

## Working Group 4 "Contacts between People" Annual Meeting

*15-16 June 2016, Brussels*  
Hotel Pullman, Place Victor Horta, 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 development of seniors' organisations and pension reforms' monitoring 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 Bologna process, the Creative Europe program, ERASMUS+ and the role of civil society in the reform processes.

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 subgroup on youth focused on planning of the EaP Youth Conference 2016. The 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.

### **Updates from Platform 4**

[Presentation on EaP Platform 4 Activities](#) by **Kamila Partyka** (DG EAC, International Cooperation in Education and Youth).

### **Education Policy Reform and Bologna Process**

This session was moderated by **Dzmitry Karpiyevich** (Association of Life-long Education and Enlightenment, Belarus). **Kamila Partyka** (DG EAC) described the [Bologna Process](#), saying that it is a voluntary process around common commitments to make higher education more comparable between countries and to make it possible for knowledge to circulate freely. The process is geared towards the inclusion of students both in the assessment and in the design of teaching. She also described the institutions that work within the Bologna Process, including working groups on monitoring, on implementation of agreed commitments, on non-implementation, and advisory groups that cover the same fields. This said civil society as such is not part of the Bologna process. She added that the European Commission can support the Bologna Process through initiatives related to recognition and quality assurance, and education programmes such as the ECTS credits system that was developed within Erasmus.

WG4 members asked how to combat the frequent lack of implementation of Bologna-inspired legislative provisions in EaP countries. They mentioned two foremost obstacles: the lack of knowledge of Bologna processes by civil society, and unwillingness to cooperate on the part of the government. **Ms Partyka** answered that there are various ways in which civil society can use existing EU-EaP instruments to monitor compliance. For instance, the Association Agreement between the EU and

Ukraine covers the modernisation of higher education. By influencing the implementation of the Association Agreement, civil society can influence the Bologna process in Ukraine.

**Alena Zuikova** (Humanitarian Techniques' Agency, Center for European Transformation, Belarus) [presented](#) one of the re-granted WG4 projects. The project, which concerns the role of civil society actors in higher education reform in EaP countries, foresees such measures as strategic consultations through a 4-day organisational activity game (OAG), in Armenia with 30 participants, and, the production of a report with relevant recommendations.

The recommendations will be forwarded to the structures responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Bologna Process. The report will be used as the basis for the discussion on the best practices related to the Bologna process during the Annual Assembly in Brussels.

**Maria Stratan** (European Institute for Political Studies, Moldova) [presented](#) the project on the higher education quality assurance in EaP countries. There is clear evidence that there are issues with implementation in Moldova, Ukraine and Belarus. The project will focus on conducting an experts' opinion assessment of higher education quality assurance policies in the EaP countries.

**Kamyla Partyka** suggested that the assessment of higher education policies in these EaP countries could include a comparison with the Baltic countries' higher education system, which has completed its transition from the Soviet to the western higher education system.

### **Cultural policies in the Eastern Partnership**

**Tatiana Poshevalova** (Public Association Centre for Social Innovations, Belarus) lamented that the EU and other countries are experiencing a crisis of ideas with respect to culture comparable to economic crisis in 2008. More specifically, identity crisis refers to different cultures in terms of ideologies and belief systems as opposed to national identities. **Hughes Becquart** (DG EAC, Creative Europe Programme) highlighted that culture can create space for a dialogue and mutual learning, as well as economic opportunities. Subsequently, he elaborated upon the joint [Communication on International Cultural Relations](#) by the European External Action Service and the European Commission. The joint initiative underlines the importance of culture in international relations. Mr Becquart indicated that there was a need for a different approach in international cultural cooperation - paradigm shift from showcasing approach to collaborative approach. The strategy is premised on the following three objectives:

- Culture as socio-economic factor - support for the development of cultural policies in partner countries and of cultural and creative sectors worldwide.
- Intercultural dialogue - supported by cooperation programs such as the Creative Europe and the EU-Eastern Partnership Culture and Creativity Program. It also entails intercultural dialogue for peacebuilding and reconciliation
- Cooperation on cultural heritage - research on cultural heritage, e.g. through Horizon 2020. Prevention of Illicit trafficking of cultural goods is another priority. Italy, UNESCO and the EU will work together on a blue helmet force to protect cultural heritage in times of conflict.

