

ANNUAL ACTIVITIES REPORT

WORKING GROUP 4 Contacts between people



EVENTS HELD BY THE WORKING GROUP 4 DURING THE REPORTING PERIOD

Working Group 4 Annual Meeting

15-16 June 2016, Brussels

The Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum Working Group 4 "Contacts between People" held its Annual Meeting on 15-16 June in Brussels. The event covered topics pertaining to youth, education and cultural policies, as well as the development of seniors' organisations and the monitoring of pension systems reform in the EaP countries. The discussion with EU policy makers from DG NEAR (Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations), DG EAC (Education and Culture) and the European Parliament focused on the Bologna process, the Creative Europe program, ERASMUS+ and the role of civil society in the reform process.





The thematic subgroups on culture, education and contacts between seniors discussed the ongoing cooperation, sharing of good practices and ideas for re-granting projects in 2017, whereas the subgroup on youth focused on planning of the EaP Youth Conference 2016. Members of the Working Group 4 also debated advocacy priorities and mechanisms, as well as possible contributions of the Working Group to the Annual Assembly in November.

Since Erika Rydgergard had resigned from the position of EU co-coordinator of the WG4, the election of the new co-coordinator was organised during the WG4 Annual meeting. Andrei Trubceac was elected as EU co-coordinator for WG4.

EaP CSF MEASURES INITIATED BY THE WORKING GROUP 4

- The WG4 coordinator drafted the List of responsibilities of subgroup coordinators and national level WG Coordinators, suggesting the Steering Committee to elaborate and present it to the Annual Assembly of the EaP Civil Society Forum.
- The WG4 coordinator proposed the amendments of the Statute of the EaP CSF, to be voted by the EaP CSF Annual Assembly.
- The WG4 coordinator initiated/drafted 5 statements at the National and regional levels, which were adopted by the EaP CSF Steering Committee, EaP CSF Armenian National Platform and will be voted during the EaP CSF Annual Assembly.

REGRANTING PROJECTS

1. EaP Countries Cooperation to Ensure the Quality Assurance in Higher Education and Strengthening Higher Education Reforms in the Eastern Partnership Countries - the Selection Committee suggested to merge the projects (European Institute for Political Studies of Moldova, the Humanitarian Techniques Agency, Belarus)



2. Communities, Classrooms and Civil Society: Sharing Experience and Developing Regional Approaches to Addressing the Rights and Needs of Children with Disabilities in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine (HealthProm, EU).

COMMUNICATION AND COORDINATION ACTIVITIES FOR SUBGROUP COORDINATORS AND WORKING GROUP COORDINATORS AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL

During 2016, Skype discussions with the participation of the EaP CSF Secretariat Staff, the WG4 coordinator, national level WG4 coordinators and coordinators of WG4 sub-groups on Education, Youth and Seniors took place.

November 26, 2016

In accordance with the decision taken during the meeting of the EaP CSF WG4 in Batumi in November 2014, the WG4 coordinator created a special platform (Google-group) for communication between members of the working group. There is a constant exchange of information, including documents and opportunities on this platform. Between December 2014 and November 25 2015, the number of participants in the Google-group increased by 58 persons, reaching 163 in October 2015. On 25 November 2016, the Google-group had 206 active participants. The Google-group has been constantly updated by the WG4 coordinator of with useful information about grants, projects and events.

The number of applications to take part in the Annual Assembly of the EaP Civil Society Forum in Brussels increased compared with 2015, with a larger share of NGOs from the EU.

A Facebook platform for participants and interested parties of the EaP Youth Conference has been created by the WG4 coordinator: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1152195154858279/> .

As of 26 November 2016, the number of members of the platform was 155.



KEY ACTIVITIES IMPLEMENTED BY WORKING GROUP 1

8th EaP Informal Ministerial Dialogue

Yerevan, 17 November 2016



As a member of the Steering Committee, Hovsep Khurshudyan represented the EaP CSF at the meeting. Speaking on behalf of the EaP CSF, Mr Khurshudyan highlighted the key role that civil society plays in the Eastern Partnership countries in promoting democracy and human rights. He stressed the need to tackle pressing issues such as the high level of youth unemployment and the persecution of civil society activists in the region. The meeting gathered Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the EaP countries and EU officials, including the Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, Johannes Hahn. The discussions mainly focused on the implementation of the renewed European Neighbourhood Policy and other challenges in the region. The full text of the address is published on the EaP CSF web-site.

Beacon Project's Round Table

11-12 November, Riga

Hovsep Khurshudyan took part in the Beacon Project's Round Table hosted by the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies and the International Republican Institute. Thanks to the support provided by the National Endowment for Democracy, the Beacon Project supports a stronger and broader transatlantic dialogue on how to close the democracy gaps in our societies and counter the disinformation machine that uses them.

