

Minutes of the Steering Committee (SC) Meeting

18-19 April 2016, Berlin

In attendance: Steering Committee members – Siarhei Antusevich, Nastassia Bekish, Krzysztof Bobinski, Avaz Hasanov, Mikayel Hovhannisyan, Hovsep Khurshudyan, Ion Manole, Dovile Sukyte, Lasha Tughushi, Yurii Vdovenko, Ulad Vialichka

Absent: Iryna Sushko

Secretariat: Sophie Huguenet, Darya Mustafayeva, Vera Rihackova, Natalia Yerashevich

1. Introductory session

Suggestions on the agenda (to include):

- Discussion of the Task force on Nagorno-Karabakh
- Statement on the Armenian genocide (24 April 24 is the commemoration day)
- Results of the Dutch Referendum

Adoption of the Agenda

2. Updates from the National Platforms and Working Groups

Ukrainian National Platform: the UA NP representative informed the SC that a meeting of the National Platform's Steering Committee took place on 13 April, with the participation of 185 organisations. A national conference on the ENP review, planned for May, which would be funded by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, is not yet confirmed.

As for the Dutch referendum, the UA NPI stated that it had no active participation, being only involved in events co-organised by the Renaissance Foundation. This is in line with the current majority attitude in UA, according to which the result of the Dutch referendum's is not Ukraine's problem as much as that of the EU.

WG2 Coordinator: WG2 Councilis informed about the preparation of the Council meeting in May. The WG2 Council stressed the need of lobbying for more EU CSO's to apply for the Annual Assembly.

Azerbaijani National Platform: the existing platform consists of 48 members; some efforts were made to enlarge the membership. Nevertheless, the suggestion to invite a wider group of observers was rejected, and only two applications were accepted.

The AZ NP communicated with the government about the release of the NP members who were eventually released. The NP referred to the recent release of political prisoners, describing it as being divided into two groups: the first releases were based on the presidential pardon and the second tranche was based on court decisions. Out of 49 prisoners, 24 who are the most well-known, were released. Aliyev's visit to the US is the reason underlying these changes, as well as the government's

decision to turn towards the EU. Update about the NP members Anar Mammadli (no travel ban), Intigam Aliyev (travel ban) and Emir Huseynov (currently an émigré has had his citizenship revoked) The issue of his membership in the NP is open. Gubad Bayramov is back in Baku and has founded the Azerbaijani Democratic Movement.

Furthermore, two NP meetings took place – the first was open to the media, and the second was *in camera*. The NP adopted an internal plan, but had to deal with the absence of funding for meetings, and the impossibility of receiving the project/s registration.

The NP met twice with Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials responsible for the EaP, and sent a letter proposing the start of consultations between the two entities – despite this, communication between the two sides remains difficult.

The NP representatives also met with MEP Heidi Hautala and with High Representative Federica Mogherini, and maintained a good cooperation with the EU Delegation.

WG5 Coordinator: WG5 Council reported on the preparation of its May meeting in Brussels (11-12 May). The number of the Council's members remains unclear.

WG3 Coordinator: its last meeting took place in Minsk, resulting in the issuing of a concept note and a proposal to other WGs on joint activities for green policy. There are 3 main policy processes within the WG3: 1) participation in the Platform 3 (consolidated comment on the working programme prepared), 2) next Ministerial Meeting on Climate and Environment (October, Luxembourg), 3) Batumi conference, June 2015. The WG3 Council has also discussed the result of re-granting, and is not satisfied with the outcome of the process.

Moldovan National Platform: the last NP's meeting, which took place with the presence of the EU Delegation, the Slovak ambassador and an MFA representative, was the occasion for a debate about relations with the EU.

The NP described the country's current political situation. The next presidential elections (scheduled for 30 October) will be conducted on the basis of a national ballot, with tensions about this decreasing after the Constitutional Court's recent decision to abandon the election of the president by the parliament. The economic situation remains difficult, and new protests will take place next Sunday due to the government's lack of activity on issues of corruption and economic reform.

