

Annual Report

European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity

2022

Board

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Photo below: The Annual Meeting of the EFDS in Skopje, 2-4 December 2022



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Introduction

2022 was the year in which the European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity was finally able to resume most of its in-person activities, after the COVID-19 pandemic forced us to take the bulk of our projects to online platforms. However, it has also been the year of the brutal Russian invasion of Ukraine, changing the geopolitical reality on the European continent for the years to come, and with it the scope and priorities of the EFDS and partner organisations.

2022 saw our annual network meeting take place in Skopje, North Macedonia on 2-4 December. We met with many of our partners from the different countries we work with. During the meetings, we discussed the political situation in North Macedonia and other countries in the region. Special attention was paid to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the political implications attached to it. Expert analysis from Western Balkan partner organisations show that there are many lessons to learn still, especially regarding further developments in Ukraine and possible reconstruction of war-torn areas. During the network meeting, we also took the opportunity to say goodbye to our former Secretary General, Arjen Berkvens, and welcome Kido Koenig as his replacement.

Overall, we see that democracy is under pressure in a number of countries. The cost of living for many in Europe and beyond has become increasingly high by spiralling inflation. Meanwhile, large multinationals note record-high profits due to high prices of gas and oil. The values of social democracy are as important as ever to secure peoples' livelihoods and spur solidarity amongst each other to counter autocrats, who wish to use societal frustration for personal gain and political favouritism. Moreover, the lack of perspective in various EU accession procedures has not helped trust in democratic actors at all.

As autocrats and dictators seek to protect themselves through military force, large-scale repression or disinformation campaigns, many activists and dissidents still fight every day for social democratic values. Solidarity amongst our organisations will be highly important in the upcoming years, to spur the co-operation and solidarity between social democratic forces throughout Europe and beyond – supporting and protecting each other wherever necessary.

In short, this annual report describes the activities we have undertaken in 2022 with the support of partner organisations. This includes our news service, our training activities and special programs for those who remain politically underrepresented.

Regional training in the Western Balkans



The progress the countries in the Western Balkans have made over the last years when it comes to the protection of the rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) people is fragile, and support remains important. The European Forum, with the financial support of the Labour Party's Westminster Foundation for Democracy programme, has organised various activities in the Western Balkans in the framework of the project "Promoting inclusion and tackling inequalities in Western Balkans". This is a continuation of the project "Enhancing LGBTI Rights in South East Europe" that the European Forum has run in the Western Balkans since 2018. We include the activities of Q1 2023 in this annual report to give a complete overview of the running program.

The project builds the capacity of social-democratic parties in the region to formulate answers to the challenges faced by the LGBTI population in the region and advocate for LGBTI rights. The project also strengthens ties between politicians and civil society, as the activities created moments for interaction between social-democratic politicians and activists from civil society organisations or local movements, such as Queer Montenegro or "Ne davimo Beograd" (Don't Let Belgrade D(r)own).

In each project country (Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina, North-Macedonia and Serbia) a national capacity-building seminar was successfully organised to build the capacity, knowledge and skills of social-democrats to respond to the challenges faced by the LGBTI community. This includes increased skills in advocating for human rights, as well as increased knowledge about the various forms of discrimination LGBTI people face in education, healthcare, the labour market, and more. On top of the 4 national trainings, a regional seminar was successfully organised in Bar, Montenegro, for 24 participants from all project countries.

To raise awareness, a newsletter was created to inform social-democratic politicians and others about LGBTI rights and struggles in the region. Lastly, six podcasts were recorded. In each podcast, one guest is interviewed. The central topic of each podcast is the search for practical applications of social democratic values in the field of human rights and improvement of the position of the LGBTI population.

Activities 2022-2023

17 December 2022	National Seminar in Podgorica, Montenegro
4-5 February 2023	National seminar in Bitola, North Macedonia
4 th of March 2023	National Seminar in Vitez, Bosnia Herzegovina
11-12 February 2023	National Seminar in Belgrade, Serbia
24-26 February 2023	Regional Seminar, hosted in Bar, Montenegro

Regional training in the MENA



In collaboration with the Olof Palme International Center from Sweden we set up a training academy for the Middle East and North Africa, the MENA Academy. This academy brings together seven partners from OPC, EFDS and FMS: Ujsario, Western Sahara; Ettakatol, Tunisia; Jordanian Social Democratic Party, Jordan; Progressive Youth Organization, Lebanon; Fatah, Palestinian Territories; Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, Iraqi Kurdistan; and People's Democratic Party (HDP), Turkey.

