

Strategy of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum for 2018-2020

Introduction

The Strategy of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum will cover the 2018-2020 period and will be aimed at logically continuing the Strategy of the EaP CSF for 2015-2017 and the preceding Concept paper “*EaP CSF - An Active Partner in Democratic Transition and European Integration*”.

The strategy outlines the major internal and external factors that will affect the work of the EaP CSF in the described period, reformulates the vision and mission of the EaP CSF and sets goals and objectives for 2018-2020. The Strategy also describes the major areas of activities contributing to each of the objectives and proposes tools and mechanisms allowing to effectively distribute responsibilities within the Forum and make thematic prioritisation.

Situation analysis

External context

The strategy implementation is influenced by various political components reflecting EU foreign policy priorities, multilateral and bilateral dimensions of the Eastern Partnerships, political fluctuations in the EaP countries, EU-Russia relations, relations between the EaP countries with Russia, relations between the EaP countries themselves, unresolved conflicts, internal political processes in the EaP countries etc.

One of the major factors affecting the processes in the region is the influence of Russia and the EU-Russia relations. After the launch of the Eastern Partnership Russia has explicitly opposed the process of integration of the six newly independent states where it still has a varying degree of influence. Russia exerts its pressure in the Eastern Partnership region mainly via the presence of Russian financial and political capital, their trade and energy dependence, labour migrants, corruption links, annexation and occupation policy and incitement of internal conflicts. All of these pressure mechanisms were used during the last decade. The refusal of the former Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich to sign the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, the Russian aggression in Ukraine following Euromaidan and the U-turn from signing the association agreement with the EU by Armenia in 2013 are the most telling examples of this.

In this respect the position of the EU varies from situation to situation based on the internal processes in the EaP countries. The EU continues to implement the “more for more” principle and principle of differentiation as stated in [the ENP review](#), however, the application of these principles is also relative due to various challenges the EU is currently facing. Brexit, refugee crisis, growing

populism in some EU member states, terrorism and the US elections have all put the EU in a situation when it needs to concentrate on its internal stability and stronger integration within the Union.

The unfavourable and even worsening environment for the civil society operation in some EaP countries, as well as the unwillingness of the national authorities to consider the civil society as a partner - some of the EaP National Authorities prefer to ignore that the EaP CSF was formed to ensure the involvement of the civil society in the process of the EaP implementation - hampered the achievement of some of the goals set by the EaP CSF in the previous strategy.

On the multilateral level, the [Eastern Partnership 20 Deliverables for 2020, where](#) the engagement with civil society is mentioned among the key cross-cutting priorities, [and the Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign And Security Policy](#), are the major reference documents that outline strategic priorities of the EU in the Eastern Partnership and will serve as the guidelines for the the EaP CSF work .

The [Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit in Riga and Joint Communication on "A Strategic Approach to Resilience in the EU's External Action"](#) are providing further guidance and context for elaborating future commitments on both the EU and EaP countries side.

The bilateral reference documents that will steer EaP CSF's work for the period 2018-2020 are the AAs/DCFTAs with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, as well as the Association Agendas and Annual Working Plans. The latter enable broader participation in the policy-making process both at the level of development, implementation and monitoring of their implementation that is ensured through institutionalised cooperation with NPs and newly established bilateral Civil Society Platforms.

For Armenia, the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) will become the major document outlining the bilateral commitments. The Armenian National Platform of the EaP CSF should play a role in the implementation of the measures specified in the agreement and become an institutionalised civil society partner with regards to the implementation of the Agreement.

Azerbaijan is negotiating with the EU a new comprehensive agreement that should provide for a better involvement of the civil society and the National Platform in the bilateral processes.

Belarus is negotiating the Partnership Priorities that set the major commitments within the bilateral cooperation framework under the reviewed ENP policy.

In addition, the Human Rights Dialogues are currently conducted with all EaP countries and need to be monitored by the civil society. Armenia benefits from GSP+¹ with the EU. Regularly monitoring compliance with the GSP+ commitments particularly following up on GSP+ country monitoring reports and contribution with additional information if needed should be done by the EaP CSF.

Beyond the scope of relations with the EU, the EaP CSF will focus its work around the commitments adopted by the EaP countries within the process of higher education reform (Bologna Process), as well as within other international organisations, namely the Council of Europe.

Internal context

During the implementation of the 2015-2017 Strategy the Forum has managed to position itself as a valued stakeholder of the EaP. It has become a trusted and representative regional civil society platform developing consolidated opinion, providing advice and expertise and communicating it to the decision-makers.

The EaP CSF has functioned as a platform of regional solidarity and advocacy actor that reacts to major developments in the EaP region by voicing its position and provides crucial, often alternative information for the decision-makers.

