June 24th 2015LCS/SA

**EAPN EXCO**

**2012-2015**

**From Oslo to Bilbao - A short review of the activities**

**Presented in Bilbao to the delegates of EAPN**

The 2015 General Assembly in Bilbao marks the end of the mandate that the current EAPN Executive Committee received during the general Assembly in Oslo in 2012.

The following short review is not intended to represent the whole of EAPN activities, of its working groups or task forces but it is limited to the **most important decisions and actions** carried out by the Executive Committee thanks to the commitment of all of us: the Exco, the Director, the Staff, the Bureau.

With this short review, we, the members of the Bureau that is now finishing its 3-year mandate, hope to start a new “tradition” and to do something useful since, by highlighting what has been done, it may be easier for the new Exco and Bureau to go ahead with the work that is awaiting us all.

**The context**

Some very challenging issues were waiting for the new Exco elected in Oslo. As time went by, things seemed to get harder and harder by the minute. Internally, the old director left his post after 10 years; the budgetary cuts were much higher than expected; the Bureau elected in Oslo, although some of us had had previous experience as Bureau members, was made up of “new” people and was elected, as Sergio Aires stated in presenting his candidacy, because the members felt that EAPN needed, **“ A leadership … more open, less conservative and of which our members, particularly the grass-roots level organizations, feel proud to be members – and this is a key and magic word: members!”**. And this is what we, as Bureau, tried to do - maybe not always successfully: give the members, through the Exco, the possibility to decide, to participate.

We don’t feel there is a need to recall here the external context: austerity, troika, budget cuts in the social sector in most European countries, lack of a European anti-poverty strategy, Europe 2020 not delivering, poverty and social exclusion on the rise, lack or difficulty of dialogue with the European institutions.

**The budgetary cuts**

The consequences of the cuts were very hard to deal with: we had to cut translations and interpretation drastically; we had to cut publications and our magazine; some staff members left and were not replaced, putting an extra burden on the ones that stayed. We had to cut the number of task forces, the number of participants to the General Assemblies or to the Strategic Congress which was supposed to be a big event involving many members. We could organize only one “Learning Forum”.

Of course there is always a positive side, although many may not agree. It was very negative that we were forced to make these changes because of lack of money but, on the other hand, EAPN was doing too many activities, at times not thoroughly thought out, and to go back to our core business was not all negative.

**Are we finished restructuring EAPN?** No, we think we are halfway through. According to us, the next Exco will have to revise the working methods of the statutory bodies, of the task forces and permanent group (EUISG). With the support of the staff, we will have to restructure the way the Brussels office is organized. It is a matter of money, of course, but it should be the outcome of a reflection on what EAPN wants to be (and wants to do) in the next years and not a process that is forced on us by the lack of resources we used to have. Having said this the budgetary constraints and the consequent deficit we are facing will produce an undesirable impact in some areas.

