

## **First Meeting of Sixth Steering Committee of Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum**

4-5 February 2015

Brussels, Belgium

### **Summary of discussion, decisions and conclusions**

**In attendance:** Steering Committee members - Krzysztof Bobinski, Andrei Yahorau, Oleg Shatberashvili, Lasha Tughushi, Plamena Borisova, Hovsep Khurshudyan, Daiva Kvedaraite, Mikayel Hovhanisyan, Sabit Bagirov, Ion Guzun, Viktor Taran.

Secretariat - Director of the Secretariat, Natalia Yerashevich (ex officio member of the SC), the Advocacy and Membership Manager, Tanya Basarab, and Financial Manager Sophie Huguenet.

## **I. Discussions and Decisions**

### **a. Participation of the EaP CSF in the European Neighbourhood Policy review**

European Neighbourhood Policy (and by extension Eastern Partnership) review was the main policy focus of the Steering Committee meeting. The Steering Committee has decided to provide comments to the paper on the ENP review to be published in March. All members and structures of the EaP CSF, especially National Platforms, will develop recommendations under the coordination of the Steering Committee.

The Steering Committee decided that it will commission a policy paper to reflect on these recommendations of the National Platforms and will engage with the EU institutions actively to provide maximum input.

### **b. Statement on escalation of violence in the EaP countries**

The Steering Committee adopted a statement on the escalation of violence in the Eastern Partnership countries. The Committee condemns actions of the Russian Federation in the Eastern Ukraine and calls for immediate termination of aggression. It condemns Russia's annexation of Georgian territories and calls on the Russian Federation to respect 2008 Medvedev-Sarkozy agreement. The statement calls for immediate withdrawal of Russian weapons and troops from Moldova and encourages parties of Karabakh conflict to reverse the escalation and maintain the peace process. Full text of the statement can be found at [http://eap-csf.eu/assets/files/Statement\\_SC\\_04\\_02\\_2015\\_ENG.pdf](http://eap-csf.eu/assets/files/Statement_SC_04_02_2015_ENG.pdf)

### **c. Civil Society Platforms within Association Agreements**

The Steering Committee discussed progress in implementation of Association Agreements in three countries: Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. The Association Agreements envision establishment of bilateral civil society platforms that will monitor AA implementation. The formation of these platforms is in process in all three countries. The Steering Committee has agreed that the European part of the civil society platforms in Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine should include at least 3 members of the EaP CSF representing European CSOs. The SC has issued a statement on this. It was decided to request EESC to include a representative of

Georgia and Moldova to take part in the status of observer in the visit of the Ukrainian delegation to Brussels in 17-18 February, to discuss the formation and operation of the Ukraine-EU civil society platform. However neither representatives of the Moldovan and Georgian National Platforms nor Secretariat's staff has been allowed by EESC to observe the meeting between the EESC and the Ukrainian side.

#### **d. Cooperation with Euronest**

The Steering Committee discussed the importance of cooperation with EURONEST. It was decided that Working Group 1 Council will be conducted on the same dates as the Parliamentary Assembly of the EURONEST (16-18 March). This will allow members of WG1 Council to take part in the meeting on Good Governance in the margins of EURONEST Parliamentary Assembly meeting and to ensure a representative of EaP CSF can address the EURONEST Assembly.

#### **e. The EaP CSF Annual Assembly 2015**

The Steering Committee unanimously decided that the Annual Assembly of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum will be held in Kiev, Ukraine. Holding of the Assembly in Kiev will demonstrate the EaP countries' solidarity with Ukraine, and the commitment to enhance the EU-partner country relations. The Assembly will take place on November 19-20, coinciding with the anniversary of Euromaidan.

#### **f. Application process for the EaP CSF Annual Assembly 2015**

The Steering Committee has discussed the timeline of the application process for the Annual Assembly and criteria for selection. The call for applications will be announced in March. The SC reiterated that only NGOs which are truly independent should attend the Assembly and decided to add a bona fide pledge to the application form.

