

Where does Ms. Marta Kos stand on the Eastern Partnership and the enlargement agenda?

Letter on Hearing of the Commissioner-designate for Enlargement, Ms. Marta Kos

Dear MEP,

The President-elect Ursula von der Leyen has decided to nominate the Slovenian candidate Ms Marta Kos, for the position of Commissioner-designate for Enlargement. The Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF) highly respects the duties and responsibilities of the new Commissioner and advocates for synergies between the enlargement agenda and Eastern Partnership policy, ensuring the continuity of the latter. As formal and only civil society observer in the EaP architecture, our network of over 1200 civil society organisations from the European Union and Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries has a long-standing history of contributing to policy processes with concrete recommendations on how to successfully advance the EaP policy and create synergies with relevant EaP countries' enlargement agenda.

Opening accession negotiations with the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, and granting EU candidate status to Georgia, marked a landmark moment for their citizens yet added another layer to the already multi-speed EaP policy. In June 2024, Moldova and Ukraine held their first Intergovernmental Conferences with the EU, officially opening accession negotiations and reinforcing their bilateral relations with the EU. This success is largely owed to progress in both countries' internal reform agenda, supported and promoted over the years by the EaP policy, which set the ground for the momentous progress towards EU accession therein.

On the other hand, the path to EU accession requires political will on both sides - the EU and the EaP country - to implement key reforms, notably fundamental reforms. The rule of law, human rights, functioning of democratic institutions, reform of public administration, economic criteria, among others, are the core of the 'fundamentals' of the EU accession process. Its progress determines the overall pace of accession negotiations for the countries on the EU accession path. Nevertheless, supporting the 'fundamentals' remains a priority in both EaP countries willing to take further steps on their EU integration path and those not currently seeking strong EU integration.

Should the lack of political commitment to join the EU threaten the implementation of such reforms, and eventually put the EU accession process at risk, the EaP policy will pursue its role to maintain these countries anchored to EU values and stimulate democratic change. Most notably, in the cases of Georgia and Armenia, the EaP policy keeps supporting the promotion of democracy, peace, security and stability both

bilaterally with the EU and regionally within the EaP and upholding the European aspiration of both countries.

Within the EaP region, the EaP policy ensures that the democratic forces of Belarus and Azerbaijan remain connected regionally with democratically minded peers. In particular, civil society plays a central role in promoting the democratisation and monitoring the implementation of those fundamental reforms in all the Eastern Partnership countries.

Mindful of the importance to ensure synergies between the enlargement agenda and the EaP policy and to support civil society's role, we would like to suggest the following questions to Commissioner-designate Ms. Marta Kos during the hearing:

- *What measures would you take to speed up the process towards the implementation of reforms in the EU candidate countries from the EaP region in the fundamentals cluster, notably in the areas of Judiciary and fundamental rights, and Justice, freedom and security?*
- *Armenia and the EU recently committed to strengthen their relations through a new EU-Armenia Partnership agenda, establishing more ambitious joint priorities for cooperation across all dimensions. What measures are you planning towards a fully-fledged 3+1 approach that includes the Trio Associated countries plus Armenia?*
- *How would you consider Georgian government's backsliding in democracy following the adoption of the Foreign Agent Law in view of the country's European aspirations? In the context of increasing risks of authoritarianisms and democracy deficiencies in the Eastern Partnership region, how would you assess increasing chances of democracy in the EU neighbourhood while supporting civil society in the EaP countries?*
- *In the wake of the proposed reform of the Treaties launched by the European Parliament in November 2023, to what extent would you consider EU future enlargements conditioned on structural EU internal reform both politically and institutionally?*
- *Supporting fundamental reforms remains a priority in all Eastern Partnership countries, both for the countries on the EU path and those who do not currently seek strong EU integration. As Commissioner, how would you ensure that the EU continues to uphold a 'fundamentals-driven' agenda that promotes the design and implementation of rule of law reforms in all Eastern Partnership countries?*
- *Civil society organisations are one of the cornerstones of successful reform processes and democratic development in the EaP and Western Balkans countries. What is your approach to promoting and facilitating an enabling environment for civil society? How would you ensure a balanced approach in supporting the role of civil society in the Eastern Partnership and the Western Balkans?*

- *As Commissioner, what role do you envisage for the European Commission to play in supporting independent civil society and media in Azerbaijan and addressing the current crackdown while engaging with the Aliyev regime on energy security?*
- *In the context of increasing risks of authoritarianisms, the Eastern Partnership remains the only channel for Belarusian civil society to maintain dialogue within the EaP countries and with the EU, and maintains Belarusian civil society interconnected with the EU and EaP countries. As Commissioner, how do you plan to continue supporting Belarusian civil society and democratic forces?*
- *Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the country's integration into the EU remains central in the Union's political agenda. What measures are you taking to ensure synergies between the EU and its Member States' political will to advance Ukraine's accession talks and the country's victory in the war of aggression?*
- *What measure would you take to ensure meaningful participation of the Ukrainian civil society in accession and reconstruction paths in the implementation of the Ukraine Facility, and the Ukraine Plan?*
- *The role of civil society organisations within the formulation, implementation and assessment of the EaP multilateral policy, as well as in holding (some) governments accountable, has grown significantly, also thanks to consistent support from the EU side. What do you see as the major obstacles for civil society to operate in the Eastern Partnership countries and what steps would you take to further empower civil society in the region? How would you assess the overall relevance of the Eastern Partnership policy to civil society and its role in the EaP countries?*

The EaP CSF has a full trust in MEPs - members of distinguished AFET Committee, in their choice of the best candidate for the new Commissioner for Enlargement and remain committed to continue working to support our shared values. The EaP CSF remains ready to keep monitoring the progress of reforms and hold the governments of the partner countries accountable and share the results of our work with you.

Respectfully,

Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum