



EASTERN PARTNERSHIP
Civil Society Forum

**Report on the Activities of the Eastern
Partnership Civil Society Forum
November 2014 - November 2015**

NOVEMBER 2015

Introduction

2015 - another turbulent year for the Eastern Partnership

2015 has been an eventful year for the Eastern Partnership. The military confrontation in Eastern Ukraine between Russian backed separatists and the Ukrainian state and the evident hostility of the Russian authorities to independent civil society organisations created new challenges for the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum. Russia also remained hostile to the pro European Association Agreements (AA) signed by Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine while Moscow's propaganda played, with some success, on nostalgia for Soviet times in these countries.

The Eastern Partnership summit in Riga failed to produce any new initiatives from the European Union and disappointed the countries which had signed AAs when the EU failed to provide them with a clear membership perspective while visa liberalisation for Georgia and Ukraine remained a 'task too far' for much of the year.

The period also saw the first stages of the implementation of reform programmes under Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area agreements signed as part of the AAs by Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. These made the fight against corruption a priority even as oligarchs retained much power in their countries and were thus able to resist change.

Armenia slowly made its way towards a new accommodation with the EU even as the perception of corruption lay at the base of protests against electricity price rises in the summer. Meanwhile the brazen theft of 1 billion us dollars from Moldova's banking system led to the fall of the pro-European government and opened the way to a possible return to power in new elections to pro-Russian parties.

In Azerbaijan, the regime fearful of a 'maidan' in the country provoked by widespread corruption continued its relentless campaign of harassment and prison sentences against respected civil rights defenders. Threats by Baku to leave the Eastern Partnership placed a question mark over the continued existence of the Azeri civil society National Platform.

In Belarus the release of remaining political prisoners underpinned a thaw in relations with the EU and came as part of civil society moved away from the politics of confrontation with the country's rulers towards a policy of engagement designed to improve the quality of institutions and respect for civil liberties.

In Georgia relations between the authorities remained good with civil society providing cadres for government institutions and the dialogue between the National Platform, other civil society institutions and the authorities continued to the mutual benefit of both sides.

All in all the year saw civil society facing major challenges as a force for change and defender of the pro-democracy, pro market and pro rule of law Eastern Partnership programme of reform in the Caucasus and Eastern Europe.



In a snapshot: Activities of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum in 2015

In the reporting period the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF) responded to the emerging challenges in the region. The EaP CSF continued to argue for further reforms in each of the EaP countries and draw attention to negative developments including human rights violations. Defence of the principle of free and fair elections, the fight for a free and independent media and against corruption remained at the centre of the attention of the EaP CSF. Security of the EaP countries and combating the Russian propaganda have become the new focus areas since 2014.

The National Platforms of the Forum voiced the consolidated position of European-oriented civil society with regard to the key developments in each of the EaP countries and presented its view on the situation, as well as policy expertise. Advocacy, awareness raising and promoting European values and standards and providing monitoring and expertise continued to be a priority for activities of the National Platforms. In November 2015 the Georgian National Platform has signed a Memorandum of Cooperation with the government aimed at engaging the Non-Governmental Organizations in the process of planning, implementation and monitoring of the Association Agreement Action Plans.

The new context of the EaP with 3 Association Agreements signatory states and 3 non-signatory countries strongly influenced the EaP CSF and the EaP CSF National Platforms in particular. With different agreements guiding their cooperation with the EU, the number of common points between countries appeared to decrease. Discussions started by the Steering Committee have revealed that more attention will need to be paid to identifying the areas for thematic cooperation between countries and between the National Platforms respectively and linking the countries in different configurations with a particular thematic interest. This will create numerous new possibilities for cooperation between the countries. How this should be done will be further discussed at the annual assembly of the Forum in Kyiv.

Thanks to the EaP CSF regranting which was pioneered in 2015, the Working Groups have been able to deepen their activities in the respective thematic directions by producing a number of analytical materials and conducting advocacy. The renewed format of the 7th Assembly on 19-21 November in Kyiv will allow its participants to take part in a number of parallel sessions and stakeholder meetings, as well as provide numerous opportunities for experience exchange, strategising, networking and project development.

The activities of the EaP CSF in 2015 have been guided by the [Strategy of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum for 2015-2017](#). The Steering Committee elected during the 6th EaP CSF Assembly on 20-21 November in Batumi, Georgia, met four times in 2015 to discuss pertinent issues for the EaP countries and develop a strategic direction for the Forum's activities. Each of the National Platforms and Working Groups acting in accordance with their statutes and the annual plans. The Secretariat has operated in accordance with the annual plan that has been presented and approved by the Steering Committee at the beginning of the year.



Activities of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum in 2015 in Detail

The EaP CSF, including its Steering Committee, National Platforms, Working Groups, sub-groups and Secretariat, conducted a number of advocacy campaigns through dissemination of statements and policy papers among EU institutions, Member States governments and parliamentary bodies of the Council of Europe (PACE) and National Parliaments of the EU member states, had meetings with officials as well as raised awareness among the general public via public events conducted by the EaP CSF.

1. Cooperation with EU institutions and addressing the audience at EaP high-level meetings and events

Cooperation with the European Parliament and EURONEST

Throughout the year the EaP CSF cooperated well with **EURONEST**. The meeting of the SC with EURONEST **Co-Chair MEP Heidi Hautala**(Greens/EFA) led to the active engagement of the EaP CSF to the EURONEST Parliamentary Assembly on 16-18 March 2015, where the SC representative Mikayel Hovhannisyán has addressed the parliamentarians and called for clearer perspectives with regard to the EaP countries' further integration with the EU and identified the need for clear and detailed deliverables to be specified by the EU in the agreements with the EaP Governments. In the margins of the meeting the EaP CSF co-organised a [joint Session of the EURONEST](#) on taking stock of the achievements and challenges of the EaP policy.

