

Minutes of Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum Steering Committee meeting, held in Baku, Azerbaijan, 4-5 April 2012

Summary of decisions and conclusions

1. Review of Poznan 2011 Forum and plans for Sweden 2012 Forum.

The feedback in evaluation questionnaires completed by participants was positive concerning the NGO fair, engagement of local NGOs, and a publication highlighting details about participants – elements that should be continued in 2012. On the other hand, participants wanted to see fewer plenaries, better reporting from the SC, and more thematic-focused smaller sessions, like the side-events. Concerning preparations, clear voting procedures should be ready ahead of the event.

The 2012 Forum event will be held in Sweden – not necessarily Stockholm – on 29-30 November 2012. A decision is expected at the end of April 2012 on the application for funding submitted to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Sweden. The proposal includes side-events (some training events).

An SC subgroup was formed for the Forum 2012 event preparation, and has produced a draft agenda. The working title for the event is *Open Partners* – with a general focus on monitoring the capacity of civil society. Funding for EU participants will be requested from the European Commission.

2. Preparations for the Secretariat

The registration of the statutes of the Secretariat of the CSF has been approved by the Belgian courts – and proposals for start-up funding will be sent to the British, Danish, Swedish, and Czech governments. The SC will finalise the job description for the position of Director of the Secretariat, and a draft budget for 2012.

A number of opportunities for office space (hosted by Brussels-based organisation) should be examined by the EU co-ordinators before the SC takes a decision on where in Brussels the secretariat would be located.

The Secretariat will be registered in the European Transparency Register.

3. Working Group 5 - Social Dialogue

The participants in the new Working Group should include a balance between EaP and EU countries in its composition, and the full integration of NGOs working on social issues, alongside trade unions, chambers of commerce, and employers' organisations.

4. Forum participants' selection procedure

Draft selection procedures and the Forum 2012 application form were examined and amended. There will be 180 selected participants – a maximum of 130 from the EaP countries and a maximum of 50 from the EU. In line with the decision of the Poznan 2011 Forum, the application will include Working Group 5 – Social Dialogue. The selection procedures will require final approval from the European External Action Service.

The call for participants should be launched by the end of April 2012 with a deadline of early June 2012.

5. SC sub-groups

Four sub-groups have been established: Working Group co-ordinators, Country Facilitators, the Sweden Forum 2012 event, and communications/EU co-ordinators.

6. Euronest

Krzysztof Bobiński and Gubad Ibadoglu Bayramov participated in the Euronest plenary meeting on behalf of the SC, where the CSF received welcome support from Commissioner Štefan Füle and Werner Schulz MEP (Green, Germany), in particular in encouraging EU delegations to bring together the CSF national platforms with the national authorities – in line with the CSF recommendations to the Eastern Partnership roadmap. The next SC meeting in Brussels should include a meeting with Euronest co-Chair, Kristian Vigenin.

7. Elections in EaP countries

Krzysztof Bobiński announced a proposal for a seminar on elections in the EaP countries. This will be consulted with the Working Group 1 co-ordinators with a view to it taking place immediately before the WG1 CSF meeting in Brussels (6 June 2012).

8. Working Groups

The WG4 CSF meeting was held in Prague, Czech Republic, on 2 March 2012. Recommendations developed were presented, together with the CSF recommendations on the EaP roadmap, by Eduard Mihalas and Jeff Lovitt, to a mini-summit of EU-Eastern Partnership governments, held in Prague on 5 March 2012.

The SC has developed an evaluation/feedback form to be completed by CSF participants at future WG CSF meetings.

Other scheduled CSF WG and intergovernmental platform meetings:

31 May 2012: Platform 2 intergovernmental meeting: Brussels
6 June 2012: WG1 CSF meeting: Brussels
7 June 2012: Platform 1 intergovernmental meeting: Brussels
18 June 2012: Platform 3 intergovernmental meeting: Brussels
21 June 2012: Platform 4 intergovernmental meeting: Brussels
9 July 2012: WG2 CSF meeting: Brussels.

9. National platforms

The SC met with representatives of the Azerbaijan national platform, discussing relations with the government (a meeting is planned with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), and with the EU delegation (a joint meeting took place during the Euronest meeting with the NP, EU delegation and Commissioner Füle).

The SC also met with Mr Azay Guliyev, chairman of the State NGO Council – a governmental NGO forum. Following the meeting, the SC sent a follow-up letter to Mr Guliyev, urging changes to NGO registration rules and encouraging continuing dialogue.

10. Next SC meeting

The next SC meeting will take place in Brussels on 17-18 July 2012. The agenda of the meeting, to be held in Brussels, should include meetings with Euronest Co-Chair Kristian Vigenin, Commissioner Füle, and the Brussels liaison office of the Council of Europe. The meeting should complete the selection process for the Sweden Forum event, and finalise the agenda of the Forum event.
