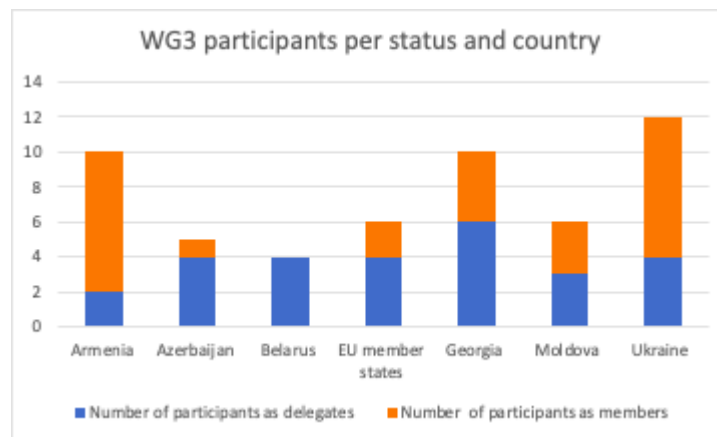


Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum Working Group 3

Online Meeting, 7-10 July 2020

Meeting Report

This year, EaP CSF Working Group 3 met online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Five online sessions were organised and took place between July 7 and 10, covering an introduction to the Forum for new delegates, three policy debates on transport, energy and environment within the European Green Deal and a meeting with EU stakeholders to discuss policy developments and priorities in the areas of expertise of WG3. The online policy debates and the meeting with EU experts were open to all WG3 members and delegates. Out of 51 attendees, 25 were current delegates and 26 were members. The chart below shows the distribution of these attendees between the 6 EaP countries and EU member states.



Meet & Greet Session

Tuesday 7 July, 09:30-11:30

Power Point Presentation [here](#).

The Meet&Greet session started with opening remarks delivered by WG3 Coordinators, Ina Coseru and Ana Otilia Nutu. Participants were then engaged in a short round of presentations, followed by an icebreaker. During the **icebreaker** – which consisted of two questions on the difficulties faced during the quarantine and on the opportunities of working from home – participants shared their perspective, hopes and predictions for the post-COVID-19 world. The results can be seen in the charts below.



Next, the EaP CSF Secretariat delivered an **introduction about the work, structure and main advocacy activities of the Forum**. The full PowerPoint slides can be accessed [here](#).

The session continued with a discussion around the **topic of the policy paper** that WG3 will develop on the consequences of COVID-19 on its area of expertise. WG3 coordinators presented the results of the preliminary questionnaire proposed to delegates in order to define the main topic covered in the paper. A total of 12 proposals was received, but only four were COVID-19 related. Among these proposals, three were centred around waste and waste management in the post-pandemic world. After a brief discussion, the participants agreed to produce two papers focusing on **waste and water management and transition to circular economy** and **COVID19 effects on transport** respectively.

The discussion continued with a round of **country updates**, shared by WG3 national coordinators, who presented a state of play of the situation in the realms of environment, energy and transport in their respective countries. In a nutshell, in all the EaP countries, some environmental problems have been worsened by the pandemic (increased waste being the most prominent example) and are often being neglected by the governments, whose attention is concentrated on gathering resources for the COVID-19 response. In **Armenia**, small

hydroelectric power plants have become a huge problem for river ecosystems and irrigation systems. Despite some reforms, the construction of small HPPs continues due to weak oversight and ineffective laws. In the transport sector, the development of the metro in Yerevan remains a pending issue, together with the general state of public transport which remains old and inefficient and over-reliant on small-sized minibuses. The pandemic highlighted further the inadequacies of the biking and pedestrian infrastructure. Although cycling gained momentum, authorities haven't taken a lead on this. There are no cycle paths and no plans to develop them, which greatly inhibits the more intensive development of this type of transport.

In **Azerbaijan**, problems with factual implementation of EIA and SEA persist. As this problem is common in the EaP region, it was suggested to create a civil society network for the monitoring of EIA works in EaP countries. The WG3 in the country is relatively small but is carrying out some activities, including sending a letter to the President and organising some meetings.

In **Belarus**, COVID-19 has put at the forefront civil society organisations and spontaneous citizens' groups, who organised numerous crowdfunding initiatives in support of the medical system. The situation for civil society organisations remains anyways difficult. In August, a new decree will come into force providing for expanding the definition of 'foreign gratuitous aid'. This term is currently used to define funds and goods received from foreign organisations, and the new decree adds to the definition *services, work, or goods bought with the help of foreign gratuitous aid*. It's not yet clear how this will affect the domain of environmental protection. The Astravets Nuclear Power Plant is scheduled to launch in August.

In **Georgia**, energy security is getting worse. There's a certain opposition to environmental issues, and dialogue with authorities on these subjects is tense. The Ministry of Economy lacks the necessary capacity to carry out reforms and allocated resources are inadequate. The work on the National Climate Action plan was completed and the draft is now under discussion. Current objectives include raising the capacity of civil society and the quality of dialogue with the government. Corruption in the environment, transport and energy sectors was signalled as a topic WG3 should explore further.