EaP CSF contributed to the drafting of the [European Parliament resolution on the review of the European Neighbourhood Policy](#) by **MEP Eduard Kukan** (rapporteur, EPP) and **MEP Andi Cristea** (shadow rapporteur, S&D), which emphasised that “the development of regional civil society platforms such as the Eastern Partnership and the Southern Neighbourhood Civil Society Fora strengthens multi-stakeholder engagement driving the democratisation and economic reform agenda in the Neighbourhood”. The resolution also stressed the importance of the support for civil society and civil society's role in scrutiny of EU assistance spending in the ENP countries.

Throughout the year the Steering Committee and the Secretariat worked with a number of MEPs on various topics. Following the release of political prisoners in Belarus the [Belarusian National Platform](#) of the EaP CSF and the [Steering Committee](#) produced statements and together with **MEP Bogdan Zdrojewski**, Chair of the Delegation for relations with Belarus, the EaP CSF held a debate focused on the future of the EU-Belarus relations. More info [here](#).

Specific issues were debated and advocated on one to one meetings with several MEPs, for example with **MEP Krystyna Lybacka**(S&D) on Bologna Process in the EaP countries and the implementation of the respective roadmap for Belarus. The Secretariat is maintaining working relations with group of involved and supportive MEPs. The upcoming event on visa liberalisation for Ukraine will be, for example, hosted by **MEPs Michaela Sojdrova, Sandra Kalniete and Jaromir Stetina** (all EPP).





Cooperation with European External Action Service and the European Commission

The EaP CSF had regular exchanges with the EU institutions throughout the year either during specifically set meetings, within the framework of the Steering Committee or annual Working Group meetings and EU-initiated consultations.

The Steering Committee and the Secretariat regularly met with a number of EEAS representatives to discuss the Eastern Partnership Summit in Riga and the Civil Society Conference in its margins and had a regular exchange on the state of bilateral cooperation with the EaP countries. A number of EEAS representatives were invited to **the annual meeting of EaP CSF Working group 1 “Democracy, Human Rights, Good Governance and Stability”** and this opportunity was used to channel the EaP CSF positions on introducing the security dimension to the EaP and strict conditionality in the sphere of human rights.

The EaP CSF participants also had a chance **to debate with Commissioner Hahn** during the Civil Society conference in the margins of the EaP Summit in Riga and at the annual meeting of the EaP CSF in Kyiv. The Steering Committee also exchanged views with **Emma Udwin, Deputy Chief of Cabinet of Commissioner Johannes Hahn**, who provided the Commissioner’s view of the need for reforms to attract investment and strengthen the economy of the EaP countries. The EaP CSF **Working Group 1** participants had a chance to discuss the progress of reforms in the EaP countries and the situation with Media Freedom and Combating Propaganda in EaP countries with a number of officials from DG NEAR. [Working Group 1 Annual Meeting Report](#)

The EaP CSF has developed good contacts with DG Trade, whose representatives attended the annual **Working Group 2** meeting and the regional meeting for National Platforms **EaP CSF National Platforms’ participation in Association Agreements (AAs)/Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) implementation in Georgia**. Representatives of the SME Support Programme from DG NEAR **Gabriel Blanc and Vincent Ray, Joanna Miksa**(DG Trade),**Dominik Olewinski** (DG Agri)and **Michaela Hauf** (DG GROW), the Platform 2 Coordinators were part of the debates which took place during the annual meeting of the Group. [Working Group 2 Annual Meeting Report](#)

The EaP CSF **Working Group 3** had a substantial dialogue with the representatives of the DG Energy, DG NEAR and DG Environment during its meeting in Brussels in June 2015. On the issues of energy security, participants debated with **Marion Schiller-Probst** (DG Energy) who encouraged regional cooperation in the area of infrastructure and interconnections, and mentioned also sustainable energy and nuclear safety as priority issues for bilateral relations with the EaP countries. More specific issues related to gas supplies across the region were discussed with **Gaspar Demur** (DG Energy). The session on environment and climate change policies was attended by **Laura Giappichelli** (DG NEAR) and **Andreja Skerl** (DG Environment) provided the EU stakeholders with alternative objective information and constructive criticism. [Working Group 3 Annual Meeting Report](#)





Working Group 4 meeting in June 2015 facilitated the contacts among working group participants and EU officials from the DG EAC and other EU organisations (European Seniors Union, Age Platform Europe, European Association for the Education of Adults). **Marta Touykova** (DG EAC) is coordinating the EaP Platform 4 and provided an update on upcoming activities at the multilateral level. Other EU officials involved were **Dearbhla Doyle** from EEAS, **Carmen Falkenberg Ambrosio** (DG NEAR) and **Joachim Fronia** and **Rob van Iersel** from DG EAC. [Working Group 4 Annual Meeting Report](#)
[Working Group 5 Annual Meeting Report](#)

2. Participation of the EaP CSF in the European Neighbourhood Policy Review

The EaP CSF sent its [position](#) on the consultation paper for the ENP review that incorporated all the suggestions received from the individual EaP CSF participants and jointly by National Platforms and Working Groups.

The Steering Committee has exchanged views on the ENP review and its shortfalls with **Christian Danielsson**, Director General of DG Near and with **Frederic Schwandt**, Deputy Head of Unit on ENP, European External Action Service.

EaP CSF contributed to the drafting of the [European Parliament resolution on the review of the European Neighbourhood Policy](#) by the **MEP Eduard Kukan** (rapporteur, EPP) and **MEP Andi Cristea** (shadow rapporteur, S&D), in which it was emphasised that “the development of regional civil society platforms such as the Eastern Partnership and the Southern Neighbourhood Civil Society Fora strengthens a multi-stakeholder engagement driving the democratisation and economic reform agenda in the Neighbourhood”. The resolution also stressed the importance of the support for civil society and civil society’s role in scrutiny of EU assistance spending in the ENP countries.

The revised ENP is the focus of the discussions of the 7th annual meeting of the EaP CSF taking place on 19-21 November in Kyiv.

3. Flagship Initiatives

- **European Integration Index for EaP countries**

In spring 2015 the EaP CSF in cooperation with a number of experts has produced a new version of the European Integration Index for EaP countries. The Index is a yearly publication produced by the EaP CSF that generates recommendations to guide countries along the reform process and serves as a monitoring tool for both civil society and policymakers in the partner countries and the EU. The full text of the most recent EaP Index publication can be found [here](#). The Index publication





was presented to the policy-makers in Brussels, Berlin, Chisinau, Minsk, Riga and Yerevan in 2015.

