

Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum Working Group 3

Online Meeting, 22 May 2025

Short report for distribution

The Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF) Working Group 3 (WG3) held its first meeting of 2025 online on 22 May 2025. The event, spanning three sessions, included a presentation of country updates, an update on the work plan and advocacy activities and concluded with a stakeholder meeting.

Session 1 – EU and country updates

In recent months, the EU has significantly increased its support for energy security in Ukraine and Moldova. On 24 February 2025, the European Commission announced a new support package that will enable the full integration of Ukraine's electricity market with the EU by early 2027, together with Moldova, as well as further integration in the EU gas sector. The EU's energy partnership with Azerbaijan continues under the existing Memorandum of Understanding, with Azerbaijani export to the EU rising by 40% between 2021 and 2024. Meanwhile, Georgia and Armenia have entered the second phase of the Eu4Energy programme aimed at supporting energy efficiency and aligning national legislation with the EU acquis.

Moldova

Moldova has recently made progress in its climate governance by adopting a new climate action law that sets a target for climate neutrality by 2050 and establishes a monitoring obligation. Although some NGOs actively support various target areas and participate in ministry subgroups, the majority lack the experience to effectively engage in discussions, and many public servants are not very knowledgeable in EU legislation. In the energy sector, notable achievements include the launch of the first tenders for large renewable energy capacities and the approval of a legal framework for energy communities. However, there remains a reduced capacity to implement climate policies at the local level, and public participation is often limited to formal processes without substantial state support. To address these issues, recommendations include strengthening the implementation of climate legislation, increasing funding, renewing the regional regranting program to stabilise the sector and to enhance the specialisation and qualifications of NGOs.

Ukraine

Ukraine's energy sector remains highly vulnerable due to the ongoing war, with several nuclear power stations still occupied by Russian forces. The conflict has had devastating

environmental impacts, including severe air pollution, soil degradation, contamination of surface and groundwater, widespread mining of land, ecosystem fires, loss of biodiversity, and the destruction of protected natural areas. In this context, Ukraine's primary focus is on postwar recovery and reconstruction, closely tied to its aspirations for future European Union membership, with both processes advancing in parallel. Ukraine is also participating in the "EU4Green Recovery" initiative, which aims to support sustainable rebuilding. However, the country faces several systemic challenges in environmental governance, such as the low prioritization of environmental issues, lack of transparency, limited public engagement and weak institutional accountability. Despite these challenges, civil society organizations have played a crucial role, particularly in conducting mock negotiation sessions under Chapters 27 and 15, which pertain to environmental and energy policies in the EU accession framework. For more information, please see [this presentation](#).

Georgia

Civil society organizations in Georgia are facing increasing challenges due to restrictive legislative measures, which have triggered widespread public opposition, including significant environmental demonstrations. Notably, there have been protests in Chiatura against Georgian Manganese Mines due to environmental degradation, leading to a suspension of operations, and in Balda Canyon since 2022, against land privatization and restricted public access, leading to a revocation of privatization plans. There has also been public resistance to the construction of a hydro power station on Sulori river. Georgia has launched a climate action plan for 2024–2025 and is in the process of preparing a new NDC strategy. However, the removal of the obligation for civil society consultations, a key precondition for EU accession, has further strained relations between the government and CSOs. Although the government has announced the creation of a fund for NGOs, promising 20 million lari (approximately 8 million USD), details regarding the funding priorities and programs remain unclear. Governance remains highly centralized, with decisions concentrated in the central offices of the ruling party, leaving local governments powerless.

Belarus

In Belarus, the civil society landscape is severely repressed, with 1891 NGOs liquidated and 1189 political prisoners. There is no genuine dialogue between the government and civil society, and international academic engagement has been banned. The state's focus is oriented toward deeper integration with Russia over sustainability and climate goals. Challenges are significant: repressive conditions have stripped civil society of any influence over state bodies, and public consultation mechanisms have been dismantled or replaced with ineffective substitutes. Despite this hostile environment, achievements persist through the efforts of environmental NGOs operating in exile, who continue to conduct research, produce shadow reports, and collaborate with EU media outlets. Their

overarching goal is to ensure that any future transition in Belarus is both democratic and environmentally sustainable. The Green Belarus Alliance remains active both within the country and abroad. The energy sector has become increasingly centralized and militarised, while Belarus has withdrawn from key international environmental agreements, including the Aarhus and Bern Conventions. Looking ahead to the EaP post-2025, priorities should include strengthening support for environmental initiatives in authoritarian contexts, developing hybrid and digital cooperation formats to operate under repression, and integrating climate action into broader human rights and security policies.

Azerbaijan

In Azerbaijan, no real dialogue takes place between civil society and the government, with the latter informally consulting entrusted experts on certain topics. This lack of inclusion was particularly evident in the preparations for COP29, where environmental NGOs were not invited to participate. Despite this, Azerbaijan is making efforts in renewable energy development. Large-scale wind farm projects are underway, with at least one already under construction. These developments include the installation of special transmission cables along the Black Sea, enabling the export of energy to the European Union via Romania and Bulgaria. While these projects mark progress in clean energy infrastructure, the exclusion of civil society from the planning and decision-making processes raises concerns about transparency and accountability in the country's environmental governance.

