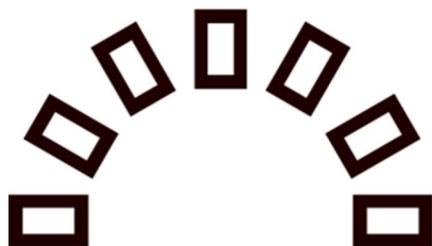


# European Forum Annual Report 2018



## European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity

### Board

President: Jens Nilsson (11-03-2018)

Vice-President: Jan Marinus Wiersma

Member: Ray Collins

Secretary General: Arjen Berkvens

### Staff

Marina Ohanjanyan: Eastern Europe

Danijel Tadić: South Eastern Europe

Jaron Liplijn: MENA & News Service

### Index

Page 1

**In Memoriam Jens Nilsson**

Page 2

**An Inheritance of Willy Brandt: 25 years of the European Forum**

Page 3

**South East Europe**

Page 5

**Eastern Europe**

Page 6

**European Forum News Service**

Page 7

**Financial report**

### In Memoriam Jens Nilsson

At our council meeting on October 18th. 2017 we welcomed Jens Nilsson as new president of the European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity. Jens had already been participating in our activities. He was a member of our delegation to Belarus in October 2016 and had been supporting our work since then. We were shocked by the news of Jens passing away on March 13th. 2018 at age 69. Although Jens was our President for a short period we remember him as a very committed social democrat and above all a friendly, social and humorous person. As a Member of European parliament and a former mayor of Östersund he was able to connect local challenges and European policy. We will sorely miss him and want to wish his family, colleagues and friends strength in coping with this tremendous loss.

## **An Inheritance of Willy Brandt: 25 years of the European Forum**

This year's celebration of 25 years of the European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity (EFDS) was the motive to produce a short history of the organisation. Jan Marinus Wiersma, vice-President, did the research and wrote the book. The European Forum was founded by the Socialist International (SI) in 1993 at the instigation of its former president, Willy Brandt. Its main task would be to help identify and further develop social democratic parties and movements (potential future members of the SI) in Central and Eastern Europe, the Western Balkans and the countries formerly belonging to the Soviet Union after the collapse of communism. The Forum has been a loose collaboration of a number of European social democratic and socialist parties, their political foundations, the Party of European Socialists (PES) and the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D) in the European Parliament. It has also received support from FEPS, the European social democratic think-tank, as well. In order to allow the Forum to make critical assessments of parties and the context in which they operated, the Forum was set up as an informal, flexible and independent mechanism, which it still is.

At the PES Congress in Lisbon on the 7th of December 2018 Vice-chair Jan Marinus Wiersma presented his book "An Inheritance of Willy Brandt" concluding, amongst others, that we need an European Forum inside the EU while continuing our work in the EU neighbourhood. The publication that reflected on 25 years of democracy and solidarity engagement in Central and Eastern Europe and discussion at the meeting in Lisbon has provided an excellent basis for reassessing Forum's strategy.



At the meeting S&D MEPs and MPs from sister parties argued that the European Forum has the potential to provide the best arena for discussions on EU and EU neighbourhood (democracy) challenges. Moreover, European Forum shall increasingly engage with (potential) sister parties, encourage them to modernize the party and decision-making (be frank to our friends), and work structurally with young people and women from progressive parties and movements. A major challenge is to bridge the gap between progressive parties and social movements, such as trade unions, youth movements and civil society. Social democratic parties in Europe shall defend our democratic values from internal challenges but also keep an eye on the growing assertiveness of Russia that has had some success in exporting authoritarianism, unfreedom and spreading disinformation to polarise our societies. Finally, it was noted at the meeting that the European Forum should continue the information service; enhance the coordination of activities and role division with FEPS, S&D and PES; strengthen the engagement with minorities (such as LGBTI); and invest more in the European Forum Training Academy for young people and women.

The conclusions of the publication and the meeting in Lisbon would shift the mission of the European Forum. From a platform of social democratic parties and political foundations aiming to contribute to the development of (social) democracy in Eastern & South Eastern Europe and the Middle East and North Africa to a platform of social democratic parties and political foundations aiming to contribute to the development of (social) democracy in the EU and EU neighbourhood. To achieve this goal European Forum should continue to gather information (fact-finding and news service) empower progressive women, youngsters and minorities (European Forum Training Academy) and bring progressive actors together (platform for bridging the gap with social movements and labour unions).

