

EaP CSF Working Group 2 & 5 Annual Meeting 4-5 June 2019, Brussels Meeting Report

June 4 (Day 1)

1. Opening session

1.1. WG refresher and statutory affairs updates

After the tour de table, WG2 coordinators - Laura Dittel, Sabit Bagirov – together with WG5 coordinator, Goda Neverauskaite, presented the agenda of the two-day meeting and established the quorum for the Working Group Coordinator elections scheduled in the afternoon of the same day (two thirds of the total number of WG2 delegates and WG5 delegates, respectively).

The meeting started with a WG refresher given by Alexandra Sabou, Administrative and Statutory Affairs Manager. Afterwards, delegates were briefly presented the last updates on statutory matters regarding:

- i. **Membership definition, rights and obligations** (in line with the [Internal Reform](#) adopted in October 2018),
- ii. Ongoing implementation of [the Internal Reform](#),
- iii. **EaP CSF Statutes** (not yet finalised, to be voted at the Annual Assembly 2019),
- iv. **Delegate selection** (the call for delegates for the first 2-year cycle of the Forum will be launched in November 2019 and current delegates are invited to keep a closed eye on the call and apply again to become delegates in the new cycle),

Laura Dittel, WG2 coordinator, reminded delegates about the importance of the [Code of Ethical Conduct](#) adopted at the last Annual Assembly (December 2018, Tbilisi), binding for all Members, Delegates, SC members, NPs and EaP CSF Secretariat.

Raisa Liparteliani, WG5 delegate, was mandated by [A/C Committee member](#), Lasha Bliadze (absent during the WG2 & 5 meeting), to present the last updates on the **Rules of Procedures of the new A/C Committee**. The members of the A/C Committee have finalized working on the Rules of Procedures on June 3 and the final document has been shared with the Secretariat for further publication. The A/C Committee will become fully operational in the coming weeks.

1.2. EaP architecture – stories from EaP Platform and Panel Meetings (February – June 2019)

To highlight the advocacy efforts led by the Forum in relation with the EaP architecture, Alexandra Sabou mentioned the unique role of EaP CSF in the current EaP structure and the Forum's active participation in EaP Ministerial Meetings, Senior Official Meetings, Platforms and Panel Meetings, CORLEAP, EURONEST and bilateral dialogues.

Since the AA 2018 in Tbilisi, selected delegates and experts participated in the 3rd EaP Ministerial Meeting on Digital Economy, 4th Panel of HDM, EaP Platform 2 meeting, EaP Panel on Organic Agriculture, Trade Panel on the Reform of Systems of Technical Regulations and of Related Infrastructure.

Maksym Koriavets, WG 2 delegate, attended both the EaP Ministerial Meeting on HDM (Bucharest, February 2019) and the [EaP Panel Meeting on HDM](#) (Brussels, February 2019). He stressed that the

Forum offers its members and network of experts the opportunity to attend high-level meetings, which set the ground for future recommendations and policies applied in the EaP region. To make the Civil Society's voice heard, representatives should:

- i. Follow the Secretariat's calls for participation to EaP meetings,
- ii. Apply and come up with recommendations,
- iii. Be prepared, collect input from the region and show the level of expertise of the CS,
- iv. Present the CS as a reliable partner to the EU institutions.

Maksym stressed that re-granting scheme of the CSF should be redirected towards projects that can be presented in such meetings, especially ministerial meetings, based on comprehensive research.

In response to Maksym's suggestion, Vera Rihackova Pachta, EaP CSF Advocacy Manager, mentioned that this year, the list of re-granting projects was established according to the list of priorities of platforms and panels. Although it is not 100 percent successful yet, this is a goal moving forward.

Georgeta Mincu, WG2 delegate, together with a selected expert from Ukraine, Katerina Shor, represented the Forum in the [EaP Panel on Organic Agriculture](#) (Tartu, April 2019). Georgeta mentioned the positive collaboration they had in collecting input from fellow colleagues from the EaP region and the constructive dialogue they had in Tartu with EU and governmental officials who attended the meeting. She emphasized that Platform & Panel meetings are the advocacy opportunity that should stay at the forefront of CSF members' actions.

