



EASTERN PARTNERSHIP  
**Civil Society Forum**

**Report on the Activities of  
the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum  
November 2015 - November 2016**

NOVEMBER 2016

## Introduction

2016 has been a year of much development and political change for the Eastern Partnership, with highs and lows for civil society throughout the region.

The EU and Ukraine provisionally applied the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement from January, while for Georgia and Moldova the Association Agreements became fully effective in July. These agreements serve a testament to all three countries' commitments to reforms.

Throughout the year the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF) followed the progress towards visa liberalisation for Georgia and Ukraine. The EaP CSF encourages the EU ministers to conclude the process with Georgia and Ukraine as soon as possible.

Armenia underwent a fourth summer of protests as Yerevan residents rallied to voice their support for an armed militant group that seized a police station in the Erebuni district in July. Responding to these developments, the EaP CSF has sent a monitoring mission to assess the situation of the civil society, media and compliance with the human rights standards. Armenian society is in vital need for democratic reforms focused on reducing corruption and addressing the issues of political and economic monopolies. The negotiations for a new EU-Armenia agreement and its implementation should have an active involvement of civil society.

In Azerbaijan, despite the release of more than a dozen political prisoners at the beginning of the year, the Azerbaijan's civil society remains paralysed and facing the worst situation since the country's independence in 1991. Azerbaijani government should make efforts towards amending the legislation regulating the activities of civil society and reinstate the environment for the work of CSOs after the 3 years of crackdowns. A new comprehensive agreement with Azerbaijan is due to be launched in coming months. The government should also facilitate the inclusion of civil society into the upcoming negotiations with the EU.

The majority of EU sanctions against Belarus were lifted this year in acknowledgement of some of the progress made there. However, despite the EU urging Belarus to set up a moratorium on the death penalty, death sentences as well as executions resumed since the sanctions were lifted.

The EU has formally launched a Mobility Partnership with Belarus to ensure better management of migration flows. While Belarus is demonstrating continued efforts to effective border management, the authorities should make a headway in implementing other important commitments like Road Map of reforms in Higher Education, Convention of the rights of people with disabilities as well as finding inclusive implementation mechanisms for recently adopted Interagency Plan of Implementation of Recommendations for Belarus from UN mechanisms. The process of building nuclear power station in Astravets also raises concerns of civil society regarding security and safety issues as well as interdependence with other obligations and conventions of Belarus in environmental field which also require appropriate actions from the national government.



Moldova, Georgia and Belarus have held national elections this year. The election of Igor Dodon, who is in favour of Moldova joining the Eurasian Customs Union, creates uncertainty over the country's relations with Europe and reflects a large disillusionment with the pro-European leaders that led the country to financial crisis in 2014. In Georgia, the ruling Georgian Dream party has secured its grip on the nation by defeating the United National Movement in an election that was marred by accusations of vote rigging. The appointment of two opposition candidates into the parliament in Belarus for the first time since 2000 is believed to have been orchestrated to appease the west.

The continued violence in the Donbas and the worst clashes in Nagorno-Karabakh in over a decade have created an incentive for the introduction of a new security dimension of the European Eastern Neighbourhood Policy. Crimea is turning into a military base posing a direct security threat to Europe. With the launch of an ICC investigation into war crimes in South Ossetia this year, Russia's role in the conflicts of its neighbouring territories is gaining renewed media and political attention.

The EU is currently facing a great number of challenges related to the need for humanitarian support for the millions of refugees, as well as the development of Euroscepticism, sometimes fuelled from the outside. The EaP countries are contributing their fair share to providing solutions for these challenges. Armenia has welcomed the third largest number of Syrian refugees per capita. Since the start of the conflict, more than 18,000 Syrians have migrated to Armenia, according to UN High Commissioner for Refugees, 6 Syrian refugees per 1000 inhabitants. Since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, Belarus became the destination point for about 160 thousand Ukrainian refugees. The EaP region is also a primary battleground for Russian propaganda efforts and can be the key to delivering the right responses. Our countries are a part of the solution to the challenges the EU is facing and should not be shifted at the back burner of the EU policy agenda.

## **In a snapshot: Activities of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum in 2016**

The activities of the EaP CSF in 2016 have been guided by the [Strategy of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum for 2015-2017](#). In the reporting period the EaP CSF responded to the emerging challenges in the region. The EaP CSF continued to argue for further reforms in each of the EaP countries and draw attention to negative developments including human rights violations.

In 2016 the areas of the Forum's activities have been diverse, starting from ensuring free and fair elections in the EaP countries and having zero political prisoners in the EaP countries (in particular the cases of the Crimean Mejlis' Deputy Head, the EaP CSF members Hovsep Khurshudyan and Levon Barshegyan, and Ukrainian pilot Nadiya Savchenko), to ensuring the respect of human rights in the EaP, particularly in the disputed territories, and to discussing how to mitigate the security threats to the countries in the region and to reaching the lasting peace in the South Caucasus, to advancing visa liberalisation for Georgia and Ukraine and working for the amelioration of the operating environment for the civil society, in particular revising the civil society legislation in Azerbaijan, and proper funding for the civil society of the region.



In 2016, the Forum conducted its statutory events and activities including the annual Working Group meetings including capacity building, Working Group Council meetings, Steering Committee meetings, joint events for National Platforms, re-granting projects, advocacy events and many others. The Forum representatives have voiced their positions at the EaP high level meetings and took part in a number consultations regarding the EU policies vis-à-vis the EaP countries, progress of reforms in the EaP, as well as funding mechanisms for the civil society. The National Platforms in countries have continued to serve as platforms for developing the consolidated position of the civil society and for pressing their governments for further reforms and more favourable environment for the operation of the civil society. The representatives of the National Platforms have been meeting with the EU high-level representatives during their visits to the EaP countries to convey their perspective on the developments of the relations between their country and the EU.

The EaP CSF's structures have continued working together and furthered their cooperation in 2016. The consolidated efforts of the EaP CSF National Platforms, the Steering Committee, and the Secretariat aimed at the releasing from custody the Steering Committee member Hovsep Khurshudyan who was detained amidst the protests on the night of 29-30 July, 2016 in Yerevan, led to the prompt release of our colleague. With the joint efforts of the Steering Committee, the Secretariat and the National Platforms the campaign on visa-free for Georgia and Ukraine has received a wide coverage in the EU member states.

In 2016 the EaP CSF has added a new instrument to its arsenal. On 9-15 August 2016, the Steering Committee has sent the Monitoring Mission of the EaP CSF on the civil society, media and human rights situation to Armenia following the 17-31 July events in order to assess the situation of non-governmental organisations and the media in the aftermath the crisis and to establish a complete and accurate picture of information about the situation in particular fields of human rights. The mission was supported by the Armenian National Platform of the EaP CSF and included leading experts in the field of human rights from four EaP countries: Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

Missions as an instrument of the Forum were further debated and positively appraised during the joint event for National Platforms "On the frontline: human rights situation in the EaP countries" in Chisinau on 19-20 September 2016, which brought together around 50 human rights experts from the EU and EaP civil society community, major international NGOs, EU institutions and the Council of Europe.

