

Resolution of the 2024 General Assembly of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum

1st EaP CSF Civil Society Summit

Eastern Partnership post 2025: rule of law, security and connectivity

Vienna, 19 November 2024

We, the General Assembly of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF), recognising the role of civil society as a driving force for the reforms in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries, convene against a backdrop of political turmoil and geopolitical complexity exacerbated by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, which today enters its 1000th day,

Recognising civil society's role as watchdog of effective implementation of democratic reforms and constant interlocutor both inside the countries and across the region, that holds authorities accountable no matter what government is elected and regardless of the country's level of engagement with the European Union (EU),

EU's Eastern Partnership

Welcoming the new EU Institutions constituting following the first European elections since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and hoping that the new EU leadership and institutional set-up may pave the way to an updated Eastern Partnership agenda,

Supporting the upcoming Polish Presidency of the Council of the European Union to organise the 7th EaP Summit in 2025 - the first since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and since 2021 - laying the foundation for a revised post-2025 EaP policy,

Reiterating EaP policy's role as safeguard, anchoring the EaP

countries and their societies to the EU regardless of the presence and type of bilateral agreement that each country has with the EU,

Acknowledging the diversity of ambitions within the EaP region regarding European integration, with some EaP countries advancing in EU accession negotiations and others not currently seeking strong EU integration,

Welcoming the European Parliament resolution of November 2023 on proposals of the European Parliament for the amendment of the Treaties following the Conference on the Future of Europe; noting that the prospect of future enlargements makes a reform of the Treaties inevitable in the context of unprecedented challenges and multiple crises,

Stressing the importance of regional cooperation, both between the EU and EaP countries and among the EaP countries themselves, playing a vital role to advance shared goals and strengthen peace and stability in the region,

Emphasising the importance of fundamental reforms in all six EaP countries and reaffirming our unwavering commitment to the EU fundamental values, which remain the cornerstone of our shared vision for a stable, prosperous EaP region,

Stressing our engagement with the thematic priorities of the Working Groups of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum stemming from the Joint Staff Working Document (JSWD) “Recovery, resilience and reform: post 2020 Eastern Partnership priorities” as well as with the EaP CSF Strategy 2022-2030,

Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine and destabilising role in the EaP region

Stressing that Russia’s full-scale war against Ukraine wages on, leaving behind colossal casualties among Ukrainians, unprecedented destruction of civil infrastructure, such as the barbaric attack to the Ohmadyt children’s hospital, energy facilities, supply chains and the environment as a result of systematic attacks. As well as documented occurrences of torture, rape and child abduction. Acknowledging that Russia’s actions form part of a wider pattern of aggression towards the EaP region and of a broader set of objectives against Western democratic values,

Stressing that Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine continues to be the main threat to the EaP countries; warning about Russia's continued acts of extraterritorial violence, foreign interference, propaganda and hybrid threat in the EaP region,

Reiterating that Ukraine's integration into the EU remains central in the Union's political agenda. Synergies between the EU and its Member States' political will must be ensured to advance Ukraine's accession talks and the country's victory in the war of aggression,

Noting that Russia continues to occupy 20 percent of Georgia's territory in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia intensifying human rights violations, including the kidnapping of peaceful population, and continued discrimination, and depriving people of the right to education in their mother tongue. Russia promotes Georgian government's actions to usher in Kremlin-style repressive laws, threatening the country's EU path and fundamental freedoms. Russia persists in its occupation of the so-called Transnistria territory of the Republic of Moldova and has escalated its destabilising operations aiming to derail Moldova's pro-European trajectory. Russia has strengthened its cooperation with Lukashenka's regime and continues to fuel tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan,

Shrinking civic space

Warning about the continued intensified crackdown on civil society in Azerbaijan and Belarus; Azerbaijani presidential and parliamentary elections and Belarusian parliamentary vote consolidated Aliyev and Lukashenka's regimes,

Welcoming the European Parliament resolution of 25 April 2024 on Azerbaijan, notably the repression of civil society and the cases of Dr Gubad Ibadoghlu and Ilhamiz Guliyev to urge Azerbaijan to immediately and unconditionally release all other political prisoners,

