

EaP CSF Steering Committee Meeting Minutes

Online, 7 -10 March 2022

Session 1 - Monday, 7 March 2022, 12:45 – 13:45

SC members present (9): Sintija Bernava, Lousineh Hakobyan, Mikayel Hovhannisyan, Shahla Ismayil, Natia Kuprashvili, Goda Neverauskaite, Ana Otilia Nutu, Tatiana Poshevalova, Irina Sukhy

SC members absent (4): Ruslan Havrilyuk, Makysm Koriavets, Adrian Lupusor, Yurii Vdovenko

EaP CSF SC Secretariat Staff present: Vera Rihackova Pachta, Kristina Pitalskaia, Calum Thomson, Erika Zimmer

External stakeholders:

Petra Gombalova Kyslingerova, Head of Division, EaP Multilateral, EEAS,

Marta Wytrykowska, Team Leader, EaP Multilateral, EEAS

Anne-France Wittmann, EEAS

*David Cullens, Head of Unit, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus & Eastern Partnership
Coordination, DG NEAR, European Commission*

*Jeroen Willems, Deputy Head of Unit, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus & Eastern Partnership
Coordination, DG NEAR, European Commission*

Brigita Salkute, Policy officer, DG NEAR, European Commission

Yvonne Gogoll, Policy officer, DG NEAR, European Commission

Moderator for the opening session Otilia Nutu began by explaining the pressure and stress the EaP CSF and its members are under as a result of the awful situation in Ukraine and by highlighting the brave and invaluable humanitarian work being carried out by colleagues at the Ukrainian and Moldovan National Platforms.

Discussions related to how civil society can be supported, particularly from the EU side. It was stated that there should be clear grant guidelines for all grantees so they can provide help that is needed, particularly in terms of transportation and other humanitarian and refugee assistance. The issue of disinformation was also highlighted, measures need to be taken to counter dangerous disinformation emanating from the Russian Federation. Currently, there remains a high level of enthusiasm to support Ukraine, but it is a marathon and not a sprint, this enthusiasm needs to be maintained in the face of a coordinated disinformation campaign aimed at creating discord between EU and EaP countries. Institutional resilience against Putin sympathisers reaching or remaining in influential and powerful positions in the EU must be strengthened.

In relation to Belarus, it was highlighted to the EU stakeholders present in the meeting that in general, the Belarusian people are against the war and that they do not agree with the decision of the illegitimate regime to join the war as an aggressor. Like ordinary Russians, it is important to remember that these are the actions of despotic regimes and not the will of the people.

The need for psychological help for Ukrainian refugees was brought to the attention of the EU stakeholders. Particularly for specialists in treating PTSD, especially when this pertains to post-war trauma. There should be funding provided and programmes to act quickly and enact countermeasures before this becomes a more major problem in the long-term.

There followed an incident between Armenian and Azerbaijani members of the Steering Committee, pertaining to the use of a logo as a Zoom background which contains an approximate map of Azerbaijan that is disputed in terms of accuracy by Armenian Steering Committee Members. The incident is noted and next steps were discussed during session 4 on March 9th.

Petra Gombalova Kyslingerova, Head of Division, EaP Multilateral, EEAS, summarised support from the EU so far:

- Condemnation of the situation in the strongest possible terms
- Sanction packages against Russia, unprecedented in scale and speed. Sanction packages that do not target the people of Russia but rather, Russia's economic strengths to increase the cost of the war for the country
- Suspension of RT and Sputnik from broadcasting in the EU to fight Russian propaganda
- For the first time, the European peace facility to provide help to Ukraine
- Coordinating with partners, more than 30 countries joined the EU Member States in sanctioning Russia
- Condemnation by the UN General Assembly
- Adoption of the temporary protection directive, which grants access to EU aid to those in need and is based on non-discrimination

David Cullen, Head of Unit, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus & Eastern Partnership Coordination, DG NEAR, European Commission, outlined that the EU is working hard on special measures and flexibility to help Ukraine as much as possible. The EC mobilised a lot of humanitarian aid and is repurposing ongoing programmes. The EU civil protection mechanism has been used as well. DG NEAR is receiving immediate requests from partners on the ground and they have been showing a lot of flexibility. He highlighted the openness of the EU to the ideas and requests presented by the EaP CSF.