#### **g. Monitoring of the human rights situation in the EaP-CSF**

The Steering Committee decided to observe the human rights situation in partner countries as well as the institutional situation of NGOs and publish information on this subject in a systematic way on the EaP-CSF website. Co-Chair of the Steering Committee, Krzysztof Bobinski volunteered to work with the secretariat on this initiative.

#### **h. Joint Activities of National Platforms**

As part of strengthening regional dimension of the EaP CSF, the National Platforms decided to hold two joint events during 2015. One event will be held in Georgia in June and it will focus on AA/DCFTA implementation. The second event will be held in Ukraine and it will focus on security. Further consultations on joint events will be conducted through email communication.

#### **i. Working Group Council and Working Group Meetings**

The Steering Committee decided that the Working Group Council meetings should be held as soon as possible and at these meeting the Councils should identify priorities for the Working Group activities.

The Steering Committee decided that sub-groups can meet independently from the working groups. This is especially important for WG1, which is the largest one.

#### **j. Regranting**

The Steering Committee discussed the re-granting procedure in support of Working Group outputs that is envisioned in 2015-2017, criteria for selection, as well as the composition of the Selection Committee.

The applications will be accepted by the Secretariat and checked for technical eligibility; applications that satisfy the technical eligibility will be forwarded to appropriate Working Group Councils. The Working Group Council makes recommendations and evaluation of possible impact of the project within the priorities defined by the Council (either set during WG Council meetings or via online exchange). Projects should consider concrete outputs including but not limited to policy papers, handbooks/toolkits or other advocacy or capacity building initiatives. Applications, along with the recommendations of the Working Group Councils are forwarded to a Selection Panel, which consists of four members, two co-chairs of the Steering Committee, one independent expert or a donor and a representative of the Secretariat. The Selection Panel makes the decision on which project applications get funding. It has also been decided that if a member of the Working Group Council is taking part in the project application, he or she should step down from the review process.

The Steering Committee also approved the budget share for each Working Group for 2015, Working Group one, due to its size, will have 70,000 Euro; Working Group 2 - 50,000 Euro; Working Group 3 - 50,000 Euro; Working Group 4 - 50,000 Euro; Working Group 5 - 50,000 Euro.

The Steering Committee decided that all participants of any of the previous Annual Assemblies will be eligible to lead a project application. It is encouraged that members of the National Platforms, who have never participated in the Annual Assemblies also take part in the project proposals, as partners.

The project proposals will need to be submitted in English. However, proposals in Russian will also be accepted, while results of projects should also be in English to ensure wide dissemination and using the results in EAP CSF advocacy work.

Following up on the Resolution on Media War conducted by the Russian Federation adopted at the annual assembly in November 2014 in Batumi, the Steering Committee has made contact with European Commission institutions, the European Endowment for Democracy (EED) and Forum members monitoring Russian media impact in their countries as well as other stakeholders working on initiatives to counter Russian propaganda. The EaP CSF met Andris Kesteris, Principal Civil Society and Media Advisor in the Directorate General for Enlargement and also discussed with the EED their new media feasibility study. The Steering Committee submits for approval to the Selection Panel a project on Russian media monitoring in 6 EaP countries initiated by the media sub-group of the EaP CSF in the coming weeks. The project should begin monitoring activities and develop proposals on behalf of EaP CSF for the upcoming Riga Media Conference, organised in the margins of the Eastern Partnership Summit. The Steering Committee will also inform Working Group 1 Council about the project proposal. The Steering Committee recommends that 10,000 Euro from the of WG1 budget be allocated for this project and that the agreed regranting criteria in terms of lead and partner organisations be applied to all projects, including this one.

## **k. Strategy**

The Steering Committee has created a task force to incorporate the latest submissions of final priorities of the working groups into the Strategy 2015-2017. Oleg Shatberashvili, Hovsep Khurshudyan and Andrei Yahorau will be part of the task force.

### **I. Funding for National Platforms**

The project on *Strengthening the capacities of the NPs of the EaP CSF* is coming to an end in the middle of 2015 meaning that the core funding for the activities of the NPs needs to be sought. The SC decided to approach this on two levels: NPs will seek funding for themselves in countries and the Secretariat will be looking for possibilities to apply for funding for the activities of all 6 NPs.