The NP received a letter from the Parliament suggesting a meeting. This said, Moldovan authorities continue treating civil society in a very formalistic manner. The NP also elaborated new rules about its functioning in order to make its membership more active and efficient. It still needs to discuss procedures of selection for the Annual Assembly's attendance.

Relations with the EU Delegation and with Moldovan authorities are problematic: Moldovan authorities have attempted to pressure the EU Delegation, for example through the involvement of serving judges who condemned the Head of Delegation's comments about corruption in the judiciary.

The NP discussed with the Slovak embassy possibilities of financial support, as it urgently needs funding for the translation of public documents, website maintenance and for other initiatives. The platform is confident that the Slovak embassy will provide support.

The NP emphasized the need for actions that improve the EU's image in the country and address growing pro-Russian support among the Moldovan population.

WG4 Coordinator: The WG4 Council reported on the preparation of the EaP Youth Conference, having submitted the relevant terms of reference to DG NEAR. It is expecting further funding from NED.

Armenian National Platform: the NP stressed that the major issue in the last two months was the country's new Electoral Code, presented by the government without any previous consultation and forwarded directly to the Venice Commission.

The government appears to be most resistant to the idea of publishing voters' lists after the elections, as this would allow access to these lists by the public.

Armenian civil society, including the National Platform, proposed five major changes to the Electoral Code. In that context, four civil society representatives were elected to consult with the authorities. This can be described as a positive development.

The NP's work involved *inter alia* meetings in February and March within the relevant working groups, the organisation of a larger NP conference, and the finalisation of recommendations for a new Armenia-EU treaty addressed to the EU.

On 7 April, the NP representatives visited Nagorno-Karabakh. In the National Platform's opinion, the recent escalation illustrated that the conflict should rather be considered within the human rights dimension than a territorial one.

WG1 Coordinator: WG1 Council discussed the next Council and WG Meeting, foreseen on the 1st and 2nd June, which necessitates a better control of the WG1 members list. The SC urged the WG1 coordinator to pay more attention to the preparation of the WG1 meeting at the beginning of June. The coordinator promised to do so.

Belarusian National Platform: the increase of bilateral contacts between the EU and Belarus was noted. Ulad Vialichka participated in the meeting of the EU-Belarus Coordination Group in Brussels, which he judged to be constructive. This meeting provided a precedent as it was the first time that a representative of civil society participated on equal terms with EU and Belarus government representatives, albeit for only two hours of the meeting. The next meeting will be held in September. According to Vialichka, there is now a more regular and intensive communication with the Head of EU Delegation in Belarus, but this does not involve any access to the content of bilateral cooperation nor does it enable any civil society oversight. The NP also informed the SC that the UNDP is to provide local authorities with funds for re-granting to the local civil society organisations.

National Platform is to hold a conference on 23 April to discuss a new overall strategy, refreshing communications with the relevant stakeholders. The heads of the EU and UN representations have been invited to attend – the former confirmed his presence.

3. Meeting with Iris Kempe, German member of the EaP CSF and a former SC member

The meeting with Iris Kempe was dedicated to the mapping of the German stakeholders focusing on the Eastern Partnership, as well as ways to establish contacts between the EaP CSF and these German stakeholders on different levels.

4. Discussion with Anne Quart, State Secretary for Europe and Consumer Protection, Federal State of Brandenburg and a member of the Committee of Regions:

The discussion with Anne Quart focused on her work within the Committee of Regions (CoR). She is the rapporteur for the revised ENP in CoR and was interested in the comments from the CSOs on the revised framework. She highlighted that the stabilisation of the region as the aim of the EaP policy had not worked too well till now. The cooperation between the regions in Germany and those in the EaP countries, as well as overcoming similar issues related to structural reforms through cooperation between border regions was discussed. Ms Quart described the existing cooperation, including with the regions in Russia. Involvement of the German CSOs in the EaP CSF was put on the agenda, a possible meeting in Brandenburg with German CSOs was suggested.

