

## EaP CSF Working Group 4 Meeting 2024 'Contacts between people'

Venue: NH Danube City Hotel  
Tuesday, 19 November 2024

On November 19, 2024, EaP CSF Working Group 4 (WG4) registered delegates held their second meeting of the year.

The meeting was moderated by the WG4 Coordinator, **Hovsep Khurshudyan**, Working Group 4 EaP Coordinator, Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum.

### Key Objectives

- Report to delegates on EaP CSF activities since the last Working Group 4 meeting;
- Ensure delegates are up to date about the ongoing process of the elaboration of the WG4 policy paper;
- Facilitate the exchange of views and recommendations with EU stakeholders in view of the vote of the EaP CSF Civil Society Summit resolution.

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

- **I.** WG4 reporting & feedback
- **II.** Updates on WG4 policy paper
- **III.** Finalisation of the EaP CSF Summit Resolution
- **IV.** WG country updates

### **I. WG4 REPORTING AND FEEDBACK**

The WG4 parallel session was opened with the presentation of the Activity Report. WG4 coordinator, Hovsep Khurshudyan, introduced delegates to the report of activities which includes the following:

- 1.** Active participation of WG representatives, and contribution with input to discussions on key thematic areas corresponding to their Working Group at the level of EaP CSF and during official EaP meetings organised under the EaP multilateral track, ***including of EaP CSF consultation on EaP priorities in the WG4 fields, selection and specification main three groups of priorities:***
  - ***Priority 1. Democratic Resilience and Civic Engagement/ key words: safeguarding democracy, non-formal and informal civic education, media literacy, combating russian disinformation and propaganda, critical thinking, intergenerational dialogue, human rights, gender equality: all this with a particular focus on refugees.***



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- **Priority 2. Rethinking EaP // New Formats for Inner-EaP and EaP-EU Relations/ key words: integration aspirations and EU dialogue in the fields of Education, Culture, Youth and Seniors, cross-sectoral and regional cooperation, civil society in discussions and decision-making processes; development of new formats for engagement that reflect the evolving geopolitical landscape and the diverse aspirations of EaP countries.**
  - **Priority 3. Lifelong Learning and Innovation/ key words: lifelong learning initiatives, research and innovation, sustainable development, capacity building, AI and digital transformation.**
2. Relevant projects carried out by the Working Group that is part of the 2024-2025 Work Plan (including the elaboration of WG policy papers).
- **Interviewing, selection and hiring (based on the ToR) of the consultant for the development of policy paper for the Working Group 4 of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum and mapping on the situation with execution of the activities, reached goals, envisaged in the following documents:**
    - a. Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum Strategy 2022-2030, [https://eap-csf.eu/wp-content/uploads/EaP-CSF\\_Strategy-2022-2030.pdf](https://eap-csf.eu/wp-content/uploads/EaP-CSF_Strategy-2022-2030.pdf)
    - b. JOINT STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT under the HIGH REPRESENTATIVE OF THE UNION FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND SECURITY POLICY of the European Commission. The name of the Document is Recovery, resilience and reform: post 2020 Eastern Partnership priorities  
[https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/swd\\_2021\\_186\\_f1\\_joint\\_staff\\_working\\_paper\\_en\\_v2\\_p1\\_1356457\\_0.pdf](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/swd_2021_186_f1_joint_staff_working_paper_en_v2_p1_1356457_0.pdf)
    - c. EaP CSF Position Paper on the Joint Staff Working Document on recovery, resilience and reform: post-2020 Eastern Partnership priorities  
[https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/swd\\_2021\\_186\\_f1\\_joint\\_staff\\_working\\_paper\\_en\\_v2\\_p1\\_1356457\\_0.pdf](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/swd_2021_186_f1_joint_staff_working_paper_en_v2_p1_1356457_0.pdf)
    - d. JOINT COMMUNICATION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020 Reinforcing Resilience - an Eastern Partnership that delivers for all  
[https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/1\\_en\\_act\\_part1\\_v6.pdf](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/1_en_act_part1_v6.pdf)
  - **Preparation of the EaP Youth Conference: thematic focus on Priorities 1 and 3 with. The activity was carried out by the Secretariat with participation of the Prep Team.**

## II. UPDATES ON WG4 POLICY PAPER

The WG4 coordinator provided updates and the timeline for the policy paper titled *“Resilient Democracies in the EaP and EU: Strengthening Capacities of the Civil Societies.”*

The drafting of the paper by Nino Jibuti is based on an inclusive process. A dedicated survey for the paper will be open until 9 December and 12 interviews are currently scheduled. The paper is aimed at being finalised in February 2025 ahead of the 7<sup>th</sup> EaP Summit.