- **Countering Russian Propaganda and media freedom**

Following up on the [Resolution on Media War](#) conducted by the Russian Federation adopted at the annual assembly in November 2014 in Batumi, the Steering Committee made contact with European Commission institutions, the European Endowment for Democracy (EED) and Forum members monitoring Russian media impact in their countries as well as other stakeholders working on initiatives to counter Russian propaganda. The EaP CSF met Andris Kesteris, Principal Civil Society and Media Advisor in the Directorate General for Enlargement and also discussed with the EED their new media feasibility study. The project on Russian media monitoring in 6 EaP countries initiated by the media sub-group of the EaP CSF was conducted and its results were presented at the Media Conference in the margins of the EaP summit in May 2015. The project helped keep this issue on the political agenda and is taken into account in proposals by EED-supported feasibility study on what possible measures can be taken to combat propaganda. The summary of the findings can be seen [here](#). The joint efforts of the EaP CSF media subgroup members and the secretariat have contributed to the launching of a new EC-funded programme in support of ethical journalism development in EaP.

[Steering Committee Position on Imposing Sanctions against Russian Media](#)

Another project aiming at protection of the freedom of media and freedom of expression across the EaP region was launched within the **EaP CSF re-granting procedure**. One of the major objectives of project activities is to raise awareness on violations of media freedom and journalists' rights. The project is led by **Independent Journalism Centre**, Moldova in cooperation with other member organisations. Its major output is the **EaP Media Freedom Watch**, a comprehensive online observatory on the state of media in the region. Within the EaP Media Freedom Watch, the project partners elaborate the [Eastern Partnership Media Freedom Index](#) that is compiled quarterly and is calculated by summing up the points obtained by over 60 participating media experts from EaP countries in four sections – Politics, Practice, Broadcasting and Internet and new media.

- **Human rights monitoring**

The Steering Committee and the Secretariat were observing the human rights situation in partner countries as well as the institutional situation of NGOs. The situation in Azerbaijan was and continues to be particularly alarming. The Co-Chairs of the Steering Committee signed a [letter addressed to Ilham Aliyev](#) urging him to take steps towards normalizing the conditions for the CSOs work in Azerbaijan. The Steering Committee has also produced [several statements on political prisoners in Azerbaijan](#) where the number of CSOs activists, journalists and bloggers who are jailed on politically motivated charges is growing. Human Rights in the Eastern Partnership countries was the topic of the key panel during the Working Group 1 meeting on 8-9 June in Brussels. On the initiative of the EaP CSF members, the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Conference in margins of the EaP Summit in Riga unanimously adopted a [special resolution on](#)





[political prisoners](#) proposed by the human rights defender and former political prisoner Ales Bialiatski.

- **Security and conflict-resolution**

Since 2014 security remains a priority topic for the EaP CSF and its submission on the reviewed ENP advised **to incorporate security and conflict-resolution to the EaP.**

The EaP CSF and the Ukrainian National Platform **conducted a 2-day long event ‘Kyiv Security Perspectives - Towards a Security Agenda for the Eastern Partnership’** that brought together security experts from the Eastern Partnership countries and the EU. The discussion focused on strengthening the security dimension of EaP policy, both via soft and hard measures. As a result of the event a [policy paper](#) was produced. More information on the event is available [here](#). The [recommendations](#) produced at the conference were widely disseminated.

- **EaP CSF National Platforms’ participation in Association Agreements (AAs)/Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) implementation**

Implementation of Association Agreements remains key for the 3 EaP countries. On 23-25 September more than 60 representatives of 6 National Platforms took part in the seminar on the National Platforms’ participation in Association Agreements/Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area implementation organised by the EaP CSF and the Georgian National Platform. During the 3-day event, held in Tbilisi, Georgia, 5 panel discussions and 7 parallel sessions took place where a set of recommendations on increasing effectiveness of civil society’s involvement in the implementation process of the above agreements were produced. More info on the event is available [here](#).

4. **Civil Society Platforms envisioned by Association Agreements with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine**

The EaP CSF Steering Committee, the National Platforms of the association countries, and the Secretariat were engaged in the process of formation of the civil society platforms spelled out in the Association Agreements with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. The Forum argued for the platforms to be democratic, representative and functional and made sure that this process should see the 3 countries sharing their experiences with each other. Thus representatives of the Moldovan and Georgian National Platform were brought to the inaugural meeting of the EU-Ukraine civil society platform that took place on 16th of April 2015 in Kyiv. The Forum also advocated that the members of the Moldovan, Georgian and Ukrainian side of the civil society platform should be able to decide independently, through a democratic national process whom they elect to represent their side and that the EU side of the platforms should not be dominated by the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC). The positions have been distributed by the Secretariat among the





relevant EU institutions representatives in Brussels and a number of advocacy meetings have been conducted. The statements of the Steering Committee in this regard can be found [here](#) and [here](#).

5. Regranting

2015 was the first year when the EaP CSF had funds available for the small projects of Working Groups. This regranting programme will continue in 2016 and 2017.

The rules and procedures for the regranting were developed by the Steering Committee and Secretariat and approved by the European Commission. Applications were received by the Secretariat and checked for technical eligibility; and forwarded to appropriate Working Group Councils. The Working Group Councils made recommendations and evaluation of possible impact of the project within the priorities defined by the Council (either set during WG Council meetings or via online exchange). Applications, along with the recommendations of the Working Group Councils were forwarded to a Selection Panel, which consisted of four members, two co-chairs of the Steering Committee, one independent expert or a donor and a representative of the Secretariat. If a member of the Working Group Council planning to submit the project application, he/she stepped down from the review process to avoid a conflict of interest.

The budget allocation for each Working Group was the following: Working Group 1 - 70,000 Euro; Working Group 2 - 50,000 Euro; Working Group 3 - 50,000 Euro; Working Group 4 - 50,000 Euro; Working Group 5 - 50,000 Euro.

