

Minutes of the Steering Committee (SC) Meeting

20-21 September 2016, Chisinau, Moldova

In attendance: Steering Committee members—Siarhei Antusevich, Nastassia Bekish, Krzysztof Bobinski, Mikayel Hovhannisyan, Hovsep Khurshudyan, Ion Manole, Iryna Sushko, Dovile Sukyte, Lasha Tughushi, Yurii Vdovenko, Ulad Vialichka

Secretariat: Darya Mustafayeva, Vera Rihackova, Natalia Yerashevich

Decisions and discussions:

The Steering Committee wholeheartedly welcomed the **release of Hovsep Khurshudyan** and expressed their readiness to make every effort to ensure that the Armenian authorities drop the charges against him. Efforts need to be made to ensure the release of other peaceful protesters who still remain in jail without legitimate reasons.

EaP CSF Annual Assembly in Brussels. The Steering Committee has discussed the draft agenda of the AA that was developed based on the prior discussion with the AA task force. The SC will have a coordination meeting on Sunday evening for 2 or 3 hours. It was agreed to prolong the registration time in the morning of the first day of the event and ask people to register already on the arrival day. The participation of the HRVP Mogherini and Commissioner Hahn was discussed. The SC discussed the candidacy of Hennadyi Afanasyev for the EaP CSF prize named after Pavel Sharamet. It was agreed that more information on this is required which will be provided by Iryna Sushko. It was agreed to have a third parallel session focused on transparency and accountability including the oversight of the civil society of the EU funding to the EaP countries. The concept of the panel will be developed by Krzysztof Bobinski, Lasha Tughushi and Secretariat. It was agreed that WGs and NPs should send their proposals on stakeholders initiated sessions by Friday, September 30 the latest. The submitted resolutions will be reviewed by the resolutions committee and the respective WG or NP Coordinator.

Monitoring Missions as a working tool of the EaP CSF. The EaP CSF monitoring mission on the Civil Society Situation, Media and Human Rights in Armenia that took place on 9-15 August 2016, its lessons learned and the next steps have been discussed. It was agreed to present the results of the monitoring mission to Armenia during the advocacy meetings in Brussels in October 2016.

The general mood was that monitoring missions can be a regular activity of the Forum. The idea of not only post factum missions but also early warning missions was debated. It was agreed to consider training a group of experts from the EaP CSF that could be sent on such monitoring missions in the future. All the materials, manuals, and templates should be developed in advance. The idea of having “big names” in the missions was voiced.

The suggestion to have a contribution to the “Magnitski list” for the whole region as one of the outputs was made.

EaP CSF monitoring mission to Armenia, Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh. The modalities of the mission to take place in October were discussed.

Re-granting evaluation and discussion about priorities. The results of the assessment sent to the EaP CSF grantees was briefly shared with the SC members. The results of the assessment will be shared with the task force.

Future of the EaP CSF and assessing the EaP CSF activities. It was agreed to develop a survey for all the EaP CSF members to see how they assess the EaP CSF activities in general, including the present EaP CSF structures and re-granting. The SC will develop a position before the AA that will be offered to the AA delegates for adoption focusing on the need to introduce changes to the Forum and its activities. This will be prepared by Ulad Vialichka, Hovsep Khurshudyan, and Natalia Yerashevich.

It was agreed that the algorithm for the participants' selection is not ideal and should be reviewed. Yurii Vdovenko shared his views of the possible way of the participants' selection to ensure that the WGs have relevant experts to serve as counterparts to the EaP Platforms.

It was suggested that the Forum needs a fund-raising officer to ensure more funding for all structures and initiatives.

Discussion on the communication between the SC and the Secretariat. It was brought up by the Secretariat that sometimes it is not possible to consult all the speakers for the EaP CSF-organised events by the respective NP Coordinators due to the time constraints. In response the need for consulting the National Coordinators when inviting speakers was reiterated, however the importance of reacting on time within realistic deadline by National Coordinators was also underlined.

Sinziana Poiana from DG NEAR has informed the SC about the review of the EaP multilateral dimension that should be in line with the Riga summit priorities and solicited ideas on how to tie it better with the NPs and WGs.

Natalia Yerashevich provided the updated from the Secretariat informing about the new grant agreement with NED, new interns at the Secretariat, the new auditor and other matters. She reiterated the importance of the annual activity reports the deadline for which is approaching. She reminded about the agreement to have the WG Coordinators of the NPs elected before the AA. Only Georgian NP will not be able to elect the WG Coordinators before the AA; however they will try to address this in the next year cycle. The need to improve and reinforce the secure communication was stressed.

Country and WGs updates

Belarus

The parliamentary elections did not bring any significant change for the society. However, the atmosphere for political debate was more liberal. Two opposition members from the Civil Party and a cultural movement received places in the parliament. The elections were marred by numerous violations of procedures, while the campaign was peaceful and slight progress was recognised by international observers. The BNP has produced a statement on the results of the elections. The Higher Education conference in Minsk is a major event that brought together experts from all the NPs, as well as representatives of the MFA, labour ministry and ministry of education.

The EaP CSF stance on the possible participation of Belarusian parliamentarians in the Euronest PA was considered by the SC members.