### III. FINALISATION OF THE EAP CSF SUMMIT RESOLUTION

With the support of the WG4 coordinator, the WG4 delegate reviewed and revised sections of the draft resolution that solely relate to the thematic area of expertise. The WG4 coordinator gathered input and later shared it with the EaP CSF Secretariat focal point. Following its adoption, the resolution is now available [here](#).

### IV. WG COUNTRY UPDATES

#### Armenia – presented by **Hovsep Khurshudyan**

- Armenian Civil Society was actively involved in the gathering of signatures for Armenia's EU membership. The process shows that middle age and elderly people were much more active and motivated during the signatures collecting than youth, which is more apolitical.
- The ANP discussed the Culture and creativity projects within Creative Europe; They already have a few projects in Armenia funded by Culture and Creativity. Armenia has not entered the media part of the Creative Europe yet, but the process is close to be finalized with the active involvement of the WG4 of ANP. The negotiations with the government on this is ongoing.
- The local WG4 and Armenian Youth Council members were actively involved in the designing of the Youth Policy, recently adopted by the Government.
- Media literacy, education at the regional level, and critical thinking are among the priorities.
- There are additionally now cross-WG meetings inside of ANP.
- The ANP is also increasing capacity, especially in terms of fundraising.
- The educational and cultural needs of 30.000 displaced schoolchildren from Nagorno-Karabakh should be met.
- As for the EU Delegation to Armenia, European institutions are focused on integration of forcibly displaced 150.000 people from Nagorno-Karabakh, as well as on research.

#### Azerbaijan – presented by **Vusala Huseynli**

Around 140 000 students applied for student loans in Azerbaijan, and around 34 000 received it. The main weakness of the CSOs in Azerbaijan is a lack of funds and difficulties to get foreign grants, which started in 2014, when restrictions were established by the government. "StudentPlus" cards are being issued and civil society is supporting the education of young girls. However, there are weak organisations: one person organisations, organisations whose leaders have travel bans; organisations with challenges; organisations in asylum; unregistered organisations, lack of strategic internal documents; lack of project finance.

Some of the recommendations for EaP Policy Post-2025 in WG4 (People-to-People Contacts) are:

#### 1. Strengthening Education and Youth Engagement:

- Expand Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe opportunities to involve more EaP students, researchers, and educators, ensuring inclusivity for disadvantaged groups.

- Develop joint EU-EaP vocational education and training programs
- Establish a dedicated fund for youth-led initiatives promoting intercultural dialogue, civic engagement, and innovation.

## 2. Enhancing Civil Society Capacity:

- Support capacity-building programs for civil society organizations (CSOs) in areas like advocacy, digital transformation, and resilience building.
- Ensure long-term funding for grassroots initiatives, especially in rural areas, focusing on gender equality, environmental awareness, and social inclusion.
- Encourage local media collaborations to highlight success stories of EU-EaP partnerships in the cultural sector.
- Digital Transformation for Civil Society and Education:
- Provide grants and technical assistance to CSOs and educational institutions for adopting digital tools and platforms.
- Need for Education and Cultural Exchange, Resilience and Inclusion.