## **South East Europe**

### ***Assessment Visit, Pristina and Mitrovica, Kosovo 28-30 August 2018***

“Kosovo finds little to celebrate after 10 years of independence”, journalist Andrew Testa wrote in the New York Times. Indeed, the majority of the 1,8 million inhabitants – with the youngest population in Europe – are disillusioned and apathetic: The international community is considered by critical voices from the civil society as divided, unable to develop and communicate a clear strategy on Kosovo and the region; The unaccountable corrupted ruling Kosovo elite, most of them former Kosovo Liberation Army fighters, is operating in the interest of their clans and business partners. The international community, on the other hand, is considered by critical voices from civil society as divided, unable to develop a clear strategy on the country and the wider region. As a result, and despite the ‘Brain Gain Fund’, young people, and increasingly members from the middle class, are fleeing the country hoping for a better future elsewhere. Rather than tackling the socio-economic causes that are responsible for this brain drain, the status of Kosovo and relations with Serbia keep determining the country’s discourse. Meanwhile young people are getting more vocal, out on the streets, to fight for more opportunities and against corruption. Exemplary for this: it was a few years ago unimaginable that an ideology-based citizens movement could become the largest political party in Kosovo; let alone that people would take it to the streets to protest against interference in an investigation into ‘fake’ war veterans. During our visit to Kosovo we held meetings with students, journalists, academics, civil society, opposition parties and the prime minister and president of the country. The main conclusion are: 1) there is very limited progress in the areas of rule of law and democracy. Convictions from Specialist Chamber in The Hague on war crimes and from Kosovo’s Courts on high-level corruption are yet to be delivered. EU should put

more pressure on Serbia with regard to organized crime groups operating in north Kosovo 2) Despite many warnings from within Kosovo and the region, it is unlikely that border corrections will lead the region back to the 90's. However, principal arguments against (such as undermining of 20 yearlong international effort, ethnic based division) border correction prevail over arguments arguing that for the sake of future EU integration a deal should be made in the near future 3) Dilemma of international community on Kosovo: stability over democracy and local politicians (local ownership) undermine vision for the region based on the rule of law and inclusive societies; SD parties should engage with progressive parties and organization in Kosovo: capacity building and policy development. 4) Visa liberalization and circular migration can contribute to mitigate the brain drain. However, political (generational) power shift is needed for young people to start believing they can build up and determine their future in Kosovo.

### ***Conference & Meetings in Skopje, North-Macedonia 31 August 2018***

*Partners: Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS), Progres Instistute, Olof Palme International and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Skopje office*

Hopes are high that with the new progressive government led by Prime Minister Zoran Zaev, sworn in on the 1st of June 2017, the political situation in Macedonia – characterized by growing authoritarianism, corruption, mass street protest, physical attack on MPs in the parliament and standstill in EU integration – is about to change. The first test was passed: After the finalization of the two local election rounds, Zaev's Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM) won in 57 municipalities, including the City of Skopje. The new government presented the "plan 3-6-9", which aim was to re-start the reform process and return the country to the Euro-Atlantic path. The successful implementation of the plan was noted in the latest report of the European Commission: the country achieved significant progress in implementing the urgent reform priorities and has largely overcome the political crisis. The assessments of the political criteria, in particular the judiciary and the public administration, are very positive. What remains is further work on alignment with EU policies and legislation, to deepen the current reforms on urgent reform priorities, as well as to strengthen access to the judiciary, fundamental rights, justice, freedom and the security of the country. Finally, on 12 June 2018 Macedonia set a first step in de-blocking the Euro-Atlantic integration by signing a name deal with Greece. Conservative Macedonian President Ivanov and a referendum in fall 2018 on the new name seem to be the final obstacles of Macedonia's EU and NATO integration. Macedonia has gone through an extreme – against most regional trends – makeover: from a nationalist authoritarian corrupted government with bad relations with neighbors to a democratic government supporting rule of law and freedom of the media, friendships with neighboring countries, and clear prospect to Euro-Atlantic integration. The opposition is internally divided over the Greece name change deal. It is expected that a yes in the referendum will pressure the opposition to accept the deal with Greece. EPP has a role to play if the conservative VMRP-DPMNE decides to vote against the constitutional changes. Sister party, with help from their partners, should further work on inclusion of Albanians and other minorities (such as LGBTI) within the party structures. Street protests against former government have created room for this. Finally, the current government is very ambitious in raising the standard of living of its citizens, which is best illustrated by this year's increase in the minimum wage. Nevertheless, as the revenues have so far only increased to a minimum amount, sufficient means to effectively reach this goal are currently missing. This underlines the necessity to attract FDI.

