

EaP CSF Working Group 2 Meeting 2024 'Economic integration and convergence with EU policies'

Venue: NH Danube City Hotel

Tuesday, 19 November 2024

On November 19, 2024, EaP CSF Working Group 2 (WG2) delegates held their third meeting of the year.

The meeting was moderated by the WG2 Coordinators, **Nino Elizbarashvili** (Georgian Association "Women in Business"- GAWB) and **Veronica Stefan** (Founder & Coordinator Digital Citizens Romania).

The discussions were structured around the following **agenda points**:

- WG2 reporting & feedback
- Updates on WG2 policy paper
- Finalisation of the EaP CSF Summit Resolution
- WG country updates

REPORTING AND FEEDBACK

The WG2 parallel session was opened with the presentation of the Annual Activity Report. WG2 coordinators, Veronica Stefan and Nino Elizbarashvili, introduced delegates to the report that can be consulted [here](#).

WG2 POLICY PAPER

The WG2 coordinators provided updates and the timeline for the policy paper titled *"Advancing economic and digital transformation in the Eastern Partnership region – enablers and challenges. What is the role of civil society?"*

The elaboration of the paper by Haykuhi Harutyunyan is based on an inclusive process. A dedicated survey for the paper is open until 10 December and 12 interviews are currently carried on. The paper is aimed at being finalised ahead of the high-level EaP Summit (next spring 2025).

FINALISATION OF THE 2024 EaP CSF GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION

With the support of WG2 coordinators, WG2 delegates reviewed and revised sections of the draft resolution that related to the thematic area of expertise of the group, namely economic development and digitalisation. The WG2 coordinators gathered input which was later reflected in the final text of the resolution. Following its adoption, the resolution is now available [here](#).



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COUNTRY UPDATES

Armenia

In the first quarter of 2024, economic growth in Armenia was recorded at 9.2%, primarily driven by the expansion of services and industry. Economic growth for the year is projected to be around 6.3%, with an average growth rate of 5.7% in the medium term.

Digitalisation efforts are ongoing in terms of implementation. For instance, the entire tax system has been transferred online, with reports now accepted only in digital format. Similarly, e-government systems have been established. The same applies to e-health. The e-health system is connected to the Armenian Government's interaction platform and exchanges data with other departmental systems to ensure data accuracy.

Azerbaijan

There is a significant need to improve the legal and regulatory framework for CSO activities and to prioritise human capital, namely through the deep revision of laws such as 'On NGOs and Foundations,' 'On Grants,' and 'On Public Participation'. Since 2015, access to foreign funding for domestic NGOs in Azerbaijan has been severely restricted due to government requirements for donor registration, and the registration of foreign grants, service contracts, and donations.

The survival of independent Azerbaijani NGOs is at risk in the country.

Belarus

A new wave of repression targeting civil society representatives operating abroad has been introduced. The government continues to threaten people within the country, making it difficult for them to maintain connections with those abroad.

It is crucial for Belarusians to remain in the Eastern Partnership. The European institutions should support key drivers of change, such as cybersecurity, informational security, culture, education, and youth.

Georgia

Civil society in Georgia has been facing a critical period since the Georgian Parliament passed the "Transparency of Foreign Funding" law. The current situation has created significant difficulties and delayed the implementation of planned activities.

The involvement of civil society in decision-making processes, particularly in policymaking and the development of state strategies and action plans, remains quite low.

Moldova

In the process of Moldova's accession to the EU, representatives of civil society organizations were invited to contribute to accession negotiations. Their contributions included developing presentations for bilateral screening sessions, reviewing these presentations, and participating in information campaigns.

Economic Development: The economy is currently experiencing growth. Many associations are being created in various fields, such as tourism, winemaking, IT, support for women in business, and support for small businesses.

Moreover, national think tanks are becoming more active, developing policies and

advocating for legislative changes in the economic sector. Hundreds of small businesses in villages are being financed by the LEADER Program, through Local Action Groups.

Ukraine

In Ukraine, civil society remains a key driver of change and resilience. However, it faces various challenges, including the pressures of war, and their impact on reforms, low citizen awareness, institutional weaknesses, limited funding, and regional disparities.

Despite these challenges, civil society demonstrates strong adaptability, innovation, and the ability to unite citizens around common goals.

Recommendations:

- Strengthen the capacity of WG2 members to monitor EU accession.
- Support WG2 members in advocating for better recovery strategies.
- Share best practices in relevant fields.
- Prepare and advocate for policy papers on relevant topics.
- Evaluate the Platform's functioning at both the national and EU levels.