

*Tallinn, 25 October 2017*

**Opening Speech by the EaP CSF Steering Committee Co-Chair Hennadiy Maksak  
at the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Conference & 9th Annual Assembly of the Eastern  
Partnership Civil Society Forum**

Dear Madam President, Your Excellences, Dear delegates and guests,

On behalf of Steering Committee of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum let me welcome you at the EaP Civil Society Conference and the 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Assembly of the Civil Society Forum. This event is of utmost importance in so many respects.

Firstly, it is held jointly by the Civil Society Forum and our Estonian partners and at a time when Estonia presides in the Council of the European Union.

Secondly, we joined efforts to bring together a great number of civil society activists in one place. It is a distinctive sign that involving civil society is an integral part of bringing democratic values and good governance to each of the six partner countries. However, our mission is not easy. We face many twists on our path of fighting corruption, human rights abuses, injustice and poverty. Unfortunately, governments of our respective countries are not always our legitimate partners. The civil society's role for our countries is therefore even more vital.

This Annual Assembly is the ninth, which means that 8 years ago for the first time we brought together friends and colleagues to share our experience and unite our efforts. The European prospective and modernisation are not mere words for us. We are grateful to the European Union for this common agenda for our citizens. Since its inception, the EaP Civil Society Forum has proven to be an indispensable pillar of both the multilateral and bilateral track of the Eastern Partnership.

We have developed numerous important instruments to provide reliable connection between the EU and Eastern Partnership societies. The Eastern Partnership Index and monitoring missions on the civil society, media and human rights situation are the examples of tools aimed at tangible results we succeeded to achieve in the 8 years of our existence, to name but a few.

It goes without saying that the EaP CSF represents a valuable platform for discussion and sharing expertise from different parts of our region. If you have a look at the programme of our joint event, you will note the wide range of very ambitious and not less meaningful issues the civil society will raise.



As the co-chair of the EaP CSF Steering Committee I would like to congratulate our Estonian partners on this very promising event. I wish you all fruitful discussions on the tangible results for people on our countries!