

EaP CSF Steering Committee meeting

Online, 1-2 February 2021

Monday 1 February, 13:00

SC members present (10/13): Sintija Bernava, Lousineh Hakobyan, Ruslan Havryliuk, Shahla Ismayil, Adrian Lupusor, Goda Neverauskaitė, Otilia Nutu, Tatiana Poshevalova, Sofia Strive, Yurii Vdovenko

SC members absent: Maksym Koriavets, Natia Kuprashvili, Irina Sukhy

Secretariat staff present: Billie Bell, Vera Rihackova, Natalia Yerashevich

1. Updates on activities from NPs (BY, MD, UA)

BY:

- Pre-revolution: stable implementation of NP project, regular meetings, AA in early 2020, progress on Digital Skills Coalition etc.
- COVID: destabilising factor in terms of project implementation, but unprecedented mobilisation of citizens and civil society → substituting state failures
- Post-revolution: repression has become state terror, creating fear in society → impact on BNP priorities and activities

MD:

- Finalised planning for 2021 and activities for 2020
- Project closed in January 2021
- Already organised 4 public events in 2021
- Sending questionnaires on the work of the Secretariat to membership this week
- Next plenary to be organised in mid-February - meeting of CC on 4 Feb to finalise this
- Plan to refine coordination of public events
- Minority government in MD is likely - this will postpone snap elections

UA:

- Board meeting - finalisation of activities and initiatives under current grant
- Amended Statute adopted in Dec
- Membership strategy and new database to be developed soon
- Current hot topic: price of gas in UA
- Maia Sandu's visit to UA was productive
- Constitutional Court showdown is in stalemate: draft laws do not comply with Venice Commission recommendations

2. EaP CSF strategy for 2022-2025

Update from Natalia Yerashevich and discussion:

- Fully-fledged Strategy to be developed in coming months for 2022-2024 period (current 2017-2020 Strategy extended into 2021)
- Possibility to engage a consultant to facilitate discussions with SC, WGs, and interested members
- Coordination with NPs strategies (synergies, but not identical)
 - UA, MD have already adopted Strategy
 - Other NPs have not yet adopted new Strategy, to our knowledge → **this process should be completed by March to coincide with the new EaP CSF project**
- Current Strategy task force: Lousineh Hakobyan and Shahla Ismayil → others are welcome, and even encouraged
- Secretariat with the task force will develop Terms of References for consultants; will be shared with the SC
- Previous strategies adopted every 3 years, where strategic objectives remain largely the same, but activities etc. evolve according to development of the organisation. It would also be possible to have a 4 year period with a mid-term review if needed. It will make more sense from the policy perspective and EaP CSF cycles

Vote on setting the new Strategy for 4 years (to 2025):

- Votes in favour: 7
- Votes against: 1
- Abstention: 0

Motion approved: the next EaP CSF Strategy will cover the period to 2025

Suggestion to consult TORs primarily with the Strategy task force, and to submit final proposal to full SC for approval (hands-on role for task force members):

Motion approved unanimously: the Strategy task force will be the main point of contact for the development of the Strategy, with full SC participating in the discussions and giving final approval

Strategy task force (currently Lousineh Hakobyan and Shahla Ismayil): **other members interested in joining should say so via email**

3. EaP Summit and our advocacy

The Steering Committee discussed the upcoming EaP Summit and the messages the civil society plans to send to the EaP and EU leaders. The EaP Summit originally planned for March 2021 will be most likely postponed to June or July 2021.

Overview:

- EC/EEAS still open to receiving suggestions from external stakeholders
- All leaders want a declaration - no such declaration has been issued since 2017
- Participation of BY under discussion

- Level of ambition for 3 DCFTA countries under discussion
- New roadmap to be adopted on technical level in coming months, and endorsed by the leaders later at the Summit
- EU response to NK conflict widely judged as inadequate → need to review security offer and crisis resolution role
- Main political issues to discuss:
 - What should be the main political message from the EaP CSF?
 - What level of representation from BY should we push for?
 - What should be the campaign around the Summit?
- Other questions for SC:
 - What do EaP civil society and populations expect to hear from EU and EaP leaders?
 - What are the most important strategic areas that should be targeted with messaging from the Summit?
- Proposals from the Secretariat concerning the above questions are included in the background documents circulated by Vera Rihackova prior to the meeting

Side event on BY: not part of official Summit agenda, but a side meeting between leaders, Coordination Council members, and civil society

SC feedback: what do EaP civil society and populations expect to hear from EU and EaP leaders?

