

5th Steering Committee meeting

02-03 October 2014

Warsaw, Poland

Summary of discussions, decisions and conclusions

In attendance: Jeff Lovitt, Vugar Bayramov, Markijan Zelak, Aytakin Asgarova, Ivana Skalova, Jan Pieklo, Andrei Yahorau, Lilia Carasciuc, Oleksandr Sushko, Kristina Vaiciunaitė, Boris Navasardian, Leila Alieva, Hennadiy Maksak, Nikolai Kvantaliani, Ivane Chkhikvadze, Rostyslav Dzundza, Tsvetelina Borissova Filipova, Daiva Kvedaraite, Aleksandra Kujawska

Regrets: Nikolai Kvantaliani (day one), Vugar Bayramov (day one)

Secretariat was represented by the Director of the Secretariat, Natalia Yerashevich, and the Communication Manager, Ivanna Volochiy.

I. Discussions and decisions

a. Batumi Forum Organisation

The task force of the SC on the organisation of the annual event in Batumi **finalised the themes of the panels of the general assembly and speakers** making sure there is country- and gender-balance. The discussions continued in the full SC and focused on the election procedure for the members of the next Steering Committee in Batumi and in making sure that the process is transparent and efficient.

The Steering Committee decided to form **a team of 12 electoral observers, which consists of members of the SC attending the assembly in the capacity of observers plus other observers of the CSF helping to organise the event**, who will observe the elections. The team will be supervised by Boris Navasardyan attending in the capacity of an observer himself.

To improve the transparency of the electoral process, it has been agreed that participants with voting rights will sign to confirm that they have received ballot papers in their conference kit upon registration and at the time of voting. All the elections will be carried out by secret ballot. To ensure a speedy process, two additional ballot boxes will be arranged for the election of EU coordinators, who are elected by the entire forum. With the help of the Steering Committee, the Secretariat will compile guidelines for election observers to follow, which will be handed to the election observers and forum participants in electronic format in advance of the forum.

b. Application Procedure for participants in the general assembly:

To improve the quality of submitted applications, the Steering Committee discussed ways to amend the application procedure. The first agreement was to tighten the requirements for the filled in applications to eliminate applicants that fail to complete the application forms in their entirety and fail to provide exhaustive answers. The requirements on filling in the application form will be clearly articulated during the next application process. The Secretariat will be responsible for identifying organisations that have not fulfilled the minimal requirements in filling-in the application.

It was agreed that independent and external evaluation of the applications could be helpful to avoid the perception of influence on the participants in the forum. The dilemma for maintaining independence through the exclusion of GONGOs vs. the need for openness to include new organisations was acknowledged.

The application procedure for observers was clarified. The call for applications for observers will be announced at the same time as that for participants and 60% of the observers' quota will be filled at the same time as the participants' quota. The remaining 40% of the observers' quota can be decided upon by the Steering Committee at a later date after the participants' selection process is over.

c. Country Facilitators' Elections

The discussion focused on the possibility of removing the election of Country facilitators from the agenda of the assembly, as most of the platforms elect, or agree upon the choice of, the Facilitator in advance of the assembly. It was agreed to continue the elections of Country Facilitators during the assembly, however the new SC will need to look at the existing procedures at the national level and possibly try to make them more uniform.

d. Reform of the Composition of the Steering Committee

The Steering Committee discussed ways to improve the operational effectiveness and accountability of the committee. Concern was expressed over the high frequency of meetings, overstressing the capacity of Steering Committee members, and the cost-effectiveness of the current number of meetings of the full Steering Committee. Bearing these factors in mind, several proposals were put forth. The first was to down-size the Steering Committee, either by having only one co-ordinator per working group or by reducing the number of EU coordinators, or by making the committee national-platform driven.

It was decided that – if not reduced in sized - the Steering Committee would in future meet in smaller and more specialised groups and restrict meetings in its full composition to one per year on top of the meetings at the general assemblies. Ways would need to be explored to establish more direct links to the Working Groups at the national level.

e. Advocacy Priorities in advance of the general assembly of the Forum

The Steering Committee discussed the priorities of EaP CSF's advocacy work for the coming months. The following four were identified: (1) Security in the Eastern partnership, including the war in eastern Ukraine, frozen conflicts, (2) humans rights, particularly addressing the deteriorating human rights situation in Azerbaijan, (3) EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights,

which still has not been signed by a number of the Eastern Partnership countries, and (4) developing practical policy recommendations based on the European Integration Index for the EaP.

f. Strategy discussion

After reviewing the next draft of the strategy of the EaP CSF for 2015-2017, the strategy task force of the SC decided on the next steps in finalising the strategy. By 16 October 2014, the Secretariat will make all the suggested structural changes and Andrei Yahorau will elaborate a new section based on the section Strategic priorities of the National Platforms.

g. Cooperation with EU-Russia Civil Society Forum

It was decided to suggest the cooperation on the working level between the Working Groups of the Forums rather than to focus on contacts at the level of the two Forums' Steering Committees.

h. The next SC meeting will convene before the start of the 6th Annual Assembly in Batumi on 19 November 2014.

II. Briefs from Country Facilitators

Armenia:

The Armenian National Platform has grown to 192 civil society organisations. It has issued a number of statements over the summer concerning incidents in Nagorno-Karabakh. Armenia's pending accession to the Russia-sponsored Eurasian Economic Union on 10 October 2014 is a big issue for the Platform. The Platform is actively working to address the growing divide inside Armenia between the pro-EU and pro-Russia camps. A significant portion of the population is not informed about the peculiarities of European integration on the one hand, and the consequences of Armenia joining the Eurasian Economic Union on the other. The National Platform therefore aims to visit regions and cities across the country to raise awareness about European integration and the Eurasian Economic Union starting mid-October. In addition, the National Platform plans to conduct internal research on the views of members of the National Platform.