### **m. Election of Co-chairs, Treasurer and Secretary**

The Steering Committee has elected Krzysztof Bobinski (Coordinator of Working Group 1) and Andrei Yahorau (Coordinator of the National Platform of Belarus) as Co-Chairs of the Steering Committee. Hovsep Khurshudyan and Oleg Shatberashvili were elected as the Secretary and the Treasurer of the registered body, Secretariat of the Steering Committee of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum.

### **n. Representative to Policy Forum for Development**

The Steering Committee elected Andrei Yahorau as the second EaP CSF representative to Policy Forum on Development. Vazha Salomadze will continue to represent the EaP CSF in the PFD with a mandate until the end of 2015. Both representatives will report to the Steering Committee regarding the cooperation with Policy Development Forum.

### **o. Cooperation with EPAN group of CONCORD**

In response to the initiative of the EPAN group of CONCORD on developing a strategic cooperation between the EaP CSF and EPAN, the Steering Committee has decided that such a cooperation will in general be beneficial and has requested the Secretariat to have a meeting with EPAN to discuss the proposed cooperation in more details.

### **p. Next Steering Committee Meeting**

The next SC meeting will take place in Riga before the civil society conference in the margins of the EaP Summit.

## **II. Meetings**

*Meeting with Frederic Schwandt, Deputy Head of Unit on ENP, European External Action Service, February 4*

The Steering Committee met with a representative of European External Action Service, Frederic Schwandt on February 4th. He informed the Steering Committee about the upcoming review of the European Neighbourhood Policy and asked for input into the public consultation on the Green Paper on ENP Review (March-May 2015). The Steering Committee welcomed the opportunity to contribute to the review and discussed some shortfalls of the ENP, especially the lack of the security dimension in the policy and lack of clear membership perspective for Partnership countries. The Steering Committee raised these issues with all the guests during the two days' meeting.

*Meeting with Richard Tibbels, Head of Division for Eastern Partnership, European External Action Service, February 4*

The Steering Committee held a meeting with Richard Tibbels, Head of Division for Eastern Partnership of the European External Action Service, Mr. He gave an overview of the relations between EU and each of the EAP countries as well as the regional initiatives and instruments that have contributed to making Eastern Partnership Policy a successful initiative, in particular with regards to the involvement of civil society actors in building deep and sustainable democracy. Mr. Tibbels talked about strengths/successes in bilateral cooperation between EU and each of the EAP countries. He underlined that the Riga Summit will focus on steps in the EAP delivery and a political message of solidarity and support. The Summit and ENP review are also an occasion to reframe relations with Belarus, Azerbaijan and Armenia, depending on their expectations. The Steering Committee discussed with Mr. Tibbels preparations for the upcoming Riga summit, the side event Civil Society Conference and had an exchange on the state of bilateral cooperation with the EaP countries and the role civil society plays there. Mr Tibbels urged the Steering Committee to work for an amicable arrangement with the European Social and Economic Committee (EESC) on the composition of the Civil Society Platforms envisaged under the Association Agreements.

*Meeting with Emma Udwin, Deputy Chief of Cabinet of Commissioner Johannes Hahn, February 5*

Emma Udwin spoke of the Commissioner's view of the need for reforms to attract investment and strengthen the economy. She also confirmed Commissioner Hahn's commitment to engaging civil society in the reform process and underlined the importance of National Platforms in providing input for an informed EaP review and for progress on reforms progress in the EaP countries. Ms. Udwin talked about importance of EU's communication directly with the public of the EaP countries to strengthen contact with the partners as well as to counter misinformation on what the cooperation with EU is. Ms. Udwin discussed some of the consultation areas in the upcoming review of the European Neighbourhood policy and encouraged the EaP CSF to make an active contribution. Bilateral country cooperation issues were further explored in the meeting.

