent role of culture in international relations,¹² defines public diplomacy as the process ‘whereby a country seeks to build trust and understanding by engaging with a broader foreign public beyond the governmental relations that, customarily, have been the focus of diplomatic effort’. Concurrently, cultural diplomacy is understood as one of the instruments that public diplomacy agents use to communicate with other states and their agencies and publics through cultural means, in the pursuit of their foreign policy objectives. Finally, cultural relations (a broader practice which EUNIC considers as its main focus), is ‘an umbrella term referring to the fostering of understanding between countries and especially their peoples’. In the case of cultural relations, agents and practitioners engage in dialogue with a much broader public, in a more dynamic way, hence, seeking to create partnerships between people either via specific government or cultural institute policies or without any government intervention.

Cultural institutions could either complement or sometimes even replace members of the diplomatic corps in practising cultural diplomacy. Yet, these institutions’ perception of their own roles has evolved – often they tend to perceive themselves more as practising cultural relations rather than being agents of cultural diplomacy. At the European level, the EU National Institutes for Culture could be one of the most advanced manifestations of this approach. EUNIC is the European network of organisations engaging in cultural relations, initiated by

¹¹ For an evaluation of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, see, for instance: Calleya, Stephen C. 2005. *Evaluating Euro-Mediterranean Relations*. London: Routledge.

¹² But also, ‘a strategic partner of the EU, actively involved in the further definition of European cultural policy’, <https://www.eunicglobal.eu/about>

the European cultural institutes, including the Goethe-Institut and the British Council, to coordinate their actions and collectively promote European ideas and values (Vallianatos 2021, forthcoming).

The notion of culture per se is much wider and has a cross-cutting overarching approach. This notion covers not only arts and letters but other activities as well, like tourism, education, research, creative industries, heritage at large, new technologies, and artisanship, as well as development, and, most importantly, values and principles. In a nutshell, culture includes all human and non-commercial (narrowly defined) activities and interactions and offers a fundamentally neutral space, that minimises probable tensions and maximises creative interaction. In fact, one could argue that culture is an open system, which can only flourish and evolve through interaction, only to be artificially framed by state policies and borders, with the focus being on the societal and human environment.

The domain of culture, in the absence of dialogue (or even relations), has also been an area of competition, among (primarily) states but also other groups, whereas the understanding and interpretation of certain notions may vary. In that respect, cultural relations usually imply a positive interaction and are practised by a variety of social and state actors, hence, can exhibit a satisfactory degree of the societal outreach. Yet, cultural relations tend to imply an inter-state dimension, contrary to the notion of (intercultural) dialogue, which offers a more dynamic and therefore useful approach:

1. in terms of the related entities and groups, it has a much wider relevance, reference, beyond the state division, to cover domestic reference;
2. it is perceived to take place between equal entities;
3. it is a continuous and evolving process, which includes different stages, i.e. acknowledgment of the 'other', tolerance, understanding, and acceptance;
4. the (desired) end result, the outcome, is a dynamic one, where both sides (should) move away from their initial position and get closer to each other.

Overall, civil society is arguably an institution that can effectively practise an intercultural dialogue to deal with the identified challenges. In fact, civil society has been outlined by the EU and other major global actors, like the OECD and the Council of Europe,¹³ as a suitable and effective mechanism to promote democratisation in the Middle East, Eastern Europe and the Balkans, to monitor good governance, the state of human rights and other civic rights

¹³ In fact, Article 15 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU, recognises civil society's role in the EU's good governance, and Article 11 of the Treaty on EU stresses the need for the EU 'to have an open, transparent and regular dialogue with civil society organisations', when preparing proposals for EU laws. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/summary/glossary/civil_society_organisation.html

in functioning democracies, but also as a crucial partner for development cooperation.¹⁴ Meanwhile, cooperation with local CSOs is included and encouraged in the agenda of the leading cultural organisations and several EU Commission Directorates.¹⁵ The closer cooperation with CSOs, however, does not exclude the institutional agents endorsing cultural relations, relevant state institutions or traditional diplomatic corps. On the contrary, a collective approach is essential to maximise the effectiveness and sustainability of cultural dialogue, especially when such a volatile and dynamic region is concerned. Albeit the significance of all the involved actors, their profile, and the activism and capabilities of civil society, provide them with an advantageous position to perform a leading role. First, the voluntary, associative action of CSOs is in the service of the common good, sharing values and behavioural codes of respecting each other's right to operate (Niblock 2005, 487); and they enjoy autonomy vis-à-vis the state and the market, while they do (or should) cooperate productively with all other societal segments. Second, civil society includes a wide variety of formal and informal organisations, covering almost all aspects of civic life, hence exhibiting (collectively) a very extensive societal and communal outreach. In addition, they have acquired specialised knowledge and skills, including innovative thinking and behaviour, in performing their multi-faceted role, including performing advocacy and monitoring activities and providing social services. Third, CSOs are generally active in networking, not only in the domestic arena but globally as well. Hence, their real power is not so much in their individuality (although some may carry the weight to have an impact through their actions), but in their collective action (Vallianatos 2017).

Intercultural dialogue 'on the ground'

The initial stimulus for introducing intercultural dialogue as a mechanism and approach by the EU was grounded in the challenge to deal with the multi-cultural fabric of most European societies and to integrate the growing and diverse immigrant communities. Therefore, introduction of 'inter-culturality' was an evolutionary step that has strengthened the multicultural approach – thus, altering the perception of diverse entities living in parallel universes and simply tolerating each other, towards a more dynamic condition where such entities not only co-exist in the same space, but also interact creatively. To this end, cultural diversity is perceived as an asset, a source of innovation and creativity. Therefore, the EU, in conjunction with the Council of Europe, perceived intercultural dialogue as an appropriate tool to deal with this 'integration' – a long way from the assimilation – of immigrants, which would also contribute to social cohesion (Council of Europe 2008). This approach was practically implemented via the Council of Europe's Intercultural Cities programme.