5. Meeting with Pamela Preusche, Head of Section “EU external relations with Eastern Europe, the Southern Caucasus and Central Asia”, Federal Foreign Office

Pamela Preusche outlined the German position on the EaP issues. In relation to Ukraine, she remarked that Germany, which holds the presidency of the OSCE in 2016, is very much involved in the implementation of the Minsk Agreement.

Ms Preusche referred to current progress in the implementation of AA/DCFTAs, stating that Georgia’s track record is positive. Discussing the recent Dutch referendum, Mrs Preusche stated that it has prompted a phase of reflection in the Hague, and that an alternative way forward must be decided soon. Subsequently, Mrs Preusche talked about the situation in Belarus, observing that there have been some steps forward in EU-Belarus relations, that there is some momentum in favour of dialogue, and that the dialogue partners should strive to attain incremental improvements even if the country’s internal situation is not ideal.

Ms Preusche shortly commented on EU-Armenia relations, stating that the negotiation of a new EU-Armenia- treaty is crucial in demonstrating that the EaP is a sufficiently flexible format. She also discussed Azerbaijan-EU relations, noting that there are some good signals of intensifying relations.

Finally, she touched upon the situation of Nagorno-Karabakh by restating the importance of the Minsk Group efforts on this issue. Yet, according to Mrs Preusche, multilateral platforms could also play a role in helping to find the way for confidence building between the parties involved.

The following questions were addressed to the MFA representative:

Will visa liberalization for Georgia come around any time soon?

Is Germany’s involvement in solving the Nagorno-Karabakh issue exclusively connected with the OSCE chairmanship or is it part of a longer term interest?

How can Germany support the EaP CSF, not only on the Nagorno-Karabakh question?

Mrs Preusche gave the following answers:

Germany's involvement cannot be ascribed exclusively to the OSCE Chairmanship. It is willing to be more active beyond its chairmanship. In that sense, in the interest of the region, Germany addressed the Russian foreign minister and has attempted to strengthen the Minsk group format.

Support for the EaP CSF must involve concrete projects. The German Parliament has a special program for the Eastern Partnership – for a total amount of 40 million euros. The call will be open in January 2017, welcoming projects on conflict resolution, youth exchange, media projects etc.

Mikayel Hovhannisyan emphasized the need to involve people living in the region in confidence building projects. He stated that people, NGOs, media, can be more effective if they have more capacity and support from the international community, something that he considers to be crucial at the light of the recent Nagorno-Karabakh escalation. Mr Hovhannisyan underlined the importance of the Minsk Group, and the need to establish working mechanisms for the monitoring of the ceasefire.

Avaz Hasanov deplored the fact that contacts have been interrupted between Armenian and Azerbaijani civil societies, holding that it is important to have serious EU funded projects in order to keep the channels open between the civil societies of the two countries.

Ion Manole raised the Transnistrian conflict. He expressed concern on the fact that no instrument to monitor human rights in Transnistria currently exists, and remarked that the EU has prioritised dialogue between Chisinau and Tiraspol over the issue of human rights in the region.

Mrs Preusche replied that human rights are important to the German government, and that communication channels to discuss human rights are important, but also that the preconditions are not always there for such channels to be opened. She observed that what needs to be done is to involve Transnistria and Moldova in the DCFTA to change their position through deeper economic integration.

Ion Manole, observed that discussions must have results or are they are useless otherwise.

Ulad Vialichka spoke of the EU-Belarus dialogue, and said that human rights organisations were not invited to conference on the future of the death penalty in Belarus. No European capital protested against this exclusion, thus denying moral support to Belarusian human rights defenders. Overall, the Belarusian government is oriented toward communication without making any hard obligations, and civil society is in a weak position since a monitoring focal point is missing.

