

**3rd Meeting of Working Group 5 on *Social & Labour Policies and Social Dialogue*
of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum**

19 February 2014, Brussels

Report of the Meeting

The annual meeting of Working Group 5 dealing with social problems and social and labour dialogue, took place in Brussels on 19 February 2014, bringing together about thirty participants.

Daiva Kvedaraitė (Lithuania), the WG's EU Coordinator, presented the agenda of the meeting, consisting of presentations by external speakers, election of a coordinator from the EaP countries, exchange of experiences in the area of social dialogue and discussion of the group's strategy for 2014-2015.

In his welcoming address, **Andrzej Adamczyk**, member of the European Economic and Social Committee, noted a completely different situation the Eastern Partnership was going through after the dramatic events in Ukraine, calling for new policy approaches on behalf of the European Union.

During the presentations session, **Alain Pelce**, Senior Specialist on International Labour Standards at the IOM's Moscow office, elaborated on the IOM's notion of social dialogue and outlined the indispensable conditions for a functional social dialogue. In IOM's terminology, social dialogue is a dialogue with or between trade unions and associations and decision-makers (social partners). Two models that are different in their scope and methods were mentioned: tri-partite consultation and bi-partite negotiation, the latter conducted with the aim of forging agreements binding on all parties. He noted the widespread confusion between these two models in the EaP countries, leading to deficiencies of the social dialogue. Pelce also outlined three conditions indispensable for a functional social dialogue, such as genuine representativeness of the civil society organisations, strong capacity, including proper resourcing and staffing of organisations to carry out their functions and – institutional framework to foster dialogue. Most of the IOM's activities in the region are focusing on the capacity-building of CSOs not only in terms of their internal organisation, but also by enabling them to provide new services and benefit from new memberships.

Madlen Serban, Director of the European Training Foundation, briefed the participants on the ETF's activities in the area of human capital development, with a focus on vocational education and training of civil society organisations representatives. Citizens were named as the ultimate beneficiaries of trainings received by CSOs. In the area of vocational training, the ETF eventually targets the governments using the multi-level

governance approach and creating the multi-level partnerships. The approach rests on the assumption that governance is allocated at different levels, including national, regional, local and sectoral, and it is essential to engage multiple partners at all the levels of governance. The ETF's activities are primarily focused on creating learning opportunities for practicing the dialogue between multiple actors, identification of matching and anticipated skills, fostering institutionalisation of the dialogue in all elements of the multi-level governance. Skills achieved by citizens were mentioned as the intended outcome of the training actions. With regard to the EaP region, Serban pointed to a difficulty in identifying genuine CSOs actors representative of their constituencies. The danger of governments offering social responsibilities to employers without actually empowering them was also discussed.

Kristina Krupaviciene, Secretary General of the Lithuanian Trade Union "Solidarumas", brought insights into the cooperation in the area of social dialogue in Lithuania. Apart from a functional tri-partite council, territorial tri-partite commissions, including trade unions, employers and government representatives, were set up. The Lithuanian Commission for Labour Protection follows the deviations in all areas of employment and has at its courts to adjudicate issues between employers and employees. Separate committees to deal with specific issues, e.g. women's committee to deal with women's right in workplace.

Vivian Konnari, Eastern Partnership Desk Officer at European External Action Service, provided an update on the EU's policy approach to the EaP countries in the changing geopolitical circumstances. Association Agreements with Georgia and Moldova are scheduled to be signed by the end of August 2014, negotiations on the Association Agreement with Azerbaijan are advancing. Preliminary reflection is underway on the future of EU-Armenia relations. Negotiations on visa facilitation and readmission agreements have been launched with Belarusian authorities, and possibility of small steps in advancing the EU's relations with Belarus is explored, advancement on the bilateral track depending on the release of political prisoners. Further measures to apply the EaP region include increasing public diplomacy efforts, including investing in visibility and public messaging both in partner countries and member states, addressing the EaP countries vulnerabilities and intensifying dialogue on the EaP with Russia.

Monica Bucurenciu, Programme Manager in charge of Regional Programmes for the Neighbourhood East at DG DEVCO, presented the available EU instruments for financing civil society activities in the area of social dialogue, both regional and global. The recently launched call for proposals under the Neighbourhood Civil Society Facility has strengthening of the social dialogue structures as one of its concrete objectives. For the programming period 2014-2020, empowerment of the civil society organisations as a vector of reform was announced as a priority, with a separate budget. Ms. Bucurenciu also mentioned the two global instruments available for financing the civil society activities. Civil Society Actors – Local Authorities (CSO-LA, previously NSA-LA) puts focus on actions at country level seeking to enhance contribution of CSOs and local authorities to governance, reinforcement of regional and global CSO networks. The



European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights was brought up as another opportunity to support the civil society activities in unstable political environments.

Minutes produced by:

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