¹⁴ See Busan for Effective Development Cooperation, further emphasised in the first high-level meeting of the Global partnership for effective development cooperation, held in Mexico in April 2014, <https://www.oecd.org/development/effectiveness/busanpartnership.htm> and <https://www.effectivecooperation.org/>

¹⁵ See, for instance, the EUNIC call for action 'European Spaces of Culture', its principles and required partners, <https://www.eunicglobal.eu/european-spaces-of-culture>

This programme identifies the urban framework as the appropriate space for integration, with the municipalities and civil society organisations as the key stakeholders embracing cultural pluralism, empowering all members of the local communities to interact, promoting participation and co-creation, and involving everyone in the decision-making process and power-sharing in urban institutions.¹⁶

Accordingly, in the EU's policies, Intercultural Dialogue as a process and a tool emerged primarily within the framework of the Euro-Med Partnership, where the third basket (social, cultural and human) made explicit reference to intercultural dialogue 'particularly through an emphasis on shared culture between the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean' (Abbott 2018). Ten years after the Barcelona Process, the Anna Lindh Foundation (ALF) was established as an intergovernmental institution dedicated to intercultural dialogue between the two sides of the Mediterranean via the interaction of the relevant CSOs. This recognised the importance of structured dialogue and the fundamental role culture plays, to achieve a sustainable partnership in the Mediterranean.

A fundamental pillar of Intercultural Dialogue, as a process, is that it recognises the plurality and fluid nature of contemporary societies in the region. Moreover, the acceptance of diversity as characteristic of those contemporary societies, implies equality among the various groups, hence rejecting any discriminatory behaviour on any basis. Intercultural Dialogue is perceived as a core skill to negotiate diverse backgrounds within societies, founded on the premise of inclusion of different viewpoints (Perini 2015, 29–31). To this end, shared values are important, whether these have either been jointly developed through interaction during the bottom-up process, or are commonly accepted universal ones. In that respect, through interaction and exchange, Intercultural Dialogue does provide good services in advancing social justice and cohesion. Still, for a successful intercultural dialogue, the following interrelated concepts should be considered:

1. *Intercultural competences* and skills which include the 'creative ability to encounter other peoples and convert insights and challenges into innovation processes and new forms of expression', the ability to foster understanding and intercultural empathy, principles of acquiring behavioural components, etc. (cognitive, functional, personal and ethical competences, according to Lähdesmäki et al. 2020).
2. *Intercultural citizenship*, in reference to the personal responsibility of the individuals within such culturally diverse societies. This implies a body of active citizens (in contrast to passive voters), knowledgeable about their obligations as such, supporters of the constructive civic values of democracy and of human rights, advocating for equality, social justice, and shared spaces to practice those fundamental values (Bekemans 16–19).

¹⁶ For more details on the Intercultural Cities programme: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities/>

3. *Intercultural education*, a learning process that leads to acquiring knowledge of other cultures and installing patterns of availability, openness and dialogue, to empower and stimulate people (citizens) to ‘contribute to social cohesion, cultural enrichment with respect to diversity and on the basis of equality’ (Lähdesmäki et al. 2020).

A number of other complementary actions and partnerships are essential to foster intercultural dialogue and to empower civil society in its implementation. These include advocacy, partnership with local authorities, the media and academia, to provide capacity building and skills development, toolkits, role models and good practices. In addition, herein lies the great significance of networking, co-creation and ownership of the process, as well as developing evidence-based arguments and policies, that reflect the societal mode and its changes.

Since the societal perceptions are always fluid, the intercultural dialogue, as a policy, its substance and its implementing audience and groups, cannot be static, and it should constantly evolve and adapt to remain timely and effective, especially within such a dynamic and fluid regional environment. In addition, intercultural dialogue requires novel formats and vision, to remain relevant and updated for all the target groups, including the youth.

General notes and recommendations

An overview of the region under consideration seems to support the argument that Intercultural Dialogue has its limits, at least as it is currently applied by a civil society, which is collectively framed in specific boundaries, capabilities, institutions and practices, and in the presence of competing interests, autocratic and illiberal regimes, populism and inherent insecurity. Yet, a more scrutinised reading of the reality, can illustrate a more optimistic perception, as well as its potential to contribute more. In fact, the Anna Lindh Foundation’s Intercultural Trends Reports — published every three years and based on region-wide surveys, illustrate a somewhat different narrative in relation to the gloomy one that is usually portrayed in many media outlets, but also a (positive) change over time (starting from a baseline recorded before 2010) of the attitudes.¹⁷ In that respect, the following points intend to offer a set of observations to improve the performance and efficiency of Intercultural Dialogue, with regard to both the Civil Society’s performance and capabilities, and the practice of Intercultural Dialogue by the relevant agents:

1. On the state of Civil Society and the CSOs (formal and informal) in this region at large, there are major differences, not only between South, North, East and West, but also within those geographical sub-groupings. Those differences are not only related to their capabilities and development level, but most important to their ability to freely and effectively function

¹⁷ Published in 2010, in 2014 and in 2018, <https://www.annalindhfoundation.org/what-we-do/intercultural-trends-report>.

within their local environment. Yet, their potentials are equally high. In that respect, the collective action of CSOs, and their function through international, or intergovernmental, institutions and other networks, offers a leeway: they offer a safer space, for the weaker counterparts, consisting of a more influential backer, whereas by networking they increase their access to opportunities, develop their potentials and, through capacity-building, their skills, hence improving their performance and effectiveness.