6. Meeting with representatives of political foundations and think tanks: Bert Hoppe(Friedrich Ebert Foundation), Stephan Malerius (Konrad Adenauer Stiftung) and Susan Stewart (German Institute for International and Security Affairs, SWP)

The discussion with the representatives of political foundations and think tanks concentrated on German policy towards the EaP countries. **Stephan Malerius** stressed that Germany pushed for sanctions against Russia and on keeping them in place. He also highlighted the changes in the German position from 2008 to 2014-2015. The main expectations of Germany were incorporated in the new

ENP: greater politicisation, stronger differentiation, conditionality and neighbours of neighbours' inclusion.

Susan Stewart pointed out that while Russia was always very important for Germany in the foreign policy, the German position changed radically and surprisingly due to the Russian policy in the Eastern Neighbourhood. She also mentioned that a new Institute of Eastern Studies with the focus on the post-Soviet space will be established by the German Foreign Ministry in the nearest future.

Bert Hoppe shared his opinion that the Eastern Partnership was rather designed to keep the EaP countries at a distance without telling them they will never become members of the EU club. He also stressed that the Foreign Ministry almost omitted Ukraine in favour of Russia in their policies and confirmed that the Dutch Referendum was about the EU, not Ukraine.

To Susan Stewart's question on the EaP CSF impact the added value of the cooperation between civil society in the EaP countries, as well as the progress in cooperation with the EaP governments (GE NP case in particular) were given as examples.

- 7. Monica Bucurenciu (DG NEAR)** [presented an update](#) on the current and future EC-funded regional civil society projects within the Neighbourhood Civil Society Facility

8. Task Force on Nagorno-Karabakh

During the SC, steps were proposed to address the Nagorno-Karabakh situation.

The Steering Committee discussed the proposal of creating a task force devoted to fact-finding on the latest Nagorno-Karabakh flare-up. If instituted, the task force will consist of human rights organisations that are CSF members but also from other international NGOs (HRW, AI, FIDH, Freedom House) and will be coordinated by the Steering Committee members. It would conduct desk research (examination of documents), field research (fact finding mission, interviews with locals, victims and experts; collecting documents) with 2-3days long visits to Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Nagorno-Karabakh, meeting all the relevant stakeholders (politicians, army, media). The required budget has been estimated as amounting to approximately EUR 8000-9000 (including travel, accommodation, local transportation and honoraria for main members). The task force's participants have yet to be chosen. On the basis of the research, the task force would develop and issue a report on the situation with human rights violations during the recent conflict with the recommendations for the OSCE Minsk Group and other international organisations on prevention measures.

Timeline - programme maximum:

Early May – field visit

May – development of report

End of May - meeting to discuss report + finalisation

Alternative timeline:

1-3 June (WG1 Meeting) – meeting to finalise the report

9. Discussion of the EaP CSF Re-granting

Following a presentation on the 2016 EaP CSF Re-granting procedure by the Secretariat, the WG coordinators exposed their opinions on the EaP CSF Re-granting.

WG2 coordinator **Yurii Vdovenko** remarked that, being in conflict of interest, all WG Council members in WG2 gave low marks to competitors. He also observed that the quality of project proposals was exceedingly poor. He made two suggestions: that only WG coordinators be allowed to comment on project proposals, and that the maximum amount of the project grant be increased to EUR 30.000.

WG3 coordinator **Nastassia Bekish** regretted that the WG Council's policy priorities – i.e the Batumi Conference – did not receive grant support. She underlined that real priorities should be taken into account, and that the selected projects are not relevant for the working groups' overall priorities.

WG4 coordinator **Hovsep Khurshudyan** said that the fact that a WG Council member is involved in a re-granting application constitutes *per se* a conflict of interest. He also agreed with Nastassia Bekish that the working groups' priorities have not been taken into account when selecting projects for re-granting. Neither was the ranking made by the WG Councils. He also observed that the limited support given for WG4 projects is disproportionate to the large amount of applications received. He also disapproved the merging of two WG4 project proposals.

