

**F**undația pentru  
**D**ezvoltarea  
**S**ocietății  
**C**ivile

# **European Civil Society House. The Romanian perspective**





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**Bucharest, 2012**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## About the project

The Carrousel project is implemented by the European Citizens Actions Service (ECAS) in partnership with the Open Society Institute – Sofia (Bulgaria), NIOK (Hungary), the Polish Robert Schuman Foundation (Poland) and Toute l'Europe (France). It received financial support from EACEA, Measure 2.1 ("Citizens' projects") of the Europe for Citizens Programme. It is also supported by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust.

The project's name comes from an innovative technique for citizen deliberations that was used throughout the project. It involves structured discussions with citizens in a "round table" format with subsequent rotation, which contributes to a better exchange of views and cross-pollination of ideas.

In the framework of the project four national panels and one European level panel were organized, together with a series of studies conducted in several EU member states. The main goal of the deliberations and research was to help better conceptualize the structure and functions of the future European Civil Society House, both physical and virtual, and its national contact points in the Member States. The feedback, ideas, and recommendations received from the participants in the discussions will be used to improve the design of the virtual ESCH and, at a later stage, of the physical offices of the House, as well. The results from the project will be the basis for formulating policy recommendations to the European institutions about how to facilitate EU citizens' access to their rights and improve their communication with citizens.

## About the study and its content

The current study was contracted to the Civil Society Development Foundation and aims to explore the Romanian context and stakeholders' perceptions regarding civil society and citizens' participation to European Policies in Romania, as well as creating the European Civil Society House.

Content:

- Review of the Romanian context. This part of the study analyzes the participation of NGOs and citizens in the decision-making process in Romania, the way they interact with and relate to the

EU, provides a map of the structures and initiatives relevant for the facilitation of access of Romanian citizens or civil society organisations to European information and reviews the cooperation between public authorities and the NGOs;

- Presentation of the qualitative and quantitative analysis of the research. This part of the study renders the views of the people involved in the research, with regard to the virtual and physical European Civil Society House, at Brussels and in Romania, its role and the mechanisms they suggest for its functioning;
- Main suggestions, recommendations and conclusions that came out of the study: key issues that should be taken into account, profile of the European Civil Society House in Brussels, profile of the national European Civil Society House.

### **About the coordinator of the study - Civil Society Development Foundation**

The Civil Society Development Foundation (CSDF) is an independent, non-governmental organisation, based in Bucharest (Romania) and established in 1994, following an initiative of the European Commission. CSDF is an “organisation for organisations”, sharing the belief that the very development of non-governmental organisations is an indicator of the progress of communities and citizens.

CSDF provides services related to: consultancy and training, advocacy, information, research, coalition and platform building, always tailored to the needs of civil society organisations, in order to increase the impact of their activities in the community. CSDF also represents the non-governmental sector’s interests towards other sectors of the society and works towards increasing the visibility of the non-governmental sector’s work and values. Reaching out to other categories of stakeholders and target groups, CSDF is currently providing services not only to NGOs, but also to public administration, the business sector, journalists, academia.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The present research proposes an in depth analysis of the Romanian context and stakeholders' perceptions regarding civil society and citizens' participation to European Policies, as well as towards the creation of the European Civil Society House. The research methodology includes a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, in order to gain a better understanding of the opportunity for the ECSH establishment in Romania. The research has been conducted around the three main pillars of the proposed ECSH, the 3 Cs:

- Citizens Rights;
- Civil Society Development;
- Citizen Participation.

### **Analysis of documents and secondary research data**

National and European policy documents, as well as researches have been closely analyzed to provide a general perspective of the policies in the area of citizen participation. In this chapter the experts explored the 3 areas of interest for the ECSH – citizens', civil society development and citizen participation, what was already being done to connect civil society and citizens and more actions to be undertaken, demands met and gaps to be filled.

### **Personalized interviews**

Within the research project 10 personalised interviews were done with representatives of organisations or institutions having a particular experience in European Affairs (informing and promoting of European topics, EU policies, facilitation of interaction between the citizens or civil society and the European institutions etc). The organisations and institutions interviewed were chosen in order to provide a relevant view of a wide range of (1) domains in European affairs (citizen rights, environment, youth, development cooperation, policy-making, structural instruments), or (2) types of entities (resource centres either for citizens or for the civil society, information centres, federations, organisations having local branches throughout the country).

## **Workshop**

A workshop was organised in order to debate upon the level of activism of Romanian citizens and civil society in relation to the decision making process at the European level, along with the roles and functions of a European Civil Society House. 25 participants out of 23 organisations or institutions attended the workshop. The group gathered labour unions and entrepreneurs' associations, NGOs active in human rights and democracy, social inclusion, culture and environment, operating individually or in larger networks, affiliated to religious cults or laic.

## **Online survey**

An online survey on the proposal to create a European Civil Society House was sent to targeted civil society organisations or institutions dealing with European affairs and was also promoted to a wide range of other civil society organisations, citizens and institutions. 103 respondents representing NGOs (associations, foundations, federations, networks), educational public institutions and other types of institutions, citizens filled in the online survey containing 9 closed and open questions.

## **Part I. CONTEXT**

This part of the study provides a review of the present situation of the NGO sector and civic engagement in decision making processes in Romania. It answers what is already being done to connect civil society and citizens to be actively involved in decision making processes and what more needs to be done, where demand is already met and where there are gaps and what the scope for synergy is.

EU integration has been one of the main goals of Romania since the end 1990s' and it has been embraced as such by the overwhelming majority of the Romanian citizens. EU integration has been perceived as the best way towards democratization, prosperity and security for the country. It is not surprising that even though the level of trust in the EU has sharply fallen over the last years, particularly in the context of the global economic crisis, it remains one of the highest in Europe. Moreover, since trust in the national institutions (Government, political parties) are very low, Romanian citizens' hopes still cling to the EU institutions as a safety net for the future of the country. As the rhythm of reforms after the accession has slowed down, with even setbacks in various areas (justice reform, democratisation), EU has become essential in ensuring that Romania keeps the course. Expectations towards the EU have been high from the very beginning of the negotiation process. The official discourse emphasising the benefits of the EU integration have contributed to these expectations. However, it is less evident for most of the population how they can really benefit from the advantages of being European citizens and this is another factor contributing to the current wave of disappointment.

### **A. Citizens and non-governmental organisations' participation in the decision-making process in Romania**

In Romania (as in most former communist countries), involvement of citizens in CSO activities or their support for CSOs remains low. The reasons are varied: from the dire Communist legacy of social mistrust, disappearance of the public space, forced volunteerism and state dependency, to the more recent economic troubles and increasing poverty, individualism and consumerism. As CSOs have been supported since the early 1990s' by foreign donors and international institutions (such as the EU itself) they are still perceived as very close to the international arena. Despite all these negative elements,



surveys which have been conducted over the last 10 years reveal a constant increase in the public trust for CSOs (particularly for NGOs) – while at the same time trust in the Government and public institutions has decreased.

The current level of trust is low in absolute value, yet, in the context of the trust crisis in Romanian institutions it can be interpreted as a general perception of civil society as stability reference. Beyond the general perception, there are four main ways of citizen involvement with CSOs: membership, volunteering, donations and mobilization through campaigns (either street manifestations or signing of petitions). Membership in an organisation usually includes also the other types of involvement. However all types of involvement remain generally underdeveloped in Romania.

Associations and foundations active in the field of human rights and good governance have been, by far, the most visible in the mass media in the early stage of the democratization process in Romania. The changes which took place after 1989 represented at the same time the starting point of the development of civil society as a guarantee of democracy and as an advocate of civil liberties.

The process of EU accession (1993 – 2004) led to an increase of the importance of civil society, particularly from the perspective of the capacity to influence public decision-making. After 1999, when the EU integration became a more clear certitude, the nongovernmental sector managed to use effectively the requirements / conditionalities imposed by the EU in order to advance, quicker, essential points for the society in their agenda.

Reports of various CSOs have been constantly used by EU institutions to evaluate Romania's progress and that, in turn, had an impact on an improvement of the attitude of the political class towards civil society at large.

One of the major successes of the 2000s' was the adoption of the law on access to information and of transparency in the decision-making process. With the tools provided by these laws, NGOs working in the field focused on the promotion of responsibility and integrity in public positions, on fighting corruption, on promoting participatory democracy, access to information and transparency in the decision-making process.

According to the latest available data, the Civil Society Directory (2010), 12.54% of all NGOs have as the main field of intervention civic participation and influencing public policies. Of these, the majority (68%) are focused on democracy and human rights, 15% work on consumer protection, 45.5% are concerned with discrimination and 56% deal with good governance and changing public policies. NGOs have a very important role in the protection of human rights. They offer direct assistance to persons whose rights were violated, they put pressure for the modification of relevant national legislation and they develop educational programs for the understanding and respecting human rights. Awareness on human rights, and on the ways to defend them are the basis to ensure their enforcement in everyday life. NGOs in Romania have been actively involved in the promotion of human rights and they had a strong influence in bringing fundamental change in the following areas: children rights, gender equality, fighting discrimination and the promotion of minority rights (including protecting ethnic and sexual minorities, fighting racism etc.), the freedom of expression, and support for a fair electoral process. In turn, the aim progresses contributed to increasing visibility and trust in civil society.