2. There are several institutions that either conduct intercultural dialogue or have activities that are relevant to those who conduct it. Yet, frequently those institutions act irrespective of the others' programmes and agenda, indicating the insufficient level of coordination and communication between them.¹⁸ Hence, there is a need to assemble, under a structured platform, the various initiatives and institutions, in order to limit overlapping and boost their efficiency and effectiveness: it will provide them with a wide access to opportunities, new ideas and approaches, available tools and know-how. Such an initiative should be hosted (at least initially) by an institution that can enjoy high visibility, geographical and thematic outreach and acceptance, but also flexibility, in order to be able to perform a coordination role.
3. Youth remains the leading group to target, equip and empower for intercultural dialogue. Yet, bridging existing cultural divides should not lead to a new generational one. Therefore, various projects should envisage relevant formats and tools suitable for different target groups.
4. There is a need for further research of approaches, potentials, and techniques of intercultural dialogue, in order to also extend the outreach of intercultural dialogue to the difficult to reach, marginalised and sceptical groups. Moreover, its role in conflict resolution and confidence building should be studied.
5. A shared and commonly agreed set of values is an essential component of intercultural dialogue, whereas education (both formal and informal, at schools and within families) is of fundamental importance. Introducing intercultural dialogue as a subject in public education would be a major step forward. This could be implemented in the partnership with CSOs.
6. Intercultural dialogue is a practice and a tool, applied by CSOs and other institutional actors, to, often, deal with specific problems and complex conditions, within the diverse and sometimes even hostile environment. In such cases, the leading and experienced institutions applying intercultural dialogue, in cooperation with the local stakeholders and the CSOs on the ground, can draw up a tailor-made strategy and programme to meet the specific conditions and needs per case, also providing training and the relevant toolkits.¹⁹

¹⁸ An example: while the Anna Lindh Foundation developed the 'Intercultural Citizenship Education Handbook', a tool for civic education, it has not developed any cooperation with NECE (a network dedicated to civic education in Europe and, through its affiliated entities in the Arab world, Africa and Eastern Europe, <https://www.bpbconnect.eu/>) or other like-minded institutions to promote it.

¹⁹ This is the Council of Europe's 'Intercultural Cities Program' methodology, where the Council draws up a specific strategy to be implemented by the respective municipalities and the leading CSOs in their respective cities, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities/how-it-works->

7. There is a need to introduce more coherent and efficient monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, a toolkit that could recognise the social impact of the implemented policies and projects to improve the performance of the intercultural dialogue.²⁰
8. With regard to the diplomatic field, intercultural dialogue has a large arsenal of cultural means to perform a positive role in promoting the state image via public diplomacy, and an understanding among states and their societies. However, to a large extent, this also depends on the agents conducting the intercultural dialogue, as well as on the main goals and objectives of the initiated projects. Yet, the transparency of the objectives and goals public diplomacy seeks to achieve is important, since there might be some driving forces, like specific state and private priorities and interests, which could remain unknown to the general public and can contradict the rationale of such a dialogue.
9. The efficiency of the intercultural dialogue largely depends on awareness and personal commitment, as well as on individual social roles.

Given the complexity of the EU's neighbourhood, the political will to implement cultural interventions and policies remains a key factor. Therefore, advocacy and lobbying from all domains are essential, as well as results-driven policies and recommendations, as indeed enlarged partnerships between the leading stakeholders.

²⁰ Both ALF and EUNIC have been working in that direction, following the experience of the British Council and the Goethe-Institut. See, for instance, <https://www.goethe.de/resources/files/pdf94/culture-works-brochure-september-2016.pdf>, https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1_5y3xBpjsfY5khp_a77se66kaU-ytTCUI.

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The SDGs and Cities from the Black Sea Region:

Exploring Macro-Challenges Limiting a More Sustained Engagement

This paper explores the work done towards the application of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by the countries in the Black Sea region. While all the countries of the region are making efforts to achieve the SDGs, each country has its own trajectory and pace. In contrast, the situation of cities from the region engaging in meeting the SDG goals and targets is different as both the number of cities and the type of engagement are limited.

In 2015, the United Nations adopted the 2030 Agenda, consisting of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)²¹, an Agenda that is driving efforts in tackling global challenges (Shulla et. al. 2021). Given their environmental, social, and economic relevance, cities are crucial for achieving the SDGs. However, getting cities to align to Agenda 2030 is not an easy process. As observed by Rees (1996, 537), 'as nodes of energy and material consumption, cities are causally linked to accelerating global ecological decline and are not by themselves sustainable. At the same time, cities and their inhabitants can play a major role in helping to achieve global sustainability'. The role of cities in reaching the SDGs is emphasized by OECD (2020), given that '[a]t least 105 of the 169 SDGs targets will not be reached without proper engagement and coordination with local and regional governments.'

In broader terms, Agenda 2030 triggers significant attention from a wide array of actors, including cities, and has led to the creation of multiple types of partnerships (MacDonald et. al. 2018). Globally, there is significant attention paid to progress towards the SDGs (Giles-Corti 2020, Benedek et al. 2021) and to the impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on countries' ability to reach the SDG objectives (Shulla et. al. 2021, Leal Filho 2020).

Sustainable development is not a new topic (Brundtland Report 1987). However, first the 2000 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and later the 2015 SDGs enabled countries, international organisations, companies, civil society, and communities to track their progress and to measure the level of sustainability of countries and cities.

²¹ For more details, please see UN Sustainable Development Goals, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>.

