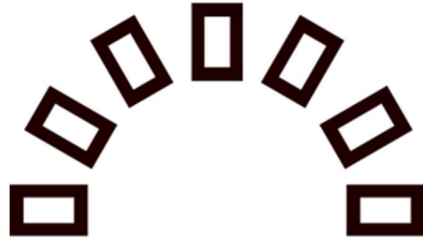


European Forum Annual Report 2020



European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity

Board

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Secretary General: Arjen Berkvens

Staff

Marina Ohanjanyan: Eastern Europe (left us 01-04)

Jaron Liplijn: MENA & News Service

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The impact of covid-19

For any international organisation the impact of covid-19 has been huge. We were unable to travel for the largest part of the year (March-December) and our last international meeting was on January 27th. In Brussels. At this meeting we presented our research paper: What's Left? Trends and Dynamics in Europe's East. We also said farewell to three very important people: Danijel Tadic (senior policy officer Western Balkans), Marina Ohanjanyan (senior policy officer Eastern Europe) and Nabila Sattar (international manager UK Labour.)

During the year we discovered that the News Service was the best activity to put our extra time and effort in. Time and energy that we could not put into training and seminars. We almost doubled our output and introduced a new way of working using digital tools. After each election or disruptive event we organised a digital meeting with our partners on the ground, relevant experts and our network. These activities were very much appreciated and we will continue with this also after the situation has normalised.

On October 9th. We organised an important European Forum council where we elected a new president: Björn von Sydow. Von Sydow is a political scientist, former speaker of the Riksdag (the Swedish parliament) and former Minister of Defence. He is a long standing member of the Swedish Social Democratic Party (SAP).

The work of the European Forum remains highly relevant. Outside and inside the European Union democracy, human rights and rule of law are under threat. We have to be resilient and inventive to counter these threats and regain the offensive. In cooperation with our partners we will develop a programme which will deal with the threats against our most important values. The European Forum will remain active to gather and disseminate crucial information, organise trainings to support activists in their work and cooperate with our political partners to promote our common values and principles.

European Forum Council Meeting – October 9th

On the 9th of October the European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity held its bi-annual Council meeting. Many EU partner organizations and partners from Eastern and South Eastern Europe joined this first every online Forum meeting. During the meeting, the new strategic plan was discussed and partners from the region debriefed the network on the political situation in their respective countries.

The meeting was opened by Vice-president Jan Marinus Wiersema who introduced the new President of the Forum, Björn von Sydow. Von Sydow is a political scientist, former speaker of the Riksdag (the Swedish parliament) and former Minister of Defence. He is a long standing member of the Swedish Social Democratic Party (SAP). Von Sydow said he is motivated to help shape the work of the Forum, even though the work is restricted because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

European Forum Secretary General Arjen Berkvens outlined the new strategic plan. Two main points stand out: the rise of illiberal trends and the work of the Forum during and after the pandemic. The Forum has traditionally focused on the EU neighbourhood. But the increase of illiberal tendencies in EU and EU candidate countries, which pose a threat to Social Democracy and democracy at large, has to be taken serious. That's why the Forum will set up a taskforce to come up with solutions and to help partners. Several partners stated that they are very happy with this focus on fighting illiberal trends in the EU. It was also mentioned that tackling fake news is more important than ever. That's why the Forum invests a lot in desk research and dissemination of information. Online platforms will be used to organize virtual meetings to discuss the political situation in partner countries. Also, the Forum will support Human Rights defenders, minority groups and activists with disabilities. There will be a continuing support for social democratic activists, women and youth.

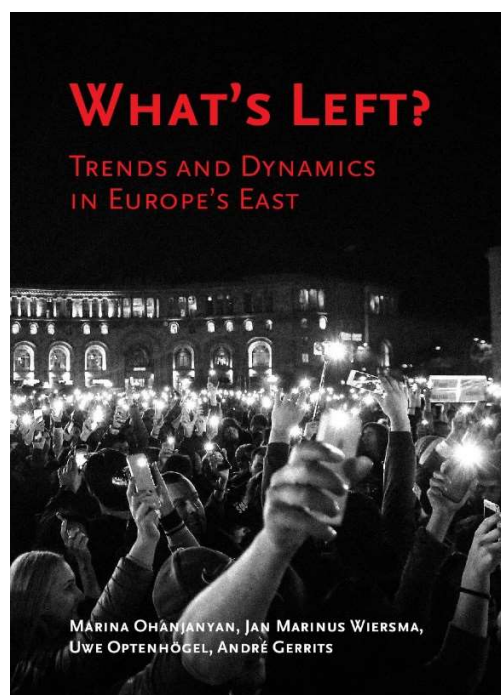
Research: What's Left? Trends and Dynamics in Europe's East

