



NEWSLETTER

Activities of the Georgian National Platform
of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum

February-March-April, 2013

Issue #1

The Newsletter has been prepared in the framework of
the Project
“Strengthening and Capacity Building of Georgian National Platform
for the Eastern Partnership”.
funded by the European Union

Joint Activities of the Georgian National Platform

The Georgia National Platform elaborated “European Integration Communication and Information Strategy of Georgia (2013-2016) in cooperation with the State Ministry for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration of Georgia. The strategy defines the communication framework with the national and international society on Georgia’s EU integration process with its benefits and obligations. Implementation of the Strategy contributes to awareness raising of its target groups on the challenges, opportunities and commitments of the European integration process and facilitates mobilization of the international community. The Coordination Council with the other members of the National Platform presented the Strategy to the State Minister of Georgia on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration and to the Head of the Committee on European Integration of the Parliament of Georgia.

On the 26th of March, 2013 the Georgian National Platform released a statement on Georgia’s EU Integration Challenges and Cohabitation. In the Statement, initiated by the 1st Working Group, the signatory organisations welcome the steps of the executive and legislative branches of the Georgian government towards European Integration but at the same time warn against dissemination of false information about the cohabitation process and manipulation with the European integration issue (See the Statement: <http://eapnationalplatform.ge/index.php?a=main&pid=241&lang=eng>)

On April 29, 2013 with the initiate of the representatives of the 1st Working Group and Media, Georgian National Platform organised a conference “Civil Society against Illegal Surveillance”. The Conference aimed to discuss the issues pertaining to the footages gained through illegal surveillance of citizens by the previous Governments and the efficient mechanisms of parliamentary and civic control in order to prevent such precedents in future.

The Conference hosted the chairman of the Georgian Parliament, the Prime Minister of Georgia, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Deputy Minister of Justice, and other high officials from the Government, as well as representatives of international organisations and Diplomatic Missions in Georgia. The initiators of the Conference urged called upon the government to delete the footage of illegal surveillance, investigate the abuse and amend the respective legislation in order to guarantee that similar mechanisms will not be used by the current government. Furthermore, they urged to establish civil society control mechanisms.



The government representatives unanimously expressed their will to elaborate efficient mechanisms of parliamentary and civil control in cooperation with civil society and the media. A next meeting on the issue was scheduled for June in order to discuss the steps taken until then (<http://eapnationalplatform.ge/index.php?a=main&pid=249&lang=eng>).

Working Group I (WG1 -Democracy, Human Rights, Good Governance & Stability)

WG1 of Georgian National Platform released a Statement on the incident between three staff members of Georgian Association of Young Lawyers (GYLA) and the Head of the Headquarters of Ajara Ministry of Internal Affairs, Valerian Telia, occurred in Batumi on 28 March, 2013. The signatory organisations appealed to the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia and the Public Prosecutor's Office to conduct efficient investigation and provide the public with comprehensive information on the case (see the Statement: <http://eapnationalplatform.ge/index.php?a=main&pid=242&lang=eng>).

On February 26, 2013, the Conference “Ethnic Diversity for Cohesive Development” was organized by the Public Movement “Multinational Georgia” with assistance of the Multiethnic Resource Centre for Civic Education Development. The event was held in the framework of the project “Embrace Diversity – Respect for All” supported by the Embassy of the Netherlands to Georgia. The primary objective of the conference was to inform the respective stakeholders about the results of the qualitative researches carried out within the framework of the project the goal of which was to ascertain, deeply receive and analyze the problems, needs and challenges ethnic minorities are facing in the country. The underlined research has been conducted with the previously selected three focus groups with the participation of ethnic Armenian, Azerbaijani and other minority communities’ representatives. The conference hosted the experts dealing with ethnic minorities’ issues, Public Defender of Georgia, representatives of legislative and executive authorities, as well as international organizations and foreign missions accredited in Georgia (140 persons in total). More information about the conference is available at <http://pmmg.org.ge/index.php?m=4&nid=21>



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On April 11, 2013 the Coordinator of the WG1 and few members of the National Platform were invited to the discussion on the status quo of the Association Agreement for the Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius (November, 2013) by the State Minister of Georgia on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration.