The Steering Committee and the Secretariat raised the following points in the follow-up debate: Temporary protection directive and concern it applies only to people who have some sort of legal stay in Ukraine, which many Belarusians who relocated to Ukraine did not have. Issue of freezing projects on the ground unilaterally by the EC and the availability of funding to people on the ground. Liability for loss through FSTP as well as guidance on pre-financing was also discussed. Situation of the media in the war and need for small mobile cameras and equipment was also

raised, as well as the need to act on disinformation. Similarly to the flow of refugees from Ukraine, other EaP countries like Armenia are also experiencing an inflow of people from Russia who are afraid of the Putin regime.

Action points:

Questions and suggestions discussed during the meeting on contractual matters and further should be sent during the course of the day (7 March 2022) to DG NEAR and EEAS so that they can be discussed internally during the upcoming internal meetings.

A letter summarising the messages and suggestions was shared with stakeholders as agreed on March 7.

Session 2 - Tuesday, March 8, 13.30-14.30

SC members present (10): Sintija Bernava, Lousineh Hakobyan, Mikayel Hovhannisyan, Shahla Ismayil, Natia Kuprashvili, Adrian Lupusor, Goda Neverauskaite, Ana Otilia Nutu, Tatiana Poshevalova, Irina Sukhy

SC members absent (3): Ruslan Havrilyuk, Makysm Koriavets, Yurii Vdovenko

EaP CSF SC Secretariat Staff present: Vera Rihackova Pachta, Kristina Pitalskaia, Calum Thomson, Iustina Haroianu, Laura Ponikelska

External guests: Marina Gutgarts, Ukrainian National Platform Secretariat, Iryna Kuropas, Ukrainian National Platform, Rostislav Dzunga, Ukrainian National Platform, Liviana Frunza, Moldovan National Platform

Moderator of the session Irina Sukhy presented the agenda of the SC meeting and of the session. The agenda was adopted. She also described the process of online elections of EU SC Co-Chair with Ana Otilia Nutu as the only candidate. With quorum achieved online, Ana Otilia Nutu was elected a Co-Chair of the EaP CSF SC Steering Committee. **All SC members present at the meeting acknowledge that Ana Otilia Nutu was elected via online vote as EaP CSF SC Co-Chair.**

The session was dedicated to the **situation in Ukraine and possible EaP CSF actions:**

An assessment of the situation and what can be done by the EaP CSF was shared by Ukrainian colleagues:

The situation in Ukraine is a full-scale war and all efforts have to be done to stop it. Ukraine now fights for democratic and European values and it is vital to share accurate information about this war. Members of the Ukrainian National Platform are in shelters and lack food and/or medication. Aggression against civilians has been trending upwards and there have been many casualties. There are also many refugees, namely women with children who are leaving for

neighbouring countries. If the Belarusian army enters Ukrainian territory, the situation will become much more difficult. There is a propaganda/information campaign claiming that Ukrainian refugees are not behaving appropriately, the aim of this is to form a negative sentiment in the West against these refugees. **The EaP CSF should work actively against this fake news, to avoid the formation of this negative sentiment against the refugees. The EaP CSF should also launch a specific re-granting tailored to this situation.** One of the priorities for 2022 was gender and women. This is a very topical issue. Most refugees are women with children, they are one of the most affected categories. In Lviv, almost all shops are closed, medication is hard to come by and there are 200.000 refugees. Infrastructure has been hit hard. The Ukrainian army mines bridges or destroys them as an act of defence. Kharkiv is entirely destroyed. The humanitarian catastrophe is still to come and can also affect Europe. Many people leaving Ukraine want to return to Ukraine and do not want to stay forever in the EU (or other countries). But many have nowhere to go back to, homes have been destroyed. After the war, Ukraine will face among others, extensive ecological problems, there is a lot of destroyed technology, industry and infrastructure, and of course the impact on the population is enormous in terms of physical injuries and psychological traumas.