Partner: Party of European Socialists (PES)

In 2019 we continued our research project into Eastern Partnership countries, which began in 2018. The research can be seen as a follow-up to a study we conducted in 2012, into the state of social democracy in Eastern Europe. In 2018-2019 we revisited this question and region, by organising a series of study visits/fact-findings to the countries in Eastern Europe, to look into their transformation. To achieve this, we have organised fact-finding missions to five countries: Georgia and Moldova (2018), Armenia, Belarus and Ukraine (2019). The fact-finding missions are conducted by a delegation that consists of a core group of experts, with additional (changing) interested members of European social democratic parties and foundations. The findings of the missions were put into a publication, which was presented in January 2020. The project is supported by the Party of European Socialists (PES).

Activities

In 2019 we organized fact-finding missions to **Armenia** (28-29 March), **Belarus** (6-7 June) and **Ukraine** (6-8 November). During the visits we met with representatives of political parties, the civil society, independent experts and international organisations present on the ground. The focus of our research, and hence our meetings during the missions, was threefold: 1) To analyse the developments in each country pertaining to democracy, rule of law, corruption and other economic/financial influences on politics etc., 2) To analyse the geopolitical field that these countries are operating in, and look into the roles that EU, Russia and other major powers play in the region, and 3) To analyse specifically the situation surround social democratic/progressive parties and movements, looking into their development in recent years and the roles they have played in their countries' political processes. We brought our findings together in the publication "[What's Left: Trends and Dynamics in Europe's East](#)", which was presented on 27 January 2020 in Brussels.



Findings and recommendations

Among other things, we have concluded that political developments in the region, especially relating to the building of democracy and rule of law, have been far from linear in the past 30 years. The countries in question have seen periods of progress, but also stagnation, or even backsliding. Although in general progress can be perceived over the longer time-frame, we should accept that the process is a long-term one. We have also concluded that it is a mistake to consider the region as simply a playing field, or a sphere of influence, between major global powers like Russia and the EU. The countries in question have shown again and again that they are sovereign actors capable of making their own decisions on the course of their development.

Our recommendations for a new approach towards the region begin with diversification. The countries of the Eastern Partnership have gone in increasingly differing directions, making their own choices at every historical crossroads, and so it only makes sense to apply a more diversified approach to them, based on their individual situations regarding geopolitical conditions, but also internal political, social even demographic dimensions. It is also important to not only push for the creation of democratic institutions, but to make sure that democracy delivers. Ordinary citizens should be able to see a result in their own lives, in the form of functioning state institutions, but also functioning public services, socio-economic development etc. In terms of geopolitics, it is important to try and make the EU-EEU dichotomy more workable for the countries “in-between”. Perhaps more communication between the two major blocs could make the choice of either-or less binary. Finally, to European social democrats we recommend a new approach to existing and potential partners and sister-parties on the ground. We should be more rigid and strict when it comes to questions of ideology, but more creative and open-minded when it comes to the form and format. For instance, loose political movements that strongly espouses and fight for core social democratic values should get more of our attention, even if they are not well-organised (yet), while established, professional and well-organised – or even powerful - political parties that nevertheless exhibit questionable morals should not receive preferential treatment.

Southeast Europe

LGBTI in Western Balkans

Partner: UK Labour Party through Westminster Foundation funds



In collaboration with the UK Labour Party, the European Forum continued to implement a project to promote the rights of Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, Transgenders and Intersex people (LGBTI) in the Western Balkans in 2020. In the SEE region, many people have a traditional perspective on sexuality and the influence of religion is substantial. In 2015, the project partners, together with local foundations, started putting LGBTI topics on the agenda of local social democratic political parties. What started with conferences in Belgrade, London and Madrid (as part of the WorldPride) has grown into a project with ToT trainings for new LGBTI activists, Pride march fringe meetings and local trainings in the four partner countries: Bosnia Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia.

2020 was also a special and complicated year for the LGBTI project. In close consultation with all partners, we continuously looked at which activities we could physically carry out and where we were forced to switch to online due to Covid-19 measures. Fortunately, we were able to carry out a large part of the activities through this flexible approach.

