List of questions to be considered by the Council in follow up to the Workshops held on 17ᵗʰ and 23ʳᵈ February 2021

In follow up to the two Workshops held on 17ᵗʰ and 23ʳᵈ of February 2021, we are presenting the key questions that were found to need further discussion at the level of the Council. The presentation of these questions has followed the order of topics discussed as per the Workshop agendas.

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1. Issues to be considered by the Council for the purpose of amending the Decision and the Rulebook

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Below are some of the questions that were discussed at the workshop with Council members on February 17ᵗʰ, followed by a summary of main options as elaborated in the Review of the Council Decision and Rulebook that were submitted to Council members before the workshop:

- Should the name of the Council be changed to better reflect its main mandate (Council for Cooperation between Government and Civil Society?)
- Should the Council mandate be further clarified to focus more on strategic issues on enabling environment fof civil society development (also by foreseeing the (quarterly) dynamics of discussing the reports on the progress of the implementation of the Strategy/Action Plan for Civil Society Development)
- Should there be deputy members of the Council or not?
- Should criteria for ceasing membership of the Council be changed or not? (3 consecutive absences?)
- Should the Council develop its Annual Work Plan?
- Should the Secretariat of the Council be also (voting) member of the Council or keep its current position?
- Should the Secretariat ensure a separate budget for the Council (visibility) activities?
- Should the Council start its sessions with the Secretariat follow-up report - on the status of implementation of conclusions from previous Council session(s)?

Mandate of the Council
As for the mandate of the Council, the following topics were discussed during the workshop:
- Define criteria for including certain topics in the agenda of Council sessions – need for a more direct link to the more enabling environment for civil society (strategic or sub-sectoral policy issues?)
- Clarify the dynamics of monitoring of the Strategy for civil society sector (quarterly reports)
- Foresee procedures for proposing priorities for public funding of CSOs (prior sectoral analysis)

- Selection of CSO representatives in working bodies – (include in the Decision not only in Rulebook) - executive not consultative function

There was no consensus during the workshop regarding the need to further clarify the mandate of the Council. Below are the recommendations provided for clarifying certain provisions of the Decision.

Key recommendations – mandate of the Council (article 2 of the Decision)
In order to further clarify the mandate of the Council and its role in different phases of the policy-making process, it is recommended to consider the following amendments of the article 2 of the Decision:
-replace the formulation: "Enhances the improvement of cooperation and building partnership relations between the government and public administration bodies and civil society sector" with the following: "*conducts awareness raising activities with the aim of promoting the culture of cooperation and partnership*"
-amend the formulation: "-monitors and analyses the public policies which are related to or affect civil society sector" with a clearer formulation "-monitors and analyses the public policies *which affect the environment for the development of civil society sector"*.
-amend the formulation "-participates in the monitoring of implementation of Government Strategy for civil society sector and Action plan for implementing the Strategy" by adding the following text: "*by discussing the quarterly reports on the progress of the Strategy implementation*"
-amend the formulation "gives proposals in planning of areas and specific priorities for financing of activities of organisations in the budget of Republic of North Macedonia" by adding the following text: *", based on elaborated sectoral analysis of responsible government bodies"*
-amend the formulation "-analyses proposals of CSOs and adopts positions on issues from its competence". The proposed new wording is: "-analyses proposals submitted by CSOs and adopts positions *on issues related to the enabling environment for CSOs"*
-add new task – "*Implements procedures of nomination and selection of representatives of civil society in working groups for drafting public policies, committees, consultative bodies and other of institutionalized forms of participation of CSOs, based on request of responsible government and public administration bodies*" (take the formulation from the Rulebook)

Need for appointing deputy members of the Council

There were different views about the need to appoint deputy members of the Council. The arguments were mainly related to the pros and cons provided in the table below.

