

# INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

## CHANGES IN CIVIC SPACE AND THE RESILIENCE OF CIVIL ACTION

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November, 2023



**U.S. EMBASSY**  
Tirana, Albania

*The conference is part of the project "Toward a stronger, sustainable and resilient civil society in Albania" implemented by Partners Albania, with financial support of the United States Embassy in Tirana.*

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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Partners Albania for Change and Development express its gratitude for the presence and contribution of all participants, representatives from civil society organizations and activists, donor community, international institutions, and state institutions in the country, in the international conference: "Changes in Civic Space and the Resilience of the Civil Action".

The event was organized in the frame of the project "Towards a stronger, sustainable and resilient civil society in Albania" implemented by Partners Albania for Change and Development, financially supported by the United States Embassy in Tirana.

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# SUMMARY

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The International Conference “Changes in Civic Space and The Resilience of Civil Action”, held on November 16, 2023 brought together, about 140 representatives from civil society organizations, networks and activists, as well as representatives from the donor community and state institutions.

The conference was organized in three main sessions: First session **“CSOs resilience against shrinking democratic space! Resiliency + Framework and its implementation at global level in response to that”** included speeches from the panelists, representatives from Partners Global, Partners Slovakia and Partners Albania.

Second session **“Resisting the shrinking space – CSOs perspective”**, included speeches from the panelists, representatives from Albanian CSOs, Partners Georgia and Partners Serbia.

Third session **“Resisting the shrinking space – Donors and State Institutions perspective”** included speeches from representatives from the Albanian Parliament, the European Union Delegation in Albania, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), and the National Council for Civil Society.

Each session was followed by Question and Answer (Q&A) sessions enabling an effective public engagement.

Conceived as a major sector’s discussion meeting, the conference aimed at identifying the key issues, ways and means to strengthen cross sectoral and inter institutional dialogue, as well as to increase cooperation between CSOs and other actors on issues addressed in the discussion panels.

This document is a summary of the speeches and discussions held in the panels, as well as the discussions from participants of the conference. It is widely shared with all stakeholders involved in the conference as well as with the public at large.

# OPENING REMARKS



**Juliana Hoxha,  
Director,  
Partners Albania for Change and Development**

Mrs. Juliana Hoxha addressed the multifaceted challenges and developments affecting the state of civil society, particularly influenced by the compounding impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the instability in political, economic, and social spheres regionally and globally over the past years. These external factors, coupled with internal dynamics within the sector, have collectively shaped the current environment for the development of civil society in the country.

Mrs. Hoxha emphasised internal challenges confronting CSOs in Albania, notably the dearth of permanent staff, the prevalent "brain drain" phenomenon, and the associated difficulties in securing requisite resources to enhance and develop staff capacities. Despite the sector's significant contributions to policymaking and decision-making, there has been a discernible democratic backslide within the operational environment of CSOs. This regression is marked by a lack of meaningful and effective cooperation between public authorities and the civil society sector, coupled with a palpable deficit in political will to implement strategic documents such as the Road Map for Civil Society.

During her speech, Mrs. Hoxha also highlighted positive developments within the sector, notably the implementation of the "Resiliency + Framework" and the introduction of "The Code of Standards for NPOs in Albania." The latter serves as a contemporary self-regulatory mechanism designed to enhance the effectiveness of NPOs, promoting principles of good governance, transparency, and accountability within the sector. These initiatives represent proactive steps toward fortifying the sector and elevating its operational standards amidst the prevailing challenges.



**Amanda Roberson,  
Deputy Public Affairs Officer,  
United States Embassy in Tirana**

In her speech, Mrs. Amanda Roberson expressed her appreciation for the efforts of Partners Albania for Change and Development in organizing this international conference, acknowledging the significance of the gathering, with over 140 participants from various sectors, to discuss on the topics.

Mrs. Roberson underscored the pivotal role that civil society organizations (CSOs) play in the democratic development of Albania. She emphasized the substantial contributions of CSOs, ranging from holding governments accountable to delivering essential services to communities. Mrs. Roberson highlighted the advocacy endeavours and the watchdog role that CSOs embody, ensuring their role to adhere to high standards, thereby promoting transparency and preventing abuses of power.

Concluding her speech, Mrs. Roberson underscored the paramount importance of collaboration among CSOs and other stakeholders. Emphasizing the need for collective action, she urged the civil sector to work together in addressing complex challenges, fostering resilience, and contributing to the establishment of a resilient society.

# TOPIC:1

## CSOs resilience against shrinking democratic space! Resiliency + Framework and its implementation at global level in response to that!



**ROSELIE VASQUEZ-YETTER**

*Co-Executive Director  
Partners Global*



**KAROLINA MIKOVA**

*Partners for Democratic  
Change Slovakia (PDCS)*



**LUIS GOMEZ CHOW**

*Senior Director  
Global Initiatives - Partners Global*



**ARIOLA AGOLLI**

*Moderator*

### Abstract

The keynote speakers in this panel delved into an insightful exploration on the shrinking space of civil space, and the resiliency of the civil society sector worldwide. The discussion provided a comprehensive overview, considering global, regional, and country-specific perspectives on critical issues such as freedom of association, assembly, speech, human rights protection, and civil society-state relations. Among the focal points of the panel were deliberations on the essence of resilience in the context of civil society, aiming to discern its multifaceted implications. Additionally, the session featured an in-depth exploration of the "Resiliency + Framework – An innovative approach and methodology," with an emphasis on its global-level implementation.

