WELCOME SPEECH AND INTRODUCTION

Anna-Karin Berglund started the conference introducing to the Swedish national agreement signed in 2008 in the social sphere between the central government and associations. The agreement was the result of a huge dialogue process and was established in order to develop a great diversity of suppliers and providers of social care. In the agreement, the government and associations agreed on 6 common principles: autonomy and independence, dialogue, quality, continuity and long term relations, transparency and diversity.

Looking back to the 6 years that have passed since then, Anna-Karin addressed the question of what has been learnt. Experience and results vary from amongst cities depending on the size. But generally the agreement allowed public authorities to gain more confidence in civil society, to multiply public/private partnerships and to procure taking into considerations social aspects.

However, there are still many challenges: the administration has to renew the way it interacts with the civil society to adopt a more participatory approach. The aim of the day is then to exchange ideas, best practices and contribute to the debate.

AGREEMENTS – WHAT’S THAT? A COMPREHENSIVE INTRODUCTION WITH A EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE

Håkan Johansson, professor School of Social Work, Lund University
Roberto Scaramuzzino, researcher School of Social Work, Lund University

The two speakers raised the question of building and developing politics together and expressed the challenge of creating synergies between a diversity of actors from civil society, researchers, to public authorities. Being part of a research group, the speakers demonstrated through various academic papers that agreements are interesting because they constitute an illustration of how the various stakeholders are seeking for solutions together. Although dialogues and forums existed before, agreements have brought in a new formalised cooperation between actors, relying on debate and dialogue. In a context where civil society has less trust in the political process, agreements represent an answer of the potential decline of democracy. Agreements also demonstrate that other actors want to participate in the civil society, not only politicians.

In the Swedish context, with the involvement of new private actors, agreements constitute the answers to broader democratic changes in one hand and welfare state changing
on the other hand.

At the EU level, the European Commission is being very creative and very active in the way it is formalising a relationship between the EU and representatives from the civil society (see the citizens initiative introduced by the Lisbon Treaty - 2009). Although it would be over emphasising to talk about a trend, many other member states have developed different forms of formalised agreements: the role model is the UK compact (1998), followed by France (2001), Denmark (2001), Estonia (2002), Belgium (2007) and Sweden (2008).

When it comes to define what an agreement is, we discover a diversity of forms: they have some kind of normative elements; they are often formally signed by high profile politicians that take the responsibility to implement them; most of them describe the actors, the principles - including dialogue and partnerships, independence, anti-corruption, transparency - and the policy areas; they often include a code of conducts to inform on actors should behave when interacting with each other; they often include some financial aspects; they often include how the agreement should be implemented and evaluated.

The two speakers concluded by saying that agreements are a way to understand who the key actors and to strengthen tights with stronger partnerships. Agreements bring legitimacy to both the public authorities at the decision making process and to umbrella organisations amongst the society. Creating a common document means creating responsibility. Some interests may be lost in order to make compromise. Another challenge is how to use a compact as a tool: when the agreement is in place the dialogue has to continue to arrive to another agreement.

The speakers drew on the attention some further questions to be debated: Who should produce the agreement at the local level? How much shall a sector speak with one voice? How to guarantee the influence from smaller organisations? Do they lose the possibility for influence? What is the best channel related to the question of dialogue vs citizen initiatives?

**INDEPENDENT VOLUNTARY SECTOR IN AN EVOLVING ENVIRONMENT**

*Caroline Slocock, Director of Civil Exchange and Head of the Secretariat to the Panel on the Independence of the Voluntary Sector*

The context in which the relationship state/voluntary sector evolves has changed. Since 2001, money going to voluntary sector has dramatically increased; voluntary sector has been acting as a contract partner. But very recently, in the years 2011-2012, money has started to reduce with a fear of loss of funding. It has been estimated that 75% of public think that the sector is essential. In parallel, it has been observed that there has been a disengagement from people to political party whilst at the same time, public prefers giving money to voluntary sector. In that context, the coalition government started to talk about the big society, a force that is different from the state and from the market.

But is the compact working? The results show a mixed picture. Disproportionate cuts
have gone to the voluntary sector who is still not seen as a social partner. Public contracts have gone to very big companies - 60% of contracts going to 100 suppliers. In that context, the sector is losing a lot of money and the money is not being replaced. The question raised is how do you generate social value as opposed to reward the lowest contract? Due to public spending cuts, the trend is going to continue although the government is trying to reinvent itself. Will the voluntary sector become the new welfare safety net? Or just a mere arm of state?