## Eastern Europe

### ***Research: Social Democracy and Transformation in Eastern Europe***

In 2012 we conducted a study into the state of social democracy in Eastern Europe. In 2018-2019 we will revisit 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 are organising 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 will be put into a publication, to be presented in early 2020. The project is supported by the Party of European Socialists (PES).

### ***Fact-finding mission to Moldova***

On February 8th and 9th 2018 we organised a fact-finding visit to Chisinau, Moldova. The aim of the visit was to assess the political situation on the ground as well as get a clear picture of our sister party, the Democratic Party of Moldova (DPM), under the new leadership of Mr Vlad Plahotniuc, who was elected its chairman in December 2016. We achieved the two goals through extensive meetings with DPM and with the civil society, opposition and the EU Delegation. At the time, our mission concluded that the economical and social situation in Moldova is quite dire, with a severe economical crisis coupled with a lack of trust by the general public in the main state institutions and political forces/politicians. The situation with democracy seemed to be deteriorating, and there were some worrying trends, including in the area of media freedom: media outlets were being highly concentrated in just several owners. During our meetings, many accusations were levelled against the Democratic Party (DPM) and its leader, Vlad Plahotniuc, including intimidation, corruption and seeking to roll back democratic development. The outcome of the upcoming parliamentary elections in the fall of 2018 seemed highly uncertain. As of this writing those elections have taken place, and have eventually resulted in a huge shift in Moldovan politics: a new government is now in place, under the leadership of PM Maia Sandu, formerly one of the leaders of the extra-parliamentary opposition.

### ***Fact-finding mission to Georgia***

On November 8th and 9th 2018 we organised a study visit to Tbilisi, Georgia. The aim of the visit was to assess the political situation on the ground and take a closer look at Georgia's development over the recent years, as well as look ahead at the upcoming presidential elections and what changes – if any – they could bring about. To achieve this, we met with a broad range of representatives - civil society, political parties, EU Delegation etc. We concluded that the Georgian society is highly polarized and divided into two main camps: the pro-Georgian Dream (government) camp, and the pro-United National Movement (opposition) camp. At the same time, many interlocutors said that it is not so much what people support, but what they oppose. There were some worries by government critics that the ruling Georgian Dream party would go to any lengths to secure a victory for its supported candidate, Salome Zurbishvili, against UNM's candidate Grigol Vashadze. The atmosphere in the pre-election period was, in general, quite tense. There were also concerns about (a lack of) internal democracy within Georgian Dream, which many believe is completely governed by its leader and founder Bidzina Ivanishvili. Another set of concerns was the highly limited (and diminishing) presence of social democratic voices in Georgia's political arena. As of this writing the presidential elections have taken place, and were indeed won by GD's preferred candidate, Salome Zurbishvili. Parliamentary elections are expected in 2020.

## ***Summer Academy 2018***

Partner: UK Labour Party through Westminster Foundation funds

In 2018 the European Forum organized the annual Summer Academy Eastern Europe together with the UK Labour Party. This year we had young social democratic participants from Armenia (Armenian Revolutionary Federation – Dasnaksutyun & Forum for 21st Century Leaders), Belarus (Belarus Women's League, Tell the Truth & Young Hramada), Georgia (Social Democrats for the Development of Georgia, Women for Justice & Georgian Dream), Moldova (Democratic Party) and Ukraine (Social Democratic Platform). The training was, as always, quite extensive, with subjects ranging from social democratic ideology to campaigning, communication strategies, interviewing and debating. The training also included a 'train-the-trainers' element. During all parts of the training we tried to prepare the participants to eventually being able to conduct a similar training themselves. Another important element were the local trainers of the SD Platform, in addition to the traditional training team from Foundation Max van der Stoep (the Netherlands) and the UK Labour Party.

The training took place from 1-5 August, in Kyiv, Ukraine.

## **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. 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.
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.
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. 2018 was a very fruitful year. There were 24 alerts. The peaceful revolution in Armenia was a main focus this year. 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.

# 2018 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	34.024
PvdA Netherlands	2.000
Labour Party	47.813
<b>Total</b>	<b>153.837</b>

## Expenditure projects (except salaries)

Fact Finding Kosovo	1.097
LGBTI Conference	7.984
PES Congress Lisbon	2.423
Fact Finding Georgia and Moldova	5.390
Political Youth Academy Eastern Europe	28.832
25 years European Forum	588
News Service*	3.321
Other costs	8.071
<b>Total</b>	<b>57.705</b>

**Salaries, rent, ICT, office costs** **96.132**

## Total expenditures

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