Being the institutionalised part of the society, the EaP CSF has been successful in articulating the needs, expectations and perceptions of societies vis-à-vis the EaP national authorities and EU decision-makers.

The growing level of expertise of the EaP CSF member organisations allowed the Forum to conduct a number of successful advocacy campaigns and activities among others aimed at strengthening the EaP as a region via economic, social, cultural and political integration between themselves and with the EU.

Despite the above mentioned, the EaP CSF is not fully utilising its potential due to its complicated architecture not fully corresponding to the goals the Forum sets for itself, as well as some gaps in the institutional capacity, ineffective internal processes, lack of motivation and sense of ownership among Forum members, misperception of the essence of the EaP CSF membership and its role by the EaP CSF members and external stakeholders.

¹ Incentive Arrangement for Sustainable Development and Good Governance granting full removal of EU customs tariffs on over 66% of product tariff lines



Vision, Mission, Goals and Objectives of the EaP CSF for the period 2018-2020

Vision

Eastern Partnership as a democratic, prosperous and peaceful region committed to European values and standards where civil society is an integral part of democratic governance and an active participant of democratic reforms.

Mission

To ensure effective participation of civil societies of Eastern Partnership and the EU in the process of planning, monitoring and implementation of the Eastern Partnership policy in constructive dialogue with the EU and EaP decision-makers, in the direction of the democratic transformation and European integration of EaP

Strategic Goal 1:

To ensure full-fledged participation of civil society organisations in the process of implementation of the EaP via institutionalising and strengthening mechanisms of dialogue - between the EU and civil society, between the national governments and the EaP civil society, and between the EU, national governments and EaP civil society.

Strategic Goal 2:

To improve the enabling environment for CSOs in Eastern Partnership countries and to increase their capacity in monitoring and implementation of reforms.

Strategic Goal 3:

To strengthen the role of the EaP CSF in the EaP policy development and implementation.

Objective 1.1:

To institutionalise and strengthen mechanisms of dialogue on the democratic reforms and the implementation of the EaP and to provide civil society expertise to the decision-makers on the EU and EaP national levels for effective implementation of the official agenda of the EaP

Objective 1.2:

To develop, formulate and communicate the expertise of Forum members to monitor reforms and fill the gaps in or going beyond the official agenda of the EaP.

Objective 2.1:

To address political, legal, financial and organisational capacity related constraints in the civil society's operating environment in EaP countries.

Objective 3.1:

To improve EaP CSF institutional capacities allowing the Forum to fully utilise its expertise in the process of the EaP policy implementation.

Areas of Activities

Strategic Goal 1: To ensure a full-fledged participation of civil society organisations in the process of implementation of the EaP via institutionalising and strengthening mechanisms of dialogue - between the EU and civil society, between the national governments and the EaP civil society, and between the EU, national governments and EaP civil society.

Objective 1.1: To institutionalise and strengthen mechanisms of dialogue on the democratic reforms and the implementation of the EaP and to provide civil society expertise to the decision-makers on the EU and EaP national levels for effective implementation of the official EaP agenda.

Outcome 1.1: Expertise provided by the civil society via EaP CSF is taken into account by the EU and EaP stakeholders.

Actions 1.1.

Regional:

- To develop specific high-quality EaP CSF products with regional added value (such as EaP CSF branded monitoring reports, road maps, shadow reports); EaP Index and several EaP CSF re-granting projects outputs are the examples of such activities and outcomes
- To ensure expert representation of the EaP CSF at the high-level official events, including the EaP Platforms and panels
- To offer timely expert input to the civil society consultation procedures both in the EaP countries and in the EU (Brussels).
- To provide and promote relevant additional input to the policy-making relevant for the EaP by voicing the CSF positions based on quality research and analysis.
- To contribute to the synergy of EU funded projects and actions with the participation of the civil society at the regional level

National:

- To establish/strengthen institutionalised sectoral dialogue formats aimed at ensuring the effective and professional participation of the civil society in the process of planning and implementation of reforms initiated in the framework of the EaP on the national and regional levels.
- To establish working mechanisms of communication (periodic coordination meetings, joint awareness raising activities, etc.) between National Platforms (NPs) and EU Delegations to coordinate communication strategies in each of the EaP countries aimed at raising awareness about the EU and Eastern Partnership.
- To develop mechanisms ensuring synergy between the efforts of all EU supported projects engaging CSOs in respective EaP countries and the respective NPs.

Objective 1.2: To develop, formulate and communicate the expertise of Forum members aimed at monitoring the reforms and filling the gaps in or going beyond the official EaP agenda.

Outcome 1.2: Civil society is able to develop and advocate for activities not included in the official EaP agenda, but prioritised by the civil society itself.