Vera Rihackova Pachta, Advocacy Manager, mentioned that during the last [Platform 2 meeting](#) (April 2019), EaP CSF did not have a speaking slot; nevertheless, the two selected experts who participated in the meeting (Veronika Movchan and Marianne Sokolova) were very active in commenting and raising questions during the Q&A sessions.

Alexandra Sabou highlighted the **3 steps** that need to be taken by experts to **participate in EaP Platform and Panel meetings**:

- i. Sign up to the [Database of experts](#) – the form is available here
- ii. Choose **area of expertise** (14 areas of expertise are currently available reflecting the priorities of the EaP Platform and Panel Meetings)
- iii. Follow the **calls for participation** launched by the Secretariat and apply

During the feedback sessions, several questions and remarks have been raised by the participants, particularly, on the possibility to publish the names included in the current database of experts and the possibility to allow experts to choose more than one or at least two areas of expertise.

Due to GDPR concerns, the Secretariat confirmed that the database could not be made public. When it comes to choosing more than one area of expertise, the delegates were reminded that they would be allowed to choose, beside their current area of expertise, one cross-cutting topic (i.e. gender).

WG 2 coordinators pinpointed the low interest in attending some Platform and Panel meetings (for example, for the upcoming Trade Panel scheduled mid-June 2019, only one expert manifested her interest in attending the meeting, although the Forum could be represented by two experts).

- ➔ **Action:** Delegates who did not sign up to the Database of Experts can register by filling in this [form](#).
- ➔ **Action:** Delegates are invited to circulate [the link to the database](#) within their networks of experts.
- ➔ **Action:** Delegates are invited to apply for the meetings under their area of expertise and to contribute with input prior to Platform and Panel meetings, based on the calls for input launched by the Secretariat.

- ➔ **Action:** Secretariat will share the [EaP Platform and Panel meetings calendar](#) with the delegates to ensure a better planning and allow delegates willing to attend meeting to plan their agendas accordingly.

1.3. Regranting projects – 2018 and 2019

Four 2018 regranting projects have been briefly presented by WG2 and WG5 delegates; the highlights of four other regranting projects financed in 2019 have been shortly introduced in the discussion.

- ➔ **Action:** Delegates have been invited to check the [reports of the 2018 regranting projects](#) and to follow the updates and the activities of the [2019](#) ones.

1.4. 10-year EaP anniversary communication campaign

Delegates received an update on the Forum's communication campaign on the 10-year EaP anniversary, which includes the organisation of a series of public events and dedicated communication actions and activities.

- ➔ **Action:** Members have been encouraged to follow/ like/ share/ translate in their languages the EaP CSF dedicated Social Media posts and endorse the **#10yearstogether** campaign messages.

- ➔ **Action:** Members are encouraged to share and circulate the last policy paper published by the Forum containing "**23 Civil Society Ideas for the Policy beyond 2020**".

2. Updates on the EaP Countries and the EU

2.1. Updates from the EU following European Parliament elections

Goda Neverauskaite, WG 5 coordinator presented a brief update from the EU side, following the **results of the EP elections**. She pinpointed several elements and features of the elections that will significantly affect the European political landscape in the next 5 years. Although the **far-right parties** made striking gains in some countries (i.e. France and Italy), they "suffered" significant losses in some other countries (i.e. Poland, Denmark, The Netherlands) and did not manage to gain the expected average percentage of 20 per cent of the votes. Despite the fact that the turnout for the EP elections has constantly decreased since 1979, in 2019, we witnessed the **highest turnout in the history of the EP elections**, where more than 50 per cent of the European voters casted their ballots. Although British voters have also participated in the EP elections despite **Brexit**, after UK leaves the EU, the number of seats in the EP is supposed to shrink (from 751 seats to 705 seats).

S&D, one of the major political groups in the EP, will not form the majority anymore. Some rumours hint that S&D is looking to create a coalition with **the European Greens** that received impressive support in several European countries.

Vera Rihackova Pachtá added that the **new NDCI** (Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument) has not been officially approved yet, however DG NEAR and DG DEVCO are already developing work plans. According to the proposal of the Commission, the NDCI budget will be divided in the geographic pillar, thematic pillar, and rapid response pillar, as well as an additional section for an emergency fund. The final allocations are subject to final negotiations among the EU members states in the EU Council, and consequently in trilogue with European Parliament and European Commission. A key trend of this proposal is money shifting from the thematic to regional programme.

