

**The fourth meeting of the Steering Committee of the EaP Civil Society Forum  
5-6 September, Kyiv, Ukraine  
Minutes**

The Steering Committee (SC) of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) Civil Society Forum (CSF) held its fourth meeting this year in Kyiv, Ukraine to discuss final preparations for the EaP Civil Society Forum in Chisinau and Forum's activities, to debate on the Forum's organisational structure and its correspondence to the Forum's goals, as well as to share recent developments in the National Platforms and Working Groups and to receive the report on the work of the Secretariat.

The following members of the SC were in attendance: Krzysztof Bobinski, Boris Navasardian, Gubad Bayramov, Yaroslav Bekish, Yaryna Borenko, Lilia Carasciuc, Anna Golubovska-Onisimova, Nikolai Kvantaliani, Hennadiy Maksak, Mikheil Mirziashvili, Gintaras Morkis, Vera Řiháčková, Oleksandr Sushko and Kristina Vaiciunaite. The Secretariat of the SC of the EaP CSF was represented by its Director Natalia Yerashevich and Communications Manager Ivanna Volochiy.

On the 4<sup>th</sup> of September, in the margins of the Steering Committee meeting, the strategy task force formed from the members of the Steering Committee as well as other experts actively involved in the Forum's activities discussed value added of the Forum, reviewed the current short-term and long-term objectives of the Forum and started setting new ones.

**5 September**

The morning session of the first day of the SC meeting was opened with updates on the current political, social and economic developments in 6 EaP countries followed by the news and recent developments from the National Platforms and Working groups.

Armenia

- Recent political developments with regard to Armenia joining the Eurasian Custom Union rather than pursuing the objective of signing the DCFTA with the EU and impact of these developments on the Armenian National Platform
- General Conference of the platform to be held on 19<sup>th</sup> September; all Working Groups of the Platform will hold their meetings in September
- Report on the observation of the recent presidential election produced and can be found here <http://goo.gl/57EaL2>
- Organisational changes in NP: new body, ombudsman office, consisting of all previous national coordinators and independent from the managing committee, was established.

- Secretariat of the platform established with acting communication officer and director in place; no funding at the moment
- Meeting of Commissioner Füle with the National Platform in the frames of EaP Informal Ministerial Meeting on Education on 13<sup>th</sup> of September. The National Platform sent the letter to the Commissioner to cancel his visit due to the recent political developments in Armenia.

#### Azerbaijan

- Presidential election is approaching. Administrative resource is being used by the current president to conduct campaign
- Dialogue between the National Platform, the EU Delegation in Azerbaijan and Azeri representatives in EURONEST
- Difficult to conduct events in the regions before the election; activists arrested; NP issued a statement on that
- The National Platform operates on the principle that attendees of the Forum become the NP participants; currently, 53 member organizations are part of the NP.
- NP members organised Regional Seminar on Public Finance Management <http://eap-csf.az/?p=160>

#### Belarus

- Two political prisoners were released
- The NP produced a statement calling for immediate release of all political prisoners.
- New trade war with Russia on potash
- NP held 3 expert meetings. The event on green energy scheduled for June was not allowed to take place by the BY authorities and was moved to the end of October. 10 policy papers on energy security and environmental protection were produced.
- European Dialogue for Modernization – EC has chosen the implementing partner in Belarus – Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies; currently the discussion of the format to make the dialogue more inclusive is ongoing
- Several political parties announced their decision to participate in the election campaign in 2015.

#### Georgia

- European Integration Communication Strategy for Georgia produced by the NP has been approved by the Government and will be implemented starting 2014
- Two representatives of the NP are part of the Commission on illegal surveillance; database of 18,000 files and recordings should be destroyed shortly; NP initiated discussion with mobile providers on the draft law on restrictions on surveillance

- The NP is actively engaged in following the situation in prisons; official council on prevention of torture has been created that includes 40 experts, 10 of whom represent the NP
- Media freedom – high scores for Georgia given by the media freedom index: <http://goo.gl/RJToVk>
- International observers' project in advance of the elections
- Assessment of reforms and how the European agenda is followed

#### Moldova

- Political fights in the beginning of the year; MD government is very much interested in AA; civil society and intellectuals support the AA, though people from rural areas are concerned about the AA's consequences for MD agriculture. The public is not well informed about the DCFTA. Information campaigns need to be conducted
- Declaration of the National Platform on pressure from Russia.
- Request to Commissioner Füle to send civilian monitoring mission to observe the situation between Chisinau and Transnistria and to avoid provocations from both sides