**Major accomplished activities**

1. **A new director.** Barbara was hired after a selection process that engaged the bureau, the staff and was ultimately ratified by the Exco. She accepted the post right before we knew the exact extent of the budgetary cuts. As a consequence she found herself having to deal with a totally different framework than she expected. She is still with us notwithstanding the many difficulties. She is now vice-president of the Social Platform (2015 – 2017) in behalf of EAPN.
2. **A new evaluation**. EAPN had not gone through an external evaluation since a long time. When we came in we discovered we had to do it and find the most adequate resources (also in terms of budget) to do it. In face of all the changes, we definitely needed a tool to guide us through the many changes we made and that still need to be made. The money for this exercise was really scant but we were able to hire the agency run by José Manuel Fresno, an expert in this field, one of the founding members of EAPN and its long-time friend who always kept in touch with us. The result of this work has been very much appreciated by the members and has been a major tool for designing the Strategic Plan that will be discussed and approved shortly.
3. **A new Strategic Plan**. The evaluation, the past documents and the support of José Manuel Fresno, were paramount for accomplishing this piece of work. But, the most important action to arrive at the new Strategic Plan was the participation of EAPN members during the world cafés, the many discussions at the Exco, not least, we hope, the Strategic Congress. We, as Bureau, hope to have given all of EAPN members the chance to really make a difference in the way this Strategic Plan has been designed and, through this method, ensure the members’ ownership of this important document.
4. **A better balance of EAPN work and a better involvement of its members.** After a few years of being kept in the back-burner, **membership development** was brought to the forefront and a pro-active Exco-led membership development process was started. A Member Development Group, made of 6 Exco members, was created with the aim of carrying out a substantial amount of work related to membership development and support in EAPN. This decision was in line with the Bureau – and Exco - vision for a more proactive membership development approach with Exco members actively planning and implementing actions with support from the secretariat. It is still early to evaluate the results of this group especially since Tanya left us and the new Development Officer just started in her new position,but the feed-back from the last “training” in Leuven has been extremely positive.
5. **Alliances Projects.** Although it was not an easy challenge (we were confronted by the Commission with this proposal together with the cut of our core budget) by the end of the day it was an important action which helped EAPN to go further on reinforcing alliances and working together priority.
6. **Enlargement of the Bureau.** The number of the Bureau members had not changed in many years. As a matter of fact EAPN, with 31 national networks and 18 Eos in membership, had the same number of Bureau members as when it was a network of 15 national networks and the Eos were not in full membership. There was clearly an imbalance between 5 Bureau members representing such a large network and, the work to be carried out is too much for such a small group. The next Bureau will have 7 members, making representation more consistent and giving the members more possibility to share the work and be more present.
7. **Enlargement and “problematic” national networks.** EAPN welcomed EAPN Latvia, EAPN Croatia and Dynamo as a new EO; we supported the reconstruction of EAPN Romania and tried to be closer to other national networks facing different kinds of problems (Greece, Netherlands). Unfortunately the problems with EAPN Slovenia are still pending but contacts are on the way. And on the other hand we continued developing contacts in new countries towards the continuous enlargement of the network.
8. **Yearly reports from national networks.** Practically all networks now present their yearly report, an important step forward for EAPN credibility as a network of networks.
9. **Pilot actions.** A new experiment for enlivening the work of the EUISG group, for encouraging national networks to work together, for engaging in the European Semester in a less “bureaucratic” way.
10. **The Fund.** Since 2012 the fund was able to support three networks (Greece, Netherlands and Estonia). This year three other networks received support from the Fund (Macedonia, Serbia and Hungary). The 1st edition of the EAPN price took place.
11. **PEPs meetings.** It is becoming harder and harder to ensure enough support for these very important meetings. Up to now EAPN has been able to organize them and work needs to be done so that their future is ensured. We believe it is important to underline the different initiatives from the Bureau (namely the pressure towards the Commissioner) were decisive to ensure the continuation of this work.
12. **Relations with our Eos.** Our director is very engaged in this field, as her election as vice-president of the Social Platform clearly demonstrate. Although not 100% settled, relations are now much improved although we still need to work to reach a good balance.
13. **Relations with the European Institutions.** It is not a very easy moment for these but we had a chance to meet many important policy-makers and bring forward our concerns. Until now we met several times the previous Commissioner and we met also the previous President of the Commission. Since the new institutions are in place we met the President of the EU Parliament (Mr. Martin Schultz, in order to assure a Parliamentary meeting of PEP inside), the Vice-President of the Commission (Mr. Valdis Dombrovskis – and we asked to meet the first Vice-President, Mr. Frans Timmermans and Mrs. Vera Jourova, Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality), the head of cabinet of the President of the EU Commission and also the head of cabinet of Commissioner Thyssen (we are still waiting to meet the Commissioner herself – the first appointment was cancelled at the last minute).
14. **A new voting system.** The system used by the Exco to elect the bureau has long been criticized as bizarre to say the least. The Bureau committed itself to work out a new system. The new Exco is asked to approve the new voting system before electing the new bureau.
15. **Last but not least, a new reimbursement system** was approved but not evaluated yet.