In **Moldova**, WG3 is focusing on several challenges: (1) the protection of Dniester river currently threatened by HPPs in Ukraine, a leftover of the soviet past; (2) COVID-19 induced environmental risks, such as increased waste and challenges with waste management; (3) political pressure from the government and oligarchs to use a strategic reserve of drinking water for irrigation; (4) ongoing illegal lodging and forest cutting, with the government taking no effective measures.

In **Ukraine**, problems are registered at the level of institutional capacity. CSOs are concerned about the government's abandonment of its environmental priorities after the liquidation of the independent Ministry of Ecology in September 2019. After public criticism, in May 2020, the government re-established a Ministry of Environmental Protection and Natural Resources, now in the process of formation. The draft laws on Waste, on Environmental Control, on Emerald Network and others remain in Parliament. Governmental discussions on the European Green

Deal are conducted exclusively in the field of climate policy and need a more holistic and cross-sectoral approach. In the energy sector, problems persist with RES development due to the government's unilateral decision to reduce the "green tariff". For what concerns transport, the draft law "on inland water transport" supported by the European Commission raises significant public objections. The level of attention is high on possible developments regarding the E40 waterway, passing through Belarus and Poland, and strongly opposed by environmental and civil society groups in all countries involved. The latest activities of WG3 in Ukraine include an [open appeal](#) of pro-European platforms to prioritize environmental issues in public policy (11.05.2020) and an [appeal](#) on the draft law in the field of hunting and the fight against poaching (29.11.2020).

Transport policy session

Wednesday, 8 July 2020, 14:00-16:00

EaP CSF European Green Deal draft paper [here](#).

Moderator Eka Laliashvili started the session introducing the recommendations included in the transport section of the European Green Deal Paper. Participants were then invited to reflect on how COVID-19 related measures have affected transport and mobility. In several EaP countries the stop of public transport left many people without mobility options, as bicycle infrastructures tend to be absent or underdeveloped, particularly outside capitals. The disruption caused by COVID-19 should be used as an opportunity to redesign urban mobility in EaP countries' capitals and regions.

One of the key priorities identified across the region is the **redevelopment of regional transport links**. While on the one hand this means improving **connectivity**, through the creation of bilateral cross-border transport commissions and the extension of EU transportation corridors into the EaP countries, it also entails aiding the transport sector's transition to a less carbonised, more sustainable model, by encouraging a switch from cargo lorries to other modes of transport such as railways and by facilitating the rehabilitation of existing transportation networks rather than the creation of new ones. Ukrainian and Belarusian participants discussed CSOs opposition to the transborder waterway E40 which poses a real environmental threat.

At the local level, the integration of public transport systems was discussed as one of the main priorities, with efforts to streamline existing transport provision between different local authority areas going hand-in-hand with the need to develop **sustainable urban mobility plans** which facilitate the future development of cleaner and greener transport networks. SUMP's should be developed for both capital cities and regions and governmental and CSOs capacity should be strengthened to this end. Improving shared mobility, urban green systems, city and streets transformation focusing on citizens' needs, enlarging the space to pedestrians and cyclists, clean transport - must be a priority and technical expertise and funds for implementation are very much needed from EU

To achieve progress in the realm of **road safety**, priority should be given to the development of institutional capacity. Road safety lead agencies and road safety funds are not yet present in all countries and the work of the existing institutions should be improved. Trainings for local authorities and local engineers (e.g. on local ticketing or shared mobility for road users) are needed.

Policy debate: Environment within the European Green Deal

Thursday, 9 July 2020 09:30-11:30

EaP CSF European Green Deal draft paper [here](#).

The sub-group on environment discussed environmental priorities related to the European Green Deal. WG3 coordinator Ina Coseru started the session with a short introduction to the recommendations formulated in the European Green Deal draft paper. As 25% of the overall budget allocated to the EaP countries will be dedicated to so-called green initiatives, CSOs must develop a clear set of priorities. Participants agreed that strong and effective **environmental governance** should be corner stone of the European Green Deal implementation. National governments should strengthen and empower their environmental ministries and agencies along with the effective regional and local environmental management.

COVID-19 has worsened the already existing problem of pollution, waste management and waste prevention. Problems like radioactive waste, medical waste and air pollution must be tackled urgently but are difficult to address as institutional governance remains weak virtually across all EaP countries.

