ST Strategy 2024-28

Organization: CDN
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Motion text

VISION

...Eastern Europe that is peaceful, inclusive, social, and sustainable. Eastern Europe with multiparty democracy in which young people with progressive values are relevant and actively engaged in civil society, politics, and decision-making processes at all levels of governance.

MISSION

Our mission is to empower and support young progressive changemakers in Eastern Europe, enabling them to increase their political relevance and impact. With our activities and events, that include trainings, seminars, conferences, as well as leveraging digital tools, platforms, and resources, we strive to equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge to lead the change for more just, open, and sustainable societies.

BACKGROUND

External

We embark this strategy period in a very different reality. The unprovoked, illegal, full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation has turned the world upside down and had immense complications for the globe and especially for our region. Meantime, we are witnessing rise of populism and authoritarianism, democratic backsliding, deliberate weakening of the institutions, attempts of state capture, attacks on civil liberties, civil society, and independent media. Consequently, it is increasingly difficult to be young, green, progressive, and democrat in this restrictive context where activism and engagement in politics is becoming more and more challenging, exhausting, and dangerous.

In opposition to this, we are also witnessing a growing movement actively fighting to counter and challenge backlash on democracy. Young activists play a vital role in this movements of resisting authoritarianism and advocating for progressive policies.

Young people are an integral building block of the diverse coalition that drives the Green and Progressive political movement in Europe. However, the gap between West and East and North and South of Europe in terms of success of Green/Progressive parties remain wide. While Western European Green parties have made significant strides in gaining political representation and influence, the

same progress has been slower to materialise in the Eastern European context. Nevertheless, recent years have seen the emergence of progressive political movements in the region with increasing influence on the forefront for the fight for democracy, equality, and sustainability.

Internal

Over the past three years, CDN has seen notable changes and developments. We have worked diligently to enhance our operations by professionalising our work, better organising tasks and responsibilities within the Executive Committee (EC), balancing workload, and improving working conditions for staff.

Furthermore, we have updated our Statutes, transitioning partner organisations into Member Organisations (MOs), a move aimed at fostering inclusivity, and creating a more cohesive network. This shift maintains primary focus on non-EU member countries while encouraging greater participation from Eastern European countries within the EU.Simultaneously, we are striving to reach and include more independent progressive activists, young politicians as well as relevant organisations.

Given the restrictive nature of governments in specific Eastern European countries, some of our Member Organisations face significant challenges in becoming more politically engaged and operating effectively within their respective nations. In recent years, numerous activists have had to relocate due to these constraints. MOs that collaborate closely with local communities in their respective countries constantly contend with the looming threat of government intervention and limitations, stemming from the intensified scrutiny on activists and NGO activities.

Process

This is the context in which this four-year strategy is being developed and drafted. The process formally started at 2023 General Assembly (GA) in Warsaw that included Strategic Planning Meeting (SPM) that aimed to extract ideas and guidelines for the next years of operation. The event brought together 21delegates from 13Member Organisations. The SPM was led by external facilitator who conducted four sessions with the aim to gather input from delegates representing MOs. Sessions included SWOT analysis, understanding people, political priorities, as well as resources, and action areas.

Taking the report from SPM into account, the Secretary General led the process and together with an EC representative worked on the initial draft, which was subsequently reviewed and approved by the entire Executive Committee. In the second phase[1], the draft was shared with MOs and Partners with a survey to gather feedback, guiding further revisions. Simultaneously, Secretary General organised several meetings with stakeholders including in-person feedback session during Study Session in Budapest attended by 10 participants. Based on the input, Secretary General and a designated EC member further refined the strategy. Finally, the Strategy Paper underwent the process of review, amendments, and final adoption by Member Organisations during the 2024 General Assembly.

SWOT LANDSCAPE

Leveraging Strengths: Sustaining and Amplifying Impact

CDN, as an organisation, possesses certain strengths that should be harnessed and expanded upon to achieve its mission and vision effectively. These strengths, rooted in the organisation's values and operational practices, include a solid reputation built on trust, a commitment to inclusiveness, and the promotion of intersectionality. CDN's diversity, both culturally and geographically, adds significant value, enhancing its ability to adapt to different contexts within the Eastern Europe. Furthermore, the organisation's dedication to democratic principles and quality work, underpinned by a well-structured network, empowers its members, and provides space for knowledge and experience sharing.