NGOs' activities have contributed greatly to the consolidation of democracy, by monitoring the government, acting for increasing transparency in the decision making process and the responsibility of public authorities, but also by enhancing the level of citizen participation, the facilitation of the direct involvement of marginalized groups in the development and implementation of solutions they were facing, influencing the culture and attitude of both government officials and citizens.

Participation is the main tool in the formulation, information and promotion of the changes desired by the citizens. As such, NGOs which wish to influence government decisions in order to solve critical problems or to draw attention on these problems, undertake activities aimed at building and strengthening mechanisms which ensure citizen participation and fostering their active and direct engagement.

The main laws regulating public participation – Law 52/2003 regarding decision making transparency of the public administration and Law 544/2001 on the freedom of access to information – are the result of the actions initiated by nongovernmental organisations, which made it possible for the topics they had proposed to turn into public policy.

Over the last years, a larger number of NGOs have carried out advocacy campaigns, particularly to influence the shape of local development plans and the way decision which concern citizens is made, with quite a number of cases where either through public and pressure or in court they managed to force public authorities to respect the existent legislation and to take the right measures.

## **B. Review of the cooperation between public authorities and the NGOs**

In the evolution of the relation between the state and the nongovernmental sector in Romania, the most recent phases allow for understanding the current dynamics, challenges and of the potential that NGOs have in ensuring the linkages with the European dimension of policy making and human rights.

In the period 2000 – 2005 Romanian NGOs committed to a new role: promoters of good governance and of the integration in the EU. In 2004-2008 the main topics of interest for CSOs were again related to the efforts made by Romania on the path to EU accession.

It is in this period that a new consultation instrument between Government and civil society is created. The College for Consultation with Associations and Foundations is created within the chancellery of the prime-minister. The College's main goal has been "to facilitate communication and to ensure the involvement of associations and foundations in the implementation of governmental policies at all decision-making levels of the central public authorities" as well as "to develop the partnership between public authorities and the nongovernmental sector and to consolidate participatory democracy in Romania".

In 2011, while the overall political context and the cooperation with the government further deteriorated, CSOs did put serious efforts in lobbying and advocacy initiatives. 60% of the respondents in the NGO Leaders' Barometer (BLONG) 2011 state that influencing public decision-making process is a focus of their organisations. For 29% of the respondents that is an important dimension of their organisation.

The main initiators of public consultations are NGOs and coalitions of NGOs (in 38% of the cases), followed by local authorities (18%) and by ministries (14%).

According to the NGO Leaders' Barometer (BLONG) 2011, 75% of the respondents declare that within their activities they cooperate with public authorities and institutions. The best cooperation takes place at local level (with local and county councils). One of the most negative perceptions on the quality of cooperation regards the interaction with the Romanian Presidency. Most of the surveyed CSOs (60-70%) leaders regard positively the general attitude of local authorities about their organisations; however the perception drops 20% when asked about concrete actions taken by these authorities to support their work. Although most of the actions aimed at influencing public policies seemed to focus on the national level (over 50% of the respondents), the most successful ones proved to be those targeting local authorities where 60% of the CSOs who initiated public policy recommendations saw their proposals included entirely or partially in the final decisions. Although advocacy work of CSOs is not ideologically driven, the perception of the cooperation with opposition parties is slightly better than with governmental parties.

In 2011 CSOs were able again to organize large thematic coalitions, generally successful in mobilizing citizens and group to oppose governmental decisions deemed unacceptable (e.g. against the Mining Law, for the preservation of wild forests, against the Law of Social Entrepreneurship).

CSOs mobilized both around issues which concerned them directly (the European Structural Funds, against the draft law on Social Entrepreneurship), and also larger issues such as environmental and heritage protection, social issues (for children with autism) or defence of civil rights (the draft law on public assemblies) and democracy (the law on electoral changes, a coalition against the referendum for a new law on the administrative reorganisation of Bucharest, a coalition against the proposed territorial administrative reorganisation of the country).

The controversial mining project at Roşia Montană drew a lot of energy and efforts from environmental NGOs and other activist groups. According to the civil society representatives, the project would create the largest cyanide based gold exploitation in Europe, destroying an invaluable historical and cultural heritage and endangering the environment in a wider area in Romania and in the neighbouring countries for a very long time in the future and with a negative economic benefit for the country. Civil society groups mobilized against the Roşia Montană Gold Corporation (RMGC), the company behind the project, staging public manifestations and boycotts, exposing the massive public campaign sponsored in the media by RMGC and the silencing of opinions opposing the project, as well as denouncing high level

complicity and lack of transparency by public institutions, including the Romanian Presidency, disregarding the environmental and cultural impact of the gold exploitation, in a pre-electoral year. A large mobilization to gather signatures for a petition against a new proposed Mining Law favouring RMGC and other potential mineral companies, against the existing legislation regulating property rights and historical and cultural heritage, managed to collect 100,000 signatures in a record time. The petition was deposited at the Romanian Parliament during the visit of a delegation of the Committee for Petitions of the European Parliament. Several flash-mobs and small spontaneous manifestations against the censorship in mass-media of opinions contrary to the project were swiftly and overweightedly repressed by the police forces, while environmental activists were intimidated and abused, increasing suspicions of obscure links between high level decision-makers and the gold corporation.

In September 2011 a coalition of CSOs managed to stop the adoption of a law which gravely restricted the freedom of assembly and of expression.

### **C. Romanian citizens, civil society organisations and the EU**

According to the latest Eurobarometer released in April 2012, Romanian citizens' trust in the EU dropped dramatically at the end of 2011, with 14%, compared to the same period of 2010 (60%). However, the level of trust remains relatively high – 46% of citizens continue to trust the EU – compared to the EU 27 average (38%). It is worth recalling that in the pre-accession period, Romanians' trust in the EU reached record levels (85% of all citizens trusted the EU).

Romania has one of the lowest rates of voters' participation to the latest European elections. 27.7% of the Romanian voters expressed their preferences, compared to a EU27 average of 43%. The main reason to vote was not related that much to the feeling of belonging to the EU, or to rational calculations. Instead, 73% of the Romanians who voted stated they did because of civic duty.

A specialized Eurobarometer on EU citizenship from 2010, revealed that the proportion of respondents claiming that they knew the *meaning* of the term "citizen of the European Union" was among the highest in Romania (60%), compared to the EU27 average – 43%. 55% of the Romanians were not satisfied with the level of information about the rights as a citizen of the European Union, while the EU27 average was 67%.

In the Flash Eurobarometer: the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (January 2012), just 8% of the Romanian citizens declared they were familiar with the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (compared to 11%, the EU average).

Over the past 5 years the Romanian CSOs came in closer contact with European civil society federative structures, and, in the context of the European integration process of Romania started to adopt similar strategies to those of the European organisations. In the NGO Leaders' Barometer (BLONG) 2011, 17.7% of the respondents declared that they belonged to a national federation, 4% were affiliated to European federation and almost 3% to international federations. 34% of NGO representatives consulted in the aforementioned survey declare that in 2010 their organisation was involved in activities at EU level, in partnership with NGOs from other EU member states.

#### **D. Structures and initiatives relevant for the facilitation of access of Romanian citizens to European information**

1. Citizens Advice Bureaux
2. Europe Direct Network
3. European Parliament Information Office in Romania
4. European Institute of Romania
5. Information Centre for Structural Instruments
6. EurActiv.ro
7. Romanian Center for European Policies
8. Romanian Association for Consumers' Protection
9. InfoCons
10. Parlamentor.ro

##### **1. Citizens Advice Bureaux (<http://www.robcc.ro/en/>)**

The access of all citizens to information regarding the civil rights and responsibilities is a prerequisite for the equality of opportunities in a democratic society. The Citizens Advice Bureaux ensure equal access of

citizens to information and advice services so that they are able to acknowledge their rights and duties. Citizens should not be deprived of information about their rights and responsibilities.

The National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux (NACAB) is a nongovernmental, non profit organisation, founded to support and to direct the activities of the Citizens Advice Bureaux (CABs). NACAB is made up of 38 NGOs that founded CABs and CAB branches in more than 60 localities in Romania, both in urban and rural environments.

NACAB coordinates the activities of the CABs, promotes the network of the CABs at the national level, and represents the network of the CABs in relation with public authorities and aims at elaborating documents with potential of impact in what concerns public policy making and social services sector, based on information furnished by the CABs.

NACAB was founded in 2002, under the Phare Programme – Strengthening Civil Society. The Association benefited from the support of the Romanian Government (the Department of Liaison with the Political and NGO Environment) and of the British Government (the Department of International Development). The Citizens Advice Bureaux (CABs) represent projects of NGOs active in the fields of social services, Human Rights, community development, child protection, consumer protection etc.

At local level, a CAB functions in partnership with local authorities (City Hall, Local Government Office, Local and County Council) and with decentralized public institutions. The CABs cover the majority of Romanian regions, functioning in 38 cities and villages, diverse in size. Apart from the 38 CABs, NACAB has also CAB subunits covering, in total, more than 60 localities of Romania, both in urban and rural milieus.

The CABs offer two types of services:

- **Information** concerning legal regulations and law provisions with regards to the problems she/he faces;
- **Advice:** people coming in contact with a CAB are helped to take informed decisions with respect to the problems they face. CABs offer an overview of the possibilities the person has at her/his disposal, along with the attached steps to be taken, following that the actual decision to be taken exclusively by the person herself/himself. Over 40,000 citizens benefit annually from the direct

services of the CABs. The impact of those services in the community is significant, as the CAB is an important pillar in promoting civic participation, transparency and accountability of public authorities.