### **Belarus** – presented by **Tatiana Poshevalova**

- The government together with Russia is building a totalitarian regime: the militarization of school education, putting the obstacles for learning foreign languages, planting propaganda in the minds of people. There is military training in schools and universities. For example, this February, all rectors of the universities participated in the military training.
- Thousands of people are in prisons, punishments of families and relatives of proactive citizens. Large scale repressions in the educational system kept going, some teachers were prohibited from work.
- About 1500 and 6500 thousand teachers were fired for political reasons.
- Universities are under direct rule of the KGB. KGB officers are appointed by Vice-Rectors for security.
- Persons expelled from education usually have prohibition for profession and even prohibition for any job.
- Influence of "Russkiy Mir" is increasing by soft power means. Russification is a key point of the government. "Rossotrudnichestvo" provided 1300 scholarships to Belarusian students to study in Russian Universities last year. The number of scholarships increased in 8 times in the last 4 years.
- About 500.000 of Belarusian migrants are now in EU countries and Georgia.
- There is urgent need to support educational initiatives and support consolidation of academic community both in and out of Belarus.
- We have to overcome the isolation of civil society in Belarus
- We want to create programs to work with youth, media literacy, cyber security, etc.

### **Georgia** – presented by **Nukri Khelashvili**

- Before the situation with the law on foreign agents, the GNP had strong relations with the Georgian Parliament and with its head. They were planning to hold the thematic meetings, and high-level conference, as well as with Georgian MFA. They had a memorandum with the Parliament but after the law on foreign influence, they had to dissimilate it and break all relations with authorities.

- Georgian civil society started to fight against the mentioned law, some of them sued the Georgian government.
- Some organisations had to stop their activities, some established new organisations because the organisations, registered after 2023 are not covered by the law.
- Some organisations refused to register as foreign agents, while others applied the documents to become foreign agents. However, the government has not started to use the law in its full force, so the full situation is not completely clear to the civil society.
- There is no problem with the direct Russian influence in Georgia as if any political party or organisation declares pro-Russian views, they do not receive any support. The situation is worse as the organisations that declare pro-European aspirations and receive money from the EU, but in reality are working for the benefit of Russia.
- Over 200 organisations are in the GNP, and over 40 organisations are in WG4. They are working in all directions, youth, conflicts, culture, etc.

#### **Moldova** – presented by **Steliana Burlacu**

- In the last meeting of Moldovan National Platform (MNP), the results of the elections and referendum, as well as the lessons to learned were discussed.
- The meetings of the MNP and WG4 are happening regularly.
- They had a few governmental-level meetings to participate in screening and discuss the reforms to implement.
- They wish to cooperate more with the government on the topic of education and science.
- Youth participated least in the elections in Moldova. 60% of the elderly population participated in the elections and they do not share the aspiration to join the EU.
- Some amendments were made to the law on youth, so it was combined with sports law.
- The MNP also wishes for Moldovan civil society to become more financially independent, so they have to work on it.

#### **Ukraine** – presented by **Ivan Kulchytsky**

##### **Russia continues to attack civilians**

**More than 3500** educational institutions were damaged and **365** were completely destroyed, according to the website of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine.

**177** scientific institutions are completely destroyed or damaged.

**12 %** of UA researchers are relocated

**30 %** of UA researchers work online

**The key challenge is how Ukrainian children can receive quality education and opportunities for their development in the context of military operations.**

- loss of human capital: victims of the war, migration abroad, reduction of labour resources for many sectors of the economy;
- destroyed infrastructure, especially in cities close to the frontline;
- funding for education and science needs to be increased in the face of budget deficits

- Helping citizens at home and Ukrainians abroad, especially vulnerable groups. Helping Ukrainian children abroad to receive Ukrainian education
- **Need to Eliminate inequality between «periphery» and «centers»**

#### **Civil society activity example**

- **«Zminotvortsi»** is a worldview educational system for teenagers aged 14 and older from villages and towns with population not more than 10 thousand inhabitants. It consists of 12 online courses that provide a comprehensive overview of the main fields of the modern world on a basic level.

#### **The reforms in science and education is being implemented in the following priority areas:**

- affordable and quality preschool education;
- a new Ukrainian school;
- modern vocational education;
- quality higher education and development of adult education;
- development of science and innovation.
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The reform process is slow, and the government has few internal resources to support reforms, so there is a lot of activity to attract external financing.

#### **Challenges and strengths of civil society:**

- Many new organisations have emerged since 2022.
- In education we need to follow the global goal 4 “Quality education”: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.