

Civil Society in Central and Eastern Europe: Challenges and Opportunities



Clara Moder

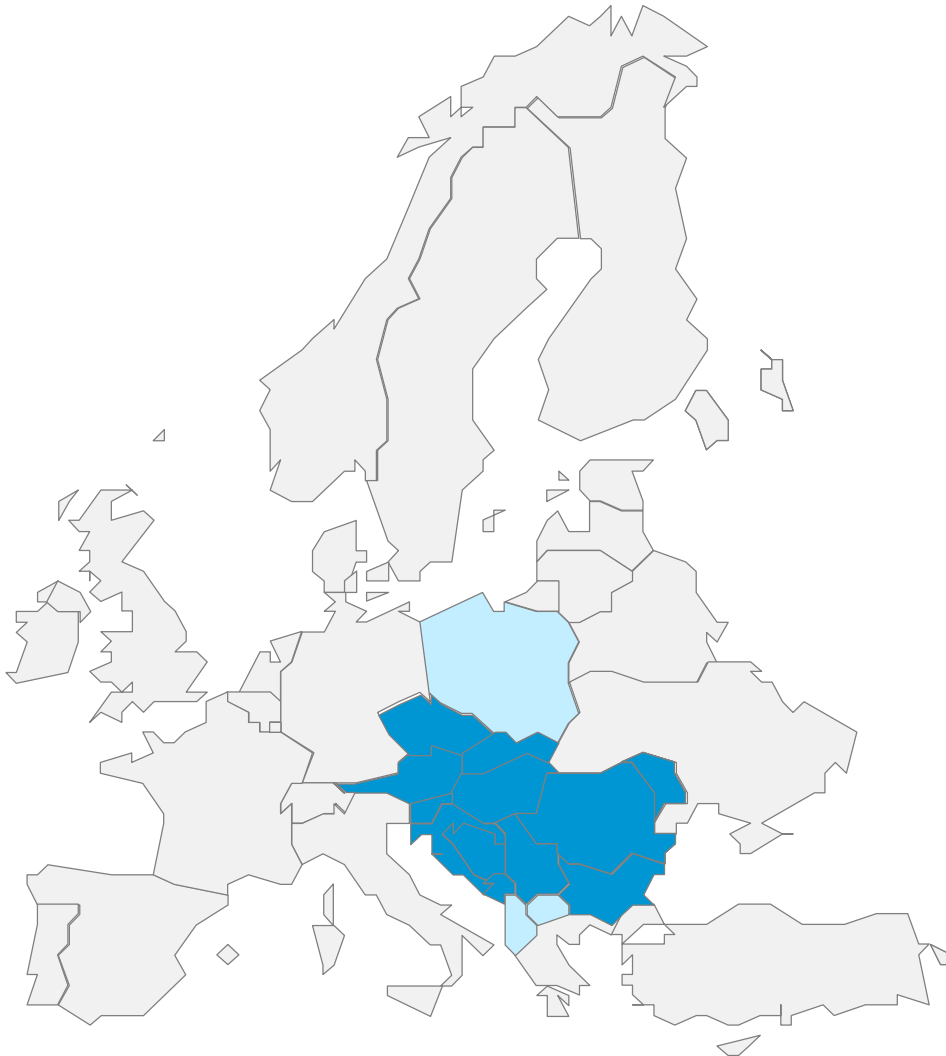
Social Entrepreneurship Center

WU Vienna University of Economics and Business

Research Project: Civil Society in CEE

- 08/2015-06/2017
- Collaborative effort of **WU Vienna** and **ERSTE Foundation**
- Goal: to **understand civil society** in Central and South Eastern Europe
 - Recent history and current shapes and forms of civil society
 - Actors of organized and informal civil society
 - Trends and challenges ahead
- Involvement of **local expertise** through 27 country authors and a large scale expert survey (n=422)

