

Where does Ms. Kaja Kallas stand on the Eastern Partnership?

**Letter on Hearing of the High Representative/Vice President-designate,
Ms. Kaja Kallas**

Dear MEP,

The President-elect Ursula von der Leyen has decided to nominate the Estonian candidate Ms Kaja Kallas, for the position of High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission. The Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF) respects highly the duties and responsibilities of the new HR/VP and advocates for the prioritisation of EU enlargement, the continuation of the Eastern Partnership policy and support for the involvement of civil society in these key processes. As a network of over 1200 civil society organisations from the EU and Eastern Partnership (EaP) and as official civil society counterpart in the EaP architecture, we have developed numerous recommendations on how to successfully advance the EaP policy and support civil society therein.

Europe and the EU need an HR/VP committed to enlargement, the Eastern Partnership policy and civil society as genuine engine of sustainable, long-lasting democratic reform.

Within the context of the political turmoil and the geopolitical complexity exacerbated by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, the Eastern Partnership policy has taken up the role of a safeguard, anchoring the EaP countries and their societies to the EU regardless of the presence and type of bilateral agreement each country has with the EU. The EaP policy ensures that the civil society and democratic forces of Belarus and Azerbaijan remain connected regionally with democratically minded peers. 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. For Moldova and Ukraine, the policy has delivered excellent results, bringing them closer to the EU and now supporting both countries' enlargement agendas. Lastly, the policy represents a key tool to advance regional priorities, notably on the rule of law and security. A stronger regional cooperation in the field of security including a human security approach which contributes to democratisation and economic development.

The EaP policy aims to promote democratisation through the implementation of fundamental reforms. This is the case for both the EaP countries on the enlargement path and those not currently seeking strong EU integration. Continuing investing in effective rule of law, democratic institutions and security is the only way not only to maintain the investments of the past but also, and most importantly, to secure long-term, sustainable

and irreversible change. Civil society in particular plays a central role in promoting the democratisation and monitoring the implementation of fundamental reforms in all the EaP countries. Civil society remains deeply interconnected in the EaP region, supporting one another in addressing shared challenges, including Russian disinformation, and promoting a shared democratic vision for the future. The EaP policy has raised the bar for civil society's involvement in both policy and political processes and we need to see the bar held high in the enlargement process as well.

Mindful of the importance of enlargement process, the Eastern Partnership policy and civil society, we would like to suggest the following questions to HR/VP-designate, Ms. Kaja Kallas, during the hearing:

- *In view of the 7th EaP Summit, how will you intend to promote the continuation of the Eastern Partnership policy? What should be the key elements of the reviewed EaP policy post-2025 to support the rule of law, security and inter-connectivity?*
- *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 HR/VP, 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?*
- *What measures would you take in reaction to a significant deterioration of the rule of law in the EaP countries? How would you improve the scrutiny of the governments and the currently EU assessment of the state of rule of law vis-à-vis the EaP countries?*
- *How do 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 increase chances of democracy in the EU neighbourhood?*
- *The Eastern Partnership policy plays a vital role in providing safeguards in times of democratic backsliding: in the context of increasing risks of authoritarianisms, the Policy 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. How will the EU continue to support Belarusian civil society and democratic forces? Do you plan to promote a revision of the empty chair for Belarus policy and invite Belarusian democratic forces as full participants in EaP meetings?*
- *Recent presidential and parliamentary elections in Azerbaijan consolidated the country's authoritarian regime. The strategic energy partnership between the EU and Azerbaijan has often come at the expense of EU's strong support to genuine Azerbaijani civil society, who have been operating under increasingly difficult conditions since the adoption of the infamous 2014 law. As HR/VP, how would you ensure support to Azerbaijani civil society – the only remaining hope for democratic change in the country?*

- *In view of the recent developments in the South Caucasus, how important would you consider supporting human security in the EaP region and its contribution to democratisation, transparency, and accountability in policymaking? What measures would you consider towards strengthening defence capabilities and security resilience in the whole EaP region?*
- *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 High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission and remains 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