The EaP CSF could collect information about what is happening. Proof of violations of human rights is needed, to identify what exactly happened: for example, attacks on civilians. People who are located in peaceful territory, can collect information. Also, women are particularly affected. **Many young women and women with children are without protection.** There are men with bad intentions targeting these women. There is a serious danger of human trafficking and sexual slavery. **Women on the borders need to be informed about this danger.** In Poland, many refugees go to people they don't know. Police try to register the refugees and control them, but the influx of people is too large. EaP CSF should also collect information about every person from the UNP. EaP CSF should make use of its access to decision-makers and collect and raise information with them.

Many refugees are also coming to Moldova. Per capita, Moldova has the highest number of refugees. There is unprecedented solidarity but there is also fake news distributed via social media and attempts to steer anger and sow disunity. The information war goes beyond Ukraine. A communications group was established involving 100 opinion leaders, journalists etc. who are spotting fakes and who inform authorities to issue statements to fight it and ensure a fast reaction. The anti-war "Stop War Campaign", involving the most popular TV stations and journalists, was launched. It is expected in the near future that war propaganda and fake news aimed at counteracting solidarity with Ukrainians will increase.

Session 3 - Tuesday, March 8, 15.00-16.00

SC members present (8): Sintija Bernava, Lousineh Hakobyan, Shahla Ismayil, Adrian Lupusor, Goda Neverauskaite, Ana Otilia Nutu, Tatiana Poshevalova, Irina Sukhy

SC members absent (5): Ruslan Havrilyuk, Makysm Koriavets, Natia Kuprashvili, Mikayel Hovhannisyan, Yurii Vdovenko

EaP CSF SC Secretariat Staff present: Vera Rihackova Pachta, Kristina Pitalskaia, Calum Thomson

External guests: Gwen Jones, Consultant

The session was dedicated to the discussion on National Platforms' external assessment with the consultant Gwen Jones who led the process.

Gwen Jones summarised the findings of individual reports and Reports on the NPs and outlined the individual Reports on NPs should not be compared, as every NP is at a different developmental stage. Questions for each NP were based on 2020 reports and recommendations.

The assessment found four NPs recommended to implement delegate selection process - Armenian, Moldovan and Ukrainian NPs without any reservations, for Georgian NP, the missing statutory documents (GNP statute and development of strategy document for 2022) should have been delivered and posted on the GNP website before the launch of the delegate selection process.

Azerbaijani National Platform has made enormous progress but is not ready to take over the delegate selection process due to the political situation in the country.

Belarusian National Platform is under difficult circumstances with the relocation of many members and communication challenges and was thus not recommended for taking over the delegate selection process.

Action point: The NP Facilitators can go through the reports again and reach out to Gwen directly in case further clarifications on recommendations and assessment are needed.

Session 4 - Wednesday, March 9, 13.30-14.30

SC members present (6): Sintija Bernava, Shahla Ismayil, Mikayel Hovhannisyan, Goda Neverauskaite, Ana Otilia Nutu, Irina Sukhy

SC members absent (7): Lousineh Hakobyan, Ruslan Havrilyuk, Makysm Koriavets, Natia Kuprashvili, Adrian Lupusor, Tatiana Poshevalova, Yurii Vdovenko

EaP CSF SC Secretariat Staff present: Vera Rihackova Pachta, Kristina Pitalskaia, Calum Thomson

Discussion on the incident between the Armenian and Azerbaijani SC members at the SC meeting on 7 March.

Co-Chair Ana Otilia Nutu opened the session by stressing that currently, half of the Forum (Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine) is in distress, yet we remain sympathetic both towards the situation in Armenia and Azerbaijan. Not every SC member could participate in the session on 7 March, hence, this incident is equally disrespectful to those absent at the session. Right now, the Forum itself is in a weak position, hence, a disunited position from inside weakens everyone in the Forum. Reference to the Code of Ethical Conduct was made. A reference to the SC meeting minutes from February 2021 & its takeaways: creation of a small group to discuss the issues could be pertinent, which would deal with the relations between the AM-AZ NPs.

Overall decision is to discuss the AM-AZ issue in a separate meeting.

Action Point: A meeting should be organised, ideally during the week of March 14-18, 2022 among the Co-chairs, Shahla Ismayil, Lousineh Hakobyan, Mikayel Hovhannisyman and the EaP CSF SC Secretariat to discuss further steps.

