

**Improving Conditions for Civil Society Organisations in Shifting Environment  
Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum: Working Group 1 Conference**

**1-2 June 2016, Brussels**  
Renaissance Hotel, Rue du Parnasse 19, 1050 Bruxelles

**Working Group 1 “Democracy, Human Rights, Good Governance and Stability”**

**Annual Meeting Report**

On 1-2 June the meeting brought together over 60 working group members from the Eastern Partnership and EU countries as well as officials from EU institutions (the European External Action Service, the European Commission and the European Parliament).

The focus of the first day of the conference was on the changes in approach brought by the review of the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), strengthening transparency of the dialogue between EaP governments and the EU by increasing involvement of the civil society organisations (CSOs) as well as improving working conditions for CSOs. The second day of discussions covered issues pertaining to streamlining gender equality, inclusion of people with disabilities, EU role in security challenges in the EaP region, countering political corruption and Russian propaganda in the media, as well as public administration reform. The conference was closed by **Krzysztof Bobinski, Co-Chair of the Steering Committee**. Subsequently, a training for beneficiaries of re-granting scheme was conducted and a meeting of Working Group 1 EU member organisations took place.

**Opening session**

***“Real stability requires functioning democracy”*** Krzysztof Bobinski

***“There can be no successful reforms or convergence with EU values without civil society as a watchdog”*** Luc Devigne

***“Outreach to civil society should be expanded through simplifying rules on working with CSOs and civil society fellowships”*** Luc Devigne

At the opening panel following the minute of silence for the victims of the recent escalation in Nagorno-Karabakh, **Krzysztof Bobinski, Co-Chair of the Steering Committee and Working Group 1 Coordinator**, highlighted the need for a peaceful resolution of the conflict. He also noted that the channels of communication between civil society actors and stakeholders in Brussels should be improved. The EaP CSF Secretariat was suggested as a potential intermediary for facilitating a more informal consultative mechanism. **Ana Nastvlishvili, Working Group 1 EaP Coordinator**, stressed the importance of defining goals of Working Group 1 for the upcoming months leading up to the Annual Assembly.

**Luc Devigne, Director for Russia, Eastern Partnership, Central Asia and OSCE at the EEAS** underlined the significance of civil society while invoking the DCFTA negotiations – without effective scrutiny

against corruption there can be no effective reform. Although there is a view that there was not enough progress with respect to the four areas of priorities developed during the Riga EaP Summit, Mr Devigne observed that visa liberalisation for Georgia and Ukraine would be a crucial development in this regard. Furthermore, *de facto* differentiation in the EaP framework is already being implemented. The relations with Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus are swiftly evolving and the EU intends to continue promoting its values and human rights considerations. He also commented on the need to expand EU outreach to civil society by simplifying rules of engagement, funding regional fora and capacity building through civil society fellowships. There cannot be successful reforms and convergence with EU values without civil society. Mr Devigne also indicated that governments cannot be compelled to be associated with the EU. However, it does not mean that the EU gives up promoting reforms in those countries. As the governments cannot be forced to undertake the necessary reforms, the change needs to come from their societies.

**Leyla Aliyeva** suggested upgrading the status of civil society by making its involvement a condition *sine qua non* for conducting negotiations. Another representative from Azerbaijan proposed establishment of flexible solutions to support independent civil society actors in Azerbaijan, as well as introduction of mechanisms to involve civil society in negotiations and consider their recommendations before negotiations are concluded. **Artur Sakuns** suggested that the EU instruments should be better employed to fight corruption in the EaP region.

#### **Public Session: How well can the reviewed ENP respond to the realities of the region?**

***“We talk about pragmatism in the means, not in the ends. This is not about megaphone diplomacy, but about achieving results.”*** Lawrence Meredith

***“It's time for the EU to empower the EaP civil society to the level of an equal partner.”*** Leyla Aliyeva

The panel moderated by the Steering Committee Co-chair **Ulad Vialichka** discussed the change in approach introduced by the reviewed ENP and the involvement of civil society organisations in the EU negotiations with the EaP governments. **Lawrence Meredith, Director for Neighbourhood East, DG NEAR**, explained that the ENP review was necessitated by the developments in the EU, as well as the Eastern Neighbourhood. The consultation process demonstrated a desire and need to:

- increase ownership through differentiation;
- define objectives that are of common interest for both the EU and the EaP partners;
- prioritise respect for fundamental rights;
- set up new process of consultation and introduce more flexible instruments to improve work with civil society.

