

**Communicating the Benefits of the Eastern Partnership:
Opportunities for Policies and Instruments of the People-to-People Dimension**

**Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum: Working Group 4 Conference
Report
16-17 June 2015, Brussels
Park Inn Hotel Brussels Midi
Place Marcel Broodthaers, 1060 Brussels**

Taking place in Brussels on 16-17 June 2015, the meeting brought together 40 working group participants and EU officials from the European Commission and EU organisations (European Seniors Union, Age Platform Europe, European Association for the Education of Adults).

The objectives of the meeting were to:

- Provide an update on policies and projects/actions happening in EaP on Platform 4 areas
- Encourage the development of regional perspectives and joint support initiatives
- Explore the ownership and communication aspects of the EaP from the perspective of the people-to-people dimension.
- Share project initiatives and Identify common actions until the Annual Assembly.

The first part of the meeting focused on updates on policies and projects/actions happening in EaP on Platform 4 areas. Priorities and future plans as well as EaP countries' participation in EU Programmes and Instruments were also on the agenda. The rest of the conference involved a mix of inputs from EaP National Platforms, and EU institutions and CSO representatives, focusing on finding ways to best communicate the benefits of the Eastern Partnership and ensure the approximation of policies to the EU acquis. The conference concluded with the final messages of the subgroups coordinators as well as discussion on joint projects and activities.

1. Updates and Actions of National Platforms and from regional activities targeting cultural and youth policies reform

Marta Touykova (DG EAC, Coordinator of Platform 4) presented EaP Platform 4 activities (detailed presentation can be found [here](#)).

Adrian Balutel (Moldovan Platform) mentioned that a meeting was organized within the Moldovan Platform to discuss the capacity building on youth policy. **Nicolai Kvantaliani** (Belarussian Platform) assessed the activity of the platform as stagnating and mentioned the thematic side event on Bologna process that is planned. **Rovshan Novruzov** (Azerbaijan Platform) shared briefly projects dealing with strengthening the entrepreneurship among disabled youth. He also mentioned an ongoing project with NATO. **Oksana Bondar** (Ukrainian Platform) spoke of the priorities of the Ukrainian platform WG 4, focusing on the need for strengthening a common identity in Ukraine, dealing with the conflict and participation of youth. **Temik Khalapyan** (Armenian Platform) talked about the EBRD civil society panel and the idea of adding a subgroup which would focus on conflict resolution and the unrecognized

territories. **Nukri Kvelashvili** (Georgian Platform) presented updates on the different actions that members of WG 4 in the Georgian Platform take.

The internal part of the meeting then concluded with the subgroups (on youth, education and culture) discussing together the current projects, developing joint plans, sharing good practices and presenting policy agenda for the remaining part of the year of WG 4. **Hovsep Khurshudyan** (Coordinator of the WG4) proposed to create subgroups in the National Platforms with current and previous chairs cooperating closely. He also suggested ensuring livestreaming during the Platform meetings.

2. Thematic panels: Communication Strategy of the Eastern Partnership – People to People Dimension

‘The civil society could help with raising awareness among the population in terms of developing critical thinking’

Dearbhla Doyle

‘The goal should be to have strong public support by increasing the people mobility and contacts, who can later on become the ambassadors of the region ‘

Erika Hellsing Rydergard

‘It is obligatory to do the reforms, communicate on the EU benefits and encourage people to become interested in the political life. ‘

Alexandra Kalatozishvili

Dearbhla Doyle from EEAS opened the panel with a brief presentation on how the EEAS sees the strategic role of communications. In her speech, she emphasized the need to communicate the immediate and long-term benefits of the Eastern Partnership especially in times of misinformation activities. Referring to the recent Riga Summit, Dearbhla Doyle said it did achieve a certain progress and now the priority is to remain inclusive and keep the cooperation between the six countries and on regional level. She also mentioned that there has been pressure from the member states to change communications and move to communicate more broadly on EU policies and values. To achieve this, the European Council in March invited the HR in cooperation with the Member States and institutions to reform the action plan on the strategic communications. As a part of this effort, a small communications team within the EEAS has been created to focus on communications related to Russia and the Eastern Neighbourhood. The idea is to improve messaging to the target audience by sharing more success stories, infographics, audio-visual materials and ensuring coherence. She also brought attention to the role of the civil society in raising awareness among the population in terms of developing critical thinking. Concerning the support of independent media, strong emphasis is put on cooperation with the local media and local actors and communicating not only in the local languages but also in Russian. Another important part of the action plan is developing the networks on EU level, regional organisations, partner governments, civil society and media. Dearbhla Doyle concluded her speech with the statement that the civil society could play the role of a media watchdog. **Carmen Falkenberg Ambrosio** (DG NEAR) presented the ongoing support under the EU Neighbourhood Info Centre and the fact that it will soon be replaced by the OPEN Neighbourhood. The new programme consists of three components: training for journalists, support to communicating to specific audiences

