

EaP CSF Working Group 1 Annual Meeting

14-15 May 2019, Brussels

Meeting Report

Day 1 – 14 May

Introductory session

After the tour de table, Krzysztof Bobinski, WG1 Coordinator, Vera Rihackova Pachta, EaP CSF Advocacy Manager, and Alexandra Sabou, EaP CSF Administrative and Statutory Processes Manager, briefly presented the last statutory updates regarding EaP CSF [membership](#), development of new Statutes, [Code of Ethical Conduct](#), and the ongoing implementation of the [internal reform](#). Mihaela Padureanu, elected member of the Arbitration Committee, updated the delegates on the new Rules of Procedure of the [Arbitration Committee](#) that are currently being developed. The delegates and members will be informed when the Rules of Procedures of the Arbitration Committee are finalised (envisaged by 3 June 2019) and the body will then become fully operational, with the delegates and members being able to submit a complaint.

WG1 members shared their feedback from the [EaP Platforms and Panels](#) meetings, in which they took part as EaP CSF representatives since the last Annual Assembly in Tbilisi. A brief overview of the role of the Forum in the EaP architecture was provided and the dates of upcoming meetings communicated. Members can represent the Forum at these meetings by responding to dedicated calls (to receive them, it is necessary to subscribe to the database of experts [here](#)).

Following this feedback session, members discussed the structure of WG1, raising several concerns and suggestions to improve the mode of operation of the group. The need for increased communication in-between WG meetings was highlighted, as well as the need improving the work produced at WG meetings for advocacy purposes.

[Four 2019 EaP CSF WG1 Re-granting projects](#) were briefly presented, followed by an update on the Forum's 10 years' anniversary campaign, which includes the organisation of a series of public events and dedicated communication.

Action: Members are invited to further disseminate the information material and policy paper “[Advancing Eastern Partnership: 23 Civil Society Ideas for the Policy beyond 2020](#)” to extend the Forum's outreach.

WG1 delegates voted and adopted the [Resolution by Working Group 1 of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum on gender policies and further updates](#). The resolution aims to showcase that WG1 stands for the inclusion of gender equality values into the work of the Forum.

Results of the vote: In favour: 40 Abstention: 1

WG Coordinators Elections

The current WG1 coordinator, Krzysztof Bobinski, presented the election process, specifying that WG1 Coordinators are elected for one year with the possibility of being re-elected; in line with the adopted internal reform, both elected WG1 coordinators are become members of the EaP CSF Steering Committee.

The **responsibilities of WG Coordinators** include: drafting the agenda of the annual WG group, representing the WG in the SC and reporting on its activities, initiating and drafting SC statements, identifying priorities and opportunities for theme-specific advocacy and selecting experts to represent the Forum at the relevant EaP Platform and panel meetings.

Each nominee introduced him/herself and answered the questions of fellow WG1 delegates, regarding their candidacies.

Results

The candidates running for the WG1 Coordinator position nominated by fellow members were: Alexandru Coica, Zofia Lutkiewicz, Sofia Strive (EU Members), Mikayel Hovhannisyanyan and Sorina Macrinici (EaP Members). The role of assessor was conducted by Dmytro Panchuk, Ukrainian World Congress, who was observing WG1 meeting. The newly elected WG 1 Coordinators are **Sofia Strive**, Forum Syd (EU Coordinator – 17 votes) and **Mikayel Hovhannisyanyan**, Eurasian Partnership Foundation (EaP – 24 votes). Due to the fact that we Forum is now in a transition cycle, their mandate will last for one year, until spring 2020 when new elections will be organized and the new cycle of 2 year-mandate will start. Both coordinators will be serving at the EaP CSF Steering Committee.

Country updates

Sebastian Bloching, European Partnership for Democracy, presented the most recent developments in relation to the adoption of reviewed Council Conclusions on Democracy Support. **Gilberto Pelosi**, CONCORD Europe, provided an update on the state of play of adoption of the new EU Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and on the proposal to establish a single Neighbourhood Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) that would include European Neighbourhood Instrument, through which a major part of support to EaP countries is channelled. According to the proposal of the Commission, the NDICI 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 dialogue with European Parliament and European Commission. A key trend of this proposal is money shifting from the thematic to regional programme. As a result, although a bigger part of the budget will be allocated to each specific region, the thematic programme budget (human rights, democracy etc.) will experience a decrease. The negotiations in the EU Council are currently slower due to other agenda, although they might speed up after the summer. **The pre-programming phase of the new instrument is taking place at the moment with consultations to define what are the challenges and priorities of each country (prepared by EU delegations) which are being sent to Brussels.** Therefore, now is the moment to send recommendations to Brussels contacts or to contacts in EU delegations.

Action: The members should send their recommendations on programming priorities for the new cycle to their contacts at EU Delegations in the country or to the EaP CSF Secretariat in Brussels.

