

**Proposal of the EaP CSF Steering Committee**

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

**will be discussed and offered for the adoption  
at the 9<sup>th</sup> EaP CSF Annual Assembly on the 27<sup>th</sup> of October 2017 in Tallinn, Estonia**

**Introduction**

The proposed 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 “*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 directions of activities contributing to each of the formulated objectives and proposes tools and mechanisms that allow to effectively distribute responsibilities within the Forum and make thematic prioritization.

**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 EaP countries, EU-Russia relations, relations between EaP countries with Russia, relations between EaP countries themselves, unresolved conflicts, internal political processes in EaP countries etc.

One of the major factors that affects 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 to the process of integration of the 6 former Soviet republics where it still has strong influence. Russia exerts its pressure in Eastern Partnership region mainly via the presence of Russian financial and political capital in all 6 countries, their trade and energy dependence, labor migrants and conflicts. All of these mechanisms of pressure were used during the last decade. The U-turn from signing the association agreement with the EU by Armenia in 2013, the refusal of the former Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich to sign the EU-Ukraine association agreement, and the Russian aggression in Ukraine following Euromaidan are the brightest 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. Due to its integrative essence the EU cannot offer EaP countries hard security structures. The EU continues to implement more for more principle and principle of

differentiation as stated in [the ENP review](#), however, the application of the principles is also relative due to various challenges the EU is currently facing. The Brexit, refugee crisis, growing populism in some EU member states, terrorism and the US elections have put the EU in a situation when it needs to concentrate on its internal stability and stronger integration within the Union.

In light of the above, the role of the EaP CSF becomes even more important in terms of ensuring that all opportunities for bringing the EaP countries closer to the EU are used to the fullest possible. 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 utilizing its unique position in the EaP architecture.

In this respect 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 to fully take part in the ongoing processes within the frames of the EaP policy.

This approach leads the EaP CSF to two interconnected blocs of activities:

- Active work on implementation of the already adopted commitments by the partner countries and the EU in the frames of the EaP and promotion of further ambitious bilateral and multilateral agendas;
- Rapid and effective response to the political, social and economic changes in the EU and EaP.

The first block of activities will be guided by the following documents and processes. On multilateral level the [Eastern Partnership - 20 Deliverables for 2020, and the Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign And Security Policy](#), are the major reference points that outline strategic priorities of the EU in Eastern Partnership and define major directions of work. "The engagement with civil society" is mentioned among key cross-cutting priorities meaning all strategic priorities envisage active involvement of the civil society and at the same time, it is a commitment taken up by the EaP governments.

[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 further commitments on both EU and EaP countries side.

The bilateral reference documents that will steer EaP CSF's work for the period 2018-2020 are the following:

The AA/DCFTA signed and in force with Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia. Further specific action priorities are articulated in the Association Agendas and Annual Working Plans. The progress of the EaP countries is monitored within the implementation reports where the civil society's input is requested.

Armenia preliminarily agreed and initialed the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA). If signed during the EaP summit in November 2017, 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 institutionalized civil society partner with regards to the Agreement.

Azerbaijan negotiates with the EU new comprehensive agreement that should provide for better involvement of the civil society and the National Platform to the bilateral processes. At the same time, the four Partnership Priorities developed under the ENP policy roof should be concluded by the EaP Summit in November 2017.

Belarus is also negotiating the Partnership Priorities that set the major commitments within the bilateral cooperation framework under the reviewed ENP policy umbrella and priorities. In addition, the EU-Belarus Mobility Partnership outlining cooperation in the JHA area, was launched in autumn 2016.

In addition, the Human Rights Dialogues are currently conducted with all EaP countries. Armenia benefits from GSP+ (Incentive Arrangement for Sustainable Development and Good Governance granting full removal of EU customs tariffs on over 66% of product tariff lines) with the EU, thus regularly monitoring compliance with the GSP+ commitments particularly following up on GSP+ country monitoring reports and contribution with additional information if needed can 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 organizations, namely the Council of Europe.

### **The 2015-2017 EaP CSF Strategy implementation**

The 2018-2020 Strategy is also informed by the assessment of the implementation of the previous strategic document of the Forum, the EaP CSF internal processes, activities of the National Platforms and Working Groups.

The assessment of the implementation of the 2015-2017 Strategy shows that Forum has managed to position itself as a valued stakeholder of the EaP; a trusted and representative civil society body that is consulted with due to its unique position as the regional civil society platform developing consolidated opinion, providing advice and expertise and communicating it to the decision-makers. The EaP CSF has continued to function as a platform of regional solidarity and advocacy actor that reacts to major fluctuations in EaP region by voicing its position and provides crucial, often alternative information for the decision-makers for policy-making and implementation.

The EaP CSF has further developed as a vital channel allowing civil society representatives to target both their national authorities and European institutions on the matters of their concern.