To make sure an agreement between state and voluntary sector can work, Caroline Slocock insisted on the core value that is for the voluntary organisation to remain independent in terms of purpose, voice and action. Organisations should be freely established and run no matter where the money is coming from; they should be free to negotiate and design a contract. Without independence, organisations would not get money nor volunteers. Being independent allow them to stay connected to a diversity of communities whilst articulating people’s causes. However, the legitimacy to campaign has been threatened in the UK lately, when some organisations have been criticised by politicians (see Oxfam, Foodbank), which has led to self-censorship. Furthermore, it has been observed a certain trend for public authorities to put terms and conditions when giving money to organisations creating interfere with independence.

To sum up, the compact has been widely adopted but failed in the implementation phase. When it has been done, it has been done very well. There is a need for a wider and share understanding by key stakeholders and government of where the voluntary sector is adding value. We also need to recognise the value beyond money. People talking about money: how can we make the voluntary sector more professional? and more valuable? What is important is not only the delivery of services but the collaboration and the design of process. what we need is collaboration and a new funding model in particularly to support innovation.

Caroline Slocock concluded by saying that in the UK the state has been willing to work with voluntary sector for a long time and will continue. But threats suggest that we have not yet the best way to make this work. The compact is not sufficient so we need a share understanding of what is distinctive.
FIVE COUNTRIES, FIVE AGREEMENTS AND FIVE INTERESTING EXAMPLES

England
Karl Wilding, Director of Public Policy at National Council for Voluntary Organisa-
tions NCVO

Relationship was characterised by tensions and misunderstandings back in the 90’s. Since then, and following the compact years, the relationships although not perfect has been characterised by great successes. Voluntary sector clearly have more role in the provision of public service.

How has the compact changed to stay relevant? Since signed in 1998, the compact have gone under further changes in 2009 and 2010 when the new government came to power. There is a need for a strong independent society in this country recognised from the government. In practice, to make that agreement living, there must be a regular and ongoing dialogue between the voluntary sector and government.

It has been underlined that there is sometimes too much emphasis on the agreement in itself rather than on the principles and how they are implemented. A “compact week” is organised once a year to look at how compact and governments work together during which the best practices are presented. It is a constant task to understand how actors work, including how the government works in terms of trading offs and decision making process. Compact has not been used in the way to rebalance power but to strengthen local partnerships: whilst trying to find areas where both government and voluntary sector are agreeing on and are pursuing the same outcomes. That’s the way they are heading to in the UK.

Estonia
Marten Lauri, Adviser in the field of Civil Society, Regional Administration Department, Estonian Ministry of the Interior
Maris Jõgeva, Executive Director NENO Network of Estonina Nonprofit Organisations

Agreement has been approved by the parliament in comparison with other countries where it was signed by the government. More than 2000 people participated in the debate carried out by small, big, diverse organisations around the country to understand how this cooperation could work. There was a wish for centralised leadership and vertical relations. At the same time, there was a space for a horizontal participation within a bottom-up approaches. In such a scheme, civil society intervenes as a watchdog as well as a partner.

The agreement has been used in 6 different areas including infrastructure where a training and advisory center around Estonia has been established; a state-funding civil society fund was created; efforts have been put on participation and coordination; a volunteering network was built up to spread the values of volunteering; philanthropic giving activities have been successful. However, initiatives in the civic education sphere have been more difficult to realise as they depend on very different policies areas.
To implement the agreement, a joint committee composed with 11 members from the government and 10 members from the NGO’s was set up for regular meetings. However, some challenges have been identified: this committee has become more like a place to gather in order to get more information on the government plan but not really about how the partnership could be developed. Furthermore, the civil society has not been too active because they don’t see the joint committee as a great center for influence. The agreement is working on action plans. Concerning monitoring, there are some good practices but they are not followed. There is a lack of work on interpretation of principles but civil society does not feel that secure to complain.

The Estonian representatives concluded by saying that it was important to be aware of the fact that partners are not equal in terms of power and resources. Then, the role and the responsibility are a bit blurry and the following questions have been raised: is the gov facilitating or leading the process? Is it a shared responsibility between government and civil society? There has been too much emphasis on the institutionalised civil society; there is a need to strengthen the leadership from both sides, for a stronger cooperation.

**Denmark**

*Kasper Overgaard Ingeholm, Ministry for Children, Gender Equality, Integration and Social Affairs, Office for Vulnerable and Civilian Communities*

*Dorte Norregaard Gotthardsen, Center for Volunteering in the Social Area*

The Charter covers all policies areas but it’s not an institutionalised agreement: it is more like a loose agreement, no legally binding. Its success has worked on mutual trust. The charter was signed in 2001 by 5 ministers responsible for the different areas in health, culture, interior, environ, education and children. It stipulates guidelines, principles that are important within the relationships with volunteers. Some of the values and principles prescribed in the charter are the following: to see diversity is a strength; to work as equal partner; cooperation is a prerequisite for the development of the society. In Denmark, the idea behind the charter is to foster interaction for a better society; the initial ambition was not to use it in all areas but to be inspired from, to remember of.