The objectives of the strategy will be implemented by the EU bringing an added value and cooperating with Member States' cultural institutes and civil society in partner countries. EU delegations will also engage in the implementation of the strategy. The primary purpose of the strategy is to facilitate cooperation, create synergies and build bridges. Although the new strategy does not create new funding programs, it will facilitate the funding of cultural activities in existing programmes.

In addition, Mr Becquart [presented](#) the Creative Europe Programme and the existing opportunities for non-EU countries. He also indicated that Creative Europe desks from different countries engage in experience-sharing with one another to facilitate the phase-in of new participating countries.

**Ihor Savchak** (Centre for Cultural Management, Ukraine) explained that culture is extremely important now in Ukraine where it is the most dynamic topic debated in the society. According to Mr Savchak support is required for cultural initiatives that drive change in the cultural field. The Centre for Cultural Management suggested a different perspective on addressing cultural policy - their approach does not focus on cultural sector but on the culture of individuals, regardless of their primary activities. All programs should enable individual to know who he/she is, what he/she identifies with and what value he/she has in the society. He also observed that cultural diplomacy can have significant impact on internal culture in the EaP countries. Mr Savchak also noted that one of the main issues in Ukraine is the lack of due attention to the importance of cultural policy from different stakeholders including government, cultural sector itself and other governmental organisations. He also mentioned that the Creative Europe Programme is too big for the Ukrainian civil society actors since it aims at larger projects with larger funding. He stressed the need for more support to creative actors as opposed to cultural institutions.

#### **Elections of the new WG4 EU Coordinator**

Kateryna Shalayeva (Erasmus Mundus Students and Alumni Association - EMA) and Andrei Trubceac (Peace Action, Training and Research Institute of Romania (PATRIR)) were nominated for the election of the WG4 EU coordinator. Andrei Trubceac was elected with 16 votes. Special gratitude was expressed to Erika Rydergard, previous WG4 EU coordinator. WG4 highly appreciated her important work and best efforts, thanks to which the WG4 activity became richer and much more efficient.

#### **Presentation of the Re-granting Project**

**Lauren Foster Mustarde** (HealthProm) [presented](#) the re-granting project on rights and needs of children with disabilities.

#### **ERASMUS+, views and perspectives from the Eastern Partnership**

The panel moderated by **Hovsep Khurhudyán** (WG4 Coordinator) was dedicated to a discussion of an ongoing and upcoming cooperation programs between the EU and the EaP countries.

**Alessandro Leone** (DG NEAR, EU4Youth) informed the members of WG4 about the Erasmus+ program and the new EU4Youth initiative to be launched in 2016-2017. A question about the eligibility of seniors' organizations from the EaP countries to participate in the ERASMUS+ program was raised, however Erasmus+ is intended for youth from the EU and the EaP countries, hence the program does

not include any activities for seniors. **Alfonso Aliberti** (European Youth Forum) highlighted the importance of cooperation between the youth organizations from the EU and the EaP countries. This cooperation, in his opinion, empowers local organizations from the EaP countries, which are seen as a core of the regional development of the civil society. However, re-prioritization of funding and revision of Multiannual Financial Framework is needed. Youth leaders can promote and develop the cooperation between the EaP CSOs and the EU in future. The speaker also mentioned that youth organizations provide a possibility to develop soft skills, entrepreneurship skills, etc. The European Youth Forum assists grassroots level organizations from the EaP countries in receiving European grants and strengthen their cooperation with partner organisations on the EU level. Mr Aliberti underlined that due to this the EaP organisations are able to apply as a lead partner in project implementation. On currently running projects by the European Youth Forum in the EaP countries, Mr Aliberti replied that the consultations on the cooperation programs in the EaP countries are currently taking place. Mr Aliberti stressed the existing cooperation with the WG4 of the EaP CSF and willingness of the European Youth Forum to further cooperation. A question related to the application guidelines for the EU4Youth projects was addressed to Mr Leone.