CABs offer information and advice in 12 domains: Child Protection, Civil Rights and Responsibilities, Consumer's Protection, Education, Health, Labour Regime, Notary Procedures, Property Regime, Public Services, Social Assistance, Social Insurance, Taxes.

## **2. Europe Direct Network ([http://ec.europa.eu/romania/information/europe\\_direct/index\\_ro.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/romania/information/europe_direct/index_ro.htm))**

The Europe Direct Network represents one of the main instruments used by the European Commission in order to inform and communicate with citizens at the local level. The network comprises, at the EU level, 480 Europe Direct information centres, 400 European documentation centres and 700 Team Europe members.

In Romania, the 30 Europe Direct information centres, 14 European documentation centres and over 20 Team Europe experts in European policies represent EC's interface to the citizens at the local level and have the mission of promoting an informed and active European citizenship. These networks provide general and specialized information regarding the EU and refer to specialized information sources, raise awareness among the public and promote debate on European themes. The network is coordinated by the Representation of the EC in Romania.

Europe Direct provides:

- General information on EU themes in all official languages;
- Answers to questions related to EU policies;
- Practical information regarding various aspects, such as necessary steps for recognition of studies or modalities of how to introduce a complaint about unsafe products;
- Names, addresses and phone numbers of organisations to which citizens may appeal;
- Advice for overcoming practical problems in exercising the rights as citizen in Europe.



### **3. European Parliament Information Office in Romania (<http://www.europarl.ro/view/ro/index.html>)**

The European Parliament Information Office in Romania informs citizens about the role and importance of the European Parliament, organizing Civic Forums, debates and caravans in various locations throughout the country.

Moreover, the office attend events of its partners and delivers presentations and communications regarding the resolutions of the European Parliament, but also information materials and publications about the European Parliament and EU policies.

To implement communication policies of the European Parliament, the office organizes information sessions for journalists on priority themes under debate, as well as on the institutional role played by this legislative forum. The office organizes seminars having as general topic the activity of the European Parliament and the European legislative process, but also seminars dedicated to specialised journalists on certain European themes.

The European Parliament Information Office in Romania has as main objectives:

- To inform the public on the European Parliament and its activities;
- To support media coverage of the debates and activities of the Parliament;
- To facilitate the connection between public authorities at the national, regional, local level and the civil society.

Furthermore, complementing the European Parliament website, the Romanian website allows:

- Better information on the MEPs;
- Tracking news on the European Parliament;
- Tracking news on the European Parliament Information Office in Romania;
- Downloading of own publications;
- Visualising the activities of the European Parliament in images;
- Getting familiar to the organisation and functioning of the European Parliament;
- Getting to know the competences and political role of the European Parliament;
- Information with regard to the auctions and the annual grants program;
- Employment opportunities and internships in EU institutions;

- Visits to the European Parliament.

#### **4. European Institute of Romania (<http://www.ier.ro/index.php/site/index>)**

The European Institute of Romania (EIR) is a public institution whose mission is to provide expertise in the field of European Affairs to the public administration, the business community, the social partners and the civil society. Studies, training, translation and communication are EIR's key areas:

- Conducting studies and policies and strategy analyses to support Romania's development within the European Union, and exercising its attributes as a Member State;
- Organizing training activities in the domain of European Affairs;
- Coordinating the translation and the linguistic and legal revision of the pre-accession acquis, of the ECHR case-law, of Romanian documents of legal nature, and setting up a consistent terminology;
- Stimulating public debates on European issues.

EIR started its activity in January 2000 as an organisation aiming at providing support to the Romanian decision-makers during the accession process of Romania to the EU. EIR began its activity as a PHARE project, with an initial staff of 22 people. The newly-settled organisation had also a wider goal, namely being a forefront platform for making the Romanian society, especially the policy makers and academia, aware of the most important developments in the rapidly changing and increasingly complex world of the European Union. After 1 January 2007, EIR shifted its strategic focus on the new priorities arising from Romania's EU membership, following the country's accession to the Union. The new priorities pertain mainly to the role, positions and possible alliances to be assumed by Romania on the European scene, emphasizing the need for a deeper examination at national level of the evolutions of the EU institutional affairs and policy-making at community level.

Nowadays, the EIR functions as a public institution under the coordination of the Department of European Affairs, which is the office in charge with the executive secretariat of EU Affairs within the Romanian Government. The EIR views are independent of any public or private bodies and are not aligned to any political party, denominational group or ideological movement.

The projects run by EIR are focused both on building institutional capacity and creating specific expertise in the EU affairs area. It currently employs about 55 experts and other staff, including researchers, training and communication experts and translators.

Among the main achievements of the EIR it is relevant to mention, in the context of this report, that EIR has organized so far more than 120 public conferences, round tables, debates and seminars aiming at stimulating at a national level in-depth public debate on European issues.

#### **5. Information Centre for Structural Instruments (<http://www.fonduri-ue.ro/>)**

The Information Centre for Structural Instruments has been founded in early 2012 under the newly-founded Ministry of European Affairs. According to the National Communication Strategy for Structural Instruments for the programming period 2007-2013, the central element of the process of public information is the above mentioned centre. The Centre is the focal point to which interested persons can direct and the place where answers to general questions and guidance towards specialized organisms is provided.

The activity of the Centre focuses on two priorities:

- Providing information on funding opportunities available, in real time and with relevant data;
- Communication on the objectives and achievements in the domain of structural instruments, by sharing successful models that contributed to the quality of life and economic situation in the communities in which they were implemented.

#### **6. EurActiv.ro (<http://www.euractiv.ro/>)**

EurActiv.ro is part of the network of portals dedicated to European affairs, having the headquarters at Brussels, and present through independent websites at Berlin, Paris, Madrid, Warsaw, Prague, Bratislava, Budapest, Sofia and Istanbul.

The EurActiv network is in permanent contact with the EU affairs world. Designed as a portal – news agency, free, in Romanian, EurActiv.ro aims towards an active involvement of the Romanian actors in the European debate, with special emphasis on the business sector. The support of the European

company EurActiv from Brussels guarantees the neutrality and objectivity of EurActiv.ro, contributing to correct and balanced information of the Romanian public opinion.

EurActiv.ro was founded in May 2004, as a truly original concept in Romania. On the one hand, it works as a news agency, providing two streams of information: the stream from Bucharest and the stream permanently connected to the heart of Europe, through its main editorial office in Brussels, stream which presents the main European policies, initiatives and developments in Romania. EurActiv.ro is an updated, objective, free source of information that translates from Romanian into Romanian the less accessible language of the EU.

## **7. Romanian Centre for European Policies (<http://www.crpe.ro/eng/index>)**

The Romanian Centre for European Policies (CRPE) was established in 2009 by a group of experts bound by the shared objective of supporting Romania's role in Europe.

The mission of the CRPE is to promote Romania as an influential leader in the development of EU agendas and policies. Another major objective is to advance the Europeanization processes in Romania and to promote the European citizenship by providing expertise in various fields and by initiating or participating in public debates.

CRPE's vision is that Romania's EU membership is a key milestone in the country's Europeanization process. While negotiating accession, Romania did not have a say in the policy making process. Now, as a full member, the country has the instruments to assert itself as an active policy-maker, able to balance and advance national and European interests. For this to happen, one needs to first understand the complexities of the European system of governance, to help define the interests of the whole spectrum of Romanian policy stakeholders, and then to design strategies to advocate them at EU-level.

Romanian civil society has to keep pace with the new reality. While Romania's democracy was still fragile, civil society actors became experienced watchdogs. But as the country joined the European Union, civil society needed to be more than a critic of last resort. It had to consolidate its capacity to generate policy ideas and to engage in policy debates generated by others. Alongside broad or issue-based social movements, informal forms of civic participation and other civil society actors, independent

think tanks capable to foster reflexive policy debates on the linkages between EU and Romanian policy processes are well-placed to play an important role. While a few Romanian think-tanks developed a record on the nexus between EU-level policies and the domestic policy process, none of them does so consistently and systematically. It is this gap that the Romanian Centre for European Policies attempts to fill as an expertise-based member of the wider Romanian civil society.

The main areas that CRPE works on are:

- Proposing new approaches and new policies to ensure the modernization of public administration by drawing on the experiences of EU member states and EU institutions;
- Proposing well-researched and clearly formulated position papers for the use of the Romanian government in major EU debates such as the EU budget reforms, CAP health-check, common energy policies, or further expansion;
- Involving various private and public stakeholders in the policy formulation process in order to stimulate the debate around the above mentioned issues.

CRPE is affiliated to the following coalitions and networks: Coalition for the European Continent Undivided by Visa Barriers; the Stockholm Network; the Regional Network for Public Administration Reform – UNDP.

#### **8. Romanian Association for Consumers' Protection (<http://www.apc-romania.ro/>)**

The Romanian Association for Consumers' Protection (APC Romania) was founded in 1990 to promote the interests of its members, as well as those of individual consumers in a period of profound and multifaceted market changes, after the fall of the Berlin wall. APC Romania's aims are to represent consumers and lobby for better consumer protection and better enforcement as well as promote more transparent markets and ensure the quality of goods and services. It informs, gives advice, educates consumers about their rights, advocates equality for all consumers and promotes and represents by all legal means consumers' rights and interests in relation to businesses and state institutions.

