

# **The Georgian National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum**

2012 Annual Report

The Georgian National Platform (NP) was founded in 2010. It is a union of non-profit local and international legal entities registered in Georgia whose aim is to promote and fulfill the goals of the European Union-initiated Eastern Partnership in the Eastern neighbourhood, as well as to generally support the European integration process.

Currently, the NP consists of 106 civil society organizations which believe that EU integration offers the best prospects for Georgia's economic, social and political development. By becoming a member of the NP they take on the responsibility to support this process.

With the aim of supporting the Eastern Partnership process, the Georgian National Platform was actively involved in ongoing processes in the country in 2012.

The Eastern Partnership 2012-13 Roadmap prioritized the holding of free and fair parliamentary elections in Georgia in 2012, the improvement of the election environment, and support for free media.

Therefore, one of the National Platform's main priorities in 2012 was pre-election environment monitoring, advocacy, and support for the development of free media and the holding of free and fair elections.

The Georgian National Platform joined and actively participated in the campaign "This Affects You Too." It should be noted that in February 2012, with a wide consensus, more than 200 civil society activists, non-governmental and media organizations joined the campaign. The campaign's aim was to demand new changes to the electoral law since the regulations adopted in December 2011 negatively affected the election environment, restricted civic activity, property rights, freedom of expression and political activity, and created the risk of presenting voters with difficult and unfair responsibilities, which then led to a "chilling effect" in regards to freedom of speech and civil involvement. This conclusion was also reached by the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, who, according to his statement, said that the new electoral law had created an "unequal political playing field."

With the aim of improving the election environment by achieving the planned goals of the "This Affects You Too" campaign, the National Platform along with partner organizations (observing organizations, media coalitions etc.) actively cooperated with the Georgian government and European structures – primarily with the EU Delegation and the European Commissioner on Enlargement, Mr. Stefan Fule and his cabinet.

Given the contemporary relevance of the elections, an election subgroup was created in August 2012 to work on monitoring the pre-election, day of the election, and post-election environment; and to provide corresponding recommendations.

Besides the aforementioned, the NP's activities included putting forward new initiatives and supporting existing ones, as well as discussing and looking for solutions to problematic issues within the format of three-party talks (the Georgian government, EU structures and the civil sector).

The NP's Coordination Council met European Council President Herman Van Rompuy on 4 July of this year during his visit to Georgia to discuss challenges related to election environment issues, the establishment of structural dialogue, and the Euro-integration process. In connection with these issues, over the course of the year the Coordination Council and other members of the NP held several meetings with EU Commissioner on Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy Stefan Fule.<sup>1</sup>

The NP developed four statements related to the topic of the elections (see below).

The NP's Coordination Council also worked with the Georgian government on the establishment of structural dialogue. On 7 May of this year, a meeting was held with the now former State Minister on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration Issues, Giorgi Baramidze. They discussed the establishment of structural dialogue with the Office of the State Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration and with other relevant representatives of the ministry.

It is worth noting that the EU Delegation to Georgia and the cooperation of the Georgian government played an important role in the establishment of three-party talks in Georgia within the format of the Eastern Partnership. A clear example was the conference "Parliamentary Elections and Georgia's EU Integration Prospects," which was held on 15 September of this year with the participation of members of the NP and representatives of the government and the EU. The conference was devoted entirely to the parliamentary elections scheduled for 1 October 2012 and their importance for Georgian-EU cooperation within the framework of the Eastern Partnership; conference participants developed a statement which was released on 18 September by the NP (see below).

On 15 October, the conference "The Political Processes in the Aftermath of the Parliamentary Elections and Future Prospects" was held with the support and efforts of the EU. The conference was attended by those political groups which had succeeded in crossing the 5 percent threshold in the election (United National Movement and the Georgian Dream coalition), members of civil society, international organizations, and representatives of the diplomatic corps (including the head of the EU Delegation to Georgia and the ambassadors of the United States of America and Switzerland). The aim of the conference was to establish three-party talks in the new political environment resulting from the election. It is significant that the first meeting of this format was held following the parliamentary election on 1 October 2012.

