

CONCEPT NOTE*

of the joint project
**“NETWORKING FOR CITIZENS AND NEIGHBOURS –
NETWORKING FOR EUROPE”**
of the Bulgarian European Community Studies Association (BECSA)
and the Trans-European Policy Studies Association (TEPSA)
to be implemented under the **PHARE – Civil Society Programme 2004**
between December 2006 and June 2008

1. SUMMARY OF THE ACTION

Please provide the following information:

1.1 Brief description of the proposed action.

The project “**NETWORKING FOR CITIZENS AND NEIGHBOURS – NETWORKING FOR EUROPE**” is a joint endeavour of the Bulgarian European Community Studies Association (BECSA) and the Trans-European Policy Studies Association (TEPSA), their members and the thematic NGO networks they coordinate, aiming to integrate Bulgarian NGOs that work in two fields – EU democratic governance and citizen participation, and foreign and security policy – into relevant pan-European networks of civil society, as well as to contribute to policy making in the relevant subject areas by ‘Europeanising’ the Bulgarian NGOs’ goal- and agenda-setting and enhancing their expertise.

The main target group, on which the action focuses, is the Bulgarian NGO community dealing with, and mastering expertise of, the two thematic spheres. The final beneficiary is the Bulgarian policy making community responsible for developing national policies in the respective fields.

Project activities are clustered in three blocks: “capacity building” block I “Citizens’ Europe” & block II “Caring for Our Neighbourhood”, and a “network building” block III. They follow a coherent logic based on a consistent overall design generating internal dynamics, a bottom-up approach, competence and responsiveness to target group needs.

As a result of this action, Bulgarian NGOs will get involved in European networks and will obtain direct access to organized civil society at pan-European level. They will raise their technical expertise allowing them to competently grasp and master complex processes of EU policy making. An important added value is the project’s contribution to strategy development at a moment in time, and in the spheres of European policy, where the Bulgarian government will need vision, competence and capacity for pro-active policy in order to meet some of the major challenges facing the Union during the first years of Bulgaria’s EU membership.

2. RELEVANCE:

Please describe the following:

2.1 How relevant is your proposal to the needs and constraints of the target country?

* As submitted within the project application package.

The needs and constraints in Bulgaria that necessitate and justify the current action derive from the extremely heavy economic, political and administrative load of the accession process on the country's society at large, and on its business community, political class, NGOs and professional communities in particular. Pre-accession efforts have proven overwhelming in the establishment of political priorities and have resulted in a predominantly re-active, rather than pro-active policy stance in the two specific policy areas that stand in the project's focus – EU democratic governance and citizen participation, as well as foreign and security policy, including relations with the new EU neighbours.

Short-term pre-accession goals, deadlines and requirements have for the most part diverted attention away from these policy fields at a time when they have been intensively debated in the EU and have experienced practical evolution 'on the ground' (e.g. EU constitutional reforms in 2000-2004, the Union's role in the Western Balkans, the launch of the European Neighbourhood Policy). On the contrary, the new status of Bulgaria as a full EU member makes imperative to develop capacities for policy formulation and strategy development exactly in these two problem areas, because the urgency of European developments in both of them has not receded and will even grow during the next three-four year. With regard to timing, therefore, the focus of the project on these subjects is fully justified.

2.2 What are the problems to be resolved and the needs to be met?

The Bulgarian NGO community, and esp. its segment focused on EU democratic governance and citizen participation, and foreign and security policy, has made relatively modest (sporadic rather than systematic) achievements in approaching the respective EU civil society networks. Although separate representatives of the 'third sector' have been involved in individual events or debates at EU level in the two fields, the NGO community in Bulgaria as a whole has lacked consistent access to civil society networks at EU level and to European policy formulation and policy making. It needs a more comprehensive, more long-term oriented and more structured approach to securing durable channels of interaction with its counterparts in EU member states and at pan-European level. It needs direct access to information, views, opinions, positions, policies and strategies circulated and implemented at EU level, with a view to their 'internalisation' in the Bulgarian domestic political and social agendas.