APC is recognized and supported by the Romanian government as organisation of public utility, which consolidates its role as a dialogue partner coming from the civil society.

APC Romania enjoys national recognition as being a member of various national and international structures, such as: Consumers International, the European Consumers' Organisation, Trans Atlantic Consumer Dialogue and International Consumer Research and Testing. In 2008 APC joined the European Consumer Centre network, logistically supporting at the moment ECC Romania.

**9. InfoCons (<http://www.infocons.ro/>)**

InfoCons, the National Association for Consumer Protection and Promotion of Romanian Programmes and Strategies – ANPCPPS Romania was founded in 2003 to meet consumer needs in Romania. It has established Centres for Information and Advice for Consumers in all counties and runs continuous activities for educating and informing citizens.

InfoCons is founding member of the Federation of Consumer Protection Organisations in Romania and has international affiliation to: Consumers International, the European Consumer Voice in Standardisation, International Consumer Research and Testing and the European Association for Education of Adults.

**10. Parlamentor.ro (<http://www.parlamentor.ro/>)**

HotNews.ro (news portal in Romania), in partnership with the Centre for Independent Journalism initiated the project Parlamentor.ro in 2011, a 1 year long project that had as goal the involvement of the Romanian public in the European Parliament debates on economic issues, thus connecting the public to the economic agenda of the European Parliament.

Designed equally to internet users throughout the country, but also to Romanian communities from abroad, Parlamentor.ro aimed to become a platform for discussion of topical issues relevant to the European Parliament, especially in the economic and social domains, thus giving citizens the opportunity to directly interact with the elected officials who represent them in Brussels and Strasbourg.

## Part II. STUDY ON THE CREATION OF THE ECSH

### A. Survey results

103 questionnaires were collected by FDSC through an online survey carried in May 2012. The content of the questionnaire was structured on two levels: a quantitative approach, gathering responses related to the importance of ECSH establishment, type of service and facilities provided, possible involvements and a qualitative approach aiming to further exploring respondents perceptions related to civil society and citizens involvement in decision making at the European level. A number of nine open and closed questions were included the questionnaires and the analysis of results is presented using charts and pies, assessment of responses and quotes from respondents. Before the evaluation of responses, the data base was cleared by incomplete or incorrect responses<sup>1</sup>.

The respondents of the online survey represent a wide range of stakeholders in the public debate regarding the establishment of ECSH: NGOs and federations of NGOs active on European policies, social inclusion of vulnerable groups, social services, education, youth, student associations, education institutions - public local schools and inspectorates, a public university holding an important department for European Studies. At least 50% of the respondents are local organisations, scattered in all regions across Romania. The European dimension is seen as an important part of the respondents work, as 79% involve in a certain extent in European Affairs, with 16% of the organisations involving full time in European Affairs (see Annex 1).

The responses regarding the importance of the subjects to be tackled by the ECSH show a relative equal distribution of responses among the 3 subjects proposed (see Annex 2). Citizens' rights and better enforcement is seen by respondents as the most important area to be tackled by ECSH, with almost 37% of the respondents rating it with the highest figure compared with 33 % for the Civil Society Development and 27 % for Citizens Participation. If we look at the figures at a whole, considering all responses for the 3 areas proposed Citizen Participation is ranked the first with the lowest number of responses for rank 3 (less important) and highest number of responses for rank 2 and 1.

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<sup>1</sup> By incorrect responses we understand the responses who didn't follow the methodology as agreed.

Providing civil society development services is considered by the respondents the most important service to be provided in Romania by ECSH with 50% of the respondents ranking these services as being the most important (see Annex 3). Creating a resource centre on European civil society is considered the most important service by 21 % of the respondents, followed by the service developing a European funding advice and assistance with filling in applications with 14%. The less significant services are seen those addressing Citizen participation as the less important service is considered the one providing a meeting place between civil society and national authorities on European policy level (20% of respondents ranking this service as being the less important).

Romanian participants in the survey confirm in the question regarding the facilities of the House, their expectations towards the role that ECSH should play as a resource centre (annex 4). The most important facility seen by respondents is the provision of a resource civil society center (44%) followed by the training courses with 32 % responses. The meeting room and desk support service is seen as the less important facilities for the Romanian respondents.

Respondents in Romania see a double role for ECSH: a support entity to enhance the development of civil society in member countries and a liaison entity between the citizens and national and European institutions. This hypothesis is supported by the responses indicating the advantages for the House in relation with national and European institutions, as 50% of the responses consider that support to citizens should be provided through the House and the other 50% split their responses between the role of a resource centre and an intermediary support organisation.

The vast majority of respondents – 98% support the establishment of the ECSH in Romania, confirming the need already voiced by civil society for many years (see Annex 6). Also the large majority of respondents, 98% would like to stay informed and involved in a future initiative in this area. . Most of the respondents stated that they would like to be regularly updated with developments on the project (newsletter etc), while part of them answered that they would be interested to benefit from the services provided by the ECSH. Out of those that expressed their willingness to become actively involved, some responses stated that they would either like to offer their knowledge and experience as experts or resource persons, or their organisation's experience on various issues possibly related to the ECSH: building up regional, national and European networks of organisations; training; awareness raising; making the link to small organisations etc.



According to most of respondents to the open question reflecting the involvement in the policy making, Romanian citizens and civil society input to European policy-making is the rather limited in Romania. Citizens are frequently not active in decision making processes even at the national level in Romania, therefore their input to European policy-making is even less.

*The low participation level at public consultations launched by the European Commission shows that we still only have a marginal interest to participate in the elaboration of European policies.*

Yet, there are areas which reveal a better level of involvement from the civil society, these being mentioned by the respondents as the following: environment, human rights, minority rights, consumers rights (mostly with regards to online trade), youth policies (including youth employability), Regional and Cohesion Policy (by getting involved in the absorption of funds), development cooperation, and the current structural funds programming for the period 2014-2020.

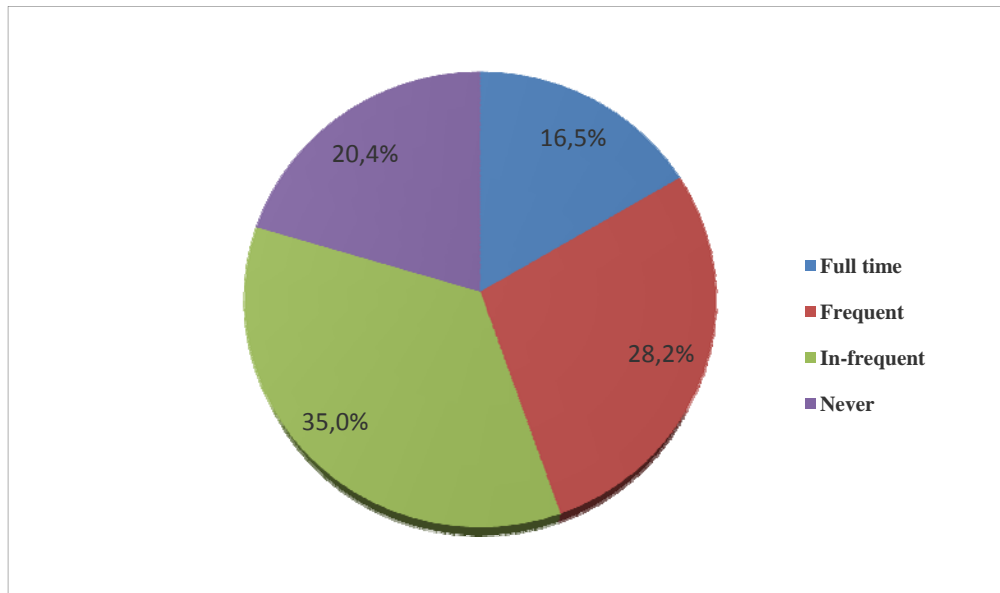
What the respondents identified as being areas with a very low level of involvement or even inexistent are areas such as: civic participation, social protection, consumers rights (generally speaking), culture, health, education, policies in relation to persons with disabilities or people with serious chronic diseases.