The member organization of the WG1 “Georgia Press Association” actively participates in the hearings of the Parliamentary Committees and organizes the meetings with the focus groups in regards to the draft law on the amendments of the Public Broadcaster”, which is initiated by the Association.

Working Group 2 (WG2 - Economic Integration and Convergence with the EU Policies)

From the directions related to the Eastern Partnership, the member organizations of the second group have carried out a number of joint activities in the areas of food safety, innovation policy, and agriculture.

In regards to food safety, the Eurasia Partnership Foundation, as the leading organization, together with several organizations of the second working group, took part in the work on the new draft Code of Food Safety. The work involved multiple reviews of the versions of the code offered by the Food Safety Agency by each participating organization, by the entire group, and together with the Agency representatives. Several such rounds were held. In connection with the Code, a meeting was also held with the leadership of the Sector Economy and Economic Policy Committee of the Parliament. The participating NGOs aim at ensuring that the measures envisaged by the EU legislation are reflected in the Code. In order to do the work better, the Eurasian Partnership Foundation sent a large group of specialists to Poland (February 19-23, 2013) to study the food safety system.

The group also involved employees of the Food Safety Agency. Thus, a good example of cooperation of employees of governmental and non-governmental organizations in the area of food safety is being created. This work is also of key importance for signing the DCFTA, as well as for the development of trade with the EU in general (especially in the nearest years) and, what is most important, for the development of the national food industry and food trade.



The direction of innovation policy is lead by Association European Studies for Innovative Development of Georgia. The requirement to pay more attention to innovation policy was reflected in the decisions of both the second working group of the National Platform and the second working group of the CSF in the past years. Several organizations of the second group, as well as of the third group, are working actively in this direction. It is also worth mentioning the formation of an NGO coalition Innovative Georgia, the development and dissemination of recommendations on innovation policy for Georgia, and intensive relations with the relevant ministries and parliamentary committees. As a result of this, the Innovation Council was created under the Sector Economy and Economic Policy Committee of the Parliament of Georgia, many members of which are representatives of the organizations included in the second and third working groups. The first meeting of the Council was held on April 18, 2013, in Kutaisi, together with the meeting of the Sector Economy and Economic Policy Committee. In addition, an agreement has been reached with the relevant ministries and agencies on the organization of training of its employees in the area of innovation policy.

For intensifying the work in the field of agriculture, with the initiative of the Association for Farmers Rights Defense (AFRD), a Subgroup of the Agricultural Policy and Rural Development has been created on the basis of the WG2 which united also the members of other working groups.



On 22 April, 2013 the representatives of the Subgroup of the Agricultural Policy and Rural Development organized a meeting for discussing the Draft Bill on "Agricultural Cooperatives" initiated by the Agrarian Issues Committee of the Parliament of Georgia. The members of the Subgroup discussed the draft bill and presented their comments with the Head of the Agrarian Issues Committee, Mr. Gigla Agulashvili and other representatives of the Committee. The meeting hosed also experts from non-member organizations of the National Platform.

After the meeting, the package of the comments, suggestions and recommendations of the Members of the Subgroup has been officially presented to the Agrarian Issues Committe of the Parliament of Georgia for consideration.

In April, 2013 the Subgroup of the Agricultural Policy and Rural Development prepared an appeal to the Georgian Government expressing the support to local farmers and suggesting the temporary suspension of the land acquisition by foreigners (see the Statement: <http://eapnationalplatform.ge/index.php?a=main&pid=250&lang=eng>)

On February 15, 2013 the WG2 organized a meeting with the Minister of Infrastructure and Regional Development, Mr. Davit Narmania. The Meeting aimed to get acquainted with the new approaches, goals of the Ministry and to discuss the perspectives of cooperation with the Civil Society sector.

On the initiative of one of the organizations of the second working group, Woman and Business, in February this year, the second group took part in the review of the draft changes and amendments to the Labour Code. The organizations submitted concrete proposals to the group working on the draft in the Ministry of Justice of Georgia, a certain part of which were reflected in the Labour Code.

On March 7, 2013 the Georgian Association "Women in Business " and „Penal Reform International" organized a roundtable "Supporting Re-socialization of Women Prisoners". The project has been implemented with the financial support in the framework of the European Union (EU)

and the United Nation (UN) joint programme “To Enhance Gender Equality in Georgia”. The project has been implemented in cooperation with the Ministry of Corrections and Legal Assistance of Georgia (MCLA).

The project aims to contribute to the ongoing reforms in the criminal justice system of Georgia, in terms of assisting the rehabilitation and re-socialisation of the particular groups within the Georgian penitentiary system, and further advancement to the international and the European human rights standards. Beside the members of the National Platform, the roundtable hosted the representatives of the government (including the Minister of MCLA), the EU Delegation to Georgia, international organizations ad also, the Deputy Public Defender, Paata Beltadze.

After the roundtable, the Association “Women in Business” organized an exhibition-sale of the handicrafts made by women prisoners “Art for Dignity”, dedicated to the International Women’s Day.

It is also worth mentioning the “Stimulating Eastern Partnership work in Georgia” project which was carried out under the guidance of the Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies together with several organizations of the WG2. In the framework of the project, studies were conducted on the possibilities of convergence of the Georgian and EU policies in such areas as supporting small business, innovation policy and social dialogue. As a result of the project, seminars were held on the issue on deepening of trade relations with the EU, the report of the aforementioned studies was published in the form of a book and a newsletter was established which will cover the issues of the Eastern Partnership on a regular basis. The project was funded by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation.

On April 19-21, 2013, the Caucasian Institute for Economic and Social Research organized an educational tour in Bakuriani. Experts and representatives of the media/NGOs from Armenia and Azerbaijan discussed the progress achieved by the countries of the South Caucasus, the existing challenges, and future priorities in the framework of the EU Eastern Partnership Initiative program.

The study tour was organized in the framework of the project “V4 for C3 EU Integration”, with the financial support of the International Visegrad Fund. The project envisages sharing of experience of Civil Society of the Visegrad countries (V4 – the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia) with the South Caucasian countries (C3 – Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia) in terms of EU integration, namely on

sustainable development, development of free trade, social policies and social dialogue
(http://www.ciesr.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=52:2013-04-26-15-26-03&catid=9:news&lang=en&Itemid=)

Working Group 3 (WG3 - Environment, Climate Change and Energy Security)

Due to the high priority of environmental and energy security issues, the working group which unites 28 NGOs with the different profiles worked and continues to work actively both with the executive and legislative branches of the government. Specifically:

The working group took part in the discussion on the dam projects in Georgia and in the monitoring of the contract concluded by the country on the construction of the Khudoni hydroelectric power station (from January 1 to March, 2013), which resulted in the development of by eight participating NGOs.



On March 14, 2013 the WG3 held a public discussion dedicated to the International Day of Action for Rivers and against Dams.



- The aforementioned meeting is the 11th global event which is directed against dams and protects rivers, water and life. On this day, under the slogan “Let’s keep free rivers”, the world calls upon decision-makers to contribute to the protection of rivers through improving the existing practice and legislation. The meeting aimed at ensuring a direct dialogue among NGOs, local population and decision-makers.
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- The event involved representatives of the communities from the Mtskheta-Mtianeti, Imereti, Svaneti, Racha, and Adjara regions that will be directly affected if the new dams are constructed.



In February, 2013 the working group met with research fellows of the Institute for Geophysics to discuss the issues of seismic activity in the locations of the dams that are now under construction or in the pipeline.

The representatives of the WG3 took part in the trainings on the principles and criteria of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) and in the processes of Georgia’s accession to this initiative.

The working group is involved in the coalition programs on energy and environment in the framework of which a public assessment of the hydroelectric power stations planned to be built in the Racha region is being made.

On March 22, 2013 a youth conference was held in connection with the World Water Day.

On March 22, 2013, the WG3 participated in the round table discussion on the issue of water distribution in the conflict regions at which the participants discussed water-related problems in the conflict zone and adjacent areas.

Working Group 4 (Contacts between People)

The Working Group 4 members have defined priority working directions that laid a base for elaboration of the Action Plan for 2013 which was drafted in February, 2013.

In March, the Working Group 4 came up with a kit of ideas for initiating possible joint actions with National Platforms of the EaP countries.

