

Annual Report 2024

European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity

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Staff during 2024:

Board

Björn von Sydow	President
Daša Šilović	Board Member
Julia Wanninger	Board Member

Staff

Kido Koenig	Secretary General
Emiel Bongaerts	Project Manager
Meriem Hammami	News Service (until 1/9)
Diandra Monhemius	News Service (from 1/9)
Morris van Assen	Trainee (until 1/7)
Guido Boven	Trainee (from 1/9)

Introduction

Dear friends and colleagues,

We are pleased to present the Annual Report for 2024 of the European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity. Also in 2024, the ongoing war in Ukraine, EU integration of several countries, electoral victory in the UK, and the rise of right-wing populism in many parts of Europe, the election of Donald Trump and the sense of urgency that Europe needs to operate more autonomously, among others, highlight the pressing need for closer cooperation between social democratic and progressive forces across Europe.

In 2024, we completed a Fact-Finding Mission to Ukraine and continued to serve as a networking hub, fostering collaboration between social democratic foundations and parties both within and outside the EU. This was particularly visible during the Annual Meeting, where we brought together colleagues from twenty-two different countries.

As we reflect on the accomplishments of 2024, we express our sincere gratitude to the individuals, parties, and organisations that have supported the EFDS. In the year ahead, we look forward to deepening our partnerships, expanding our influence, and advancing the important work of promoting social democracy and solidarity. Thank you for your continued dedication to the values that unite our social democratic community.

Sincerely,

Also on behalf of our President Björn von Sydow and board members Daša Šilović and Julia Wanninger,

Kido Koenig

Secretary General
European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity

The EFDS in 2024

The EFDS has achieved the following in 2024;

- We have completely revised the news coverage from the EFDS, it is now entirely dedicated to networking and sharing news from partners of the Forum.
- The EFDS focuses exclusively on Eastern Europe, the Southern Caucasus, South-Eastern Europe and existing EU countries. A wide range of online meetings have been organised on the political situation in Georgia, Moldova, North Macedonia and Ukraine, among others.
- We conducted a Fact-Finding Mission to Ukraine with the EFDS network.
- We organised our network meeting at the end of November in Brussels, where representatives from 22 different countries attended. The collaboration with FEPS around this meeting, which started in 2023, proved to be succesful again.
- We organised a series of Trainer of Trainers (ToT) sessions with FEPS. With this, we are creating a European trainer pool, which different organisations will use, and where trainers can reinforce each other.
- The EFDS attended several international activities, such as the Labour Congress in Liverpool, the Korcula School by the CEE Gender Network and several events in Brussels, where we were able to share our knowledge and networks in the focus regions.

Annual Meeting 2024 in Brussels



- On Friday November 22, the European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity (EFDS) held its Annual Meeting at the FEPS headquarters in Brussels. Social democratic and progressive organisations from twenty-two countries came together to discuss some of the most pressing issues that we currently face in Europe. The EFDS is a cooperation between political foundations, parties and movements from EU countries, Southeastern Europe and the Eastern Partnership. On a yearly basis, many of these organisations work together on capacity-building programs, such as publications and training. With this, we aim to build towards a strong, resilient, social and green Europe for the future. Find below the key results and thematical lines of action from this meeting towards 2025 and beyond. The EFDS looks forward to the cooperation and support with partners in the upcoming year.
- In many of our contexts, our left movements have lost ownership of key social-economic issues to the far-right. We must again become the main political force that is associated with social justice, combating economic inequalities, and workers' rights. In 2025, the EFDS is encouraged to seek out closer collaborations with trade unions and exploring the possibility of a fact-finding mission on the alliance between trade unions and social democrats in a variety of political contexts.
- The increasing success of far-right and anti-democratic parties has resulted in several governments which includes these parties, moving political discussion further in the realm of far-right discourses. We must never make concessions on human rights and the rule of law in our countries, nor work together with parties who do not accept basic democratic values. The EFDS is encouraged to work towards sharing academic-based approaches on countering democratic backsliding to our partners in the form of trainings, online webinars, and publications.
- The fight against climate change and pollution is threatened by the fear that those with the least means will have to pay most of the green transition. This fear is being abused by populists across the political spectrum. We must strongly advocate for a green transition where those most responsible for climate change and pollution pay the bill, while those with little means will be least affected. In the EFDS network,

many organisations work on building progressive narratives on a just green transition. The EFDS will make sure in 2025 that projects and knowledge on this topic will be well-distributed among our network.

