

UKRAINIAN NATIONAL PLATFORM ANNUAL REPORT

The main focus of the UNP was to defend democratic values and promote European reforms. In particular, the UNP, including its leaders and member NGOs were in the core of the Euromaidan movement, which started in November 2014 to defend the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement (AA) subsequent to President Yanukovich's refusal to sign the agreement, as initially planned, at the EaP Vilnius summit on November 29-30. Currently, after the signing of the AA and its provisional implementation, the UNP is working to ensure proper implementation of AA and related reforms. This report points out core highlights in approaching the Association Agreement and working with its core agents in Ukraine.

LONG COMMITMENT TO THE ASSOCIATION AGREEMENT

On November 19, 2013, in contrast to previously announced commitments, the Ukrainian government decided to postpone the signature of the AA. It was done rapidly, without any consultation with civil society and political parties. That decision was negatively received by civil society, which initiated protest rallies. The Ukrainian National Platform was among the first actors involved in this action.

On November 29-30, the National Platform, including entire leadership, initiated the rally in Vilnius, near the Summit venue. Following the UNP initiative, Ukrainian and EU civil society leaders took part in the "Civil Society Signature" procedure under the Association Agreement. On the side of Ukraine, the AA was "signed" by Oleksandr Sushko, NP Facilitator, and on the side of the EU, by Krzysztof Bobinski, Co-Chair of the EaP CSF. Many other civil society activists also put their signatures under the symbolic "Association Agreement".

EUROMAIDAN ACTIVISM

The government remained unresponsive in the face of popular demands to sign the Association Agreement, and starting from 21 November 2013, Euromaidan evolved as a mass public protest movement. The UNP EaP CSF members took active part in peaceful initiatives at Euromaidan and beyond, managing volunteers, providing logistics and opening public platforms to develop systemic reforms for Ukraine. To find out more about Euromaidan developments, read the January-May digest by the EaP UNP.

COMPREHENSIVE REFORM AGENDA FOR THE EU INTEGRATION

Euromaidan and further political developments helped the UNP concentrate and unite around various reforms. A good overview of the reform agenda can be found in the Reanimation Reforms Package, which is a legislative initiative of about 150 experts from various civil society organisations, think tanks and business structures. The experts work on crucial legal reforms in 13 spheres: judicial and prosecution reform, law enforcement, anti-corruption measures, electoral law, administrative reform, decentralisation and regional development, tax reform, deregulation, educational reform, pensions and social security, health policy, land reform and media freedom. So far, the Reanimation Reforms Package has proposed drafts of 17 laws that were supported by the Ukrainian Parliament. In addition, "platforms of reforms" were formed by groups of people's deputies in the Ukrainian Parliament and the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine. Among other reforms, a new more comprehensive reform agenda has been brought about by UNP of the EaP CSF, which advocated for more transparency and higher professional standards. More information about the initiative is available on Facebook and on the Internet (in Ukrainian). The most recent vision of the reform agenda can be found here.

UNP EAP CSF AND FAIR ELECTORAL PROCESS IN 2014

UNP EaP CSF member OPORA was highly active in monitoring the most complicated elections in the history of Ukraine, Presidential and Parliamentary elections, respectively, 25 May, 2014, and 26 October, 2014. The elections, performed in a state of war; were “held in correspondence with legislation and democratic standards. The result of the vote count is fair, and no violations which could have influenced the final election result were detected. All candidates were provided with equal opportunities. However, the campaigning was complicated in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts and, therefore, it is difficult to claim that they were absolutely free. Therefore, we prefer to say that campaign opportunities were quite equal.” The report from OPORA can be found at the initiative’s site.

VISA LIBERALISATION REFORMS

The EaP UNP WG1 Visa Sub-group has been active in bringing about the reform agenda for visa liberalisation in Ukraine. In particular, transition to the second phase of the VLAP is challenged by war in the East of Ukraine and annexed Crimea, which keeps the EU states concerned and rigid to liberalise the visa regime. The Visa sub-group in Ukraine has been particularly outspoken and active in advocacy while the ‘second chance’ for visa liberalisation for Ukraine has been constantly challenged by the problem of the ‘internally displaced’ from the war in the East of Ukraine.

MEASURES TO GUARANTEE INFORMATION SECURITY

While orientation on the Association Agreement has positively influenced media freedom in Ukraine, information security concerns have grown due to military aggression and Russian propaganda. The Media sub-group has proposed to create a special information security unit at the National Security and Defence Council and to develop a comprehensive communication strategy for the Russian-speaking regions of Ukraine. Besides, the sub-group has been advocating against Russian media products (TV-series) and has been constantly monitoring the Ukrainian and Russian media to detect fake news. At the same time, members of WG2 have been producing a digest of ‘Information resistance’ to provide analytical materials to counteract Russia’s information aggression.