The 2020 Roadmap is going to phase out and be replaced by new programs being developed now. How should the new roadmap and the post -2020 deliverables look like? Since **the pre-programming**

phase of the new instrument is taking place now with consultations to define what are the challenges and priorities of each country (prepared by EU delegations) which are being sent to Brussels, delegates should send their recommendations to Brussels contacts or to contacts in EU delegations.

- ➔ **Action:** WG participants are invited to get in touch with contacts both in Brussels and in EU delegations and prepare/ submit recommendations for the new cycle.

2.2. Updates from the EaP Countries (presentations available)

Armenia

Karen Chilingaryan, WG2 local coordinator in Armenia, assessed the current state of play in the country after the 2018 “velvet revolution”. Despite the revolutionary change in the government, certain systemic problems related to the fiscal system, transport, consumer rights and agriculture remain at stake and are highly discussed by the Armenian CS and WG2 members.

Transport. Karen highlighted that various issues related to transport are not only linked to the environment, but also to the economy, which makes the sub-group for transport (currently under WG3) relevant for WG2 as well. The country has seen a clear upward trend, with about 25% increase of accidents and deaths on Armenian roads. WG members are seeking access to the AM – EEC discussions transport, especially regarding public transport in Yerevan. WG2 is eager to make several recommendations.

Consumer rights. Consumer rights protection remains a sensitive topic in all 6 EaP countries. There have been several attempts and proposal for amendments to the “Law on Consumer Rights”.

Agriculture. Under the new government, the Ministry of Agriculture does not exist anymore as a separate entity, but has been included in the Ministry of territorial administration and infrastructure. According to the opinion of several NGOs working on agricultural matters, this change might lead to a decline of the sector.

Arzuman Harutyunian, WG5 local coordinator in Armenia, added that the dialogue between the AM government and the CSOs improved, as the current government uses various communication platforms and channels to reach out to the CSOs and sometimes externalise the implementation of various social services. Arzuman has also referred to the 2019 regranting project “Partnership for social inclusive and gender equal employment policy” developed Armavir Development Center, from Armenia in collaboration with the Ukrainian "Bureau of social and political developments" and the Georgian Scientific Intellectual Club "Dialogue of Generations" aiming to tackle, among others, gender-based discrimination.

Azerbaijan

Ilgar Huseynli, WG2 local coordinator, mentioned that the decrease in oil prices since the second half of 2014 has created serious difficulties for the economy of Azerbaijan, which pushed the government to perform various reforms, focusing, among others, on the development of SMEs particularly in the field of agriculture. Although in 2018, SMEs accounted for 84 per cent of all Azerbaijani companies, their value on the market is not significant. SMEs are mostly concentrated in urban areas, more than half are currently registered in Baku, Sumgait and Ganja. In 2018, Azerbaijan has adopted a set of strategic roadmaps aiming at reigniting economic growth and strengthening the SMEs development.

Mirvari Gahramanli, WG5 local coordinator, mentioned the numerous changes in the Labour Code that are favouring the employers, rather than the employees, the incomplete Labour legislation and legislative inconsistencies related to maternity leave and social protection of people with disabilities, increasing unemployment rate and very limited wages and pensions for certain categories of workers.

Belarus

Vladimir Kariagin, WG5 local coordinator, focused his updates on the lack of changes when it comes to social dialogue in the country. He stressed that the engagement of the civil society and other social actors in a meaningful dialogue with the governmental authorities would be key in reinforcing the modernisation of the society and the development of new economic activities, in making the government more transparent and accountable. The freedom of assembly is threatened at the moment by the bureaucratic procedures recently put in place and the additional administrative costs requested to the organisers. This is why more and more Belarusians are organising meetings in other countries to avoid the cumbersome process of getting the meeting authorization.

Georgia

Nino Elizbarashvili, WG2 local coordinator, mentioned that WG2 members have worked on several recommendations to amend pieces of legislation on SMEs development, convergence, and harmonization with EU legislation. They have also worked on suggestions regarding access to business, business education and women entrepreneurship, with a focus on providing information and support to Georgians living in rural areas.