Discussion on the impact of the current situation on Forum's internal processes and activities

Delegate Selection Process

UNP is not ready for the continuation of the process. There is a question mark regarding the election of the UA National Facilitator, too. The EUD in Ukraine is not responsive either. Also the BNP requested to postpone the process.

Currently, three options are viewed:

The 1st option is transferring UA back to the old procedure however the question is who would shortlist UA candidates on the UA NP side?

The 2nd option is to postpone the delegate selection process for the whole Forum.

The 3rd option is to keep the current UA delegates and move ahead for the rest of the Forum NPs.

The majority of SC members present supported option 2. However, extending the mandate by 6 months is not realistic as it comes in conjunction with the AA preparations, therefore, the Secretariat proposed a 1 year extension. The related questions include the issue of re-opening the call for delegates and the prolongation of the current SC mandate. Statutory wise, informing Belgian authorities would be needed, but it shouldn't be an obstacle. Partial postponement is complicated because WG coordinators have to vote on all country lists.

Suggested solution as of 9 March: postponement for 12 months

Ukrainian delegates participation in EaP CSF WG meetings: it is very uncertain and conditional to the results of the war and its fallout, it also depends on the decision on the Delegate Selection Process.

Solution: decision on WG meetings has to be taken, the chosen format can facilitate (hybrid) participation of UA members

Regranting to NPs

Force majeure definition and liability case can change, the Secretariat wrote to DG NEAR.

The Steering Committee supports the Secretariat's decision to go ahead with pre-funding of staff costs for UA NP. Whether the SC letter towards the EC is needed, will be clarified at a later stage.

Regranting to members

Secretariat suggested to reprogramme the LOT2 (EUR 120,000) and LOT3 (EUR 100.000) calls for 2022 into a call for projects to support UA refugees assistance (namely in MD, RO, PL, SK), support to UA CSOs (relocations, support to activities) and support to Forum activities targeting the mitigation of the impact of the war- i.e. as per discussion with UA NP - fighting fake news and disinformation regarding Ukrainian refugees, gender aspects and support to women & children, psychological support. The reprogramming might be relevant for Moldova as well.

No quorum during the SC meeting was achieved and **SC vote is needed via email to initiate the procedure with the EC.**

Action Point: SC online vote on the reprogramming of FSTP to members will be initiated after the SC meeting

Session 5 - Wednesday, March 9, 15.00-16.00

SC members present (4): Shahla Ismayil, Goda Neverauskaite, Ana Otilia Nutu, Irina Sukhy

SC members absent (9): Sintija Bernava, Lousineh Hakobyan, Mikayel Hovhannisyan, Ruslan Havrilyuk, Makysm Koriavets, Natia Kuprashvili, Adrian Lupusor, Tatiana Poshevalova, Yurii Vdovenko

EaP CSF SC Secretariat Staff present: Vera Rihackova Pachta, Kristina Pitalskaia, Calum Thomson, Laura Ponikelska

Continuation of the discussion on the impact of the current situation on Forum's internal processes and activities

During this session, the Steering Committee members discussed advocacy priorities for 2022 and the impact of the war in Ukraine on EaP CSF activities.

EaP CSF Strategy 2022-2030

The SC concluded that the adopted new strategy as well as draft Results Framework and Action Plan are fit for purpose but the implementation will have to be adjusted to the current crisis and its fall-out to ensure its long-term validity. Mechanisms to collect and review data need to be put in place in order to see if and how the strategy is being implemented will have to be reviewed as well.

Action point: The Steering Committee should issue a statement, welcoming the adoption of the new strategy and highlighting that certain priorities will be shifted due to the war in Ukraine. The Secretariat will prepare a communication to members, delegates and applicants about the impact of the war in Ukraine on the Delegate Selection Process.

Gender Mainstreaming Strategy (GMS) Implementation

The National Platform Secretariats have received the call for nominations for the GMS Task Force in the beginning of February. However, a few questions remain. The participation of the Ukrainian National Platform in the task force is to be confirmed. Starting from March, the task force should have started working on the vision note for the GMS implementation, which currently is impossible due to the absence of Ukrainian participants. Since Belarusian participants are also missing, a reminder should go out to the Belarusian National Platform.

