



PROGRAMUL DE COOPERARE ELVEȚIANO-ROMÂN  
SWISS-ROMANIAN COOPERATION PROGRAMME

## Final Event on 25<sup>th</sup> of March 2019 in Bucharest, Romania

Your Excellency, Mr. Mattli, Ambassador designate of Switzerland  
Ladies and gentlemen  
Dear colleagues from Romania and Switzerland

It is a great pleasure to celebrate with you here at the Cărturești Carusel, a gorgeous and innovative bookshop, the successful implementation of our two funds to support the civil society in Romania and Swiss-Romanian partnerships.



The civil society in Romania – newly emerging after 1990 – has gained an important role in the democratic development and today comprises of 42'000 active associations, foundations and federations in rural and urban areas. This represents a fairly high degree of civic engagement compared to other EU countries but has yet to catch up with Switzerland's more than 100'000 civil society organisation for less than half of the population of Romania.

The civil society in Romania has become very active and important. It has gained strength over the past years as it regularly mobilised activists to safeguard the new liberties and democratic principles.

Civil society organisations with their staff, boards, members and volunteers play an important role in providing services for vulnerable people which are not served by public services for various reasons. They are also innovators in rural and urban areas by developing new living opportunities and addressing neglected or emerging issues. And last but not least they pinpoint to problems and advocate for change in practices, policies and laws in order to improve the access to and the quality of social services as well as to protect the environment.

Our two funds supported several hundred civil society organisations in Romania focusing on innovative and crucial initiatives contributing to solving contemporary development problems. Thus, we tried to select the most relevant projects with skilled and dedicated Swiss and Romanian partners.

During more than three hundred monitoring visits to executing agencies we came across numerous highly motivated young leaders and dedicated people who have a clear vision about desired change that improves the life of their communities and families. To convert a nice idea into meaningful and mobilising activity - ultimately leading to social change and tangible improvements or impact - requires a good portion of courage, dedication and stamina.

The fascination of the two funds lied in their diversity of issues addressed ranging from mental health, care for disabled, education for vulnerable children, community development, eco-tourism, income generation by marketing of local products, safeguarding biodiversity and improving the quality of urban

spaces. A few highlights from among the projects are presented here but all involved Romanian and Swiss organisations and thousands of their members and supporters deserve a big thank you for their great investment in time, for sharing their ideas, shaping new policy frameworks and strengthening the bilateral ties between Romania and Switzerland.

Two examples were especially enlightening for me:

**ADEPT (Transilvania Foundation)** established a mountain bike trail from Viscri to Sighisoara. The related promotion of the area as a biking destination including mountain bike contests contributed to an impressive growth of tourists and cyclists. Several guesthouses were established or newly constructed and bike-rental shops have been opened. The discussions about the ownership and maintenance of the trail led to intensive local debates after it was partially destroyed by logging activities. This contributed to increased awareness about the importance of such infrastructure and the role of various stakeholders to make it sustainable.



ADEPT

**The Association of Training** created the *House of experiments* in Bucharest. The exhibition attempts to increase the students' interest in science by offering out-of-school learning opportunities. Since the opening in January 2016 more than 130'000 children, teachers and adults visited the location and enjoyed the various electric, chemical and physical experiments.



KEK-CDC

These are just two out of the 141 projects which have all been very active in promoting their activities and the Swiss-Romanian Cooperation Programme through publications, press conferences, social media and video productions.

The new [website](#) developed by ARGO provides an excellent testimony of the various projects and their achievements. Now, interested users can get closer insights and links of the various projects. This legacy may also help to further consolidate the networks among the civil society actors.

We have learned many things along the way but two are outstanding:

- 1) Such a complex programme can only be implemented smoothly if all stakeholders share a joint vision, are dedicated to the support of the civil society and make compromises for pragmatic solutions.
- 2) It requires a good level of trust among the various stakeholders believing in the good intentions of the involved people and institutions. Striking a good balance between monitoring and controlling on the one hand and being flexible for newly emerging needs and opportunities on the other hand, remains vital.

We, from the Swiss Intermediate Body (SIB), believe that the two funds have contributed to a vibrant civil society in Romania and fostered the linkages between Swiss and Romanian partners. On behalf of the SIB, I would like to thank SDC and the local representation, the Embassy and the Swiss Contribution Office in

Bucharest as well as the representatives of the National Coordination Unit for their generous, precise and timely support during the past years.

Special thanks also go to my colleagues from CSDF and REPF for the efficient and effective cooperation and big dedication to the funds during the past 8 years. They had to endure lengthy discussions in order to harmonise two different and rather complex administrative systems – namely the Romanian and the Swiss – in order to make the funds work.

I hope that this event together with the launching of the website and the photo-album provides further evidence of the capacity of the civil society as a change agent and the need for further support. The provision of social services, the promotion of voluntary work and the vigilant observation of governance issues remain important tasks in the coming years. The current discussions in the Swiss parliament for a next contribution are therefore hopefully the start of a new beginning.

Thank you and a *foarte multumesc*

Dieter Zürcher, Head of the SIB