European Forum
for Democracy and Solidarity

Annual Report 2025

European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity

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Staff during 2025:

Board

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

Staff

Kido Koenig	Secretary General
Emiel Bongaerts	Project Manager
Yza Schraal	Trainee (until 1/7)
Elene Amiranashvili	Trainee (from 1/9)

EFDS Network Session in Belgrade

In November 2025, we gathered in Belgrade for our EFDS Network Session, bringing together partners from across our network under the umbrella of the European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity. The meeting was an important moment for us to reflect on the pressures facing democracy across Europe — from growing polarisation and disinformation to funding uncertainty and shrinking civic space. Throughout the session, we focused on how we can remain resilient as a network, how we prioritise our work in a rapidly changing environment, and how we better communicate what we stand for. A key takeaway was the importance of working more closely together, strengthening regional cooperation, and ensuring that our organisations are sustainable and firmly rooted in the communities we aim to serve.

Our discussions also helped us sharpen our collective focus. We agreed that issues such as media freedom, equality and rights, youth engagement, political pluralism and the fight against corruption require renewed attention and clearer public messaging. Rather than staying at a purely technical level, we recognised the need to reconnect with citizens in practical and visible ways — through local outreach, community conversations and stronger engagement with young people and trusted voices. Overall, the session reaffirmed our shared commitment to standing up for democratic values, strengthening our alliances, and ensuring that our network remains relevant, credible and impactful in the year ahead.

Four Fact-Finding Missions

In 2025, at the explicit request of our Steering Committee, we significantly intensified our fact finding work and organised four in depth missions to Serbia, Georgia, Moldova and Armenia. These visits were not symbolic. They were carefully prepared research missions aimed at giving our network a clear, honest and up to date understanding of political developments on the ground, the space for progressive actors, and the concrete ways in which we as the European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity can offer meaningful support. In each country, we met a broad range of interlocutors including political parties, social democratic actors, civil society organisations, trade unions, researchers, activists and international partners. The findings from these missions now directly inform our strategy, partnerships and advocacy at European level.

In Serbia, members of the Steering Committee of the FEPS Friends of the Western Balkans visited Novi Sad and Belgrade on 13 and 14 May, following the outbreak of large scale student protests in November 2024. The timing was critical. The country is experiencing a visible tightening of political control, increasing pressure on independent voices and serious concerns about the state of democratic institutions. During our visit, we met representatives of the student movement, social democratic sister parties, political scientists, NGO representatives and labour unions. What we heard consistently was a deep concern about authoritarian tendencies, shrinking democratic space and the blurring of lines between state and party structures. The protests have demonstrated that there is still strong democratic energy in society, particularly among young people, but they are facing intimidation and limited institutional support. Our mission underlined the urgent need for sustained European attention and stronger international solidarity with democratic actors in Serbia. It also reinforced our role as a connector, ensuring that our members and partners remain closely engaged with developments in the country.

Our mission to Georgia, which took place between 21 and 23 May, occurred in an equally difficult context. Since the disputed parliamentary elections of October 2024, the country has experienced months of protests, met with growing repression from the ruling Georgian Dream party. Arrests of activists and opposition figures, intimidation and the adoption of restrictive foreign agent legislation have placed enormous pressure on civil society and opposition forces. There are even public discussions within the ruling party about banning the political opposition entirely. Against this backdrop, we met political parties, civil society organisations and international partners to answer a central question: how can we most effectively support our progressive and social democratic colleagues in Georgia. One key message from our interlocutors was that communication with EU actors often feels fragmented and unclear. There is a strong need for more structured, consistent information sharing and more formalised ties with European social democratic networks. Initial steps have already been taken, including participation of Georgian representatives in our Annual Meeting. However, given the seriousness of the democratic backsliding, our conclusion is clear: engagement must become deeper, more institutionalised and more sustained.

In Moldova, our delegation travelled to Chișinău from 9 to 11 October, shortly after the parliamentary elections of 28 September. The political landscape is currently dominated by the Party of Action and Solidarity, which secured a commanding victory and now holds a simple majority in parliament. PAS has set ambitious goals, including completing EU accession negotiations by 2028 and joining the European Union around 2029 or 2030. Achieving this will require far reaching reforms in the judiciary, the economy, territorial administration and social policy. While PAS expresses confidence in its mandate, several concerns emerged during our discussions with political parties across the spectrum, civil society, trade unions, experts and international partners. One of the main issues is social cohesion. Overall, our mission confirmed that Moldova stands at a pivotal moment, with both significant opportunity and serious risks.

Finally, from 3 to 5 December, we organised a fact finding mission to Yerevan, Armenia, in the run up to the 2026 parliamentary elections. The aim of this mission was to assess the current political and socio economic landscape, evaluate the state of social democracy and progressivism, and identify areas where political foundations and our network can provide targeted support. During the visit, we met political parties, civil society organisations, labour representatives, researchers and international partners. Armenia is navigating a complex environment shaped by security concerns, regional instability and internal political debates about reform and governance. Our discussions focused on the resilience of democratic institutions, the credibility of upcoming electoral processes and the capacity of progressive actors to organise and communicate effectively. The mission allowed us to gather first hand insights into both the challenges and the opportunities for strengthening democratic cooperation and social democratic engagement in the country.