Bearing in mind the dynamic environment and the EaP CSF internal processes (the current strategy of the EaP CSF runs out at the end of 2017), the discussions has started on reassessing the effectiveness of the Forum as a structure and its priorities and actions. In particular, the Working Group 1 of the EaP CSF had a brainstorming session at its annual meeting. The further discussions in this direction will continue at the Annual Assembly in Brussels and throughout 2017.

Thanks to the EaP CSF re-granting, which was pioneered in 2015, the Working Groups have been able to deepen their activities in the respective thematic directions by producing a number of analytical materials and conducting advocacy. A number advocacy successes have been achieved by the EaP CSF thanks to the targeted advocacy activities in Brussels. The EaP CSF was explicitly mentioned in the Council Conclusions issued on November 14, 2016 in the article where the role of the civil society and specifically that of the EaP CSF within the EaP multilateral framework was reaffirmed.



## Activities of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum in 2016 in Detail

### 1. Cooperation with EU institutions (the European Parliament, the European Commission, the European External Action Service, the Council of the European Union, EURONEST, and European Economic and Social Committee)

The EaP CSF had regular exchanges with the EU institutions throughout the year either during targeted advocacy activities, EU-initiated consultations or within the framework of the Annual Assembly, Steering Committee or annual Working Group meetings.

Throughout the year the EaP CSF has worked with a number of MEPs on various topics.

At the end of 2015 EaP CSF and the EPP Group of the European Parliament co-organised a panel discussion on challenges and prospects of visa liberalisation for Ukraine. As a result of close cooperation with the EaP CSF, a group of MEPs initiated a letter of support for visa-free regime to Ukraine and Georgia to draw the attention of the European Council and the European Commission to the substantial progress achieved by the countries in fulfilling the requirements of the visa-liberalisation package.

The EaP CSF Steering Committee Co-chairs Krzysztof Bobiński and Ulad Vialichka attended the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly meeting on 22-23 March in Brussels, where they shared the Forum's view of the situation in the Eastern Partnership. Ulad Vialichka presented the EaP CSF position on the EU policy towards Belarus at the meeting of the respective Working Group. The recommendations on the engagement of the Belarusian government and the parliament were provided to MEP Heidi Hautala, as well as suggestions on the future cooperation of EaP CSF with EURONEST.

Closed meeting on Azerbaijan was organised in May 2016 in cooperation with friendly MEPs and EED. The event was attended by 3 MEPs and policy advisors from all political fractions of the EP.

The gender sub-group of the EaP CSF has provided an input to the Opinion on women's rights in the Eastern Partnership States and other neighbouring countries (2016/2060(INI)) initiated by the EP's Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality. As a result, the final text of the Opinion includes two articles (8 and 21) based solely on EaP CSF input.

Six MEPs and political advisors were provided with briefings on the general state of affairs in Crimea with focus on state of media, security, compliance with the EU sanctions and severe limitations to civic activism. A set of recommendations was consequently developed in cooperation with OSEPI and distributed to the MEPs and other stakeholders, as well as reports on compliance with the sanction regime from the side of some of the EU countries' companies. The recommendations on Crimea were shared by MEP Petras Austrevicius with the whole group of Friends of Ukraine in the EP. Also, as a follow-up of the Crimean advocacy, a letter of MEPs on



elected deputies of Russian Duma to VP/HR Federika Mogherini was initiated by Petras Austrevicius.

Via friendly MEPs the EaP CSF has managed to introduce questions to High Representative Federica Mogherini during the EP hearing on Belarus in November 2016.

Together with the Chair of the Delegation for the relations with Belarus Bogdan Zdrojewski, the EaP CSF and its Belarusian National Platform held a panel focusing on Dialogue between Citizens and Institutions in Belarus at the EP. A contribution to the written address on Bologna roadmap implementation in Belarus was also provided to the office of MEP Zdrojewski in November 2016.

The Steering Committee and the Secretariat regularly met with EEAS representatives to discuss the situation in a particular EaP country or developments in the region in general.

The EaP CSF was invited to provide input to the progress reports for Georgia and Ukraine, which cover developments in the implementation of the Association Agenda of both countries, in advance of the Association Council and Cooperation Council. One to one meetings with EEAS officers took place on the respective developments in Azerbaijan, Armenia, Crimea and Moldova on the course of the year. A number of EEAS representatives were invited to the annual meeting of EaP CSF Working group 1 “Democracy, Human Rights, Good Governance and Stability” and this opportunity was used to channel the EaP CSF positions on introducing the security dimension to the EaP and strict conditionality in the sphere of human rights. High-level EEAS representatives are taking part in the high-level sessions of the Annual Assembly of the EaP CSF, a number of the mid-level representatives are taking part in the stakeholder meetings dedicated to each of the 6 EaP countries. Regular contact with EEAs representatives is also maintained via EaP CSF representation at EaP multilateral platforms and panels.

Meeting of the Steering Committee with Boris Iarochevitch, Head of the Division, Eastern Partnership, Regional Cooperation and OSCE, EEAS was organised during the SC meeting in Brussels. The Secretariat met with Head of Division on recommendations for the Review of the EaP multilateral Platforms/Panels structure and on how to optimise the input of the EaP CSF.

### The European Commission

Representatives of relevant DGs of the European Commission are regularly invited to the annual Working Group meetings, as well as the Steering Committee meetings. The Forum participants have also provided their position to them during the official EaP platform and panels. The Forum took part in the consultation “DG NEAR funding to civil society” held in June/July 2016. 8-page compilation of responses and recommendations from EaP CSF members were provided to DG NEAR. The Steering Committee met with Katarina Mathernová, Deputy Director General, Directorate General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations and provided recommendations on the future civil society support by the EC. The Deputy Director General Mathernova also participated at the EaP Youth Conference “Youth for Rights”. The EaP CSF has advocated with DG EAC to get its voice heard in reviewing the Belarus Bologna roadmap

implementation. DG ENER, DG GROWTH and DG ENVI were also counterparts of the EaP CSF members providing policy advice based on EaP CSF 2016 Re-granting projects.

The Council of the European Union was engaged at the level of COHOM and COEST standing committees via two closed briefings on Azerbaijan (May 2016) and Crimea (September 2016). The representatives of EU member states are often invited to the Forum events and are also actively engaged by the EaP CSF representatives at multilateral EaP Platforms and Panels. Moreover, [EaP CSF in the Council Conclusions issued on November 14, 2016](#) is referred to explicitly under article 9 of the Conclusions, the role of the civil society and that of EaP CSF specifically within the EaP multilateral framework was reaffirmed.

#### The European Economic and Social Committee

The EaP CSF presented its Position on EESC Draft Opinion on ENP Review at EESC meeting in Brussels. The EaP CSF cooperates with the EESC in the frames of the Association Agreement bilateral platforms with Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. The EESC has hosted the Working Group 5 during its annual meeting in Brussels.

## 2. Advocacy activities

### Targeted advocacy events in Brussels

Two comprehensive targeted advocacy campaigns were organised by the EaP CSF Secretariat in 2016. The concept of these campaigns included one to one meetings of EaP CSF representatives and experts with the representatives of EU institutions (EEAS, European Commission, European Parliament), briefings for EU Council committees COEST and COHOM, and closed events for selected Brussels audience.

