

Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum - Working Group 2

Online Meeting, 24 – 25 June 2024

Short report for distribution

The Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF) Working Group 2 (WG2) held its first meeting online on 24-25 June 2024. The event, spanning five sessions, involved the introduction of delegates, statutory elections, policy country updates, and the formulation of the 2024-2025 Work Plan.

Introduction

The meeting began with introductory remarks from outgoing coordinators Laura Dittel (Slovakia, EU) and Nino Elizbarashvili (Georgia, EaP). Delegates introduced themselves, their organisations, and countries, highlighting their unique contributions to the civil society ecosystem. The EaP CSF Secretariat provided an overview of the Forum's structure, regulatory processes, and activities, particularly focusing on the history, mission, and priorities of WG2 for the 2024/2025 cycle.

Statutory elections and results

Statutory elections for new WG2 coordinators were held. The candidates included Nino Elizbarashvili (Georgia), Iryna Kuropas (Ukraine), David Tsiskaridze (Georgia), and Veronica Stefan (Romania). Angela Chicu (Moldova) withdrew her candidacy. The candidates presented their motivations and electoral programmes and engaged in a Q&A session with delegates. The election results, announced the next morning (forth session), showed Nino Elizbarashvili and Veronica Stefan as the new coordinators:

<https://vote.electionrunner.com/election/SCsEK/results>

Policy country updates

Delegates provided updates from their respective EaP countries and National Platforms.

Armenia. Karen Chilingaryan (WG2 delegate and appointed spokesperson in the session on behalf of local WG2 within the Armenian National Platform) discussed digitalisation, economic development, agricultural trade, and energy security. Renewable energy, especially wind energy, was highlighted, noting its untapped potential despite higher infrastructure costs.

Azerbaijan. Samir Aliyev (WG2 delegate and appointed spokesperson in the session on behalf of local WG2 within the Azerbaijani National Platform) referred to preparations for COP29 as a priority for the Azerbaijani government this year. He touched upon positive reforms pertaining to green energy transition, and highlighted challenges such as increased income tax rates and tightened regulations for taxi services. Lastly, he emphasized the crackdown on civil society and media, along with the rise in political prisoners.

Belarus. Natallia Harbuz (local WG2 coordination within the Belarusian National Platform) discussed the economic impact of EU and international sanctions on Belarus (Lukashenka's regime), shift in trade partners, and the severe repression of civil society. The principle of "isolate the regime – open up to people" was stressed to alleviate the impact on ordinary citizens.

Georgia. Nino Elizbarashvili (local WG2 coordinator within the Georgian National Platform) highlighted the critical period for civil society due to the new adopted law "On transparency of foreign funding". She also



referred to the need for more targeted reforms in trade, economic development, and digitalisation to tackle various challenges pertaining to Georgian SMEs' access to finance, digital divide, and trade barriers for domestic businesses.

Moldova. Adrian Lupusor (WG2 delegate and appointed spokesperson in the session on behalf of WG2 within the Moldovan National Platform) emphasised the importance of EU accession negotiations and touched upon the need to tackle pressing challenges in public administration and the judiciary sector, as well as the impact of Russia's aggression against Ukraine for Moldova. Energy security improvements and creating an enabling environment for businesses were also mentioned.

Ukraine. Iryna Kuropas (local WG2 coordinator within the Ukrainian National Platform) gave an overview of the Ukrainian National Platform's participation in international and local events and stressed the importance of civil society's work in times of war. She also referred to the importance of supporting social entrepreneurship and creating synergies between civil society and businesses.

WG2 Work Plan 2024-2025

The final session was dedicated to discussing WG priorities and developing the 2024-2025 Work Plan through two breakout discussions in Russian and English. Key issues included:

Russian-Speaking Group: Focused on EU fund allocation, trade barriers, digitalisation, and combating hybrid threats. The importance of civil society's role in monitoring and ensuring accountability was highlighted.

English-Speaking Group: Discussed issues pertaining to access to finance for SMEs, market opportunities, trade barriers, digitalization, brain drain, and touched upon the need for setting clearer EaP policy targets. Delegates proposed several actions to be included in the WG Work Plan including peer-to-peer learning and knowledge sharing sessions, development of roadmaps for EU accession, and elaboration of factsheets on various relevant topics for the WG.

The two small groups also discussed possible thematic focuses for WG2's policy paper.

Conclusions

The meeting concluded with an agreement to coordinate and articulate key policy priorities across the region, preparing for the WG Work Plan, policy paper, and prepare for the next in-person meeting in Vienna (EaP CSF Civil Society Summit).

