



## EASTERN PARTNERSHIP Civil Society Forum

### Activity of the Georgian National Platform of EaP CSF in

2013-2014

Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum Georgian National Platform (EaP CSF) was established in 2010 and in recent years it managed to gain a leading position as a consolidated Civil Society actor in democratization process of the country.

Georgian National Platform is the largest coalition of non-governmental organizations in Georgia and currently unites 138 NGOs. Members of the GNP are splitted in to five following thematic working groups: **Working Group 1** Democracy, Human Rights, Good Governance & Stability, **Working Group 2** Economic integration and convergence with EU policies, **Working Group 3** Environment, climate change and energy security, **Working Group 4** Contacts between people, **Working Group 5** Social Dialogue. Coordinators of the workings groups are represented in the Coordination Council headed by the chairman of the Platform.

#### Activities

In 2013 member organizations of Georgian National Platform (GNP) prepared Policy Papers on specific acute policies with the relevant recommendations. They identified the policy areas and prepared to the Government of Georgia (GoG) 19 Policy Papers. The Working Group I (WGI) prepared the policy recommendations on Self-Government, Elections, Media and Criminal Justice.

The WGII - Agricultural Policy; Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA); Food Safety; Innovation; Small and Medium Enterprises (SME).

The WGIII - Development of Energy Sector in Georgia in the Context of EU Integration; Autonomous energy supply of the administrative unite; Analysis and recommendations of the relevant legal acts of Georgian electricity policy towards EU energy policy harmonization; Ecological Crisis of Energy Sector; Economic Aspects of Climate Changes.

The WGIV - Informal Education; Cultural Heritage; Conflicts; Youth Policy – Youth Employment Problems in Georgia; Integration of Ethnic Minorities.

The GNP organised a Conference „Reforms for European Integration - Georgian National Platform" in Trialogue format where the policy papers were presented to the relevant representatives of GoG and EU Delegation in all 19 directions. The Conference was followed by the numerous cooperative meetings between the sectors. For instance, the Ministry of Sport and Youth initiated further discussions of the relevant papers with the authors of the documents. One of the experts elaborating the papers on non formal education was welcomed to present the paper during her visit in the USA. Expert on youth policy presented the paper in the Ministry of Sport and Youth, prepared recommendations were reflected in the National Policy of Youth of Georgia. With the initiative of the GNP Chairman, the additional meeting was convened for discussing the further advocacy campaigns of the papers. Thus, the papers elaborated within the project became the subjects of the further joint meetings that in turn contributed to increasing the interaction and cooperation of GNP members with the GoG as well as with the representatives of the EU Delegation responsible for various sectoral issues.

The recommendations elaborated in result of Policy Papers, were also presented by the GNP delegation at the Third Summit of EaP in Vilnius, Lithuania in 2013 as well as to the 5th EaP CSF in Chisinau, Moldova in 2013.

2nd Conference in trialogue format entitled „Reforms for European Integration - Georgian National Platform" was held on December 10, 2013. The Trialogue gathered up to 140 participants including the GNP members as well as the representatives of GoG and EU Delegation. The Conference aimed to discuss in Trialogue, with the representatives of GoG, International Community and Civil Society, Policy Papers elaborated by GNP members. The Trialogue format contributed to policy dialogue with the Government and active participation of Georgian Civil Society organizations in reforms which represent necessary preconditions on EU integration path.

The structural dialogue of GNP with the Government of Georgia was pursued through two directions: 1) regular meetings of the Coordination Council (CC) with high level officials of the Georgian Government and 2) the issue-based policy dialogue through meetings of the NP working groups with the relevant line ministries.

During the year 2013, the CC representatives as a whole and/or individual members had more than 30 meetings with the authorities to discuss the overall progress in EaP process and the most acute issues identified by GNP representatives and positions of the Government with regards to the civil society recommendations. The meetings were held with both, executive as well as legislative branches in an open and constructive format. The meetings were held with the representatives of almost all the Ministries, namely, EU integration, Foreign Affairs, Reintegration, Economy, Agriculture, Sport and Youth, Education, Energy, Environment and Culture.

The WGs as a whole or/and individual representatives had more than 50 meetings with GoG including the line ministries. The meetings had a form of working discussions of the development in their relevant fields, different policy issues and the recommendations for filling in the existing gaps.