The participating local foundations are: Center of Modern Skills (Serbia), Forum of Left Initiative (Bosnia Herzegovina), Progres Institute (North Macedonia) and Fund for Progressive Politics (Montenegro).



Activities 2020	8-9 April	Training of Trainers (ToT) (online)
	21 August	Fringe meeting Bosnia Herzegovina (online)
	15 September	Fringe meeting Serbia
	17-18 October	Training North Macedonia
	30-31 October	Training Montenegro
	14-15 December	Training Bosnia Herzegovina (online)

Middle East & North Africa

MENA Academy

Partner: Olof Palme International Center

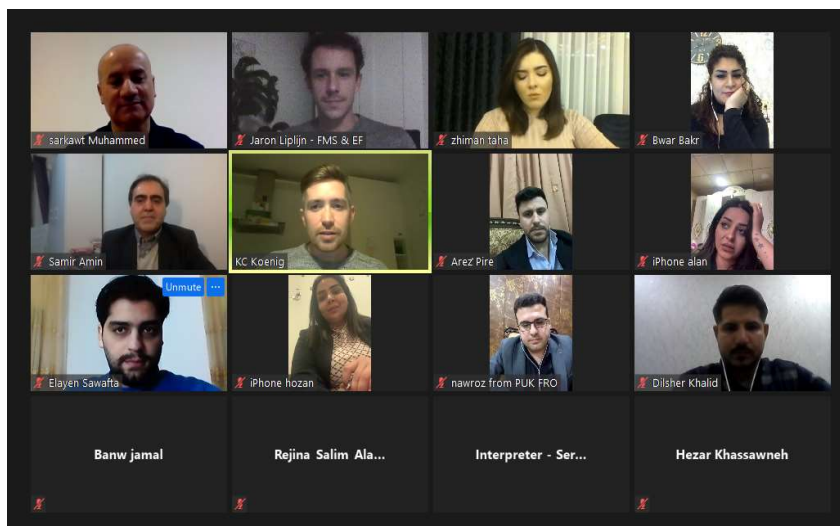
In cooperation with the Olof Palme International Center and the Foundation Max van der Stoel we have set up a training academy for young social democratic activists from the Middle East and North Africa. This academy brings together seven partners of OPC, FMS and the European Forum: Ujsario, Western Sahara; Ettakatol, Tunisia; Egyptian Social Democratic Party, Egypt; Jordanian Social Democratic Party, Jordan; Progressive Youth Organization, Lebanon; Fatah, Palestine; Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, Iraqi Kurdistan and People's Democratic Party (HDP), Turkey.

The aim of MENA Academy is to increase the confidence, knowledge and competences of young (female) activists, and by doing so, enable them to participate more actively in their respective parties and to rise the ranks of their party structures and gain formal positions in regional and /or national youth boards. With this project we also create an informal network of exchange for young politicians in the MENA region.

Four training activities are part of this two-year project. Three activities focus on campaign, communication, leadership, policy development and internal party democracy and the final activity is follow up and Training for Trainers (ToT) training.

Unfortunately, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, we were unable to organize physical activities as part of the MENA Academy in 2020. The first training of 2020 was planned from 12 to 15 March in Tunis, Tunisia, but we had to cancel last minute due to the outbreak of the pandemic.

In the months that followed, there was intensive contact with the OPC program manager and the partners about planning activities. There was the hope that in September 2020 we would be able to travel to Tunisia again, unfortunately the pandemic came back stronger after the summer, especially in the MENA region. Alternatively, we have organized three online sessions for alumni and for the already selected participants of the aforementioned Tunisia training. In 2021, we will initially continue to organize online activities.



Activities 2020	6 November	MENA Academy alumni online follow up
	8 December	MENA Academy online training 1
	15 December	MENA Academy online training 2

Future Leaders 2020

Partner: UK Labour Party through Westminster Foundation funds

This year we could not organize the yearly Future Leaders training because of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. The training was scheduled for April 2020 and selection started in February 2020, but we had to stop the preparation process due to inability to organize the training in person.

Eastern Europe

Summer Academy 2020

Partner: UK Labour Party through Westminster Foundation funds

This year we could not organize the yearly Future Leaders training because of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

Online Meetings

Bosnia-Herzegovina Local Elections

On November 20, the European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity held an internal online meeting for the network. The meeting was about the local elections in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Ifran Cengic, MP in the Federal Parliament and former SFP General Secretary gave a detailed analysis of the election results. Around 13 persons were present.

