



***Activity Reports of the Working Group 1
for the Forum in Stockholm
November 2012***

In course of the period from Poznan Forum until the Stockholm event, a wide range of activities took place in the framework of this largest working group of the Forum. Representatives of its Sub-groups took part in numerous panel discussions, workshops and conferences related to issues of Democracy, Human Rights, Good Governance and Stability. Working Group coordinators were present at the 7th and 8th meetings of the Platform 1 of the Eastern Partnership where they delivered messages on behalf of the Steering Committee and the Working Group to representatives of the EU governments and those of the Eastern Partnership states. Attached to this document in the *Annex 1* is the statement by the Working Group 1 and the Steering Committee for the participants of the 8th Panel meeting of November 15, 2012.

On June 7, the annual WG1 meeting took place in Brussels with more than 60 representatives attending from all six EaP countries, as well as from some EU member states. In course of the meeting, sub-groups developed a set of recommendations that were later delivered to the EU and EaP governments at the official Panel 1 meeting which took place on the following day in Brussels. Report from the meeting and the list of recommendations can be found in the *Annex 2* and *Annex 3* to this document, accordingly.

At the annual meeting, a new Sub-group was created that will address questions related to **Election monitoring**. It is planned that a special CSF Task Force consisting of representatives of different countries (both EU and EaP) will observe the elections process – including engagement and discussions with various stakeholders in the respective EaP country where an election is taking place (international organizations and missions, local civil society, political parties, expert community). The Task Force shall consist of CSF representatives with experience in election observation, electoral law, party financing, media monitoring. The Task Force will produce a report on its findings. Among other things, it will assess how previous recommendations by ODIHR have been or have not been taken into account.

On the margins of the Group meeting, WG1 hosted the Eastern Partnership elections workshop. The purpose of the workshop was to examine the elections which have taken place this autumn in Eastern Partnership countries (Armenia, Belarus, Georgia and Ukraine). The aim was to look at the process of elections. What purpose do they serve for rulers and ruled. Do they give an opportunity to electorates to choose their representatives or do they merely serve to confirm an already established social and political order? What is the role of external actors like the OSCE or the Council of Europe (the Venice Commission) and the European Parliament? Do the standards they set and seek to implement through technical assistance and observation of elections influence the process? What is the role of domestic election observers like NGOs? Many other questions were also discussed in course of the event.



Thanks support of the Ministry of the Czech Republic, several projects were implemented by member organisations of the Group.

For instance, the Centre for Strategic Research and Development of Georgia coordinated the project "Promoting Citizen Participation in Local Governance in 6 EaP Countries".

Through the project, a report with information on the national legislation of EaP countries and their application in practice in terms of citizens' participation at the local level has been produced in scope of the "European Charter of Local Self-government", "Additional Protocol to the European Charter of Local Self-Government on the Right to Participate in the Affairs of a Local Authority", "Strategy for Innovation and Good Governance at Local Level", and "The Code of Good Practices of Citizens' participation". This report will be published in the coming months and made available to all relevant institutions and stakeholders.

Sub-Groups of the Working Group 1 reported the following activities up to the date of the Stockholm Forum.

I. Media Sub-Group

- 1.** Development of model laws (legal provisions) for EaP countries regulating specific areas of media operations, specifically, given their urgency, - on transparency of media ownership and on standards of election campaign coverage (MSWG is well positioned to draft such model laws in cooperation with other EaP structures (Euronest).
- 2.** Introduction of Media Freedom Index for EaP countries. The existing similar indexes - by IREX, Reporters without Borders, Freedom House indexes are not enough compliant to the specific situation in this region, while index is very important to assess the state with media and its dynamic, as well as for elaboration of strategy for action, MSWG has almost developed the methodology, and seeks for funding of the initiative.
- 3.** The "Media Landscape of the EaP countries" (a product of MSWG in 2011) was widely disseminated and presented during the year, and serves as good basis for media researches including those new ones being initiated by the subgroup itself.
- 4.** During the year MSWG was also working on the model methodology of monitoring media coverage of elections in the EaP countries.
- 5.** Members of the MSWG were involved in the foundation of the Network of media self-regulatory bodies, which unites respective institutions from 5 EaP countries. Certain plans were developed to establish cooperation between MSWG and the Network.



II. Local Government and Public Administration Reform Sub-Group

The Subgroup of the WG1 on Local Government and Public Administration Reform continued its activities since the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum in Poznan in November 2011.

