

## Steering Committee Meeting 26 May 2020, Online

### Session 1 (10:30-12:45)

#### **Attending:**

**SC members:** Zaur Akbar, Olga Chyzova, Ina Coseru (Co-Chair), Mikayel Hovhannisyan, Shahla Ismayil, Maksym Koriavets, Natia Kuprashvili, Nikolai Kvantaliani, Tatiana Marian, Sofia Strive (Co-Chair), Yurii Vdovenko

**Absent:** Lousineh Hakobyan, Ion Manole

**Secretariat:** Juulia Baer-Bader, Billie Bell, Iustina Haroianu, Moritz Höpner, Tania Marocchi, Francesca Nista, Vera Rihackova Pachta, Laura Ponikelska, Alexandra Sabou, Natalia Yerashevich

#### **Opening remarks**

Sofia Strive (Co-Chair) welcomed SC and Secretariat members to the meeting, remarking upon the way in which everyone has had to adapt to new ways of meeting and working online.

Natalia Yerashevich (Director) echoed the Co-Chair's words, and updated SC members on the new working arrangements of the Secretariat, as well as the personnel changes which have occurred since the last meeting.

#### **Updates from NPs, WGs, and the Secretariat**

##### Armenia:

The state of emergency has been extended. May 25 marked the highest point of the infected people and largest number of deaths (6 people). The government recently announced that individual responsibility is very important. On the other hand, cafes etc. are still open.

Processes related to the constitutional reform have been postponed, and dialogue between civil society and government have become more difficult due to the COVID-19 situation. Some online dialogue is taking place. There are attempts of the former regime to use the current situation against the government.

##### Azerbaijan:

The underfunded civil society has difficulty in switching on online work. The findings of the NP's needs assessment will be available in 6 weeks. The database is being updated and a good working framework is being set up. Currently, the lockdown has become less strict. From next week on, it will probably be even more relaxed. There were arrests of political activists and critics recently. The NP wants to respond to this, but the statement is not yet supported by all the members.

#### Belarus:

The government did not impose any emergency measures related to COVID-19. There are more than 30.000 confirmed cases. Death toll is less than 200 cases officially. Also, no financial instrument was put in place to support SMEs. The presidential elections are supposed to take place on 9th August with many candidates running for office.

Ecology concerns: Belarus wants to launch a nuclear plant this year. However, there are more than 100 cases of Covid-19 in the nuclear power plant. A postponement of the launch was demanded.

University students have to continue to go to classes. There are cases of violation of students' rights (some were expelled from their dormitories). In addition, people who are trying to disclose the real numbers of infected people or death toll from COVID-19 are punished and arrested.

NP prepared a two-pager on COVID19. The NP is trying to organise online activities to support member organisations.

#### Georgia:

The number of infected people in Georgia is relatively low. There are more than 700 confirmed cases, the fatal outcome is 12 and more than 500 have recovered. The state of emergency was lifted, but meetings of more than ten people are still prohibited. It is election year, however the opposition has limited possibilities to organise meetings and the pre-election campaign. The NP continues its work online. WG1 members continue to work on the constitutional reform.

#### Moldova:

The state of emergency ended on 15th May. Restaurants, bars and hotels open from 15th June. International transport resumes from 1st June. More than 7000 infected and 260 deaths.

For the moment, 52 MPs remain in the coalition between Socialists and Democrats, but members of the Democratic Party are leaving. Only 2 MPs from the Democratic Party need to leave for new elections to be necessary.

Presidential elections are fixed for the end of November. If early elections are announced, the government might be merging the two elections (early elections with the presidential elections).

The NP will appoint a new facilitator and new WG coordinators in June.

### Ukraine:

There are about 22.000 infected people; 300,000 test have been made. The airports should open again from 15th June. The Ukraine ambassador to the EU has published an article about Ukrainian participation in the Eastern Partnership outlining the priorities for Ukraine including the sectoral integration.

### Secretariat update:

PrepareEaP4Health campaign and webpage was launched dedicated to COVID pandemic and its effects in the EaP. The page receives a lot of attention from the stake-holders. Also, there is a new tracking tool there on the foreign aid allocated to EaP countries. There is a section on the civil society actions to mitigate the effects of COVID19.

In response to our reaction to the EU communication to the future of the EaP, we have received a number of positive feedback from MEPs and EU MSs.

We conducted a consultation with members on COVID related difficulties to civil society and restrictions of freedoms based on which several briefing papers will be developed.

Upcoming: online WG meeting starting June, finalising project evaluation and development of the new project, current project adjustment due to COVID, planning for the youth conference and Annual Assembly.

### **Project adjustments due to COVID-19**

Natalia Yerashevich presented the results of decisions taken by the Task Force:

- putting to vote of the delegates the extension of the SC mandate until the next AA or whenever elections are possible (whatever earliest);
- putting to vote of the delegates the extension of the current strategy until the end of 2021;
- requesting the EC for no-cost extension of the project for 2 months until the end of Feb 2021;
- producing policy papers on the topics of education, agriculture, and economic support.

The SC decided to increase the number of policy papers to five (one per each WG) and let WGs decide on the topics. The budget equally split between 5 policy papers is allocated from a part of the initial budget allocated for the WG meetings; money will be disbursed only after an addendum to the project is signed by the EC. The focus of each paper will be COVID-19 effects on EaP, covering different topics per WGs.