*Most disfavoured area is culture. There is a minimum involvement in the elaboration of cultural policies, most of the ones we know, are formal.*

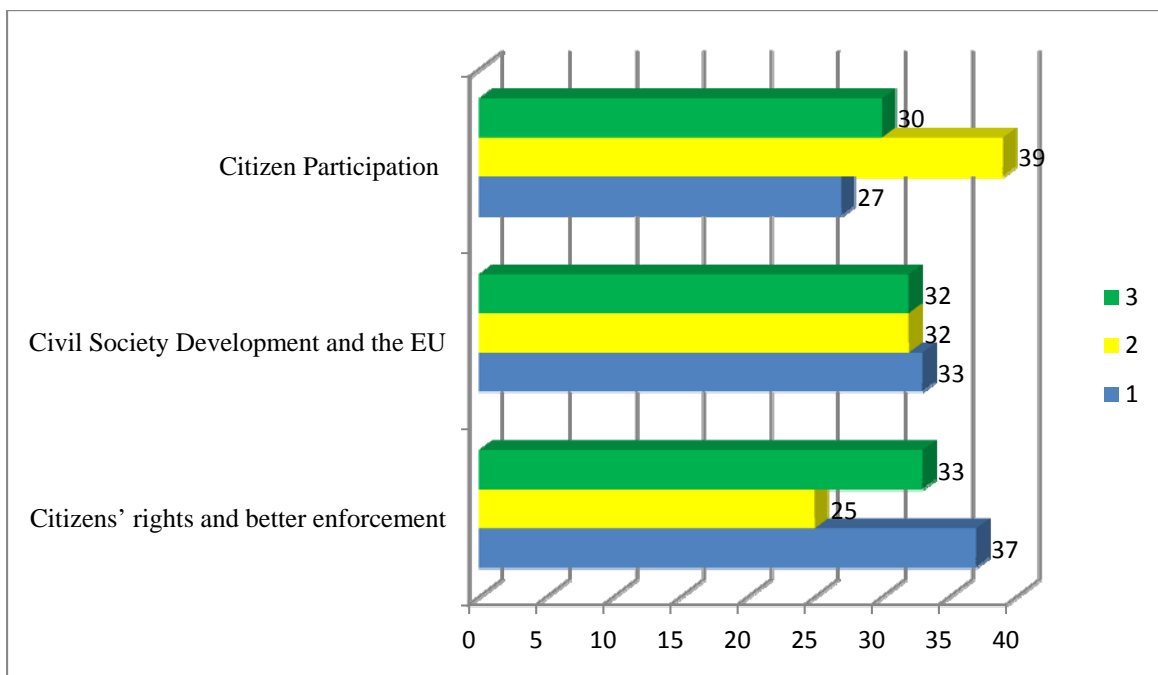
In terms of geographical areas, input to European policy-making comes rather from Bucharest, the capital city, and less from other areas of the country. However, citizen and civil society input happens more often in the urban areas rather than the rural areas, one of the respondents having emphasized this gap: *“Rural areas are the most underrepresented when we speak about European policies and civic involvement”*. Civil society organisations that are members of networks, umbrella organisations, federations, coalitions or other kinds of association are often more involved in defining European policies than other organisations, through their representatives either at the national or European level. A functional system of rapid consultation of citizens by decision makers (politicians, state institutions) is also necessary, and NGOs should monitor the correct implementation of such consultations.

*We need a strong civil society, more visible and acknowledged nationally and internationally, we need capable public authorities open to social dialogue with citizens and civil society. Civil society can be developed only through citizens and with citizens, and in consequence we need to support the spirit development and civic and proactive attitude of citizens, in all areas, from creating programmatic documents, specialized European assistance, new European practices, emerging needs of information and training(...). But for all of these NGOs need active members from citizens, active partnerships with public authorities, training for public servants, and professional development of the people working in public authorities.*

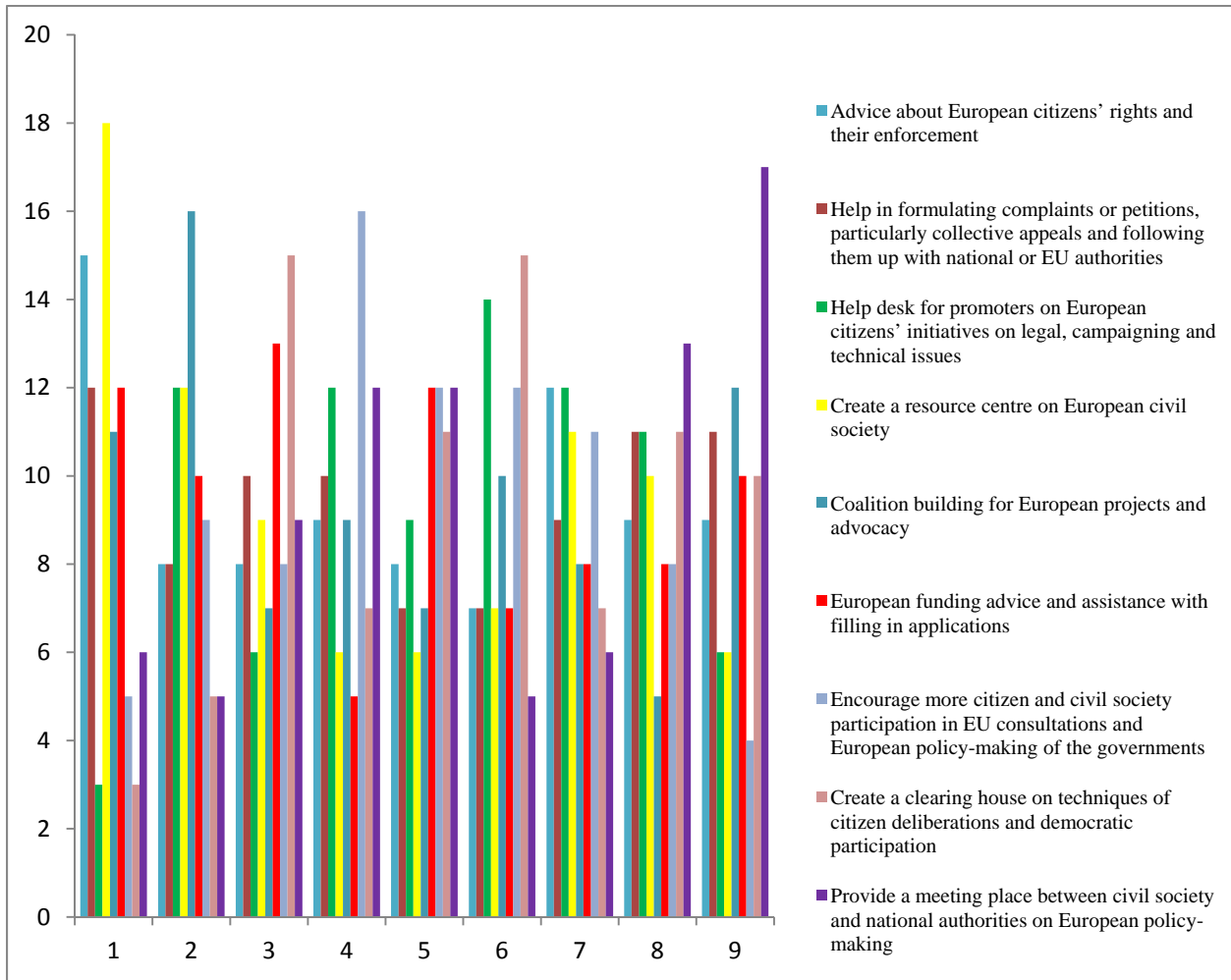
**Annex 1: Question: What is the extent of your own and/or your organisations involvement in European Affairs? (Number of responses N=103)**



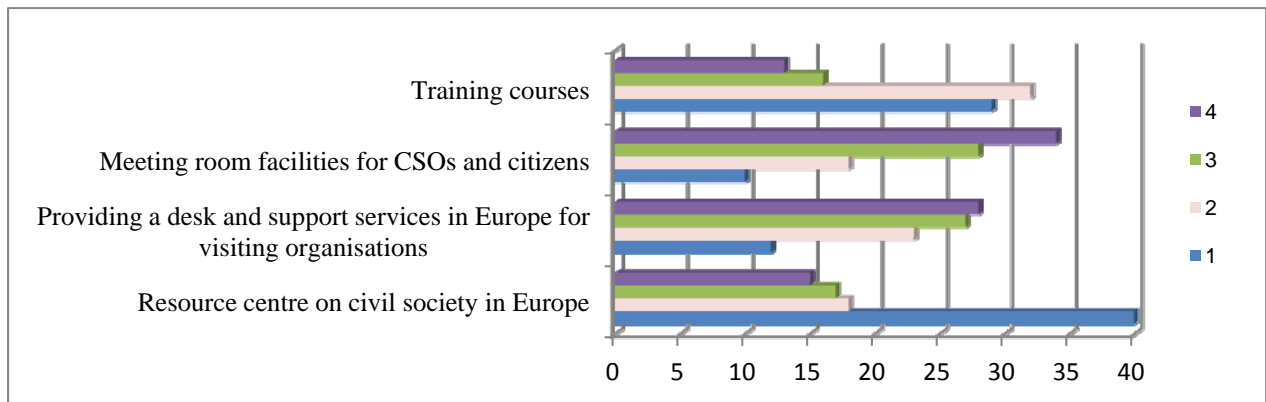
**Annex 2: Question: In what order of importance would you rank the following 3 subjects? (N = 98)**