Progress towards the SDG targets varies significantly among countries and regions. In the Black Sea region, the emphasis on the SDGs by different countries varies. For example, Ukraine developed an approach to the SDGs in 2017 (Ahmed 2020), while Romania launched its National Sustainable Development Strategy aligned with the SDGs in 2018 (Celac and Angheluşă 2018). Moreover, Romania also nurtures regional efforts to strengthen the commitment of Black Sea countries towards Agenda 2030 through convening regional high-level conferences on the Black Sea.²²

A similar dynamic can be observed at the level of cities. The United Nations recognises the relevance of cities for sustainable development, and is encouraging them to become active in SDG-related efforts (United Nations 2018). Overall, there is a recent growing trend among cities to connect to Agenda 2030 in various ways, to implement the SDGs and monitor progress on SDG targets and indicators (OECD, 2020). Cities are beginning to adapt Agenda 2030 in their local communities. In many countries, for instance, leading cities are making the first steps in defining relevant targets and indicators for their communities, aligning their strategies, and monitoring implementation.

The research objective of this paper is to uncover the macro-challenges encountered by local communities in the Black Sea region in their engagement with the SDGs. The assumption the article departs from is the following: when cities start engaging with the SDGs, the length of time needed to reach the impact at the level of cities may negatively affect the capacity of countries to achieve their SDGs targets. Therefore, it is important to understand what limits the capacity of cities to connect to Agenda 2030, and find ways to mitigate the respective limits.

Methodologically, the research is qualitatively driven (Spencer, Pryce and Walsh 2014) and is based on a conceptual, policy and document analysis, as well as on secondary literature about cities and sustainable development. Empirically, the research relates to the case studies of countries from the Black Sea region.²³ The paper has also benefited from insights derived from the 10th edition of the International Neighbourhood Symposium.²⁴

Several limitations affect the results of the conducted research. The first one is related to the novelty of the studied phenomenon and access to data about the way in which cities from the Black Sea region engage with the SDGs. Often the information is available either in local languages only or it is not communicated at all. Furthermore, lessons drawn from the presented case studies may not be representative of a broader set of countries.

²² Agenda 2030: Partnerships for Sustainable Development 2019, <http://dezvoltaredurabila.gov.ro/web/parteneriate/>; the High Level Conference on intensifying regional cooperation for implementing the SDGs organised within the framework of Romania's Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization (BSEC) Presidency, <http://dezvoltaredurabila.gov.ro/web/2020/11/10/conferinta-la-nivel-inalt-a-tarilor-din-regiunea-marii-negre-gazduita-de-guvernul-romaniei-laszlo-borbely-uniunea-europeana-isi-propune-sa-produca-pana-la-35-din-energia-sa-electrica-din-surse-off/>

²³ For the purpose of this research, the analysis brings empirical evidence from the following countries of the Black Sea region: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, Georgia, Moldova, Romania, the Russian Federation, Turkey, and Ukraine.

²⁴ 10th International Neighborhood Symposium, 11–17 December 2020, <https://cies.khas.edu.tr/en/symposium/international-neighbourhood-symposium/2020-international-neighbourhood-symposium-ins-youth-empowerment-civic-engagement-and-sustainable>.

Nevertheless, the conducted research brings added value, given that a better understanding of the macro-challenges encountered by cities in adopting and delivering on the SDGs would increase the national capacity of the Black Sea countries to achieve better results vis-à-vis their SDG targets.

Sustainable development and the SDGs

The international community became aware of global sustainability challenges with the Brundtland Report in 1987. Despite that awareness, environmental degradation puts the existence of our planet and of the human species at risk. The level of human activity detrimental to the environment was reached in the 1990s. According to Rees (1996, 537), 'for the first time, since the dawn of agriculture and the possibility of geographically fixed settlements 12,000 years ago, the aggregate scale of human economic activity is capable of altering global biophysical systems and processes in ways that jeopardize both global ecological stability and geopolitical security'.

The international community made significant progress in addressing this challenge by coalescing global decisiveness, to fight climate change and strive for sustainability and resilience (Giles-Corti 2020). These efforts include articulating Agenda 2030 that consists of the Sustainable Development Goals.²⁵ Agenda 2030 comprises 17 goals (the SDGs) and 169 targets that the world should attain. The Agenda is, however, voluntary, raising questions regarding its strength to mobilise sufficient buy-in to deliver on its aims.

The 17 SDGs attract more attention than their predecessors, the MDGs. However, progress after the first five years is modest, and several regions are falling behind on multiple targets, even in the OECD countries. According to the OECD (2020), '[a]t least 80 % of regions from OECD countries have not achieved the suggested end values for 2030 in any of the 17 goals'. The COVID-19 pandemic has further accentuated the inability of countries to reach the SDGs targets and puts on additional pressures, requiring increased resources to mitigate its social, economic, and political consequences (Shulla et. al. 2021).

SDG 11 is specifically focused on cities and sustainable communities. It generates a wide interest in operationalising targets and indicators with regard to city sustainability. Several initiatives are advancing in this direction, including the OECD's Programme on a Territorial Approach to the SDGs (OECD 2020); the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe and the Organization for International Economic Relations' Project on Smart Sustainable Cities (UNECE); the UN-Habitat's City Prosperity Initiative (UN-Habitat); and the Global Urban Indicators database (UN-Habitat 2002); Zinkernagel et. al. (2018), Campagnolo et. al. (2018), Benedek (2021) focusing on Romania, the SD City Ranking focusing on Russia.

²⁵ For more details, please see UN Sustainable Development Goals, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>.

Countries present reports on advancements on the SDGs within the framework of Voluntary National Reviews (VNR). These reports may offer a perspective on advances on SDG 11 and a broader take on how cities contribute to achieving the SDGs or how they may connect to global networks on specific topics such as climate change, water quality, etc.²⁶

In this context, a growing importance is placed on the role of cities in reaching the SDGs. Cities are becoming central actors, exposing perspectives on how local communities can become more sustainable and resilient. COVID-19 increased the attention paid, at a local level, to sustainability and further raised expectations for cities to address sustainability challenges.

