



## **CIVIL SOCIETY SUPPORT TEAM**

### **MINUTES OF THE ADVISORY BOARD MEETING 19 FEBRUARY 2009 - MERIT HOTEL, NICOSIA**

As you know, the first Advisory Board Meeting was held on the 25th of September 2008 in Boğçalıyan Restaurant with the participation of 45 persons representing 27 civil society organisations. The second of these Advisory Board Meetings was held on the 19th of February 2009 in Merit Hotel Nicosia with **53 persons representing 36 civil society organisations**, with the participation of the Civil Society Support Team and a representative from the EU Programme Support Office. As with the first meeting, in the second participating organisations covered a wide geographical range, from Lefke to Famagusta, from Nicosia to Rizokarpaso as well as representing a range of thematic areas from “environment”, “women’s rights” to “cultural heritage” and “health”.

The meeting started with the opening speech of the Team Leader of the Civil Society Support Team Juliette Remy-Sartin and continued with comments and questions regarding the activities of the CSST, the role of the Advisory Board and its functioning as well as the “Civil Society in Action” grant programme.

The opinions, suggestions and thoughts that came up throughout the discussions during the meeting have been particularly rich and diverse. The geographical and thematic diversity and riches that characterised the participant organisations was successfully reflected to the content of the meeting. In order to keep anonymity, we, as the CSST, asked participants to write down on large pieces of paper that were hung on the walls of the meeting hall the positive and negative aspects of CSST’s activities. We thank all participants who shared their views with us through post-its. You may find the comments below.

In addition, during the meeting a questionnaire was distributed to participants. The aim of this second questionnaire was for the CSST to find out which thematic areas Turkish Cypriot civil society organisations are active in, in which areas they feel the need to be more active and what additional trainings could be provided to improve their organisational capacity. We thank all of those CSO representatives who have filled in the form either during the meeting or after, through e-mail and online. We would like to point out that the online questionnaire is still available for you to fill in on our website. You may find the evaluation report based on those questionnaires that have been received to date attached. (Annex I)

In the meeting, participants mostly posed questions on the EU grant programmes and especially pointed out their concerns related to the delays in the signing of contracts. The questions posed mostly regarded how applications were evaluated, who were awarded grants, when the contracts of those awarded grants will be signed, and whether the names of those organisations which were awarded grants



## CIVIL SOCIETY SUPPORT TEAM

will be made public. Both the CSST and the representative from the EU Programme Support Office provided explanations at the end of the meeting.

In the second meeting, as in the first, participating CSO representatives brought forward the suggestion to hold meetings based on thematic sub-groups rather than large meetings with the participation of all organisations in order to move forward more efficiently.

During the meeting, as with the previous one, participants wrote on post-its their answers to the question **“What are your positive opinions with regards to the services of the Civil Society Support Team to date?”** and posted them on large papers hung on the wall of the meeting hall. The answers were as below:

- I think it is important that a start was made
- Project preparation trainings are useful and i hope for them to continue
- We want to work with the Greek Cypriots on human rights
- We want to know more about activities related to Rizokarpaso
- I appreciate your services very much. I hope for the criticisms to provide guidance to you
- Is attentive in every way to CSOs and makes an effort
- The hospotality provided by the CSST is perfect. Communication is good and it uses the media very well with regards to its activities
- I support their efforts in trying to move the “meeting train” away from financial rails to non-financial ones
- I congratulate them for being able to bring together CSOs from different fields
- It is very nice that you inform us regularly and organise trainings
- Trainings and conferences
- It is very much appreciated that you bring together CSOs and mobilise them
- You are very successful in organising CSOs and bringing them together
- The CSST’s activites are extremely important, useful and full of dedication. This is true for all its activities.
- I find the training seminars very worthwhile.
- We believe in the usefulness of these meetings. Thank you for inviting us and giving us the opportunity. I think that it will be more effective if you brought together CSOs working in similar fields
- It succeeded in bringing together CSOs working in different fields
- The friendly approach and the training activities you provide on organisational and financial issues to newly developing CSOs and associations in Cyprus is very mature and meaningful
- You provide an opportunity for many civil society organisations in Cyprus to get together. Eventhough partially, you are also helping to provide a



## CIVIL SOCIETY SUPPORT TEAM

confederational structure which has been lacking. It provides the opportunity to develop relations with other organisations.