Problems persist also in the domain of **EIA and SEA**, either due to inadequate or faulty implementation (sometimes only one environmental aspect is taken into account or worse, the implementation of EIA and SEA is left to the companies in charge of infrastructure construction, who are in clear conflict of interest) or complete lack thereof. A suggestion was made to develop an EaP CSO monitoring group on EIA and SEA implementation in order to address this common problem. Participants also suggested to use more efficiently existing environmental bilateral institutions (bilateral commissions and councils) between EaP countries who share borders and between EaP countries and EU member states to support concrete projects. Attention was also drawn to the uncontrolled areas in the EaP and the necessity to monitor environmental pollution. The EU and the OSCE should support CSOs' efforts to improve and extend **environmental monitoring in uncontrolled areas** of the EaP countries. A bonus-malus system of import quotas based on legal requirements and regulations of the EU could be used to exclude some products (especially if coming from uncontrolled territories, where no standards apply) because environmental threats pose a risk to all neighboring countries.

While discussing the environmental recommendations of the European Green Deal draft paper, a point was made that too many of them are focused on measures that would affect the economic sector. In times of economic decline, the business sector will be less prone to adopt sustainable principles if these do not embed a clear economic advantage. Therefore, it was advised that EaP CSF recommendations on the European Green Deal should be revised to take this into account.

Asked to identify the priorities the EaP CSF WG3 should put forward as a group as part of its contribution to European Green Deal among a set of options discussed during the session, the majority of participants support (1) *strengthening waste management and wastewater treatment* and (2) *supporting better implementation of EIA and SEA, including in transboundary context*.

Last but not least, the group received a short introduction to the concept note of the upcoming Youth Conference 2020 which will be dedicated to Youth4Environment and will take place online on September 24-26. Members of WG3 are invited to contribute to the finalisation of the concept and to participate in the discussions surrounding the event.

Energy policy session

Thursday 9 July, 14:00-16:00

EaP CSF European Green Deal draft paper [here](#).

WG3 coordinator Ana Otilia Nutu started the session presenting the section on energy from the European Green Deal paper. The recommendations included in the paper cover two main areas. The first is aiding the **green energy transition** in the EaP region, with support for energy efficiency programmes at the local level, the establishment of multi-stakeholder dialogues and comprehensive energy plans at the national level, and efforts to enhance the use of renewable energy at the regional level among some of the key recommendations in that area. The second aspect relates to **strengthening energy connectivity** between the EaP countries and the EU. A number of important policy prescriptions emerged from the group's discussions, including additional efforts to support the implementation of existing legislation seeking to align national regulatory frameworks with the EU acquis, facilitating so-called 'green mortgages' to fund energy efficiency projects for homes, businesses and more, and utilising networks such as the Covenant of Mayors in order to share best practices and identify areas for potential collaboration. Based on participants' contributions throughout the session, a number of potential priority areas were identified. When put to a multiple-choice vote, the main priority was deemed to be *"Support diversified renewable energy sources"* (67%), followed by *"Energy efficiency in buildings"* (56%), with *"Enhance energy sector governance and build institutional capacity"* and *"Stability of legislation"* equally matched on 33%.

Stakeholder meeting

Friday, July 10, 09h30-11h30

During the stakeholder session, participants engaged in discussions with Marion Schiller-Probst, International Relations Officer at DG ENERGY and Anna Repullo Grau, Political Officer for Eastern Partnership at the EEAS.

Marion Schiller-Probst mentioned the importance of strengthening resilience as an overarching objective. From the EU perspective, the cooperation should focus on three main topics: the first focus should be on reducing external energy dependence of EaP countries, supporting the creation of interregional energy markets which will help sustainability, competitiveness and create jobs; the second focus should be the transition to sustainable energy systems, e.g. promotion of RES and making energy systems fit for the digital era; finally, the third aspect is the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. This new aspect has not been covered yet by the EU joint communication. In relation to the post-2020 activities, the EU will be focusing on

the continuation of the 2020 deliverables that have not been achieved and on the working of a new regional subnetwork to be endorsed at the energy panel that will take place in October in the form of a videoconference. This new sub-sectoral network (to be steered by Lithuania from the EU side and a EaP country to be identified) would have 3 objectives: identifying political, physical, legislative obstacles in the existing energy mix of partner countries and making recommendations which could help shape the EU assistance to overcome such obstacles; and implementing a pilot project in one of the EaP countries.

Anna Repullo Grau updated the participants on what was discussed during the leaders meeting on 18 June. She outlined that short-term priorities were shifted due to the pandemic and forces were put on putting together the substantial support package to the EaP region. She also mentioned that the Council has adopted conclusions on the future of the EaP on the 11th of May. The joint communication and the council conclusions say that the support of the Green transformation should be mainstreamed in all the other areas of work, from economy, to trade and the digital. Relating to the leaders' conference, Anna Repullo Grau underlined the support and commitment which the leaders have reaffirmed to the partner countries. Resilience is central to tackle novel challenges of our time, such as the green and digital transformation. The next ministerial meeting is expected to shape the new deliverables in the area of environment and climate change. EU stakeholders raised the necessity of having deliverables which are measurable. It is important to be able to measure the results and thus the success or failure of measures.