Moldovan Presidential elections

On November 19, we organized a meeting about the Moldovan presidential elections. These elections took place on the 1st of November and marked a remarkable shift. Maia Sandu won the election and became the first female president of Moldova. Ana Mihailov, programme coordinator at the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Moldova gave an analysis of these elections. Around 15 people from our network were present.

Georgian Parliamentary Elections

On November 6, we organized a meeting covering the parliamentary elections in Georgia. These elections took place on 31 October and 21 November under the new electoral code. Levan Tsutskiridze, executive director of the Eastern European Centre for Multiparty Democracy in Georgia, gave an analysis of the elections, state of democracy and the new electoral system. Around 13 people from our network were present.

Ukrainian Local Elections

On October 30, a meeting covering the results of the local elections in Ukraine took place. We had a discussion with Bohdan Ferens, Founder of the Social Democratic Platform Ukraine about the election, social democracy in Ukraine and what we can do to strengthen social democrats in Ukraine. Around 15 people visited these elections.

Meeting on the political situation in Serbia

On November 13th, the European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity organized a meeting to discuss the political and social-democratic situation in Serbia. We had a discussion with parties, foundations, PES, S&D, FEPS, and PA who are all involved in or committed to a democratic Serbia and to our sister parties. The discussion focused on the split in the Democratic Party. Thus, we concluded that there are no signs of a united opposition and that the June 2020 elections can be interpreted as a sign that Serbia is moving in the direction of a one-party state and a hybrid regime. This meeting has been the start of a series of meetings in which we work together with the FES in Serbia to bring the splintered social-democratic movement together with the aim of forming a strong democratic opposition that could be of relevance in the parliamentary elections in April 2020.

Follow-up meeting Serbia: Briefing by Knut Fleckenstein

On December 18, we held a follow-up meeting about Serbia. Knut visited Serbia and has met with four members of the social-democratic movement and with some members of civil society to understand their view on social democrats in Serbia. We conclude that the end goal of the mediation would be (re)unification of the social democratic forces in Serbia. A social democratic platform is needed where the different parties can cooperate. In 2021 we will continue with the dialogue and online discussion with all the parties and organizations that are involved in Serbia.

European Forum News Service

Partner: Olof Palme International Center

As in previous years, we have continued to provide people working in the field of democracy support relevant information about the political context of the countries we are active in. Due to covid-19 we were able to invest extra time in the News Service, because it was an activity that was not influenced by travel bans or restrictions on meetings. We were able to almost double our output. This project delivers high level and unique information through the use of different tools:

1. **Monitoring:** the staff of the European Forum does actual day-to-day monitoring of the political situation in our target countries. We do this by following international and local media sources, as well as regular contacts with our partners on the ground.
2. **Reporting short term:** on a day-to-day basis reporting on the developments in our target countries through our website, Facebook and twitter. We published 88 articles in 2020 (42 in 2019.)
3. **Reporting mid-term:** every two weeks we provide our network with a so-called Newsflash, which contains all relevant political news on our target countries. We published 23 Newsflashes.
4. **News alerts:** we provide our network with News Alerts – short memos/briefings - whenever something extraordinary happens in our target countries or with our partners in the target countries. 2020 was a very fruitful year. There were 26 alerts (12 in 2019.) We provided unique information.
5. **Country updates:** the staff of the European Forum publishes country updates on the website. These country updates are refreshed after collapses of governments, elections, revolutions or other fundamental political changes. In 2020 20 country updates were updated (11 in 2019.)

2020 Financial report

The European Forum is not a legal entity in itself. The Foundation Max van der Stoel is the legal entity under which the projects are carried out. With accountants is responsible for the annual FMS audit and this includes the check of the European Forum finances.

Income

SPD Germany	25.000
SAP Sweden	27.000
SDP Denmark	6.000
Labour Party Norway	6.000
SPOE Austria	6.000
Olof Palme International Center	32.634
PvdA Netherlands	6.000
Labour Party	8.227
Total	116.861

Expenditure projects (except salaries)

LGBTI Project (support Labour)	8.255
News Service* (support Olof Palm International Center)	4.217
Costs meeting in Brussels + farewell reception	5.542
Total	18.014

Salaries, rent, ICT, office costs **98.847**

Total expenditures

* The expenditures are mainly salaries. The other costs for the website and other technical costs are projected here.