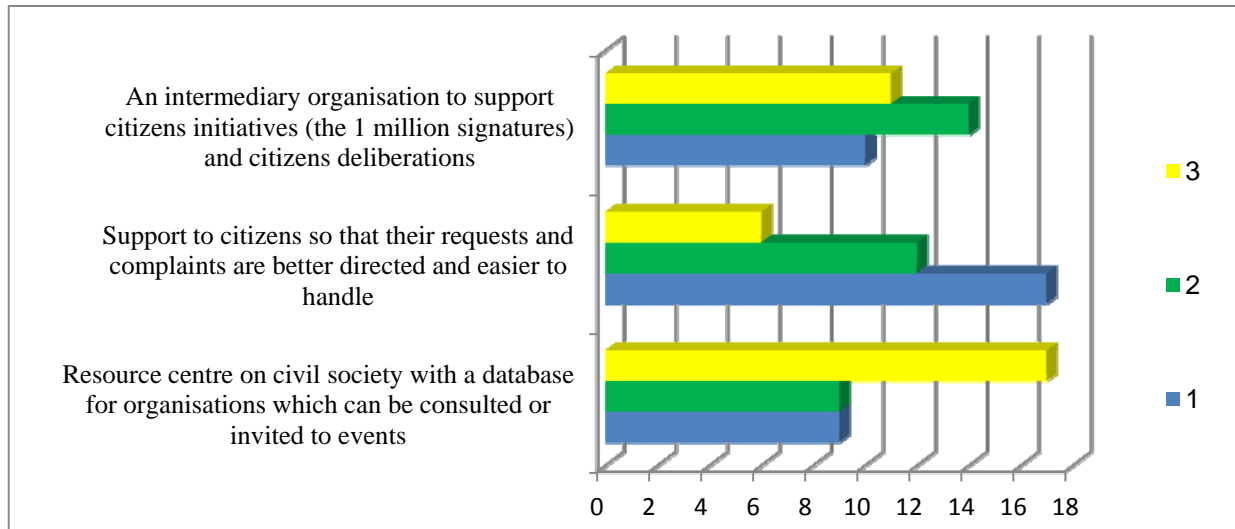
**Annex 3: Question: Which of the following services would you consider most important to obtain or least wanted in your country? (N = 90)**



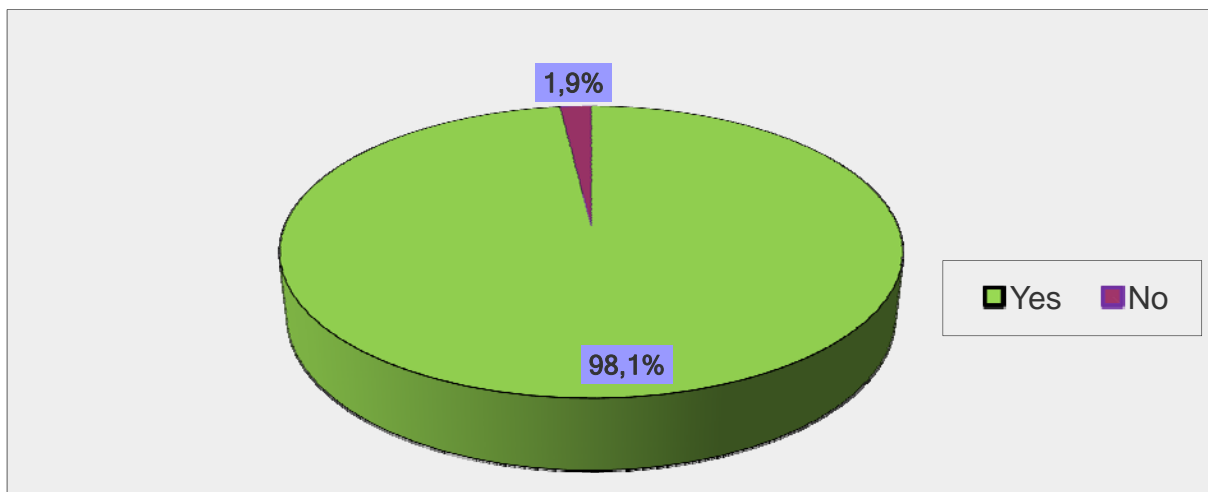
**Annex 4: Question: In what order of importance would you rank offering the following facilities at a European Civil Society House in Brussels? (N = 91)**



**Annex 5: Question: What aspects of this project, in your opinion would be most advantageous for national governments and the EU Institutions seeking to improve access for citizens to European affairs? (N = 36)**



**Annex 5: Question: Looking back over your answers, do you think it is a good idea to create the European Civil Society House in your country? (N = 101)**



## B. Interviews' findings

### Respondents:

1. Asociația Națională a Birourilor de Consiliere pentru Cetățeni (ANBCC): [www.robcc.ro](http://www.robcc.ro)
2. Asociația Pro Democrația (APD): [www.apd.ro](http://www.apd.ro)
3. Centrul de Resurse pentru Participare Publică (CeRe): [www.ce-re.ro](http://www.ce-re.ro)
4. Centrul pentru Jurnalism Independent (CJI): [www.cji.ro](http://www.cji.ro)
5. Centrul pentru Politici Durabile Ecopolis: [www.ecopolis.org.ro](http://www.ecopolis.org.ro)
6. Centrul Român de Politici Europene (CRPE): [www.crpe.ro](http://www.crpe.ro)
7. Europe Direct CENTRAS: [europedirect.centras.ro](http://europedirect.centras.ro)
8. Federația Organizațiilor Neguvernamentale pentru Dezvoltare din România (FOND): [www.fondromania.org](http://www.fondromania.org)
9. Fundația Soros România: [www.soros.ro](http://www.soros.ro)
10. Global Romanian Society of Young Professionals (GRASP): [www.mygrasp.org](http://www.mygrasp.org)

### Cs' perspective

On each of the three domains it has been highlighted the need for support and coordinated actions, with prioritization determined in particular by the specific expertise of each organisation/institution following their organisational strategies. Opinions were shared, even equilibrated: some state that supporting development of civil society will implicitly determine civic participation and involvement and consequently citizen rights awareness; some place the support for civic participation as the base for further development of civil society.

Proposals for actions or services to be provided by the ECSH in a particular area were determined by how much knowledge/experience they had on each of the pillars addressed. The more active an organisation is on a particular pillar, the more critical it becomes with respect to what needs to be improved, changed, developed, etc.

Even the three pillars are interconnected (and acknowledged as such), discussions have revealed an appreciation towards the initiative in which relevant stakeholders for each area are brought together,

are valued in a coordinated manner, with a focus on avoiding duplication of actions/efforts determined by lack of information.

NGOs present and involved in European projects often claim this experience as a good practice on European issues and emphasize their role in channelling information from European to national/local level. They appreciate the need to support civil society development, but this cannot be done without supporting civic involvement and participation.

*Particular appreciations supported in discussions:*

- Civil society in Romania is suffering, there is limited expertise available at national level on European issues, there are very few organisations capable to read a European directive; other do it rarely, and even less have a constant monitoring, most of it depending on available financing. ***Expertise is very limited within civil society as real participation is impossible without expertise. Participation should be encouraged from the civil society perspective, civil society should be first encouraged to get active on European issues***, there are indicators that need to be monitored, citizens cannot do it as they do not understand;
- European subjects are still of limited interest for Romanian citizens – only approx. 400-450 requests registered at Europe Direct Centre are focused on European issues (ranging close to the European average: according to the Interim Evaluation of the EC in 2011, the weekly average is of 10 answers within the network of the 484 active centres). Most often requests address issues related to: EU mobility, citizen rights (counselling for petitions submitted to European Court of Citizens Rights, the European Ombudsman), info on EU funding opportunities. ***Few citizens really know their national rights and even less know their supranational rights, established through the Fundamental Rights Charter of the European Union***. From the Europe Direct experience, citizens facing human rights abuse are not aware of actions that they should take in order to complain to national or European authorities. ***For a consolidated civil society, citizens need to actively participate and these citizens will be able to express themselves in the civic sphere when they know their rights and are capable to critically judge them***. After information and training (as possible action methods), citizens will be capable to form a representative civil society to interact with national institutions, to promote citizen initiatives, to take advocacy actions. Even though, since the model cannot solely come from the interior, ***a***

*resource centre at European level is needed to stimulate a civil society (through models, methodologies, strategies) that finds it difficult to identify models and which is in a process of professionalization.*

### **Facilities at a European Civil Society House in Brussels**

Physical presence of ECSH in Brussels has been supported, being appreciated as the most important of all facilities enlisted, with particular emphasis on the need for the House:

- To avoid acting solely just as a resource point, but having a concrete role in selecting and proper channelling of information relevant for different stakeholders and domains;
- Not turn just into a depository of info, but be focused on actions;
- Have a particular focus on facilitating networking, supporting advocacy and lobby actions, but making it so that it supports the transposition of the European language (institutional mechanism, procedures, etc.) in a more friendly manner, accessible to more NGOs or citizens and thus raise involvement on both sides;
- To avoid turning into just a consultative body for the EC, but capitalise on its proximity and focus on the opportunity to have impact on policy changes.

Several concrete recommendations were formulated as to the type of facilities/services the ECSH should provide: assistance and support for advocacy on policy issues; relevant and updated databases not only on administrative aspects, but also in terms of expertise available in different fields/countries (contacts, qualitative appreciations, resources for advocacy work etc.); training particularly on understanding/adapting to the EC institutional language, strategic / programmatic planning from EC perspective, consultation and participation mechanisms at EU/national levels; facilitate exchanges among old and new member states experiences on different policy issues relevant to national and European context.

*Particular appreciations supported in discussions:*

- It's important for the ECSH to act as Resource centre on civil society in Europe. You cannot speak though about representation, each organisation is active at individual level. **A Civil House should**



*be a place for representation, a meeting place since we work with a time instrument that is the expertise;*

- ECSH should be ***a bridge among national civil society and European institutions, with lobby and advocacy objectives***, as well as for promoting national civil society. It should favour the good practice, methods and strategies exchange. Take advantage of the fact that currently, the civil society is just represented, having consultative role, within the European Economic and Social Committee, even the EESC activities are not sufficiently promoted;
- ***Expertise is very important*** and it should be considered among facilities/services available at ECSH. Type of service which is normally provided by think tanks in EU countries.