Warning about the dangerous short- and long-term consequences of Lukashenka's regime and the promoted diplomatic isolation of Belarus from international cooperation mechanisms, including Belarus' withdrawal from the EU's Eastern Partnership,

Expressing serious concerns over the conduct of Georgia's legislative elections on 26 October 2024, marked by systemic manipulation,

intimidation, and breaches in vote secrecy. Welcoming the EU announced mission to Georgia to investigate any irregularities in regard to the elections of 26 October 2024,

Deploping the stigmatising impact of the 'law on transparency of foreign influence' in the run-up to the elections, as reported by numerous civil society organisations, together with incidents of attacks and intimidation,

Warning about the current backlash on civil society by the Georgian government and recalling the urgent opinion issued by the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe (CoE) of May 2024 on Georgia's law on transparency of foreign influence, strongly recommending that the Georgian authorities abandon the special regime of registration, reporting and public disclosure requirements for civil society organisations, online media and broadcasters receiving foreign support, including administrative sanctions,

EU negotiations and European aspirations

Welcoming EU's first Intergovernmental Conferences with Moldova and Ukraine, officially opening accession negotiations and reinforcing their bilateral relations with the EU. Trusting that this will provide impetus to both countries' internal reform agenda; welcoming European Council's decision to grant EU candidate status to Georgia on the understanding that the relevant steps are taken,

Welcoming the outcome of presidential elections and EU accession referendum held in the Republic of Moldova that confirmed the European aspirations of its citizens; deploring the unprecedented anti-EU disinformation campaign and Russian interference. Welcoming the adoption of Reform and Growth Facility for Moldova to accelerate its reform process and boost socio-economic growth,

Welcoming the Security and Defence Partnership between the EU and Moldova to strengthen cyber resilience; highlighting that the EU supported for the first time Armenia from the European Peace Facility to enhance the country's resilience in case of possible future participation in international military missions and operations,

Welcoming Armenian authorities' political will and efforts to bring the country on a steadier EU integration path, and the launch of a visa liberalisation dialogue. Welcoming the launch work on a new

EU-Armenia Partnership Agenda, establishing more ambitious joint priorities for cooperation across all dimensions.

As delegates to the General Assembly of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum:

Strengthening support for Ukraine

1. We continue to stand in solidarity with the people of Ukraine, call on the EU, its Member States, and the international community, particularly NATO leaders, to take bolder decisions in continuing to provide political, humanitarian, military and financial support to Ukraine to achieve just and long-lasting peace, and to provide Ukraine with a clear timeline for NATO membership.
2. We call on the EU, its Member States, and the Ukrainian authorities to ensure participation of the Ukrainian civil society in the EU pre-accession, reconstruction processes and post-war green recovery of Ukraine as well as within the implementation of the Ukraine Facility and the Ukraine Plan.
3. We call on the international community to ensure accountability for the crimes committed by Russian authorities and military forces in Ukraine, and call on international prosecutors, including the International Criminal Court, to investigate and prosecute Russia's attacks on Ukrainian health care system as both war crimes and crimes against humanity.
4. We urge international humanitarian organisations to establish and maintain a robust supply chain to continue to deliver medical equipment and supplies for affected hospitals and medical facilities, to provide humanitarian aid to communities in the combat zone and to support humanitarian demining.
5. We urge local and international media to continue to document strikes on civilian infrastructure and disseminate complete and objective information about the attacks by Russia.
6. We call on the EU and its Member States to:
 - Support Ukraine to restore electricity, heat and critical energy infrastructure, in particular ahead of the upcoming winter;
 - Strengthen physical protection of energy facilities in Ukraine, including nuclear power plants, from Russian attacks, and ensure nuclear safety;
 - Support Ukraine to build decentralised sustainable electricity and heating infrastructures.
7. We call on the EU to mobilise private EU investment to support Ukraine in rebuilding dispersed electricity and heat generation facilities.

8. We call on the EU to engage and provide equal opportunities for Ukrainian businesses in Ukraine's recovery projects, aimed at supporting the country's economy.