He also emphasised that values remain at the core of the EU's relationship with its partners as evidenced by the first section of the ENP review. He underlined that pragmatic approach applies to the means, not the values. Mr Meredith also explained that the civil society centre of expertise at DG NEAR was established to put civil society organisations at the heart of the policy. With respect to Belarus, he observed that the human rights dialogue is to begin next year and the assistance is to double.

**Leyla Aliyeva** (Centre for National and International Studies) stated that an increase in pragmatism in the reviewed ENP is worrying. She explained that differentiation should not be about lowering ambitions in favour of interests of small elites. Instead, it should focus on individual obstacles to reform in the EaP countries as a basis for policy formation. According to Ms Aliyeva, Azerbaijan is a missed opportunity for the EU. If enough investments were made for governance and reforms, the country would be different. Trade negotiations result in asymmetrical outcomes benefitting only elites without contributing to democratisation of the region. Also, ownership should be understood in a broader sense encompassing both government and civil society. She stressed that the release of political prisoners in Azerbaijan is merely a cosmetic reform as no structural changes are taking place.

**Hrant Kostanyan**, researcher at CEPS, outlined the reasons for increased pragmatism in the EU approach towards the Eastern Partnership. The resistance of the elites from the EaP countries, as well as inconsistent response to developments in the EaP region and Russia's activities in the region were identified as the causes for the shift from a normative to pragmatic approach. **Boris Navasardyan** (Yerevan Press Club) highlighted the need for clarification of mechanisms for engagement with civil society in the three non-AA countries. **Shahla Ismail** (Women's Association for Rational Development, Azerbaijan) called on the EU to be more public regarding involvement of the civil society during negotiations with the governments from the region. **Nataliia Motuz** (Assembly of Pro-Democratic NGOs of Belarus) expressed her concerns over the lack of transparency regarding the process of the EU consultations with civil society organisations, selection and genuineness of those CSOs. **Fuad Hasanov** (Democracy Monitor, Azerbaijan) raised an issue with respect to ensuring participation of CSOs while Azerbaijan has an opportunity to be very selective with regard to the content for the new cooperation agreement with the EU. **Vera Rihackova** (EaP CSF Secretariat) brought attention to a possibility of funding unregistered CSOs through EIDHR and introducing more flexibility in financial reporting within re-granting.

#### **Public Session: How to make the dialogue with governments and the EU more transparent?**

***"There is no institutional status for civil society in EU-Belarus bilateral relations" Petr Kuznetsov***

***"Civil society in Moldova is focusing on technicalities of the AA/DCFTA, rather than the reform agenda" Victoria Bucataru***

The panel focused on the working environment and issues confronting CSOs in the EaP region. **Avaz Hasanov** (Humanitarian Research Public Union, Azerbaijan) commented on the difficulties facing civil society in Azerbaijan. CSOs are prevented from receiving funding from foreign donors and, as a result, they are *de facto* barred from submitting project proposals. He explained that the government does not envisage a dialogue with civil society and stressed that the EU should better engage with Azerbaijani CSOs.

**Lasha Tugushi** (European Initiative - Liberal Academy Tbilisi) elucidated that the level of civil society involvement in Georgia is sufficient. However, the Georgian government does not provide adequate information on its positions during negotiations with the EU. The negotiations on visa liberalisation perfectly exemplify this issue.

**Petr Kuznetsov** (Center of Regional Development GDF, Belarus) stated that due to the current geopolitical realities, the EU has to engage with the Belarusian regime without insisting on improving the respect for democratic freedoms. He noted that civil society does not have an official status within the framework of EU-Belarus bilateral relations. The government should be interested in employing expertise of civil society as authoritarian regimes generally do not possess adequate expertise.