Armenia

In Armenia, environmental NGOs are actively involved in decision-making processes related to nature protection, climate change and energy security. They organised conferences to make recommendations for the upcoming COP30 in Brazil and started the preparation of activities for COP17 on the Convention on Biodiversity which will be held in Armenia in 2026. NGOs have also contributed to discussions under the Paris Agreement and played a role in shaping the national masterplan organised by Transparency International, offering concrete policy recommendations. A notable area of progress is the transition to solar energy, with Ecoteam playing an active role in legislative development. NGOs have established eco rights schools for public servants and have been actively involved in public hearings on mining activities. One of Armenia's top environmental priorities is the expansion of forests and green areas, with 1,200 hectares already planted and growing. Under its climate change commitments, Armenia has pledged to increase forestation by up to 1.2%. Other environmental goals include improving air quality, increasing electric transport, and enhancing control over urban construction and waste management. Significant challenges remain, for instance changes in environmental legislation often favor mining companies, with the government not consistently considering the input of environmental NGOs.

Session 2 – Work Plan and Advocacy Activities

Next delegate selection to be launched by the end of 2025

The selection for the 2026-2028 cycle of EaP CSF delegates will be launched by October 2025 with a call for applications published on the website and will conclude by the end of March 2026. The delegate selection is a lengthy process involving several parties including WG Coordinators, EU delegations and National Platforms. The EaP CSF Steering Committee oversees finalising the selection. For EU delegates, the EU members will also be involved in the selection process. Applicants to the delegate selection process must be Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). The criteria generally considered include non-partisanship, involvement in the EaP thematic areas and the carrying out of work that relates to European values. The EaP CSF Steering Committee is additionally currently revising the thematic and structural quotas which should be adopted in July. Each cycle, up to 160 delegates are selected, including 20 per National Platform and up to 40 delegates from the EU.

State of play & looking forward of WG1 activities for 2025, Eastern Partnership political and policy developments, including the official EaP Multi-annual Work Plan 2025-2027

The Polish Presidency of the Council of the EU started on the 1st of January 2025 and runned until the 30th of June. Reinvigorating the discussion around the Eastern Partnership initiative is at the core of Polish Presidency. This commitment has been deployed through the elaboration of an informative document, a non-paper on the Eastern Partnership that has been supported by over 16 out of 27 Member States, which is beyond the traditional number of supporters of the Eastern Partnership initiative. The EaP CSF has advocated for the continuation of the EaP initiative towards the Polish Presidency and produced a position paper based on the resolution adopted last November in Vienna. The work of the EaP CSF will continue throughout the upcoming Presidencies; the EaP CSF will shortly intervene in the Eastern Neighborhood preparatory group of the Council of the EU on the importance of role of civil society in the EaP initiative. On 20 March, the Forum took part in an official meeting with high-level civil servants from the EaP countries and the EU, the so-called Senior Officials Meeting, where it reiterated the strategic importance of the EaP initiative, and the need to further strengthen synergies with other dimensions, such as the Black Sea. The Forum recently submitted a memorandum to the European Commission in response of a call for evidence on the upcoming joint communication of the Commission and External Action regarding a strategic approach to the Black Sea. In this memorandum, the Forum highlighted the importance to ensure cooperation between civil society from the Black Sea basin and beyond with the Eastern Partnership civil society, namely the Forum. At the Senior Officials Meeting, the EU presented its plan of activities for the upcoming 3 years regarding the Eastern Partnership initiative. The main novelty compared to previous years it that this plan is now multi-

annual and covers 2025 to 2027. In there are all official Eastern Partnership activities starting from 2025, including the EaP Youth Conference and our Civil Society Summit next December. The priority areas of the Multi-Annual Work Plan, based on the 2020 Joint Staff Working Document of the European Commission, include: complementarity with the enlargement process; security, democratic and societal resilience; economic development, green transition and regional connectivity; civil society and youth. The next Senior Officials Meeting is foreseen in autumn; this will be an occasion to further improve the Work Plan.

EaP Index 2025

Eastern Partnership Index is a data-driven monitoring tool crafted by independent civil society from the region and developed by the EaP CSF. It tracks political and policy developments in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine – focusing on their progress toward democratisation, sustainable development and European integration. The Index is grounded in rigorous research and local expertise, with findings validated through peer review. It serves as both a benchmark and advocacy tool, widely used in EU and regional policymaking. The 2025 edition, set to launch in the end of June, will inform advocacy work of the EaP CSF and provide independent input for the EU's 2025 country assessments, as well as contribute more broadly to policy debates, reform efforts, and stakeholder engagement across the region and in Brussels.

Session 3 - Stakeholder session

Participants had the opportunity to engage with a representative from DG ENEST to exchange views on energy, climate, and infrastructure development. The discussion also underscored the importance of strengthening cooperation with municipalities, recognizing that much of the policy implementation occurs at the local level. A key pillar of these efforts is the Covenant of Mayors, an ambitious initiative joined by many Eastern Partnership countries, that aims to reduce municipal greenhouse gas emissions by 60% by 2050.