

Report on the activities of the Steering Committee of the EaP CSF November 2012-October 2013

Statements adopted by the Steering Committee in the reporting period:

- [Statement](#) condemning the announcement of the intention of Armenian authorities to join Customs Union, 5 September 2013
- [Statement condemning attack on EaP CSF members in Yerevan](#), 5 September 2013
- [Statement calling for signing the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement](#) and stating that political risks of a non-signing is much higher than the aggregated risk of signing the Agreement, 17 June 2013
- [Statement on Presidential Elections in Armenia](#) that cannot be considered as fair both in terms of accuracy of procedures and perceptions of Armenian citizens vis-a-vis the official results, 6 May 2013

The Steering Committee has addressed the audience at the following high-profile meetings in the frames of the Eastern Partnership:

- Eastern Partnership Informal Ministerial on Education in Yerevan, 13 September 2013. The [speech](#)
- Official Meeting of Foreign Ministers of the EU member states and EaP countries in Brussels, 23 July 2013. The Co-Chairs of the Steering Committee expressed gratitude to Commissioner Füle and Catherine Ashton, the High Representative, for their commitment to human rights in the region and speaking up whenever these rights have been broken. However they expressed regret that the negotiation of the Association Agreements between the EU and partner governments saw almost no involvement of civil society. The [speech](#)
- Euronest Parliamentary Assembly in Brussels, 27 May 2013. The [speech](#)
- The meeting of the Eastern Partnership Platform I on "Democracy, Good Governance and Stability". The [speech](#)
- The meeting of the Committee on Social Affairs, Education, Culture and Civil Society of the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly. The [speech](#)
- Eastern Partnership Informal Ministerial on transport in Tbilisi on 12-13 February 2013. The [speech](#)
- Other Eastern Partnership Platforms and Panels

Written opinions and correspondence

The Steering Committee has submitted to Commissioner Füle a **brief on the state of play in the National Platforms** in July 2013 containing achievements and constrains to the work of NPs, as well as general

suggestions. In June the Committee provided a brief to the European External Action Service containing recommendations for the debate on the **"EU action in support of civil society in Eastern Europe, Russia and Central Asia"** at the COEST Capitals meeting on 20 June in Brussels.

Throughout the year the Forum has provided input to various **Euronest reports and meetings**, including the report on poverty and social exclusion.

The exchange of letters between the Chairman of the Azerbaijani Delegation to the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly Elkhon Suleymanov, who cautioned CSF against the inclusion of representatives of conflict zones into CSF, and the Steering Committee which sought unsuccessfully to find a way of including representatives of CSOs from conflict zones into the work of the Forum early in 2013. Another exchange of letters was with Public Council of the Republic Armenia on the newly developed "Strategic Concept of the Development of Civil Society in the Republic of Armenia" to ensure that the "Strategic Concept" and the projected "Law on the Public Council of the Republic of Armenia" would not limit the independence of non-governmental organizations in the country.

Steering Committee meetings:

The Steering Committee had four meetings in the reporting period, two in Brussels, where it met with Commissioner Stefan Füle, representatives of the European External Action Service, European Commission (EuropeAid), and Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and one in Yerevan and Kyiv respectively, where the Committee met with representatives of the Armenian Foreign Ministry, the EU Delegation to Armenia and Armenian National Platform and the Ukrainian National Platform.

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

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

[The minutes of the second SC meeting](#)

[The minutes of the first SC meeting](#)

Forum participants' selection procedure:

In March 2013, the call for applications for the Forum 2013 was launched. Based on the three selection lists – National Platforms/EU coordinators, Working Group co-ordinators, and EU delegations – the selection of participants was then finalised. There were 454 applications to participate in the Forum (583 applications submitted for the previous Forum last year), out of which 250 organisations were selected by the Steering Committee in line with the eligibility guidelines.

The Steering Committee has received 45 applications from Armenia, 85 – from Azerbaijan, 33 – from Belarus, 43 - from Georgia, 54- from Moldova, and 87 – from the EU.

The final list prepared by the Steering Committee was consulted with the European External Action Service (EEAS)/European Commission before final publication. The list of selected organisations was then published on the website. Questions were raised by some NGOs about the selection process –(this year from a Belarusian and Georgian applicants). In response, the Steering Committee noted that those questions concentrated on the issue of transparency of the selection process conducted by the National Platforms.

The Steering Committee believes that it is necessary to strengthen the criteria to ensure that there is greater knowledge about the experience, national and international, and commitment to engagement and to enrich Forum activities, on the part of applicants, and that this information should be made available to all three parties drawing up the shortlists.

Much attention has been devoted to finding ways to involve CSOs from conflict zones into the work of CSF, however an optimal compromise resolving the issue has yet to be found.

Advocacy

The Steering Committee has conducted advocacy campaign aimed at parliamentary bodies of the Council of Europe (PACE), the OSCE and the European Parliament to send competent and unbiased observers to presidential elections in Georgia and Azerbaijan this autumn, which resulted in the European Parliament reversing its decision taken in July not to observe forthcoming presidential elections in Azerbaijan.

Another campaign was aimed at governments participating in the OSCE with a request not to downgrade the OSCE delegation in Baku, as requested by the Azerbaijani government.

Forthcoming advocacy:

- Position on proceeding with signing/initialling AAs and DCFTAs with Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine
- position on Ukraine; Timoshenko case is crucial
- the shape of the EaP after Vilnius

Flagship initiatives

The activities under flagship initiatives in the areas of election monitoring, independent media, and anti-corruption were successfully conducted.

The CSF has monitored this year's Presidential elections in Armenia and questioned its results. The presidential election in Georgia this October is also on the radar of the Forum. One of the main concerns is that the local government administration will be used to build a majority for the party of the government. CSF is monitoring the situation in Azerbaijan and is concerned about the ongoing crackdown on civil rights and the imprisonment of opposition activists in advance of the presidential election in October.