**Victoria Bucataru** (Foreign Policy Association, Moldova) mentioned that although there is institutionalised cooperation between Moldovan government and civil society, it does not guarantee that civil society recommendations would be taken into account. In terms of civil society cooperation with the EU delegation, Ms Bucataru regretted that the focus of this relationship is on technicalities as opposed to the reform agenda.

**Mikayel Hovhannisyan** (Eurasia Partnership Foundation, Armenia) remarked that civil society in Armenia is proclaimed as a partner in the reform process yet *de facto* it is not involved. Mr Hovhannisyan enumerated three options for civil society: to seize occasional opportunities to influence decision-making process, stop participating in the reform process, or form a parallel agenda that would be strongly advocated. The lack of partners within the country and an inconsistent approach from the EU also represent significant challenges. The concerns raised by the Armenian civil society are rarely reflected in EU documents.

**Iryna Bekeshkina** (Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiative Foundation, Ukraine) discussed the cooperation of Ukrainian government and civil society, especially with respect to sharing expertise. Nonetheless, she brought to attention instances where the government disregarded concerns of civil society as in the case of legislation on public procurement excluding criminal liability for false financial declarations.

**Public Session: How can we improve the working environment for CSOs in difficult conditions?**

***“In the past two years the government of Azerbaijan adopted over 20 amendments that violate freedom of association and result in breaches of the ECHR. Therefore, these developments cannot be considered only as an internal issue.”*** Anar Mammadli

***“A shift from government-to-government approach to society-to-society approach is needed”*** Jerzy Pomianowski

***“Civil society in Belarus is tired as there is no sufficient pressure from the EU with respect to fundamental rights.”*** Elena Tonkacheva

The panel discussion was dominated by the analysis of the obstacles to the work of civil society organisations and means to overcome them. **Anar Mammadli** (Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Center, Azerbaijan) described impediments to the work of independent civil society in Azerbaijan. NGOs in Azerbaijan cannot receive foreign funding, donations over 120 USD have to be registered with the Ministry of Justice, and volunteers are required to have individual contracts that also must be registered with the Ministry. In the past two years the government of Azerbaijan adopted over 20 amendments that violate freedom of association and result in breaches of the ECHR. Therefore, these developments cannot be considered only as an internal issue.

**Mathieu Bousquet** (DG NEAR) shared that the governments are becoming more inventive in how they limit the civil society operations. As a result, the EU and other donors need to adapt to these developments. He stressed that the EU is not using megaphone diplomacy, but it is diplomatic efforts behind the closed door that bring results. Human Rights Dialogues is one of the instruments that the EU is using to talk about human rights violations. Mr Bousquet reassured that the priorities of each EaP country's cooperation with the EU (Partnership Priorities) will be identified with the participation of the civil society. The EU is ensuring that the civil society is actively engaged on sectoral policies which should prepare all the governments for working together with civil society more intensely. The EU needs to anchor its support to civil society and human rights within the international framework.

**Jerzy Pomianowski** (European Endowment for Democracy) stated that it is not only the space for civil society, but also the donor support that is shrinking. He mentioned that a proper balance needs to be found to help people in Azerbaijan - a shift from government-to-government approach to society-to-society approach is required. He mentioned that the EU is slowly adapting to the situation: although the flexibility is not structurally inbuilt, the EU has modified its support to the society of Belarus and it also needs to find ways to support civil society in Azerbaijan. He reiterated the importance of preventing new politically motivated arrests in Azerbaijan, as well as the need to support civil society in exile. He stressed that the increased engagement of the EU with Belarus should not have detrimental effect on the EU's dialogue with Belarusian civil society. All opportunities for engagement should be used.

**Elena Tonkacheva** (Legal Transformations Center "Lawtrend", Belarus) explained that the civil society in Belarus is tired as there is no sufficient pressure from the EU with respect to fundamental rights. The structural problems remain – the death penalty has not been abolished and violations of freedom of information, as well as freedom of assembly are occurring on a regular basis. The funding for human rights NGOs has been decreasing. She noted that sanctions for Belarus were lifted prematurely. Ms Tonkacheva also noted that the EU continues its cooperation with the government and GONGOs. The civil society representatives stressed that neither Belarus nor Azerbaijan are fulfilling the obligations they have undertaken within the international frameworks as the ECHR and the UN system. If more people are imprisoned based on politically motivated charges, the sanctions should be introduced by the EU.