The Eastern Partnership policy

1. We call on the EU, its Member States and EaP countries to continue the Eastern Partnership policy and promote the role of civil society therein, including the EaP CSF. The EaP policy ensures that the civil society and democratic forces of Belarus and Azerbaijan remain connected regionally with democratically minded peers. For 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 its European aspiration. The policy brought the Association Trio countries closer to the EU and keeps supporting their internal reform agenda.
2. We call on the EU, its Member States and EaP countries to work towards a renewed post-2025 Eastern Partnership policy that continues to prioritise the broad aspect of security enhancing resilience and information sharing and joint response mechanism. The latter is a key mean to contribute to the overall security of the EaP region and to counter threats on disinformation. The broad aspect of security should include a comprehensive strategy to the Black Sea region, including energy and economic security. Civil society plays a key role in strengthening the ability of the EaP to boost their security resilience and should be actively involved.
3. We call on the EU and its Member States to expand EaP regional security cooperation to develop a human security approach that can directly contribute to democratisation, transparency, and accountability in policymaking, facilitating a transition towards governance models that prioritise the interests and involvement of all citizens.
4. We call on the EU and its Member States to address common challenges on democracy, good governance and stability, sustainable economic development, as well as improving energy and transport cooperation, protecting the environment and resolving conflicts, through a robust revised European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) within the Multiannual Financial Framework 2028-2034 being negotiated in 2025.

Supporting an enabling environment for civil society and civil society's participation in the EaP policy

1. We call on the EU, its Member States, and Eastern Partnership governments to support civil society's expertise and involvement in the

EaP policy at all levels through regular consultations, including via a dedicated Working Group on Civic Space within the Eastern Partnership policy.

2. We urge the Eastern Partnership countries to include civil society organisations in the design, implementation and assessment of national laws promoting public dialogue and discussions, deliberative and inclusive practices when discussing democratic reforms and to involve civil society in the EU pre-accession process.
3. We call on the EU and its Member States to counter the progressive shrinking and closing of civic space and to strengthen capacity building and institutional support in order to improve civil society's abilities to contribute to policy dialogue to advance reform in the EaP countries.
4. We emphasise the obligation of EaP governments to uphold the fundamental rights of their citizens, comply with international standards and create an enabling environment for civil society at local, national and regional level. This includes removing legislative barriers for civil society to engage with regional and local authorities.
5. We call on the EU and its Member States to support the sustained operation of civil society actors in all EaP countries, including those forced to operate in exile, by providing consistent and reliable funding opportunities.
6. We deplore the current Georgian government's intensified crackdown on civil society that severely undermines the ability of Georgian civil society to take part in civic dialogue, policymaking and consultations on matters related to the EU path. We call on the Georgian civil society to continue to stand up for its rights and freedoms and speak up against electoral irregularities, fraud and intimidation.

Countering authoritarianisms and democracy deficiencies

1. We call on the international community to redouble efforts and step up their commitment to the build-up of democracy in Belarus and Azerbaijan. We urge the European Union to prioritise democratic governance, human rights, and the rule of law over short-term interests, including energy agreements and supplies, when engaging with EaP countries' governments. We call on Azerbaijani authorities to repeal repressive legislation driving independent civil society organisations and media to the margins of the law.
2. We urge the EU Member States and the European Institutions to call for the release of all political prisoners in Azerbaijan and Belarus, leverage all available mechanisms to put pressure on the offending governments and stand in solidarity with them and their families. We call on increasing international pressure to unconditionally release

all political prisoners in Azerbaijan - including EaP CSF Azerbaijani National Platform members, Dr. Gubad Ibadoghlu, Anar Mammadli, Hafiz Babali, Aziz Orujov, Bakhtiyar Hajiyev, and many others, such as female journalists Sevinj Vagifqizi, Elnara Gasimova, Nargiz Absalamova - and in Belarus, such as Ales Bialiatski, Viktor Babaryka, Maksim Znak, Marya Kalesnikava, Marfa Rabkova, Katsiaryna Bakhvalava, Maryna Zolatava.