Option 1: Keeping the current set-up of the Council, without	Maintaining the higher level of public officials present at Council sessions	Risks of increasing cases of ceasing membership of the Council due to more	Is the solution in having less sessions with more in-depth, strategic discussion

deputy members	Ensuring a more advanced internal cohesion and mutual trust among regular Council sessions. Ensuring the stability of the Council work.	than 3 absences from Council sessions during a year (art.9 of the Decision on the Council)	and timely announcement/ preparation of each session?
Option 2: Introducing deputy members	Easier ensuring of the required quorum for Council sessions.	Risk of lowering hierarchical level of public officials present at Council sessions, without adequate knowledge or capacity for formulating the ministry's position on topics on the Council agenda. Lower potential for creating "institutional memory", cohesion and team spirit among Council members. Risk of deputies fully taking over the members role in the Council – especially in case of public administration bodies.	Should deputies from CSOs be proposed along with members and pass the same selection process or should they be proposed and confirmed by the selected CSO members?

Reasons for ceasing membership of the Council

The discussion on the reasons for ceasing membership of the Council was closely related to the issue of deputy members.

A possible recommendation was given to amend the article 9 to change the conditions for ceasing the membership of the Council – "three *consecutive* absences during the year".

Otherwise, in case there will be deputy members, there would probably be much less absences and less need for ceasing membership of the Council.

Role of the Secretariat of the Council
The discussion on the role of the Secretariat was focused on several issues:

- What exactly "creating conditions for the work of the Council" means? Does is foresee expert, administrative and financial support?
- Should a separate budget for the activities of the Council be planned? For which activities?
- How proactive should the Secretariat be?
- Should the majority of topics on the Council agenda come from the Secretariat?

Among other, the recommendation was formulated to change the article 11 of the Decision and introduce additional task for the Secretariat: -"ensures the budget for the Council activities".

The discussion during the workshop also covered the dilemma on whether the GS/Unit for Cooperation with NGOs (as Secretariat of the Council) should also be formally member and have voting power. In general, the argument for the Secretariat to keep its current position (and not serve as voting member) seem to be prevailing, also to ensure the **neutrality of the Secretariat and maintain the balance in the number of Council members** from government and CSOs.

Annual work plan of the Council

As for the Annual work plan of the Council, the discussion was focused on the following issues:

- Introduce **obligation of the Council to adopt its annual work plan of activities**, taking into account the Government (legislative) work program and obligations from strategic documents affecting civil society development.
- Importance of timely identification of acts planned in Annual Government Work Plan which are related or affect the CSO enabling environment.
- Enabling the Council to **discuss the draft Government Annual (Legislative) Workplan** and advocate for the inclusion of the legislative priorities related to the enabling environment for civil society.

The discussion at the workshop seemed to be in favour of introducing the obligation of the adoption of the Annual plan.

Regarding **the Rulebook of the Council**, the discussion was focused on the following topics:

- Procedure of the annual planning of the Council work
- Communication with CSOs from sectors represented in the Council

- Further strengthening of the transparency of the Council work
- Ensuring the proper follow-up of the Council conclusions
- Harmonizing the Decision and the Rulebook of the Council in regard to the Council's mandate

In general, the discussion at the workshop demonstrated the support to the proposals to define the procedure of annual planning, further improve the transparency of the Council work, as well as ensuring the proper follow-up of the Council conclusions (by introducing the obligation for the Secretariat of the Council to prepare the report on the status of the implementation of the Council conclusions from the previous session(s) and present it at the beginning of every session of the Council).

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2. List of questions/topics to be discussed by the Council in relation to its internal and external communication

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This list contains some of the questions that were discussed at the workshop with the Council members on February 23rd. It is followed by a summary of the main recommendations as elaborated in the Assessment of the communication capacities of the Council that was submitted to the Council members prior to the workshop:

1. What are the immediate needs for promotion of the Council, prior to the election of the new members?
2. What kind of support is needed in promotion of the Council's work by the General Secretariat?
3. Establishment of a working group in charge of planning communications (consisted of members from the Council, the Unit and the Project)
4. Nomination of communications person to support the work of the Council – how it should be done? Is there a need of changes in the job systematizations in the Unit?
5. Is there a need to nominate a spokesperson of the Council and establish guidelines for media communication (which should determine who will speak on behalf of the Council, especially in sensitive situations)?
6. Building capacities for communication of the Unit and the new members of the Council with support from the Project – when should this happen?
7. Which civic platforms should be used for promotion of the Council's work?
8. What are the expectations for the Council's promotion through the Project's website? Should the website of the Project be transferred to the Unit after its completion?