EaP Platform IV - Torino Process 2016 Regional Conference

9-10 November, Tbilisi

Hovsep Khurshudyan and Mariia Symonova took part in the Eastern Partnership Platform IV - Torino Process 2016 Regional Conference, presenting the activities of the EaP CSF WG4. Inspired by the EU Copenhagen Process, the Torino Process is an evidence-based approach to

the analysis of VET and skills policies, based on country ownership and the broad and open participation of stakeholders from the public and private sectors.

Presentation of the EaP Civil Society Forum at the 9th edition of the Black Sea NGO Forum

30 October - 2 November 2016, Varna

Hovsep Khurshudyan was invited to participate in the 9th edition of the Black Sea NGO Forum as a representative of the EaP Civil Society Forum. During the panel «Connecting the Forum with other regional initiatives», he presented the EaP CSF, its activities, structure, re-granting mechanisms and application process for membership.

Tatra Summit 2016

29 October 2016, Bratislava

Hovsep Khurshudyan took part in the discussion on «European Neighbourhood Policy Review one year after – Challenges to the East», an expert workshop on the side-lines of the GLOBSEC Tatra Summit 2016. On this occasion, he raised the issue of the involvement of the EaP civil society in the European Neighbourhood policy reviewing process.

Organisation of the Eastern Partnership Youth Conference “Youth for Rights”

27-28 October 2016, Bratislava

The EaP CSF Working Group 4 “Contacts between People” and its Coordinator Hovsep Khurshudyan initiated holding the Eastern Partnership Youth Conference “Youth for Rights”. The conference was for the first time organised by the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum under the patronage of the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the European Union on 27-28 October in Bratislava, Slovakia. It brought together 145 young activists from the EaP countries, Russia and the EU, who advocate for human rights and the democratic development of their societies.

The event was dedicated to main 5 topics:

- Youth for democracy – youth participation in decision making at the local, regional and state level (youth NGOs, informal activists groups and their role in promotion of democracy in the EaP countries), good governance, corruption, freedom of expression;
- Youth for environment – campaigns and strategies in tackling environmental issues, dialogue with authorities;
- Youth for inclusion and diversity - ethnic, religious and sexual minority rights, tolerance, youth policies against radicalization;

- Youth for education – students’ rights and academic freedoms, participation in decision making (students’ self-government, student unions), Bologna process standards;
- Youth at work - labour markets, migration and social and labour rights.



The Aim of the Conference was to facilitate cooperation and networking between participants engaged in the Conference to create stronger and trust-based bonds for the future, and to create synergies between the EaP Youth Conference, on one side, and the next EaP Youth Forum-2017(Warsaw), the upcoming EaP Civil Society Forum Annual

Assembly-2016 (November, Brussels) and the next Platform 4 meeting of the Eastern Partnership-2016 (December, Brussels) on other side, taking part in the development of priorities and the agenda for both EaP events.

Study visit to Istanbul

19 October 2016

Hovsep Khurshudyan had a study visit to Istanbul to establish ties with Turkish civic and cultural organisations, expert’s communities and media. This travel was supported by the Turkey-Armenia Travel Grant administered by the Hrant Dink Foundation, in collaboration with the Eurasia Partnership Foundation (EPF) and Gyumri “Youth Initiative Centre” NGO (YIC) in Armenia.



Working meeting to discuss the contents of the EaP Youth Conference “Youth for rights”

12 October 2016, Kiev

The meeting was organised by the Prep Team of the WG4, with participation of the facilitators, trainers and experts of the event and with aim to ensure coordination and collaboration among them to achieve

common goals. The event was funded by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

Youth Social Forum

25 September 2016, Yerevan

Hovsep Khurshudyan, as a EaP CSF Working Group 4 coordinator, was a speaker in two panels of the Youth Social Forum in Yerevan. He presented to the young leaders the ways of combating xenophobia as well as possible consequences of militarisation of Armenia.



Human Rights Conference « On the Frontline: human rights situation in the EaP Countries»

19-20 September 2016, Chisinau

Hovsep Khurshudyan took part as a speaker in the panel “Human rights challenges in the EaP countries and international mechanisms”.

26 August 2016, Yerevan

After having being released from prison, Hovsep Khurshudyan had a press conference together with another EaP CSF, leader of the National Citizens' Initiative Davit Sanasaryan (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BCiWVeTS0qg>), and then participated at the human-rights defenders civic rally, having a speech on 26 August 2016: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wHJGGzV071I>

29 July 2016, Yerevan

Hovsep Khurshudyan was arrested on 29 July and on 2 August 2016 was imprisoned together with other civic activists and politicians. He spent a month in prison on fabricated criminal charges based on the false testimony of two police officers, after taking part in a peaceful demonstration to express his civic position and political views. Although Hovsep Khurshudyan was released on bail, the charges against him and his colleagues have not been dropped so far and many of them are still in jail. EaP CSF Steering Committee issued a special statement demanding Hovsep Khurshudyan's immediate release: <http://eap-csf.eu/index.php/2016/08/04/steering-committee-demands-immediate-release-of-steering-committee-member-hovsep-khurshudyan-2/?lang=ru>