Addressing Weaknesses: Strengthening the Foundation

Despite its notable strengths, CDN has encountered specific challenges over the past few years. Some of MOs have exhibited instability and inactivity within the network, and in their local initiatives. Motivation levels among MOs and activists associated with CDN have been inconsistent. The secretariat has faced recurring challenges stemming from relatively poor working conditions and issues with staff well-being, along with difficulties arising from inadequate internal communication tools and task division. These challenges are compounded by several weaknesses, including high turnover of staff, limited impact assessment, reluctance towards innovation, difficulty to reach new audiences, insignificant political influence, insufficient knowledge transfer, a dearth of comprehensive policies, and an absence of a dedicated social media presence. Addressing these challenges and weaknesses is essential for CDN's continued growth and impact in the region.

Using Opportunities: Embracing Strategic Advantages

CDN's strategic planning capitalises on emerging opportunities in the political and organisational landscape. We are witnessing growing engagement of youth in politics even though the methods are different from traditional ways such as party or organisational membership. At the same time, there is rising Green movement in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) as well as increased focus from the wider Green movement in the region with aim to support progressives on the ground. CDN, with its established presence and expertise, is uniquely positioned to seize this moment. CDN should explore extensive partnership opportunities, foster sustainable collaborations, and facilitate the exchange of experiences and ideas with partners. Furthermore, embracing intersectionality and digital technologies can enhance CDN's influence and reach.

Mitigating Threats: Safeguarding Organisational Resilience

To secure its future, CDN must address potential threats that could interrupt its mission. These are the potential threats to successful achievement of the mission: consolidation of far-right, authoritarian, and populist governments in

the region that create hostile environment for progressive activists; shrinking space for civil society; all these accompanied with economic challenges that result in demoralisation and high level of brain drain of CDN's primary target group; Besides, visa and border restrictions hindering in-person events.

STRATEGIC GOALS:

1. Empower Progressive Changemakers

...and equip activists and leaders with necessary capacities to actively engage in political processes; Provide comprehensive training, political education, opportunities for knowledge exchange, and utilise digital tools to foster their growth, reach, and impact.

2. Strengthen the Network

...and connect further with the existing Member Organisation as well as welcome new ones. Moreover, prioritise intra-organisational growth and professionalisation of CDN to enable greater and more sustainable impact.

3. Bring Eastern European Perspective

...and cultivate a strong understanding of regional dynamics and political developments in Eastern Europe. Position CDN as influential source and a reference point within Green and Progressive European circles.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES:

1. We will Empower progressive changemakers by:

1. Developing and implementing effective training events to enhance their capacities;

2. Strengthening theoretical knowledge in key subject areas (such as the climate crisis, security, social justice, democracy) by organising educational events such as seminars, conferences, Study Sessions, as well as knowledge-sharing outputs such as publications, podcasts and recordings;

3. Design and implement tailored mentoring year-long projects with series of in-person and digital meetings focusing on key areas of impactful and sustainable organisation.

4. Elevating attention towards 1. young members within political parties who are not necessarily involved in youth wings; 2. progressive activists who are not part of member organisations;

5. Collaborating with professional organisations, companies, experts, and academics to support preparatory teams in creating relevant and

high-quality content for activities as well as deliver at least 1/4 of sessions during the events.

Overarching approach:

- Promoting Inclusivity: Ensure that all our activities are inclusive and accessible to a diverse range of participants. Implement measures to accommodate different backgrounds and ensure safe space;
- Ensuring intersectional approach: embed an intersectional approach into all our initiatives, recognising the interconnectedness of environmental issues with social justice concerns, as well as acknowledging the complex interplay of personal characteristics such as race, gender, sexuality, class, and ability;

2. We will Strengthen the Network by:

1. Evaluations and annual membership survey to gather feedback and ensure relevance of upcoming activities;
2. Expanding Network Membership, particularly in countries where we currently lack representation. Additionally, giving special attention to the independent activists and young members of progressive political parties;
3. Focusing on further Professionalisation of the organsiation: improve internal management, governance processes, policies, transfer of knowledge and documenting.
4. Diversifying Funding Sources: Develop a fundraising strategy to maximise support from Green foundations while actively seeking new funding sources. Concurrently, increase attention towards small-donor donations and launch fundraising campaigns.
5. Developing well-being-oriented Human Resource policies, fostering skill and knowledge development, and enhancing the working conditions and retention of staff and the Executive Committee;
6. Organising productive and well-planned Executive Committee Meetings and invigorating General Assemblies;
7. Enhancing communication channels and strategies, including the use of digital platforms and social media, to effectively disseminate information, statements, share success stories, and mobilise for collective actions and campaigns.