These papers will be elaborated by hired experts. The hired team of experts will be in charge of coordinating the entire process of producing policy papers starting from elaborating under which angle a specific topic will be developed, the key team, how the EaP CSF members input will be incorporated and how the quality of the paper and proper editing will be ensured. The Secretariat

with the task force, possibly with involvement of external experts will draft the terms of reference. The TOR should include the structure of the papers enabling a broader common vision behind all 5 policy papers that will be produced under one umbrella. The input of the EaP CSF members should be collected and draft papers should be consulted by the EaP CSF members. Each paper should cover all the EaP countries and a general comparisons with the EU. The primary target audience of the papers are EaP governments and EU decision-makers; secondary - civil society, academia and broader audience. A common mechanism on how to identify and select topics in each WG will be proposed by the task force and Secretariat. There is no need for adopting one method for the choice of the topic, but rather establishing broad requirements to the proposed topics.

To avoid the conflict of interest SC members will not be able to apply as part of the experts teams. The selection commission for the expert teams will include in equal numbers SC members, Secretariat and external experts.

A task force for discussing further matters related to policy papers is created and includes Zaur Akbar, Nikolai Kvantaliani, Mikayel Hovhannisyan, Tatiana Marian, Maksym Koriavets, Shahla Ismayil, Ina Coseru, Sofia Strive, Olga Chyzova.

### **Discussion on modalities of the Annual Assembly**

The EC is ready to provide half of the funding for AA, if we now reprogramme some funds for COVID-related activities and the sanitary situation will allow holding the in-person event, which is however hardly likely. The two formats presented by the Secretariat for the AA are 1) a hybrid format, with some offline meetings within each country or countries combined with online sessions; 2) a fully online meeting.

August will be the latest term to decide in what format the AA will take place. The SC will reassess the situation in July. The Secretariat can already start working on the planning for option 2.

A task force for organising AA is established, and it includes Nikolai Kvantaliani, Sofia Strive, Shahla Ismayil, Ina Coseru, Zaur Akbar, Mikayel Hovhannisyan.

### **Session 2 (13:30-15:30)**

#### **Attending:**

**SC members:**Zaur Akbar, Olga Chyzova, Ina Coseru (Co-Chair), Lousineh Hakobyan, Mikayel Hovhannisyan, Shahla Ismayil, Maksym Koriavets, Natia Kuprashvili, Nikolai Kvantaliani, Tatiana Marian, Sofia Strive (Co-Chair), Yurii Vdovenko

**Absent:** Ion Manole

**Attending from the Secretariat:** Juulia Baer-Bader, Billie Bell, Vera Rihackova Pachta, Natalia Yerashevich

### **Re-programming funds from AA budget**

The Director of the Secretariat has presented options for reprogramming for the consideration of the SC. The options included: 1. capacity building along the lines of new EaP priorities including health and 2. regranting on COVID19 focusing on helping vulnerable populations. Reprogrammed funds from AA and moving other meetings and events online can result in approx. 300.000€.

After the consideration of a number of options, it was agreed that the money could be allocated to the National Platforms for COVID-related activities. The funds would have to be spent by the NP Secretariats and could not be re-granted to the projects of NP organisations to avoid regranting cascade. In order to explore this option further, a deadline of 8 June was set for NPs to indicate if they have the capacity to absorb the funds and on what activities they would spend it. Some NPs expressed doubts about their capacity to use extra funding.

### **Procedure for developing the new EaP CSF project for 2021-2023**

With the current EaP CSF project coming to an end later this year, and undergoing external evaluation, the SC was informed that it should decide on the procedure for developing the new project for the 2021-2023 period.

Taking into account the results of the project evaluation and the guidance issued by the European Commission following the evaluation, the SC will meet in late June or early July for an externally facilitated discussion on the strategic priorities for the next 3 years and the project's priorities and activities from 2021. Surveys of the members will be organised at this stage if needed. A Project Task Force and the Secretariat will develop the ideas further based on which the Secretariat can elaborate the details of the new project.

Members volunteering to participate in the Project Task Force are: Zaur Akbar, Ina Coseru, Lousineh Hakobyan, Shahla Ismayil, Nikolai Kvantaliani, Tatiana Marian, and Sofia Strive.

### **Updating the *Moniteur Belge***

The Director informed the SC that Forum's entry in the *Moniteur Belge* needs updating. The first change would be to include the new National Facilitators from Azerbaijan and Moldova. The second change would be to designate the Director of the Secretariat as the legal representative of the EaP CSF, in line with Article VI of the Forum's Statute.

A recorded vote was held on whether to approve Natalia Yerashevich as the legal representative of the Forum in the *Moniteur Belge* until she resigns or the SC decides to appoint a different legal representative. The votes were as follows:

Votes in favour: Zaur Akbar, Ina Coseru, Lousineh Hakobyan, Shahla Ismayil, Maksym Koriavets, Nikolai Kvantaliani, Tatiana Marian, Sofia Strive, Yurii Vdovenko

Votes against: 0

Abstentions: 0

### **Session 3 Meeting with stakeholders, 14:30-16:30, 28 May 2020**

The SC held a meeting with a number of stakeholders from DG NEAR led by Vassilis Maragos and EU Delegations that was chaired by Co-Chair Sofia Strive. After the introductory words from Sofia Strive and Vassilis Maragos who focused on the upcoming high-level meetings, the EU COVID support to the EaP and how the EaP policy will be reshaped, SC members provided messages from each country on the current challenges faced by the civil society, and discussed broader reservations about the future of the EaP policy.

As a result of the meeting the SC decided about drafting of the speech for the Foreign Ministers meeting and organising another meeting with stakeholders that will focus on a particular country or a thematic area. It decided to contribute to the elaboration of the new deliverables as soon as the process and timeline from the EU institutions become clearer. The internal discussion in this regard can already happen during WG meeting or separately organised sessions.

#### **Next SC meeting**

The next SC meeting will take place online following the EaP Leaders meeting in July.

Adopted on June 8, 2020