#### **Public Session: General Progress of the EaP**

**Boris Iarochevitch**, Head of Division for the Eastern Partnership, Regional Cooperation and OSCE, EEAS provided an update on the overall progress of the EaP. He talked about the follow-up work on conclusions of the EaP summit in Riga, and the preparations for the next EaP summit that will most likely take place in Brussels on June 2017. The next EaP summit foresees the presentation of results that benefited citizens, the demonstration of the added value for the societies in all four EaP policy areas agreed in Riga. In this regard, the plans to lower significantly costs of roaming and transaction costs are in the pipeline. Furthermore, the negotiations of the new treaty with Armenia should be finalized by the date of the summit. Finally, there are plans for side events, and the EEAS encourages EU member states to support these activities. Poland already expressed an interest to host the Youth event.

The EaP Ministerial Meeting in May 2016 recognized the importance of the EaP multilateral dimension. Consequently, the architecture of the multilateral framework will be reviewed, and changes might be proposed by the next EaP summit. For the time being, new panels are being added (digital market), other considered (panel on employment and employability), and three existing panels under the Platform 1 are being merged into one “Rule of Law Panel”.

Finally, there are calls to use the EaP for confidence building between Azerbaijan and Armenia from the side of the OSCE Minks Group.

On the state of relations with Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus, **Boris Iarochevitch** noted:

- Three rounds of negotiations with the Armenia on the new treaty already took place. There are difficult talks especially about the trade part.
- On Azerbaijan, the Commission is waiting for the negotiation mandate from the Council and the European Parliament. The scoping exercise has started as well as the preliminary consultations. HR situation in the country improved a bit since several political prisoners were freed. It will be most likely extended PCA as membership in WTO is required for any other type of more ambitious agreement. The human rights dialogue was suspended; there is some progress on EURONEST participation of AZ members of parliament.
- The first EU-Belarus coordination meeting took place with the civil society representatives present. It was a good experience and discovery for both sides. The HR dialogue is taking place in Minsk during the second week of June 2016.

On the progress of the implementation of AA/DCFTA with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, **Boris Iarochevitch** noted:

- Some significant improvements have already taken place, with an increase of trade and FDI.
- Regarding the visa-free regime for Georgia and Ukraine – there are delays in the process due to the agreement with Turkey (temporary suspension mechanism review)
- On 11-12 July 2016, an informal dialogue on SMEs will take place in Kyiv. Commissioner Hahn will be present and will be meeting the civil society.

## Q&A Session

*The ENP Review is not legally binding, the legal basis and translation into the EU practice includes the review of ENI – how is it going to happen, will there be significant changes?*

BI: The revision of the programming documents is taking place in 2017 instead of 2018 in order to incorporate the ENP review and the new partnership priorities for political and technical cooperation. It is a first step, and the instrument (ENI) will not be largely modified by 2020. However, there are already some ideas about how the next instrument to be adopted within the next EU financial framework should look like. The focus on the next programming phase also concerns regional programmes, and multiannual priorities will be revised.

*What will be the involvement of the civil society into the negotiations of the partnership priorities and new agreements?*

BI: For Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine there will be no priorities as the AA/DCFTA are already in place - there can be only additions on security.

Concerning Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus, this point will be part of the discussion on the new type of agreement. In any way, civil society will be consulted: the EU is pushing for the EaP governments to include civil society. However, the process is not always transparent and there is reluctance.

Regarding Armenia, we were disappointed by what happened in 2013 but this could be an opportunity now for Armenia to be a bridge between the Eurasian Economic Union and the EU. There are some confidential parts of the agreement, so far the negotiations went well but there were some issues: Armenian authorities reached out with new, tougher requirements on their side. These said, not all preparatory documents can be shared, and there is a deficit of transparency. At the same time, the negotiations are not smooth. Overall, the civil society should continue to address the authorities and demand access. In Georgia, the EU managed to include business community into the negotiations but only very late in the process.

For Belarus, there is an ad hoc format because there are not many tools and there is only one old agreement (on the other hand, with Azerbaijan and Armenia, there are PCAs that contain some mechanisms of consultations). Azerbaijan is keen to have the agreement, especially due to the economic crisis in the country. There will be conditions linked to the human rights and a consultation mechanism in place.

