

## Subgroup Success Stories

*Highlights 2013 – 2014*

### Media Subgroup

Currently the key project of the subgroup is the project “ENP East Media Freedom Watch” aimed at raising regional and international awareness of the situation concerning media freedom and journalists’ rights in the Eastern Partnership countries – Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

For effective implementation of the project, a news [website](#) was launched to report on the rights of journalists and media freedom situation in the six countries of the Eastern Partnership. Within the framework of the project, a special methodology was developed which analyzes the real-time outlook on media freedom. The results will be summarized in the “[Index of media freedom](#)”. The project prepares quarterly, as well as interim and final [reports](#) on media freedom and journalists’ rights in the target countries will be presented.

The project is funded by the European Union and is set to run from March 2013 to March 2015”

### Subgroup: Local Government and Public Administration Reform

#### Achievements

The Subgroup on Local Government and Public Administration Reform (of the Working Group 1 on Democracy and Human Rights) is composed of more than 20 CSOs from the EU and Partners countries. The members took part in a number of initiatives at the national and EU levels to orient the policies towards decentralization, empowerment of local governments with a specific focus on citizens/CSOs’ participation, to support public administration reform for better effectiveness and accountability.

#### **Joint initiatives with the CORLEAP – Committee of the Regions Assembly and a political forum of local and regional authorities from the EU and the EaP countries.**

Acting as a permanent observer in CORLEAP, the Subgroup participated and brought in valuable insights to the CORLEAP General Assembly, held in Tbilisi in September 2014. In a joint statement, disseminated and presented at the event, the subgroup reiterated their key messages on the state of local development policies and current practices from their countries respectively.

Members of the Subgroup took part in a training session on fiscal decentralization and territorial cooperation organized at the CoR in April 2014, discussing the multilevel approach to governance and its potentialities in Partner countries.

## **Support to the development of the Flagship initiative on Municipal Development by DG DEVCO**

The subgroup contributed to the formulation and elaboration of the EU Municipal flagship initiative by providing expertise and inputs to DG DEVCO on the development of the flagship criteria, and the priorities and methods for its implementation, stressing the importance of accountability and citizens/CSOs participation in local decision-making. The Flagship Initiative on Municipal Development will soon be launched in EaP countries.

## **Regular participation in the EaP Expert Panel on Public Administration Reform of the EEAS**

## **Constant exchanges of expertise and project development/implementation with the members of the Subgroup**

### **Subgroup 'Culture'**

An initiative of EaP CSF Working Group 4 "Contacts between People", the culture Subgroup has become one of the most active groups of the Forum, encompassing over 20 representatives, mostly from the Eastern Partnership countries.

The Subgroup on "Culture" has successfully reached out to EU policy-makers and engaged in constructive policy dialogue at expert seminars, ministerial conferences and working group meetings. This has enabled a broader recognition of cultural policy as an important aspect of the Eastern Partnership process, mirrored in the Joint Declaration of the Vilnius Summit of the Heads of States in November 2013, which stipulates that "*the policy dialogue on the modernisation of cultural policies in Eastern European partners will be continued.*"

### ***Achievements of the Subgroup since the 2013 Forum in Chisinau***

The **Nataša Eastern Partnership Civil Society Platform for Culture** was established by the Subgroup in Lublin in October 2013 to support, promote and inform sustainable cultural development through the Eastern Partnership countries. The platform is composed of civil society organisations and cultural actors from the EU and the Eastern Partnership, who pioneer like-minded initiatives in their quest to deepen involvement in existing cultural projects and networks in the region. The Subgroup has successfully launched the [website](#) and [online communication tool](#) of the Platform.

The Subgroup has positioned itself as a **key stakeholder** in the Eastern Partnership Culture Programme II for the period of 2015-2018 following a multilateral meeting between representatives of the Subgroup and the European Commission on "Culture in EU External Relations", which took place in Brussels in February 2014. The Subgroup has been established as a point of contact for civil society involvement in the programme.

A productive **partnership** has been established with **the Eastern Partnership Platform 4 on "Contacts between People"** as a result of the Subgroup's active participation in the platform's

meetings and projects including the conference on “Cultural Policy in Europe, Finance, Management, Audience Development”.

**Greater civil society involvement** in the implementation of UNESCO 2005 “Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions” is expected following the Subgroup’s lobbying efforts at the UNESCO regional seminar in October 2013, which prompted the inclusion of civil society in the concluding statement of the event.