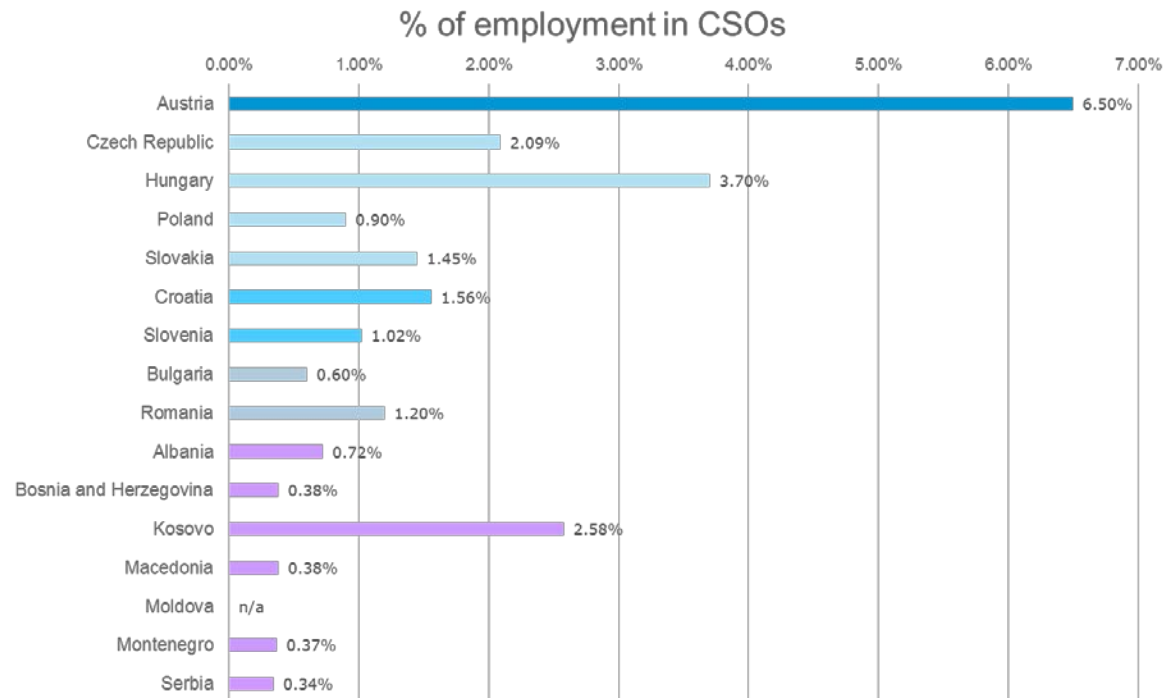
Focus countries



Albania
Austria
Bosnia and Herzegovina
Bulgaria
Czech Republic
Croatia
Hungary
Kosovo
Macedonia
Montenegro
Moldova
Poland
Romania
Slovakia
Slovenia
Serbia

Civil society in CEE is very active, but very heterogeneous

- **129 million inhabitants** in 16 countries
- **~500,000 estimated active CSOs**
- **~800,000 people** (about 1.8% of working population) employed in CSOs
- **~30 million** involved in some form of **volunteering**



The European Union is perceived as a source of hope and positive transformation

- High levels of trust in the European Union as positive transformatory power in the next decade
 - Funding opportunities
 - Legal framework
 - Legitimacy building
- Most relevant in Non-EU countries (ALB, BiH, KO, SRB, MAC, MD, MNE)



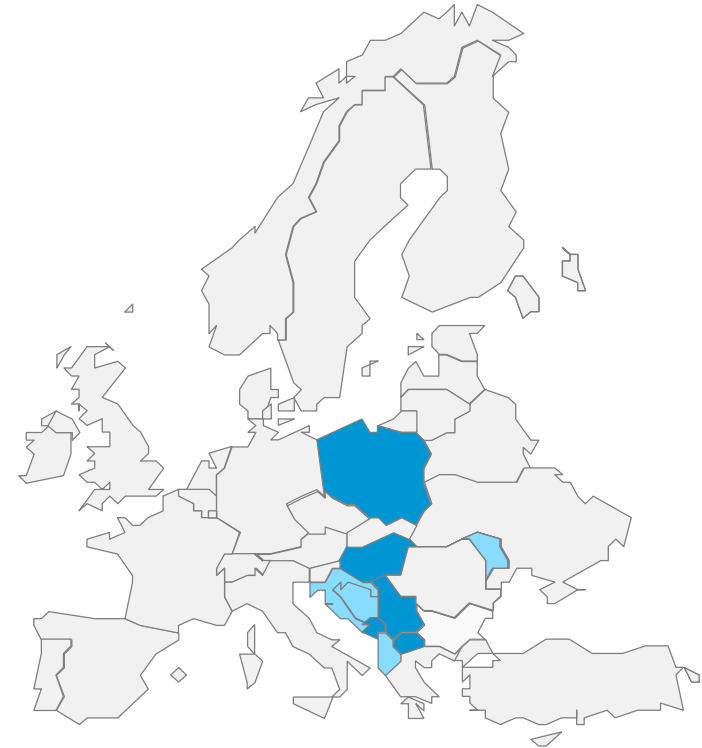
Foreign donors are withdrawing

- Foreign donors have started withdrawing from the Non-EU countries, as well as from Bulgaria and Romania
- Little domestic public involvement
- High dependency, e.g. in Kosovo: 74% of CSOs funded by foreign donors
- Challenge for the funding structure of CSOs



Central governments exert control over CSOs

- Limited funding possibilities for „critical“ CSOs
- Campaigns against civil society leaders
- Consequences: self-censorship, withdrawal into service delivery, weakening advocacy and watchdog functions of civil society
- Emergence of „pro-government“ CSOs



(Established) CSOs become more professional

- Administrative capacity building for large scale EU funding
- Activities include impact measurement, corporate relations/fundraising, use of market mechanisms
- Risk of „losing soul“ when professional means more businesslike



Digitalization supports the emergence of new grassroots movements

- Digitalization and Social Media provide new opportunities for organization of civil society engagement
- Shows high potential of citizen engagement and mobilization
- Often ad-hoc and topic-driven initiatives
- Challenge: institutionalization of initiatives, sustainability



The road ahead?

- Civil societies in CEE developed rapidly and in diverse ways since 1989
- Despite diversity, some of the major challenges are shared e.g. de-democratization, funding difficulties
- Awareness for a „European civil society“ is important in order to address these challenges



VIENNA UNIVERSITY OF
ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS

Clara Moder, M.Sc.
Social Entrepreneurship Center
WU Vienna University of Economics
and Business

Welthandelsplatz 1, Building D2
A-1020 Vienna, Austria

clara.moder@wu.ac.at
+43 1 31336 4349