*Visa liberalization for Georgia and Ukraine is one of the crucial issues for the EU image in those countries. Is there a chance visa free regime will be in place this year?*

BI: The EU institutions are clearly pushing for it, and the proposal was made to the Council. The context of the migration crisis and the deal with Turkey, as well as the temporary suspensions of Schengen, are in play. France and Germany together with several other member states have been blocking this issue. Hopefully, Georgia and Ukraine will have a visa waiver by this summer.

#### *Recommendations by WG1 participants*

- Association agenda can be revised, EU should be more focused and not ask everything at the same time.
- On review of the multilateral format of EaP, the EaP CSF can better structure its work in order to have meaningful contribution – horizontal approach for all WGs and better integration into the work of the EaP Platforms.
- After each round of negotiations with Armenia and Azerbaijan, there should be a session with the civil society and business community where the EU should disclose what can be disclosed. EU should also declare it is not against inclusion of the civil society into the process, as it is often used as an argument by the Armenian and Azerbaijani governments.
- Direct budget support – problem is not in the method itself but in the way how the reforms are assessed against it. It is not efficient promotion of the European integration in the EaP countries.
- Azerbaijan money flowing into EU (and USA, and organisations like UNESCO), Commission should introduce targeted sanctions and encourage the EU member states to start investigate

suspicious financial operations related to Azerbaijani elites. (*response by Boris Iarochevitch: It is a new subject, we are trying to control the inflow from the Gulf, in this sense Azerbaijan is not such a big problem. We have a realpolitik with Azerbaijan which goes sometimes against our values.*)

## **Break-out Workshops I**

### **Break-out Workshop on Gender Equality**

The break-out workshop was moderated by **Julia Mickiewicz** from the Belarusian Organisation of Working Women. **Emma Sandahl** from European Commission, DG NEAR participated as a speaker.

**Emma Sandahl** underlined the importance of gender equality being part of the EU agenda in all fields of its action. In other words, gender mainstreaming must be included *inter alia* in environment, security, and migration policies. Gender mainstreaming requires constant review, and an effective review needs a scale of analysis. There is already a scale of analysis elaborated by the World Economic Forum, Global Gender Index, which estimates gender mainstreaming on a scale going from 0 (activity has been screened using the gender equality policy marker and does not target gender equality) to 2 (gender equality is the main objective of the activity and that the activity would not have been undertaken without this objective). **Emma Sandahl** also signalled her availability to link the sub-group's participants with the European Women's Lobby. **Julia Mickiewicz** from the Belarusian Organisation of Working Women briefly presented the **EaP CSF Re-granted project** "*Developing a single strategy on Gender Equality issues of the EaP CSF*".

### **Break-out Workshop on Security**

The break-out workshop was moderated by **Jeff Lovitt** from New Diplomacy and **Hennadiy Maksak** from the Foreign Policy Council "Ukrainian PRISM" with **Linas Linkevicius** from the EEAS as a speaker.

**Linas Linkevicius** talked about the shared role of EU and EaP countries in facing security challenges in the region. Ukraine was the first country joining an EU security mission, with Moldova and Georgia following suit in 2013. Besides, Ukraine has participated in the EU's battlegroups. Moreover, the EU has engaged in missions aiming to make its partners more resilient to future crises. These missions include the EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia, the EU Border Assistance Mission to Moldova and Ukraine, the EU Advisory Mission to Ukraine. The reviewed ENP does not replace but rather supplements the overall EU Security Strategy. Nevertheless, the ENP review marks a change in the EU's attitude towards partners in terms of security. In 2015, DG NEAR has disbursed 404 million EUR for the EaP countries' security, providing assistance in justice reform, counterterrorism and border management. The reviewed ENP lays a greater emphasis on hybrid threats - in that respect, the EU is identifying which are the most vulnerable sectors in the EaP countries, so that the direct financial assistance is better allocated in order to increase resilience in those sectors.