The Black Sea countries and the SDGs

In the Black Sea region, all countries are making efforts to achieve the SDGs, however each of them has its own trajectory. This section will provide a brief overview of how countries in the region engage with the SDGs. Table 1 shows how the countries in the region relate to the SDG Agenda. When available, information on how cities are engaging with the SDGs is also included.

Table 1. Countries and cities in the Black Sea region and the SDGs

Country	Details on approaches to achieving the SDGs
Armenia	The Armenia Transformation Strategy 2020–2050 was adopted in 2019 and aligns the strategic objectives of the country to the SDGs (Republic of Armenia 2020). Armenia's national statistics system has been recently redesigned, and a national framework for monitoring the SDGs has been put in place accordingly (Mnatsakanyan and Safyan 2020). The city of Goris in Armenia has undergone the smart sustainable cities evaluation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the Organization for International Economic Relations (OIER). ²⁷
Azerbaijan	Azerbaijan held a Sustainable Development Forum in 2018 and filed two VNR Reports, in 2017 and 2019 (Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan 2017, Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan 2019). In 2020 Azerbaijan was ranked 54th out of the 166 countries in the Sustainable Development Report 2020 (Mehdiyev 2020).
Belarus	Belarus adopted a Roadmap for SDG Implementation in 2018 (Government of the Republic of Belarus, 2018). Furthermore, in partnership with the UN Economic Commission for Europe and the European Investment Bank, Belarus focused on Green Urban Development, supporting cities in this regard. As a result, seven cities had developed such plans by mid-2020 (UNECE. Belarus).
Bulgaria	The National Development Programme Bulgaria 2030 was adopted in 2020 and aligned Bulgaria's development strategy with the SDGs. Moreover, in 2020 Bulgaria submitted its first Voluntary National Review Report (Government of Bulgaria 2020a, Government of Bulgaria 2020b, UN SDG. Knowledge Platform. Bulgaria).

²⁶ See, for instance, the 2020 VNR Report of the Russian Federation (Government of the Russian Federation, 2020).

Georgia	Georgia declared all the SDGs as national priorities in 2017 and finalised their nationalisation in 2019 (UN. Georgia).
Moldova	In 2017, Moldova developed their Moldova 2030 Strategy that aligned the country's objectives to Agenda 2030, completing the nationalisation process of the SDGs. Since 2019, Moldova has focused on the implementation and monitoring of the SDGs, mainly on the role of regions and municipalities (GIZ. Moldova 2030, UN. Moldova).
Romania	Romania adopted its Sustainable Development Strategy 2030, aligned with the SDGs in 2018, under the leadership of the Department of Sustainable Development (located under the Prime Minister's Office). Benedek et al. (2021) developed an integrated approach for calculating an SDG Index for measuring progress towards the SDGs at local and regional levels. Accordingly, municipalities like Făgăraş and Timișoara are in early stages of aligning their development strategies to Agenda 2030.
Russia	In 2020, Russia adopted a plan to align key development projects with the SDGs and a plan with measures to counter the impact the COVID-19 pandemic has on sustainable development (Analytical Center for the Government of the Russian Federation 2020, Government of the Russian Federation 2020). With regard to cities, the SD City Ranking assesses 185 of the Russian cities with over 100,000 people (SGM Rating Agency). Furthermore, Moscow is one of the cities that joined the OECD's Programme on a Territorial Approach to the SDGs (OECD, 2019).
Turkey	Turkey embedded the 17 SDGs in its already existing National Development Plans (NDPs) and sectoral strategies. Turkey was one of the first countries to present the VNR Report in 2016 and presented the second VNR Report in 2019. Turkey defined a set of 218 indicators to be monitored (Government of Turkey 2019, the European Environmental Agency 2020). Turkey has also put in place a National SDG Best Practices Database.
Ukraine	Ukraine has adapted the country's development strategy to the SDGs since 2017. There is high level support for aligning with Agenda 2030 (Ahmed 2020). The city of Voznesenk has undergone the smart sustainable cities evaluation of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the Organization for International Economic Relations (OIER). ²⁷

*Author's own representation based on the indicated sources.

Taking into account the data presented in the paper, all countries in the region have been making efforts towards meeting the SDGs. Furthermore, a regional dynamic around the 2030 Agenda is emerging with regional events, such as the Bucharest Conference on Agenda 2030 in the Black Sea region.²⁷

In contrast, the situation of cities engaging with Agenda 2030 is different. Both the number of cities and the type of engagement are limited. A review of how cities from the Black Sea region are engaging with the SDGs shows that they are rarely doing so. When they do, such engagement most often happens in collaboration with international organisations, for instance, the UN Economic Commission for Europe or the OECD.

²⁷ The High-Level Conference of the Black Sea Countries entitled 'An enhanced regional collaboration for the implementation of the SDGs' which took place on November 10, 2020, <http://dezvoltaredurabila.gov.ro/web/2020/11/10/conferinta-la-nivel-inalt-a-tarilor-din-regiunea-marii-negre-gazduita-de-guvernul-romaniei-laszlo-borbely-uniunea-europeana-isi-propune-sa-produca-pana-la-35-din-energia-sa-electrica-din-surse-off/>.

Concurrently, the SDG processes are nationally driven, and, at national levels, the role of cities is often recognised. In some cases, national governments develop guides dedicated to city engagement with the SDGs, thus recognising the key role cities have to play in meeting the SDGs. Good examples of cities engaging substantively with the SDGs in the Black Sea region are the cities of Moscow in Russia, Izmir in Turkey, Voznesenk in Ukraine, and Goris in Armenia.

A key aspect to reflect on relates to the reasons why cities in the countries of the Black Sea region do not engage more significantly with the SDGs. To this end, the next section will focus on this inquiry in order to flesh out different macro-challenges Black Sea cities encounter that limit engagement with the SDGs.