- The topic of migration differs starkly per country. In our network these challenges become visible. For example, for Belarusian members, migration means exile, as they had to flee their country to escape political repression. In Southeast Europe, migration often means brain-drain, with many people leaving the region for other parts of Europe. In many EU countries, migration has become a dominant, often toxic, political discussion. We must acknowledge that in all these contexts immigration is a complex and multi-faceted issue for which there is no easy solution. Members acknowledge that for the EFDS this is a topic to pay attention to in 2025 – sharing progressive, academic-based approaches.
- All over the world, women's and minority rights are increasingly under threat due to conservative politics. We must continue to stand firmly for gender equality, LGBTQ+ rights, and the emancipation of regional minorities. EFDS will continue our projects such as our LGBTQ+ inclusion in the Western Balkans Project and supporting the activities of the CEE Gender Network, as well as sharing best practices from our network.
- Russian aggression is a big threat to European security, visible in Ukraine, but also in other countries in Europe and especially the Eastern Partnership. Combating social inequality and strengthening democratisation in the Eastern Partnership is necessary for European security. We plan on starting an Eastern Partnership Program to support social democratic forces in the region and also explore the possibility of a fact-finding mission to support social democracy and progressivism in Armenia.
- Last, a key wish from the EFDS network in 2025 is to improve communication on programs and best practices, both within the network as towards constituencies. The EFDS will be updating our means of communication by investing more in social media, webinars and other means of interaction.

Fact-Finding Mission: Ukraine

In July 2024, the European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity visited Ukraine in cooperation with other political parties and foundations from Europe. The five-day visit was dominated by visiting political actors and exploring social aspects within Ukraine's EU integration process. But of course, the reflections of the visit were broader – an acknowledgement of the reality in which Ukraine has been living since 2014. Find below some general takeaways from our visit. A detailed report has been shared internally with the members of EFDS.

Uncertainties and certainties during the war

Uncertainty has reigned supreme in Ukraine since the large-scale Russian invasion in 2022. In the first months since 24 February 2022, uncertainty about the rapid Russian advance. Last year, uncertainty about the success rate of the Ukrainian offensive. And this year, uncertainty about Western – especially US – support and uncertainty about the course of the war now that the front has fairly stabilised. What is certain is that the air alert goes off several times a day – especially in cities in the east of the country. Ukraine's air defences are able to parry most missile attacks by the Russian aggressor – but not always. A day before the FMS visit, this became catastrophically clear with the blatant attack on Okhmatdyt children's hospital in Kyiv, resulting in at least 33 deaths. It shows that Ukraine could urgently use more air defences to protect its cities and energy facilities.

Another daily certainty in Ukraine is power cuts. Persistent Russian attacks on power supplies mean that in some cities there is only four hours of power a day. At the time of heat waves in summer and severe cold in winter, this hits many Ukrainians hard. Thousands of generators ensure that important facilities continue to work.

Complex challenges

What is also certain is the Ukrainians' will to win the war as well as put the country rock solid on the path of EU integration. This is not an easy path. Much of the focus during our visit was on opportunities and challenges in a post-war Ukraine. Conversations about this sometimes feel paradoxical while Ukraine is still fully engaged in an existential war, with a huge impact on all facets of society and citizenship. Nevertheless, it is important to have these conversations – especially in view of the support we as EFDS give to political actors who advocate a social and democratic course.

The challenges in a post-war Ukraine are therefore manifold. Huge funds are available in the reconstruction of Ukraine. This reconstruction must take place in a fair manner, where the reins are not in the hands of multinationals and large Western companies, which will have a degree of self-interest in the future Ukrainian economy. This also applies to social aspects of EU integration as a whole. Excessive liberalisation and repeating mistakes made in other Central and Eastern European countries in EU integration should be avoided in this regard. Among other things, meaningful facilitation of social dialogue between employers, trade unions and government is an important means to this end. Here lies a task for social democrats and progressives across the EU – knowledge sharing and expertise building is key here.