#### Ukraine

- Association agreement - civil society groups are formulating their position and developing scenarios that are most probable to take place in Vilnius.
- Political groups are more willing to work to have the AA signed, however there is lack of political trust and will.
- There is no feeling of irreversibility – Armenia example. The UA government underestimates the possibility of AA not being signed, as the signing can be blocked by one of the member states.
- NP conducts various activities with a focus on Association Agreement
- Law packages are currently voted on rapidly by the Parliament to insure the positive perception before the signing of association.
- Annual conference of the NP - 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> September. Large number of applications for the NP. Will develop statements on Vilnius summit and AA. Parliament and Government officials are invited to the conference.
- Presentation of the European Integration Index on the 4<sup>th</sup> of September. <http://goo.gl/QmjXUI>
- On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of September conference on social implications of DCFTA organized by the second working group of the NP and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung was held. <http://goo.gl/k6lqrY>

**Working groups updates:**

- Working Group 1. Democracy, human rights, good governance and stability  
Krzysztof Bobinski informed that the project proposals submitted to the EU Delegation in Baku on election observation will not be funded. On the positive note, he added the EP has revised its decision not to send EP observers for the presidential elections in Azerbaijan.

Subgroup news: A representative from the Subgroup on Local Government and Public Administration Reform participated in the plenary Meeting of CORLEAP on the 3 September in Vilnius. <http://goo.gl/2CIGzd>

- Working Group 2. Organised an event on the “Economic Integration and Convergence with EU Policies” on economic integration of Ukraine in June 2013 in Chernihiv, Ukraine. <http://goo.gl/FSq7qz>;  
International Conference on "Social and Economic Dimensions of the DCFTAs with EaP countries" in Kyiv, Ukraine - September 2013 <http://goo.gl/dpC2Qo>
- Working Group 3 ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENERGY SECURITY. Annual Meeting of the group took place on 8th July, 2013 in Chisinau highlighting the launch of Clima East Project (2-4 July 2013) in Brussels.  
On the same dates the Energy Security Platform meeting was held in Vilnius with 2 representatives of the WG3 taking part in it.
- Working Group 4. Annual Meeting of Working Group took place mid-June. Sub-group Culture representatives were present at the Cultural Ministerial in Tbilisi (end of June) and took part in EaP Culture Congress in October. Regional seminar on the practical implementation of the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions to take place in Lviv, October 23-25, 2013.  
Youth side event to be organized before the Chisinau Forum on 2-3 October;  
Cooperation with the Regional Youth Unit of EaP; more input and consultations with civil society should be organised.
- Working Group 5.  
Concerns of the Armenian and Moldovan participants on the focus of the activities of the WG5 on social dialogue only. How to redefine the group? It was decided to make the focus of the group broader to include social rights and policies and possibly in Chisinau see if WG5 can be merged with WG2.

### **Discussion of the project on the CSF National Platforms Strengthening**

The members of the SC expressed their concern on how the regional component of the project on strengthening National Platforms is progressing. It was decided that a meeting of the Steering Committee of the project is needed to clarify the management structure and pending actions. The issues raised by the SC during its previous meeting with project manager Victor Cotruta from REC Moldova have not been addressed by the management of the project.

### **Update from EU coordinators**

Mikheil Mirziashvili updated on the Crisis Management Initiative's Black Sea Peace-building project that covers 5 countries of the EaP. It was agreed to conduct the first meeting on a new sub-group on regional stability during the Forum in Chisinau.

Vera Řiháčková informed on the recently produced policy paper <http://goo.gl/JHSJeR>. The upcoming elections in the EU and change of the Enlargement Commissioner in 2014 have been brought up as prompting the CSF to work hard on sustaining the Member States' support to the EaP initiative in general. It was suggested to set up an Advisory Group of influential figures who could help the Forum in this task.

### **Update from CSF Secretariat**

- The 4-year project for producing the European Integration Index have been submitted to SIDA and the decision on it will be made in October. The project will be implemented by PASOS (coordination of research, peer-review process, scoring, editing), the Secretariat (advocacy events, fundraising, updating the Index website, reporting to donors), a Ukrainian NGO (coordination of the Ukrainian research team, kick-off meeting in Kyiv, printing the Index), OSI (expert support) plus several members of the previous core team. Kyiv-based International Renaissance Foundation will be providing part of the funding for the first year of the project.
- On the future funding of the Secretariat, the SC was informed that the Commission will make a decision in November.
- It was suggested by the SC that the Secretariat fund-raise for the small project that will include experience sharing events for the National Platforms to collect the best practices and to develop unified minimal rules and basic organisational principles and a list of optional best practices for the National Platforms who will however continue to enjoy their autonomy. It was also agreed on the need to collect and put in writing already

established rules and principles guiding the operation of Working Groups, Sub-Groups, the Steering Committee, as well as the Forum in general as well as to produce the description of responsibilities for all the members of the SC, what will facilitate the nomination and election of the SC members during the Forum and will serve as a canvas for the activities throughout the year.