Armenia - Abraham Artashesyan, WG1 Coordinator for Armenia

The country is celebrating the anniversary of the Revolution. Cooperation between the Armenian government and civil society is not as strong as it should be yet, which creates challenges. There is no institutional cooperation or will to hire more personnel and invest into human resources. The lack of strong investment into these means, which could foster and facilitate progress, hinders positive results. Those opposed to the Revolution are trying to have a negative impact in Armenia, with oligarchs, mostly, trying to buy the voices of people. The owners and heads of media outlets remain unknown, while spreading misinformation. When the new government took over, it was declared that public administration would be improved. However, there is no clear vision on how to make the public administration more efficient and how this will be achieved in the future. The merging of ministries does not necessarily facilitate this (five instead of ten). Nevertheless, there has been progress in regards to communication and cooperation with the government overall; civil society needs to remain patient and consistent.

Azerbaijan - Shahla Ismayil, WG1 Coordinator for Azerbaijan

Civil society and foreign donors are experiencing unprecedented crackdown. This crackdown has had a strong impact on financial resources of the civil society sector, which has created a domino effect on advocacy activities, infrastructure etc. Human resources are currently lacking in the civil society sector. In 2014, the narrative of the government was rather aggressive, but has softened a bit now. Yet, all communications with the government remain interrupted, as well as with academic and business sectors, which do not want to engage for fear of risking their own communications with the government. A large protest action rallied more than 25 000 people for justice in January and a number of political prisoners were released (51) so there has been positive change in society.

Belarus - Vasilii Sankovich

There has been no positive change in legislation on the protection of human rights in Belarus. No anti-discrimination legislation has been adopted. The Belarusian government continues to discriminate LGBT, Roma, people with disabilities etc. Although the government has developed a platform for human rights, most recommendations coming from human rights defenders are not being considered. Death penalty remains, although less people are sentenced to death. Some steps were taken towards judicial system reform, but the lack of independence of the judiciary remains problematic, as it is still under the control of the president and his administration. There is no independent access to justice. The internet is monitored and journalists are under pressure. Following the legislation change on right to assembly, some types of meetings are now allowed without prior authorization; however these can still be fined if they don't fit the government's criteria so having public meetings remains difficult. CSOs continue to experience difficulties to register under the current legislation. The pressure on independent bloggers and journalists has increased and the latter have been the target of defamatory articles.

Georgia - Natia Kuprashvili

Georgia has seen a significant setback in democracy due to serious issues related to the justice reform implementation and nomination of the judges to the High Council. Nevertheless, the country remains a reliable partner for the EU. The EaP Index can be used to discuss challenges in Georgia. Georgia ratified the Istanbul Convention. Judiciary reforms remain to be the main challenge for 2020. EaP CSF Georgian

National Platform advocates for urgent reform of the judiciary system and ensuring its independence, independence of media and development of democracy. The National Platform suggests that civil society should strengthen its monitoring role.

Moldova - Sorina Macrinici

The country is waiting for a new government following the elections that were held according to a mixed electoral system in February. The elections saw an unprecedented use of administrative resources during the elections and intimidation of international observers. There is still no coalition to form the new government, which means there is a risk new elections will be held in two months. Two parties (Democratic Party and Socialist Party) are in talks, but this represents a big risk for CSOs. According to a resolution of the European Parliament, Moldova is now a 'captured state'. Civil society is disregarded and isolated by the authorities; consultations are rare and very formal. The numerous criminal investigations against prominent judges are creating an environment where judges are fearful to talk, criticise the government, and adopt certain decisions. All court rulings are available online, but recently the website has been modified so that people cannot be searched by name anymore. The head of the corruption office has resigned with an unknown motive, and his replacement has a poor reputation. Regarding the environment for CSOs, the government has cut off foreign funding, and CSOs have been leading numerous advocacy activities to reverse the decision. CSOs and independent media have been the victim of smear campaigns, which have become more professional.

Ukraine - Andrii Kulakov

The country has experienced a series of reforms, including public administration. Decentralisation is one of the most successful reforms, giving more prominence to local communities. The anti-corruption court will be established and start functioning in September. The second report on border management and migration was published last year. Overall, the visa liberalisation benchmark continues to be fulfilled, and though a lot of work still needs to be done, there seems to be no risk that the visa liberalisation system will be suspended. The most prominent focus is given to the situation in Crimea and the occupied territories in Eastern Ukraine. A new law on security was adopted last year, according to which civil control was introduced. More reforming steps will have to be taken so that civil control can be achieved in the future. On the results of the presidential elections: the agenda of the newly-elected president is a big challenge as he is still perceived as an enigma by many analysts. The hope is that European integration will stay a priority for the current administration. *CSOs are willing to continue cooperating with the administration. However, they are also willing to continue being the watchdogs of the system and assess the way new reforms will be adopted.* In addition, parliamentary elections are to be held soon. It is expected that the new parliament will be extremely diverse from an ideological standpoint. Indeed, it is likely that some pro-Russian groups will secure a few seats in the new Parliament.