*Meeting with MEPs, Heidi Hautala (Greens/EFA) and Petras Austrevicius (ALDE), February 5*

Members of European Parliament Heidi Hautala (Greens/EFA) and Petras Austrevicius (ALDE) met with the Steering Committee and discussed issues of cooperation of EaP CSF with the European Parliament, in particular engaging with the upcoming EURONEST Parliamentary Assembly and the ENP review. There was an exchange on the situation in the EaP countries, and particularly in Ukraine.

*Victor Cotruta from REC Moldova who is in charge of the Strengthening the capacities of the NPs of the EaP CSF project shared with the SC the project results and lessons learned.*

### **III. National Platforms' briefs**

#### **Armenia**

After the Annual Assembly in Batumi, the Armenian National Platform discussed the strategy and the action plan for 2015. The action plan is being developed and the plan of activities has already been outlined. One of the major issues that the Armenian National Platform is working on is the new format for the relations between Armenia and the EU after the U-turn of the Armenian Government. The EU has requested the National Platform to provide input on the new format of relations and how the civil society could be better involved. Each WG of the NP plans to develop recommendations for the submission to the Armenian Government and the EU. National Platform is working to implement the resolution adopted at the Annual Assembly in Batumi, according to which the National Platforms must increase their membership. There are also ongoing discussions on how to better involve new members.

### **Azerbaijan**

The National Platform has met twice since the Annual Assembly in Batumi and elected the working group coordinators. The coordinators will be planning activities and priorities for 2015. One of the main problems of the National Platform is funding. Because of the new legislation introduced in January 2015 there is no clarity on the procedures that donors have to follow to be able to provide funding. The National Platform is also discussing how to make its members more active.

### **Belarus**

The National Platform held a meeting where Working Group coordinators were elected; in 2015 WG Coordinators will be forming groups similar to the European Forum structure, thus the structure of the NP is no different from all other NPs. Upcoming Presidential elections in November 2015 are on the agenda. While human rights condition in the country remain grave, the number of actual arrests have diminished and the government is using targeted repression. The National Platform will continue to focus on educational reform, more concretely on implementation of Bologna Process in the country. The National Platform hopes to contribute to National Strategy of Sustainable Development and will advocate for a recognised place of the NP in the dialogue between the EU and the Belarusian government.

### **Georgia**

The National Platform has provided comments on the action plan for the implementation of AA to the Georgian Government. The National Platform also opened an office in the building of national Parliament of Georgia, where it has the opportunity to closely monitor and contribute to the legislation process. The representatives of the National Platform met with Commissioner Hahn during his visit to Georgia and discussed monitoring of the Association Agreement implementation by civil society. The National Platform is meeting on February 11 to discuss the action plan and priorities for 2015. One of the main goals for this year will be to involve more organisations from the regions, as currently only ¼ of the National Platform membership is from the regions. The National Platform is actively working to provide humanitarian aid and support to Ukrainian refugees in Georgia.

A focus of the National Platform is the creation of the civil society cooperation platform, envisioned under the Association Agreements. Negotiations regarding the format and composition of such a platform are continuing.

### **Moldova**

The Moldovan National Platform is actively engaged in monitoring the implementation of the Association Agreement. The NP is taking part in the formation of a civil society platform as envisioned by the Association Agreement. The National Platform is concerned about the long period of negotiation among parliamentary parties to form a government. The elections took place at the end of November and there is still no government in place. This entails many risks, including on instability in Transnistria due to fewer resources they get from Russia, as well as the influence of Russian propaganda and dependence of some media outlets on oligarchs who own them.

### **Ukraine**

The Ukrainian National Platform is trying to assist the government in implementation of reforms, which is particularly difficult as the country is engaged in a war and most of human and financial resources are spent on military activities (5 million euro a day has been calculated as the current war-related expenses). The members of the National Platform are actively involved in relief efforts for the population affected by the war.

The National Platform is also seeking to actively engage all of its members in the activities of the platform. One of the main issues is the formation of the new civil society platform, envisioned by the Association Agreement. Negotiations with the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) have started and the National Platform will meet with the representatives of the EESC in February to further discuss the composition of the platform.

Adopted on 17 February 2015