Actions 1.2

- To allocate a part of the EaP CSF re-granting to identification and development of such priorities, as well as to support advocacy and communication of those priorities to the relevant stakeholders,
- To conduct EaP CSF Monitoring Missions to EaP countries based on the urgency and demand formulated by a National Platform, Working Group or the Steering Committee,
- To promote initiatives of individual CSF members developed as results of a gap analysis of the official EaP agenda,
- To implement multilateral activities such as thematic awareness raising or advocacy campaigns, solidarity actions, etc. aimed at strengthening the ties between the National Platforms, and at increasing the ownership of the EaP CSF activities among its members.
- To support implementation of joint activities of two or more EaP CSF Working Groups that would conceptualise and address the application of conditionality the EaP CSF is continuously advocating for.

Strategic Goal 2: To improve the enabling environment for CSOs in the Eastern Partnership countries and to increase their capacity in monitoring and implementation of reforms.

Objective 2.1: To address political, legal, financial and organisational capacity related constraints in the civil society's operating environment in the EaP countries.

Outcome 2.1: Legal regulations for CSOs, policy advice, financial sustainability and advocacy mechanisms are improved in the EaP countries.

Actions 2.1

- To identify, formulate and advocate for major legislative improvements and good practice to be implemented by the national authorities in order to improve the legal and institutional environment for civil society in the EaP countries and facilitate the policy dialogue on the reforms.
- To support CSOs and their representatives who are harassed by the national authorities beyond the scope of law or on the basis of twisted legal regulations.
- To provide timely and effective mechanisms of fast response to some developments or crises in the EaP countries related to civil society and provide independent monitoring and recommendations for the decision-makers and other stakeholders.
- To improve the transparency and accountability of CSOs and civil society networks, including the EaP CSF National Platforms.
- To consult regularly with the donor community (European Commission and EU Member States in particular) on funding priorities for the civil society in the EaP countries, contributing to complementarity of funding and actions.

- To advocate for further improvements, flexibility and transparency of the EU civil society funding in the EaP countries.
- To communicate and create synergies among projects implemented by EaP CSOs and funded by the EU in order to increase their impact and harness the full potential of outputs generated by the civil society within the projects.
- To support stronger ties between the civil society (primarily the EaP CSF National Platforms) and the local mainstream media.

Strategic Goal 3: To strengthen the role of the EaP CSF in the EaP policy development and implementation

To perform its role in the EaP, the Forum should be strong institutionally, with well-developed sense of internal solidarity among its members, and work effectively with the EU and national authorities in the EaP countries utilising its unique position in the EaP architecture. The EaP CSF needs to be well-equipped with effective mechanisms that will allow it to promptly react to the dynamic situation in the region by developing policy positions, rigorous communication and advocacy and have a dynamic membership.

Objective 3.1: To improve the EaP CSF institutional capacity allowing the Forum to fully utilise its expertise in the process of the EaP policy implementation.

Outcome 3.1: Improved internal communication mechanisms, effective distribution of duties among the EaP CSF structures and better understanding and ownership of the EaP CSF activities among the member organisations is in place.

Actions 3.1

- To build institutional capacities of the EaP CSF member organizations aimed at increasing their effectiveness in monitoring, advocacy, policy analysis and awareness raising.
- To strengthen the membership base by improving the openness, transparency and accountability of the EaP CSF and its National Platforms and conducting targeted information campaigns about the EaP CSF and its NPs.
- To improve communication processes within the EaP CSF structures (NP-NP, WG-WG, Secretariat-NP, SC-rest of the Forum, WG Councils, subgroups, task forces), ensure more effective circulation of information within the EaP CSF, and to introduce periodic information updates..
- To strengthen the leadership role of the EaP CSF Steering Committee by amending the rules and procedures enhancing motivation and responsibility of the SC members, improving the effectiveness of the decision-making, and providing for clear division of responsibilities between the SC and the Secretariat.
- To build institutional capacities of NPs, to improve their regulatory basis by introducing joint minimal operational standards, to support and strengthen the secretariats of the EaP CSF National Platforms and their coordination and cooperation with the EaP CSF Secretariat.

- To build capacities of EaP CSF member organisations based on needs assessment and jointly identified priority areas, including the policy trainings on the EU and EaP decision-making and institutions.
- To facilitate the exchange of experience among the NPs.
- To support implementation and performance of the EaP CSF Monitoring Mission mechanism by establishing the pool of experts, providing trainings, development of monitoring methodology and report samples and templates.
- To improve the engagement of the EaP CSF EU member organisations in the Forum's activities and advocacy, consequently contributing to better understanding of the EaP region in the EU member states
- To strengthen the advocacy activities of the Steering Committee members on behalf of the EaP CSF.

