**Establishing an effective multi-stakeholder dialogue mechanism for the implementation and monitoring of SEE 2030 Strategy**

The South East Europe 2030 Strategy (SEE 2030) provides for the establishment of open and transparent mechanisms of dialogue with different stakeholders so as to promote their engagement in implementation and monitoring of the Strategy and increase the awareness of the region’s sustainable development agenda.

Overall, the dialogue mechanisms should involve the following stakeholders:

1. Civil society, think-tank community and academia
2. Parliaments of the SEECP participants
3. Government institutions
4. Private sector
5. Region-to-region dialogue.

**1. Engaging civil society, think-tank community and academia**

In May 2021, in the framework of preparatory activities within the SEE 2030 Strategy, the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) Secretariat organised two rounds of consultations, on May 21 and on May 25, so as to introduce the Strategy to the relevant civil society stakeholders (think-tanks, academia, private sector, civil society organisations) and collect their feedback to be potentially included into the draft Strategy. The very agenda and the scope of these interactive seminars were shaped by the contributions of other think-tanks in SEECP participants.

The two events brought together -in a digital format- the representatives of all 13 SEECP participants active in various sectors and were used to invite them to provide their expert insight on the SEE 2030 document. Approximately 100 people were directly involved: government officials from the entire region and representatives of international organisations sat at the same table with members of civil society and think tanks, educational practitioners, legal consultants, academics, health experts, and young people. This interactive consultation process is a great example of interregional and cross-sectoral co-operation. Following the successful endorsement of the Strategy by the SEECP Summit and moving on to the next stage, the civil society, think tanks and academia are expected to play an essential role in both the implementation and the monitoring processes.

Active, transparent, accountable, and meaningful participation of **Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)** is considered vital to the following aspects:

* It can strengthen the Strategy’s potential to support and enhance regional dialogue among the CSOs and help the networking and co-operation within the civil society (CS). In this sense, CSOs are an indispensable part of the structural dialogue, overall.
* Some CS activists, particularly the ones with strong institutional capacity, may be considered a valuable source of expertise and know-how, especially regarding the implementation of SDGs at a local level, disseminating results, etc. With their accumulated good practices, CSO are to be seen as important assets in providing alternative ideas and feedbacks to SDG-related actions.
* CS can contribute significantly to the monitoring process by providing their research findings.
* CSOs can contribute to the visibility and dissemination of SEE 2030 Agenda via projects with the multiplier effect and dissemination campaigns.
* Many SDG elements, particularly those related to spatial planning of local services, green transition and digitalisation, could be better addressed through the localisation of their implementation. In this sense, the involvement of CS at grassroots / local level is extremely important for successful implementation of SDGs.

Moreover, particular effort is to be made to enhance the role and participation of the region’s **think tanks** in SEE 2030. The SEE 2030 could be instrumental in utilising the collective capacity of think tanks by connecting them with the regional statistics and policy prioritisation effectors. At the same time, intensified regional dialogue, peer-to-peer reviews and other types of exchange of regional experiences could then be localised through think tanks. It is safe to say that think tanks have significant policy formulation and advisory capacities that went untapped in the SEE so far. Some of them have strong access to donor-financed technical assistance and accumulated world-level experience. They also have substantial capability in doing policy-level research and recommendation. Taking actions to incorporate such capacity into the regional priorities of SEE 2030 would be extremely helpful in creating synergy between regional, sub-regional, economy-level and local initiatives and actions.

Last but not least, the involvement of **academia** in the dialogue can fill a gap in the SEE region, where institutions providing formal or non-formal education traditionally operate in parallel and separate from each other. This stands in contrast to the current academic evidence suggesting the efficiency of civic, cross-sectorial educational models which combine methods of formal and non-formal learning. Participatory and trans-disciplinary synergies are proven to disrupt hierarchical development models and localise best practices (SDG 17).

**2.**  **Establishing dialogue with parliaments of the SEECP participants**

The SEE 2030 Strategy, supporting the Parliamentary Dimension of the SEECP, aspires to establish a dialogue with the respective SEE parliaments so as to foster and enhance the political ownership of this endeavour. Parliamentary contributions will also be vital to constantly updating the strategy according to the national priorities and needs of the SEECP participants, so as to preserve it as a living document.