The EaP CSF Secretariat received **41 proposals, out of which 32 were deemed to be eligible**. The majority of the proposals were submitted according to the priorities of Working Group 1 and Working Group 4. The Selection Panel decided to provide funding for **15 projects**. The overwhelming majority of submitted projects was of high quality. The regranting projects will be showcased at the 7th EaP CSF Assembly in Kyiv where the project outputs will be presented and debated with the participants. The re-granting procedure has proved to have a major impact in term of providing the Forum with numerous tangible outputs. These will serve as a basis for further advocacy efforts in the policy areas of relevant to the Forum's participants. The outputs of regranting will be used fully in the upcoming year for multiple advocacy purposes.

6. High-profile meetings in the framework of the Eastern Partnership, in which the members of the EaP CSF took part

[Eastern Partnership Civil Society Conference in the margins of the EaP Summit, 19-21 May](#)

A large delegation of the EaP CSF members took part in the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Conference. Apart from being active participants, moderators and speakers, EaP CSF members organised a number of advocacy actions. CSOs from Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova submitted to Commissioner Hahn symbolic applications for the EU membership from their countries signed by the participants of the conference. On the day of the Eastern Partnership Summit the civil society





representatives organised a demonstration to urge the Summit to adopt a stronger declaration focusing on visa liberalisation for Georgia and Ukraine, a EU membership perspective for the three EaP countries that signed Association Agreements and maintaining sanctions against Russia to ensure peace in Ukraine.

[EaP Ministerial in Luxembourg, 20 April 2015](#)

On 20 April, the EaP CSF Steering Committee Co-chair Krzysztof Bobiński addressed Foreign and Interior Ministers focusing on the necessity of combatting Russian propaganda in the mass media and maintaining existing sanctions, as well as introducing sanctions against media bosses in Russia responsible for its dissemination. Bobiński also argued on behalf of EaP CSF for a credible membership perspective to be extended to those EaP countries that signed the Association Agreements in order to support their reform efforts. More information [here](#).

[5th EaP Informal Ministerial Meeting in Minsk, 29 June 2015](#)

The EaP CSF Steering Committee Co-chair Andrei Yahorau participated in the meeting, which gathered foreign ministers of the EaP countries, EU Institutions representatives including the Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations Johannes Hahn, aimed at reflecting on the results of the Riga summit and discussing how to take the Partnership forward across the agreed areas of cooperation. In his address, Mr Yahorau pointed out the need to apply different level of EU conditionality according to the differences in their political choices. Yahorau's presentation was greeted with applause by the meeting. More information [here](#).

The EaP CSF representatives took part in the following [EaP Platforms and Panels](#):

- 2nd Eastern Partnership Youth Forum, Riga
- EaP Seminar on Industrial Policy and Innovation
- EaP panel on Research and Innovation
- EaP Platform 2 meeting, 13th Meeting of Platform 2 on Economic Integration and Convergence with EU Policies
- EaP Panel on Statistics, Minsk
- 3rd Workshop "Towards Harmonisation of Digital Markets (HDM) in the EaP and the 1st EaP Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) on Digital Economy, Brussels
- EaP seminar on biodiversity and nature protection, in Brussels
- EaP Panel on Public Administration, Stockholm
- ETF workshop "Integrated and networked approaches to skills anticipation and matching", Helsinki
- EaP Ministerial on Digital Economy, Luxemburg
- EaP Panel on integrated Border Management, Riga
- EaP Platform 3 meeting (Energy Security), Brussels
- Jean Monnet Seminar "A changing neighbourhood – Eastern Partnership", Tbilisi
- 6th EaP Panel on SME Policy





- EaP Panel on the Fight against Corruption on "Democracy, Good Governance and Stability", Amsterdam
- Skills Dimension of Migration event, Brussels
- EaP Statistics Panel on labour market statistics, Tbilisi
- EaP Panel on Environment and Climate Change, Brussels
- Regional conference "Mutual Learning for better qualifications" ETF, Batumi
- 7th Panel on SME Policy, Odessa
- 14th Trade Panel, Kiev
- 9th EaP Panel on Public Administration Reform, Vilnius
- 1st HDM Panel meeting, Brussels (Harmonisation of Digital Markets)
- ETF workshop "Approaches to skills anticipation and matching", Paris

7. Steering Committee meetings and decisions on internal matters

- **The Steering Committee had four meetings in the reporting period**

The first meeting in Brussels saw an exchange of views with representatives of EU institutions and discussed the participation of the EaP CSF in the European Neighbourhood Policy review, its statement on escalation of violence in the EaP countries, the situation with Civil Society Platforms within Association Agreements and Steering Committee statement in this regard, the EaP CSF participation at the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly in March in Yerevan, Monitoring of the human rights situation in the EaP CSF, Working Group Council and Working Group Meetings and the re-granting procedures for small projects and funding for National Platforms

[The minutes of the first Steering Committee meeting](#)

The second and third SC meetings in Riga and Vilnius focused on the selection process of the participants to the annual meeting of the EaP CSF, planning of the Annual Assembly in Kyiv, discussion on the CSO situation in Azerbaijan and reaction of the Steering Committee to the statement produced at the EaP Summit, as well as planning of the joint events for National Platforms.

[The minutes of the second Steering Committee meeting](#)

[The minutes of the third Steering Committee meeting](#)

The fourth SC meeting in Tbilisi focused on discussing the revision to the procedure for re-election of National Platform Coordinators, assessing the work of the Working Group Councils and Forum's advocacy in EU member states and the EaP CSF funding situation.

[The minutes of the fourth Steering Committee meeting](#)

- **Revision of the procedure for election/re-election of National Platform Coordinators**





It was agreed by the members of the SC to add to the regulations of the Forum that the representatives of National Platforms to the Steering Committee (National Facilitators) can be re-elected between the annual meetings by the delegates of the respective annual meeting if the National Facilitator cannot perform his/her duties or the National Platform members find the work of the National Facilitator unsatisfactory. The Working Groups can also re-elect their Working Group Coordinator at the annual Working Group meeting. This change will be offered for voting to the general assembly at the annual meeting in on 19-21 November in Kyiv.