In March, one of the coordinators of the Working Group 4 was invited to join the group on bilingual education recently created under aegis of the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia and working on the issues related to education of ethnic minorities in Georgia, including elaboration and improving the Georgian language teaching methodology and currently utilized approaches.

On March 1, 2013 six member-organizations of the Working Group 4 have elaborated the project titled “Delivery of assistance in the protection and promotion of social, economic, cultural, labor rights as well as rights to equal treatment of women, internally displaced persons and ethnic and religious minorities through strengthening HRDs rights protection capabilities” and consequently applied to the European Union in the framework of the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) program: Country –Based Support Scheme for Georgia.

The Working Group 4 is currently conducting preliminary works for organizing the workshop on the issues of cultural heritage protection in the framework of the capacity building program of the Georgian National Platform. Thereby, on March 18 a meeting with Dr.Oliver Reisner, representative of the EU Delegation to Georgia was held, and consequently with support of the latter the contacts were established with EU grantee civil society organizations working in the respective field. In line with this, on March 23, consultation meeting has been organized with Tamar Amashukeli, chairperson of the NGO “Tbilisi Hamkari”. On April 26, the Working Group 4 meeting has been organized in order to discuss the issues related to preparation of the workshop.

On April 7, one of the coordinators of the Working Group 4 was invited to the TV talk-show “Our Courtyard” at the Georgian Public Broadcaster which was dedicated to cultural issues.



The importance of the EaP Georgian National Platform and its activity for the promotion of civil society interests on local and international levels has been underlined.

On April 17, 2013 a meeting of the sub-working group on conflicts took place which was attended by Mikheil Mirziashvili, representative of the Finish organization “Crisis Management Initiative” and member of the EaP CSF Steering Committee. The meeting was dedicated to the issue of engagement of Abkhaz and South Ossetian colleagues in the Eastern Partnership format, as well as an option of their participation in the Civil Society Forums.

In April, 2013 a sub-working group on culture has been created in order to intensify activity in the field of culture.

Coordinators of the WG4 are conducting negotiations with the LEPL “Children and Youth Development Fund” functioning under aegis of the Ministry of Youth and Sport of Georgia in regard to signing the Memorandum of cooperation and mutual support.

On February, 2013 the Association “Peaceful and Business Caucasus”, working on conflict issues, organized the consultations on industry, legal and gender issues, for the representatives of the Community Centers from Abkhazia. The consultations took place at the Coalition Resource Centre in the village Khurcha of Zugdidi region.

On April 26-28, 2013 the Association “Peaceful and Business Caucasus” organized also the meetings of the representatives of the Georgian-Abkhazian-Ossetian networks of the Community Centers in the village Perevi of Sachkhere region and Tbilisi. At the meeting the grant contract has been signed providing the financial support from TBC Fund to the Georgian-Abkhazian-Ossetian networks of the Community Centers for contributing to development beekeeping.

On 1-5 March, the Public Movement “Multinational Georgia” with the support of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) carried out the project implying the delivery of assistance in building the capacities of human rights defenders, media workers and civil societal actors in the South Caucasus. The seminar hosted participants from South Ossetia, Abkhazia, Nagorno Karabakh, Armenia and Georgia (16 persons in total).

The program included two educational components: a) workshop which aimed to enhance capacities of participants in the following issue areas: advocacy and lobbying; national, regional and international mechanisms utilized in the field of protection of human rights; promotion of peace, security and social cohesion; peace building, public diplomacy; reconciliation; networking and alliance building; forms of effective partnership; negotiation skills and b) field visits and meetings with the influential and well respected local (Armenian) representatives of civil societal organizations, media sources, educational establishments, think tanks, conflict and political scientists, practitioners of negotiations, experts and foundations whose field of interests covers the South Caucasus.

The project was implemented in partnership with the Multiethnic Resource Center for Civic Education Development, Armenian Committee of the Helsinki Citizens Assembly, NGO “Cooperation and Democracy”, NGO “Free Citizen – Civic Initiatives Support Center” with whom the Memorandum of cooperation has been signed. More information about the conference is available at <http://pmmg.org.ge/index.php?m=4&nid=24&lang=Geo>)