- Feeling presence of EU
- Developing European space of norms and standards, even if enlargement isn't yet on the agenda
- Better responsiveness to events on the ground
- Proposals from BNP (Tatiana Poshevalova):
 - Europe should come back to proactive policy in the Eastern Partnership region with a desire to bring these countries closer to the European norms and standards, to focus on strengthening democracy, independency and resilience
 - Long-term strategic approach: the new policy framework should cover a 15-20 year horizon. It is necessary to interrupt the cyclical fluctuations in European policy, which are largely dependent on the political turbulence in Eastern Neighbourhood countries
 - Orientation of politics predominantly towards society rather than government: this should also include bringing volumes of assistance provided to states down while increasing assistance provided to civil society
 - Rejection of the "Russia first" principle: the new Eastern Partnership policy should be based on the priority of EaP countries' independence
 - The strategic goal of this new policy is to lay the foundations for European transformations of these countries in all important spheres (from economy to political institutions)

Tuesday 2 February, 13:00

SC members present (10/13): Sintija Bernava, Lousineh Hakobyan, Ruslan Havryliuk, Shahla Ismayil, Adrian Lupusor, Goda Neverauskaitė, Otilia Nutu, Tatiana Poshevalova, Sofia Strive, Irina Sukhy

SC members absent: Maksym Koriavets, Natia Kuprashvili, Yurii Vdovenko

Secretariat staff: Billie Bell, Tania Marocchi, Vera Rihackova, Alexandra Sabou, Natalia Yerashevich

Guest (only present for discussion on Nagorno Karabakh): Mikayel Hovhannisyan (WGI EaP Coordinator)

1. Updates on activities from NPs (AM, AZ, GE)

AZ:

- COVID + war in NK have had an impact
- However, work still ongoing: policy papers, revising statutory documents
- Conference for external stakeholders (government, international community, NGOs, etc.) on 12 February. Panels: COVID and implications for human rights; changed political context after war; EU-AZ relations and cooperation agreement; civil society situation and future perspectives
- Board meetings almost every 10 days, in permanent communication on all manner of issues
- Advocacy, communication and membership plans to come in 2021
- Lockdown over, but measures still in place. Schools reopened on 1 February. Vaccination programme launched but some reticence from population (because of lack of trust in healthcare system, and because of unwillingness to take a Chinese vaccine)

AM:

- Board elections and WG coordinator elections led to 80% change in governing roles
- Strategy for 2021 adopted (also in English) → to be followed by a 2 year strategy when new delegate cycle starts
- Membership development plan (in Armenian → being translated)
- Website currently being updated
- Code of Ethical Conduct to be adopted at next annual meeting
- NP meeting on post-war situation and internal political context
- Annual assembly in first half of January
- Statement on the situation in the South Caucasus at end of January
- Researching impact of war on wide range of areas

GE: Natia absent

All NPs:

- Members assessment of their current Secretariats; designate organisation which will hold that role for 2021-2023 → **end of February**
- **New 3-year project for each NP should be developed by early March or earlier; please allow for time to address comments from the NP granting advisory committee**

2. SC communication

- Agreement to try to use Slack for SC communication among members and with Secretariat and among the task forces; SC Google Group remains
- A video tutorial will be circulated and evaluation of our use of Slack to be made at a later date

3. Draft advocacy annual plan for 2021

The Steering Committee discussed the draft advocacy objectives for 2021, focusing on the EaP Summit, COVID-19 impact on the region and related long-term challenges and opportunities, stronger representation of civil society at all levels and phases of the policy-making process and specific issues pertinent to developments in EaP countries. The annual advocacy plan will be further elaborated and discussed over the course of February.

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4 main objectives:

- Continue advocacy for stronger EaP CSF representation at all levels
- Put civil society and the Forum at the centre of implementation of EaP policy, while retaining a key role in monitoring etc.
- Assessment of implementation of 20 Deliverables for 2020 → link to EaP Summit
- Raise long-term challenges and opportunities posed by COVID-19 pandemic → advocacy/communication around 8 COVID policy papers etc.