Being the institutionalized part of the society, the EaP CSF has been successful in articulating the needs, expectations and perceptions of societies, who are the main beneficiaries of the EaP, vis-à-vis both National authorities and EU decision-makers

The growing level of expertise of the EaP CSF member organizations allowed the Forum to conduct a number of successful advocacy campaigns and created preconditions for the Forum to initiate activities aimed at strengthening the EaP as a region. It should be mentioned that the term “region” is conditional since the integration processes that are taking place after the collapse of Soviet Union are leading to regionalization and at present it is still not clear whether EaP will become a region, a sub region or a divided territory of mixed influences. In this respect the EaP countries should strive for effective regionalization in order to provide sustainable and peaceful development via ensuring economic, social, cultural and political integration.

Thanks to its multilateral essence and the flexibility of civil society in terms of developing and proposing alternative strategies, the EaP CSF can become a frontrunner of the EaP through developing and promoting regional initiatives and addressing the gaps that exist in the official agenda.

Despite the above mentioned, the EaP CSF is not fully utilizing its potential due to its complicated organizational architecture that does not fully correspond to the goals that the Forum sets for itself, some gaps in the institutional capacity, ineffective internal processes, lack of motivation and ownership among Forum members, misperception of the essence of CSF membership and its role by the EaP CSF members themselves and external stakeholders. From the external factors, the unfavorable and worsening environment for the civil society operations 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 implementation of the EaP - hampered the achievement of the goals set by the EaP CSF in the previous strategy.

### **Mission, vision, goals and objectives**

The new vision of the EaP CSF formulates a clear picture of a desired situation that the civil societies of the EU and 6 EaP countries are willing to achieve and also sets a common basis for all CSF members united by their common values and aspirations regarding the integration of their countries to the European family.

Based on the internal discussions within the CSF, evaluation of the previous Strategy implementation, as well as analysis of the results of the survey on the perceptions and expectations from the CSF disseminated among the Forum members, the scheme below introduces the reformulated vision and mission as well as goals and strategic objectives set for the 2018-2020 period.

## 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.

#### Strategic goal 1:

To ensure full-fledged participation of civil society organizations in the process of implementation of the EaP via institutionalizing 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 institutionalize 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 organizational 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 utilize its expertise in the process of the EaP policy implementation.

## Directions of Activity

**Strategic goal 1:** To ensure full-fledged participation of civil society organizations in the process of implementation of the EaP via institutionalizing 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 institutionalize 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

**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 EaP CSF high-quality 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 EaP CSF at the high level official events, namely 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 EaP-relevant policy-making by voicing CSF positions based on quality research and analysis and CSF analytics.
- 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 institutionalized sectoral dialogue formats aimed at ensuring CS effective and professional participation in the process of planning and implementation of reforms initiated in the framework of the EaP on national and regional levels.
- To establish working mechanisms of communication (periodic coordination meetings, joint awareness raising activities, etc.) between NPs and EU Delegations to coordinate communication strategies in each of the EaP countries aimed at raising awareness on 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 agenda of the EaP.

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

### **Actions 1.2**

- To dedicate part of the EaP CSF re-granting to identification and development of such priorities, as well as to support the 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 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 among its members..
- To support implementation of joint activities of two or more EaP CSF Working Groups that would conceptualize and address the application of conditionality EaP CSF is constantly advocating for.

**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.**

**Objective 2.1:** To address political, legal, financial and organizational capacity related constraints in the civil society's operating environment in 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 EaP countries and facilitate the policy dialogue on the reforms.
- To support the CSOs and their representatives who are unjustifiably 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 reaction 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 the 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**

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

**Outcome 3.1:** Improved internal communication mechanisms, effective distribution of duties among EaP CSF structures and better understanding and ownership of the EaP CSF among the member organizations 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.
- To improve communication processes within the EaP CSF structures (NP-NP, WG-WG, Secretariat-NP, SC-rest of the Forum), ensure more effective circulation of information within the EaP CSF, and to introduce periodic information updates via specific mechanism.
- 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 organizations 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 EaP CSF EU member organisations in the Forum 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.

### **Actions aimed at operationalizing the strategy:**

- Development of the WG annual 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,
- 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 the internal procedures that will ensure the effectiveness and transparency of the EaP CSF and its National Platforms,
- Institutionalization of Monitoring Missions.

### **Thematic prioritization mechanisms**

There are several mechanisms that allow prioritizing thematic directions in the EaP CSF's work. These mechanisms are particularly important due to the diversity of the Forum members' spheres of interest and the diversity of themes covered by the EaP in general and the EaP CSF in particular.

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

1. The official agenda of the EaP (key documents: 20 deliverables for 2020; implementation plans for the EaP Platforms and panels).
2. CSF-initiated themes based on common interests, regional/multilateral priorities and gaps identified in the official agenda
3. Need to react to rapid 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 and gives the opportunity for preliminary identification of several thematic priorities, while application of the second and the third

mechanisms contribute to the implementation of the Objective 1.2 and provide the CSF with additional flexibility in terms of both utilizing its expertise and being able to respond to force majeure situations.