Action Point: As of May 2022, the Forum should start implementing the GMS by starting to work on the vision note.

Annual Assembly 2022

The status of the delegate selection process is unclear and thus it needs to be clarified who would be invited to the Annual Assembly 2022.

Other suggestions from members on how to respond to the war in Ukraine

Introduction of the membership fee to use for humanitarian support. As per EaP CSF Statute, 10 EUR per member was paid during the Annual Assembly as an event fee during physical events.

The budget line for the monitoring mission could be used to organise a large advocacy visit of the leaders of National Platforms to Brussels. To organise such an advocacy visit of the 6 National Platforms to Brussels, there has to be a joint position of what to advocate for.

While Ukraine is currently rightfully at the centre of attention, the other countries should not remain in the background. The EaP CSF should consider cost-efficient and smaller projects to engage the other 5 countries on diverse initiatives and strengthen the ownership of the National Platforms.

It was concluded that the Forum will not move forward with any of the above-mentioned issues.

Session 6 - Thursday, March 10, 13.30-14.30

SC members present (8): *Lousineh Hakobyan, Mikayel Hovhannisyan, Shahla Ismayil, Natia Kuprashvili, Goda Neverauskaite, Ana Otilia Nutu, Tatiana Poshevalova, Irina Sukhy*

SC members absent (4): *Sintija Bernava, Ruslan Havrilyuk, Makysm Koriavets, Adrian Lupusor, Yurii Vdovenko*

EaP CSF SC Secretariat Staff present: *Vera Rihackova Pachta, Kristina Pitalskaia, Calum Thomson, Iustina Haroianu, Laura Ponikelska*

Discussion about the decision to delay the delegate selection process, potential ramifications and next steps

The meeting opened with the Secretariat explaining the state of play with the decision to postpone the delegate selection process that seemed to have been made during the sessions in the previous day. As well as the potential issues that could arise from proposed solutions. In terms of what to offer for the delegates who already applied, the decision of whether to open an entirely new call or keep existing applications, while allowing for withdrawals and perhaps some new submissions, could be made at a later date once the timeline for the delayed delegate selection process is agreed upon.

The Secretariat continued by detailing the challenges that are emerging with the decision to postpone the selection process. This includes prolonging the mandate of the current SC by an additional year. The SC members who do not want to continue in their role would be able to step down and replacements can be elected. The resignation and election of replacement procedure is well defined in the EaP CSF Statute.

The option of using the same statutory precedent as was used for the WG1 EU Coordinator replacement for Sofia Strive was also raised. This would mean that the extension of the current mandate would not have any effect on the term limits in place and would not prevent eligible SC members from running for subsequent terms.

There followed an explanation of the procedure for how to proceed if the decision is to extend the mandate:

The proposed procedure as per EaP CSF Statute - the legal validity of the procedure is being checked for compliance with Belgian law

1. SC puts the current delegate selection process on hold due to the war in UA (minutes of the meeting)
2. SC agrees (minutes of the meeting) the postponement of the delegate selection process by 12 months is the preferable solution
3. SC votes to convene the Extraordinary General Assembly to discuss and approve the extension of the current delegates mandate, as well as of the mandate of the Steering Committee - as per article 6, point 11 of the [EaP CSF Statute](#)
4. The Extraordinary General Assembly is convened online, the quorum of two-thirds of delegates present is necessary to adopt the decision
5. If the quorum is not achieved, the vote will be taken online as per article 6, point 8 *The quorum of General Assembly meetings is achieved by the attendance of two-thirds of the Delegates. In the event of failure to achieve a quorum at a General Assembly meeting, the meeting may continue but decision-making shall be postponed to a subsequent meeting or conducted online in accordance with online voting procedures.*

To call the Extraordinary General Assembly either 50% of delegates from at least four NPs can ask for it or it can be called by the SC. A quorum of 2/3 of current delegates would need to be present in this meeting, which could be quite difficult, especially given the current circumstances. Therefore, a subsequent online vote would likely also be required to certify the decision taken by the EGA on the delegate selection process. The format of the EGA would likely be a 90-minute online meeting with all current delegates invited and encouraged to take part.

