

Resolution of the 10th Annual Assembly of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum

We, the representatives of civil society from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine and the EU member states, gathered together in Tbilisi at the 10th Annual Assembly of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF) reiterate our support for the aims of the Eastern Partnership to which we, and our countries, voluntarily committed ten years ago.

We note that 2018 marks the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 100th anniversary of the regaining of the independence of many of our states, which was preceded by a struggle for freedom by many generations. The memory of these tragically short-lived states obliges us work for the free and independent development of our countries in the EaP.

It was a century ago that our governments initiated programmes, which included freedom from censorship and free elections, enlightened labour codes including an 8-hour working day, access to free elementary education and gender equality with the vote for women. Azerbaijan instituted universal suffrage and became the first democratic state among the Muslim countries, while Georgia abolished the death penalty and guaranteed the rights of national minorities in its constitution.

The Eastern Partnership programme, and its 2020 Deliverables initiative, adopted at the Eastern Partnership summit in 2017, enshrines these traditions for which the EaP CSF has worked unremittingly, with the crucial support of the European Union, since the EaP CSF came into being ten years ago.

Despite these efforts the EaP CSF continues to face serious challenges in the observance of human rights and backsliding in the fields of media freedom, justice system and in the fight against corruption. There are still political prisoners in several countries. The EaP needs to be more ambitious in addressing these problems, as well as those of state capture and disinformation.

The Assembly commends achievements of the EaP, such as visa liberalisation, which should be now be extended to those countries which still do not have visa free access to the EU. The Association Agreements (AA) with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine that pave the way for ambitious reforms designed to improve living conditions for the citizens of our countries are also a major achievement of the EaP.

The approaching 10th anniversary of the Eastern Partnership should boost reform efforts and the CSF EaP declares that it will continue to strive, in harmony, for the establishment of democratic systems, free markets and the rule of law in all EaP partner states with a view to either prepare them for membership of the European Union, if and when these countries are willing and ready to join, or to consolidate and broaden the scope of their existing cooperation for those who opt for a tailor-made partnership with the EU.

The Assembly declares its solidarity with those in the European member states and in the EaP countries who are working to resist undemocratic and nationalist forces in their midst. We believe that the ideal of a democratic and tolerant Europe living in peace is common to both the member states and the EaP countries. Populism and political polarisation are among the serious challenges facing our societies as they hinder stable development and leads politicians to attack the media and civil society.

We look forward to that day when democratic and law abiding state structures are finally established in all our countries and our citizens are able to live freely in peace in well governed states which respect human rights, freedom of speech and the rule of law.