A representative from Moldova asked about the involvement of the civil society in the elaboration of security strategies in EaP countries. A Georgian CSF member deplored the fact that the EU delivered no vision on how to counter external aggression. **EaP CSF Re-granted project** *“Security Alert on the EU’s Eastern Doorstep”* was briefly presented by Georgian participant. Afterward, a civil society representative from Armenia made few remarks on the possible role of Armenian and Azerbaijani civil society in improving the tense situation prevailing between Armenia and Azerbaijan. In that regard, he noted that the EU should be more active in supporting confidence-building, as it is an area where the civil society can have a very beneficial role. A Moldovan CSF member underlined the importance of the rule of law – and reform of the judiciary – in order to prevent internal threats to security. A Belarusian delegate asked whether it was possible that NATO and the EU do more to reach out to civil society and citizens from the EaP countries in order to explain their vision for a secure neighbourhood.

### **Break-out Workshop on Rights of People with Disabilities**

This workshop was moderated by **Vitalii Covaliov** from the Union of Organizations of Disabled of Moldova, with **Nadia Hadad** from the European Network of Independent Living as a speaker.

**Vitalii Covaliov** stressed the importance of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (or CRPD), the first binding international legal instrument stipulating the rights of persons with disabilities. The Union of People with Disabilities’ Organizations in Eastern European countries has been created in 2007 for the purpose of international exchange of experience toward the effective implementation of the CRPD. On 2 February 2016, a report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Ms. Catalina Devandas Aguilar, summarized the results of the mission to the Republic of Moldova on 10-17 September 2015. Many facts stated in the report are characteristic not only of the Republic of Moldova – its observations apply also to other countries of the EaP.

**The EaP CSF Re-granted project** *“From Inclusion to Participation in Decision-Making”* was presented that is currently implemented in Armenia, Georgia and Moldova. The project aims at increasing the participation of persons with disabilities in processes and decision-making directly related to them. Within the framework of the project, the interviews with government officials, decision-makers, representatives of relevant CSOs and disabled people will be conducted. This work should be carried out at the national, regional and local levels. Seminars, training sessions and other events are also planned. The Index of Participation of PWDs in decision-making will be developed as one of the main project outputs. The Index will be elaborated separately for each of the three countries and there will be also a comparative part. It should serve as a useful tool for government officials and civil society and provide ground for action and responsible decision-making.

**Nadia Hadad** presented the work of the European Network on Independent Living (ENIL), a non-governmental organization promoting independent living through human and civil rights. ENIL promotes and supports the Independent Living Movement in Europe since 1989, and was started in Strasbourg with about 80 persons from 18 countries. Independent living is having the same range of options and the same degree of self-determination taken for granted by persons without disabilities.

It is the result of a human rights based policy, possible through the combination of various environmental and individual factors that allow persons with disabilities to have control over their own lives. ENIL advocated for rights of people with disabilities both at the EU and at the national level: it is active in EU policy development, builds networks with other similar organizations, and regularly conducts advocacy trainings for civil society members.

**Nadia Hadad** also provided some recommendations for **the EaP CSF Re-granted project** presented. She said that the Index of participation and the related research should take into consideration: the involvement of all type of disabilities, barriers to participation such as public administration policies, integral accessibility, budgets but also the paradigm-shift. Besides, accessibility monitoring should take into account both access (from public transport to public space) and the needed support and assistance for this. Human rights education should take the CRPD's motto ("nothing about us without us") as a guideline, and should include human right indicators that measure the improvement of quality of life for all persons with disabilities. Finally, evidence-based advocacy and advocacy campaigns should be led by experts in human and antidiscrimination rights, be mainstreamed beyond CSOs and among persons with disabilities and decision-makers, should facilitate an exchange of ideas and knowledge about good legislation and practice in the area of participation and more with other European countries, and should improve the collection of relevant data and issues to support advocacy and development of good legislation in this area.

## **Break-out workshops II**

### **Break-out Workshop on Political Corruption**

The break-out workshop was moderated by **Ion Manole** from PromoLex, with **Ramona Strugariu**, advisor to Monica Macovei, MEP, as a speaker.