**Petra Škrinjar** (Head of office, MEP Milan Zver, Rapporteur on Erasmus+) informed the participants about preparation of the report on Erasmus+ programme implementation. Erasmus+ merged all previous programs in this field. The report includes quality and goal achievement. Main goals of the program are increasing of informal education level, closing the skills gap, increasing the skills level, increasing of young peoples' abilities. Furthermore, the program aims to increase the affiliation of young people from the EaP countries to the EU and foster democratic participation, respect human rights and rule of law as well as European values in the EaP countries. Ms Škrinjar also stressed the importance of the Bologna process in the EaP countries and indicated it as a very important part of the Erasmus+. Mr Leone also promised to take into account this matter and provide the EaP CSF with further information on the support of education programs for adults in the Erasmus+ framework. Vera Rihackova from the EaP CSF Secretariat made a suggestion about taking into account the results of 2 projects on Bologna process, which will be available in autumn 2016 into Erasmus+ report. Ms Škrinjar emphasized that comments and suggestions, which could be beneficial for the EaP countries should be addressed to her and will be revised. She also provided the participants with a timeline of the Erasmus+ report adoption. In particular, presentation of the report in the European Parliament in July 2016, further voting on the report in the Committee of Education in November 2016 and final vote in the European Parliament in December 2016-January 2017.

#### **Development of seniors' organisations and monitoring pension reforms and policies in EaP countries**

The panel moderated by **Tatsiana Zelko** (Nashe Pokolenie, Belarus) debated protection of the rights of seniors', increasing their participation in societies and the need for reforms to pension system in the EaP countries. Ms Zelko expressed her hope to ameliorate quality of life for senior citizens by cooperating with organisations working on seniors issues in the EU. She also emphasised the importance of intergenerational dialogue. **An Hermans** (European Seniors' Union) spoke about better integration of seniors within societies. The European Seniors' Union is focused on giving a voice to seniors and senior associations on a societal as well as political levels. She also noted that human rights

movement is as important for seniors as it is for young people. The society, governments and political systems should respect the fact that seniors have a right to live in dignity and be an active part of society. It is essential to work on the relevant issues such as long-term care, health care, pensions and accessibility for people with special needs. Seniors should also be more involved in recreational activities and public initiatives. Ms Hermans reminded that the EU does not have a competence on matters related to pensions, however, it can pursue a dialogue with the Member States encouraging positive changes in this area. The growing importance of the intergenerational dialogue was also reiterated. **Aliaksandr Zialko** (Pension Event, Belarus) [highlighted](#) that seniors are an important demographic group for the integration process of the EaP countries. He identified the main structural issues relating to seniors' rights in the EaP countries:

- Absence of an ombudsman for protection of the rights of seniors
- Absence of expert monitoring group on the pension system
- Shortage of CSOs working on seniors' issues

Mr Zialko outlined possible courses of action to address these issues, namely:

- Establishment of a monitoring group for pension system and institutions for protection of seniors rights
- Events for exchange of the best practices
- Collaboration on implementation of international obligations
- Establishment of a program comparable to ERASMUS+ for promotion of seniors' education

**Narek Gasparyan** (Union of Senior Generations, Armenia) detailed the activities of the Union of Senior Generation, including protection of interests of pensioners, their integration in social, economic as well as political life in Armenia and organising recreational activities like English language and dancing lessons. Furthermore, it was suggested that in terms of social inclusion, organisations working on seniors should cooperate with their counterparts in the field of culture to boost seniors' involvement in cultural activities and arts.

#### **Recommendations by the Prep-Team members for the 2016 EaP Youth Conference in Bratislava, 15 June 2016:**

- The conference needs to have a precisely defined purpose, and linkages to specific policies in EaP countries and in the EU. The formula of the youth conference must find the right balance between capacity-building and policy recommendations. Its main target are human rights defenders and to grassroots militants who are interested in capacity-building, have some national policy experience, but are not well connected with EU policies. The participants must be capable to provide relevant policy recommendations at the end of the conference.
- The conference must include an evidence-based discussion. This result might be attained if the conference is preceded by preparatory work, so that there is a document which is ready to be discussed at the conference itself.
- It was proposed to devote the conference's first day exclusively to capacity building and training, while discussing policy initiatives during the second day, arguing that policy

recommendations should be based on previous knowledge. He added that it would be better for country facilitators to organise preparatory meetings to ensure efficient preparation by the participants.

- The selection criteria for the conference need to be more specific.
- Working group “youth against radicalisation” should be replaced with “youth for inclusion and diversity”.

The European Commission documents related to Platform 4:

- [Fifth Progress Report on Platform 4](#)
- [The ERASMUS Impact Study](#)
- [Communication “A New Skills Agenda for Europe”](#)
- [Working Document “Analytical underpinning for a New Skills Agenda for Europe”](#)
- [Presentation on Creative Georgia Forum](#)

[Photos from the WG4 Annual Meeting](#)