Taken together, these four missions demonstrate our commitment to staying closely connected to realities on the ground. Rather than relying solely on desk research or second hand reporting, we invested time and resources in direct dialogue with those shaping and defending democracy in their respective countries. The insights gathered in Serbia, Georgia, Moldova and Armenia now guide our strategic choices and our advocacy towards and with partners in our activities. They reaffirm the importance of our role as a bridge between national progressive actors and the broader European social democratic family.

Milestone projects: bringing foundations and parties together

Throughout 2025, the EFDS has been part of multiple initiatives where we share our networks and bring members together, below you find the most notable ones.

Training of Trainers
We took part in the Training of Trainers programme organised by the Foundation for European Progressive Studies with a variety of events in Vienna (June 2025) and Amsterdam (Oct 2025), where we helped connect participants from our network and supported the overall delivery of the training. The programme focused on practical skills such as how to design interactive workshops, improve public speaking and facilitate group discussions. By encouraging our members to participate and by staying closely involved in the process, we helped strengthen the pool of trainers linked to our network and ensured that the knowledge gained feeds directly into our own activities and future capacity building work.

Friends of the Western Balkans
Through the Friends of the Western Balkans initiative, we contributed to discussions that led to a joint statement on the future of the region and its path towards the European Union. We have been part of the Slovenia and Serbia sessions in May and November 2025. We connected our members to the process, encouraged input from partners in the region and supported coordination between organisations. By being part of this collective effort, we helped ensure that progressive voices from the Western Balkans were represented and that our network remains closely engaged in debates around enlargement and democratic reform.

Enlargement Conference
At the event A Common New Chapter for EU Enlargement, organised by the Foundation for European Progressive Studies, we supported participation from our network and contributed to discussions on how the European Union can move enlargement forward in a credible and inclusive way. We used this opportunity to link our members with policymakers, experts and sister organisations, helping them share their perspectives and build new contacts. Our involvement ensured that insights from our regions were part of the broader European conversation on the future of enlargement. This was organised in May 2025.

Our Sessions at the PES Conference
During the Party of European Socialists Conference, we organised and hosted two own sessions on the Eastern Partnership and one on Ukraine specifically. By this, we are creating space for our network to present its work and priorities. We coordinated speakers from among our members, shaped the agenda and facilitated the discussion. This allowed us to showcase concrete experiences from our regions, strengthen our visibility within the wider progressive family and connect our members directly with political leaders and partner organisations.

Korcula School
We were involved in the **Korčula School**, a long-running annual gathering organised by the Central and Eastern European Gender Network together with partners including FEPS and PES Women, where progressive activists and political leaders meet to talk about gender equality and how to strengthen women's participation in politics.

First EUkraine Progressive Summit in Kyiv
We were closely involved in the organisation of the first EUkraine Progressive Summit in Kyiv, working together with partners from across Europe and Ukraine. We helped bring participants from our network to the summit, supported outreach and contributed to shaping the programme. The event created direct exchanges between Ukrainian and European

progressive actors on the country's future in the European Union, and our role ensured that our members were actively part of these discussions and follow up cooperation.

Friends of the Eastern Partnership
In the Friends of the Eastern Partnership initiative, organised together with the Foundation for European Progressive Studies, we helped plan the workshops, identify participants from our network and facilitate exchanges between organisations from Armenia, Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia. We supported both the online sessions and the in person meeting in Vilnius, making sure our members were not only present but actively contributing. By doing so, we strengthened direct cooperation between organisations in the region and helped lay the groundwork for continued joint activities.

News Service

With the Forum, we organised again a variety of analysis and news updates for our network. These have especially been focused around elections and major political updates in Southeastern and Eastern Europe. We did this by written media on www.europeanforum.net, webinars through our dedicated YouTube channel and a monthly newsletter to three thousand people in our network. It has been pivotal for us to connect and give a platform to colleagues in our network in these moments of communication.

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2025 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. Please take note that in this report, the project management of the Annual Meeting and Fact-Finding Mission is put under 'Project Management and Office Costs'. The costs under the specific activities only constitute direct expenditures for accommodation, travel, meals, et cetera.

Contribution	**2025**	**2024**	**2023**
Drustvo Progresiva	€ 1.000	€ 3.000	
Eteron Institute	€ 1.500		
SDP Croatia	€ 1.500		
SPD Germany			€ 25.000
SAP Sweden	€ 27.000	€ 27.000	€ 27.000
SDP Denmark			€ 6.000
Karl-Renner-Institut	€ 6.000	€ 6.000	€ 6.000
PvdA	€ 6.000	€ 6.000	€ 6.000
Labour Party UK	€ 38.229	€ 31.352	€ 37.228
Total	**€ 81.229**	**€ 73.352**	**€ 107.228**

Expenditure	**2025**	**2024**	**2023**
Fact Finding Missions	€ 4.428	€ 7.500	€ 5.090
LGBTI Program	€ 41.242	€ 31.352	€ 37.288
News Service	€ 12.000	€ 12.000	€ 22.500
Annual Meeting	€ 225	€ 8.761	€ 10.136
Support for Korcula School	€ 3.000	€ 1.000	€ 1.000
Project Management & Office Costs	€ 25.000	€ 32.000	€ 42.000
Total	**€ 85.895**	**€ 92.613**	**€ 118.014**