8. Steering Committee Statements adopted in the reporting period

1. [Statement on the Release of Political Prisoners in Belarus, 26 August 2015](#)
2. [Statement on the Court Decision in the Cases of Leyla and Arif Yunus, 20 August 2015](#)
3. [Statement on the 23 June Attacks of the Armenian Authorities against Peaceful Protesters, 24 June 2015](#)
4. [Reaction to the Joint Declaration of the Riga Eastern Partnership Summit, 22 May 2015](#)
5. [Statement on a So-called Criminal Investigation against Promo-LEX and Other Independent CSOs in Transnistria, 13 May 2015](#)
6. [Statement on Visa Liberalisation for Georgia and Ukraine, 8 May 2015](#)
7. [Joint Statement of the National Platforms on Recognizing the European Perspective for the Eastern Partnership States, 23 April 2015](#)
8. [Statement on Political Prisoners in Azerbaijan, 24 April 2015](#)
9. [Statement on the Formation of the Civil Society Platform in Ukraine, 10 April 2015](#)
10. [Position on Imposing Sanctions against Russian Media, 6 March 2015](#)
11. [Statement on the formation of civil society platforms in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, 13 February 2015](#)
12. [Statement on the Escalation of Violence in the Eastern Partnership Countries, 5 February 2015](#)

9. Working Group and WG Council meetings

In cooperation with WG Coordinators the EaP CSF Secretariat organised 5 annual meetings of Working Groups and 5 meetings of the Working Group Councils that were used as advocacy opportunity for WG members and an opportunity to exchange ideas on the selected priorities of the WGs. The meetings were also used to report on the situation in countries. The WG representatives had a chance to meet with more than 30 representatives of the EU institutions, with whom they raised more than 50 issues. The reports from annual WG meetings and their annual reports are below:

[Working Group 1 Annual Meeting Report](#)
[Working Group 2 Annual Meeting Report](#)
[Working Group 3 Annual Meeting Report](#)
[Working Group 4 Annual Meeting Report](#)
[Working Group 5 Annual Meeting Report](#)





[Working Group 1 Annual Report](#)
[Working Group 2 Annual Report](#)
[Working Group 3 Annual Report](#)
[Working Group 4 Annual Report](#)

10. National Platforms annual reports

The National Platforms have continued to serve as reform drivers in 2015, however in some countries the operating environment and possibilities for having a productive dialogue with the authorities is more conducive than in others. While the Georgian National Platform has managed to open its office in the Parliament to facilitate its advocacy efforts and has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Government on monitoring and implementation of the AA, the Azeri National Platform has struggled to meet and has a number of its members jailed and their accounts frozen.

[Armenian National Platform Annual Report](#)
[Belarusian National Platform Annual Report](#)
[Georgian National Platform Annual Report](#)
[Moldovan National Platform Annual Report](#)
[Ukrainian National Platform Annual Report](#)

11. Applications for the annual meeting of the EaP CSF

In March 2015, the call for applications for **the annual meeting of the EaP CSF** in Kyiv was launched. Based on the three selection lists – National Platforms/EU coordinators, Working Group co-ordinators, and EU delegations – the selection of participants was finalised by the Steering Committee.

This year there were **425 applications** for the Annual Assembly, out of which **236 organisations** have been selected to take part in the Forum either in the capacity of a participant or observer in line with the eligibility guidelines. **43 per cent of the selected delegates** coming to Kyiv did not attend the Annual Assembly of the Forum in Batumi in 2014. **28 per cent of the attendees are new participants** who never attended the Forum.

12. Next Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum

A decision on the 8th annual Assembly will be made during the meeting of the new Steering Committee in Kyiv, Ukraine.

13. Funding and accounts

- **EaP CSF funding**

At the end of 2014 the Secretariat has signed a new 3-year grant with the European Commission for a total of 3.324.294,34 EUR. The EC will finance 90, 24%, that is to say 3.000.000 EUR maximum. The objectives of the three-year project are:



- To encourage further cooperation between organisations from the Forum by supporting the joint activities of the Working Groups and National Platforms;
- To improve the functioning of the structures of Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (Working Group, National Platforms) in order for the Forum to become more representative and allow it to become an effective and reliable counterpart for national governments;
- To increase the capacities of the Secretariat to act as support structure for the Forum.

Project activities include:

- Organising Forum meetings (working groups: 5 meetings per year, Steering Committee – up to 3 meetings per year, plenary meetings: 1 meeting per year);
- Organising advocacy events in Brussels or the EaP countries;
- Supporting joint projects and activities of the WGs through re-granting
- Organising capacity development activities for Working Groups in the frames of WG meetings or other events;
- Supporting the (regional) activities of National Platforms
- Financing the activities of the Secretariat as support structure for the Forum

The project on *Strengthening National Platforms* implemented by REC Moldova that started in early 2013 is in its final stages meaning that most of the National Platforms are left without funding for their key activities. The Armenian National Platform has received a grant from the EU Delegation for its activities. The Georgian National Platform most likely will receive the funding of the EU Delegation in early 2016.

In the spring 2015 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic has allocated up to 90,000 € for small projects with focus on priorities of the 1st, 4th and 5th Working Groups of the Forum. A number of the EaP CSF participants could benefit from this funding opportunity. The list of funded projects is available [here](#).

The European Integration Index for EaP countries in 2014-2015 has been funded by SIDA, however no further support is forthcoming and new funding for the project is being sought.

Funding for the activities of the Forum that was planned to be provided by SIDA will not be forthcoming due to considerable budget cuts of SIDA caused by the refugee crisis.

- **EaP CSF Secretariat Annual accounts**

Financial year 2014

The Secretariat's total budget for 2014 was 310.028 EUR from which the European Commission financed 80,64%. The co-funding part (19,36%) which amounted to 60.028,33 EUR was financed by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA). This budget has not included the funding for the annual assembly and annual working group meeting, which was financed by the EC separately.



The annual accounts of the EaP CSF Secretariat are audited on a yearly basis according to the Belgian legislation which governs non-profit organisations. On September, 23rd 2015, the Secretariat received the audit report from external auditors (DGST & Partners) on the General Accounts of the EaP CSF Secretariat for the reporting period 2014. No inconsistencies have been found.

