

Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum - Working Group 4

Online Meeting, 24 – 25 June 2024

Summary report for distribution

The Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF) Working Group 4 (WG4) ‘Contacts between people’ 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 Sintija Bernava (Latvia, EU) and Tatiana Poshevalova (Belarus, EaP). Delegates introduced themselves, their organisations, and countries, highlighting their unique contributions to the civil society ecosystem. Following the tour de table, the EaP CSF Secretariat provided a short introduction to the EaP CSF and Working Group 4. This included the history, mission, and structure of the EaP CSF as well as the priorities, activities and main milestones for Working Group 4.

Statutory elections and results

The EaP CSF Secretariat provided a short introduction to the EaP CSF governance structure. The session continued with the statutory elections for new WG4 Coordinators. The candidates for the position of EaP Coordinator were Mr. Hovsep Khurshudyan from the organisation “Free Citizen” Civic Initiatives Support Center NGO” (Armenia) and Mr. Zaur Akbar from the organisation “Youth Club Public Union” (Azerbaijan). The one candidate for the position of EU Coordinator was Ms. Anastasiia Halyko from the organisation “CRISP e.V.” (Germany). 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 Hovsep Khurshudyan and Anastasiia Halyko as the new coordinators. <https://vote.electionrunner.com/election/7X8iw/results>

Policy country updates

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

Armenia. Hovsep Khurshudyan, representing the local WG4 of the Armenian National Platform at the meeting, put emphasis on the local WG4’s cooperation with the Ministry of education, sport and culture in Armenia, including through the establishment of a structured dialogue. The Ministry is the main counterpart in covering the fields of education, culture and youth. Collaboration will also be started with the Social Ministry. The ambition is to moreover reactivate sub-Groups at the country level. All these processes go together with the Statutory process in the Armenian National Platform.

Azerbaijan. Hasan Huseynli, representing the local WG4 of the Azerbaijani National Platform at the meeting, focused on education and underlined that there have been many activities have been undertaken to allow youth to study abroad, including scholarship programmes. He underlined a recent update of the Law on NGOs/Civil Society in the country and stated that there is a deep wish for civil society in Azerbaijan to be more active in achieving successes in the Neighbourhood programme of the EU.



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Belarus. Vital Rymasheuski, representing the local WG4 of the Belarus National Platform at the meeting, stressed that repression in the country is expected to increase over the coming years. He made an additional emphasis on the growth of xenophobia, increased isolationism and discrimination based on citizenship in Belarus. Solutions are being sought, and many initiatives are being created for Belarusians to continue participating in public life.

Georgia. Nukri Kvelashvili, local WG4 Coordinator of the Georgian National Platform, highlighted that the newly implemented law on “foreign influence” has hindered civil society’s efforts. He additionally briefly described the composition, goals, and activities of the Georgian National Platform. He added that most of the Georgian NGOs are not going to register in the list of foreign agents and are actively cooperating with donors.

Moldova. Steliana Burlacu, representing the local WG4 of the Moldovan National Platform at the meeting, stated that the reform process in Moldova is moving in a dynamic direction. Members of the NP can join governmental Working Groups focusing on science and research, education and social entrepreneurship. Civil Society can have the possibility to work with governmental bodies. Among the main challenges, Ms. Burlacu underlined that Peace and Security are actual topics for the country. On the topic of Youth, the number of students and youth is decreasing due to emigration and brain drain.

Ukraine. Ivan Kulchytsky, local WG4 Coordinator of the Ukrainian National Platform, highlighted Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine has had a devastating impact on education and science in the Country. There is a need to transform the content and organisation of the educational process, and funding for education and science should be increased despite budget deficits. He added that civil society in Ukraine has been active in providing fundraising activities, helping citizens to receive Ukrainian education.

WG4 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. Both groups discussed the main priorities of the Working Group in relation to ‘Contacts between People’.

The English-speaking group elaborated a list of 22 key points to be addressed, covering education, culture, media literacy and engagement as well as the development life-long skills. The Russian speaking group drew up two main objectives: (i) Involving culture, education, bloggers, and opinion leaders to work on a joint strategy combating information wars and consciousness war; and (ii) Raising awareness of young people from EaP/EU countries who work in the areas of culture, education, and blogging, about information wars.

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).