- Azerbaijan (May 23-27, 2016) - closed meeting with COEST was organised in cooperation with the Permanent representation of the Czech Republic to the EU, as well as closed meeting at the European Parliament in cooperation with EED, hosted by friendly MEPs. Individual one to one meetings of the experts present with the EEAS, Cabinet of Commissioner Hahn, Cabinet and several MEPs were organised. Briefings were provided on the general state of affairs in the country in terms of economic, social and security development, on the state of civil society and political prisoners. Specific advocacy messages were successfully delivered to the stakeholders.
- Crimea (September 26–29, 2016) - closed door roundtable was organised in cooperation with OSEPI and EED, as well as closed meeting with COEST and COHOM in cooperation with the Permanent representation of the Czech Republic to the EU. Individual one to one meetings were organised at the EEAS, Cabinet of Commissioner Hahn, Cabinet of HR/VP Mogherini, and with 6 MEPs and political advisors. Briefings were provided on the general state of affairs in the peninsula with focus on state of media, security, compliance with the EU sanctions and severe limitations to civic activism in Crimea. Specific advocacy messages were successfully delivered



to the stakeholders. A set of recommendations was consequently developed in cooperation with OSEPI and distributed to the stakeholders, as well as reports on compliance with the sanction regime from the side of some of the EU countries' companies.

#### EaP CSF Re-granting related advocacy

Out of the policy oriented projects, the WG1 *Security Alert on the EU's Eastern Doorstep* contributed to the pre-NATO summit debate with well-received policy paper offering the civil society expertise in the security domain that has become one of the EaP policy priorities after the ENP review. The project led by Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development (Georgia) in cooperation with Foreign Policy Association (Moldova) and NGO Promotion of Intercultural Cooperation (Ukraine) delivered six country studies, a policy paper *Security Alert on the EU's Doorstep: Strategies for Strengthening Security in the Eastern Partnership Countries* and additional post-NATO summit paper *Time for a New Security Architecture for NATO and Eastern Neighbours*.

The related advocacy events included:

- The Warsaw project event hosted by the Polish Institute of International Affairs/PISM organized on 21st June 2016 in Warsaw
- Following the Warsaw event, the project leader was asked to provide PISM with more copies for the Warsaw Summit Experts' Forum—NATO in Defence of Peace: 2016 and Beyond, held on the margins of the NATO Summit on 7–9 July 2016. This was the official conference organized by the Polish Institute of International Affairs (PISM) and GLOBSEC, in partnership with the Atlantic Council, the Center for Strategic and International Studies, and the German Marshall Fund of the United States
- NATO's Open Door Policy in Warsaw and Beyond on 21st June 2016 Warsaw, an event organized by the German Marshall Fund
- EaP CSF regional conference *Security Challenges of the EU's Eastern neighbourhood* organised in Tbilisi on 28-29 July 2016

#### Successful input into the decision-making of the EU institution

- Recommendations on EU democracy support and civil society funding in EaP

EaP CSF embarked upon comprehensive strategy of advocating for improvements of the EU civil society funding and democracy support in the EaP countries with the aim to bring more flexibility and tailored solutions, including for EaP countries like Belarus or Azerbaijan. In January 2016, the Secretariat was represented at Carnegie Democracy Group dedicated to the issue of EU democracy support where representatives of European Commission, EEAS, European Parliament, EU member states and civil society were present. Policy Paper “Recommendations for the Slovak



EU Presidency and beyond: More effective EU Democracy Support in the EaP” was developed by the team of authors (Richard Youngs, Vera Rihackova, Miriam Lexmann and Marton Ugrosdy) and presented at a workshop in Prague (June 10 2016) and in Brussels (June 17). This Brussels workshop was co-organised and hosted by EaP CSF Secretariat and gathered representatives of European Commission, EU member states and civil society. Furthermore, recommendations on re-granting, Financial regulation review, EIDHR implementation, approach to and funding of the new actors within the civil society, management of operating grants, re-granting, and reaching out to the grassroots organisations were developed with the 8-page input of the EaP CSF members provided to DG NEAR in July 7. The written input followed the active participation of EaP CSF Secretariat at the DG NEAR consultation procedure “DG NEAR funding to civil society”, organised on July 1 2016 in Brussels. The issue of support to civil society in difficult conditions was also debated at WG1 Meeting session titled (June 1-2, 2016) “How can we improve the working environment for CSOs in difficult conditions?”, attended by the representatives of European Commission and EEAS.

- Requested input into the European Parliament’s AFET/DROI Opinion on women’s rights in the Eastern Partnership States and other neighbouring countries (2016/2060(INI)). The EaP CSF WG1 Gender sub-group provided well received input with many suggestions implemented into the final text of the Opinion, and with two articles (8 and 21) based solely on EaP CSF input.

See the [full text](#).

Article 8. Encourages the enhancement of economic policies for women and the use of microcredits as a tool for economic independence, as well as the promotion of entrepreneurship skills; stresses the need to provide guidance and clarification to women on how macroeconomic policies can support their rights, and the need for women to have access to information on their social and economic rights;

Article 21. Strongly condemns human trafficking and any other exploitative practice which violates the right to bodily integrity and inflicts violence; stresses the need to tackle human trafficking, the majority of victims of which are women who are exploited for sexual or work purposes; supports the placing of those policies at the core of development cooperation in the EU neighbourhood policies.

- [EaP CSF in the Council Conclusions issued on November 14, 2016](#) - referred to explicitly under article 9 of the Conclusions, the role of the civil society and that of EaP CSF specifically within the EaP multilateral framework was reaffirmed.
- EaP CSF input into the 8th Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference held in Batumi (June 7-10, 2016) as well as into the EaP Ministerial Meeting on Environment (18 October 2016, Luxembourg). The main themes of the Batumi conference were Air Quality and Green Economy. EaP CSF Georgian National Platform held a side event: CSOs of Georgian Eastern Partnership National Platform for Advancing of Green Economy on June 9, 2016. The side event was attended by Deputy Minister of Environment and Natural Resources of Georgia, Head of Department of



Energy Efficiency and Alternative Energies of Georgia, representatives of CSOs of Ukraine, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Moldova and Russia. A declaration for greening of economy and sustainable use of natural resources was prepared. The second side-event Environmental Policies, Programmes and Plans to implement SDGs in Eastern Partnership countries: from commitments to achieving targets was held as a part of official programme of the conference. It was organised by EaP CSF WG3, namely by the European Eco-Forum with support of Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum in partnership with the European Environmental Bureau, UNENGO MAMA-86 and in cooperation with Georgian National Platform of the EaP CSF.

