

10TH ANNUAL ASSEMBLY REPORT

Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum



DEAR EAP CSF FOLLOWERS,



The 10th Annual Assembly "Leading the Way Towards a Democratic European Future" has crowned the activities of the Forum in 2018, bringing together almost 300 civil society organisations, representatives of the EaP countries and the EU member states, and EU institutions.

In this summary, we would like to provide you with main results of our joint work over three days in Tbilisi.

We wish you a pleasant reading.

Yours,

EAP CSF

"The list of human rights violations and perpetrators developed by an independent committee should be public to have the 'naming and shaming' effect on potential perpetrators (...)"

Matthew Caruana Galizia



The Annual Assembly discussed how to further sustainable, democratic development of the EaP countries and ensure European Union's commitment to the Eastern Partnership policy. In various interactive formats, participants gained insight into the work of the Forum, developed new ideas and elaborated recommendations, as well as participated in discussions around the direction that the EaP, and EU, could take, inviting for self-reflection and reevaluation of the current context.

The current state of play in the EaP region, in areas as diverse as democracy,

rule of law, human rights, elections, as well as enabling environment for civil society were the central elements of the three-day event, giving special attention to the 100th anniversary of independence in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia and Ukraine.

Held at the Georgian Parliament, the panel on combatting corruption and human rights violations in the EU and EaP countries debated the introduction of the EU global sanctions for human rights violations, a topic recently discussed at the EU Council meeting. The civil society believes that adopting such a tool would be extremely useful to combat impunity.



"You are a voice against corruption, for transparency, for fundamental freedoms, for independent judiciary, for professional civil service and free and fair elections."

Johannes Hahn, Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement

The important role of the civil society in transformations of the societies and pushing the reforms forward was acknowledged by all the speakers of the event. The **Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia, Zohrab Mnatsakanyan** praised civil society as a key actor in the success of Armenia's Velvet Revolution, which has been one of the key moments for Armenia and the whole region this year.



Armenians took to the streets of Yerevan taking the future into their own hands. The mobilisation of youth and students has been especially important. This year the EaP CSF presented its first-ever Civil Society Award to **Davit Petrosyan, a youth activist** who was instrumental in organising student protest actions.



The changes in Armenia bring hope that the reform process will not only lead to a better future for Armenians, but also provide a model and example of peaceful change and reform for other members of the Eastern Partnership. The session “Elections in the EaP: what is at stake” identified a common problem in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine – the difficulty to introduce changes to the electoral systems that could prevent the ruling parties from taking strong majorities. Unequal pre-election environment is another common challenge for most of the EaP countries. Recent elections in Armenia has been the first free and fair elections in twenty years in the country.






Irakli Kobakhidze, Chairperson of the Georgian Parliament

“In the last few years, the voice of civil society organisations has been particularly strong and vibrant in Georgian politics, and it has even resonated worldwide. The meeting of representatives of prominent civil society organisations from Eastern Partnership countries is an important opportunity to strengthen societal foundations of our young democracies.”

However the civil society should start scrutinising the new Armenian government from the onset so that the democratic transition is secured. The countries easily backslide in the electoral processes. The well-conducted elections in Georgia in 2013 was put into contrast with the developments that followed.



“We see you, civil society, have a role in ensuring the accountability of the Eastern Partnership governments – and the EU, as well, you have a role to communicate to your citizens, and help us shape the future of the Eastern Partnership”

Lawrence Meredith, DG NEAR



For the third time, the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum presented its Pavel Sheremet Journalism Award. This year we had the honour to hand over our trophy to Moldovan **journalist, Natalia Morari**, who is under constant pressure from Moldova's ruling oligarch elite to tone down her coverage of misdoings in the country. Facing financial challenges and uncertain working conditions, underpinned by the need to regularly fundraise and subsist on grants, Morari does not give up and continues her work, exposing the misuse of power by the political elite in Moldova.

Working Group meetings allowed the opportunity to foster a productive relationship between the civil society, EaP governments and EU institutions. Together with several EU stakeholders, our delegates developed civil society recommendations to the EU, EaP and EU member states decision-makers. The EaP CSF' five WGs (WG 1 - "Democracy, Human Rights, Good Governance and Stability", WG 2 "Economic Integration & Convergence with EU Policies", WG 3 "Environment, climate change and energy security", WG 4 "Contacts between People" and WG 5 "Social & Labour Policies and Social Dialogue") follow the work of the thematic multilateral Platforms of the EaP, develop common projects and advocate on behalf of the civil society.