Active participation and initiation of common projects in the Eastern Partnership by member organisations of the Subgroup

### Visa Facilitation sub-group

During the period of 2013-2014, the Visa Facilitation Subgroup directed its activity on efforts to support the EaP partner countries, encouraging them to conduct reforms in the sphere of security, justice and home affairs and offering support for increased people to people contacts. Europe without Barriers (EWB) was elected to coordinate Visa facilitation subgroup activities in 2012. It has brought together independent experts from a variety of think tanks, including representatives from the international Coalition for Visa-free Europe ([www. visa-free-europe.eu](http://www.visa-free-europe.eu).) The Coalition’s main goal is to eliminate all the artificially created administrative barriers for EaP citizens to move freely around Europe.

The sub-group also includes independent observers from other organizations, which are interested in freedom of movement.

This period in the operation of the subgroup was productive due to the fact that Moldova officially received visa-free regime from the EU in 2014, whilst Ukraine and Georgia were successfully admitted the second phase of the Visa Facilitation process.

In 2013, the process of visa facilitation was marked by some other positive changes; - Armenia and Azerbaijan signed Visa Facilitation Agreements with the EU, Belarus now enjoys “informal facilitation” has finally launched visa dialogue with the EU.

The Euromaidan movement and subsequent Russian aggression in Ukraine’s Eastern regions presented itself as an important trial period for Ukraine. During these events, the issue of freedom of movement remained topical and by virtue of civil society activism was included in the agenda of changes envisaged by a European vector in Ukraine’s development.

During the massive rallies in Ukraine in November 2013 and February 2014, civic activist and visa sub-group’ members actively advocated the right of Ukrainians for visa-free perspectives in relations with the EU and made an accent on the need for government reforms.

As follow-up to the discussion on the appeal, the meeting of the sub-group members took place in Warsaw on December 19, 2013. During the meeting, the issue of temporary visa abolishment for

Ukrainians, who, at that time, were under severe pressure from Yanukovich's authoritarian regime has been discussed. It resulted in drafting a letter to the governments of the EU Member States and EU institutions to make a decision on the suspension of the visa regime for short-term trips to the EU for citizens of Ukraine in 2014. In a letter written to several key officials in the EU, including Herman Van Rompuy, Jose Manuel Barroso and Catherine Ashton, among others, civic group plead with the EU institutions to show some flexibility to Ukrainian citizens in traveling to the EU. We also launched a strong discussion regarding the necessity to search for new instruments of support towards visa-flexibility in times of crisis.

**The following work priorities were defined by the group's members:**

Improvement of the current EaP mechanisms of visa liberalization processes in the relevant countries.

Introduction of independent monitoring and analysis of “visa dialogues” within the framework of flagship initiatives between the EU and the partner countries. International EaP Visa liberalization index

Support of the EaP partner governments in fulfilling reforms in the visa liberalization sphere.

Monitoring of current EU regulations concerning the facilitation of visa procedures and border crossing.

**Practical steps taken by visa facilitation sub-group in the period 2013-2014:**

**On November 3, 2014**, the Consortium of the Ukrainian organization issued an appeal to consular establishments of the EU located in Ukraine to initiate a ban on the issuing of European visa to members of the Civic Chamber of the so called Autonomous Republic of Crimea, who publicly took steps against the territorial integrity of Ukraine and took several actions undermining and threatening the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Ukraine, including supporting actions of the separatist groups in the Eastern part of Ukraine. **(The appeal is attached).**

**November, 2014**, the Monitoring Report on the Agreement between the European Union and the Republic of Armenia on the Facilitation of the Issuance of Visas has been presented in Yerevan. (Full report see here: <http://pasos.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/bok-eng.pdf>.)

**On September 5, 2014** the [EU-EaP Visa Liberalisation Summary of Recent Developments on the visa liberalization path from the May-July 2014](http://visa-free-europe.eu/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/EU-EaP-Visa-Liberalisation-May-July-2014_EN.pdf) has been published. See the link : [http://visa-free-europe.eu/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/EU-EaP-Visa-Liberalisation-May-July-2014\\_EN.pdf](http://visa-free-europe.eu/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/EU-EaP-Visa-Liberalisation-May-July-2014_EN.pdf).

**On June 6, 2014** The paper “A second chance for Ukraine” paper was presented in Brussels. The paper discusses where Ukraine currently stands in terms of the technical requirements, which need to be met by its “post-revolutionary” elites.

<https://docs.google.com/viewer?url=http%3A%2F%2Fnovisa.org.ua%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2F2014%2F06%2FEN-Batory-policy-paper-Ukraine-second-chance-2014.pdf>.