This action responds to such perceived needs of Bulgarian civil society by offering a consistent and coherent programme for addressing European networks and by working towards an upgrade of the institutionalized BECSA-TEPSA relationship into a networking hub for civil society at national level in Bulgaria and civil society at European level in the respective policy fields. Carrying out the action in practice will attain an enhanced participation of Bulgarian NGOs in shaping EU policies and an improved implementation of EU policies in Bulgaria and will gradually 'Europeanise' the Bulgarian NGOs' goal- and agenda-setting with a view to the new status of Bulgaria as an EU member state.

2.3 Who are the actors involved (final beneficiaries, target groups)?

The direct target groups of this action are two – a primary group at national level, as well as another (broader) target group at European level. (1) In the country, the most important target group is the Bulgarian NGO community working in, and mastering expertise of, the two thematic spheres focused around "Citizens' Europe" and "Caring

for Our Neighbourhood". (2) In EU member states, these are our counterparts in civil society (associations, think tanks, trusts, clubs, foundations, research centres and institutes, etc.), who are also involved in the same fields. Representatives of both target groups will be directly concerned by project activities. They will be able not only to attend events and debates, but also to tailor them with the help of various forms of feedback, in order to achieve a full engagement in implementation. The overall number of NGO representatives who would be directly impacted by the project is estimated at around 900 persons (about 600 organised within the project and another 300 in related events).

The final beneficiary of the project is the Bulgarian policy making community responsible for developing national policies in the respective two fields of action. Here, one should include not only politicians in government and in parliament, as well as top administrators, but also eminent experts from the civil society and academia and public figures, who are influential in the making of Bulgaria's European policies. Representatives of the final beneficiary will take part in appropriate project activities and will profit from project deliverables.

2.4 What are the objectives and expected results?

The general objectives of the project are: (1) to contribute to the stability of democracy in Bulgaria by engaging civil society in the making of the country's European policy and by promoting the citizens' voice in the formulation of policies and decision taking, with a view to gradually laying the foundations for a participatory democracy; (2) to enhance the capacities of the Bulgarian NGO community for substantive participation in the integration process as a new EU member state. The specific objectives are: (1) to integrate the Bulgarian NGO community that works in two key fields – EU democratic governance and citizen participation, and foreign and security policy – into relevant pan-European networks of civil society; (2) to gradually 'Europeanise' the Bulgarian NGOs' goal setting and agenda setting with a view to the new status of Bulgaria as an EU member state; (3) to upgrade the institutionalized BECSA-TEPSA relationship towards a networking hub for civil society at national level in Bulgaria and at European level in the two respective policy fields.

The project expects to obtain the following results: For the target group: (1) The Bulgarian NGO community will get involved in European networks in the two thematic fields and will obtain direct access to organized civil society at pan-European level; it will have a platform for a constant flow of ideas and initiatives for joint action and for establishing contacts leading to future partnerships. (2) Bulgarian NGOs in the two thematic fields will raise their technical expertise allowing them to competently grasp and master complex processes of EU policy making. (3) The 'toolbox' of activities and the whole instrumentarium of action of Bulgarian civil society will be diversified. For the final beneficiary: (1) the project will fuel Bulgarian policy making with innovative ideas and policy initiatives; (2) the Bulgarian policy making community will recognise the Bulgarian NGO community as a legitimate and capable partner in European policy making.

2.5 What is the added value of the action (what adds the action by reference to (central or local) government action and actions implemented by non state actors)?

The main added value of this project is of structural character: Channeling networking efforts of Bulgarian NGOs working in two essential policy fields to connect

to European civil society through a networking hub, the BECSA-TEPSA relationship, will provide direct access to EU-level decision making, will facilitate capacity building and network building, and will upgrade the role of NGOs in this country in policy shaping in the respective areas.

A special added value for governmental action at national level in particular is the intensified policy debate that will unfold – timely, competently guided, forward-looking and policy-oriented. The project will make this contribution to strategy development at a moment in time, and in the spheres of European policy, where the Bulgarian government will need vision, competence and capacity for pro-active policy in order to meet some of the major challenges facing the Union during the first years of Bulgaria's EU membership.

3. METHODOLOGY AND SUSTAINABILITY:

Please describe the following:

3.1 What are the main project activities?

Project design envisages three blocks of activities: “capacity building” **block I “Citizens' Europe”** & **block II “Caring for Our Neighbourhood”**, and a “network building” **block III**.