The parliaments of each SEECP participant are already involved in the implementation of UN SDGs priorities in their economy-level strategies. Given the fact that the SEE 2030 is to build on the SEECP participant’s economy-level implementation of SDGs, regular information exchange with the SEE parliaments is thought necessary not only to secure the political level awareness of the parliaments but to enhance the regional dialogue among them on the SEE 2030 Strategy. Having the parliaments informed with substantiated implementation reporting of SEE 2030 and collecting their feedback would enrich further extension of the Strategy in parallel to the deepening of SEECP participant’s economy-level implementation of SDGs.

**3.** **Involving the private sector**

Taking stock of the lessons learnt by the SEE 2020 Strategy, where a top-down approach had not left enough space for productive involvement of the private sector, the SEE 2030 Strategy, with its participatory, bottom-up approach, provides ample room for dynamic participation of the implementers and intended beneficiaries on the ground, such as the private sector and its related institutions.

Enhancing public-private sector partnership and role of financial sector / financing for development for the implementation of SDGs in SEE is one of the Strategy’s key priorities. In addition to raising its awareness, sharing responsibility and increasing responsiveness to the SDG implementation, private sector participation should be seen also as a complementary resource to the public financing for the implementation of UN SDGs and SEE 2030 Strategy.

Moreover, this dialogue mechanism can serve to encourage the co-operation among the region’s private sector and civil society / academia through the provision and exchange of consultancy, training, research and practice, thus generating more collaboration and growth, especially in socially responsible projects, and having a direct positive impact on SEE societies.

The private sector participation in the implementation of both UN Agenda 2030 and SEE 2030 Strategy via different capacities is of crucial importance for the following reasons:

* The private sector is at the core of human capital development, research and innovation efforts of the region.
* Representatives of the financial sectors have a critical role in promoting Digital and Green Financing.
* The private sector can be a catalyst in mobilising funds in line with social and economic goals, particularly the ones related to education, health, environment and sanitation services as well as renewable energy, natural disaster risk reduction and sharing, spatial planning and localisation of SDGs implementation.
* The business sector plays an important role in respecting human and labour rights as determined by the relevant UN and ILO conventions, the European Social Charter of the Council of Europe, as well as the relevant EU legislation. In this regard, the implementation

of SEE 2030 could not be successful without active participation of the private sector.

* Productive and sustainable co-operation with the private sector is of critical importance for decelerating depopulation, as strong emigration would not only leave the private sector without the necessary skills pool but also narrow its demand base and eventually shorten its enterprise life span.

As described by the UN, the private sector would participate and contribute to the implementation of UN SDGs and SEE 2030 through the following four means: core business operations; value chains; social investments; and advocacy efforts. In this endeavour, the People-First approach to public-private partnerships will be encouraged in line with the relevant EU and UN policies / standards and guidelines on public procurement, corruption, and transparency. Therefore, the role and involvement of private sector in all dimensions and actions will be sought.

One of the aspirant Strategy targets is the establishment of a Bankers Associations’ Dialogue Mechanism for Development Financing aimed at introducing innovative approaches in financing responsive to SDGs and the SEE 2030 objectives.

**4.** **Region-to-region dialogue**

The SEE 2030 Strategy attaches utmost importance to region-to-region dialogue through which good practices, know-how and experiences in implementing the UN SDGs and Agenda 2030 would be shared at the regional level. In this regard, the Strategy aims to establish regional dialogue mechanisms with the Mediterranean and the Black Sea regions as the regions bordering on the SEE and having overlapping membership with the SEECP. There are also plans to facilitate meetings among banking and insurance associations and to regularise this dialogue so as to promote developmental financing.

**Challenges and suggested remedies**

Naturally, the efforts to establish and facilitate the dialogue mechanisms are not without challenges. We will outline just a few of them here.

1. In terms of numbers:

Thirteen SEECP participants multiplied by the number of potential contacts gives a significant number of institutions, organisations and experts that may have different agendas and conflicting time schedules.

1. In terms of expertise:

The stakeholders involved might have different levels of expertise and different understandings of the Strategy per se.

1. In terms of priorities:

Different representatives of SEECP participants might have conflicting interests or be in the state of competition, stand for different social / political ideologies or have convergent priorities.

1. Technical challenges:

Limited capacity and shrinking space are some of the other challenges to be considered.