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**Speech by Goda Neverauskaite Steering Committee Member and Working Group 5
Coordinator of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum delivered at the Eastern
Partnership Senior Official Meeting**

On behalf of the Steering Committee of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, I would like to share with you today civil society's observations on the developments in the Eastern Partnership region and information on our own assessment of 20 deliverables for 2020.

The Eastern Partnership policy has led to good results in the areas of economic development, trade and market opportunities, as well as in connectivity, energy efficiency, environment and people-to-people contacts.

However, the developments of the past few years have shown that none of the EaP countries have developed sustainable democratic institutions. The preliminary results of the Eastern Partnership Index, soon to be published by the Civil Society Forum, reveal some modest developments in the protection of human rights, but backtrackings on the important areas of media and judicial independence, public administration and in the fight against corruption. Overall, the pace of reforms remains slow and their sustainability fragile.

The Eastern Partnership policy should be strengthened to tackle the challenges posed by state capture, corruption and disinformation. To achieve this, we need a more ambitious approach and a stronger partnership between EU institutions and civil society.

Civic society played a crucial role in the revolution in Armenia, opened the door to the hope that the Armenian reform process can be a model of peaceful reform for other EaP countries.

Now, the new Armenian government has to tackle complex changes, while dealing with institutions and policies inherited from the past. The EU should support the efforts of the Armenian government and review with new Armenian officials the CEPA implementation roadmap prepared by the previous regime.

Seeing no improvement in the relationship with the EU after Armenia took important steps towards a more democratic system, might send confusing signals to other EaP countries, who would have fewer incentives to follow the same path. As we saw, and unlike Armenia, Moldova is losing ground in the democratic race.

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We welcome the prompt reaction of EU institutions and member states to the worsening situation in Moldova and the decision to suspend EU financial support until the upcoming elections in January 2019. While this is a positive step, the EU should think of a new and more complex approach towards backsliding countries, as financial consequences are not a big enough carrot or a stick to improve the situation in Moldova in the short-term.

Overall, we notice how the EaP has become slightly more technical in nature, turning into a policy conducted mainly by the European Commission. Civil society would like to call upon EU member states to be more present, and to use their political weight to ensure the security of EU borders and the stability of their neighbours. We are therefore concerned by the current trend driven by some EU member states, who are advocating for neutrality as a preferred conceptual solution for the EaP region. Neutrality has not worked for Moldova and we warn against this approach.

It is with these considerations in mind that I share with you our concern about the future of EU financial assistance to Eastern Partnership countries.

The proposal to combine the current 12 EU external action instruments under one roof – the Neighbourhood, Development, and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) – sends a strong signal to the EaP partner countries and societies that they are not a special category of partners who are helping to secure EU's vital interests.

Moreover, as currently framed, the NDICI does not contain any reference to existing civil society support programmes and does not assign any explicit role to civil society in the annual assessment.

We advise against establishing this single instrument and we recommend:

- First, to take financial support to the EU neighbourhood out of the NDICI regulation and re-establish the European Neighbourhood Instrument on the basis of the existing ENI regulation. This would ensure continuity and prevent the risk of downgrading the EaP policy concept, which is likely to carry negative effects on the stability and resilience of the region.
- Second, to enhance further the ENI 2.0 and to sustain the current system of ENI governance. The ENI budget line was increased in the draft MFF proposal for 2021-2027 to 22 billion Euros, 24% more comparing to the current MFF. The final allocations are subject to the EU member states deliberations on the MFF package but such an increase would underline the political importance of the EU neighbourhood and could effectively support the ambitious agenda the EU has in this region.

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We urge you to reflect on these concerns, and most importantly on the consequences of the new regulation, on which we have prepared a detailed position paper.

To conclude, the upcoming Foreign Ministerial Meeting will be an excellent occasion to discuss these concerns as well as the state-of-play of the implementation of the 20 Deliverables for 2020. As we stressed on several occasions, the deliverables are a step forward in terms of providing a set of concrete results to be achieved by the EaP Summit and 2020. Our Ukrainian National Platform has conducted a comprehensive assessment on their implementation, and we are currently holding a consultation with our members, the results of which will be presented at the meeting.

Thank you for your attention.