In addition, a specific audit (expenditure verification) was also carried out to assess the financial management of the EC grant according to EC rules and requirements, contained in Annex II of the grant contract “General Conditions applicable to European Union-financed grant contracts for External Actions”. For the period January 1st to December 2014, the external auditors submitted their report on March 2, 2015 and stated that no non-eligible costs had been found.

Finally, the European Integration Index 2014-2015 grant with SIDA was also audited separately on July 31st, 2015.

Financial year 2015

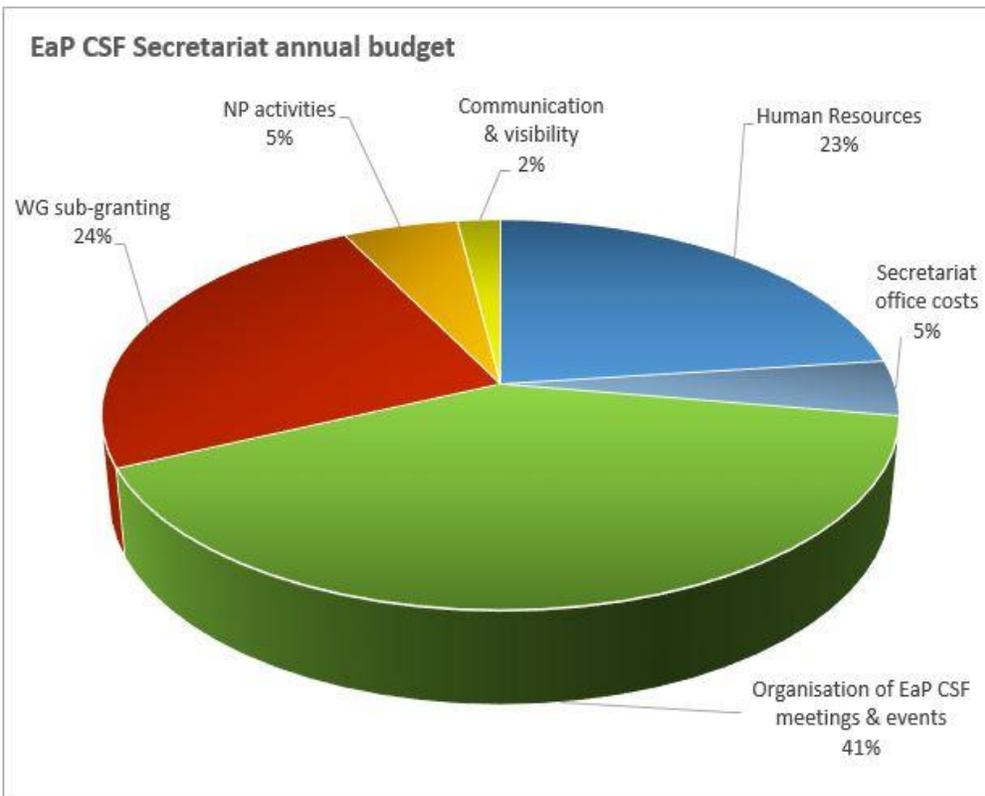
For the financial year 2015, the EaP CSF Secretariat has an approximate annual budget of 1.108.098 EUR (one third of the three-year grant). The EC will finance maximum 90,24% (999.947,64 EUR). The 3-year grant with the EC is a welcome development that allows for sustainability and medium-term planning. There is an increase in comparison to 2014, however it is mostly due to the fact that funds that in 2014 were paid by the EC separately to fund the annual assemblies and annual working group meetings are now in the budget of the Secretariat.

The obligatory co-funding part to be found for 2015 is 108.150,36 EUR. The Secretariat has already secured approximately 34% of it with the signing of a grant agreement with the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). There is still 71.380 EUR to find for 2015 activities.

The 80.500 US\$ NED grant is for the period July 1st, 2015-June 30th, 2016 and therefore 34% of the co-funding for next year (2016) is already secured.



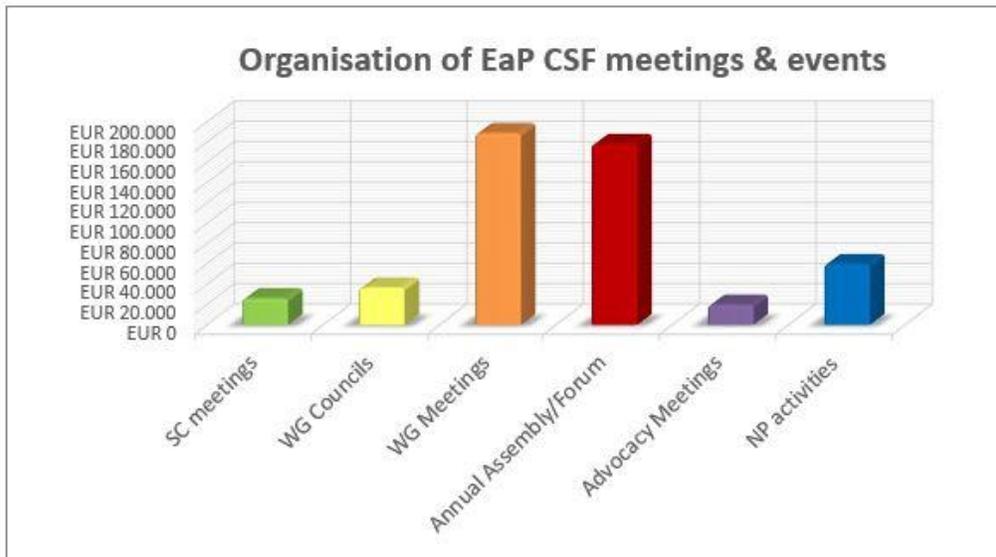
Table 1 – EaP CSF Secretariat Annual Budget



The main type of expenditures per year are the organisation of EaP CSF meetings and events, such as annual meetings of five Working Groups and Working Groups Councils, four Steering Committee meetings per year, two National Platform capacity-building events, the Annual Assembly and 5-6 smaller advocacy meetings.

