

Brussels, 28 November 2016

**Opening Speech by the EaP CSF Steering Committee Co-Chair Krzysztof Bobiński
at the 8th Annual Assembly of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum**

Welcome to our guests, to our delegates those who are here for the first time and those who have been here before. This is a wondrous event, this eighth annual assembly which brings together people from organisations in the eastern partnership countries but also those from EU member states who are interested in working with us. Sadly, some are no longer with us like David Tumanyan from Armenia.

This assembly is a great invention. Only a few of us were present at the first assembly in Brussels but they included Ulad Vialichka and Boris Navasardian and I wonder how many of those participants then realised they were establishing a parliament, a civil society parliament for the Eastern Partnership.

For this is the main value of our meeting, that we meet and talk and exchange opinions and plan to work together because as different as we are we have so much in common not only a common desire to build a fairer, safer and well functioning world but we face common threats be they from neighbouring countries which fear the success of the changes which we are working for but also from internal forces, from the autocrats and the kleptocrats who can imagine no other way to govern other than by cheating, stealing and lying.

These are turbulent times not only in Europe, but also in America and we must stick together and work together for the changes and the values in which we believe and also to work to free those of our number who are still in prison for political reasons and remember that this is our primary duty – that if they lock one of us up we all have to work to get him or her freed.

But before I ask Commissioner Hahn to take the floor, the commissioner who is keeping the enlargement, neighbourhood and partnership going with a steady and competent hand I want to tell you about a friend of ours whom I met recently in Kyiv. She had been on the steering committee a couple of years ago and I asked if she missed us and she said yes she did miss us. I asked why and she told me that ‘you are free people’ and she was right we are free people and I wish you that we continue to work to share that freedom others in the partner countries and wherever else freedom is in danger. Commissioner Hahn, the floor is yours.