In conjunction with the activities implemented to support the establishment of structural dialogue and free and fair elections, the National Platform continued to work on issues related to human rights, economic integration, environmental protection and energy, as well as the deepening of contacts between people. Over the course of the year, the NP actively responded to human rights violations, including instances of homophobia and transphobia, and the torture and humiliating treatment of prisoners. Additionally, the NP also actively participated in the "Agreement

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<sup>1</sup> The Coordination Council and the National Coordinator of the Civil Society Forum held meetings with European Commissioner on Enlargement and European Neighborhood Policy Stefan Fule on 7 May, 10 June, and 12 October of this year.

against the Environment” campaign organized by environmental organizations against the March 2012 changes to environmental law.

The National Platform and its member organizations cooperated with the EU’s local delegation on various processes, among them the 2012-2013 Eastern Partnership Roadmap, determining budgetary assistance priorities, and preparation of the final report on the 2012 European Neighbourhood Policy’s action plan.

In October 2012, a working subgroup on visa issues was created in the National Platform on the basis of the first and fourth working groups, so that the NP’s member organizations could implement appropriate activities according to the joint action plan, which serves to help fulfil and monitor the 2012-2013 Eastern Partnership Roadmap.

Also in October 2012 in conjunction with the working subgroup on visa issues, a working subgroup on conflict issues was created on the basis of the first and fourth working groups, whose goal is to promote a peaceful resolution to the conflicts.

The NP’s activities were comprehensively covered by various television stations and the media, and the NP’s web page, <http://eapnationalplatform.ge>, was regularly updated. In addition, every statement was translated into English and sent to accredited diplomatic missions in Georgia, international organizations, and to the EU’s External Action Service (including European Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy Stefan Fule and other relevant figures).

### **Structure of the National Platform**

In accordance with the National Platform’s charter, a Coordination Council was elected at the 21 January 2012 General Meeting. The Coordination Council is responsible for guiding the National Platform’s activities in terms of organization and content. The members of the Georgian National Platform’s Coordination Council are:

1. Ketevan Tsikhelashvili - Chairperson of the Coordination Council – “European Initiative - Liberal Academy Tbilisi”
2. Tamar Chugoshvili – Coordinator of the first working group – “Georgian Young Lawyers’ Association”;
3. Nino Lomjaria – Coordinator of the first working group – “International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy”;
4. Davit Narmania – Coordinator of the second working group – “Caucasian Institute for Economic and Social Research”;
5. Paata Beltadze – Coordinator of the second working group – “Georgian Trade Unions Confederation”
6. Lia Todua – Coordinator of the third working group – “Center for Strategic Research and Development of Georgia”
7. Temur Vekua – Coordinator of the third working group – Union “Ekoteki”
8. Marina Solomonishvili – Coordinator of the fourth working group – International Foundation “LEA”
9. Lali Devidze – Coordinator of the fourth working group – “Caucasian House”

The General Meeting also confirmed the National Platform’s charter and code of ethics, which determined the NP’s goals, functions and scope of activities. According to Charter the Country Facilitator for Civil Society Forum, Manana Kochladze, was awarded the status of the advisor to the Coordination Council. With the aim to support the effective work of the Coordination Council, the Council elected a secretariat: Eka Mrulishvili and Salome Bulia.

The Coordination Council has carried out several coalition projects with the aim of effectively implementing the Georgian National Platform’s goals. They are:

- “Georgian National Platform for Eastern Partnership,” which is ongoing with financial support from the Open Society Georgia Foundation until 21 January 2013. The project’s goal is to support the effective work of the Georgian National Platform and increase public awareness of its activities. The project provides for the functioning of the secretariat, working group meetings, and the translation of documents and other organizational expenses;
- “Strengthening Capacities of the Georgian National Platform for Eastern Partnership” whose goal is European integration, in particular support for the priorities of the Eastern Partnership by strengthening the National Platform through increased participation and involvement. The project is financed by the European Commission and is scheduled to begin in January 2013 and continue for 18 months. The project will support and strengthen the work of the working groups and carry out activities such as monitoring of the implementation of the Europe Neighborhood Policy/Eastern Partnership’s action plan, shadow accounting and the preparation of recommendations, increasing the capacities of the NP’s member organizations through organizing trainings and seminars, etc.
- The “Strengthening Capacities of the National Platforms of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum” project, presented by the Steering Committee of the Civil Forum, and supported by the European Commission. The project is expected to begin in January 2013 and last for 36 months. The project comprises activities such as establishing the secretariat of the forum, as well as increasing partnership and opportunities among the National Forums of the Eastern Partnership.

Meetings of the National Platform’s Coordination Council and the working groups took place regularly within the framework of the NP. According to the charter, the Coordination Council’s meetings were also attended by the national coordinator of the Civil Society Forum, Manana Kochladze. Additionally, the constituent working groups of the National Forum (WG 1 – Democracy, human rights, good governance and stability, WG 2 – Economic integration and convergence with EU policies, WG3 – Environment, climate change and energy security, WG 4 – Contacts between people) and the election subgroups held regular meetings.

Finally, members of the National Platform participated in the selection of participants for the fourth meeting of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, as well as provided recommendations for candidate organizations to the National Coordinator of the Civil Society Forum. The final formation of the Georgian delegation will take into consideration recommendations from the National Platform, Civil Forum’s Steering Committee and the EU. The Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum will take place 29-30 November in Stockholm, Sweden.

#### **Statements Initiated by the National Platform:**

- 12 March 2012 – The Coordination Council’s appeal to the European Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy, Stefan Fule, in support of the “This Affects You Too” as well as regarding the monitoring of the parliamentary election scheduled for October of this year (see enclosed);
- 23 April 2012 – Stefan Fule responds to the Georgian National Platform’s appeal. In his letter of response, Commissioner Fule gave high praise to the National Platform’s involvement in the democratic development process, as well as expressed his desire to meet representatives of the NP before the election (see enclosed);
- 25 April 2012 – Statement/appeal initiated by the third working group regarding environmental protection and the use of natural resources. The statement, which concerned the 20 March harmful changes in the law with regards to environmental protection and the use of natural resources, was addressed to the accredited diplomatic corps in Georgia as well as to international banks (see enclosed);
- 29 August 2012 – Statement regarding the pre-election media environment (see enclosed). A briefing was also held in connection with this statement;

- 18 September 2012 – Statement regarding the election environment which provided recommendations to various actors taking part in the electoral process in the time remaining before the elections, the day of the elections, and the period immediately following the elections (see enclosed). A briefing was also held in connection with this statement (see enclosed 1);
- 28 September 2012 – Statement/appeal by the election subgroup addressed to the government, election subjects, the Central Election Commission, mass media, local and international observers, and cable television operators about the responses to specific challenges (including cases of torture and inhumane treatment, arrests, secret recordings, photography and video recording, media accessibility, exit polling);
- 5 November 2012 – Statement regarding the parliamentary elections and the role of civil society (see enclosed).

**In addition to initiating its own statements and appeals, the National Platform signed on to the following statements:**

- 13 February 2012 – “This Affects You Too” campaign, which concerned changes made in October 2011 to the organic law on the political unions of citizens (see enclosed);
- 18 May 2012 – Statement in response to an incident during a demonstration/march by representatives of the LGBT community as part of the activities marking the 17 May 2012 International Day Against Homophobia (see enclosed);
- 19 September 2012 – Emergency statement by civic organizations regarding the torture of prisoners (see enclosed).

**Contact Information of the Georgian National Platform:**

Address: Rustaveli Ave. 50/1. Tbilisi 0108 Georgia

TEL: +995 32 239 1128, Cell: +995 593 18 58 78; +995 593 10 44 64

E-mail: [np@ei-lat.ge](mailto:np@ei-lat.ge)

Web Page: <http://eapnationalplatform.ge>