PRESS RELEASE

**NEW GLOBAL INITIATIVE REPORT LOOKS AT THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN TACKLING ORGANIZED CRIME AND CORRUPTION IN THE WESTERN BALKANS**

**VIENNA, Austria – 15 March 2021:** Less than 1 per cent of civil society organizations (CSOs) registered in the Western Balkans deal directly with organized crime or corruption, a new report from the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC) has found.

The new report produced by the GI-TOC’s **Observatory of Illicit Economies in South Eastern Europe (SEE-Obs), ‘Stronger together: Bolstering resilience among civil society in the Western Balkans’**,published on Monday 15 March 2021, shows that few of the 100 000 CSOs in the Western Balkans Six (WB6) are focused on one of the most serious and widespread threats to the region. At the same time, the report maps out where CSOs are active in reducing the vulnerability associated with organized crime and corruption in the Western Balkans by working on issues related to drug use, youth development, post-prison reintegration, media freedom, environmental issues and integrating marginalized groups.

The report, based on more than 100 interviews with CSOs in the field, underlines the important role that civil society plays in dealing with organized crime, the main challenges that CSOs dealing with this topic face in the Western Balkans, and identifies good practices.

‘This report shows that the space for civil society in the Western Balkans is shrinking,’ said lead author Kristina Amerhauser. ‘This is concerning since civil society has a key role to play in strengthening resilience to organized crime and corruption.’

Based on the research findings, it is evident that CSOs that deal with youth, that include social enterprises, that act as service providers and that are engaged in local media or research provide the best entry points for having an impact in their communities.

Some conclusions highlighted in the report are:

* Organized crime and corruption need to be brought closer to the community by demystifying the issue and explaining its impact on communities.
* There needs to be more effective regional cooperation between CSOs dealing with organized crime and cooperation in the WB6.
* CSOs need to find a way to keep open channels of communication with different levels of government – to be non-governmental rather than anti-governmental officials.
* International donors should be more sensitive to the challenges of CSOs working in this field, particularly small CSOs with limited capacity in small communities.
* CSOs should formulate and communicate messages more clearly to shape the discourse on organized crime and take small but sustainable steps in the community to build resilience.
* CSOs should initiate misdemeanor or criminal proceedings before the relevant state authorities after investigative journalists break a story.

*‘We hope that this report can contribute to a better understanding of the local impact of organized crime and highlight the work of brave and dedicated people in their communities,’ said co-author Walter Kemp. ‘Although civil society organizations face major challenges in the Western Balkans, solidarity can help them become stronger together.’*

The report will be presented on 19 March in a 90-minute webinar featuring insights from the GI-TOC’s research team and from civil society representatives who will discuss the importance of civil society in tackling organized crime in the Western Balkans. Interpretation will be provided into Albanian, Macedonian and Bosnian-Montenegrin-Serbian.

**Find out more:**

**For more information on the event,** [**click here**](https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/resilient-balkans/)

**For more information on the Observatory,** [**click here**](https://globalinitiative.net/observatory/see_obs/)

**For further questions please contact Claudio Landi (****Claudio.landi@globalinitiative.net****).**

About the Global Initiative

*The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime is a network of professionals working on the frontlines of the fight against the illicit economy and criminal actors. Through a network of global civil society observatories on the illicit economy, we monitor evolving trends and work to build the evidence basis for policy action, disseminate the expertise of our Network and catalyze multisectoral and holistic responses across a range of crime types. With the Global Initiative’s Resilience Fund, we support community activists and local NGOs working in areas where crime governance is critically undermining people’s safety, security and life chances.*

About the SEE-Obs

*The Observatory is a platform that connects and empowers civil-society actors in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia. The Observatory aims to enable civil society to identify, analyze and map criminal trends, and their impact on illicit flows, governance, development, interethnic relations, security and the rule of law, and supports them in their monitoring of national dynamics and wider regional and international organized-crime trends. The Observatory was launched as an outcome of the 2018 Western Balkans Summit in London, a part of the Berlin Process.*