### **Advantages from the perspective of EU institutions**

ECSH could certainly be a Resource centre on civil society with a database of organisations which can be consulted or invited to events and may facilitate citizens initiatives (with focus on promoting initiatives and in general the proactivity approaches), but should carefully consider the duplication of efforts and services with existent or prospective networks and / or services available at different institutional/organisational levels.

Numerous networks, general or specialised on different fields, are active at the level of EC and they support citizens in different areas (i.e. finding a job - EURES, general information - EuropeDirect, consumers rights - ECCNet, etc.). Even though, the multitude of network may create confusion for citizens and therefore, even in the case of ECSH setting up, it ***should be considered the intentions existent at EC level to set-up a “one-stop shop”***. Pro and cons exist, in particular given the fact that too much centralisation may not always be efficient.

### **Setting-up the ECSH in Romania**

ECSH being present in Romania has been almost unanimously supported as a good idea, but with a limited physical presence, mainly with functions of contact point. At least not until it convinces on its effectiveness, not until services, facilities, utilities are piloted through the online/virtual platform. Even though, the local contact point is relevant.

There would be too many administrative issues related to a physical presence and consistent resources needed. Even though, there can be organisations/networks capable to administer such an initiative (from the expertise point of view), but it is important not to become an institutionalised structure.

NACAB is one of the organisations who expressed their interest and willingness to support the initiative as a partner.

*Particular appreciations supported in discussions:*

- ECSH setting-up in Romania cannot be appreciated as being opportune. If it focuses on citizens' initiative, there is no need for it since there is the Europe Direct network which already does it. If it is functional in Brussels, it can be a contact/information point; it can be supportive on practical issues. Depending on services, it can be considered also the payment of a fee;
- Even if not physical, but still with a contact point, it is important that ECSH has a particular action plan for Romania to make it active, visible and relevant;
- Complementarity of services and functions compared to existent structure must be a condition for ECSH functionality.

**Areas where citizen and civil society input to European policy-making in Romania is adequate or where it is missing**

- The Coordination and Verification Mechanism (justice) is one of the areas where the civil society influence is very strong – there are several activities with expertise in the field and which elaborate reports which are consulted and considered at European level. You need expertise for this and the expertise has to be paid – citizens cannot pay for it, NGOs fundraise in order to be capable for it, they do it in a structured framework, they focus on evidence based policy and the impact is more extensive and more efficient;
- Consumers rights, in particular the regulation of the online trade, and environment policies seem to be areas in which citizens have had the most relevant contribution in terms of influencing European policies;
- Low participation to public consultations launched by EC show a marginal interest to participate in the elaboration of European policies;

- At national level, there are significant difficulties in identifying positive examples of real consultation processes, involvement of NGOs in developing public policy documents, despite the quite relevant legislation regulating the field;
- The involvement of civil society has influenced the positive evolution with respect to Romania-Moldova cooperation, supporting the dialogue among NGOs from the respective countries;
- Child protection – laws have been changed as a result of NGO involvement;
- The allocation and use of structural funds - low effectiveness both in terms of civil society actions and citizens;
- Youth employability and internship – positive and constructive contribution to the European Charter and follow up to the European consultation on structured dialogue with youth;
- Free movement of citizens, labour rights are of most interest;
- Property rights – restitution of properties has been a burning issues since the beginning a 90's; Romania has found itself recently in the situation to be warned by CEDO to solve at legislative and administrative level all inadequacies leading to numerous processes in court;
- Electoral rights – it is under debate from the last elections the opportunity to change the voting system in Romania; recently, a law has been passed through the Parliament in spite of the public opposition of some of the most prominent NGOs, requiring a large consultation on the subject before its change, and not in the proximity of the coming general elections.

## C. Workshop conclusions

A group debate upon the level of activism of Romanian citizens and civil society vis-a-vis the decision making process at European level, along with the roles and functions of a European Civil Society House revealed primarily that the current lack of confidence of Romanian citizens in politics and politicians, whether national or European can be fought with actions genuinely deriving from civil society at large.

The group structure - labour unions and entrepreneurs' associations, NGOs active in human rights and democracy, social inclusion, culture and environment fields, operating individually or in larger networks, affiliated to religious cults or laic<sup>2</sup> – offered the possibility to collect diverse experiences which led, at the end to surprisingly common views and conclusions.

### **Current status of Romanian citizens/ civil society activism**

- The information on how to reach the European level is diverse and available; however, the level of understanding and interest of average citizen is low; at the same time, the average citizen is not informed and educated with the proper skills and knowledge to appreciate the quality of information offered, and thus unable to make proper decision for further acting;
- When joining EU, the level of expectations and trust of Romanian citizens was really high, while during the last years, particularly during the financial crisis, and due to the unfulfilled promises of Romanian politicians, the scepticism<sup>3</sup> in the benefits of EU membership has installed; combined with the lack of civic involvement generated by the communist regime, the participation to public decision is really low;
- Neither Romanian representatives in European structures, mostly politicians, nor citizens have the conscience of their rights and duties: communication is fractioned from both parts, persons in public functions do not encourage participation and expression of opinions, while citizens still feel uncomfortable when affirming their rights in front of public decision makers;
- Although Romania has registered a significant increase in households Internet connexions in 2011, the penetration rate especially in rural areas remains unsatisfactory; since the majority of information is accessible online, large groups of citizens lack the possibility to access it;

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<sup>2</sup> The group benefitted from the presence of 25 persons.

<sup>3</sup> Eurobarometer 2007 – Romanian confidence in EU was at 67%, while in 2011 decreased to 46%.

nevertheless, simple access to Internet should be accompanied with proper searching skills and expertise for selecting and understanding the available information;

- It was mentioned that every European institution has its own mechanisms of communication (websites, newsletters etc); still, the variety of communications methods, the large number of public releases of information and the complex terminology determine a drawback and reluctance to actually use the available contact or petitioning mechanisms;
- Specialised assistance is needed when one actually decides to advance from information to action phase (e.g. filing a complaint to European Court of Justice or European Court of Human Rights required highly specialised assistance for both regular citizens or NGOs);
- At the same register, it was welcome the European Citizens Initiative, only the process is long and still need further dissemination in Romania; European Ombudsman prerogatives should be better acknowledged at the level of individuals;
- Romanian citizens activism is reduced just to write letters to local media, Romanian public institutions and members of Parliament; citizens did not prove the capacity to get organised or to take advantage of the institutional mechanisms offered by European institutions, being sporadically in contact with Romania's representatives in European structures, and only by letters (e.g. to MEPs or political groups in European Parliament);
- Civil society organisations at large are connected only to national realities and the liaison to European perspective is given only by the means of local media which is dominated by the speeches of politicians driven mainly by political fight, thus misleading and generated mistrust;
- At the same time, generally, well experienced NGOs are part of European platforms and slightly learn to integrate European institutions as regular stakeholders; it is their role to further promote their knowledge to smaller Romanian NGOs and directly to citizens, only the number of the experienced ones is still by far insufficient, and even they need further assistance and attention;
- At national level, programmes run by international donors, especially European Union opened automatically the channels of communication to European policies and requirements, and turned to be opportunities for domestic organised actors such as NGOs to connect to initiatives at European level, act and react to decision exceeding the national borders, but affecting directly the Romanian environment;

- It would be efficient to consider NGOs as vehicles of information and intermediaries between citizens and institutions, whether national or European; thus, NGOs should be strengthened, with particular attention to those organised in networks;
- Grassroots organisations, as structures closest to citizens and communities should be encouraged to connect to European movements and mechanisms either directly, only it is unlikely to have the capacity to act individually, or by joining platforms and networks;
- Dialogue with Romanian representatives in structures such as CESE or COREPER should be intensified.

Identification of possible structure, roles and function of a European Civil Society House considered the shortcomings above mentioned. Its mission would be to increase the trust into the European institutions capacity to act in favour of citizens able to legitimately affirm their rights.

Its main functions should be of channel of communication to European institutions, having the proper authority to address them on behalf of NGOs and citizens from national level, and benefitting of independence from the political actors.