The speed of steps taken by Ukraine in the EU process is admirable. The involvement and assistance of the country's vibrant NGO sector has also proved indispensable in this regard. An important point of focus here is the assistance and opportunities for the Ukrainian government to push through reforms at the local level throughout the country. For a broad-

based EU process, it is important that institutional reforms are not merely centred in the centre of the country. The situation in frontline areas and lack of capacity due to war efforts are major challenges here.

The deployment of the EFDS

The EFDS will continue to work on these issues. A final aspect of Ukrainian democratisation is also significant here – political pluralism. The uncertainties of war – as described above – are weakening the role of political parties and the Verkhovna Rada (parliament) in Ukrainian political processes. The latter is well explainable now that unity and cooperation between parties is key during martial law. However, to meet the several challenges around EU integration and post-war reconstruction process, Ukraine will benefit from a diverse political landscape, in which different parties and political colours are represented.

The only realistic way to deal with both the uncertainties and certainties of war is to provide adequate military, humanitarian and social support for Ukraine from the West. This will give Ukraine a good chance of winning its much-deserved future prospects around EU integration, democratisation and political pluralism. The EFDS is very honoured to have visited Ukraine again for the first time since 2019, after years of online engagement due to the corona pandemic and full invasion in 2022. We want to thank all partners for making this possible, namely the SD Platform Ukraine and the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Office in Ukraine.

Regional projects – bringing foundations and parties together

Throughout 2024, the EFDS has continuously tried to find cooperation among members, resulting in joint projects and important moments of network-building. This is fully in line with the results of the Survey we conducted among the EFDS' members. In this chapter, we point out some of these synergies.

LGBTI+ inclusion in the Western Balkans

The progress made by countries in Southeast Europe in protecting the rights of LGBTI+ individuals over recent years remains fragile, and continued support is essential. With financial backing from the Labour Party's Westminster Foundation for Democracy programme, the EFDS has organized a range of activities in the Western Balkans as part of the project "Promoting Inclusion and Tackling Inequalities in the Western Balkans." This initiative aims to enhance the capacity of social-democratic parties in the region to address the challenges faced by the LGBTI+ community and advocate for their rights. The project also fosters stronger connections between politicians and civil society, while facilitating collaboration between political foundations in the region.

In each participating country (Montenegro, Bosnia & Herzegovina, North Macedonia, and Serbia), several capacity-building activities were carried out. These included improving advocacy skills for human rights and deepening understanding of the various forms of discrimination that LGBTI+ people face in areas such as education, healthcare, the labour market, and beyond.

European Training of Trainers

FEPS, the Foundation Max van der Stoep (FMS), and the Renner Institut, in cooperation with the European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity, organised the first European Training of Trainers sessions in 2024. The participating trainers have experience facilitating or training groups and on issues such as democracy, campaigning, media, public speaking, or thematic issues relevant to progressive and/or social-democratic politics (e.g. gender, housing, social policies, green policies, etc). The purpose of this session was to increase the in-house capacity of trainers and facilitators and up-skill. In addition, each trainer brought their own experiences, and the exchange between trainers with different styles and ideas was of great added value. We will continue these sessions in 2025.

Korcula School 2024



As has become tradition, the CEE Gender network organised the thinktank known as the Korcula School, taking place on the Croatian island of Korcula. A summary of the 2024 edition can be found here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VcCSYu4BcCw&ab_channel=CEEGenderNetwork



This year marked a special year for the CEE Gender network, as it celebrated its 30th anniversary. A video dedicated to this joyful event was presented at the Korcula School:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RKfwp-Lx-yk&ab_channel=CEEGenderNetwork



A moment of particular interest to the European Forum was when EFDS board member and head organizer of the School Dasa Silovic brought together a series of (former) presidents of the Forum. In the room were Björn von Sydow and Lena Hjelm-Wallen and online were messages from Heinz Fisher and Margot Wallström. Looking back on the 30+ years of collaboration between the CEE Gender Network and EFDS presidents was special.



News Service, Website and Communication

The EFDS provides the international social democratic movement with insights into the political landscape of Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe, the Caucasus, with a particular focus on the development of social democracy. By analyzing and sharing information on specific countries, EFDS enhances understanding and fosters connections. These insights are published as Country Updates, which are prepared by project managers and interns who monitor and report on political developments. Additionally, project managers oversee the website and compile the bi-monthly Newsflash.