It identified the following objectives:

To promote reforms in the EaP countries to support local governments, their autonomy and capacities, towards a better decentralization;

To promote local self-government and public administration reforms in EaP countries

To promote the role of civil society in promoting local governments and decentralization and public administration reform;

To monitor the commitments of the EaP countries as for local governments capacities and autonomy, and in terms of public administrative reform;

To exchange best practices among the civil society actors involved in public administration reform and local governments capacities and autonomy;

Achievements:

1. Documents and Monitoring Reports at the national level:

The subgroup and its members continued their work throughout the year by raising the attention on Local Government and Public Administration Reform and producing and circulating reports and monitoring on the topics. This information has been made available to the EU and Council of Europe institutions and stakeholders. The Subgroup members regularly exchanged ideas and best practices and formed a community of experts on the topics.

Some of the reports and information have been published on the CSF EaP website and on ALDA website:

<http://www.alda-europe.eu/newSite/eap/home.php>

Armenia: Local Self Government Reform in Armenia (2009_2010), produced by Communities Finance Officers. The updated version is will be published soon.

Georgia: Fiscal Decentralisation in Georgia 2011, produced by the Centre for Strategic Research and Development of Georgia.



Moldova: National decentralization Strategy, project under discussion 2011, produced by Institute for Urban Development of Moldova

Azerbaijan: Assessment of Conformity of organizational and operational aspects of municipalities in Azerbaijan with principles and requirements of European Charter, Produced by NGO Alliance BINA for Municipal Development

Belarus: activities on Local Government management of the Lev Sapieha Foundation

2. Assessment on Citizens' participation at the Local Level in the Eastern Partnership countries

Funded by the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs, CSRDG from Georgia coordinated the project "Promote Citizen Participation in Local Governance in 6 EaP Countries".

Through the project a report with information on national legislation of EaP countries and their application in practice in terms of citizen participation at local level in scope of the "European Charter of Local Self-government", "Additional Protocol to the European Charter of Local Self-Government on the Right to Participate in the Affairs of a Local Authority", "Strategy for Innovation and Good Governance at Local Level", "The Code of Good Practices of Citizens' participation" has been produced. This report will be published soon and made available to the relevant institutions and stakeholders.

3. Lobbying and policy making

3.1. Committee of the Regions and CORLEAP

The Subgroup constantly remained in contact with the Committee of the Regions and with the initial steps of the CORLEAP. It participated in the follow up of the Action plan. A group of Subgroup representatives attended the Stakeholders meeting at the CORLEAP meeting on the **May 30, 2012** and in the Bureau meeting on the same day as observers. An initial platform of cooperation has been started focusing on a common priority for Fiscal Decentralisation¹. **The topic is proposed to be considered high in the agenda of the WG1 and mentioned as a possible flagship initiative.**

The Subgroup took part, as permanent observer to the CORLEAP annual conference on September 17, 2012 and established a constant dialogue with the CORLEAP members.

See attached the document for Assessment on Fiscal Decentralisation in the EaP countries produced by the subgroup members as input to the CORLEAP annual conference.

¹ ALDA and OSF Ukraine sponsored some of the costs of this initiative



3.2 Congress of the Council of Europe

Continuous relationship took place with the Congress. Our information was regularly sent to the Congress Secretariat.

ALDA, as coordinator, organized the visit – in Strasbourg and in Brussels – of the BINA Alliance for Municipal Development from Azerbaijan in March, who was then able to meet relevant stakeholders.

A particular relevance was given to the Monitoring report on Azerbaijan produced (and approved in the Congress Plenary Session of October) at the Congress. Our members participated actively in bringing advice to the Monitoring team.

3.3. Eastern Partnership platforms and activities

Representatives of the Subgroup participated in the Workshop organized by the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs in May in Tbilisi and in the Expert Panel on Public Administration in June, in Tbilisi.

A presentation of the work of the Subgroup and the CSF EaP was done at the EPC centre in April in Brussels at the occasion of the discussion on the Estonian Report on Eastern Partnership Public Administration Reform.

III. Visa Facilitation Sub-Group

There has been considerable synergy between the visa subgroup and the Visa-free Europe Coalition (today over 40 organisations). We have cooperated over organising a number of seminars, conferences and events. Research on the reforms necessary for visa liberalisation in all the six countries of the Eastern Partnership has been conducted and now will be presented via an internet tool that helps to visualise the results. We have also regularly contacted the European Commission, the European Parliament as well as the relevant authorities of the European Union Member States in order to bring their attention to the visa policy issues. The Commissioner Cecilia Malmstroem has admitted that the EU needs to cut the red tape in order to facilitate the travel of bona fide travellers.