(young people, professionals, targeted campaigns) and real time information and dissemination platform. 10 million euro will be spent on communicating what European Union is to the population in EaP countries. Carmen Falkenberg Ambrosio enumerated the ways the EU could assist. She mentioned raising the issue of freedom of expression as the fundamental right of citizens, continuing the policy dialogue on freedom of expression, supporting the efforts of the CSF in improving media freedom, continuing work with the Council of Europe, organising training for journalists, communicating about the EU policies in EaP through new technologies and targeted audiences. She concluded with the invitation to get involved in implementing the Eastern Partnership Visibility Strategy. Next, **Carmen Falkenberg Ambrosio**, elaborated on the trainings for journalists. They are mainly addressed at youth and journalists who are already working in the field but also other information multipliers as they carry certain weight. The programme will also cover different types of media. **Erika Hellsing Rydergard**, Coordinator of the Swedish CS Network reiterated the strong support for the EaP in Sweden, however, she also stressed that the general knowledge on the Initiative and the situation on the countries is rather low. That is why, according to Erika Hellsing Rydergard, the goal should be to have strong public support by increasing the people mobility and contacts, who can later on become the ambassadors of the region. She also highlighted the fact that the EaP and especially its civil society could be involved in as many cooperation areas as possible. Finally, she drew attention to the role of the diaspora from the EaP countries in the EU member states, which could be more involved in promoting the EaP and needs to be considered as an actor of the future when forming the communication strategies. Final **Alexandra Kalatozishvili** from Multi-ethnic Resource Centre for Civic Education Development, Georgia elaborated on the role of mass media. She presented the example of Georgian population: 80% of the population watches television which, in fact, is mainly influenced by the government and Russia. Alexandra Kalatozishvili sees reforms, communication on the EU benefits and encouraging people to become interested in the political life as obligatory. On the other hand, information campaigns on why the EU needs Georgia is equally important. Alexandra Kalatozishvili added that two EU integration offices will be opened in two regions of Georgia to spread the news on EU integration and free trade advantages. She also brought to attention the involvement of the Georgian National Platform in the drafting of the European Communication Strategy for the Ministry of European Integration.

Youth Policy approximation to EU acquis - advocacy and capacity building initiatives

‘We cannot close the door for other actors but reach out for all the youth.’

Joachim Fronia

‘It’s worth working also with the GONGOs if they have good projects. What is more, there is always the perspective that sending volunteers to Europe can change their perspective or mentality after returning to the country. This can then create a spill over effect.’

Tomasz Bratek

‘It is useful to communicate with the authorities and the government, however, we must be aware that GONGOs destroy the system and the work of the civil society.’

Tatiana Poshevalova

The panel kicked off with the presentation of **Joachim Fronia** from DG EAC in which he briefly presented the EaP Youth Window and Erasmus plus initiative development. Then, **Tomasz Bratek** Polish National Agency for Erasmus+, hosting the Eastern Europe and Caucasus Resource Centre emphasized that the education, not only youth policy is not the subject of the common policy which means that these topics are only covered by recommendations. He also assessed the EaP Youth Window programme as an important tool which provided youth with opportunities to gain new skills, participate in trainings, etc. **Nicolai Kvantaliani** from the Belarus NP shared an example of a success story from Moldova, where the youth was invited to participate in creating amendment to the youth law. **Marine Manucharyan**, **Armenian NP** assessed the past round of Youth programme as having helped many organisations, but it also posed many challenges. She expressed her hopes for a longer perspective of the programme and stressed the need of the CSOs from the EaP to take the lead in the process. Youth policy is the priority for 2015 in Armenia and it is important that there have been some positive signals that the revision of the youth policy will be actually realised. One is the fact that the ministry invited CSOs to get involved in the work on the youth institute. She also expressed her hopes to see the next annual assembly forum focusing more on the youth-related topics. **Marine Manucharyan** highlighted the need to address the question of honorarium for the volunteering youth which is often not in place. **Tomasz Bratek** elaborated on the evidence based policy concept and said that youth exchanges bring concrete results – skills gained, which are being permanently monitored. At the end of the panel, speakers expressed their views on the cooperation with the GONGOs. Tomasz Bratek said it is worth working with these organisations if they have good projects. What is more, there is always the perspective that sending volunteers to Europe, can change their perspective or mentality and that would create a positive spill over. Joachim Fronia added that we cannot close the door for other actors but reach out for all the youth. Finally, there were comments on the need for youth organizations to take a step further and assume responsibility in dealing with the challenge of outreach and capacity, and to contribute to policy-making in other sectors, based on their experience.