3. We urge the Azerbaijani authorities to release the Armenian captives currently held behind bars in Azerbaijan.
4. We deplore the current shrinking of civic space in Georgia and smear campaigns targeting civil society and individuals, including the May 2024 Foreign Agent Law, that undermines democratic principles and jeopardises the country's path towards the EU. Alongside the enactment of wide-ranging anti-LGBTQ+ law that prohibits fundamental rights and freedoms. We call on the Georgian authorities to immediately repeal restrictive laws that limit the work of civil society and independent media and ensure the freedom of speech and press.

Supporting Belarusian civil society and Democratic Forces

1. We urge the leadership of the European Union, its Member States, and the EaP countries' authorities to continue providing staunch political support to Belarusian civil society and Democratic Forces, and to draw a clear distinction between civil society in Belarus and Lukashenka's regime. The EaP CSF Belarusian National Platform, civil society and the Belarusian democratic forces in the country and in exile should continue to be regarded as the interlocutors of the democratic Belarus in the relations with the EU, should remain included in the EaP initiative and connected regionally with democratically minded peers.
2. We call to speed up the formulation of joint actions aimed to halt repression, ensure the release and recovery of Belarusian political prisoners and support the country's progression towards democratic integrity. This should be formulated in cooperation with Belarusian civil society and democratic actors. Over 1,300 people, including civil society representatives and journalists, remain behind bars for politically motivated reasons; this list is constantly being replenished with new political prisoners. We call on the EU and its Member States to put all efforts to release them.
3. We urge the EU Member States and international institutions to establish new formats to coordinate with Belarusian socio-political actors in international political processes and structures, along the good practice established by the EU Consultative Group with Belarusian civil society and democratic forces, including the coordination of assistance through the Senior Officials' Meetings on Belarus, the Council of Europe

Contact Group and the US - Belarus Strategic Dialogue.

4. We urge the EU Member States to revise the implementation of the Council Decision 2022/579 of 08 April 2022 (5), namely, to introduce exemptions for civil society organisations re-granting EU funds to Belarusian residents, alongside existing exceptions for UN agencies concerning cash payments.
5. We call on the EU and its Member States to observe the measures recommended by the International Labour Organization (ILO) governing body under the Article 33 of the ILO Constitution on the subject of Belarus.
6. We call on the EU and its Member States to promote policies fostering international mobility for Belarusian students and scholars into international educational and cultural programmes, and to continue supporting programmes promoting democratic values to counter Lukashenka's authoritarian indoctrination.

Supporting EU enlargement and European aspirations

1. We call on the EU and its Member States to push forward a 'fundamentals' driven agenda in all engagements with the EaP countries, both with those on the enlargement path and those that do not currently seek strong EU integration. Particular emphasis should be put on reforms in the areas of judiciary, notably on fight against corruption, and fundamental rights, and justice, freedom and security.
2. We call on the EU, its Member States, and Moldovan and Ukrainian authorities to open the 'fundamentals' negotiation cluster during the upcoming Polish Presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2025, and to accelerate the screening process of the chapters under the remaining clusters.
3. We urge the EU, the international community and all stakeholders, including the Georgian government, to support Georgia's fight for democracy by ensuring that all Georgian citizens' voices have been listened to and respected in regard to the 26 October elections. We call on the EU to condition any future financial aid to the Georgian government on electoral integrity and a trusted investigation of alleged systemic fraud during the legislative elections of 26 October 2024.
4. We reiterate that the future of Georgia is European. We call on the EU and its Member States to leave the door open for Georgia and to consider setting up a path to the opening of accession negotiations on the understanding that Georgian authorities deliver on democratic reforms as a candidate country. We call on the Georgian authorities to swiftly realign with European Union values and norms and recommit to Georgia's EU path.

5. We call on the EU to intensify its dialogue with the Armenian government to facilitate further integration in light of Armenia's explicitly articulated European aspirations towards a fully-fledged '3+1' approach that includes the Trio Associated countries and Armenia.
6. We call on the EU to assess the readiness of the EU internal reform both politically and institutionally in view of EU future enlargements, in the wake of the proposed reform of the Treaties launched by the European Parliament in November 2023.
7. We call on the EU, its Member States, and the international community, to strengthen their efforts to support the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Eastern Partnership countries within their internationally recognised borders.