### Advocacy issues promoted in cooperation with the EaP CSF National Platforms

Monitoring of the Bologna Roadmap for Belarus implementation has been a long-standing advocacy priority of EaP CSF. In 2016, joint advocacy efforts were undertaken before the meeting of BFUG AG2 in Minsk. 2nd Monitoring report (January-May 2016) was prepared by Belarusian National Platform and a list of independent civil society and student's organisation were recommended to be met in Minsk by the AG2 members. Recommendations on Education Code, Work placement, Academic Mobility and Academic Values, Transparency and access to information were made. Furthermore, Ulad Vialichka, Co-chair of the EaP CSF Steering Committee participated at a closed session of EURONEST Committee on Belarus (March 21 2016) where the issue was discussed. The Belarusian National Platform held a conference in Minsk titled "Public participation in Higher Education modernization: civil society role in the implementation of the Roadmap for higher education reform in Belarus" on September 23-24 2016 with high-level speakers from other EaP countries attending. The 3rd Monitoring report (June-September 2016) published, providing input to the written address on Bologna Roadmap implementation to MEP Bogdan Zdrojewski. Also, two EaP CSF 2016 Re-granting projects are focusing on the reform of higher education across EaP countries, providing further comparative expertise and policy input into the upcoming advocacy activities on the issue.

### **3. Re-granting**

This year in the framework of the re-granting scheme the EaP CSF Secretariat received **59 proposals**, out of which **49 passed the eligibility screening**. The majority of the eligible proposals were submitted under the priorities of the Working Group 1 "Democracy, Human Rights, Good Governance & Stability", Working Group 2 "Economic Integration & Convergence with EU Policies, and Working Group 4 "Contacts between People". The Selection Committee decided to provide funding for **18 projects**. The selected projects cover at least three Eastern Partnership countries. The level of participation was high with many applications of good quality and with the requested amount that exceeded several times the total budget available for this scheme. In total, the EaP CSF disbursed **321.165 EUR**. The EaP CSF Re-



granting 2016 has been supported by the European Commission, NED and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic. The full statistics for EaP CSF Re-granting 2016 can be found [here](#).

The EaP CSF Secretariat has been focusing on building the visual brand and common identity of the re-granting projects for this purpose a Visibility Guide for Re-grantees was developed. A more effective advocacy of the project outputs was also in focus in the course of the year. The training sessions for grantees on communication, advocacy and reporting were organised on the margins of every WG meeting. The projects were showcased at virtually every EaP CSF event organised in 2016 with the 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Assembly in Brussels capitalized on as a major advocacy opportunity. Infographics and success stories were prepared, presented and distributed to all participants. The grantees had an opportunity to display their project outputs and products at the Annual Assembly venue. Full presentation of the project objectives achieved and final outputs is conducted during the Parallel Working Group meetings on the first day of the Annual Assembly. The EaP CSF awards for three best performing projects were presented, based on the selection carried out by the EaP CSF Steering Committee. Finally, the policy input and policy advice generated by the projects were delivered and discussed with the stakeholders during the WG Initiated Stakeholders' session on the second day of the EaP CSF Annual Assembly. Besides these joint efforts, every project has followed its own advocacy and communication plan.

The priorities for the EaP CSF Re-granting 2017 are to be developed at the EaP CSF Annual Assembly by the respective WGs. The next call is expected to be open by the end of 2016, allowing for extended implementation period of the projects in 2017. The EaP CSF Re-granting has proved to be a useful tool for generating expertise and policy advice relevant for various EaP policy fields, as well as for grassroots work implemented within local communities on the issues like waste management or women entrepreneurial skills. Besides strengthening the work of the WGs, one of the objectives for 2017 is to tie the projects more closely with the priorities of the EaP multilateral platform and panels' priorities in order to empower further the EaP CSF representatives attending these meetings.

#### **4. Regional activities for National Platforms**

- [Eastern Partnership Civil Society Conference “Security Challenges of the EU’s Eastern Neighbourhood” Held in Tbilisi, Georgia 28-29 July 2016](#)

The Georgian National Platform and Liberal Academy Tbilisi brought together over 60 representatives of the Georgian government, EU institutions, and civil society representatives from the EaP countries as well as prominent security experts at this conference in Tbilisi. Together they identified solutions to the key security threats for the EaP countries, developed recommendations for the EU and NATO to stabilize the region, and identified the measures to be taken by the civil society. Based on these recommendations a [policy brief](#) was produced. The discussion was led by the Head of the EU Delegation to Georgia Janos Herman and attended by EaP CSF representatives Krzysztof Bobinski, Lasha Tughushi and Kakha Gogolashvili. Also present were the Advisor to the President of Georgia for the Foreign Affairs Tengiz Phkhaladze, the First Deputy State Minister for



Reconciliation and Civil Equality Ketevan Tsikhelashvili and Jakub Kalensky from EEAS East StratCom Task Force.

[Policy Brief: Security Challenges of the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood](#)

- **[Human Rights Conference “On the Frontline: human rights situation in the EAP Countries” Held in Moldova, 19-20 September 2016](#)**

The Moldovan National Platform brought together 50 human rights experts from the EU and EaP civil society community, major international NGOs, EU Institutions and the Council of Europe. The Moldovan National Platform Coordinator, Ion Manole, Ombudsman of Moldova, Mihail Cotorobai, and the Head of the EU Delegation to Moldova, Pirkka Tapiola led the discussions which featured panels on international mechanisms addressing human rights challenges in the EaP countries, best practices for human rights defenders, as well as human rights monitoring and protection in conflict zones. The event included workshops where participants developed recommendations for future actions in tackling human rights abuses in the EaP countries. The participants adopted [two resolutions](#) - on the execution of judgements issued by the European Court of Human Rights regarding human rights violations in conflict areas of the EaP countries and on the effective monitoring of human rights in conflict areas by strengthening the protection of human rights defenders.

[Resolution No.1](#)

[Resolution No.2](#)

- **[On 23-24 September, International Conference “Public participation in Higher Education modernization: civil society role in the implementation of the Roadmap for higher education reform in Belarus”](#)**

The conference was organized by the by Belarusian Public Bologna Committee and its local partners in cooperation with Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum and its Belarusian National Platform of the EaP CSF. The conference brought together experts on higher education reform from Belarus and other Eastern Partnership Countries. The event has given a start to strategy development on how implement the Roadmap and bring Belarusian higher education to European values and standards. The conference focused on the Roadmap implementation, stakeholders' participation in this process and its impact on the Belarusian higher education development, structural changes and adherence to Bologna fundamental values.



## 5. European Integration Index for EaP countries

In summer 2016 the EaP CSF has received funding from the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Open Society Institute for producing the new edition. The Index is a yearly publication produced by the EaP CSF that generates recommendations to guide countries along the reform process and serves as a monitoring tool for both civil society and policymakers in the partner countries and the EU. The revision of methodology for producing the Index has started in summer 2016 to ensure that the analytical product better respond to the new realities of the region. The new edition is planned to be published in spring 2017.

## 6. High-profile meetings in the framework of the Eastern Partnership, in which the members of the EaP CSF took part

### EaP Ministerial in Brussels, 23 May 2016

On 23 April, the EaP CSF Steering Committee Member Ion Manole addressed Foreign and Interior Ministers, focusing on protracted conflicts and other challenges in the Eastern Partnership region. He suggested that the EaP CSF be permitted to send a fact-finding mission to Nagorno-Karabakh in light of the recent flare ups there. He stressed the importance of human rights and democracy in regions affected by conflict, and urged the EU to promote these values. In light of the Netherlands referendum on EU-Ukraine AA/DCFTA, Ion Manole highlighted the importance of EU confidence-building measures such as the visa liberalisation process and urged for these to continue unhindered.