- Smaller groups- positive energy and more work- better results

The answers to the question **“What do you think the Civil Society Support Team should improve and embetter in the services that it has been providing to date or what are the things you think the CSST has not done to date and would be good if it did?”** can be found below as categorised by our team.

- Do you have an audit board which is responsible to check where, how and in which ways the money is spent by civil society organisations benefiting from the grant programme?- i suppose you don't have
- We get stuck on political issues far too much in meetings. The CSST should safeguard itself from such discussions. There are no solutions found and time is wasted on these kinds of issues
- More open to the public, using a language which is understandable by the people
- CSST should, at the same time, be a voice for CSOs
- Thanks for all the activities to date. It would be useful if the seminars and trainings from now on are more diversified and especially remind people what types of values people should have. I wish you success
- Sharing the results of activities
- We prefer the meetings to be held within working hours or like today right after a working day. Thanks
- That training programmes are not during work hours
- It is difficult to make time for voluntary work during work hours. We hope for activities to take place outside working hours, on weekends/evenings
- Small meetings bringing together CSOs working in the same fields can be more effective
- Meetings to take place outside working hours
- You cannot have a discussion with more than 60 participants
- Allow civil society organisations to get to know each other on a regional basis
- After regional meetings to organise a central one so that a healthy synergy can be created
- Please respond to the e-mails that are sent
- You can be a catalyst for developing collaboration (for activities to influence the public opinion) between CSOs that are working in similar fields. Activities in this respect are not sufficient
- You can have an e-newsletter
- Must have better collaboration



## CIVIL SOCIETY SUPPORT TEAM

- We expect you to help us in establishing contact with persons responsible in solving problems that we face during project implementation
- Practical and effective solutions for projects and project writing
- We want the information on the participants who have attended the first and second advisory board meetings to be distributed to everyone
- The complaints received by CSOs that the CSST has been in contact with are for instance: -project have a narrow coverage-; I believe that the CSST could be more effective in conveying the problems that are faced during the project application process to the Commission and should be able to enforce its comments. If the fund is approved then there should be easier ways to give it.
- In order to strengthen civil society organisations we believe that you need to be more active in the preparation of projects
- Couldn't it be possible to use this so that similar projects that are submitted by CSOs in South Cyprus are implemented in the North and vice versa?
- If there is no model for CSO structures in the EU (this is what we were told) then why are certain CSO models being imposed in Cyprus? There needs to be a clarification on this point
- The CSST should remind the EU to be respectful to CSOs and stop acting like a "black box"

Some comments which were posted on the papers were related more to the grant programme and especially the EU rather than the CSST. You may find them below:

- Projects should be put in an hierarchical order depending on their immediacy. For instance the animal shelter project
- The faster the process is done the more credible it will be
- The experts who evaluate the grants should prioritise the interests of Cyprus and should not think that they are obliged to the EU
- In the field of rural development, fisheries and research should be added as topics
- As long as the mistakes, shortcomings and deficiencies on the side of the European Commission are not corrected, the efforts of the CSST will not bear fruit
- I would like to learn about projects that you have successfully completed
- I think that the EU financial team is negatively affecting the efficiency of the activities of the CSST
- Because the EU is very stingy with regards to financial support we lose heart and it affects our dialogue with you. Of course you must not be happy about this situation either



## CIVIL SOCIETY SUPPORT TEAM

- With regards to financial support to be provided to CSOs there is an extreme sensitivity on the part of the EU regarding the Greek Cypriot properties. It feels like we are trying to be pacified in this country.