Creating a cultural shift in the EaP societies

'Belarus failed to create a shift through civil society participation. The priority for now must be the creation of an environment which stimulates the exchange of ideas.'

Tatiana Poshevalova

'Ministry of Culture reflects an old perspective where the ministry does something which is labelled "culture", whereas ministries should be for culture – i.e. setting in place a policy that is conducive to culture development.'

Terry Sandell

'60% of the population in the EaP countries identify themselves with Russian culture and this highlights how big a role cultural association and background plays in people's political choices.'

Ihor Savchak

Terry Sandell EaP Culture Programme II, opened the panel with a brief presentation of the new EaP and EU Culture and Creativity programme which envisages funding through Creative Europe. It is free to form any partnerships and work with anyone from cultural and other sector. According to Terry

Sandell, we might expect an increase in the number of start-ups in creative industries over the next three years. The proposals are supposed to bring differentiation, facilitate innovation and use of resources to support positive trends. He highlighted that ministries of culture are soviet models, not modernised. In his belief, the simple name of ministry of culture reflects an old perspective where the ministry does something which is labelled “culture”, whereas ministries should be for culture – i.e. setting in place a policy that is conducive to culture development. There is still a 19th century understanding of what culture is, emphasizing classical and folklore culture. In his opinion, many opportunities has been missed, however, Georgia and Moldova try to change it. In Georgia, the approach is getting more consultative, making people talk, work together (governments, public, private sector and civil society). In addition, the current situation in Ukraine brings many discussions; people are really trying to do different things. **Ihor Savchak** added that in Georgia 30% of the population support the integration with the Eurasian Union. What is more, 60% of the population in the EaP countries identify themselves with Russian culture and this highlights how big a role cultural association and background plays in people’s political choices. **Rob van Iersel** from the DG EAC presented the Creative Europe program and the funding possibilities it offers to creative industries. The program is supposed to help the sector, make different European actors cooperate, strengthen competitiveness of creative industries and foster the intercultural dialogue. He added that some non-member states have participated in the programme (Norway, Iceland, and Balkan countries, Turkey, Georgia and Moldova). Negotiations with Ukraine continue. He also mentioned that the programme is highly competitive as only 15-20% of proposals are funded. He advised to have a European Union partner for first time applicants, to learn about how the programme functions. **Tatiana Poshevalova** from EuroBelarus International Consortium spoke about the transition process and the importance of value-based culture and education. Belarus is experiencing stagnation and has officially renounced the transformation process. According to Tatiana Poshevalova we can experience transformation also through culture, however, little has been done in this field so far. She also added that Belarus failed to create a shift through civil society participation. The priority for now must be the creation of an environment which stimulates the exchange of ideas. Tatiana Poshevalova also shared her opinion on the communications with GONGOs. According to her, it is useful to communicate with the authorities and the government, however, we must be aware that GONGOs destroy the system and the work of the civil society. The panel ended with the intervention of the Armenian representative who expressed deep hopes for Armenia joining the Creative Europe programme.

**Strengthening platforms of seniors and the value of adult learning policies in EaP Countries:
challenges and good practice**

‘It is highly important to have a platform of cooperation between EU and EaP as people who have lived for 70 years in the Soviet Union share different values than the young generations.’

Tatiana Zialko

‘We should create a regional solidarity network providing support for the repressed academics and students who dare to challenge the lack of democratic governance in higher education in Belarus.’

