



PROMOTING CIVIL SOCIETY THROUGH PRO BONO PRIVATE SECTOR SERVICES

Round Table – Conclusions

On Thursday, March 5, 2020, twelve representatives of the non-profit sector, the academia and business met at the Prague Creative Center for a discussion entitled *Promoting Civil Society Through Pro Bono Services Of The Private Sector*. The meeting was organized by the [DEMAS](#) association in cooperation with [PILnet](#), the global network for public interest law. The discussion focused on the current challenges for organized civil society (not only) in the Czech Republic, on the existing instruments for supporting civil society, forms of cooperation and support between the civil and the private sector.

Motivation to support the civil sector

When business supports civil society by providing pro bono and expert services, it reacts to the current needs of civil society organizations. This also includes situations when commercial services are offered for a symbolic price.

Conditions for a good partnership

Mutual benefit depends on a functional **relationship**. In particular, when an organization identifies insufficient collaboration and pro bono capacities, it is necessary to communicate openly with the provider. Coordination of needs of NGOs, civil society and pro bono service providers is considered important; both on the part of individual organizations and also for large and international corporations which have pro bono officers to coordinate such cooperation.

Especially from the business side, **risk assessment** of potential cooperation and partnership is performed (to avoid negative effects on the company's image); however, similar risk assessment was also recommended to NGOs, for example, in the development of corporate donorship, where operation of certain companies in developing countries was mentioned as problematic.

The involvement of NGOs in cases of politicians as the so-called “watchdogs of democracy” (anti-corruption activities, conflict of interest, etc.), or advocacy activities where companies may feel there is a possibility

of abuse of the company's name in a "political fight" with a negative impact on the company's position may be problematic for corporations; however, this should not prevent NGOs from doing their work. In their turn, NGOs should also develop individual small fundraising to strengthen their financial independence.

Possibilities of strengthening the civil sector

Civil society organizations and society as a whole have gone through different stages of development in thirty years of freedom, just like society as a whole. Civil society organizations have not only represented minority target groups, but also pursued advocacy activities and prevented the abuse of democratic instruments. However, at the turn of the century/in the late 1990s, the sector fell apart and diversified.

To support cross-sector cooperation, [local action groups](#) (LAG; operating on the basis of the EU LEADER methodology, in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture and the Association for Rural Renewal of the Czech Republic) have been created to foster business development, take care of the landscape, develop education and social programs by connecting rural inhabitants, non-governmental organizations, private business and bodies of public administration (municipalities, associations of municipalities and institutions).

NGOs should thus develop and nurture the relationship between local entrepreneurs and the civil sector, as well as expand volunteering, not only in the form of pro bono services. However, this may be a challenge due to the lack of trust to the civil sector by the broader public and a lack of a deep-rooted tradition of volunteering.

Increasing the transparency of NGO activities can be a step towards strengthening confidence, e.g. by broadcasting their own events through online streaming services. This can help NGOs open their work to a wider audience.

Best practice examples

Platforms presented as examples of good practice include [UmSemUmTam](#), a project managed by Via Association, or [Česko.Digital](#), a new initiative bringing together IT and online services professionals.

NGOs through the lens of political representation

The issue of cooperation and the image of NGOs in the media, which was also mentioned at this round table, was addressed [in October 2019 in the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic](#). According to the CVVM survey, one of the motivators for organizing the meetings was long-term [increasing distrust in nonprofit organizations](#).

Creating "**advocacy networks**" was mentioned as one of solutions aiming at strengthening trust in the civil sector; the creation of a [networking platform across the civil sector, communicating with stakeholders and reflecting on sectoral developments](#) was mentioned as an example.