He proposed to **amend conflict of interest rules so to remove the wording "friends" and clarify the meaning of the word "family"**. It was also suggested that, within the EaP CSF Re-granting Scheme, the WG coordinator decides on a ranking of applications after consultation with WG Council members.

Avaz Hasanov talked about his exchange with the Azerbaijani WG4 coordinator Rovshan Novruzov, who regretted that Azerbaijan's financial regulations for CSO's financing precludes members from applying and receiving grants. A conference was proposed, to be held in Baku at the end of May, on the Strategic Partnership Agreement, and asked whether such conference can be financed by the EaP CSF.

It was also proposed to restrict the number of possible partnerships, when applying for re-granting, to lead or partner 1+1, 1+2, or 1+3 format. He stressed the need to improve procedures for the redistribution of money among the Working Groups, to take into account Working Groups' priorities in a more effective way, and to put in place some form of assistance to improve the writing of projects.

The co-chair of the Steering Committee **Ulad Vialichka** stated that the external experts involved in the evaluation of the re-granting project proposals worked well from the technical point of view.

He stated that, when seeking the opinion of WG Councils, it is very easy to incur in conflicts of interest. However, on the other hand, the expertise from the WGs is needed. He proposed that WG coordinators be involved and allowed to give an opinion at the same level of Selection Committee members. Both selected WG coordinators should participate in delivering one mark for the project proposals relevant to the scope of their working group. This can be done only at the condition that the

WG coordinators be excluded from applying for re-granting. He touched upon the issue of the procedure's transparency, holding that a reasonable balance should be found that preserves the manageability of the re-granting procedure.

It was decided to:

- 1) Present a PP on re-granting, summarizing the procedure and issues and asking questions to the members on how to improve it
- 2) Update the rules for re-granting for the next year, with a questionnaire to the members about re-granting
- 3) Modify the existing rules on conflict of interest
- 4) Adopt the redistribution of re-granting funding

Responsible persons: Ulad Vialichka, Vera Rihackova

10. Discussion in groups

Regional NP events:

It was decided to organise two events:

- 1) Soft Power as a Challenge to National Security – Tbilisi, June 2016
- 2) Human rights dimension in the revised ENP – Chisinau, September 2016

It was decided that the NPs have to submit their suggestions for the related sections of the agenda of the EaP CSF Annual Assembly by 10 May.

11. Presentation of the EaP CSF budget by Sophie Huguenet

The budget was adopted by all SC members present.

12. Draft Statement on the Armenian Genocide

A draft Statement on the Armenian Genocide was put before the SC and adopted by nine votes for and one against after an exhaustive discussion that engendered high emotions late in the day. One SC member was absent during the vote. The Committee failed to fully take into account the procedures for the adoption of resolutions stating that depending on the level of sensitivity or controversiality or the effect on the vital interests of a particular National Platform, the majority required for adoption of a draft resolution differs. The SC also failed to recall that a precedent had been set last year when a similar resolution on the Armenian Genocide was not adopted after the colleague from Azerbaijan declined to support it while asking for the principle of consensus to be applied in this case. The SC then agreed with his position.

After the close of the SC meeting in Berlin the secretariat pointed out that in case of sensitive or controversial matters, the required majority for the adoption of the statement differs and the decision was taken to hold back the publication of the resolution until this issue could be considered again. The co-chairs then decided to return to the question of the resolution and asked for the SC members to vote to set it aside which meant that it would not be published until such time as the SC members thought it appropriate to do so.

Seven members of the SC voted to accept the suggestion of the co-chairs while two voted against and three failed to take part in the voting.

Recognising the immense significance of the Genocide issue the co-chairs also published on the CSF website their condolences to the families of those who had been victims of the Armenian Genocide, an unparalleled tragedy and the first of a tragic series of such events in the twentieth century.

The rules on the adoption of statements will be reviewed by the SC during the next meeting.

13. Next SC Meeting

It was decided that the next meeting will be held on **3-4 June in Brussels**.