The meetings contributed to providing both sides with more insight, avoiding misunderstanding and confrontation and finding solutions acceptable for both sides though some of the meetings were tense and did not reach consensus on the covered topics. According to the GNP statistics, WG had constant contact with the following line ministries: Ministry of Energy, Environment, Economy, Correction and Legal Assistance, Agriculture, Sport and Youth, Education, Culture and Reintegration.

Many of meetings were fruitful. For example, as a result of negotiations with the Ministry of Correction and Legal Assistance, the representatives of WG1 were awarded special permission to conduct monitoring in the prisons in Eastern Georgia from July to November, 2013.

The leading group within the GNP is WG3 that apart from its obligatory gatherings according to the NP Statute, it had additional monthly meetings with the Ministry of Energy on Khudoni related contracts requiring numerous amendments. It is noteworthy that the Ministry of Energy had considered the WG as a main actor within the civil society sector to hold discussion meetings on this issue.

The structural dialogue has been established between the Government and GNP. It is noteworthy that the Authorities, especially the ministries of EU integration, Foreign Affairs, Economy, Sport and Youth, Energy as well as the Parliament considers GNP as a main actor and a face of Civil Society sector.

Organization of dialogues between the GNP, the EU representatives and Government of Georgia were also considered for strengthening CSOs engagement in policy dialogue and monitoring of ENP/EaP processes. 2 dialogues have been successfully held during the year.

The meetings served as a platform of trilateral discussions on concrete issues and recommendations (tabled by CSOs) whereas GoG and the EU had an opportunity to jointly reflect upon the latter. The Dialogue fostered fully-fledged civil society engagement in a comprehensive process with both official interlocutors present and interacting. It turned into one of the most effective practices of civil society engagement in EaP related processes given the good will and reciprocity from the GoG and the EU.

During the 2013-2014, numerous meetings have been organized by GoG with participation of GNP. Members of Georgian National Platform were regularly participating at the hearings and discussions of the relevant Parliamentary Committees as well as with the executive branch of the Government.

In result, GoG took into account the following 17 recommendations and legislative changes on the basis of Civil Society Sector's recommendations.

The GNP was one of the initiators of the deletion of illegal surveillance organized by the previous governments and abolition of such approach ensuring fundamental right to privacy. Following this initiative, GNP members elaborated 6 project laws. The Parliamentary Committee of the Legal Issues appraised the project laws, gave it a status of legislative initiative and started Parliamentary hearings. Some of them have been adopted, the part is under hearings.

With the initiative of the GNP member organizations, 4 legislative changes have been made in the context of Media. Namely, the comprehensive legislation amendments have been made in regards to the Georgian Media including Georgian Public Broadcaster, legislative changes Adjara State Broadcaster and its financial transparency. It is noteworthy that the legislative changes implied also the appliance of so called “Must Carry” and “Must Offer” principles on the permanent basis. GNP members recommendations were also taken into consideration in regards to anti-discrimination bill.

In December, 2013, GNP members’ efforts made GoG to change its decision on the postponement of preparation of the State Border Management Strategy that is necessary component for a visa liberalisation process in Georgia.

In early 2014, the WG2 was approached by GoG to provide recommendations for Georgian Labour legislation that was later considered. GNP organisations managed to refrain the permission on import of vast of coal thermo electric power station.

WG3 took part in discussions of forest policy concept (in September, 2013) with the Ministry of Environment, the Parliamentary Committee and Forest Policy Service. The WG3 members are considered as the most active representatives of severe discussions with the Government on construction of Hudoni Power Station in Khaishi (Svaneti) and Tbilisi. They are regularly invited to various TV talk shows and debates on Energy and Environmental issues.

The Ministry of Sport and Youth initiated a follow up meetings with the representatives of WG4, the experts working on Policy Paper (within the Action) on Youth Employment. The WG4 members were involved in the meetings for providing their recommendations in regards to the country’s Youth Strategy.

Communication and Information Strategy is a product of successful cooperation of the Government of Georgia and EaP CSF Georgian National Platform. Process led by Office of the State Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration and Open Society Georgia Foundation ; Drafting process started in November, 2012, first draft reviewed by GNP in March, 2013. Following the government consultations strategy was approved by the GoG on September 5, 2013.

The main goal of the document is to provide information to the population of Georgia on the advantages related to the European integration process and on the commitments that the country has undertaken in this respect.

The Office of the State Minister on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration in cooperation with other relevant state entities, the Public Broadcaster of Georgia, representatives of the National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society’s Forum and other partner organizations (including organizations from the EU member states) will develop an Annual Action Plan.