The MENA Academy was focussed on improving political knowledge and skills of women and youth through trainings. Important modules of these activities included campaigning, communication, leadership, policy development and internal party democracy and in addition there were follow up activities with a Training for Trainers (ToT) training.

The MENA Academy was a four-year project, which started in 2019 and concluded in 2022. Initially, there were 4 activities were scheduled for 2022. However, due to the postponement of 2 trainings from 2021, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the total number was brought to 6. Having said that, towards the end of the year, it became clear that due to rising prices on all fronts internationally, we would not be able to complete all these activities and stay within the budget. Therefore, 5 activities were implemented in 2022.

Activities 2022

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|------------------|---|
| 13 – 16 January | MENA Academy in Hammamet, Tunisia |
| 13 – 16 January | MENA Academy Follow Up & ToT in Hammamet, Tunisia |
| 2 – 5 June | MENA Academy in Kurdistan, Iraq |
| 2 – 5 June | MENA Women Academy in Kurdistan, Iraq |
| 25 – 26 November | MENA Academy Follow Up & ToT in Amman, Jordan |

Network meetings in 2022

In 2022, we had several meetings focussed on the political situation in the region. One of the meetings was organized online and focussed on the elections in Serbia, that took place on April 3. This was a highly insightful meeting, giving more insight on the dynamics inside the combined Serbian opposition that challenged the incumbent, autocratic president, Aleksandar Vucic.

The Korčula School took place in Croatia, in August 2022. The “Korčula School” brings together women and men political leaders from centre left and social-democratic parties, experts, political activists and feminists, especially from South Eastern Europe to discuss gender equality issues.

On October 14th and 15th, the PES held it’s congress in Berlin. The European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity organized a fringe meeting with board members Björn von Sydow and Jan-Marinus Wiersma, and founder of the Ukrainian SD Platforma Bohdan Ferens as speakers, hosted by Secretary-General Arjen Berkvens. The topics of the panel were the fact finding mission to Moldova, the situation in Ukraine and the publication What’s Left and its relevance today.

Annual meeting of the EFDS – Skopje

From the 2nd until the 4th of December 2022, the Annual Meeting of the European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity took place in Skopje, North Macedonia. Representatives and politicians from social-democratic foundations, think tanks, and parties gathered in the Macedonian capital to discuss the political situation in the region, the perspective on EU membership, and gender equality.

It was fitting that the meeting took place in North Macedonia, a country that has made many strides in its democratic development. A social democratic and progressive government has calmed tensions since 2017, following the country’s sharp democratic decline in the preceding years.

In gender equality, too, it was pointed out by the Minister of Labor and Social Policy Jovana Trenchevska that North Macedonia stands out in the region, with a woman vice-chair of the social-democratic party and multiple women ministers in the government.

This meeting was supported financially by FEPS.

CEE Gender network meeting

Simultaneous with the Annual Meeting of the European Forum, the Central and Eastern European Network for Gender Issues (CEE Gender Network), which was established under the auspices of the European Forum, held its meeting. Macedonian Prime Minister Dimitar Kovačevski addressed the participants.

Other contributions came from Daša Šašić Šilović, chair of the CEE Gender Network, and former leader of the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia Radmila Šekerinska, and Tamara Tripic, former Member of Parliament in Serbia for the Democratic Party.

North Macedonia’s path to the EU

It became clear from the discussions at the meeting how much the country has done and the difficult concessions it has had to make on its path to European Union membership, the most poignant being the changing of its name in 2018. The Macedonian parliament approved a

constitutional amendment to change the country's name to North Macedonia, narrowly securing a two-thirds majority.

“Pressing the green button on the name change was the most difficult decision I’ve had to make in my life,” Pavle Bogoevski said about the decision at the event. “Being a politician means doing what is not popular, but what is right” said Macedonian Minister of Defence Slavjanka Petrovska about the name change.

The urgency at the meeting was clear. EU leaders must restore trust in the EU and take resolute actions toward the Western Balkan countries, giving them perspective on EU accession and breathing new life into the slow accession process.

Overview

20 April	Online meeting on Serbian elections
26 – 28 August	Korčula School Croatia
14 – 15 October	Fringe meeting PES congress, Berlin
2 – 4 December	Annual Meeting of EFDS in Skopje

A new website!

After a couple of years, our website europeanforum.net has been renewed by an external bureau. This was highly necessary, as many certifications of the old website were not up to date anymore. Security and other important prerequisites for a well-functioning website are now updated.