[The National Platforms and Working Groups reports](#) on activities November 2012-September 2013

Monitoring of the implementation of the *Eastern Partnership: A Roadmap to the autumn 2013 Summit*

The Eastern Partnership Roadmap to the autumn 2013 Summit sets out an indication of how far the EU and the partner countries expect to have come in achieving particular and general objectives by the end of the second half of 2013.

An additional objective of the CSF monitoring is to make clear arguments for:

- reforms that will further democratic values and respect of human rights
- furthering bilateral and multilateral co-operation and European integration through increasing transparency in the relationship between the EU and the EaP countries
- improving efficiency, co-ordination, and implementation of policies towards European integration.
- a new roadmap, or an alternative to a roadmap, for the coming two years

The monitoring provides independent, empirical-based, expert evaluation and at the same time formulates clear, concise conclusions and recommendations targeted at a variety of audiences, not least:

- national governments
- European Commission and EEAS
- European Council and EU member states

The monitoring reports complement the *European Integration Index for Eastern Partnership Countries*, another initiative within the CSF that will be presented at EaP CSF meeting on 4-5 October in Chisinau and will contribute to forming the CSF's recommendations to EaP Vilnius summit.

EaP European Integration Index

[Fresh report for 2013](#)

The Forum is taking over the responsibility for the European Integration Index from 2014 onwards. Open Society Foundations will continue to play a role in the development of the Index. The 4-year project for producing the European Integration Index has been submitted to SIDA. The project will be implemented by PASOS (coordination of research, peer-review process, scoring, editing), a Ukrainian NGO (coordination of the Ukrainian research team, kick-off meeting in Kyiv, printing the Index), OSI (expert support) plus several members of the previous core team, and the Secretariat (advocacy events, fundraising, updating the Index website, reporting to donors). Kyiv-based International Renaissance Foundation will be providing part of the funding for the first year of the project.

Funding

The annual Forum event, as well as annual meetings of Working Groups are continued to be funded by the European Commission.

The Forum continues to benefit from the EC-funded (Neighbourhood Civil Society Facility) project on Strengthening National Platforms implemented by REC Moldova that started in early 2013 and will run until mid-2015.

The operational costs of the Secretariat of the CSF, as well as expenses for the organisation of four Steering Committee meetings per year are currently covered by the European Commission with co-funding from SIDA. The decision on the EC funding for the second year of the Secretariat's operation will be made in November.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic has allocated over 140,000€ for small projects with focus on priorities of the 1st and 4th Working Groups of the Forum.

Decisions of the Steering Committee on the CSF internal structure

- To come up with the Forum's strategy for 2014-2016 with an emphasis on advocacy. The country and thematic priorities based on the input from National Platforms and Working Groups will be added to the draft strategy that will be finalised after the EaP summit in Vilnius, bearing in mind the importance of the summit in defining the Forum's priorities.
- To form an Advisory group of influential public figures who will help sustain interest in EaP and Forum. The decision on the members of the Advisory Board of the Forum will be made by consensus by the Steering Committee.
- Three positions of the EU Coordinators of the Forum will be eliminated due to the fact that their function (to strengthen advocacy and relations towards the EU institutions and member governments, to foster greater engagement of EU civil society organisations and networks in the Eastern Partnership process and the Partner countries, and to lobby for effective and sustainable support for civil society in the Partner countries through EU funding mechanisms) will be performed by the newly established Advisory Board and an Advocacy Officer at the CSF Secretariat in Brussels who will be serving as a Secretary of the Advisory Board and will work in tight cooperation with Co-Chairs of the SC, EU WG Coordinators, Advisory Board, and the SC in general. The EU Working Group Coordinators as the representatives of the EU civil society organisations will contribute to the advocating the Forum's interests.

"Strengthening Non-State Actors' Capacities to promote reform and increase public accountability" project

Members of the Steering Committee were involved in shaping the realisation of the project "Strengthening Non-State Actors' Capacities to promote reform and increase public accountability" implemented in six EaP countries by Konrad Adenauer Foundation that includes five major components: mapping, capacity development, ad-hoc support, and communication.

The Secretariat

The Secretariat operates within the outlines developed by the CSF and fixed in its [statute](#). It currently has two full-time staff members – Director and Communications Manager, as well as part-time Financial Manager.

Starting from January 2013 the Secretariat supported the activities of the Steering Committee, facilitated Forum representatives' participation in the official EaP Platforms, panels, and meetings, as well as channelled the Steering Committee's opinion at relevant points to the EU institutions in Brussels. In general the Secretariat is serving as an information and coordination hub of the CSF for the stakeholders in Brussels, EU member states, as well as EaP Governments. 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 (distributed to approx. 1,000 to addressees) and other channels; it organised advocacy events for National Platforms and Working Groups in Brussels. The Secretariat supported the organisation of the annual Assembly of the Forum, annual Working Group meetings and Steering Committee meetings and ensured that the delegates' selection process is carried out according to the procedures developed by the Forum.

Message from the Steering Committee to the Forum participants

- **CSF is more than just an annual event. Participation in the Forum means a commitment to take part in the activities of the CSF all the year round be it in a working group or a national platform.**
- **The CSF and Eastern Partnership in general might be heading for some difficult times so it is important that we chose people who are committed to the CSF.** Please think carefully about the people you elect to the Steering Committee as working group coordinators (people from the EU side are also very important) and national facilitators. The CSF now has a competent and dedicated secretariat but it can't operate on its own.
- Message and CSF contribution to EaP Summit in Vilnius is crucial.

Next Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum

The next Forum will be hosted by the Government of Georgia next year.