### **Main conclusions of the discussions**

- ECSH in Brussels should be institutionalised: citizens and NGOs need formal mechanisms for reaching European institutions; this would not substitute the right to appeal directly, but ensure the assistance in understanding the bureaucracy;
- ECSH should contribute to “value citizenship at institutional level”<sup>4</sup>; in an environment dominated by political driven decision, ECSH might act as counterbalance in favour of the constituents and bring the decision closer to them;
- Officially connected to European institutions, by clear and firm partnership agreement, yet flexible enough and independent to avoid bureaucracy and creation of a new inefficient institution, ECSH should not be assimilated to the formal public EU institutions;
- It is highly important that independence is an attribute for ECSH, both at national and European level, and particular attention should be given its legitimacy at national level; no Governmental intervention should be allowed;

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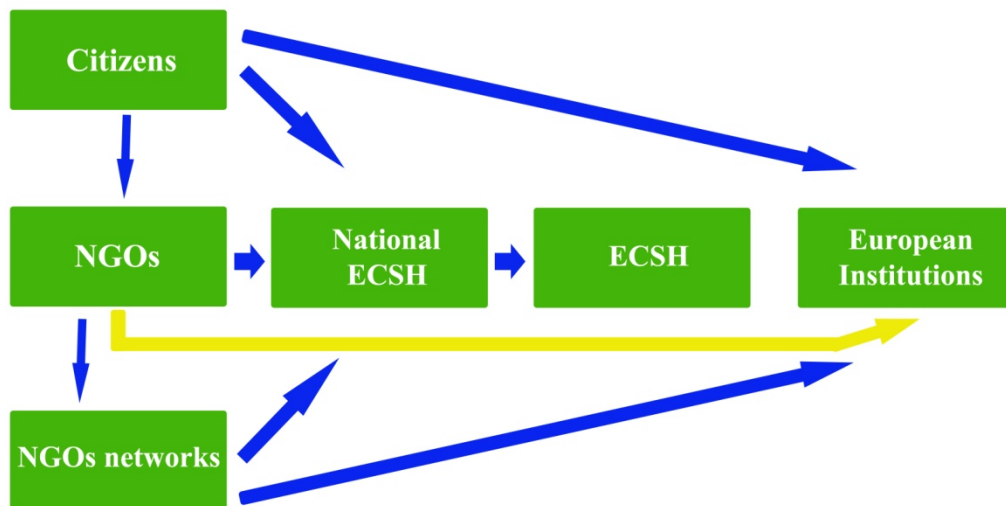
<sup>4</sup> Opinion of one NGO representative.

- ECSH should not be limited to a resource centre, but to be a coordination point for structured dialogue between citizens via NGOs and European institutions, and even more, have a follow-up function for actions in progress in front of European institutions;
- ECSH should be a reference for the so-called European information, by filtering all spread online information, organise it in an easily and friendly manner, as well as by offering the degree of centralisation so much needed in an extreme vast online space;
- Beyond its information role, ECSH should facilitate the understanding of NGOs and citizens: it is not sufficient to offer information, but also to ensure that the skills and capacity of the recipients are adequate for further use it;
- Exchange of good practices and harmonisation of approaches in different areas should be facilitated by ECSH;
- ECSH at national levels should be in close connection to ensure the transfer of information from one members state to another (e.g. European citizens initiative);
- At national level, ECSH functions should be fulfilled as a pilot phase by an existent platform such as FOND<sup>5</sup>, a consortium formed by organisations active in democracy, civic participation and citizens' rights issues, or an organisation well represented throughout the country, with experience in assisting citizens or intermediating the relations between citizens and public institutions, such as ANBCC<sup>6</sup>; after one to two years, and following an evaluation, it should be decided whether a separate entity is needed;
- For both national and European level, the online facilities should be predominant as working method – they ensure proper coverage and rapid massive reactions, but mandatorily accompanied by a physical dimension – an office facility where any citizens can step in, particularly for those less educated and with no Internet access;
- NGOs should be primary partners of ECSH, since they have the possibility to act as direct dialogue partners with citizens; the working mechanism should follow a rolling system, but not hierarchical (the existence of the ECSH would not restrain the right to address directly the European institutions);

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<sup>5</sup> [Federatia Organizatiilor Neguvernamentale pentru Dezvoltare din Romania](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Asociatia Nationala a Birourilor de Consiliere pentru Cetateni](#)



- At the same time, national NGOs should be assisted themselves by ECHS in their efforts of reaching accurate and clear European information, as well as in understanding better the mechanism of participation for their own stakeholders to European decision making process;
- ECHS should reach the whole range of NGOs, from large, experienced organisations to grassroots ones, thus ensuring a closer connection to local communities and citizens;
- ECHS should publicly act and state that citizens themselves or via NGOs have to be part of co-decision process at European level, and from this perspective, all co-decision mechanisms should be investigated and made available to the general public in a manner able to produce effects .

**List of participants:**

1. Confederația Națională Sindicală “Cartel Alfa”
2. Asociația pentru Antreprenoriat Feminin
3. Asociația ProEuro Cult
4. Asociația EcoConcept
5. Primăria orașului Mioveni, Serviciul Public Asistență Socială



6. Asociația pentru Servicii Integrative
7. ABT
8. Asociația Mame pentru Mame
9. Asociația Agent Green
10. Asociația de arte și spiritualitate ZAN ART
11. Fundația pentru promovarea sancțiunilor comunitare
12. Asociația Omenilor de Afaceri Argeș
13. Asociația Europeană pentru Apărarea Drepturilor Omului
14. Alianța Civică
15. Asociația Centrul pentru Dezvoltare Democratică
16. Asociația OMNIMIND
17. Asociația Activi pentru Viitor
18. Asociația Ecumenică a Bisericilor din România AIDRom
19. Confederația Caritas România
20. Fundația Ruhama
21. Asociația Justiție pentru România
22. Societatea Română de Radio și Televiziune SRTV
23. Fundația pentru Dezvoltarea Societății Civile

## Part III. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- The majority of Romanian citizens are neither aware of their rights and duties in their capacity of nationals of a member state of the European Union, nor actively involved in public policy shaping and decision-making processes.
- Surveys which have been conducted over the last 10 years reveal a constant increase in the public trust for CSOs (particularly for NGOs) – while at the same time trust in the Government and public institutions has decreased.
- A specialized Eurobarometer on EU citizenship from 2010, revealed that 55% of the Romanians were not satisfied with the level of information about the rights as a citizen of the European Union, while the EU27 average was 67%.
- In the Flash Eurobarometer: the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (January 2012), just 8% of the Romanian citizens declared they were familiar with the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (compared to 11%, the EU average).
- Participation is the main tool in the formulation, information and promotion of the changes desired by the citizens. Public participation is ensured via NGOs, which are increasingly preoccupied of building and strengthening mechanisms which ensure citizen participation and fostering their active and direct engagement.
- 60% of the respondents in the NGO Leaders' Barometer (BLONG) 2011 state that influencing public decision-making process is a focus of their organizations. For 29% of the respondents that is an important dimension of their organization.
- The main initiators of public consultations are NGOs and coalitions of NGOs (in 38% of the cases), followed by local authorities (18%) and by ministries (14%)<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> NGO Leaders' Barometer (BLONG) 2011

- CSOs mobilized both around issues which concerned them directly (the European Structural Funds, against the draft law on Social Entrepreneurship), and also larger issues such as environmental and heritage protection, social issues (for children with autism) or defence of civil rights (the draft law on public assemblies) and democracy (the law on electoral changes, a coalition against the referendum for a new law on the administrative reorganization of Bucharest, a coalition against the proposed territorial administrative reorganization of the country).
- In the NGO Leaders' Barometer (BLONG) 2011, only 4% were affiliated to European federation and almost 3% to international federations, while these are the only methods for ensuring the representation in Brussels.
- Further development are critical in all areas the ECSH intends to act, and the establishment of a European Civil Society House is needed and opportune, as long as it serves increasing the Romanians confidence into the European institutions capacity to act in favour of citizens, able to legitimately affirm their rights.

### **European Civil Society House in Brussels**

- Physical presence of ECSH in Brussels is welcome; it should be officially connected to European institutions, by clear and firm partnership agreement, yet flexible enough and independent to avoid bureaucracy and creation of a new inefficient institution; ECSH should not be assimilated to the formal public EU institutions;
- It is highly important that independence is an attribute for ECSH, both at national and European level, and particular attention should be given its legitimacy at national level; no Governmental intervention should be allowed;
- ECSH should not be limited to a resource centre, but to be a coordination point for structured dialogue between citizens via NGOs and European institutions, and even more, have a follow-up function to actions in progress in front of European institutions;
- Physical presence of ECSH in Brussels is welcome, with the recommendations for the House:
  - to avoid acting solely just as a resource point, but having a concrete role in selecting and proper channelling of information relevant for different stakeholders and domains;

- not turn just into a depository of info, but be focused on actions;
- have a particular focus on facilitating networking, supporting advocacy and lobby actions, but making it so that it supports the transposition of the European language (institutional mechanism, procedures, etc.) in a more friendly manner, accessible to more NGOs or citizens and thus raise involvement on both sides;
- to avoid turning in just a consultative body for the EC, but capitalise on its proximity to thus and focus on the opportunity to have impact on policy changes;
- Other facilities/services the ECSH should provide: assistance and support for advocacy on policy issues; relevant and updated databases not only on administrative aspects, but also in terms of expertise available in different fields/countries (contacts, qualitative appreciations, resources for advocacy work etc.); training particularly on understanding/adapting to the EC institutional language, strategic / programmatic planning from EC perspective, consultation and participation mechanisms at EU/national levels; facilitate exchanges among old and new member states experiences on different policy issues relevant to national and European context.

#### **European Civil Society House at national level**

- At national level, ECSH functions should be fulfilled as a pilot phase by an existent platform, a consortium formed by organisations active in democracy, civic participation and citizens' rights issues, or an organisation well represented throughout the country, with experience in assisting citizens or intermediating the relations between citizens and public institutions; after one to two years, and following an evaluation, it should be decided whether a separate entity is needed;
- It is likely that the house in Romania operates mostly virtually, with minimum resources allocated to a physic premise. The physic premises should serve only as contact point;
- It should concentrate on working with NGOs since Europe Direct facilities already aims at serving individual citizens, or at least intervene only in areas uncovered by the existing structures.