As mentioned before there are several reference documents for identification of the first set of thematic priorities. The major document that sets multilateral priorities is the 20 deliverables for EU 2020 which allows identifying sets of thematic priorities for the 1-4th working groups of the EaP CSF, as well as work plans of the official EaP platforms and panels. Cross-cutting priorities relate to several WGs which means that in addressing these deliverables inter-WG cooperation should be promoted.

The table below illustrates the thematic division of 20 deliverables for 2020 in accordance with the EaP CSF working group division. In order to ensure participatory planning within the WGs more detailed description of CSF interventions for each deliverable should be conducted by WGs themselves and become part of the WG annual plans.

Working groups	EU 2020 Deliverables	Other WGs that can be involved
	1. Gender equality and non-discrimination	WG 4, WG5
	2. Plurality and independence of media	WG 4
	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
	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	WG 5
	5. Harmonisation of digital markets	WG 4
	6. Trade among Partner Countries and between them and the EU	WG 1
	7. Extension of TEN-T core networks	WG 1, WG 2, WG 4
	1. Security of energy supply	WG 2
	2. Enhanced energy efficiency and improved use of renewable energy, as well as reduction of Greenhouse Gas emissions	WG 1, WG 2
	3. Environment and adaptation to climate change	WG 1
	1. Visa Liberalisation Dialogues and Mobility Partnerships	WG 1
	2. Establishment of EaP European School	All WGs
	3. Young people's skills, entrepreneurship and employability	WG 2
	4. Integration of EaP and EU research and innovation systems and programmes	WG 1, WG 2

Apart from the EU 2020 Deliverables there are other processes that also allow to determine several thematic priorities in advance. Some of them (HRD, Bologna process) already contain thematic focuses, while the others (Partnership priorities, Association Agenda) are more general and contain wider spectrum of thematic areas. All these processes allow to conduct thematic prioritization on national level or on the level of a separate working group and should be taken into account during the planning activities of WGs and NPs.

Although addressing the 2020 Deliverables is mainly contributing to the Objective 1.1 of the current strategy there are several aspects in the document that directly relate to the improvement of the enabling environment for the civil society in EaP countries outlined in Objective 2.1.

Another important aspect that should be taken into account while defining thematic priorities is the gained expertise of the CSF throughout the past period. Namely, the products developed through the re-granting scheme allows to identify several areas that are of particular interest for Forum members and thus can be included in the list of thematic priorities for the 2018-2020 period. This means that the part of re-granting projects should ensure continuity of most successful activities and the second part should give opportunities for new initiatives proposed by Forum members.

The table below presents the major topics that were raised through re-granting projects in past two years.

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

<p>WG 5: Social &amp; Labour Policies and Social Dialogue</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decentralized social services</li> <li>• Social entrepreneurship</li> <li>• Labor rights</li> </ul>
---	--

The re-granting scheme should remain one of the major mechanisms supplying new ideas for the Forum and the main tool for expanding the thematic spectrum of Forum activities. Through the re-granting scheme the CSF will be able to both contribute to the ongoing processes and to come up with new tools, strategies and products that will fill the existing gaps in the overall process of the EaP implementation. Moreover these products should be actively advocated with the decision makers.

Monitoring Missions is another tool that gives the CSF additional flexibility and allows the Forum to implement activities covering areas other than the ones prioritized in the official agenda. The Monitoring Missions will strengthen the position of the Forum as an alternative and independent information provider.

Through these mechanisms the CSF should promote new initiatives of its members that are prioritized by the Forum based on common interests and cooperation opportunities and are in perspective promising in terms of further capitalization. These activities in a longer-term perspective will contribute to the process of forming of joint system of values and a regional vision among the civil society across the EaP.

Other tools of CSF such as regional events and advocacy visits may also be used for raising, discussing and addressing issues that are not included in the official agenda but are highly valued by the Forum.

### **Conclusion**

In a nutshell, the thematic prioritization of the Forum consists of two major parts: predetermined menu of topics declared by the decision makers and thematic preferences identified or to be identified by the Forum itself. Combination of these two parts gives the CSF an opportunity to perform both functions: a body institutionally connected with the official EaP process and an independent platform for civil society from the EU and EaP countries with its own initiatives and activities. As a result of using such approach the CSF will receive the opportunity to utilize its capacities to the maximum extent possible. This will also allow CSF member organizations to effectively position themselves in the Forum architecture depending of their type of activity, capacities and motivation.

In order to effectively implement the proposed strategy, an organized effort from all EaP CSF units is needed. The internal reform and participatory development of detailed activity plans for NPs and WGs should be launched as kick off activities that will be followed by actions described under each Objective listed above.



It is crucial to ensure adequate distribution of duties among the Secretariat, the Steering Committee, National Platforms and Working Groups. Throughout implementation of the strategy there might be a need for establishment of other structures within the CSF that would cover this or that function, such as for example a structure focusing on fundraising and development, capacity building, etc.

Finally, the effective work of the Forum properly communicated to the external actors will allow the Forum to further develop its positive reputation of engagement on the country and EaP levels that will positively affect the overall situation in EaP countries and will fill the gaps that currently exist in the EaP policy.