Providing adequate assistance to refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs)

1. We call on the EU Member States to provide support for refugees forced to leave Belarus for political reasons in the swift legalisation of their stay, their social integration and prevention of discrimination, and call on the respect of the principle of non-refoulement.
2. We remind the EU Member States about the importance of facilitating the relocation of EaP citizens at risk of political persecution, including civil society representatives, through visa support, job opportunities, educational and cultural opportunities.
3. We remind that over four million people from Ukraine benefit from the temporary protection mechanism following Russia's full-scale invasion. We welcome EU Council's decision to extend temporary protection until March 2026 for the Ukrainians fleeing from Russia's war of aggression. We call on EU Member States to formalise its prolongation.
4. We call on the EU, its Member States and the donor community to provide necessary assistance to the over 120,000 Armenians who have been subject to enforced displacement from the former territory of Nagorno-Karabakh. Azerbaijani authorities assert that Armenians can return to the region on the sole condition that they accept Azerbaijani citizenship; however, reliable security and protection guarantees are missing. We call on the Armenian and Azerbaijani authorities to finalise a lasting peace agreement putting to an end to decades-old conflict and recall the order of 17 November 2023 of the International Court of Justice.

Cross-cutting priorities

1. We call on the EU Member States and EaP governments to prevent Russia from circumventing existing sanctions, further increase sanctions pressure on Russia and ensure appropriate counteraction to Russian propaganda in the EU and EaP countries.
2. We call on the EU and its Member States to ban all direct and indirect imports of Russian fossil fuels, including LNG. We call on EaP governments to put all efforts to rapidly reduce dependence on Russian fossil fuels and accelerate the green transition.
3. We urge EaP governments to strengthen measures to tackle gender-based violence, call on Armenian and Azerbaijani authorities to ratify the Council of Europe's Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention).
4. We urge EaP governments to strengthen measures for the social and labour inclusion of persons with disabilities in line with the UN Convention on Persons with Disabilities and the European Social Model.
5. We call on EaP governments to further promote reforms on digitalisation of Public Administration services to increase transparency, reduce red tape and improve citizens' quality of life, including in rural areas. We call on the EaP countries to adopt measures to facilitate digital transformation of businesses, including Small-Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and stress the need to support women's participation in SMEs.
6. We call on EaP governments to actively engage with trade unions and social partners and respect social dialogue, trade union rights, freedom of association, right to collective bargaining as a cornerstone of democracy, in line with the European Social Model.
7. We call on EaP governments to integrate social justice principles into economic policies and reforms to address income inequality, advance gender equality and support migrant and informal workers.
8. We call on the EU to actively encourage EaP governments to involve civil society organisations, economic and social partners in the design and implementation of policies. This is particularly important to accelerate the green, Just Transition of businesses, including SMEs.
9. We stress the importance to stimulate connections between EaP countries' SMEs and EU businesses, including through entrepreneurial networks. This would contribute to increase EaP SMEs' competitiveness and enable them to benefit from the opportunities under the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas established between the EU, and Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia respectively.
10. We call on the EU to continue supporting environment-related actions in the EaP countries and call on EaP governments to implement environmental protection policies on reducing carbon emissions, preserving biodiversity, improving public transportation, combating air,

water and soil pollution to mitigate the effects of climate change.

11. We call on EaP governments to adopt reforms for a Just Transition to a green economy and environmentally friendly policies, promote energy security by investing in power grid connections and the use of renewable energy sources
12. We call on EaP governments to ensure meaningful participation of young people in the design, implementation and assessment of youth policies, and to develop and promote safe and accessible youth spaces. Particular attention should be provided to young people in the most vulnerable situations, including, among others, young persons with disabilities, LGBTQIA+ and displaced young people.
13. We call on the EU to support EaP youth in mobility by strengthening programs such as Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps, ensuring full security of participants.

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