Azerbaijan:

In light of the recent government crackdown on civil society in Azerbaijan, Steering Committee members discussed the role of the Azeri National Platform and the strategy that it should take. The core question was whether the National Platform can function amid the political climate in the country. Much of the platform's leadership is in exile, in prison or under investigation.

Belarus:

The next Belarusian presidential elections will take place no later than November 2015, but civil society efforts to influence the elections are likely to be minimal. Concerning Belarus' ties with the EU, the lack of a common agenda still remains at the forefront of issues. Furthermore, there has recently been an incident concerning Maira Mora, head of the EU's delegation to Minsk. She was quoted in September 2014 as calling on Belarusians to support President Lukashenka in light of the events in Ukraine. This statement was not supported by the National Platform. The Belarusian National Platform is scheduling a meeting in early November to prepare for the upcoming Assembly in Batumi.

Georgia:

Georgia is still a frontrunner of the Eastern Partnership, and Euro-Atlantic integration remains a priority of the government. Nonetheless there are a number of internal and external challenges facing the country. For the former part, the government system is becoming weaker as a result of the Prime Minister trying to balance the system in his favour, which may lead to some constitutional changes impeding the checks and balances system. The personal quarrel between the President and the Prime Minister is also becoming increasingly poignant. In other news, there was regrettably no civil society consultation during the Georgian government's adoption of the Association Agreement Implementation Plan for 2014. The Georgian government is poorly prepared to implement the Association Agreement. CSOs of the National Platform will be monitoring the implementation of the AA. For the latter part, Russia continues to be an unpredictable aggressor, occupying 20 percent of Georgian territory. Russia is deploying a number of soft power mechanisms, including through economic ties, engagement with NGOs and influence over the Georgian Orthodox Church, which remains the most trusted institution in the country.

A meeting was recently held between the National Platform and the European Economic and Social Committee on the structure of the civil society platform, as stipulated in the country's Association Agreement with the EU. The Georgian National Platform has tried to send humanitarian aid to Ukraine, however this has been impossible due to customs barriers. It has been agreed that supplies will be delivered by participants of the youth forum side-event.

Moldova:

The upcoming elections in Moldova present a tough agenda, which is marked by pro-EU and pro-Russia camps battling each other. A significant portion of the population is concerned with the state of affairs with Russia, as a large part of the Moldovan labour force is working in Russia. Moreover, the situation in Transnistria and Gagauzia presents a challenge, having been further catalysed by the separatist tensions in Ukraine. The Moldovan National Platform has been involved in a number of activities, including several actions to support Ukraine, monitoring of the justice system and EU awareness raising events. A continuing issue for the national platform is that of fundraising and strategic planning, which will be finalised at the end of October.

Ukraine:

The upcoming parliamentary elections in Ukraine will lead to a rotation of the political elite, and the next parliament will likely be more homogenous and have a more consolidated political will on the issue of strategic direction with no serious pro-Russia forces. The conflict in eastern Ukraine is an emerging frozen conflict. The situation is peculiar in that there is no natural border as in the case of Transnistria. As regards settlement, there is no basic consensus on the solution, including a provisional one. The best solution at this point is a sustainable cease-fire. Ukraine has a sense of direction, but lacks a sense of its own borders.

The Association Agreement, which was ratified by an overwhelming majority in the Ukrainian Parliament, will be enforced through the notification procedure on 1 November 2014, with the exception of the DCFTA, which was postponed until the end of next year. The reaction of society has been ambivalent on this matter. However, it is clear that there is a lack of enthusiasm regarding the prospects of the agreement because a third party was involved as a legitimate partner at the negotiating table. The NP will be monitoring the implementation of the AA.

On 8 November 2014, the annual meeting of the NP will take place, where input to the upcoming general assembly will be discussed, as well as the process for the creation of the civil society platform to monitor the implementation of the AA as stipulated under the AA.

III. Meetings

Roundtable between EaP CSF Steering Committee and the Polish Institute of International Affairs (PISM), 2 October

The Steering Committee of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum participated in a roundtable discussion organized in partnership with the Polish Institute of International Affairs on 2 October in Warsaw. The event discussed the objectives for the 2015 Riga Summit on the Eastern Partnership as well as the state of human rights and democracy in the region, with particular regard to the situation in Azerbaijan. The roundtable was attended by experts and government representatives, including Poland's Ambassador for the Eastern Partnership, Konrad Pawlik.

Meeting with Marcin Marcin Świąćicki, Member of the Polish Sejm, Former Mayor of Warsaw, October

Mr. Świąćicki presented an overview of Poland's local self-government system and offered advice for reform in Ukraine. Differences between federal and unitary systems and their political repercussions were elaborated. In response to Jan Pieklo's question, the struggle of choosing between a unitary and federal system in Ukraine was discussed. The meeting ensued as a Q/A session with the national facilitators from Georgia and Moldova taking interest in Poland's lessons for reform in their own countries.

Meeting with Tomasz Orłowski, Undersecretary of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland, 3 October

Four steering committee members, including Leila Alieva, Hennadiy Maksak, Jan Pieklo and Ivane Chkhikvadze, and one representative of the Secretariat, Ivanna Volochiy, met with Mr. Orłowski at the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. General developments in the Eastern Partnership, as well as Poland's foreign policy towards the region were discussed. As a result of the meeting, Mr. Orłowski will be attending the 6th annual assembly of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum this November in Batumi, Georgia.

Adopted: 20 October 2014