Macro-challenges: a mapping exercise

Macro-challenges encountered by cities in the Black Sea region in their engagement with the SDGs derive from differing characteristics of the region and of each of the Black Sea countries. This section focuses on the macro-challenges that relate to the policy-making process, given that implementing the SDGs relies on the adoption and adaptation of the 2030 Agenda at national and local levels. The identified challenges include hyper-centralisation, the policy-making culture, data scarcity and limited research infrastructure, societal characteristics, and SDG-related challenges.

Hyper-centralisation of both the decision-making and the policy-making processes

The Black Sea countries are mostly characterised by centralised states with significant power concentration at the level of capitals. This limits the policy-making capacity of local communities and brings a certain level of dependence on central state institutions. In such political systems, cities are restricted in their room to manoeuvre from both a decision-making and a budgetary perspective. Furthermore, such a lack of capacity coupled with the complexity of defining SDG targets and indicators may further limit the ability of cities to meaningfully engage with the SDGs.

Lack of an evidence-based policy-making process

A consequence of the centralisation of the Black Sea countries, most of which had an authoritarian past, relates also to the policy-making process. Power dynamics, the capacity of public institutions, and the research infrastructure have contributed to a policy-making process that is not based on evidence. Given the relevance of evidence for the SDGs, for instance, defining indicators and collecting data for monitoring implementation, cities in the Black Sea region are not well positioned to manage the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Limited research infrastructure and data scarcity

All countries in the Black Sea region have a limited research infrastructure and low capacity in data collection. In certain countries, data systems are now being put into place (see Mnatsakanyan and Safyan 2020 regarding the Armenian case). Given that difficulties exist at national level, most of the time cities have a less favourable context, often not benefiting from research infrastructure or access to data. Data collection and analysis are fundamental for implementing Agenda 2030 and for achieving all of the SDGs. As long as cities are strengthening their capacity to collect and analyse data, the likelihood of developing better approaches for achieving the SDGs will also increase.

Societal characteristics that limit engagement with the SDGs

Within local communities, achieving the SDGs relies on multiple stakeholders and on the community of inhabitants. This reliance is further strengthened since the SDGs imply multiple changes and at times a deep transformation in the life of local communities. In essence, in order to achieve several of the targets (for instance, the environment-related targets) individuals should behave differently (e.g., not litter and put better waste management systems in place). This poses a macro-challenge, taking into account the fact that societies in the Black Sea region manifest similar characteristics with regard to limited understanding of environmental challenges such as climate change and environmental degradation (BSC 2019). Furthermore, the conflicts in the region pose significant challenges to retaining the added value of current investments.

SDG-related challenges

The SDGs themselves generate challenges for cities. Above all, the complexity of the process – adapting targets and indicators to local contexts – requires increased research and statistical capacity, which is missing in most cities in the Black Sea region.

Moreover, the SDGs do not emphasise all aspects of relevance to cities, making it difficult for cities to build up more popular support for Agenda 2030. While social, educational, environment-, health-, poverty- and inequality-related issues are well-emphasised goals, other priorities which are relevant for local communities are not. These include, in particular, issues related to the human component of local communities – for instance, cultural aspects, social manifestation, arts, creativity, etc. In their current form, the SDGs appear little focused on the human and cultural dimensions of local communities. This omission puts cities in a difficult context, where, strategically, it may prove difficult to attract community buy-ins for Agenda 2030 that do not nurture its fulfilment, but only ensure its survival.

Conclusions and recommendations

This article has emphasised the importance of cities in both negatively affecting global sustainability and in substantiating global efforts for achieving the SDGs. The analysis has shown that cities in the Black Sea region are in the early phase of engaging with the SDGs and joining global trends in environmental protection and sustainability. The mapping exercise provided above has exposed challenges at all policy levels – local, national, regional, and global. The key challenges relate to political will and the ability of communities to understand complex processes with regard to strengthening sustainability and its benefits.

Based on the analysis, the following recommendations have been developed, which cities, countries, and international institutions can take into account, to become active supporters of the SDGs and bring a positive contribution to local, national, and global sustainability efforts, mainly:

for the United Nations

1. Further enhance the 2030 Agenda to be people-centred and more sensitive to local particularities.
2. Put stronger emphasis on the capacity of cities to implement the SDGs.

for national governments from the Black Sea region

1. Decentralise the modalities of engagement with the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs at the level of cities, to build responsibility and capacity at local levels.
2. Develop guidelines and invest in research infrastructure and data production.
3. Further strengthen statistics institutions and data collection mechanisms, in order to track progress on the SDGs.
4. Correlate research funding with the SDGs that will contribute to the increase in research capacity and stronger support for the implementation of the SDGs.

for cities from the Black Sea region

1. Engage with the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs through a multi-sector and participatory approach; ensure that local communities understand the SDGs and are motivated to contribute to achieving the Goals; re-think local strategies accordingly.
2. Align strategies, policies, data collection, and data analysis, and ensure the increase in sustainability.

3. Invest in enhancing community participation in the SDGs, taking into account the community's role in achieving the SDGs. Stimulate local actors, such as community foundations, companies, NGOs, and community leaders, to drive efforts on reaching the SDGs.
4. Build extensive partnerships to support efforts in achieving the SDGs; play the role of mediator and catalyser; enable discussions and action to coalesce around SDG-implementation needs; join regional, European, and global initiatives related to the SDGs.
5. Build a network of SDG cities on the Black Sea and enable learning and exchange of good practices.