**Ramona Strugariu** made a presentation on the European Parliament's work on political corruption. As of now, the EU politically backs anti-corruption efforts in Moldova through the multilateral framework provided by the EaP. It has a budget support program for Moldova and a special budget support addressed to Ukraine, which include funding for civil society organisations. Yet, there is not one unified scenario on how to deal with corruption in the EaP countries. While strategies for fighting corruption in EaP countries should be differentiated according to the national context, any fight against corruption needs to start from a thorough reform of the judiciary.

A civil society representative from Bulgaria said that the monitoring of the electoral process is important because political parties' access to state funding is dependent on reaching a certain electoral threshold. **Ramona Strugariu** said that Romania is a good example of this issue. Currently, no Romanian political party receives an official and transparent financial support from the state. That is because the Romanian legislation on the funding of political parties is weak and unsystematic.

**Ion Manole** intervened, saying that state funding of political parties is not the most pressing issue. The most important problem in the EaP countries is the use of the public administrations' resources for political campaigning. Indeed, EaP countries lack clear standards on the monitoring and reporting of electoral and travel expenses. In addition, there is very little media and citizen involvement in the monitoring of these expenses. The **EaP CSF Re-granted project** "*Consolidating efforts of the civil society organisations in fighting political corruption*" that is being carried out by PromoLex includes monitoring on this precise aspect.

Another question touched upon the value of freedom of access to public information legislation and its potential in fighting corruption.

**Ion Manole** concluded with some considerations on the wider context in which the fight against political corruption takes place. The underlying issue is that citizens do not trust the political process and do not want to participate in it. Moldova's massive emigration rate aggravates this problem because citizens who emigrate and citizens who prepare to emigrate are rather participative. At the same time, political corruption is one of the many causes of emigration. Another factor which prevents a normal political process in Moldova is the persistence of the conflict in Transnistria, in which the Russian Federation plays an important role.

#### **Break-out Workshop on the role of Civil Society in Public Administration Reforms process**

The break-out workshop was moderated by **Antonella Valmorbida** from ALDA with **Maria Perez-Rocha** from DG NEAR as a speaker.

**Antonella Valmorbida** stressed the importance of civil society's involvement as an aspect of the public administration reform in the EaP countries. She affirmed that ALDA has already done work in that field, laying forth its observation on how CSOs may affect that process in a paper, which was shared during the official meetings with DG NEAR. She also mentioned **the EaP CSF Re-granted project** "*Update on Public Administration and Local Governments Reform in EaP*" that is currently being implemented by ALDA and its partners. She regretted that public administration reform and EU support thereto, is not sufficiently understood by CSOs. Consequently, the use of funds allocated to the EaP countries for public administration reform escapes effective monitoring. This regrettable situation is confirmed by the fact the staff of the EU delegations who are involved in public administration reform have very little contact with CSOs. Finally, she highlighted the opportunities offered by DG NEAR's Centre for expertise on civil society. Such structure could increase awareness of the importance of civil society in public administration reform. Indeed, the question of whom to consult is an ongoing problem for EU delegations. In that respect, the EaP CSF could help to address this problem, as it provides the appropriate balance between genuineness and professionalism.

**Maria Perez-Rocha** suggested that the European Commission's new reference framework on public administration reform lays down a check-list on the effective participation of civil society in public administration reform, which is based on three overall requirements: comprehensiveness, cross-cuttingness, and inclusiveness. These are areas of engagement where the civil society has a key role.

Civil society may participate at the policy level, through inclusive policy-development, policy-dialogue between civil society and the government, and at the level of service delivery, monitoring the public authorities' and their delivery on the implementation targets. Regrettably, the EaP countries generally do not put in place genuine consultations with the civil society. For instance, the Ukrainian government's new draft strategy of public administration reform was presented on internet for two weeks without any wider advertisement and escaped the attention of the civil society.

**Ulad Vialichka** from Belarus remarked that CSOs often have a problem in finding a niche in its work on public administration. In this sense, the weight of failure often lays on civil society, which is not prepared to bring forward the conversation with the authorities. Also, strengthening evidence-based policy-analysis and advocacy is difficult, while remaining extremely important. In that regard, the EU should explore avenues to provide enhanced capacity-building assistance to CSOs. Another participant asked about civil society consultation processes in EaP countries. According to her, albeit NGOs are called and their outputs published, their work is not considered at the policy-making level. She asked what is considered by the Commission to be sufficient enough procedure of the civil society consultation.