As in previous years, we remain committed to offering individuals engaged in democracy-related work relevant and up-to-date political analysis of the regions we focus on. We have rationalised our News Service by not including 'Country Updates' anymore and writing less frequent articles.

Our 'News Service' delivers high-quality, unique information through various tools:

- **Monitoring:** We track daily political developments in our target countries by following both international and local media and maintaining direct contact with partners on the ground.
- **Short-term reporting:** Through our website, and Facebook, we provide daily updates on political events. In 2024, numerous articles were published and widely shared via our platforms, which proved to be particularly effective.
- **Mid-term reporting:** Every four weeks, we distribute our Newsflash to over 3,400 subscribers, summarizing key political developments in our target countries.
- **News Alerts:** We issue short memos or briefings whenever significant political events occur, ensuring our network stays informed. These alerts also include election updates, providing timely news on electoral developments.
- **Webinars:** we have made webinars on key political developments, such as on North Macedonia, Georgia and Moldova.¹ These webinars reach a niche audience of a few hundred viewers per session and offer the added value of Q&A with experts on the country/situation at hand.
- **MENA Democracy Watch:** in 2023, after our extensive survey among the members of the EFDS, we decided to focus our news service on the Western Balkans and the Eastern Partnership countries and no longer on the MENA region. In 2024 the

¹ On Turkey:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mNBSmFzekCM&list=PLUwTbFHCNNVfGD5bD90zbPkGXvaelemjH&index=11&ab_channel=FoundationMaxvanderStoel

On Bosnia and Herzegovina:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ANsnJtQctE8&list=PLUwTbFHCNNVfGD5bD90zbPkGXvaelemjH&index=12&ab_channel=FoundationMaxvanderStoel

On Moldova:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=arrmCmwcYfA&list=PLUwTbFHCNNVfGD5bD90zbPkGXvaelemjH&index=13&ab_channel=FoundationMaxvanderStoel

On Bulgaria:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7XOkEIBgQB8&list=PLUwTbFHCNNVfGD5bD90zbPkGXvaelemjH&index=14&ab_channel=FoundationMaxvanderStoel

On Georgia:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cGShFQVmbJc&list=PLUwTbFHCNNVfGD5bD90zbPkGXvaelemjH&index=15&ab_channel=FoundationMaxvanderStoel

Foundation Max van der Stoel (FMS) has been able to continue the library the Forum had built through the [MENA democracy watch](#), which is made available through the EFDS website, but as a separate service.

2024 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, after which we can publish the European Forum finances.

Income	2024	2023
Drustvo Progresiva	€3.000,00	-
SPD Germany	€0,00	€25.000,00
SAP Sweden	€27.000,00	€27.000,00
SDP Denmark	€0,00	€6.000,00
Karl-Renner-Institut	€6.000,00	€6.000,00
PvdA Netherlands	€6.000,00	€6.000,00
Labour Party UK	€31.352,00	€37.228,00
Total	€79.352,00	€107.228,00

Expenditure		
Fact Finding Mission Georgia	€0,00	€4.788,00
Fact Finding Mission Ukraine	€7.500,00	€0,00
LGBTI Project (support Labour)	€31.352,00	€37.288,00
News Service	€12.000,00	€21.000,00
Annual Meeting	€8.761,00	€9.500,00
Website project	€0,00	€1.500,00
Fact Finding/Network meeting on Belarusian opposition	€0,00	€302,00
PES congress meeting	€0,00	€636,08
Cost support Korčula school	€1.000,00 ²	€1.000,00
Project management and overhead/office costs	€32.000,00	€42.000,00
Total	€92.613,00	€118.014,08

The 2023, the Forum ran a financial deficit of €10.786,08, which was aggravated in 2024 and rose to €13.261,00. The deficit was covered by the Foundation Max van der Stoel. In 2024, we continued the path of limiting our expenses, particularly on the news service and on the project management side. Sadly, with the departure of the Danish (announced) and German (sudden) members, the income decreased more quickly than the expenses.

² In 2024, through FEPS