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Concluding Remarks

Predictably, the recommendations from our experts are many and varied, depending on the context and their area of expertise. While some are practical, and others are more reflexive and philosophical, they all reflect both the depth of the challenges societies and polities face, as well as the endless possibilities to address them. The contributors to this volume have provided us in their chapters with a rich canvas of recommendations, which reflects their diverse backgrounds, interests, and expertise. Our aim here is not to repeat their many sensible ideas and calls for action. Rather, we attempt to accentuate their commonalities.

Stefan Cibian reminds us, with his classification of recommendations to the United Nations, the national governments from the Black Sea region, and the cities from the Black Sea region, of the bevy of stakeholders that comprise the societal landscape and their interaction. This point is further reinforced by Cristina Rigman in her chapter, when she makes a point about the need for 'increased consideration of CSOs as dialogue partners for governments and the inclusion of CSOs in all the recovery and resilience support schemes that governments are developing'. Furthermore, Rigman suggests the need for local capacity building, as close to the service providers as possible. Here too her recommendation echoes Stefan Cibian's point about the need to 'invest in enhancing community participation in the SDGs, taking into account the community's role in achieving the SDGs'.

In other words, the need for capacity building at local, regional, national, and international levels can only be effectively achieved if CSOs or local communities are involved in the process. This is a point that Michael Kavuklis repeatedly makes as he assesses the role of youth involvement as civil society actors. According to Kavuklis, young people 'should be included in the creation of the content and outcomes' of all projects addressing their needs while he stresses the need to 'support projects that make young people advocates for their local communities'. Similarly, Agapi Kandilaki in her study about gender dynamics, highlights the relevance of 'enhanced cooperation between governmental organisations, academia and civil society' to increasing the visibility of gender equality issues, so as to reflect today's social agenda. Finally, Stefanos Vallianatos stresses the importance of 'the collective action of CSOs, and their function through international, or intergovernmental institutions and other networks' for the enhancement of intercultural dialogue.

In other words, societal and civil society resilience can only be built through wider societal and institutional interaction. Civil society in general can only be strengthened if it has an institutional and recognized consultative role in the governance process across all sectors.

The authors also point to the need to take a more scientific approach to civil society and the role of CSOs. For example, Cibian promotes the need for the development of guidelines and investments in the research infrastructure and data collection in order to ensure the implementation of the SDGs at the level of local communities. The authors also prioritise the access of CSOs to services, such as digital services and skills, in order to ensure that the most vulnerable groups are not left out in the cold. Finally, all the authors iterate that their recommendations aim at building sustainable processes where the different societal actors feel empowered to contribute to the strengthening of society's social fabric, irrespective of whether one's focus is on civil society engagement within the European Union or in either its Eastern or its Southern neighbourhoods. While the needs and challenges might differ from region to region and from issue to issue, the overall perception is that the challenges faced by CSOs are more or less similar. In other words, each of the topics investigated by the contributors – civil society in the post Covid-19 era, the role of youth, SDGs, gender equality, and intercultural dialogue – cannot be perceived in a vacuum, as the interactions between them are many. For example, as Kavuklis writes, enhancing youth engagement creates empowerment participation, while neglecting to focus on their role in meeting the SDG targets is not sustainable.

To conclude, the depth and breadth of ideas and recommendations presented by the contributors to this volume should make us hopeful that civil society engagement is bound to grow with the demand to meet the growing challenges that our societies are facing; albeit the fact that no specific mention has been made of the very real challenge of the shrinking enabling environment for CSOs in the European Union's neighbourhood. The political will to support engagement is crucial. As Vallianatos correctly asserts, with reference to intercultural dialogue and cultural interventions, 'advocacy and lobbying from all domains are essential, as well as results-driven policies and recommendations, as indeed enlarged partnerships between the leading stakeholders'. This statement, in fact, applies, without exception, to all civil society related actions and priorities.

About the Contributors

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Stefan Cibian is the executive director of the Făgăraş Research Institute. Stefan is an Academy Associate with the Africa Programme at Chatham House – The Royal Institute of International Affairs. He also teaches courses related to international development at Babeş-Bolyai University. Stefan is the President of FOND, the Romanian NGDO Platform and GRASP, the Global Romanian Society of Young Professionals, He is also the Treasurer of CONCORD – the European NGO Confederation for Humanitarian Aid and Development. Stefan holds a PhD in Political Science and International Relations (2012) as well as an MA in public policy (2006) from the Central European University. He holds a BA in Political Science from Babeş-Bolyai University and in Law from 1st of December 2019 University, Romania. Stefan has studied or conducted research at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA), the University of Ljubljana, and Salzburg University.

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Michael G. Kavuklis is owner of Marketing Agency mgk.advertising and President and Project Manager in International Projects of the House of Europe in Rhodes. He is also founder and head of the Organizing Committee of the Rhodes Model Regional Co-operation International Youth Leadership Programme and of the Organizing Committee of the Europe, Entrepreneurship and Sustainable Development Forum – EESD Forum Rhodes. He also serves as the focal point of the Greek Network of the Anna Lindh Foundation for the Aegean-Crete, and he has been elected to the Board of the European

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Cristina Rigman is a senior professional specialised in strategic planning, leadership and adaptability, project design and management, organisational development, monitoring & evaluation, good governance, networking and leadership. She has 20 years of work experience in the non-profit sector and for the past 6 years she has been working as trainer, facilitator and consultant for CSOs in the European Union, the Western Balkans, the South Caucasus and Asia. Cristina is a graduate of Political Science, focused on social research methods, a certified trainer of trainers, a coach and consultant on Maxwell DISC behavioural analysis and a certified practitioner AQai (Adaptability Quotient). She is currently delivering her own development programmes dedicated to CSOs and their leaders, employees and volunteers.