There have been a number of seminars and conferences and events devoted to visa policy organised by members of the Visa-free Europe Coalition and WG I visa liberalisation sub-groups has taken place, including: Contacts between people: EU visa policies towards the Eastern Partnership countries conference, organised in Yerevan by the Analytical Centre on Globalization and Regional Cooperation (Armenia) and the Stefan Batory Foundation (Poland) with the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic; The EU Visa Practices in 2012: Are there any Changes, organized by the by Europe without barriers, Kyiv, Ukraine; the meeting of the Visa-free Europe Coalition, held and organized by the Stefan Batory Foundation, Warsaw, Poland; Access to Europe and visa policies: A major



challenge for the EU and its neighbours, organized by the Notre Europe, Paris, France and Batory Foundation, in Paris, and many more.

On the 20th of November the members of the visa-group are launching the Eastern Partnership Visa Liberalisation Index, an internet tool that helps visualise the progress made by the Eastern Partnership states towards visa-free regime with the EU. Visa Liberalisation with the EU (lifting visa requirement for short-term trips) is granted to countries that fulfil a number of criteria and meet benchmarks. These criteria are listed in Visa Liberalisation Action Plans. Up to now only two out of six Eastern Partnership countries have started visa liberalisation dialogue with the EU and have been granted such Action Plans. The Action Plans are tailored to the situation in a particular state, however, broadly the criteria for visa liberalisation are the same. A team of national experts investigates and evaluates the pace of reforms in each of the EaP states. The results can be found at monitoring.visa-free-europe.eu It will be updated every three-four months and regular reports on the progress made and challenges still in front of the EaP states on their way to visa-free travel will be sent out to the media, decision-makers and opinion-leaders.

We have managed to bring to the attention of the European Commission representatives the problems with the current visa policy, especially that fact that the existing provisions are not fully implemented by the EU MS, and as a result that the EU visa policy is not as friendly as it could have been. In response, the European Commission has launched an initiative aimed at the review of the current EU MS visa policy as well as further facilitation of the EU MS visa policy.

We also have had a meeting with the Polish MFA representatives, including consuls, during which we drew the attention to the problems regarding Polish visa policy, including problems with online applications as well as a very low percentage of long-term visas. The meeting as well as follow-up cooperation with the MFA resulted in an increased percentage of 4- and 5-year visas issued by Polish consulates in Ukraine and Belarus.

We would like to focus more on the implementation of the provision for long-term visas for selected groups (people who have positive visa history and can justify the need to travel often to the EU). For this purpose, we have prepared a survey of EaP CSF members on their visa experience. This will help us illustrate, that the existing provisions are not always implemented (long-term visas for 4-5 years are not issued often enough). The results of the survey will be discussed during the CSF in Stockholm and a common position will be prepared urging the EU MS to implemented the existing provisions as well as initiate further facilitation the EU visa policy.

IV. Fight against Corruption Sub-Group

During 2012 anti-corruption subgroup participants were working on several projects to promote cooperation between anti-corruption CSOs in the region.



EASTERN PARTNERSHIP Civil Society Forum

First, the subgroup was working on a joint project on conflict of interest policies development and implementation in the region. The project proposal for EU in the framework of the EuropeAid Call for Proposals entitled “Strengthening the Capacities of Non-State Actors - Actions in partner countries” was developed; unfortunately the subgroup did not receive financing for the project, currently other options for financing are being considered.

Second, group participants actively work on promoting “Open Government Partnership” initiative in the region. The goal of this work is to empower CSO’s in Eastern Partnership countries and Russia to hold governments transparent and accountable via global Open Government Partnership Initiative.

In the framework of this work TORO Creative Union (Ukraine), Ukrainian Institute for Public Policy, Transparency International Anti-corruption Center (Armenia), Transparency International Azerbaijan, Transparency International Georgia, Transparency International Moldova and Center for Anti-Corruption Research and Initiative Transparency International Russia implemented a research project to develop a vision for joint efforts in monitoring of the national OGP plans among EaP CSOs. Project participants developed small analytical papers describing lessons learnt from their national OGP process, gathered for a working meeting in Kyiv and developed a paper with joint position on best approaches to promote the most successful models of CSOs engagement of the OPG process. Also, an action plan for further joint advocacy campaign was developed. The publication developed in this project is available on the web-site of the Ukrainian Institute for Public Policy. The Project was supported by the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

To move OGP topic further, participants of the sub-group initiated another project which will run till March 2013 and is supported by British Embassy in Ukraine. Project participants plan to gather at least 20 successful national practices of implementation of specific OGP initiative components; conduct trainings for government and CSOs on implementation of these practices; develop unified methodology on civic monitoring of OGP National action plans’ implementation in participating states of the project; test 6 components of methodology in each of the participating states of the project. Participants of the subgroup constantly discuss other ideas for joint projects in the framework of the group.