The following activities are planned in each of block I & II: Act. 1 / resp. Act. 4: 2 debating circles in Bulgaria (1 in Sofia & 1 in a mid-sized district centre), Act. 2 / resp. Act. 5: 2 public lectures in EU member states (with a balance between ‘new’ and ‘old’), Act. 3 / resp. Act. 6: 1 joint BECSA-TEPSA conference in Sofia, Act. 7: publication of volumes resulting from work in the two thematic fields. Block III gathers the following action: Act. 8: consolidating the networking capacities of Bulgarian NGOs, Act. 9: book promotion event at EU level in Brussels, Act. 10: participation of Bulgarian NGO members in “EU presidency conferences”.

In the internal dynamics of the project, the applicant has made the parameter “links to other activities” key to project planning and implementation. Each activity is firmly placed in the overall logic of the project, it derives from previous activities and/or results in subsequent activities, in order to cumulate the impact and achieve an overall synergic effect.

3.2 Who will be your main implementing partners, what is the length of your relationship with them and how will they be involved in the project?

Structured cooperation between BECSA and TEPSA started in 2002 with the implementation of joint EU projects (CEEC-Debate, EUCON, FORNET, EU-CONSENT), although individual collaboration between prominent members of the two associations was established already in the mid-1990s. Cooperation has included organisation of joint events and participation of members in each-other's events, developing policy recommendations on current EU problems, carrying out joint research projects under common design. Successful bilateral and multilateral cooperation contributed to a raising trust and desire for further synergies between the partners. That is why, when the General Assembly of TEPSA considered expanding its membership to cover also Bulgaria and when discussing the choice for a Bulgarian TEPSA member, BECSA's application was endorsed. BECSA became the Bulgarian member of TEPSA in December 2005.

3.3 How will the project achieve sustainability?

The project offers several prerequisites for **financial sustainability**: (1) It draws a framework for generation of future projects. Partners operating / networks functioning under this project will be encouraged to develop joint projects in the future, in order to follow-up on debates and policies standing in the focus of this action. Successful implementation of this project will be decisive for future common efforts. (2) It fosters lobbying capacities: A special activity (Act. 8) is aimed at earning the partners' recognition in policy making and business circles, which will be instrumental for generating further financial support for the networks and their activities. (3) Sale of publications, as a source of income for maintenance and further action. A special activity (book promotion – Act. 9) will contribute to generating a higher rate of sales.

Achieving **institutional sustainability** is the result to be achieved by focusing on substantiating the institutional relationship – BECSA's membership in the TEPSA network. BECSA's membership in TEPSA has been tested in practice during the past 4 years, has passed through a competitive approval procedure, and is, therefore, highly unlikely to be jeopardised in the future. On the contrary, the current project will contribute to raising BECSA's profile as a pro-active (although new) TEPSA member. At a lower level of project implementation, the bottom-up approach adopted for carrying out most activities will undoubtedly generate a feeling of ownership among members of the network, and will have a consolidating (i.e. institutionalising) effect.

The project will exert a **positive long-term policy impact** on two essential aspects of policy making in Bulgaria – * citizens' participation / EU democratisation, constitutionalisation and institutional change, and ** regional dimensions of foreign policy making, especially with regard to the future EU neighbours (Western Balkans & Black Sea area). Debates and analysis generated throughout the project will help the government develop: (1) a comprehensive policy approach to the forthcoming new round of debates / negotiations on the European Constitution, which comes forward on the EU's agenda in 2007-2008; (2) a concrete programme for operative action in the framework of EU policy towards the Western Balkans, which is needed in order to maximise Bulgaria's role as an influential EU member state in the region; (3) a strategy of action in the framework of the Black Sea dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy, which is still missing in Bulgarian foreign policy making.

3.4 Will it have multiplier effects?

The project will heavily rely on four types of 'multiplying agents': (1) event participants: Since the majority of them will come from Bulgarian and/or European NGOs, the key themes and the main conclusions of the debates will be 'exported' for further reflection in the respective association, club, foundation, society, etc. Moreover, in operational/network terms, each representative of an NGO will him/herself open the trans-national network to additional layers of civil society. (2) publications: Academic volumes and information material will represent a 'condensed' capacity building instrument, which will be useful for disseminating knowledge and information about networks and other resources far beyond the circle of event attendees who will be directly impacted by the project. That is why, the book promotion exercise (Act. 9) will have a special added value for the multiplication of project activities. (3) internet: Internet dissemination is a sine qua non in the world of modern communications. Both partners have extensive mailing lists and frequented web sites that will be used for contacting broader audiences. (4) media: All public events – public lectures, conferences and book promotion – will make a special effort to approach journalists working in the respective field, columnists and news sections

in electronic media, in order to draw public attention to the project. Moreover, the invitation of eminent journalists knowledgeable of the subject matter to act as commentators / discussants at the events will be an additional 'magnet' for the media community to provide wide coverage of the events.