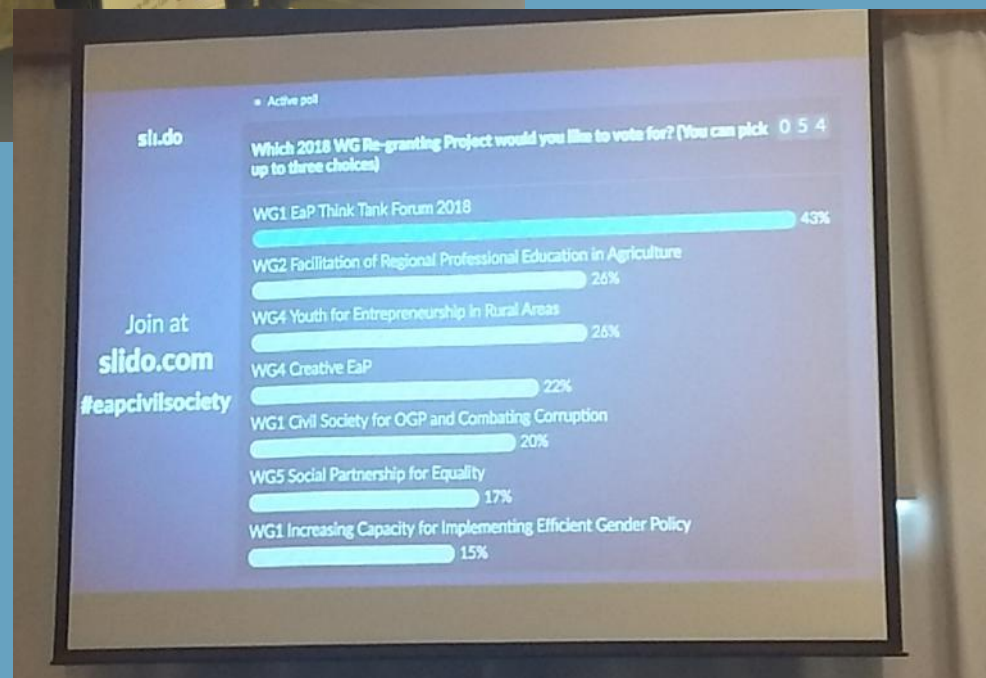
The important role of the civil society became one of the central elements of the welcome reception, which was hosted by **Mamuka Bakhtadze, Prime Minister of Georgia**. He underlined his commitment to deepen the cooperation with the civil society in his opening remarks. **Carl Hartzell, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to Georgia**, stressed the strong support from the EU side to the civil society, which is seen as an indispensable actor within the democratic dialogue in Georgia and other EaP countries.



100 Anniversary
100 Armenia
100 Azerbaijan
100 Belarus
100 Georgia
100 Ukraine



In light of 100th anniversary of independent Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia and Ukraine, the three-day event furthermore explored how these countries' historical experience had influenced their political trajectories. Reflexions on the centenary of independence of the EaP countries took place in various formats all over the event, including the public discussion and the photo gallery prepared by the National Platforms of the Forum.



For the first time, the delegates and guests had the opportunity to vote for the three best EaP CSF 2018 Re-granting projects that were presented within the virtual and real Gallery Walk. The 3 best-voted projects were the EaP Think Tank Forum 2018 – A New Security Agenda for EaP - The Regional Approach (WG1), Youth for Entrepreneurship in Rural Areas (WG4) and Facilitation of Regional Professional Education in Agriculture and Rural Development in EaP countries (WG2).

Aside from the discussions on the past and the future of the EaP region, we also devoted some sessions to internal matters of the Forum. In an interactive “World cafe” format, delegates were invited to participate in a kick-off session during which, they had a chance to familiarise themselves with the functioning of Forum, following the adoption of the internal reform, as well as its bodies and important projects including the EaP Index. The Steering Committee presented the proposal for the Code of Ethical Conduct to the Assembly, which was subsequently submitted for a vote and approved by the delegates. Moreover, the Assembly proceeded with elections of members of a newly created body, the Arbitration Committee.



The Annual Assembly also adopted its resolution marking the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 100th anniversary of the regaining of the independence of many countries from the region. Despite all successes, the resolution notes, the EaP region continues to face serious challenges in the observance of human rights and backsliding in the fields of media freedom, justice system and in the fight against corruption in some EaP countries. The Annual Assembly put an emphasis on the worsening situation in Moldova by adopting a special resolution voicing concerns for the upcoming pre-election period. Several other statements were adopted on the occasion of the Annual Assembly by the Steering Committee.



ANNUAL ASSEMBLY REPORT

10th Annual Assembly gathered together around 300 civil society representatives from six Eastern Partnership countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, as well as the European Union member states. More than 30 EU and EaP government officials, internationally-renowned commentators and speakers came together for this occasion. It was a pleasure for us to host this year's Annual Assembly in Tbilisi, Georgia and we are looking forward to meeting you next year.

ABOUT US

The Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF) is a unique multi-layered regional civil society platform aimed at promoting European integration, facilitating reforms and democratic transformations in the six Eastern Partnership countries - Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. Serving as the civil society and people-to-people dimension of the Eastern Partnership, the EaP CSF strives to strengthen civil society in the region, boost pluralism in public discourse and policy making by promoting participatory democracy and fundamental freedoms.

For more information, please visit the EaP CSF website at www.eap-csf.eu