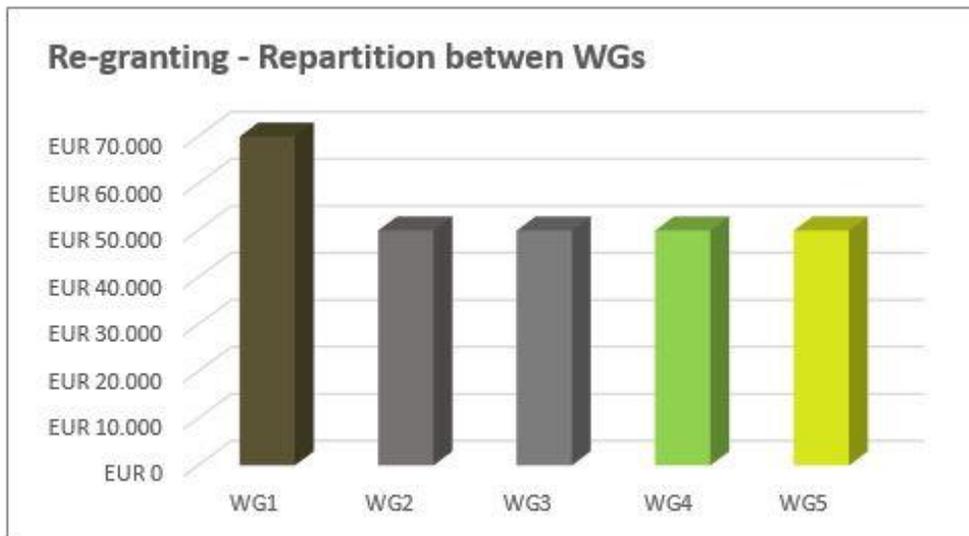


Table 2 – EaP CSF meetings and events budget



Finally, 24% of the EaP CSF Secretariat’s annual budget is dedicated to the regranting scheme.

Table 3 – EaP CSF regranting scheme per WGs



In 2015, 15 projects have been selected and awarded a grant for a total amount of 194.122 EUR. Therefore, the remaining 75.878 EUR of 2015 will be carried over and added to the regranting budget for 2016 and 2017.



Building on this first experience, which saw an unequal number of applications received by WGs, the repartition of funds available for regranting between WGs will be adapted.

14. The EaP Secretariat's activities

The Secretariat operates within the outlines developed by the CSF and in line with its [statute](#). It currently has three full-time staff members: Director - Natalia Yerashevich, Advocacy Manager - new position added in 2015 due to the expansion of programme activities - Vera Rihackova and Communications Manager Darya Mustafayeva, as well as part-time Financial Manager – Sophie Huguenet.

The work of the Secretariat is supported by interns, to whom we are very grateful for their dedication. In 2015 the following people have been interning at the Secretariat: Anthony Adams (UK), Avto Koridze (Georgia), Amedee de Radzitzky (Belgium), Ryte Kukulskyte (Lithuania), Ewa Zukowska (Poland), Alina Lyadova (Latvia), Larisa Moroz (Republic of Moldova).

In 2015 the responsibilities of the Secretariat expanded. The Secretariat supported the activities of the Steering Committee by organising four Steering Committee meetings and ensured the follow up and implementation of all the decisions taken by the Steering Committee, solving procedural issues, and channelling the Steering Committee's and Forum's positions at relevant points to the EU institutions in Brussels.

The Secretariat supported Working Groups and National Platforms by organising and drafting the agendas of the annual Working Group meetings and 2 regional events for National Platforms.

The Secretariat organised advocacy events for National Platforms and Working Groups and the meetings of the new body - 5 Working Group Councils. The organisation of Working Group Council meetings has become a new type of events that the Secretariat is organising after the introduction of this new body at the annual assembly in 2014.

For 2015-2017 the European Commission transferred the full control for the organisation of the annual assembly (2-day event with more than 250 participants in attendance) to the Secretariat. The Secretariat staff have come up with the agenda approved by the Steering Committee, identified and invited speakers, ensured that the election of the next Steering Committee and the procedure for adoption of resolutions is organised in proper way.

Regranting became an additional area of activity and here all the procedures were developed and the selection process was coordinated.

In general the Secretariat organised more than 20 EaP CSF events in 2015, the largest of which were the annual assembly with more than 200 people in attendance, annual Working Group 1 meeting and regional activity for National Platforms focused on the implementation of the Association Agreements with more than 60 people in attendance for each of the 2-day events.



The Secretariat facilitated more than 60 Forum representatives' participation in the official EaP Platforms, panels, and other meetings.

The Secretariat has coordinated the submission of the input and often prepared draft versions of the Forum's contributions. Secretariat's staff participated in a number of meetings to update different audiences on the Forum and its activities.

Communications Activities of the Secretariat

Serving as an information, coordination and expertise hub of the CSF for the stakeholders in Brussels and EaP partner countries, the Secretariat is working to increase Forum's visibility and is publicising the Forum's activities through the Forum's website, facebook, twitter, monthly newsletter and other channels.

In the reporting period **more than 150 articles** were produced and published on **the EaP CSF website** including in Forum News section, Eastern Partnership News section, and the newly created Azerbaijan Watch section The functionality of the website and the visibility of information was improved to include more visuals, including the updated slider with clickable links. A separate webpage was created for the Annual Assembly 2015: <http://eapcsf-assembly.org/> In January-November 2015 the EaP CSF website had 143,920 page views.

The EaP CSF **Facebook** page had 9,974 likes – 1,293 new likes in comparison with December 2014.

EaP CSF **Twitter** has 966 followers – 276 new followers in comparison with December 2014.

9 newsletters + 15 ad hoc updates and campaigns have been produced and circulated to more than 2,200 subscribers.

14 **Press releases/statements** have been circulated by the Secretariat.

In 2015 there have been more than **50 mentions of the Forum and its activities in media.**

More than 30 interviews with/ opinion pieces by Forum members appeared on **TV/radio and in the written press/online.**



Annex

What is the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum?

The Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum is a representative forum of civil society organisations from the Eastern Partner countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine) and EU civil society organisations active in the Partner countries. The Forum and its organs (national platforms, thematic working groups, and Steering Committee) are recognised as key civil society partners for the European Commission in the framework of European Union (EU) relations with the Eastern Partner countries, and with regard to the EU's commitment to support civil society actors in the Partner countries and to engage them as essential partners in democratic development.

Mission

To facilitate and strengthen the active and expert engagement of civil society in the Eastern Partnership and in the Eastern dimension of EU external relations policies, and in participatory governance and accountable policymaking with regard to the democratic transition and European integration of the Eastern Partnership countries, including prospective EU membership.

APPENDIX II. FORUM STRUCTURE

Annual Forum

The annual Forum is the highest decision-making body of the Forum, at which up to 13 members of the Steering Committee are elected for a one-year term. The annual Forum approves the by-laws, conflict-of-interest rules, and any changes to these core governance documents. Between annual Forum events, the delegates to the previous Forum act as the highest decision making body, and can make decisions by majority vote through email voting.

The annual Forum is a leading annual civil society event, providing networking and experience-sharing opportunities for civil society representatives. It also links them with representatives of the European Commission, EEAS and other EU institutions, Partner country governments, and EU civil society organisations and international networks.

The Annual Forum includes meetings of all working groups and subgroups of the Forum, and the annual event provides space for showcasing national and international initiatives where civil society expertise and projects facilitate a more participatory policy-making and democratic transition in the Partner countries.

Working Groups

Within the Forum, five working groups have been set up and are functioning to discuss issues pertaining to the four intergovernmental thematic platforms, and to contribute to the agenda of the platforms. The working groups of the Forum are working in parallel to the platforms and should contribute to the progress of the platforms' programmes.

The working groups are:

- WG 1. Democracy, human rights, good governance and stability
- WG 2. Economic integration and convergence with EU policies
- WG 3. Environment, climate change and energy security
- WG 4. Contacts between people
- WG 5. Social and Labour Policies and Social Dialogue



National Platforms

The national platforms are established and operate in all six Partner countries. Each Partner country's platform decides on the format and mechanism of establishing and functioning of their platform. At the same time, there can be only one national platform in each country recognised by the Forum, and the national platform should adhere to the mission, vision, core values and principles of the Forum.

Membership in the national platform is open to all eligible civil society organisations, and confers access to information and the ability to apply for the annual Forum event.

All national platforms should correspond to the following requirements:

- share the aims and objectives of the Forum and organise activities for their implementation at national level
- operate inclusively, in a non-discriminatory manner, showing openness towards all eligible civil society organisations in the country
- provide access to information to all members
- members not only have rights but also responsibilities
- a chair/facilitator/co-ordinator (or even Steering Committee) should be elected
- only organisations (not individuals) are eligible for national platform membership
- the national platform should engage with all five working group topics

The composition and division of responsibilities within the national platform should correspond to the composition of the Forum as a whole (division into working groups and thematic sub-groups, etc.) Co-ordination and synergy between the Forum Steering Committee and the national platform or Forum participants from the Partner country is provided by the Country Facilitator.

Steering Committee

The Steering Committee is the permanent representative body, with a mandate from civil society in the Partner countries plus civil society representatives from the EU member states and representatives from the four thematic platforms. Up to 13 members of the Steering Committee are elected by the members of the Forum for a one-year term. The Steering Committee meets three to four times per year to guide the activities of the Forum, to plan ongoing engagement with EU and other counterparts, and to work towards creating a sustainable funding basis.

The Steering Committee is structured as follows:

- Out of two Working Group Coordinators, each working group elects one, either from the EU or from Partner countries to become a Steering Committee member
- Each Partner country delegation at the Forum's annual meeting elects a representative to become Country Facilitator
- Two EU Co-ordinators, elected by the whole annual Forum from already elected EU Working Group Coordinators.

Responsibilities of the Steering Committee:

1. Serve as the governing Board of the Secretariat of the Forum, the legally registered entity established upon the decision of the Forum
2. Participation at thematic platform meetings, where possible
3. Participation in selection of the Forum's representatives for all panel/seminar meetings where the Forum is invited



4. Recognition and support of one national platform per Partner country
5. Regular communications with national platforms and working groups
6. Creation of concepts on Forum strategic development

The Steering Committee is guided by the by-laws of the Forum, terms of reference and procedures for the Steering Committee, conflict of interest rules, and adequate funding to fulfil the expected tasks. The by-laws should spell out the overall expectations and tasks of the Forum. Reflecting that the Forum is a bottom-up approach to European policy making, the by-laws should be submitted for consideration and a vote of the whole Forum.

Secretariat

The Secretariat co-ordinates communication between the Steering Committee and Forum participants, liaises with the European Commission, EEAS, and other EU institutions, and monitors EU-Eastern Partnership developments, promotes the results and activities of civil society projects, and organises meetings of Forum representatives with EU officials, etc. The Secretariat is established in Brussels as a legal entity. The governing Board of the Secretariat of the Forum is the Steering Committee. Board membership terminates upon the annual election of the new Steering Committee, whereupon the new members of the Steering Committee become members of the Board of the Secretariat of the Forum.

Core functions of the Forum Secretariat staff:

- support Steering Committee in representing the Forum in official correspondence, and liaise with the European Commission, EEAS and others in preparation of meetings of Steering Committee and working Groups,
- monitor intergovernmental platform meetings, other expert meetings, and other developments at EU level (EU Council, Commission, EEAS, Parliament, EESC, bilateral meetings in Brussels, other Brussels stakeholders, e.g. civil society networks),
- support the sustainable development of the national platforms,
- set up meetings with European Commission, EEAS and others for visiting Forum experts/delegations,
- prepare advocacy calendars, maintain project database of civil society activities, and support presentation of projects at Forum events and to key EU stakeholders,
- Monitor and update Forum official website www.eap-csf.eu in co-operation with Working Group Coordinators, Country Facilitators, and EU Co-ordinators.
- manage legal reporting requirements and accounting, reporting to donors.