4. EXPERTISE AND OPERATIONAL CAPACITY:

Please describe the following:

4.1 What is the experience of your organisation in project management?

BECSA was founded in November 1992 and was registered in February 1993 as a non-profit, non-governmental organisation. Its activities started in 1993, with the establishment of institutional contacts with 'sister' NGOs in EU member states, and, since 1994, with the development of NGO-focused projects under various programmes funded by the EU and other donors.

During the past five years, BECSA has gained **project management experience** in the capacity of: (1) project coordinator of the following actions: * Participation in the Bulgarian and European Debates on the "Future of Europe" (2000-2004), ** Regional Jean Monnet Project "2007 – One Enlargement Is Not Enough" (2003-2005, 7 partners, 246252,96 EUR), *** Regional Jean Monnet Project "Young Scholars from the Candidate Countries for an Enlarged EU" (2004-2005, 3 partners, 105149,42 EUR); (2) project partner of the following actions: * FORNET Network (A European Foreign Policy Research Network) (2003-2005, 24 partners, EUR 381000), ** EU-CONSENT Network of Excellence (Wider Europe, Deeper Integration? 'Constructing Europe' Network) (2005-2009, 48 partners, 3,7 MEUR), *** CINEFOGO Network of Excellence (Civil Society and New Forms of Governance in Europe: The Making of European Identity) (2005-2009, 48 partners, 3,9 MEUR), **** Project ESSHRA (Enlarging the SSH Research Agenda) (2006-2008, 5 partners, 0,51 MEUR).

In addition to that, an essential function of BECSA is **assistance to NGOs in project development and implementation** in the following spheres: (1) BECSA carries out coordination and offers assistance in the implementation of the Jean Monnet programme of the EU in Bulgaria. (2) BECSA has become the institution providing infrastructure support, advice and assistance on the implementation of the Sixth Framework Programme of the EU in the field of Social Sciences and Humanities and serving as a national contact point for the preparation of project applications and the management of projects. (3) Since 2002, BECSA has advised and assisted Bulgarian NGOs in designing project applications both for the Communication Strategy for EU Accession of the Bulgarian Government, and the Information Programme of the EC Delegation in Sofia.

4.2. What is the experience of your organisation and your partner(s) of the issues to be addressed?

By taking part in the international and national projects listed above (see exact titles!) BECSA has established its expertise in the thematic areas covered by this project – EU democratic governance and citizen participation, as well as foreign and security policy, including relations with the new EU neighbours. Its achievements are demonstrated by its **publications**: * One Enlargement Is Not Enough: South-East European Debates on EU Integration, (2005, 248 p.); * The EU in 2005: Candidate Countries' Perspectives, (2005, 440 p.); * Views from the Outside: The EU between a Constitution and Parliamentary Elections, (2004, 208 p.); * The EU after 1 May 2004:

Is there a shock from enlargement? Implications for South Eastern Europe, (2004, 640 p.); * More than a dwarf? Fornet essays on Europe's foreign policy, security and defence, (2004, 296 p.)

Selected key publications of BECSA members (also technical experts under this project) are another proof of expertise in the respective policy fields: DINKOV, Dinko: Cooperation in South-Eastern Europe: Ideas and Opportunities (64 p.), Bulgaria in European Integration (203 p.), KOLAROVA, Rumyana: Bulgarian Citizenship – Basic Concepts and Their Possible Transformation (1995), Diversity and Unity in the Enlarged European Union (2001), Implications of enlargement for the rule of law, democracy and constitutionalism in post-communist legal orders (2003), NIKOLOV, Krassimir: The Bulgarian “Future of Europe” Debate Revisited (2005), The European Neighbourhood Policy and Bulgaria – Challenges and Opportunities (2005), We in the Debate on Europe: Institutional and political aspects (2003).