

## Annual Activities Report 2013-2014

# WORKING GROUP 1

## Democracy, Human Rights, Good Governance and Stability



The year 2014 has been marked by serious challenges to democracy and human rights in the Eastern Partner countries, not least the Russian occupation of Crimea and the subsequent war and tragic loss of thousands of lives in eastern Ukraine, but also the worsening situation facing civil society organisations in Azerbaijan, both in terms of random inspections and freezing of bank accounts, and the arrest of civil society activists, opposition figures, human rights defenders and independent journalists.

These events have knock-on effects in other Eastern Partner countries, and set the scene for new strategic priorities that need to be set for a new period in relations between the EaP countries and the EU, not least with the arrival on 1 November 2014 of a new European Commission and a new Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations.

## PRESSING THE CASE FOR FREEING POLITICAL PRISONERS

The WG1 co-ordinators, Jeff Lovitt and Leila Alieva, led in addressing international actors in CSF advocacy concerning both the Russian aggression in Ukraine, and the need for a strong EU reaction – calling for tough sanctions on energy and financial sectors from the very first sign of the occupation of Crimea, and consistently raising the case of political prisoners in Azerbaijan.

The WG1 co-ordinators represented the CSF at a meeting of the Euronest Committee on Political Affairs, Human Rights and Democracy held in Brussels on 11 February 2014, and decided it more appropriate that the EaP Intergovernmental Platform 1 meeting, held in Brussels on 11 June 2014, be attended by EaP CSF participants working on issues prioritised on the agenda of the meeting, namely corruption and public administration reform. Lilia Carasciuc, Transparency International (Moldova), and David Tumanyan, Communities Finance Officers Association (Armenia), therefore represented the CSF at the platform meeting.

## CSF INITIATIVES ON VISAS AND MEDIA FREEDOM

Initiatives driven by CSF WG1 subgroups have included work towards visa liberalisation between the EU and EaP countries, which bore fruit when Moldova became the first EaP country where holders of biometric passports enjoy visa-free travel with the EU (since May 2014). On 31 October 2014, the European Commission concluded that Georgia has now met the requirements of the first phase of the Visa Liberalisation Action Plan, launching the final assessment phase before the Commission can recommend to the European Council the introduction of visa-free relations between Georgia and the EU.

Other ongoing initiatives involving WG1 participants include the Eastern Partnership European Integration Index, now a joint project of the CSF with Open Society Foundations supported by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), and the ENP East Media Freedom Watch project. WG1 members are also working with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Latvia ahead of Latvia's EU Council Presidency in the first half of 2015. The Eastern Partnership summit in Riga will be accompanied by both a civil society conference and an Eastern Partnership Media Freedom conference. WG1 participants Boris Navasardyan, Jan Piekło, and Jeff Lovitt are members of the programme committee preparing the media freedom conference to be held in Riga on 20 May 2015.

## 2013 WG1 CO-ORDINATOR ANAR MAMMADLI AWARDED VÁCLAV HAVEL HUMAN RIGHTS PRIZE

The WG1 coordinators proposed to the Steering Committee that the CSF should nominate Anar Mammadli, Chairman of the Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Center in Azerbaijan, for the Václav Havel Human Rights Prize, an annual award presented by the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (the impact of which was strengthened by the fact that in 2014 Azerbaijan chairs the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers). Anar was CSF WG1 co-ordinator in 2013, arrested on invented charges after he spoke truth to power, and highlighted the shortcomings in the rigged October 2013 Presidential elections in Azerbaijan.

The CSF advocacy efforts have reinforced the efforts of others, and have seen the nomination for human rights awards of Anar and other political prisoners, including Rasul Jasarov, head of the Legal Protection and Awareness Society, another active CSF WG1 participant, who was also arrested in 2014. Both Anar, Rasul and more than 100 other political prisoners remain in jail, some sentenced (Anar was sentenced to five-and-a-half-years), others such as Rasul in remand prison pending trial.

Their cases were persistently raised in meetings with European Commission and European External Action Service officials and diplomats, and featured prominently in the statements made by the CSF Steering Committee, including the CSF statement delivered by Leila Alieva, to the ministerial meeting of EU and EaP foreign ministers that took place in Brussels on 22 July 2014. The main points pressed in the statement were calls for:

- appointment of European Commissioner for Civil Society and Human Rights,
- immediate release of all political prisoners in Partner countries,
- strong support for unity of Ukraine against Russian interference and aggression,
- greater defence and security co-operation, including joint energy security policy, between EU and Partner countries.