Raisa Liparteliani, WG5 local coordinator, mentioned that WG5 has been advocating on the following topics: occupational health and safety in the workplace and labour inspection, unemployment benefits, prohibition of discrimination and introduction of minimum wage. Several recommendations have been prepared by the group to address those challenges.

Moldova

Viorel Chivriga, WG2 local coordinator, focused his updates on trade-related challenges faced by Moldova. The challenges are two-folded: on the one hand, on the exploitation of good, there is no alignment of the local legislation with EU standards and, in this regard, WG2 members prepared several recommendations to be sent to the EU institutions; on the other hand, Moldova is facing a pervasive migration wave that is affecting all economic sectors and the rural areas.

Tatiana Marian, WG5 local coordinator, emphasized the good progress registered by Moldova in terms of social dialogue.

Ukraine

Makysm Koriavets, WG 2 local coordinator, emphasized the good practices and examples in terms of SME development in Ukraine that could be shared with other EaP countries. Ukraine adopted SME development strategy for 2020 and adopted a plan according to this strategy. However, SMEs have to be more informed on possibilities of using alternative forms of funding. In November 2018, a law on transport was adopted which was a big step mostly based on EU best practices and legislation. The country also developed concepts for digital economy. However, the country has also experienced drawbacks: such as the lack of strategy on harmonization of digital markets (i.e. broadband strategy, roaming fees). In terms of trade and safety implementation, Ukrainian exports of goods to the EU has increased, which is a good indicator of Ukrainian competitiveness.

Valerii Riepin, WG5 local coordinator, mentioned that WG5 is focused on concepts of social dialogue. Starting 2019, they have prepared a report on human rights violations in Ukraine and studied the situation of social dialogue in Ukraine.

When it comes to strengthening social dialogue, the main barrier is legislation. The current legislation prevents the creation of trade unions.

Following the Presidential elections in Ukraine, WG5 aims to send the presidential administration their recommendations on legislation and amendments. WG5 will also continue to work with political parties within the campaign for Parliament elections.

3. Meeting with External Stakeholders : impact assessment

The group met Raffaella Boudron, DG NEAR, Maxime Bablon and Katja Modric Skrabalo, DG GROW, and Rikke Mengel Jorgensen, DG TRADE.

Raffaella Boudron, DG NEAR, in charge of EaP Platform 2 and Panel 1, praised the good input and the constructive and critical feedback received from the Forum. The recommendation would be to receive more precise and dedicated input relevant for the EaP Platform 2.

Maxime Bablon, DG GROW, mentioned that the input received from EaP CSF is essential to counter-balance the view of the governments and other stakeholders. It would be very relevant to receive more concrete stance from both the business sector and the civil society. Platform 2 encompasses many different sectors, which makes it very challenging, particularly when covering 6 countries. More targeted input and concrete examples to showcase issues at stake would be appreciated.

Katja Modric Skrabalo, DG GROW, coordinator of the Trade panel on Technical regulations, mentioned that the Forum's contribution to the panel has been very useful, although topics are rather technical. The Forum's representatives would need to acquire more technical expertise in order to fully benefit and contribute to this panel meetings.

Rikke Mengel Jorgensen, DG Trade, in charge of Trade panel (expert panel on trade related issues), mentioned that in 2018 the major focus of the Panel meetings was on developing the EaP Trade Help Desk. In 2019, the panel meeting which is scheduled to take place in mid-June in Brussels will be focused mostly on sanitary and phytosanitary issues (SPS). The meeting will also give the EaP CSF representatives the opportunity to engage with experts from the International Trade Center (ITC) (joint agency of the UN and WTO) and to find out more about the state of play of the EaP Trade Help Desk.

Rikke highlighted that in general the CSF input is constructive and needed to counter-balance the views of the EaP governments. The only downside would be the length of the interventions made by the representatives of the Forum during Platform and Panel Meetings.

- ➔ **Action:** More structured and concise input highlighting 3 or 4 ideas to be used instead of lengthy speeches.
- ➔ **Action:** Delegates invited to actively apply to the EaP Platform and Panel meetings and contribute with input.