Thematic priorities and operationalising the strategy

The thematic priorities for the EaP CSF for 2018-2020 will be developed based on:

1. The official EaP agenda (key documents: 20 deliverables for 2020; implementation plans for the EaP Platforms and panels).
2. Topics initiated by the CSF based on common interests of its members, regional/multilateral priorities and gaps identified in the official agenda.
3. Need to react to rapid and sometimes unforeseen changes in the region, political, social and economic fluctuations in a particular EaP country or the region in general, including elections, civic uprisings, conflicts, etc.

The first mechanism is mainly targeting the Objective 1.1, while application of the second and the third mechanisms contribute to the implementation of the Objective 1.2 and provides the EaP CSF with additional flexibility in terms of both utilising its expertise and being able to respond to force majeure situations in the region.

The major document that sets multilateral priorities is the 20 deliverables for 2020 which allows for identifying the sets of thematic priorities for Working Groups of the EaP CSF. Cross-cutting priorities relate to several WGs at once; in addressing these deliverables inter-WG cooperation should be promoted.

The table in Annex 1 illustrates the indicative thematic division of 20 deliverables for 2020 in accordance with the EaP CSF working group division. Detailed description of the CSF interventions for each deliverable will be developed by WGs and will become a part of the WG annual work plans.

Another important aspect helping define the thematic priorities is the already developed expertise and the track record of the EaP CSF. Namely, the products developed through the re-granting

scheme allow to identify several areas that are of particular interest for the Forum members and thus can be included in the list of thematic priorities for the 2018-2020 period. This means that one part of re-granting projects should ensure continuity of most successful activities and the other should give opportunities for new initiatives proposed by Forum members. The table in Annex 2 presents the major topics that were covered via the re-granting projects in past two years.

Actions aimed at operationalising the strategy:

In order to effectively implement the strategy, an organised effort from all the EaP CSF structures is needed. It is crucial to ensure adequate distribution of duties among the Secretariat, the Steering Committee, National Platforms and Working Groups.

- Development of the WG annual work plans,
- Development of the NP annual plans,
- Development of the CSF annual plan, including the advocacy strategy and communication strategy,
- Development of CSF fundraising plan,
- Development of NP fundraising plans. The EaP CSF shall support NPs in their fundraising activity to ensure sustainable work of the platforms, including operation of national Secretariats.
- Implementation of the internal reform of the EaP CSF,
- Conducting the review of the EaP CSF internal procedures, including the procedures of the National Platforms,
- Introducing internal procedures that will ensure the effectiveness and transparency of the EaP CSF and its National Platforms,
- Institutionalisation of Monitoring Missions.

Annex 1

Working groups	EU 2020 Deliverables	Other WGs that can be involved
WG1: Democracy, human rights, good governance and stability	1. Gender equality and non-discrimination	All WGs
	2. Plurality and independence of media	
	3. Rule of law and anti-corruption mechanisms	ALL WGs
	4. Implementation of key judicial reforms	All WGs
	5. Implementation of public administration reform	All WGs
	6. Security (fight against organised crime and hybrid threats, including cybersecurity)	WG 2, WG 4
WG2: Economic integration and convergence with EU policies	1. Digital economy (harmonisation of digital markets)	WG 4
	2. Regulatory environment for SMEs	WG 5
	3. Gaps in access to finance and financial infrastructure	WG 1
	4. New job opportunities at the local and regional level	WG4, WG 5
	5. Trade among Partner Countries and between them and the EU	WG 1
	6. Extension of TEN-T core networks	WG 1, WG 2
WG3: Environment, climate change and energy security	1. Enhanced energy efficiency and improved use of renewable energy, as well as reduction of Greenhouse Gas emissions	WG 1, WG 2
	2. Environment and adaptation to climate change	WG 1, WG4
	3. Security of energy supply	WG 2
WG4: Contacts between people	1. Establishment of EaP European School	All WGs
	2. Young people's skills, entrepreneurship and employability	WG 2, WG5
	3. Integration of EaP and EU research and innovation systems and programmes	WG 1, WG 2, WG4
	4. Visa Liberalisation Dialogues and Mobility Partnerships	WG 1

Annex 2

Working groups	Re-granting projects thematic directions
WG1: Democracy, human rights, good governance and stability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Countering Russian propaganda • Gender equality • Enforcing implementation of policy commitments related to people with disabilities • Fight against corruption • Public Administration reform • Security
WG2: Economic integration and convergence with EU policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SME development • Women entrepreneurs
WG3: Environment, climate change and energy security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy and advocacy work on climate change • Waste management • Energy efficiency and alternative energy
WG4: Contacts between people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher Education reform • Youth empowerment • Culture and Creativity
WG 5: Social & Labour Policies and Social Dialogue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decentralised social services • Social entrepreneurship • Labor rights