## NEW SUBGROUP ON REGIONAL CO-OPERATION AND CONFIDENCE BUILDING

In the Working Group, these shifting challenges have also been reflected by the formation of a new, potentially very important subgroup, namely the subgroup on Regional Cooperation and Confidence Building. Security issues and the challenges of current and frozen conflicts are likely to be high on the agenda of WG1 in the coming period.

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## WG1 LAUNCHES FACEBOOK GROUP

The subgroups met on the occasion of the full meeting of WG1 that took place in Brussels on 17 June 2014. The meeting was preceded by new initiatives launched to improve communications in WG1, namely launching a WG1 facebook group, and creating a spam-proof mailing list system (gathering contacts of participants in WG1 meetings from the past three years) to reach out to WG1 participants. Messages – sent in English and Russian – have informed WG1 participants of funding opportunities, asked for input into the new EaP CSF strategy, and invited their input into shaping the agenda of the June WG1 meeting.

As a result, for the first time, the WG1 meeting was a dynamic event with strong plenary sessions and a range of side-events taking place on 16 and 18 June, put together with the support of the EaP CSF Secretariat, directly based on the feedback from WG1 participants to enable their initiatives to be presented.

## WG1 MEETING, BRUSSELS, 16-18 JUNE 2014

Some 80 participants from EaP and EU countries, met at the WG1 meeting on 16-18 June 2014. The discussions largely focused on issues that are currently high on the Eastern Partnership agenda, including the future of the Eastern Partnership project in the context of recent political and security developments, the impact of the Eurasian Economic Union as well as the challenges of implementation of the Association Agreements in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. The issues of human rights, Russian propaganda, free and fair elections, and political prisoners featured prominently throughout the discussions.

The side-events included:

- Launching event of Minority Rights Group policy paper: 'Partnership for all: The impact of Eastern Partnership on minorities'
- Visa liberalisation for Ukraine
- Media Freedoms and the Russian Propaganda War and ENP East Media Freedom Watch
- Human Rights and Political Prisoners in the Eastern Partnership



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## EU PROJECT FUNDS WG1 PROJECTS ON ECHR, MONITORING OF EU FUNDING, AND ELECTIONS OBSERVATION

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Through the WG1 newsletter, a call for proposals was issued within the EC-funded project "Strengthening the capacities of the National Platforms (NP) of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (CSF)", which aims to strengthen and promote civil society organisations' role in reforms and democratic changes in the EaP countries.

The call for proposals resulted in the selection of three proposals that are now underway, and focus on improving the execution of European Court on Human Rights (ECHR) judgements in the EaP countries, monitoring of EU budget support, and on election monitoring in the EaP countries.

The project to "[Strengthening NGO Participation in the Execution of ECHR Judgements in the EaP](#)" will strengthen the capacities of NGOs and human rights lawyers both nationally and internationally, and will be implemented by Legal Education Society (Azerbaijan), Human Rights Embassy (Moldova), Helsinki Citizens Assembly Vanadzor (Armenia), Human Rights House Tbilisi, and Ukrainian Helsinki Human Rights Union.

Eleven human rights lawyers and NGO representatives from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine have already been trained to engage in the execution process of ECHR judgements. The training was organised by the Legal Education Society (Azerbaijan), in co-operation with the Human Rights House Tbilisi. The participants improved their knowledge on how civil society can follow up on ECHR judgments internationally before the Committee of Ministers (CoM) of the Council of Europe (CoE). The activities of the project will also include training for human rights lawyers and NGOs nationally, as well as consultations with lawyers and NGOs preparing individual communications. Finally, there will be a training for journalists on ECHR judgments.



Led by Open Society Foundation NGO, Ukraine, the project, "[EU Budget Support to Eastern Partnership Countries: Civil Monitoring and Evaluation](#)" will monitor the quantity and effectiveness of the EU Development and Cooperation Instrument (DCI) thematic programme 'Non-state actors – Local authorities', focus on indirect state budget support to the EaP countries and, where necessary, describe the state of play, amounts provided, and policy impact achieved.

The "[Comparative elections observation](#)" project implemented by the European Initiative Liberal Academy from Tbilisi, Georgia, aims to provide a comparative analysis of 2013-2014 elections in selected EaP countries, and lessons that can be drawn from the different monitoring reports. This initiative builds on the monitoring experience to date of members of the sub-group of Election Monitoring within the Working Group.