During the **Q&A session**, several topics have been at stake:

- Assessment of the current state of play in terms of **export of animal products** from EaP countries to EU;
- **Extension of the (animal) product list with the right to be exported to the EU** (i.e. poultry, dairy products, etc.), **approval of food safety strategy** in some EaP countries and adoption of the **RASFF quick alert system** for food products;
- **Harmonization of legislation** and adoption of the trade-related **EU acquis** in the EaP countries (adoption of several European and International Standards and termination of conflicting national standards that are contradicting EU and international regulations);
- **Success stories** from the **DCFTA countries** on trade-related issues to be further presented and given as examples of good practices to be acquired by other countries;
- **Gender pay gap, unemployment, consumer rights** need to be addressed in all EaP countries;
- **Digitization of public services** in the EaP countries (good examples coming from Azerbaijan, i.e. ASAN services);
- EU support for the **accession to WTO** of Azerbaijan and Belarus;
- **Access to finance for SMEs: EU financial support to SMEs** comes mostly as loans and there is a need for a **more diverse support** that does not necessarily involve banks

- The Balkan agreement on intra-regional trade could be used as an example to ignite the **EaP intra-regional trade**;

➔ **Action:** WG members are invited to submit **recommendations for the post-2020 EaP Platforms and Panels agenda**.

4. WG coordinators elections

Elections for WG2 and WG5 have been organised in the presence of Maryna Iaroshevich, Director of the Ukrainian World Congress, who took part in the WG meeting as observer and assessor of the elections. The quorum necessary for the organisation of the elections has been established (at least two thirds of WG2 and WG5 number of delegates attended the elections and casted their ballots).

For **WG2** EU and EaP coordinator positions, the following candidates run for the elections:

- from the EU CSOs: Olga Chyzhova (Estonia) and Andrej Galcenko (Czech Republic);
- from the EaP CSOs: Maksym Koriavets (Ukraine), Georgeta Mincu (Moldova), Nino Elizbarashvili (Georgia) and Mikhail Doroshevich (Belarus).

The **newly-elected WG 2 coordinators** are: Olga Chyzhova (Estonia) and Maksym Koriavets (Ukraine). In line with the Internal Reform, both of them became Steering Committee (SC) members. They have a 1-year mandate.

Andrej Galcenko withdrew his candidacy before the announcement of the election results. The assessor took note of his decision.

For **WG5** EU and EaP coordinator positions, the following candidates run for the elections:

- from the EU CSOs: Dzmitry Babicki (Poland)
- from the EaP CSOs: Tatiana Marian (Moldova)

Both of them have been unanimously elected and undertook the responsibilities of WG5 coordinators. Tatiana Marian became SC member. They have a 1-year mandate.

June 5 (Day 2)

1. Public event #10years together series: The Civil Society Perspective: Taking stock of the 10 years of the EaP Policy and strategizing for post-2020: Trade, Digital Economy and Harmonization of Digital Markets (event report attached)

2. Index Presentation, by Tania Marocchi

The publication and results can be consulted by members who are encouraged to use them to support their advocacy activities (Power Point attached).

3. Brainstorming in small groups

Participants have divided in 4 small groups and worked on further developing the recommendations developed during the previous Annual Assembly. The topics at stake are:

- i) Trade
- ii) Harmonization of Digital Markets (HDM)
- iii) Structural Reforms
- iv) Social dialogue

➔ **Action:** The documents will be finalised by the sub-group members and facilitators and shared with the Secretariat within two weeks from the meeting or finalised within Padlet boards.

4. Feedback round and conclusions

The newly-elected WG coordinators and the delegates provided feedback on the format of the meetings. The Secretariat made several last remarks on the dates of the Annual Assembly (Brussels, December 4-6), the communication channels at the disposal of members (Google groups, Facebook groups, Padlet), *#10yearstogether* communication campaign and advocacy efforts beyond 2020.

- ➔ **Action:** Secretariat will share with the WG2 & 5 the presentations made during the meeting.
- ➔ **Action:** WG participants are invited to share their feedback on the WG meeting by filling in this [feedback form](#).
- ➔ **Action:** Save the date: **next EaP CSF Annual Assembly – December 4-6, 2019, Brussels**