### 7th EaP Informal Ministerial Dialogue in Kyiv, 11 July 2016

The EaP CSF Steering Committee member Iurii Vdovenko participated in the meeting, which gathered foreign and economic ministers of the EaP countries, EU Institutions representatives including the Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations Johannes Hahn. The meeting addressed security challenges following the Warsaw NATO summit, the Brexit vote, and the release of the EU Global Security Strategy, as well as development of SMEs and trade. In his address, Mr Vdovenko welcomed the concept of resilience, incorporating the rule of law, human rights and good governance, as well as long-term commitment to civil society, as the basis of the EU foreign policy towards its neighbours.

### First EaP Partnership Formal Ministerial Meeting on Environment and Climate Change in Luxembourg, 18 October 2016

The meeting gathered **Ministers of Environment** and experts from the **EU** and the six **EaP countries**, civil society organisations, as well as European Commissioners **Karmenu Vella** (Environment, Fisheries and Maritime Affairs) and **Johannes Hahn** (European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations). The discussions focused on **environmental governance, green economy and the implementation of the Paris Agreement on Climate**

**Change.** Anna Golubovska-Onisimova spoke on behalf of the EaP CSF and stressed the need for the reinforcement of cooperation on environmental reform in EaP countries and called for clear time-framed targets for EaP countries regarding key achievements required for Good Environmental Governance.

### 8<sup>th</sup> EaP Informal Ministerial Dialogue in Yerevan, 17 November 2016

The EaP CSF was represented in the meeting by Hovsep Khurshudyan, member of the Steering Committee. Speaking on behalf of the EaP CSF, Mr Khurshudyan highlighted the key role civil society plays in the Eastern Partnership countries in promoting democracy and human rights and stressed the need to tackle pressing issues such as high level of youth unemployment and the persecution of civil society activists in the region. The meeting gathered Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the EaP countries, EU officials including Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations Johannes Hahn. The discussions mainly focused on the implementation of the renewed European Neighbourhood Policy and other challenges in the region.

In 2016 the EaP CSF representatives took part in more than 30 EaP Platforms and Panels. The EaP CSF has co-organised the side event of the CSDP panel in Vilnius on 3-4 March.

- CSDP panel and civil society conference, Vilnius
- EaP Panel on Environment and Climate Change, Brussels (in preparation of the EaP Ministerial on Environment)
- Yearly workshop on EaP energy regulators, Vilnius
- 1st HDM Panel meeting (Harmonisation of Digital Markets), Brussels
- EaP Platform 1 meeting, Brussels
- EaP Foreign Ministers' Informal Dialogue, Tbilisi
- European Commission Security Sector Reform consultation, Brussels
- 14th Meeting of Platform 2 on Economic Integration and Convergence with EU Policies
- EaP Platform 3 Meeting, Brussels (for mid-term evaluations, etc.)
- EaP Platform 4 Meeting, Brussels
- 4th meeting of the EaP Panel on Agriculture and Rural Development ("ARD Panel")
- Trade Policy and EU Agreements in Eastern Europe - Why Gender Matters, Stockholm



- Fifteenth Meeting of the Eastern Partnership Platform 2 “Economic Integration and Convergence with EU Policies”, Brussels
- Meeting of EaP Panel on Environment and Climate Change, Luxembourg
- Workshop on Migration and Asylum, Stockholm
- ETF Workshop “Approaches to Skills Participation and Matching – experiences in the EU and Eastern Partnership region: linking research on labour markets and skills dynamics with policymaking”, Maastricht
- Platform 4 meeting, Brussels
- 11th Eastern Partnership Public Administration Reform Panel, Warsaw
- EaP Ministerial on Environment, Luxembourg
- Informal Ministerial meeting on Digital Community, Luxembourg
- Business Development Panel (formerly SME Panel), Yerevan
- Transition to market economy and demands for skills anticipation workshop, Prague

## 7. Steering Committee meetings and statements

### **The Steering Committee had four meetings in the reporting period**

The Steering Committee met for the first time in January 2016 to discuss the main priorities of the EaP CSF for its 2016 working programme. The Committee elected its co-chairs, Krzysztof Bobinski and Uladzislau Vialichka. The SC addressed an [open letter on Moldova](#) to the High Representative Federica Mogherini and Commissioner Johannes Hahn proposing the establishment of a EU-driven mediation task force for Moldova, and issued a [statement on the human rights situation in Armenia](#). The SC also discussed the timeline and the selection procedure of participants for the next Annual Assembly of the Forum.

#### [The minutes of the first Steering Committee meeting](#)

The second and third SC meetings in Berlin and Brussels focused on project selection for the re-granting scheme of 2017, the organization of the 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Assembly in Brussels and the planning of regional events. It was agreed at the third meeting that WG Coordinators would be elected by National Platforms prior to the Annual Assembly and that election lists would be consulted by the WG Council. At the third meeting, the creation of a task force on Nagorno-Karabakh was also discussed.

#### [The minutes of the second Steering Committee meeting](#)

#### [The minutes of the third Steering Committee meeting](#)



At the fourth SC meeting in Chisinau, the SC welcomed the release of Hovsep Khurshudyan and expressed the need for efforts that would lead to the release of other peaceful protesters. The discussions focused on the use of Monitoring Missions as a working tool of the EaP CSF and the assessment of re-granting. The Steering Committee decided to have a third parallel session at the Annual Assembly focused on transparency and accountability, which would include the oversight of the civil society of the EU funding to the EaP countries. It was agreed that the results of the monitoring mission to Armenia would be presented during the advocacy meetings in Brussels in October and the training of a group of experts from the EaP CSF for future monitoring missions was considered.

[The minutes of the fourth Steering Committee Meeting](#)



## Steering Committee Statements adopted in the reporting period

1. [Statement on recent and forthcoming elections, 13 October 2016](#)
2. [Statement on the persecution of Ilmi Umerov endangering his life, 29 August 2016](#)
3. [Statement on the Arrest of Hovsep Khurshudyan and Recent Developments in Armenia, 1 August 2016](#)
4. [Statement on the Detention of Levon Barshegyan, 29 July 2016](#)
5. [Statement on the Murder of Pavel Sheremet, 25 July 2016](#)
6. [Statement on the Recent Events in Armenia, 19 July 2016](#)
7. [Statement on the Attack in Nice, France , 18 July 2016](#)
8. [Open letter to His Holiness Pope Francis, 17 June 2016](#)
9. [Statement on the Mass Shooting in Orlando, Florida, 17 June 2016](#)
10. [Statement on Possible Delays in Introducing Visa-Free Regime with Georgia and Ukraine, 25 May 2016](#)
11. [Statement on the Release of Khadija Ismayilova, 25 May 2016](#)
12. [Reaction of the Steering Committee Co-chairs on the Occasion of the 101st Anniversary of Armenian Genocide, 24 April 2016](#)
13. [Statement on the Result of the Non-binding Referendum in the Netherlands on the Ratification of the Association Agreement with Ukraine, 12 April 2016](#)
14. [Appeal by the EaP CSF Steering Committee to the members of the Armenian and Azerbaijani National Platforms of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, 11 April 2016](#)
15. [Statement on Release of Several Political Prisoners in Azerbaijan, 18 March 2016](#)
16. [Statement on the Release Nadiya Savchenko, 9 March 2016](#)
17. [Statement on the lifting of EU sanctions on a number of Belarusian officials, 23 February 2016](#)
18. [Statement regarding the European Parliament Resolution on the Human Rights Situation in Crimea, in particular that of the Crimean Tatars, 5 February 2016](#)
19. [Statement on the Deteriorating Human Rights Situation in Armenia, 1 February 2016](#)
20. [Open letter to the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini and Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations Johannes Hahn on the situation in Moldova, 29 January 2016](#)