Index presentation - Tania Marocchi (presentation attached)

Public event (event report attached)

Members participated actively in the public event 'The civil society perspective: Taking stock of 10 years of the EaP policy and strategizing for after 2020 – Democracy, Human Rights, Good Governance, Stability'. The debate took stocks of how 10 years of EaP have delivered in the field of democracy and good

governance and was the occasion during which members offered recommendations to EU and other stakeholders for the future.

Day 2 – 15 May

Meeting with External Stakeholders: Impact Assessment

The group met Javier Fuentes Leja, Team Leader responsible for EaP Platform 1, EEAS, Jeroen Willems, Deputy Head of Unit at DG NEAR, Marius Puodziunas, responsible for Security, CSDP and Civil Protection Panel, EEAS.

Javier Fuentes Leja

Although governance and strengthening the institutions in the EaP region have been at the core of the EaP, lately many shortcomings have been observed, particularly throughout the past year. However, the numerous activities related to the EaP organized in the last few days (EaP High Level Conference, HLC) prove all the progress that has been achieved over the last decade stemming from the 2009 momentum. The HR/VP Federica Mogherini underlined in her speech at HLC the need to strengthen further the role of civil society within the policy implementation. The [policy paper launched by the Forum and the 23 recommendations of the EaP CSF](#) were highly appreciated by the EEAS and they set the ground for the discussion on the next set of post-2020 priorities from civil society perspective. The EEAS continues to focus its work on rule of law through several projects for the upcoming year, however, there will be no other meeting of Platform 1 in 2019. The work on the EaP work programme for 2020 has begun; the major focus will be on rule of law deliverables, resilience and cyber security.

Civil Society was advised to:

- feed the data collection exercise and be proactive in gathering evidence and data that could be further used for the assessment of the performance of the EaP countries.
- work on specific training suggestions that could be discussed and articulated together with the EEAS. Many trainings offered under Platform 1 are open to all interested civil society representatives. Civil society has always been associated with several sensitive topics (security, rule of law, resilience) and some of the skills required to perform activities in these fields are quite technical.
- should increase the level of specialisation in all fields in order to increase the level and the input to the outcomes of all meetings.

Marius Puodziunas

The CSDP panel meets twice a year. It is important for civil society to take part in these panels since civil society plays an important role working with security issues. These panels allow civil society to receive high-level information related to the CSDP field (cybersecurity, hybrid threats etc). Several trainings related to CSDP are organised by the EEAS to educate and update professionals in the field. Mechanisms should be envisaged to allow representatives of civil society to attend those trainings.

Jeroen Willems

The European Commission has established a six-month period of monitoring the progress on the 20 deliverables. This is the second time the European Commission is doing this exercise via the EU delegations, however not many guidelines were given to the EU delegations on the way they need to collect

data, particularly from the civil society. Civil society and the EaP CSF is invited to contribute to this monitoring. The structured consultation process on the future of the EaP 20 deliverables beyond 2020 is to be launched soon. Until the establishment of the new Commission in November, a reflection exercise is being conducted and EU officials are receiving a lot of input. Considering the 10th year of engagement of the EaP CSF, the EaP CSF seems more organized and more efficient in delivering input.

Civil Society was advised to:

- prepare a document that captures how the post-2020 agenda should be shaped.

Meeting with external stakeholders: Rule of law in focus

The group met Kaisa Honka-Hallila, COEST Delegate at the Permanent Representation of Finland to the EU, Jan Petry, International Relations Officer, DG JUST, and Rusudan Mikhelidze and Olga Savran from the Anti-Corruption Network at the OECD (presentation attached).

The upcoming Finnish Presidency of the EU Council will place emphasis on rule of law within the framework of the EaP, and on how to strengthen rule of law and the role of different actors. The EU as a whole is currently experiencing a crisis in rule of law, which might represent a chance to further push the agenda on rule of law since the need for finding better tools and strategies to support rule of law is apparent. In order for reforms to be efficient, the experts point out that the mindset of people in each country is crucial and that the local context of each country has to always be taken into account and reflected in approaching reforms. The experts reaffirm the vital role of assessment in reform processes, which is accomplished through different mechanisms such as the justice programme survey implemented with the World Bank which polls citizens experienced with the justice system. On the issue of corruption, there is no official figure regarding the amount of money, which has flown out of the EaP and Russia over the past decade. However, after the first year of electronic assets declaration was completed by the OECD, the total sum of official assets was more than the total IMF support to Ukraine. Officials are satisfied with the status quo, they are not interested in opening up to political and economic competition. The OECD anti-corruption division is working on compliance with the Anti-Bribery Convention of which the matrix for the EaP stems from OECD countries template.

Brainstorming in small groups

The members divided in six sub-groups: rule of law, good governance & public administration reform, security & CSDP, enabling environment for civil society, media & strategic communications, gender equality. Each sub-group included a member of the Secretariat. The groups discussed the recommendations developed in Tbilisi, refining them and adding new ones. The final documents will be shared by the sub-group facilitators with the Secretariat within four weeks from the meeting or finalised within Padlet boards.