**Maria Perez-Rocha** replied that what matters is the process itself; it must involve proper discussion with all relevant stakeholders. The result of the process should not be the "fanciest" law, but rather a minimum level of ownership achieved through the consultation. Without such a level of ownership, there is no real implementation and no real reform.

#### **Break-out workshop on Media and Russian propaganda**

The break-out workshop was moderated by **Boris Navasardian** from the Yerevan Press Club with **Miriam Lexmann** (IRI) as a speaker.

**Miriam Lexmann** started by introducing the work of IRI, which runs programs in Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova. It has a new exciting project, the "*Beacon Project*", whose primary aim is to fill in certain gaps in the existing monitoring and analysis efforts, which do not build a wider picture of the situation, trends, and actors. The Beacon Project is a collaborative platform to share experiences and knowledge on media messages, through the use of ICT tools and automated data collection, which provides wider scale qualitative & quantitative database. This will allow to build a better picture of the "who, where and when" of disinformation.

She outlined some challenges related to propaganda and disinformation and the need to strengthen the transatlantic dialogue on propaganda. The Beacon Project is based on several pillars: ICT tools to create a broader picture of societal factors, the collection of data analysis on where and why disinformation occurs, support of quantitative data collection through polling. Overall, the data will be matched with polling so to have a more accurate picture of opinions and narratives.

Text analyses through ICT tools can help to see the relationship between different texts and authors. The disinformation does not have to be in Russia nor must it be clearly related to Russia due to the instruments employed by trolls and other influencers. Propaganda can cover any topic: TTIP, EU, refugees and so on. And the mainstream media is taking over these narratives. For example, the

Ukrainian media ran a story stating that one hundred thousand refugees were being sent by the EU to Ukraine. Beacon Project intends to become an open platform and one stop shop to find information about these issues.

**Boris Navasardian** noted that, out of six EaP countries, three are heavily influenced by Russian propaganda. Afterward, he presented **the EaP CSF Re-granted project** *“Joining efforts and skills to confront propaganda”* that is being carried out by his organisation on the monitoring of Russian propaganda in EaP countries. This project has four stages: (1) the collection of country reports on the media landscape in EaP countries, (2) the monitoring of three leading Russian TV channels, (3) verifying how these messages are spread by EaP countries media, (4) drafting a final report.

### **Meeting of the WG1 EU member organisations**

The meeting was attended by five civil society organisations from the EU. The director of the EaP CSF Secretariat and the Co-chair of the EaP CSF Steering Committee were participating in the meeting. On the agenda, there was the question of how to activate the EU CSOs in the EaP CSF while ensuring better coordination among EU CSOs.

**Antonella Valmorbida** started with a short presentation followed by a debate on the lack of one EU platform in the Forum. She argued that the lack of an EU platform hampers the activities of CSOs from the EU: in the absence of such platform, they can only participate in Working Groups and subgroups.

The participants agreed that the Forum lacks EU organisations in general and, in particular, of large EU CSO stakeholders. **Antonella Valmorbida** stressed that a better EU coordination is necessary for the EaP CSF in order to reach its objectives. The creation of a new EU platform could be a solution.

There was no agreement on the way forward because the idea of a new EU platform was opposed by another participant of the meeting, who argued that the EU organisations should not be put into a separate platform and that there are other existing platforms for the EU CSOs. Also the idea of trying out a form of EU Coordination before suggesting adjustments of rules to the EaP CSF Annual Assembly was not accepted. The participants of the meeting did not come to an agreement on the next steps.

### **Training session for the grantees of EaP CSF 2016 Re-granting scheme**

The representatives of lead organisations and project partners (one instance) of the six WG1 2016 EaP CSF re-granted projects were present at the session, as well as advocacy, communication and financial managers of the EaP CSF Secretariat. The training on compliance with the communication, advocacy and reporting standards for re-granted project was conducted, with many follow-up questions on related issues, namely on financial reporting. It was considered a useful exercise and exchange of information that will be implemented during the every upcoming EaP CSF WG meeting.