

Society

# Policy Brief: Activities of civil society can lead to successful bottom-up democratization

by EWB 18. 07. 2023.



*Public forum discussion at the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade; Photo: Facebook / Nije filozofski ćutati*

VIENNA – New Policy Brief “[Civil society: a driver for democratisation from below in Serbia](#)”, published within the “WB2EU” Network, presents the ways in which the activities of civil society can lead to bottom-up democratization through various activities, including citizen education, organization of citizen assemblies and launching individual policy initiatives. It provides specific examples from Serbia, a country struggling with the functioning of democratic institutions but nevertheless featuring instances of successful democratizing civil society activities in recent years.



The Policy Brief explores the concept of “democratisation from below” as a bottom-up approach to democracy, emphasising the active role of citizens and civil society organizations in promoting and sustaining democratic values. It recommends the creation of mechanisms for better informing and educating citizens on the importance and power of civic activism, further development of the concept of citizens’ assemblies and other forms of deliberative democracy and strengthening of the capacities to assist marginalized groups.

One of the ways in which CSOs contribute to democratization is citizen education. For grassroots movements to have any success in mobilising enough support for their cause, the first step is to inform and educate citizens on the issues they are trying to address. A successful example from Serbia, according to the Policy Brief, is a public campaign by “Kreni-promeni” (Go-change) association, which spread information about the harmful nature of mining practices. This ultimately led to massive protests against the Jadar lithium mining project in Western Serbia, which made the government backtrack on its decision to support it.

Another way is the organization of the so-called citizen assemblies, which are defined as “assemblies of citizens, demographically representative of the larger population, brought together to learn and deliberate on a topic in order to inform public opinion and decision-making”. They are usually organized on the local level. In Serbia, two such assemblies were organised in Belgrade and Valjevo, where urban solutions and policies to solve the problem of polluted air were discussed.



According to the document, even individuals can

use bottom-up approaches to reshape public policy. The most famous examples were unfortunately rooted in tragic deaths, which led to the adoption of Marija's Law and Tijana's Law, named after girls who lost their lives, and initiated by members of their family members. Legal changes led to stricter punishments and stronger protection mechanisms for the cases of child molestation.

There are also plenty of good practise examples of how civil society organisations can have an impact on improving the position of marginalised groups in a society, and one example mentioned in the Policy Brief is the joint European Union and Council of Europe ROMACTED programme, whose methodology is specifically based on a "democratisation from below" approach connecting marginalised groups and decision-makers on the local level.

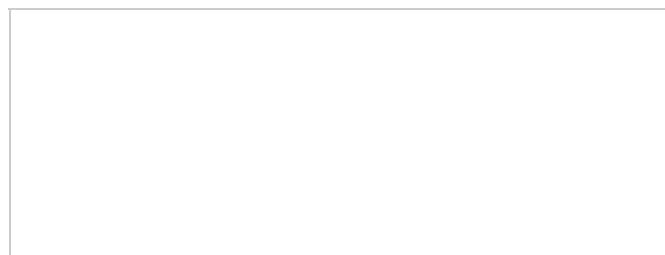


***The Policy Brief is published in the framework of the WB2EU project. The project aims at the establishment of a network of renowned think-tanks, do-tanks, universities, higher education institutes and policy centres from the Western Balkans, neighbouring countries and EU member states that will be most decisive for the enlargement process and Europeanisation of the region in the upcoming years. The WB2EU project is co-funded by the European Commission under its Erasmus+ Jean Monnet programme.***

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