

Dear Dr. Busek,

~ Without a free expression of opinions, exchange of ideas and access to independent information, the wheels of democracy grind to a halt and voices are silenced.

~ Without the opportunity to discuss issues with people from the “other” side of an ethnic or religious divide, there is little hope of resolving problems.

~ Without secure and open fora for debate, there is no support for cultivating individual or group participation in, or responsibility for the democratic process.

Dr Busek, as someone who has been deeply involved in fostering Democracy and Reconciliation in Southeast Europe, you know only too well that the shortlist above is the key to genuine change in any post-conflict and post-communist society. Sometimes, these three elements are found within a transnational organisation or in intergovernmental contacts. But as someone who knows the region well, you also know that the Civil Society sector has been in the forefront of this battle, way ahead of national governments. The free expression of opinions, the opportunity to hear the “other” and a forum for debate are the very foundation stones of the Civil Society. Over the past two decades, it was the Civil Society that protested against wars, was the first to help refugees, was the first to look into war crimes, was the first to offer a hand to the other. In your capacity as Special Coordinator of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe you have acknowledged this countless times through your tireless support for NGOs and their work in the region.

It is with this in mind, that we the undersigned non-governmental organisations are writing this letter to urge you to help us raise the awareness within the governments of the member states of the South East European Cooperation Process and the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, as well as the partner countries and the European Union, about the need to ensure the institutional representation of the civil society organisations of SEE within the Regional Cooperation Council. We are worried by the prospect of the Civil Society sector being de facto left out in the cold when it comes to future institutional structure of the RCC. If this does not change, then two decades of very hard work, hundreds of millions of Euro and countless invaluable networks will be lost.

Civil Societies of SEE countries were pioneers in regional cooperation even before the formation of the Stability Pact and the launching of the SEE CP. In many cases the bottom up civic initiatives resulted with the first contacts between the SEE national governments. They gave and continue to give heart and soul to the processes of reconciliation and regional cooperation. Since its formation the Stability Pact offered and continues to offer a forum for regional cooperation of civil societies from

all South Eastern European countries. We the undersigned organisations have actively participated in these Stability Pact initiatives since the very beginning.

Referring to the Conclusions of the Regional Table of the Stability Pact, held 16th November 2006 in Bucharest stating that, “WT I reconfirmed the importance of the involvement of the civil society in regional cooperation and recommended that the RCC offer full political support to an active role of the civil society in the process of Euro Atlantic integration”, and bearing in mind your committed personal engagement to the promotion of the civil society and continued support to the strengthening of the regional dimension of civil society activities, we urge you to invest all your personal efforts and influence to ensure that civil society finds a prominent and institutional role with the structure of the Regional Cooperation Council.

The RCC must give political support to the Civil Society if its aims for cooperation are to stand a chance of being realised. Without the support and momentum of the Civil Society, the pacts, treaties and handshakes will be little more than gestures. It is the Civil Society which has and will make the difference on the ground.

Thank you very much for your continued efforts to promote the civil society in SEE.

Signed by:

1. Citizens’ Pact for SEE, Novi Sad (Serbia)
2. CDRSEE, Centre for Democracy and Reconciliation in Southeast Europe, Thessaloniki, Greece
3. Helsinki Committee for Human Rights of the Republic of Macedonia, Skopje, the fY Republic of Macedonia
4. NGO Future, UNMIK-Kosovo
5. Fund for an Open Society-Serbia, Belgrade, Serbia
6. Balkan Trust for Democracy, Belgrade, Serbia
7. The Peace Institute, Ljubljana, Slovenia
8. EDA Development Agency, Banja Luka, BiH
9. FOSIM, Foundation Open Society Institute – Macedonia, Skopje, the fY Republic of Macedonia

10. Kosovo Helsinki Monitor, Pristina, UNMIK - Kosovo
11. Open Society Fund Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina
12. Liga Pro Europa (The Pro Europe League) –Bucharest, Romania
13. FORUM – Center for Strategic Research & Documentation, Skopje, the fY Republic of Macedonia
14. Belgrade Fund for Political Excellence, Belgrade (Serbia)
15. Centre for Civic Education, Podgorica (Montenegro)
16. Centre for Liberal Strategies, Sofia, Bulgaria
17. Center for Civic Initiative, Prilep, the fY Republic of Macedonia
18. MJAFT! Movement, Tirana (Albania)
19. The Journalistic Association "Balkan Forum" and "Balkanite" magazine, Sofia (Bulgaria)
20. Center for Development of Non-Governmental Organizations (CRNVO), Podgorica (Montenegro)
21. Civitas Foundation for Civil Society, Cluj Napoca (Romania)
22. Association of Multiethnic Cities of Southeast Europe PHILIA, Centre for Regionalism, Novi Sad (Serbia)
23. EXIT Association, Novi Sad (Serbia)
24. European Movement in Serbia, Belgrade (Serbia)
25. European Cultural Foundation (ECF), Amsterdam (The Netherlands)
26. kuda.org, Novi Sad (Serbia)
27. Group 484, Belgrade (Serbia)

28. The Centre for Peace Studies, Zagreb (Croatia)
29. Vojvodjanka - Regional Women's Initiative, Novi Sad, (Serbia)
30. Association FORMA F, Mostar (BiH)
31. BHWI Foundation - Women's Initiative Foundation, Sarajevo (BiH)
32. BETA news agency, Belgrade (Serbia)
33. NGO “Jelena Anzujska” Kosovska Mitrovica, UNMIK-Kosovo
34. Community Building Mitrovica, Kosovska Mitrovica, UNMIK-Kosovo
35. Europe House, Slavonski Brod (Croatia)
36. One World Platform SEE, Sarajevo (BiH)
37. Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation, Novi Sad (Serbia)