A new charter was adopted in 2013 that includes more formal collaborations between sectors and new assignments given to the voluntary sector that used to be reserved to public entities. In the new document, efforts have been put to make it as a living agreement. More than 500 organisations and local councils were invited to work on the new charter written by a working group representatives of different actors. Some follow-ups initiatives were set up: 5 regional dialogue meetings - corresponding to the 5 regions in
Denmark - were organised during which all actors were invited. The speakers mentioned it had been hard to measure the progress during the implementation phase. It seems that more municipalities have been using it in comparison with voluntary organisations. The new charter has been essentially used as an inspiration to keep the principles at sight continually.

**Belgium**

*Brightness Mouligneau, process manager Flanders in Action, official of the Flemish Government*

*Bart Verhaeghe, Policy Coordinator of the United Associations*

In Flander, the charter was signed in 2006-2007 within the framework of the Pact 2020 as part of the “Flanders in Action Plan”. Prior to it, the debate started with 2000 organisations coming from different sectors (academics, non profits, journalists) gathered around the question: what is our common ambition? The charter set several goals covering over 300 projects. At the same time, economic crisis, and societal challenges including immigration, cross-borders, poverty, complexified the situation, undermining the implementation of the charter. So in 2011, the partners met again whilst focusing on fewer areas - 13 instead of 300 - and using a new method based on 5 steps: analysing the system, envisioning, experimentation, assessing, translating.

This new charter also stressed some key issues - social innovation, inequality, diversity, participation - and included some key principles - interaction and cooperation, efficient policy, societal transition to civil organisations. Although the charter is not legally binding, it has brought a big impact. This work lead to a memorandum to further strengthen transitions underlying the following messages: create awareness, think ahead and act now and work with the whole ecosystem. However threats still exist and need to be tackled such as the instrumentalisation of the voluntary sector or the balance between the cooperation and providing legitimacy to the government.

**Poland**

*Ewa Galka, Director PISOP (The Association Centre of Promotion and Civil Initiatives Development)*

*Lukasz Grzybak, responsible for the cooperation in Poznan*

The speakers gave an overview of how the civil society was organised in Poland before focusing on the example of Poznan, the 4th biggest city in Poland, where an agreement was signed between the local government and local NGO’s. There are two forms of NGO’s: Associations (36,000) and foundations (5,000). But most of the times, those organisations are not active and don’t have the resources. NGO’s are undertaking more and more public services. According to the principle of subsidiarity set by the Polish Constitution, local governments are very strong at local levels giving them the competence to address local affairs. In terms of cooperation and agreements between the civil society and local authorities, there is in principle a good mutual understanding and awareness but limited partnerships. In Poznan, there are over 4000 NGO’s. The agreement signed at local level includes an annual cooperation agenda prepared every year by the local government and NGO’s working together; it also contains the main principles of cooperation and areas of partnerships. The agreement also created a council of public
benefit, a public dialogue commission and an NGO’s and voluntary support center. The aim is also to promote volunteering activities, by for instance electing the “volunteer of the year”, in a country where 90% of the NGO’s were created from the 90’s.

SOCIAL INNOVATION, PARTNERSHIP AND NON-PROFIT ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Ariane Rodert, Policy Adviser in EU Affairs for Famna and Forum – idea-based organisations, and member of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESK)

Ariane Rodert started her presentation with an overview of the role of the European Economic and Social Committee, the European institution acting as a bridge between the organised civil society and the other European institutions. The EU is actively working on two policy trends social innovation and social enterprises. There is a paradigm shift and the EESC is acting on it and calls on the Member State to take fully advantage of the opportunities set by the EU legislation. Ariane Rodert raised and explained some key issues on how to create the best social innovative partnerships and explained why civil society is the driving seat and needs that enabling environment to operate that paradigm shift. At this stage it is crucial to find ways to move from agreements to implementation.

The EU supports social enterprise as a feature for European social model. The civil society is looking for a common partnership but needs to be involved earlier. Dialogues are important but it’s important not to get stuck in those consultations. There is a need for a new way of working, a new set of mind, a space for innovation and for sharing failures. Public authorities have to be brave and policy makers should better connect different areas. There are some obstacles in terms of legislation so it is important to encourage governments to conduct some impact investment evaluations. We need to actually measure what matters. Even though in times of cuts and budget constraints, there are opportunities: we have a new commission in office that has already shown some good indications. However, the new opportunities need to be seized at national and local levels as well.