## **8. Working Group and WG Council meetings**

In cooperation with WG Coordinators the EaP CSF Secretariat organised 5 annual meetings of Working Groups and 5 meetings of the Working Group Councils that were used as advocacy opportunity for WG members and an opportunity to exchange ideas on the selected priorities of the WGs. The meetings were also used to report on the situation in countries. The WG representatives had a chance to meet with more than 30 representatives of the EU institutions, with whom they raised more than 50 issues. The reports from annual WG meetings and their annual reports are below:

[Working Group 1 Annual Meeting Report](#)

[Working Group 2 Annual Meeting Report](#)

[Working Group 3 Annual Meeting Report](#)

[Working Group 4 Annual Meeting Report](#)

[Working Group 5 Annual Meeting Report](#)

[Working Group 1 Annual Report](#)

[Working Group 2 Annual Report](#)

[Working Group 3 Annual Report](#)

[Working Group 4 Annual Report](#)

[Working Group 5 Annual Report](#)

In 2016, the EaP CSF Working Group 4 “Contacts between People” and its Coordinator Hovsep Khurshudyan initiated holding **the Eastern Partnership Youth Conference “Youth for Rights”**. The conference was for the first time organised by the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum under the patronage of the Slovak Presidency in the Council of the European Union on 27-28 October in Bratislava, Slovakia. It brought together 145 young activists from the EaP countries, Russia and the EU who advocate human rights and the democratic development of their societies.

The EaP CSF member organisations from the subgroup Public Administration and Local Governance Reform of Working Group 1 and MEP Bogdan Zdrojewski, organised a panel discussion entitled **“Dialogue between Citizens and Institutions in Belarus – the Way Forward?”** at the European Parliament on 26 April 2016.



## 9. National Platforms activities

The National Platforms have continued to serve as reform drivers in 2016, however in some countries the operating environment and possibilities for having a productive dialogue with the authorities is more conducive than in others.

The Azeri NP has continued its efforts aimed at improving the oppressive legislation governing the operation of the civil society in the country.

The Armenian NP followed and reacted to the developments in sphere of the EU-Armenia cooperation on official level and was proactive by consulting, proposing and raising issues important for the Armenian society and related to the logic of the EU-Armenia relations. The Platform has carried out substantial activities during the campaign of the referendum on amendments to the RA Constitution, the meetings with the RA authorities on the RA new Electoral Code, as well as the EU-Armenia new framework agreement negotiations. The NP has issued 11 statements and conducted 12 events in the reporting period.

The Belarusian NP has further consolidated its position as a stakeholder in the Belarus-EU relations in the realm of the EaP policy. The civil society in general expanded its presence and strengthened voice in EU-Belarus relations via pro-active participation in in the formats of the EU-Belarus Coordination Group and the EU-Belarus Human Rights Dialogue. The BNP and its members organised 53 events (conferences, negotiations, consultations, round tables etc.), which were attended by 442 people. This activity resulted in an increase in the interest and confidence of civil society organizations within the BNP. Seven public statements and a common position was released by CSOs on behalf of the BNP.

The Georgian NP following the Memorandum of Understanding signed with the Government, the NP together with the Office of the State Minister of Georgia on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration organised a series of sectoral meetings during the year (with ministries of environment, education and agriculture), which allowed the NP to offer their view on sectoral developments. The NP has opened four representations in the 4 regions and carried out capacity building sessions for them.

The Moldovan NP focused on advocacy campaigns on implementation of the Association Agreement and sectorial issues related to this. The NP is a part of the consultation process for the new action plan for implementation of the AA in Moldova and one of the main stakeholders in developing the EU-Moldova Association Platform. The National Platform took part in more than 30 strategic high level discussions and meetings (ministries and government). The National Platform insisted for an investigation on the unpublished results of the National Census – as a result the Director of the National Bank of Statistics resigned and an action plan was elaborated.

The Ukrainian NP has received an institutional support from the EU Delegation on Ukraine and has conducted a series of strategic planning exercises. Among numerous priorities in 2016 were human rights protection, including in occupied Crimea and Donbass; Ukraine's security in the context of cooperation with the EU; Promotion of visa-free regime between the EU and Ukraine; the reform of public administration and anticorruption reforms in the context of implementation of the EU requirements.

[Armenian National Platform Annual Report](#)

[Azerbaijani National Platform Annual Report](#)

[Belarusian National Platform Annual Report](#)

[Georgian National Platform Annual Report](#)

[Moldovan National Platform Annual Report](#)

[Ukrainian National Platform Annual Report](#)

## **10. Applications for the annual meeting of the EaP CSF**

In March 2016, the call for applications for **the Annual Assembly of the EaP CSF** in Brussels was launched. Based on the three selection lists – National Platforms/EU coordinators, Working Group coordinators, and EU delegations – the selection of participants was finalised by the Steering Committee.

This year there were 538 applicants for the Annual Assembly, out of which 200 organisations have been selected to take part in the Forum either in the capacity of a participant or observer in line with the eligibility guidelines. 22,8% of the selected delegates coming to Brussels have not attended the Annual Assembly of the Forum in Kyiv in 2015. 26,9% of the attendees are new participants who never attended the Forum.

## **11. The EaP Secretariat's activities**

The Secretariat operates within the outlines developed by the CSF and in line with its [statute](#). It currently has three full-time staff members: Director - Natalia Yerashevich, Advocacy Manager - Vera Rihackova, Communications Manager Darya Mustafayeva, as well as part-time Administrative Manager – Lidia Gromadzka and Financial Manager – Sophie Huguenet.

In 2016 the Secretariat supported the activities of the Steering Committee by organising four Steering Committee meetings and ensured the follow up and implementation of the decisions taken by the Steering Committee, solving procedural issues, and channelling the Steering Committee's and Forum's positions at relevant points to the EU institutions in Brussels.

The Secretariat supported Working Groups and National Platforms by organising and drafting the agendas of the annual Working Group meetings and 2 regional events for National Platforms. The Secretariat organised advocacy events for National Platforms and Working Groups and Working Group Councils.

Re-granting, a new area of activities introduced in 2015, has continued to be solidified as a new instrument of the Forum. The advocacy outreach of the Secretariat has increased in 2016 with a number of advocacy successes that followed rigorous advocacy campaigns in Brussels.