Potential campaigns:

- Continue *#PrepareEaP4Health* campaign
- Launch *EaP CSF - voice of citizens' expectations* campaign around EaP Summit
- Possible campaign around *Equal possibilities for civil society in the EaP region* to promote improvement on legislative frameworks around CS in the EaP countries
- Campaign around Belarus
- EaP Index campaign to promote new edition

Other objectives/priorities:

- Stronger influence of CS on EU-EaP relations
- Inclusivity and equality
- Increase demand for gender equality policies, review reflection of gender policies in new EaP roadmap etc.
- NDICI programming to ensure funding for CS in 2021

Next steps:

- Incorporate SC feedback into draft
- Develop specific campaigns, targets, activities and messages, as well as their timeline

- Meet with SC Advocacy task force (Shahla Ismayill, Tatiana Poshevalova, Irina Sukhy, Sofia Strive, Ruslan Havryliuk, Adrian Lupusor, Lousineh Hakobyan) to discuss revised draft
- Incorporate task force feedback
- Discussions with interested Forum members and with NP Secretariats
- Incorporate member and NP feedback
- Finalisation

Suggestions/feedback from SC:

- Continued focus on BY: current sanctions regime is weaker than 2010
- Release of prisoners of war in NK → to be discussed in later discussion
- Targeted advocacy around AA countries: satisfying demands for greater ambition while avoiding fragmentation between AA and non-AA countries

4. Election of Co-Chairs

Quorum:

- 9 out of 13 SC members must be present for a vote to be binding
- 10 SC members present, therefore the quorum is met

Nomination of Co-Chairs:

- EU:
 - **Sofia Strive** (nominated by Goda Neverauskaitė, seconded by Otilia Nutu)
- EaP:
 - **Irina Sukhy** (nominated by Ruslan Havryliuk, seconded by Tatiana Poshevalova)
 - Adrian Lupusor (nominated by Sofia Strive, nominee declined)
 - **Shahla Ismayil** (nominated by herself)

Election of Co-Chairs:

- The election took place online via the ElectionRunner platform
- The results were as follows:
 - Election of EU Co-Chair:
 - Sofia Strive: 11 votes (100%)
 - None of the above: 0 votes (0%)
 - Election of EaP Co-Chair:
 - Irina Suky: 7 votes (64%)
 - Shahla Ismayil: 4 votes (36%)
 - None of the above: 0 votes (0%)
- Turnout: 11 out of 13 (77%) - two more than the 9 required to be quorate
- For the full results please see the following link:
<https://vote.electionrunner.com/election/OS9mf/results>

The quorum of 2/3 participation in the election having been met, Sofia Strive and Irina Sukhy were duly elected as Co-Chairs of the EaP CSF Steering Committee

5. Implications of the war in Nagorno-Karabakh on Forum's operations

Impact of the war on civil society overall:

- AZ:
 - Emotionally exhausted by the war
 - Lots of economic and political consequences
 - Very few CSOs and activists refrained from publicly supporting the war → solidarity effect
 - Civil society will be a big participant in peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts, however, it is absent from dialogue due to the generally repressive situation in which it finds itself
- AM:
 - War created many security, humanitarian, social, cultural and political issues
 - Sense of insecurity and uncertainty
 - One main focus of CS is on the issue of PoWs and civilian captives (100-200 people)
 - Need to respond to toxicity/sensitivity around the war
 - First war didn't resolve the NK issue, and nor did the second → durable resolution is yet to be found

Impact of the war on the Forum and its NPs:

- AZ:
 - Solidarity effect meant that CSOs and activists calling for peace received abuse
 - However, rational current within NP which says that we have to work together in the framework of the EaP, and should boost CS participation in dialogue
- AM:
 - Organisations within the platform are primarily focused on the consequences of the war
 - Monitoring deliverables and other issues remain priorities on the agenda

How the Forum can handle requests for action from AM/AZ:

- Any communication within the Forum on the issue of NK will be emotional, as well as potentially confrontational → AA was a clear illustration of that, and in many ways it's inevitable
- Any attempt to discuss the conflict is likely to be counterproductive without adequate controls and filtering
- Central issue: need to avoid an 'ostrich' situation, where the Forum avoids engaging on the issue, while also avoiding confrontation
- Forum considered well-placed for confidence building measures, but we need to decide how to approach the issue, how to resolve matters around contentious statements, projects, and activities from ANP and AZNP, etc.
- The conflict is not happening between the EaP CSF NPs: many people in both platforms are able to work together and sit around the same table despite their own stories and experiences of the conflict

- Similar discussions are happening at the level of other organisations
- No-harm approach should be applied. Is now the right time? Doing nothing not an option, however we shouldn't make an artificial process out of it - time will bring natural answers
- Is there a resource within either society to avoid provoking the other within the framework of the work/actions of the NPs?