Armenia

Mikayel Hovhannisyan explained that the triologue between civil society, government and opposition on the amended Armenian Electoral Code failed. However, the government and opposition came to some sorts of agreement. The new law imposes limitations on civil society and media. Unfortunately, there is no positive precedent of cooperation between civil society and political opposition currently. [OSCE/ODIHR opinion](#) should be taken into account with regard to the draft. The recent events in Armenia were described, especially the hostage crisis of 17-31 July. Many criminal cases were based only on the police testimony.

Another important event is the resignation of the Prime Minister. The former Prime Minister was involved in corruption scandals. The new Prime Minister Karen Karapetyan used to be a deputy CEO of Russian gas producer Gazprom's Mezhhregiongaz unit. There are different opinions on this appointment: this is the final step in securing the control by Russia or President Sargsyan is actually trying to bring more managerial capacity.

Azerbaijan

The National Platform Coordinator Avaz Hasanov was not present.

It was suggested that since the former political prisoner Intigam Aliyev is not allowed to leave the country, it should be made sure that someone will come instead of him. Moreover, it was suggested that the activists who are in exile should have an opportunity to be full members of the Forum.

Georgia

Parliamentary elections are to be held in Georgia on 8 October. Two parties have a chance to pass the 5 per cent electoral threshold, including Georgian Dream coalition and United National Movement. The minor parties can join through the first-past-the-post system in single-member constituencies.

The Pope will be visiting Georgia on 30 September-1 October.

Georgian National Platform is organising a high-level conference in early November. Around 25 policy papers will be presented to the government. The Country Facilitator Lasha Tughushi has recently attended a meeting with the largest business association in Georgia. They would like to join the NP. Their participation in the memorandum of cooperation with the government was suggested.

The cooperation with the bilateral civil society platform on the basis of the AA was discussed. The structure proposed by the EESC (3+3+3) is not acceptable for the Georgian side. The following structure was suggested: 1+1+16 (Georgia) + 9 (EESC). The idea is to involve the bilateral platform in the GE NP activity.

Ukraine

In the past 2 months the evaluation of the NP capacity was conducted through 29 interviews. A report was produced as a result. All the activities of the Ukrainian National Platform will now be linked to the project "Civic Synergy: Strengthening Participation in European Integration Reforms through EU-Ukraine Civil Society Platform and Ukrainian National Platform of the EaP Civil Society Forum" implemented by the European Programme Initiative of the International Renaissance Foundation (IRF) together with the mentioned Platforms. New staff to be employed within the project. The project's leaders (Dmytro Shulga (IRF) and Zoriana Mischuk) announced a tender for facilitation of strategic

planning, funding is expected to be received in November. IRF will also be responsible for the re-granting scheme.

UA NP produced several statements, including the statement on the worsening situation in Crimea. Ilmi Umerov, deputy head of the Mejlis, has recently been released due to the pressure from various civil society actors, including the EaP CSF.

The Steering Committee of the UA NP was to hold its meeting on 22 September. The Annual Conference for both platforms is to be held in early November. There will also be the conference dedicated to the implementation of the *Synergy* project. Two SC members and the Secretariat will be invited to attend.

Another reform related to visa-free regime – introduction of electronic income declaration for civil servants was postponed until 2017.

The Government Office for European Integration was renamed the Government Office for Euro-Atlantic Integration. Its former Director Nataliya Hnydyuk and her team left the office. The changes in leadership are expected.

Moldova

MD NP has recently held a meeting on organisational matters related to the human rights conference. There is a possibility that the Slovak Embassy will support the NP.

WG1

The WG Coordinator will contact the group members with regard to the stakeholder meeting planned at the AA.

WG2

On 15 September Iurii Vdovenko attended the presentation of the project [“U-LEAD with Europe: Ukraine Local Empowerment, Accountability and Development Programme”](#) in Vinnytsia. Commissioner Johannes Hahn and Prime Minister Volodymyr Groysman presented the draft program.

The European Parliament conducted a mission to Ukraine. However, the MEPs did not visit the Eastern Ukraine, with the exception of 3 MEPs which is a very sad development.

In the light of the EaP review it was suggested to establish the Panel on regional governance and cross-border cooperation.

WG3

With the EaP CSF financial support, WG3 conducted two side events during the Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference in Batumi: one with GE NP and the other one with EcoForum. A joint capacity building was conducted with WG2, including the discussion with DG NEAR.

The advocacy activities focus on climate change since Armenia and Moldova have not signed the Paris Agreement yet.

Suggestions for the panel discussion on energy security during the Annual Assembly have been received.

WG4

The EaP Youth Conference organised by the EaP CSF in Bratislava in October will be opened by the President Kiska and Commissioner Navracsics. Hovsep Khurshudyan suggested considering ForumSyd as a potential sponsor. Preparatory meeting is to be held in Kyiv on 12 October.

Hovsep is working on the PPP in the culture field – synergy between WG4, Black Sea NGO Forum and Culture and Creativity Programme. The regional meeting on the PPP is funded by a Romanian foundation.

Hovsep attended a meeting in Minsk on the lifelong learning and other issues in the EaP. The members of the seniors' subgroup took part in the meeting of the European Seniors' Union in Vienna.

WG5

Letter on the establishment of the 5th EaP multilateral platform was sent to the EESC.

Adopted: 7 October 2016