Also, the website will be much easier to find on various search engines. Through this search engine optimization, articles and country updates of the EFDS will be accessed more through online search.

Fact-finding: Moldova

On 27-29 June 2022 the European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity, together with sister foundations and parties visited Moldova. The goal of the visit was to assess the current political landscape, speak with different organisations and individuals about the future of Moldova, and hear and discuss the challenges they are facing. Moldova is facing several problems that it can barely tackle. First, the war in Ukraine affects the national budget, as Moldova hosts around 75.000 refugees and the government financially supports families that have taken people in. Second, as another direct consequence of the war in neighbouring Ukraine, the country faces skyrocketing inflation rates of around 30 percent, crashing the Moldovan economy. Third, the contract on the deliverance of gas from Russia halted, forcing the country to buy gas on international markets. Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic has left its mark on the health system and economic growth potential.

Moldova was already considered one of the poorest countries in Europe, but nevertheless seems full of solidarity and willingness to help the citizens of its neighbour, troubled by war. With its EU candidacy status, Moldova will have more financial opportunities to combat corruption, reform the judiciary - Moldovan authorities and the EU started a pre-vetting process - and improve governance. Human capital is one vital issue in the effectiveness and functioning of the government institutions.

Neutrality does not offer much security in times of uncertainty, so there exists the need for action to be taken. The current government is trying as much as possible to respond to recent developments and to take action, according to international organizations that are present in the country. The Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS) presents itself in a professional manner, leading a government that for 50 percent consists of women, has a female President and Prime Minister, and enjoys robust electoral support amongst the diaspora that exercised its right to vote in the most recent general election. The government has a healthy majority and an ambitious reform agenda. The main challenge for PAS is growing criticism of citizens and parties, some of which are not even considered in opposition, about its handling of the crises.

The European Commission is expected to write a more detailed report with steps that must be taken to improve the political climate, as a single party almost has a constitutional majority and parties like the populist SOR raise concerns about corruption. The main political contradictions in Moldova are not traditionally ideological: left-right. The main issues are: attitudes towards Russia, the EU, corruption and the way to deal with the break-away Transnistrian region. If a party calls itself socialist, liberal or conservative, that says little about its ideology. Moldova has over 50 parties, that are often used for business purposes as puppet parties. The progressive family and the European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity should stand firm and protect its social democratic values and we believe that there is space for social democracy in Moldova.

The news service

As in previous years, we have continued to provide people interested or working in the field of democracy with relevant information about the political context of the countries we are active in.

This project delivers high level and unique information through the use of different tools:

1. **Monitoring:** 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 through regular contact with our partners on the ground.
2. **Reporting short term:** on a day-to-day basis, we report on the developments in our target countries through our website, Facebook and twitter. 2022 was a really fruitful year for us. We published 124 articles, compared to 94 in 2021 and 88 in 2020.
3. **Reporting mid-term:** every two weeks, we provide over 3400 subscribers with our 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. There were 22 alerts. We provided unique information. This also includes election updates and overviews regarding news around elections in our target countries.
5. **Country updates:** we publish Country Updates on the website, in which all relevant political information about our target countries is mentioned. These Country Updates are refreshed after collapses of governments, elections, revolutions or other fundamental political changes. In 2022 29 country updates were updated (20 in 2021). As of 2023, the term Country Update will be changed to Country Profile.

2022 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. Accountants are responsible for the annual FMS audit and this includes the check of the European Forum finances.

Income	
SPD Germany	€ 25.000,00
SAP Sweden	€ 27.000,00
SDP Denmark	€ 6.000,00
SPOE Austria	€ 6.000,00
Olof Palme International Center ¹	€ 213.385,32
PvdA Netherlands	€ 6.000,00
Labour Party UK	€ 26.136,66
Total	€ 309.521,98

Expenditure	
LGBTI Project (support Labour)	€ 26.136,66
News Service (support Olof Palme International Center)	€ 51.305,12
MENA Academy (support Olof Palme International Center)	€ 162.080,20
Conference/network meeting North Macedonia ²	€ 6.944,10
Website renewal project	€ 5.901,80
PES congress meeting	€ 1.423,00
Salaries (project management) and overhead (rent, ICT, office costs, etc.)	€ 45.500,00
Total	€ 299.290,88

The 2022 financial result is positive, largely due to the co-financing of our network meeting in Skopje by FEPS. This positive result is being invested in the Forum in 2023.

¹ Olof Palme projects contains expenditure from 2020 and 2021

² Full amount was €21 042,73. 67% of the final cost was co-financed by FEPS, the Foundation of European Progressive Studies.