- The need for having a written manual/instructions for new WG and sub-group Coordinators was stated to ensure continuity in WG and sub-group activities from year to year when the Coordinators change.
- Possibility for NPs and WGs to conduct advocacy events in Brussels with the support of the Secretariat. It was agreed that advocacy should feature more prominently on the agenda of the Forum. It was agreed that advocacy events may only be organised on behalf of the National Platforms or a Working Groups. Yaroslav Bekish mentioned that for Belarusian NP this may be problematic and that events of the **organisations** of the National Platforms can also be supported. The SC has not made a decision on the matter thus leaving the rule that the advocacy events should be initiated by the NPs or Working Groups rather than single organisations.

### **Decisions of the Steering Committee:**

The SC has decided on the items below and will suggest the following matters for the consideration of the whole Forum in Chisinau:

- To form an Advisory group of influential public figures who will help sustain interest in EaP and Forum. The decision on the members of the Advisory Board of the Forum will be made by consensus by the current SC and list of the advisory group will be shared with the Forum in Chisinau.
- Three positions of the EU Coordinators of the Forum will be eliminated due to the fact that their function (to strengthen advocacy and relations towards the EU institutions and member governments, to foster greater engagement of EU civil society organisations and networks in the Eastern Partnership process and the Partner countries, and to lobby for effective and sustainable support for civil society in the Partner countries through EU funding mechanisms) will be performed by the newly established Advisory Board and an Advocacy Officer at the CSF Secretariat in Brussels who will be serving as a Secretary of the Advisory Board and will work in tight cooperation with Co-Chairs of the SC, EU WG Coordinators, Advisory Board, and the SC in general. The EU Working Group Coordinators as the representatives of the EU civil society organisations will contribute to the advocating the Forum's interests.
- It was decided to come up with the draft strategy that will be shared with Forum participants two weeks before the Forum in English and Russian to ensure that they

have enough time to review and contribute. The input of the NPs and WGs can be collected during and after the Forum.

Other decisions:

- It was decided that there is no need to create an Ombudsman position /office at the Forum's level that would deal with complaints aimed at the Steering Committee and others. The decision was justified that there is no need to create another structure of the Forum that is already complicated enough. However it was decided that this function may be performed by a member of the Steering Committee. Putting in writing all the procedures and principles that were developed by the Forum in the years of its operation, but which are currently not reflected in the Forum's documents, and making them public will also help in decreasing the amount of complaints and in addressing the complaints.
- There is a need to codify Co-Chairs into the statute, where currently only one Chair is listed, and spell out and divide their functions.

### **Statements adopted by the SC**

The SC adopted two statements:

- Statement regarding intention of Armenian authorities to join Customs Union: <http://eap-csf.eu/en/news-events/news/statement-of-steering-committee-of-eastern-partnership-civil-society-forum-regarding-intention-of-armenian-authorities-to-join-customs-union/>
- EaP CSF Steering Committee condemns attack on its members in Yerevan - <http://eap-csf.eu/en/news-events/news/eap-csf-steering-committee-condemns-attack-on-its-members-in-yerevan/>

### **Next SC meetings**

The next meeting of the SC will take place in the morning of the 3rd of October in Chisinau to make final preparations for the Forum.

The new SC comes into force immediately after the election and will meet on the last day of the Forum to elect its Co-Chairs. However the old SC continues to serve as a task force on organisation of the civil society side event in the margins of the EaP summit in Vilnius.

The new SC will meet in Vilnius on 29 (afternoon)-30 November. Using the opportunity that the members of the old SC will be in Vilnius attending the civil society side event of the EaP



Summit, there will be a chance for the two compositions of the SC to come together to ensure continuity and discuss pending issues for half a day.

### **Meeting with the Ukrainian National Platform**

On the 6th of September, the Steering Committee met representatives of the Ukrainian National Platform. In a friendly atmosphere the participants exchanged views on the Forum activities and the activities of the National Platform. Most of the questions/comments addressed to the SC members were focused on how to take part in the Forum, communication pitfalls and suggestions and funding opportunities for NGOs. Oleksandr Sushko, the National Coordinator of the Ukrainian platform shared the updates on the work of Ukrainian National Platform, as well as future activities, including the Annual Meeting of the Platform in mid-September. The Steering Committee representatives commented on the recent developments in Armenia, Russia's pressure on EaP countries in advance of signing/initialling the Association Agreements/DCFTAs, EaP Summit in Vilnius, as well as possibility of cooperation between the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum and the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum. A member from the National Platform of Ukraine suggested to include security issues in the working groups discussions.

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