Following the 17-31 July events, on 9-15 August 2016 the Steering Committee sent a Monitoring Mission of the EaP CSF to Armenia in order to assess the situation of non-governmental organisations and the media in the aftermath of the crisis, and to collect complete and accurate information about the situation in particular fields of human rights. The mission was supported by the Armenia National Platform of the EaP CSF and included leading experts in the field of human rights from four EaP countries: Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. Preliminary conclusions and recommendations of the mission have been published on the Forum website: <http://eap-csf.eu/index.php/2016/08/22/preliminary-findings-and-recommendations-of-the-eap-csf-monitoring-mission-to-armenia/?lang=ru>

The consolidated efforts of the EaP CSF National Platforms, the Steering Committee, and the Secretariat aimed at the release from custody of the Steering Committee member Hovsep Khurshudyan, who was detained amidst the protests on the night of 29-30 July 2016 in Yerevan, led to the prompt release of our colleague.

2-5 July 2016, Minsk

The WG4 coordinator participated in the Educational festival as an expert.



15th Meeting of the Eastern Partnership Platform 4 “Contacts Between People”

7 June 2016

The WG4 coordinator Hovsep Khurshudyan and the WG4 Education sub-group member Andrey Yahorov took part in the EaP Intergovernmental Platform 4 meeting. The meeting was dedicated to the Developments and next steps in the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Eastern

Partnership (EaP).



Working Meeting of the WG4 Council

10 March 2016, Bratislava

The meeting focused on the outcomes of the EaP CSF actions in 2015, the developments of WG4 advocacy at the EU-level, including Platform 4 updates, the priorities and activities of the National Platforms, EaP CSF Re-granting 2016, the EaP Youth Conference, the preparation of the



WG4 meeting.

Starting of the preparation activities in view of the EaP Youth Conference

January 2016

The preparatory team for the organization of the EaP Youth Conference was established at the end of the January. A coordinator of the EaP Youth Conference was elected and the name of the conference was approved. The concept and the Draft Agenda of the Conference were developed by the Conference coordinator.

EED event «Armenia: on the brink of constitutional change? »

15 December 2015, Brussels

The WG4 coordinator Hovsep Khurshudyan, together with two prominent Armenian civic activists, was invited as a speaker at the EED advocacy event : «Armenia: on the brink of constitutional change?».

<https://www.democracyendowment.eu/news/armenia-referendum-spurs-largest-ever-local-observation-initiative/>

<https://www.democracyendowment.eu/news/armenia-on-the-brink-of-constitutional-change/>

Advocacy meetings

15 December 2015, Brussels

The WG4 Coordinator Hovsep Khurshudyan and the Advocacy Manager of the EaP CSF Secretariat Vera Rihackova met with several officials in the European Parliament and the European Commission:

1. Herbert Salber, Ambassador, EU Special Representative for South Caucasus and the crisis in Georgia, EEAS;
2. Mr Adriano Martins, Deputy Head of Division Eastern Partnership bilateral, and Mr Razvan Stefan RAB, Desk Officer for Relations with Armenia, European External Action Service (EEAS);
3. Yakub Tarka, Assistant to the Vice-President of the European Parliament.

14th Meeting of the Eastern Partnership Platform 4 “Contacts Between People”

14 December 2015

The WG4 Co-coordinators Hovsep Khurshudyan and Erika Rydergard took part in the 14th Meeting of the EaP Ministerial Platform 4. Two main goals were reached. First of all, they advocated for the amendments, suggested by the WG4 members, to the Platform 4 2014-2017



Working Plan mid-term review. Moreover, the EaP Youth Conference on human rights was included in the Working Plan and funded by DG NEAR.

2 December 2015, Yerevan

As a member of the EaP CS Forum, Hovsep Khurshudyan had a speech during the rally dedicated to the Constitutional reforms in Armenia.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QgHRnFaZ3oE>

MEDIA COVERAGE

In Ukraine:

Журнал Країна, 10 September 2016

In Belarus:

<http://eurobelarus.info/news/world/2016/09/02/ovsep-hurshudyan-osvobozhdenie-novyh-politzaklyuchennyh.html>

<http://eurobelarus.info/news/world/2016/07/20/ovsep-hurshudyan-gruppa-sasna-tsrer-ne-terroristy-eto.html>

In Armenia:

<https://eaparmenianews.wordpress.com/>

https://eeas.europa.eu/topics/eastern-partnership/14123/eastern-partnership-youth-conference-youth-for-rights_en

<http://galatv.am/hy/news/170371/>

<http://www.aravot.am/2016/08/01/722711/>

<http://galatv.am/hy/news/135073/>

<http://galatv.am/hy/news/168889/>

<http://galatv.am/hy/news/162493/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X7FNhRidVX8>