In general, the Secretariat organised more than 20 EaP CSF events in 2016, the largest of which were the

Annual Assembly with more than 200 people in attendance, annual Working Group 1 meeting and 2 regional events for National Platforms with more than 60 people in attendance for each of the events.

The Secretariat facilitated more than 60 Forum representatives' participation in the official EaP Platforms, panels, and other meetings. The Secretariat has coordinated the submission of the input and often prepared draft versions of the Forum's contributions. Secretariat's staff participated in a number of meetings to update different audiences on the Forum and its activities.

Serving as an information, coordination and expertise hub of the CSF for the stakeholders in Brussels and EaP partner countries, the Secretariat is working to increase Forum's visibility and is publicising the Forum's activities through the [Forum's website](#), [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), monthly newsletter and other channels. The EaP CSF ensures the constant growth in visibility through the website and social media channels.

A new sleek, user-friendly and visually oriented [WordPress website](#) that includes a [membership database](#) was launched in October 2016. In the reporting period more than 140 articles were produced and published on the EaP CSF website. The EaP CSF Facebook page has 11177 likes – 1067 new likes in comparison with December 2015. EaP CSF Twitter has 1280 followers – 314 new followers in comparison with December 2015. 46 campaigns - 9 newsletters + 37 ad hoc updates and campaigns - have been produced and circulated to around 3000 subscribers. 16 press releases/statements have been circulated by the Secretariat. In 2016 there have been more than 70 mentions of the Forum and its activities in media. More than 30 interviews with/opinion pieces by Forum members appeared on TV/radio and in the written press/online. The video of the Forum is in the process of creation.



## Annex I

### Funding and accounts

#### EaP CSF (legal entity *The Secretariat of the Steering Committee of the EaP CSF*) funding sources

The general funding sources of the EaP CSF Secretariat are the European Commission and foundations or national institutions (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, development agencies, etc.).

The strategy of the EaP CSF Secretariat is primarily focused on securing funding for the functioning of the EaP CSF (A) and, to the extent possible, to fundraise for flagship projects, like the European Integration Index for Eastern Partnership countries (B).

#### **A) Project “*Support to the activities of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum*”:**

The EaP CSF Secretariat is currently operating a three-year grant from the European Commission entitled “*Support to the activities of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum ENI/2014/347-121 (2015-2017)*”.

The objectives of the three-year project are:

- To encourage further cooperation between organisations from the Forum by supporting the joint activities of the Working Groups and National Platforms;
- To improve the functioning of the structures of Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (Working Group, National Platforms) in order for the Forum to become more representative and allow it to become an effective and reliable counterpart for national governments;
- To increase the capacities of the Secretariat to act as support structure for the Forum.

Project activities include:

- Organising Forum meetings (working groups: 5 meetings per year, Steering Committee – up to 3 meetings per year, plenary meetings: 1 meeting per year);
- Organising advocacy events in Brussels or the EaP countries;
- Supporting joint projects and activities of the WGs through re-granting
- Organising capacity development activities for Working Groups in the frames of WG meetings or other events;
- Supporting the (regional) activities of National Platforms
- Financing the activities of the Secretariat as support structure for the Forum

The total of the grant is 3.324.294,34 EUR. The EC undertakes to finance a maximum amount of 3.000.000 EUR and the grant is further limited to 90,24% of the eligible costs of the project. There is an obligatory co-funding part of 324.294,34 EUR to be found over 2015-2017 period.



As of 20<sup>th</sup> November of 2016, the EaP CSF Secretariat has secured contributions from the following sources:

- 80.500 USD under the Grant agreement 2015-851 with the National Endowment for Democracy (NED);
- 65.660 EUR under the Grant agreement with the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs provided via Czech Embassies in the EaP countries;
- 57.540 USD under the Grant agreement 2016-1241 with NED.

**B) Project “European Integration Index for EaP countries”:**

The project European Integration Index for EaP countries has been carried out by the EaP CSF Secretariat since 2014.

In 2014-2015, the Index has been funded by SIDA. In 2015, SIDA, in spite of the initial willingness to fund the project and Forum in general, and a thorough assessment of the needs of the Forum made, no funding was provided. For 2016-2017, the Index project will be implemented thanks to the support of the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with a grant of 490.000 CZK, and the Open Society Foundation, with a grant of 55.000 USD.

**EaP CSF Secretariat Annual accounts**

The EaP CSF Secretariat is registered as a non-profit organisation under the Belgian law, and therefore its accounts are expressed in Euro and are maintained in compliance with international accounting standards and the legislation on international non-profit making association (AISBL) applicable in Belgium.

According to the Belgian legislation, the annual accounts of the EaP CSF Secretariat are audited on a yearly basis. On June 3<sup>rd</sup> 2016, the Secretariat received the audit report from external auditors (DGST & Partners) on the General Accounts of the EaP CSF Secretariat for the reporting period 2015. No inconsistencies have been found (“*Opinion sans reserve*”).

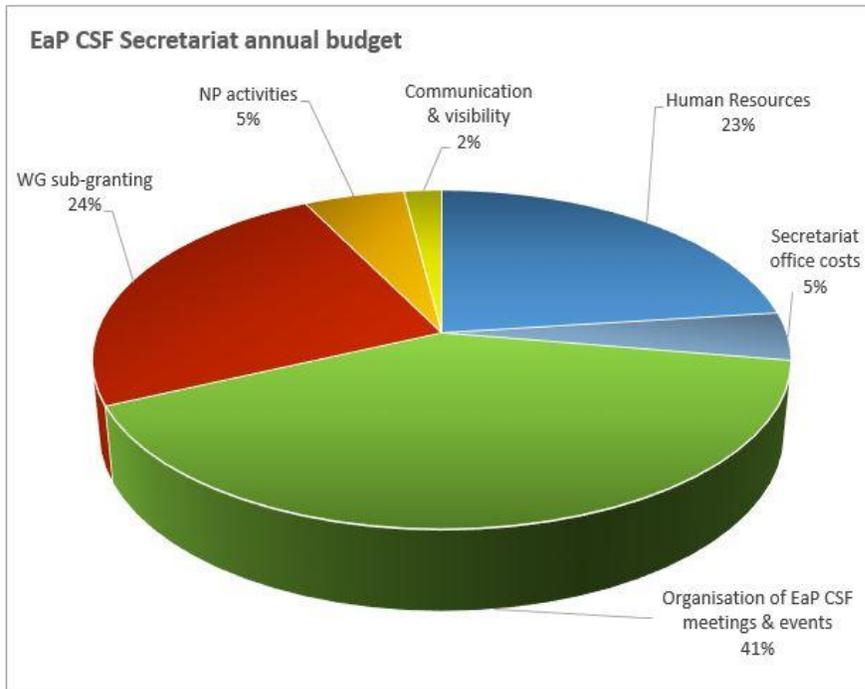
**Annual budget:**

For the period 2015-2017, the annual budget of the EaP CSF Secretariat is equivalent to one third of the three-year grant from the European Commission: 1.108.098 EUR.