Moving forward within the Forum:

- Suggestion to create a small group to continue this discussion in a separate format. This group could devise a mechanism for managing tensions and potential confrontations within the Forum
- This is only the first of our conversations of this kind; more will follow
- The issue of Armenian POW was raised and that the Forum should be vocal about it

6. Planning the next AA

Lessons learned from AA2020:

- Plan the event in advance (AA timeline, AA task force...)
- Decide on the dates/ type of event/ concept and major blocks of the agenda in the first part of the year (before summer)
- Rethink: strategy and operations come in one package
- Design terms of reference for the recruitment of the service provider that reflect the real degree of complexity of the event and the agenda
- Reflect more on the user/ attendee experience before/ during the event
- Communicate better and more efficiently before/ during/ after the event
- Balance expectations and priorities

Provisional planning for AA2021:

| Organisation of Annual Assemblies of the EAP CSF 2021 | Feb-21 | Mar-21 | Apr-21 | May-21 | Jun-21 | Jul-21 | Jul-21 | Aug-21 | Sep-21 | Oct-21 | Nov-21 | Dec-21 | Secretariat, SC, all members, service provider |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| AA2021 task force formed and lessons learnt from 2020 shared internalised; | ■ | | | | | | | | | | | | SC, Secretariat (Director, Admin manager) |
| SC approval: type of event (online)/ date | ■ | | | | | | | | | | | | SC, AA task force, Secretariat |
| Elaboration of the main blocks of the agenda and title proposals | ■ | ■ | ■ | | | | | | | | | | AA task force + Secretariat elaborate the main blocks of the agenda submitted for SC approval |
| Elaboration of TORs for the selection of service provider; launch of C/A; (May-June); interviews | | | | ■ | ■ | | | | | | | | Admin Manager, Comms Manager, Finance Manager, AA Task force involved in the selection process |
| Provider selected; first meeting with service provider, planning of the collaboration and clear division of responsibilities (logistics, comms, finance, technicalities) | | | | | | ■ | | | | | | | Service provider, Secretariat (all available for the meeting) |
| Further elaboration of the agenda with AA task force; prep of the internal communication plan and templates, update of lists; | | | | | | | ■ | ■ | | | | | Secretariat, AA task force; Admin manager (lead on logistics) |
| Launch of the registration platform for delegates (beginning of September) + launch of ticketing | | | | | | | | | ■ | | | | Admin manager, Service provider, AA task force (+ SC co-chairs) |
| Ongoing invitations registrations/ ticketing for all categories (delegates/ members/ observers/ guests/ speakers/ media) | | | | | | | | | ■ | ■ | | | Admin manager, Service provider, Secretariat members |
| Invitation of high-level speakers; | | | | | | | | | ■ | ■ | | | Director, Advocacy Manager, other Secretariat members + support from AA task force |
| Development of visuals and comms materials (starting end of September) | | | | | | | | | ■ | ■ | | | Comms manager |
| Script elaboration; discussion with the team and the service provider on the script | | | | | | | | | | ■ | ■ | | Secretariat, service provider, AA task force (+SC co-chairs) |
| Rehearsals (before AA) | | | | | | | | | | | ■ | | All |
| Post-AA survey, debriefing, lessons learnt | | | | | | | | | | | | ■ | Secretariat, Admin and Membership manager, AA task-force |

AA2021 task force:

- Ideally 5 SC members
- Responsibilities:
 - Work collaboratively with the Secretariat to plan and implement the event
 - Provide guidance and support in shaping the concept/ agenda / title/ priorities
 - Participate in the selection of the service provider
 - Be involved in designing the flow of the event
- Task force members: **SC members to be invited to express their interest by email**

The concern about the decision of the Secretariat to close the comment section during several panel debates during the Annual Assembly was voiced.

Vote on organising AA2021 in an online format:

- Votes in favour: 8
- Votes against: 0
- Abstention: 1

Motion approved unanimously: AA2021 will be organised in an online format, subject to consultation with SC members not present at the meeting

Vote on organising AA2021 between 29 November and 3 December 2021:

- Votes in favour: 9
- Votes against: 0
- Abstention: 0

Motion approved: AA2021 will be organised between 29 November and 3 December 2021

Adopted on 11 February 2021