PRIORITY ON TRANSPARENCY IN PARTY POLITICS AND FINANCE

The core challenge to the political system of Ukraine after Euromaidan was to make the political process more transparent and accountable. As an achievable goal, the EaP UNP anti-corruption subgroup chose to monitor and advocate for more transparent party finance. The Centre for Political Studies and Analysis, as well as their partners at the Reanimation Reform Package (ex., Centre.UA) managed to achieve a greater amount of financial reports published by people’s deputies during the latest Parliamentary campaign. Among other priorities, anti-corruption measures included the following:

- Strengthening virtue and accountability in public sector.
- Limiting influence of private capital on politics.
- Destroying state monopoly on information and to guarantee access to publicly important information.
- Reducing corruption risks in public finance and public procurement by ensuring their transparency and competitiveness.
- Creating an independent office to prosecute corruption offences.
- Strengthening opportunities for detecting and criminally prosecuting corruption offences.

LOBBYING OF SOCIAL PROTECTION IN REFORM PROCESS

A package of amendments to Ukrainian social policy was submitted to the Ministry of Social Policy and Social Services by WG 5. This package includes amendments to the following documents: the Budget Code of Ukraine, Laws of Ukraine “On Social Services”, “On Social Work with Families, Children and Youth”, “On Local State Administrations”, “On Local Self-Government”, “On Local Administrations”, “On Self-Organization”. The comprehensive package of legislative amendments was developed according to the suggestions of non-governmental and charitable organizations at meetings and events held by Coordination Expert Council at the Center for Advanced Social Research during the last six months (December 2012-June 2013). The main purpose of these meetings was to develop a common vision among NGOs as to the ultimate goal in reforming the social services system by 2016. The proposals presented in the package were further advocated in 2014, as the reform process during the war and economic crisis may decrease attention to social protection. WG5 insisted on better social dialogue and closer cooperation with the EESC with regard to the establishment of the EU-UA Civil Society Platform.



DEVELOPMENT OF INSTITUTIONS ENVISAGED BY THE ASSOCIATION AGREEMENT: EU-UA CIVIL SOCIETY PLATFORM

The UNP EaP CSF has taken up leadership in creating the EU-Ukraine Civil Society Platform that has been proposed in Articles 469 and 470 of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement. In particular, article 469 of the Association Agreement establishes a Civil Society Platform to manage bilateral consultations between Ukrainian civil society and the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) on the European side. However, the Agreement does not suggest any precise formula to determine the structure and composition of the Platform. Moreover, it passes to the Platform the responsibilities to define its own agenda and rules of procedure, which is now a point of debate with the European Economic and Social Committee. In perspective, the Civil Society Platform will be 'the forum... to meet and exchange views' on the implementation of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement to the EU and its civil society partners in Ukraine. The Platform should become a powerful mechanism for Ukrainian civil society and the first mechanism of this kind proposed solely to a civil society of a state. The UNP has proposed its own conception of the Platform which was presented to the EaP CSF in April and which called to combine the EaP UNP and the CSP. To read the Concept Note, follow the link.

Further efforts to bring together employers, trade unions and NGOs resulted in the establishment of a joint Initiative Group which prepared rules for the Constituent Assembly of the EU-Ukraine Civil Society Platform, which was established on 7 November 2014. 15 members of the Ukrainian side were elected freely and fairly, and the Ukrainian side continues consultations with the EESC the CSP format. Find public press-release here.

Traditionally, the EaP CSF UNP has held the EU Integration School, a EaP media-seminar and school for activists to inform about the Eastern Partnership and modernization agenda.

Tasks to accomplish in 2014:

- To effectively lobby ecological laws in the newly elected Parliament, as the current coalition agreement does not contain any norms in this respect. To balance the ecological and energy lobbies, reconcile the two groups for more consistent pro-European Cooperation
- To intensify work of the WG2 to properly prepare Ukraine to enter the DCFTA in January 2016
- To strike a balance between WG1 and other groups, as the strongest NGOs in WG1 lead reform proposals UNP and frequently propose to head the UNP at the expense of the representation of other groups.
- To improve visibility of WG4, as diversity in the group does not result in productivity. To strengthen policy focus (cultural policy), which may improve coordination.