It is divided between six main budget items: organisation of meetings and events, WG re-granting scheme, NP activities, communication and visibility, human resources and secretariat office costs.

**Table 1** – EaP CSF Secretariat yearly budget’s distribution for the period 2015-2017





The main type of expenditures per year are the organisation of EaP CSF meetings and events, such as annual meetings of five Working Groups and Working Groups Councils, four Steering Committee meetings per year, two National Platform capacity-building events, the Annual Assembly and 5-6 smaller advocacy meetings.

The second main budget item is the Working-Group re-granting scheme, with 24% of the EaP CSF Secretariat’s annual budget is dedicated to it, for a total of 810.000 EUR for the three years

In 2015, 15 projects have been selected and awarded a grant for a total amount of 160.425 EUR. In 2016, 18 projects were selected and awarded a grant for a total amount of 320.000 EUR.

In 2017, the re-granting scheme will therefore have a total budget of 329.575 EUR. If funds have not been spent by 2016 grantees, they will be added to the 2017 re-granting budget.

## ANNEX II. FORUM STRUCTURE

### What is the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum?

The Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum is a representative forum of civil society organisations from the Eastern Partner countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine) and EU civil society organisations active in the Partner countries. The Forum and its organs (national platforms, thematic working groups, and Steering Committee) are recognised as key civil society partners for the European Commission in the framework of European Union (EU) relations with the Eastern Partner countries, and with regard to the EU's commitment to support civil society actors in the Partner countries and to engage them as essential partners in democratic development.

### Mission

To facilitate and strengthen the active and expert engagement of civil society in the Eastern Partnership and in the Eastern dimension of EU external relations policies, and in participatory governance and accountable policymaking with regard to the democratic transition and European integration of the Eastern Partnership countries, including prospective EU membership.

### Annual Forum

The annual Forum is the highest decision-making body of the Forum, at which up to 13 members of the Steering Committee are elected for a one-year term. The annual Forum approves the by-laws, conflict-of-interest rules, and any changes to these core governance documents. Between annual Forum events, the delegates to the previous Forum act as the highest decision making body, and can make decisions by majority vote through email voting.

The annual Forum is a leading annual civil society event, providing networking and experience-sharing opportunities for civil society representatives. It also links them with representatives of the European Commission, EEAS and other EU institutions, Partner country governments, and EU civil society organisations and international networks.

The Annual Forum includes meetings of all working groups and subgroups of the Forum, and the annual event provides space for showcasing national and international initiatives where civil society expertise and projects facilitate a more participatory policy-making and democratic transition in the Partner countries.

### Working Groups

Within the Forum, five working groups have been set up and are functioning to discuss issues pertaining to the four intergovernmental thematic platforms, and to contribute to the agenda of the platforms. The working groups of the Forum are working in parallel to the platforms and should contribute to the progress of the platforms' programmes.

The working groups are:

- WG 1. Democracy, human rights, good governance and stability
- WG 2. Economic integration and convergence with EU policies
- WG 3. Environment, climate change and energy security
- WG 4. Contacts between people



- WG 5. Social and Labour Policies and Social Dialogue

### **National Platforms**

The national platforms are established and operate in all six Partner countries. Each Partner country's platform decides on the format and mechanism of establishing and functioning of their platform. At the same time, there can be only one national platform in each country recognised by the Forum, and the national platform should adhere to the mission, vision, core values and principles of the Forum.

Membership in the national platform is open to all eligible civil society organisations, and confers access to information and the ability to apply for the annual Forum event.

All national platforms should correspond to the following requirements:

- share the aims and objectives of the Forum and organise activities for their implementation at national level
- operate inclusively, in a non-discriminatory manner, showing openness towards all eligible civil society organisations in the country
- provide access to information to all members
- members not only have rights but also responsibilities
- a chair/facilitator/co-ordinator (or even Steering Committee) should be elected
- only organisations (not individuals) are eligible for national platform membership
- the national platform should engage with all five working group topics

The composition and division of responsibilities within the national platform should correspond to the composition of the Forum as a whole (division into working groups and thematic sub-groups, etc.) Co-ordination and synergy between the Forum Steering Committee and the national platform or Forum participants from the Partner country is provided by the Country Facilitator.

### **Steering Committee**

The Steering Committee is the permanent representative body, with a mandate from civil society in the Partner countries plus civil society representatives from the EU member states and representatives from the four thematic platforms. Up to 13 members of the Steering Committee are elected by the members of the Forum for a one-year term. The Steering Committee meets three to four times per year to guide the activities of the Forum, to plan ongoing engagement with EU and other counterparts, and to work towards creating a sustainable funding basis.

The Steering Committee is structured as follows:

- Out of two Working Group Coordinators, each working group elects one, either from the EU or from Partner countries to become a Steering Committee member
- Each Partner country delegation at the Forum's annual meeting elects a representative to become Country Facilitator
- Up to two EU Co-ordinators, elected by the whole annual Forum from already elected EU Working Group Coordinators.

Responsibilities of the Steering Committee:



1. Serve as the governing Board of the Secretariat of the Forum, the legally registered entity established upon the decision of the Forum
2. Participation at thematic platform meetings, where possible
3. Participation in selection of the Forum's representatives for all panel/seminar meetings where the Forum is invited
4. Recognition and support of one national platform per Partner country
5. Regular communications with national platforms and working groups
6. Creation of concepts on Forum strategic development

The Steering Committee is guided by the by-laws of the Forum, terms of reference and procedures for the Steering Committee, conflict of interest rules, and adequate funding to fulfil the expected tasks. The by-laws should spell out the overall expectations and tasks of the Forum. Reflecting that the Forum is a bottom-up approach to European policy making, the by-laws should be submitted for consideration and a vote of the whole Forum.

### **Secretariat**

The Secretariat co-ordinates communication between the Steering Committee and Forum participants, liaises with the European Commission, EEAS, and other EU institutions, and monitors EU-Eastern Partnership developments, promotes the results and activities of civil society projects, and organises meetings of Forum representatives with EU officials, etc. The Secretariat is established in Brussels as a legal entity. The governing Board of the Secretariat of the Forum is the Steering Committee. Board membership terminates upon the annual election of the new Steering Committee, whereupon the new members of the Steering Committee become members of the Board of the Secretariat of the Forum.

Core functions of the Forum Secretariat staff:

- support Steering Committee in representing the Forum in official correspondence, and liaise with the European Commission, EEAS and others in preparation of meetings of Steering Committee and working Groups,
- monitor intergovernmental platform meetings, other expert meetings, and other developments at EU level (EU Council, Commission, EEAS, Parliament, EESC, bilateral meetings in Brussels, other Brussels stakeholders, e.g. civil society networks),
- support the sustainable development of the national platforms,
- set up meetings with European Commission, EEAS and others for visiting Forum experts/delegations,
- prepare advocacy calendars, maintain project database of civil society activities, and support presentation of projects at Forum events and to key EU stakeholders,
- Monitor and update Forum official website [www.eap-csf.eu](http://www.eap-csf.eu) in co-operation with Working Group Coordinators, Country Facilitators, and EU Co-ordinators.
- manage legal reporting requirements and accounting, reporting to donors.