Ales Krot

Gina Ebner [presented](#) the European Association for Education of Adults activities. She emphasized the importance of adult education and shared the results of one study realised in UK, which states that if we provide the adults with the opportunity to learn, we can reduce their medication by half. She also highlighted the fact that by having wide-ranging adult strategies combining the life and basic skills we make a lot of progress. **Tatiana Zialko** from Nashe Pokolenie then, emphasized the need to involve more organisations of seniors and to create a subgroup on seniors. She brought attention to the fact that the idea of the EaP is to bring these countries closer to the European values. Therefore, it is highly important to have a platform of cooperation between EU and EaP as people who have lived for 70 years in the Soviet Union share different values than the young generations. She also compared the perception of seniors in EU and EaP countries. In the EU, seniors are respected, meet the governments or high profile officials while in the EaP countries they are called pensioners or retirees and are not respected by the society. Finally, she expressed her hope to see organisations of seniors from Azerbaijan, Georgia and Moldova join the sub-group. **An Hermans** from the European Senior Union took the floor to present the activity of the organisation, stressing the need to communicate with real people's stories and perceptions that would help strengthen solidarity. **Maciej Kuhkarczyk** from Age Platform Europe described the policy challenges of working on issues of age. According to him, the challenges of the seniors are different and the pace of change in this area is different. He believes that the solution might be the cooperation between the EU and its immediate neighbours. He then presented the activity of the Age Platform Europe. He shared the latest achievement, which was the creation of the Charter of the rights and responsibilities of the people in need of care, which they are trying to lobby for at national and EU level.

Education policy reform

Hayala Husseynova, from Young Democratic Reformers Public Union, Azerbaijan NP, gave a [presentation](#) on the implementation of Bologna in higher education in Azerbaijan; she did not see any problems with implementation of Bologna in Azerbaijan, neither with human rights situation. **Ales Krot**, Student's Council, Belarus NP, took the floor to speak about the Bologna system in Belarus. According to Ales Krot, Belarus did not learn the lessons of the process since some points were not included and students were not involved in the process. At the May Summit in Yerevan, Belarus was included in the Bologna process on conditions of implementing a roadmap. However, so far no roadmap has been developed. He also voiced the need for an international body which will monitor the process and, importantly, for involving independent organisations from Belarus in the monitoring process. Ales Krot also shared his idea of creating a regional solidarity network providing support for the repressed academics and students who dare to challenge the lack of democratic governance in higher education in Belarus. **Marta Touykova** from DG EAC mentioned the focus in the EU on youth unemployment. She brought attention to the increased EU budget for education even in times of current crisis. She also mentioned the long work on higher education law in Ukraine, which was finally implemented. Mobility of students and staff and cooperation between universities were stressed as important in building trust. **Hovsep Khurshudyan** mentioned a recent meeting on education during which e-learning was discussed. Marta Touykova suggested to organise a peer learning event or a seminar under Platform 4 on that topic. Hovsep Khurshudyan also mentioned recent idea of president Obama to spend 200mIn\$ on opening up online libraries and asked how the EaP can join such projects. Marta Touykova mentioned the EaP Connect project and promised to follow up on this idea. **Tanya**

Basarab also raised the concern on the influence church has on public opinion in EaP countries and its interference and lobby for education materials based on conservative values

Looking ahead: recommendations on strengthening the people to people dimension of EaP

Hovsep Khurshudyan invited all the subgroup coordinators to share their next steps. **Tatsiana Zialko** said she will have a closer look at the selection process of the NGOs dealing with seniors so that the group gains more members. She will also submit a report on a first joint project with organisations from Ukraine and Armenia and announced the visits to these countries. **Ihor Savchak** promised to keep lobbying in the countries where the Creative Europe is not yet in place. He underlined the importance of realising the transnational projects and engaging projects within the Creative Europe framework. He stressed the need to keep issuing recommendations and advocate. **Nicolai Kvantaliani** mentioned that his subgroup would keep looking for projects and common ideas. He stressed the importance of the flagship ideas and the need to realise substantial projects before Kyiv Assembly. Youth subgroup will focus on the Youth Index project and will keep advocating that youth be high on the agenda of the EaP. The panel finished with discussion on the regranting process and ideas for the Annual Assembly.