The Action Plan will be approved by the Commission of Integration of Georgia with the European Union in December each year. The Parliamentary Committee on the Integration of Georgia with Europe, EU experts and the National Platform of the Eastern Partnership’s Civil Society Forum will

be responsible for the monitoring and assessment of the implementation of the strategy and the Action Plan. The monitoring activity will be based on the indicators provided in the Action Plan. Public opinion surveys will be a main factor used in the assessment of the success of the Strategy and will be carried out on a regular basis.

In order to raise general public awareness on ongoing EU integration processes, including the EaP initiatives and GNP role in it, national platform implemented active media work and regional awareness building campaigns. As a result coverage in printed/electronic media increased. Regular communication with journalists on EaP matters was established by the GNP that effectively raised their sensitivity towards not only GNP but EaP as well as EU-Georgia related issues. Regular coverage of NP activities by different journalists contributed to their skills and expertise to comprehensively cover the EU integration matters and likely have a longer-term sustainable effect also beyond the project duration. More than 500 000 people were reached out by electronic media.

One of the most significant events took place on April 13, 2014. Georgian National Platform held the open air concert on Europe Square in support of Georgia's European ambition under the motto "We Choose Europe". The concert was attended by the Head of European Union Delegation to Georgia, Ambassador Philip Dimitrov. Giorgi Margvelashvili, President of Georgia, addressed the public. Georgian musicians, artists, journalists, athletes and representatives of other professions have joined the open-air concert initiated by non-governmental organizations.

On 18 July 2014, representatives of the Georgian National Platform attended an extraordinary session of Parliament, which ratified the EU Association Agreement.

In the framework of this event Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy Štefan Füle met representatives of the National Platform. The Commissioner stressed the importance of National Platform and expressed his gratitude for the work performed by the NP. The participants of the meeting discussed the challenges of the post-ratification period of the Association Agreement and ways of future cooperation.

On October 10, 2014 Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum Georgian National Platform signed Memorandum of Understanding with the Medical Centre "CITO" in support of Ukrainian refugees affected by the armed conflict.

In the framework of the Memorandum Georgian National Platform provided the humanitarian aid to the Medical Center, "Cito" for Ukrainian refugees temporarily residing in Georgia.

The memorandum was signed by the Chairman of Georgian National Platform Lasha Tughushi, Director of the Medical Center "Cito", Natia Shavdia and Head of Department for the Management and Coordination of Emergency of the Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia, Zurab Utiashvili. The event was attended by the representatives of Georgian National Platform and the Embassy of Ukraine in Georgia.

On October 22, Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum Georgian National Platform organized Ukraine support rally outside the Embassy of Ukraine. Parallel rallies were held in Tbilisi, Zugdidi and Batumi. The main purpose was to express sincere solidarity to the Ukrainian people, support country's European aspirations, its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Participants brought the flags of EU, Ukraine and Georgia, as well as red umbrellas as a symbol of the people who died in Ukraine as a result of the Russian aggression. There were lit candles and people sang national anthem of the Ukraine.

Within the framework of the project “Strengthening and Capacity Building of Georgian National Platform for the Eastern Partnership” informational meetings held by the partner organizations in the regions of Georgia.

The main goal of the meetings was to raise awareness of local population on the EU integration process, significance of signing of Association Agreement, positive outcomes and commitments to be done by Georgia.

Association Green Alternative organized regional meeting in Stepantsminda, Kazbegi Municipality on the topic "EU Energy Policy and Challenges to face Georgia” with the special focus on the importance of EU Georgia Association Agreement, its impact on energy policy of Georgia, also compliance of new energy projects with EU standards and decision making process.

Center for strategic Research and Development of Georgia conducted informational meeting in Telavi. The meeting was devoted to the implications of Association Agreement and DCFTA for food safety in Georgia. The participants were made aware of the structure and content of Association Agreement and DCFTA, as well as the National Strategy on Food Safety developed in the process of DCFTA negotiations and upgraded recently. The short overview of the history and principles of food safety in EU was presented and discussed using specific examples from Georgian reality.

The Georgian Young Lawyers’ Association held informational meetings in the region of Gori and Akhalkalaki. During the meetings special emphasis was placed on the following topics: state strategy on migration and action plan, readmission, domestic violence, state policy towards domestic violence, legal aid for the victims of domestic violence and local self-governance reform.