**On May 13, 2014**, the publication on “*Abolishing Visa Regime Together: Experience of EaP Countries*” was published. The publication presents the experience of civil society in the Eastern Partnership countries in striving for a visa free regime with the EU. It shows civic expertise and advocacy instruments used by civic sector representatives aimed at the abolition of visa regimes in the EaP countries.

<http://novisa.org.ua/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Abolishing-Visa-Regime-Together-Experience-of-EaP-Countries.pdf>.

**On March 16, 2014** the EWB presented the independent monitoring outcomes on how the main provisions of the EU-Ukraine Enhanced Visa Facilitation Agreement have implemented by EU consular establishments in Ukraine.

<http://novisa.org.ua/en/ugoda-pro-sproshhennya-oformlennya-viz-mizh-ukrayinoyu-ta-yes-stan-vikonannya-diyuchih-pravovih-norm-infografika/>.

Detailed monitoring results by country are available at the following link :

<http://novisa.org.ua/en/konsul-stva-shengenu-v-otsinkah-detalizovani-rezul-tati/>.

**On April 7, 2014** the [Assessment of the Envisaged Reform of EU Visa Rules](#) prepared by the Visa-free Coalition was published.

The whole document in pdf can be viewed here:

[https://docs.google.com/viewer?url=http%3A%2F%2Fvisa-free-europe.eu%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2F2014%2F05%2FVisa\\_Code\\_Reform\\_Review1.pdf](https://docs.google.com/viewer?url=http%3A%2F%2Fvisa-free-europe.eu%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2F2014%2F05%2FVisa_Code_Reform_Review1.pdf).

**January , 31 , 2014** – the Statement by the Steering Committee of the Visa-free Europe Coalition on planned amendments to rules for entry into Ukraine, which prescribe the introduction of a fee for entering personal data of travelers to a dedicated database charged for every entry into Ukraine as well as the introduction of a requirement to present proof of sufficient financial resources for the duration of the stay in Ukraine (an amount of **at least EUR 400 per day**, in cash or on the basis of a bank statement).

<http://novisa.org.ua/en/zayava-kerivnogo-komitetu-koalitsiyi-za-bezvizovu-yevropu-shhodo-zaplanovanih-popravok-do-pravil-v-yizdu-ta-perebuвання-inozemtsiv-v-ukrayini/>.

**On October 4-5, 2013** the 5<sup>th</sup> Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum in Chisinau took place .

The sub-group meeting resulted in the presentation of the resolution “**Towards a visa free Europe – making the dream real!**”. More details on the discussion and Resolution itself see below.

<http://novisa.org.ua/en/na-shlyahu-do-bezvizovoyi-yevropi-roblyachi-mriyu-real-nistyu-rezolyutsiya-tematichnoyi-robochoyi-grupi/>.

**14th of May 2013, the Annual meeting of Working Group 1 on Democracy, Human Rights, Good Governance and Stability** took place in Brussels.

*Visa Facilitation sub-group meetings conclusions:*

The Visa Facilitation sub-group has come up to the following conclusion: the Eastern Partnership can serve as an important complementary element to bilateral relations between partner countries and EU in the sphere of freedom of movement liberalisation through the creation of a necessary regional platform for countries with similar interests and problems.

The sub-group participants support the idea to continue experts’ research for the EaP Visa Liberalisation Index, which includes independent assessment of the fulfillment of criteria for visa liberalisation by all six EaP countries. The index is available here: <http://monitoring.visa-free-europe.eu/>

Apart from this, experts of the visa sub-group suggested to improve the current regulations of visa facilitation provided by the EU Visa Code and Visa Facilitation Agreement between the EU and third countries. In this regard, the following recommendations to the Consular missions of EU Member States and the EU Commission were developed. See the following link:

<https://docs.google.com/viewer?url=http%3A%2F%2Fcap-csf.eu%2Fassets%2Ffiles%2FDocuments%2FCSF%2520recommendations%2520visa%2520sub-group.pdf>.

**The issues scheduled to be discussed by the group’ members during the Forum in Batumi:**

- Regional approach to the issue of visa liberalization for the partner-countries: changes, expectations, freedom of movement prospects;
- Visa liberalization and its new security challenges: example of Ukraine. Which EaP mechanism could be involved to overcome those new risks and challenges?
- The search for new arguments for the EU Members states in favor of visa free regime introduction for the partner countries.
- Why should the EU abolish visas for the EaP countries? Why Governments of the partner countries should carry out reforms in order to receive visa free regime?