The moderator, Mrs. Agolli extended the discourse, inviting the audience to engage in conversations, providing feedback on *what resiliency means and what is of greatest concern to civil society organizations and activists in the imminent decade*. The conference provided a platform for panelists and participants to exchange ideas and insights, fostering a nuanced understanding of the challenges and strategies associated with fortifying civil society in an evolving global landscape.

# Remarks by Keynote Speakers

- A discernible and concerning trend of increasing authoritarianism, fundamentalism, and extremism has emerged on a global scale. This shift in political dynamics poses significant challenges to the democratic values and the autonomy of civil society organizations (CSOs).
- Financial sustainability for CSOs is notably challenging, marked by substantial cuts in funds directed towards civil society and a discernible shift in funding patterns, characterized by a decrease in support for CSOs. These financial constraints impede the ability of CSOs to fulfil their vital roles and functions within societies.
- The landscape is further complicated by restrictions on digital information, coupled with the proliferation of misinformation and disinformation. Such limitations pose substantial hurdles to the free flow of information and compromise the integrity of public discourse, demanding a vigilant response from civil society actors.
- An additional impediment arises from the prevalence of anti-CSO narratives propagated by governments and officials. This ideological opposition hampers the legitimacy and effectiveness of civil society, necessitating strategic responses to safeguard the space for civil society engagement.
- A global trend of the fragmentation of the civic space is observable, characterized by what can be described as "unhealthy" competition within the sector. This fragmentation poses challenges to the coherence and collective impact of civil society initiatives worldwide, underscoring the need for concerted efforts to foster collaboration and cohesion within the sector. Addressing these multifaceted challenges requires strategic planning, effective advocacy, and collaboration on both national and international fronts.

# Audience participation

The audience feedback on what resilience mean and what concerns the most the civil society organization or activist in the next decade is:

**What is the main concern as a civil society organization or activist in the coming decade?**  
172 responses



Mentimeter

**What does resilience mean to you?**  
107 responses



Mentimeter

# Recommendations

- The imperative for an augmentation in critical skills, encompassing communication, fundraising, and digital literacy, among others, resonates across sectors. A strategic emphasis on skill development is essential to enhance organizational capabilities and meet the evolving demands of a dynamic landscape.
- Adopting a proactive stance, organizations must embrace digital transformation and craft tailored messages for diverse audiences, irrespective of the space—be it physical or within the digital community. Navigating the complexities of both realms demands an adaptable and nuanced communication strategy to effectively engage stakeholders.
- The "Resilience + Framework" serves as a foundational guide, resting on seven pillars: situational awareness, adaptive capacity, connectedness, entrepreneurial mindset, legitimacy, staff commitment and capacity, creative communications. This comprehensive framework contributes to fortify organizations across multiple dimensions, fostering resilience and adaptability.
- Fostering increased collaboration with civil society actors, including academia, the private sector, journalists, and other stakeholders, is paramount. Establishing stronger connections with diverse entities outside the immediate organizational sphere enriches perspectives, fosters knowledge exchange, and enhances collective efficacy within the broader civil society ecosystem.

# TOPIC:2

## Resisting the shrinking space – CSOs perspective



**ESMERALDA XHELILAJ**

*Program Director  
STREHA Center*



**DENADA SHPUZA**

*Executive Director  
The Women Center "Hapa të Lehtë"*



**UROS MISLJENOVIC**

*Program Officer  
Partners Serbia*



**NATIA GOPODZE**

*Director  
Partners Georgia*



**EDA NOÇKA**

*Moderator*

### Abstract

The speakers in this panel provided an insightful examination of experiences related to the implementation of the RESILIENCY+ initiative at the national level. It is emphasized the critical importance of internal adaptability within civil society organizations, especially in the context of a dynamically evolving external environment as well as the necessity for strategic tools and methodologies, for maintaining organizational sustainability.

Mrs. Nocka, the moderator of this sessions invited the audience to actively share insights on measures considered essential for enhancing the resilience of their respective organizations. This interactive involvement aimed to leverage collective wisdom and identify actionable strategies to strengthen the adaptive capacities of civil society entities. The audience actively participated by providing input on the question: "*What steps can civil society organizations take to enhance their resilience?*"







# TOPIC:3

## Resisting the shrinking space – Donors and State Institutions perspective



**EJONA MANJANI**

*Coordinator on interest groups  
Albanian Assembly*



**VALERIE COVIC**

*Program Manager  
Governance Sector  
Delegation of the EU to Albania*



**PETRA BURCHER**

*Head of Development Cooperation  
Swedish International Development  
Cooperation Agency (SIDA)*



**VLADIMIR THANO**

*Vice Chair  
of National Council  
for Civil Society*



**KRISTINA VOKO**

*Moderator*

### Abstract

The crucial role of donors and state institutions in facilitating productive and meaningful collaboration with the civil society sector cannot be overstated. Financial sustainability stands out as a key element in discussions about resilience, with the international donor community playing an indispensable role. Their financial support serves as the primary foundation upholding the resilience and sustainability of civil society initiatives. In this session, representatives from the Albanian Assembly, and the donors' community shared their insights on actions that donors and state institutions can take to ensure effective cooperation and support for CSOs and activists.

Ms. Voko, the session moderator, encouraged audience participation in the discussions answering questions as: *What can donors do to increase resilience of the sector; What can government do to increase resiliency of the sector; and which factors are considered to be the most important in supporting the resilience of the sector?*





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