Dimitrios Triantaphyllou is Professor of International Relations and Director of the Center for International and European Studies (CIES) at Kadir Has University, Istanbul. He holds an MA and a PhD in International Relations from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University and a BA in Political Science and History from the University of California, Berkeley. He has previously served in various capacities in a number of research and academic institutions such as the Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP), Athens; the EU Institute for Security Studies, Paris; the Hellenic Observatory at the London School of Economics; the University of the Aegean, Rhodes; and the International Center for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS), Athens. He also served as an advisor at the Hellenic Ministry for Foreign Affairs. He is Associate Editor of Southeast European and Black Sea Studies (SSCI indexed); a member of the Greek-Turkish Forum; co-convenor of the Commission on the Black Sea; a member of the Advisory Boards of the Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation, the International Institute for Peace, Vienna; and the Corporate Social Responsibility Association of Turkey.

Stefanos Vallianatos is Head of International Relations at Hellenic Foundation for Culture, Athens. He holds a PhD in the field of International Politics from Lancaster University. He has taught Middle East Politics and the History and Politics of the Balkans at the International Centre for Hellenic and Mediterranean Studies, Athens and frequently publishes and comments on issues related to developments in the wider Middle East, on civil society in the Arab world and the Mediterranean. His most recent activities include the coordination of a capacity building project on Active Citizenship and Social Entrepreneurship (organised by the Anna Lindh Foundation and the Greek National Network of the Anna Lindh Foundation), the hosting and organisation of the annual meeting of the Lazord Foundation Fellowship for NGO leaders and joining NECE's focus group on 'Exchange between Europe and North Africa'.

About the Partners and the Donors

The Center for International and European Studies (CIES)

The Center for International and European Studies at Kadir Has University was established in 2004 as the Center for European Union Studies to study Turkey's European Union accession process. Since September 2010, the CIES has undergone a major transformation by widening its focus in order to pursue applied, policy-oriented research and to promote debate on the most pressing geostrategic issues of the region. The CIES' areas of research and interaction include EU institutions and policies, cross-cutting horizontal issues such as regional cooperation, global governance, and security, inter alia, with a geographical focus on the Black Sea region (including the Caucasus), the Mediterranean, Southeastern Europe, Turkish-Greek relations, and transatlantic relations. The CIES has organised numerous international conferences and outreach activities with selected speakers on a wide range of issues and has partnered with a number of like-minded organisations in Turkey and abroad. In 2011, the CIES started to publish The Neighbourhood Policy Paper series. In addition, the CIES publishes the CIES Policy Briefs, short and informative expert analyses and commentary on some of the contemporary and pressing international relations challenges. With the support of Kadir Has University, the CIES has laid the foundations for a sustainable research institution. It hopes to continue its mission of being a viable policy-oriented research center by promoting sustainable activities, synergies among partners and by continuing its outreach through policy-oriented publications, seminars, conferences, training symposia, and other activities.

NGO 'Quadrivium'

NGO 'Quadrivium' aims at conducting multidisciplinary research and providing policy recommendations in the field of European studies, foreign policy, regional development, education and leadership. It seeks to enhance civil society institutions and promote democratic values in Ukraine. To this end, 'Quadrivium' seeks to fulfil the following mission: interdisciplinary study of significant achievements of social and cultural, political and legal, moral and value-based experiences of the Western countries for their further dissemination and implementation into the Ukrainian society. 'Quadrivium' implements various research projects with the support of the European Commission, the Swiss State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation, the International Visegrad Fund, the Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation, the International Renaissance Foundation, the Representation Office of Hanns Seidel Foundation in Ukraine etc.

NGO 'Promotion of Intercultural Cooperation'

NGO 'Promotion of Intercultural Cooperation' (PIC) is a Ukrainian NGO based in Odessa. It aims to promote international cooperation and dialogue by raising awareness to the issues of international, interethnic relations, global and local socio-political and cultural problems, to provide an analysis and

training in the mentioned spheres. NGO PIC has 11 years of experience in organizing projects dealing with international relations, which first of all involved research (including sociology), analysis and further public discussions and presentations. Since 2015, NGO PIC has been publishing UA: Ukraine Analytica <http://ukraine-analytica.org> — the only English language journal in Ukraine, which is widely presented at international forums, and sent both printed and e-version to hundreds of addresses worldwide.

The Foreign Policy Council ‘Ukrainian Prism’

The Foreign Policy Council “Ukrainian Prism” is a non-governmental think tank focusing on foreign policy and international security studies. The organisation aims to contribute to the formation and implementation of an effective foreign policy of Ukraine through expert analysis, development of recommendations and consultations, creation and promotion of expert diplomacy tools. Ukrainian Prism actively cooperates with the expert community and the bodies of executive and legislative power of Ukraine, which are involved in the development and implementation of the foreign policy of Ukraine; conducts research on the foreign policy, international relations, security and public diplomacy, and develops policy recommendations; provides informational, organisational and consulting support to public authorities, civil society organisations, educational establishments, etc.

The Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation (BST)

The Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation (BST) is a grantmaking initiative based in Bucharest, Romania. It was created in 2007 by the German Marshall Fund of the United States, with the support of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania, the Government of Latvia, and the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, the Robert Bosch Stiftung and Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and the European Commission. The BST has been strengthening regional cooperation, civil society, and democratic foundations in the countries of the Black Sea region. In particular, the BST has focused on building trust among citizens and in the public institutions, affirming the value of citizen participation in the democratic process, promoting the involvement of civil society in conflict resolution, and fostering regional cross-border ties in the public, private, and non-profit sectors. In this regard, it organises regular study tours to countries in the region and other events of interest to the regional political climate and coordinates research. The BST is committed to continuing to offer support in the democratic climate in the targeted regions, not only through grantmaking, but also through its policy and leadership development programs. The BST will also keep promoting regional views on issues of importance to both the region and the international community, such as security, democracy, and European policies toward the neighbourhood.

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