A question was raised about how this delay would affect the boards of the National Platforms that currently have the same term limitations as the SC. It was discussed that as this delay will shift the entire mandate, this could be used as a precedent for changes at the NP level, but this would have to be checked against the individual NP statutes to be sure.

Concerns were raised about the inclination to postpone the delegate selection. Some NPs have struggled with motivating their members to contribute to the work of the Forum. It was argued that the changing of delegates would help bring in new blood and counteract the apathy being experienced. As such, it was argued that 12 months is too long for a potential delay.

A potential, hybrid delegate selection process was also mooted, whereby countries that are ready to proceed and a delay is implemented for the countries that are too heavily affected by the situation in Ukraine. However, it was reiterated by the Secretariat that this would impose a heavy and sustained workload on the Secretariat and that due to the situation in Ukraine, certain WG coordinators and EU Delegations are not present to take part in the delegate selection process meaning it would not be conducted in a full and thorough manner. It would also pose a number

of operational challenges to the process itself and in effect, create two parallel but different cohorts of delegates, one serving an extended term and one starting a new term.

Different formulations for a delay were proposed, such as “The SC and Delegate mandate is extended until the point by which it becomes possible to carry out the delegate selection and by the latest by [date]”. However, several serious questions were raised about such a formation, from both a legal and statutory standpoint. Changing the calendar of other fixed Forum processes and events was also raised, however, it was stressed by the Secretariat that this would be unprecedented and probably impossible to implement given already agreed upon dates and locations, as well as the time needed to prepare for events such as the Annual Assembly with external partners, like the Czech Presidency. Any changes to such fundamental Forum processes and events would have to be discussed with the European Commission and could have major budgetary implications.

The SC members present in this session concluded that this key issue will be discussed and decision deferred to the Extraordinary Steering Committee Meeting to be held on April 4, 2022, 13.30-16.00 CEST.

Action Point: To organise the Extraordinary SC Meeting. For NP Facilitators, to discuss the issue with the boards of the NPs and consult their statutory documents. The Secretariat will inform all delegates, members and applicants about the complicated situation and deferring the decision on the Delegate Selection Process to **April 4, 2022**.

Belarus Beehive Project

Lukasz Byrski then presented an update on the Belarus Beehive project which detailed the progress made and eventual goals of the 30 month project, which received a 2 million euro grant from the European Commission. Catalina Arghir, finance manager of the Belarus Beehive project who joined the Secretariat in January 2022 also introduced herself to the SC members present at the meeting.

Session 7 - Thursday, March 10, 15.00-16.00

SC members present (4): Lousineh Hakobyan, Shahla Ismayil, Goda Neverauskaite, Ana Otilia Nutu

SC members absent (9): Sintija Bernava, Ruslan Havrilyuk, Makysm Koriavets, Natia Kuprashvili, Adrian Lupusor, Mikayel Hovhannisyan, Tatiana Poshevalova, Irina Sukhy, Yurii Vdovenko

EaP CSF SC Secretariat Staff present: Vera Rihackova Pachta, Kristina Pitalskaia, Calum Thomson

In the follow-up discussion to the previous session, it was noted that the AA2022 as well as WG meetings in 2022 will be discussed during the Extraordinary SC Meeting on April 4. The SC

members also suggested an email notification on the postponement of the decision on the delegate selection process should be sent to all delegates, members and applicants.

Action point: The Secretariat will inform all delegates, members and applicants about the complicated situation and deferring the decision on the Delegate Selection Process to April 4, 2022 during the week of 14-18 March.

Membership applications

The SC approved the membership application of Artnova Foundation (WG4, Poland). The EaP CSF Secretariat will proceed with informing the new member about the SC decision and assist in further steps.

The Agenda Points that were not discussed

- The evaluation of the AA 2021 - the Secretariat shared with the SC a comprehensive evaluation report of the AA 2021. It was agreed the document will be consulted by SC members who can revert to the Secretariat in case of further questions.
- The award procedure modification - the amended wording of the award procedure guidelines was shared with the SC by the Secretariat ahead of the meeting. The document will be put to online vote.