In addition to these questions, the following was discussed at the workshop:

- There has been lots of efforts invested in the Council's work, however more should be invested in transparency and visibility to improve the perceptions about the importance of its mission and the results achieved.
- The website www.nvosorabotka.gov.mk contains the latest information from the Council's sessions, decisions, calls, etc; however it should be upgraded to contain more informative contents "packed" in a catchy and attractive manner
- Members of the Council could also proactively use their networks to promote the results of their work, with assistance from the Unit and the Project.
- CSOs and institutions could be more active in the promotion of the Council's competencies/mission/results
- The Project's contribution in the promotion and visibility of the Council is highly valuable; However, systemic and sustainable solution regarding communications should be found.

Support to be provided by the Project for external communication of the Council – recommended actions

- The Project's website/social media profiles to serve as a platform for promotion of the Council's work and competencies.

- Production of different types of awareness raising/educational tools – video about the Council/competencies/members, e-newsletter, factsheet, brochure, annual report for the results of the 3-year work, etc.

- Organizing periodic meetings of the Council`s members with CSOs

- Tailor - made social media campaign (videos, infographics, blogs, educational announcements/teasers, online quiz, exchange of web banners with CSOs, etc.)

Support to be provided by the Project for internal communication of the Council – recommended actions

- **Development of internal communication protocols between the Project, the Council and the Unit:**
    – Establishing of a working group to be responsible for communications consisting members of the Project, the Council and the Unit.

    – Online calendars for the staff of the Project, the Unit and the members of the Council.

    – Workshop/s for communication capacities building in order to efficiently implement the communication strategy/promotional workplan of the Council.

> **3. List of questions/topics to be discussed by the Council in relation to its consultation with civil society**

This list contains some of the questions that were discussed at the workshop with the Council members on February 23rd. It is followed by a summary of the main recommendations presented in the proposal for Guidelines for the Council for Cooperation with and Development of Civil Society Consultations with Civil Society.

- **Can consultation with CSOs be conducted in a centralized manner with the support of the Secretariat (General Secretariat of the Government – Sector for Policy Analysis and Coordination-Unit for Cooperation with NGOs) ?** (This wouldn't replace the communication and consultations that the Council members have with their networks and partners but will allow a wider participation and openess of the Council to other interested parties)
- **Should consultation be regulated in a separate document (Guildines) or integrated in Rulebook of the Council and partly through the communciation strategy?**
- **If the Council conducts an organized consultation process which of the key actions should be included in formal documents of the Council?** (Key actions should be considered only after agreeing on the changes of the Decision and the Rulebook)
- **Does the Secretariat have the sufficient resources to facilitate such process?**
- **How can the TA support this process?** (ex. create the formal procedures for EoI, feedback and complaints mecanisms)

In addition to these questions, the following was discussed at the workshop:

- The Council has already done several consultations (especially on funding), this should be collected, systematized and published in order for CSOs to be able to recognize these efforts
- The proposed Guidelines are based on principles that all agree on, but the Council members do not have sufficient time and resources to address such recommendations individually
- Two-way communication and feedback was emphasized as very relevant for communication with CSOs
- Independence of the CSOs was raised as potential issue

Recommendations:

Guidelines for Consultations with Civil Society of the Council for Cooperation with and Development of Civil Society can help to strengthen participation of wider civil society in the

work of the Council and in the development and/or monitoring of public policies that impact the sector, as defined in the Decision for Establishment of the Council. Moreover, the Guidelines can support effective participation and cooperation based on respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law, that would be integral to the operations of any consultative body of the state institutions. Ultimately, they intend to facilitate the planning, implementation and follow-up of the Council's consultations with wider civil society and constitute an effort to make the Council more transparent, accountable and effective.

The adopted Guidelines should be implemented by the Council, and facilitated by the Secretariat in its implementation. This effort will not replace the communication and consultations that the Council members have with their networks and partners but will allow a centralized wider participation and openness of the Council to other interested parties.

Additional resources need to be allocated to the secretariat to support the communication and the consultation of the Council.

The TA can support the Council in further operationalization of the consultation model they will select.