3. We will Bring Eastern European Perspective by:

1. Strengthening Partnerships with Progressive and Green Stakeholders: Foster ongoing and extended collaborations with partner organisations like Federation of Young European Greens, as well as

European Green Party, Green European Foundation, and Heinrich Boell Offices in the region.

2. Increasing political communication on Eastern Europe issues and developments: publishing statements and opinion pieces by Executive Committee Members, Secretary General, and other relevant individuals, organising webinars, providing input to other Green and Progressive actors;

3. (Re)Introducing and maintaining Newsletter to share important updates, insights, and perspectives from Eastern Europe. Highlight the contributions of Member Organisations and other progressive forces from the region, actively engage with them to gather input and provide informed contributions on key regional and political developments.

BOLSTERING OUR CAPACITY FOR EFFECTIVE STRATEGY DELIVERY

To ensure our ability to execute the strategy effectively, we recognise the importance of building organisational capacities which are essential not only for our strategic success but also for achieving our goals. Consequently, we have identified following four priorities:

Internal Management:

- Develop a comprehensive governance handbook that outlines roles, responsibilities, and decision-making processes for the Executive Committee, office as well as for temporary structures (such as Presidency, Prep Teams);
- Improve delegation order and reinforce in practice;
- Develop transfer document for each staff position (replacing of single document for whole staff);
- Optimise office structure and positions, ensuring more efficient task allocation and defined responsibilities:
    - In case of financial possibilities, prioritise the following new staff positions for: 1. Finances and Admin 2. Communications

Communications:

- Utilise digital organising tools such as petitions and establish newsletter using 'Action Network' platform (transfer data from all other

sources). Initially, to be distributed quarterly, with the goal of transitioning to a monthly basis;

- Targeted social media presence and increased political communication;
- Improve internal communications by unifying communications channels;

Human Resources:

- Revise contracts to ensure their legal compliance and practical applicability;
- Prioritise office well-being and professional growth;
- Update guide for onboarding and offboarding procedure;
- Establish a systematic performance assessment process, including regular evaluations and feedback sessions;

Finances:

- Reinforce intra-organisational financial procedures and rules;
- Strengthen fundraising efforts to diversify income streams by applying a minimum of two grants from sources beyond our existing partners. However, ensuring that any new projects do not overburden existing staff;
- Facilitate sub-granting possibilities to member organisations;

IMPLEMENTING, MONITORING AND EVALUATION

To bring our vision and mission to life, CDN is led by its Executive Committee and Secretary General, elected by member organisations at our annual General Assembly. The daily operations are carried out by staff, based in Belgrade, under the responsibility of the Secretary General. Our guiding document, the Political Platform, adopted by member organisations at the General Assembly, outlines our political positions and values. While Internal Rules of Procedure regulates framework of our operations. In addition, Safe Space Policy provides practical guidelines for ensuring inclusive and safe environment during our activities as well as general work.

Implementing

Central to our implementation strategy are the Annual Activity Plans that are developed and presented by the Executive Committee to be adopted at the General Assembly. They serve as a roadmap for the year ahead, outlining specific initiatives and activities aligned with our strategic objectives. Developed through inclusive and democratic processes, these plans provide detailed guidance for action, defining objectives, and timelines.

In coordination with our Annual Activity Plans, Executive Committee presents a Financial Plan which is subsequently adopted at the General Assembly. This plan

is designed to efficiently allocate resources in alignment with our strategic objectives and initiatives, ensuring the availability of the financial support required to achieve strategic objectives.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The fulfilment of Strategic Plan is monitored by the Executive Committee under the guidance of Secretary General. They identify and track Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) directly linked to our strategic objectives. These KPIs undergo an annual review to assess their progress and effectiveness in advancing our strategic priorities.

As part of the monitoring process, progress reports related to the Annual Activity and Financial Plans are presented at the General Assembly. These reports offer a comprehensive overview of each initiative, highlighting achievements, challenges, and areas for adjustment, while also showcasing their alignment with our strategic objectives and progress toward fulfilment.

CDN values feedback from participants of our events, Member Organisations, partners, and other stakeholders. We actively seek input through surveys, consultations, and feedback mechanisms to gain diverse perspectives on our work. This continuous feedback loop helps us identify areas for improvement, refine our strategies, and enhance the impact of our initiatives.

The strategy will undergo a mid-term assessment at the two-year mark to evaluate its relevance, progress, and effectiveness in advancing our strategic priorities. The review process will be led by Secretary General and involve analysing feedback from conducted activities, interviews with several participants, stakeholders, selected Member Organisations, and partners. Based on the feedback, the Executive Committee should discuss amendments to the Strategy to be proposed at the 2026 General Assembly.