

20 April 2021, Brussels

9th EURONEST Parliamentary Assembly – Opening Session

Speech by the EaP CSF Co-Chair Sofia Strive

Distinguished Co-Chairs of the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly, Members of the European Parliament and Members of Parliament from the EaP countries, ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for inviting me to speak on behalf of the EaP CSF and thank you for actively listening to the voice of civil society in the region. I don't have too much time and thus, I will be very clear and very concise with delivering my four main points that I hope you will take note of and consider carefully.

Firstly, during the past year with all its invisible but also highly visible enemies and challenges, the **civil society in the Eastern Partnership has shown an immense level of innovation, determination, resilience and courage**. When moving forward with the new framework of the EaP, it is vital that we ensure that civil society is meaningfully included throughout the process, from the planning and implementation to the monitoring and evaluation part. Including the voice of the civil society is the only way to ensure that **“building back better” will really become “better” for all groups of society**, for all regions of the countries and for all needs in a long-term perspective.

Secondly, what is on everyone's lips and on everyone's mind these days – **vaccines**. It is alarming that the vaccination in the EaP region has barely even started. If fighting a global pandemic, an invisible enemy that knows no border, we have to cooperate across borders when distributing and sharing the vaccines that are available. As representatives of the Civil Society in the Eastern Partnership, we are having a hard time understanding what is perceived as a lack of support from the EU on vaccines and also **why is the EU running such a reputational risk**. That is why we also endorsed a letter of civil society representatives to the leaders of the EU on the Vaccination in Eastern Europe.

Thirdly, I would like to highlight the deteriorating **security situation**. Connected to a number of unfortunate events in the region, the security situation has never been worse than it is today for the people in the EaP. I am referring to **individual human security**, where we see peaks in cases of domestic violence, poverty and unemployment. I am referring to digital security risks with an increased level of cyber threats, state propaganda and decreased freedom of press. But I am also referring to state security where our EaP colleagues face threats from neighbours and foreign powers. These security risks have different forms, but all have devastating consequences for the whole population. We thus believe that increased efforts need to be done and security should go hand in hand with resilience when framing the new targets for the EaP.

Finally, on the **draft Euronest resolution with recommendations for the upcoming EaP Summit**, we the EaP CSF, agree with many points made in this resolution and would like to use this opportunity to encourage everyone that have the chance to vote to support this document for the sake of supporting a safer, healthier, more inclusive and more sustainable EaP in the near future.

Delivered by Sofia Strive, Co-chair of the EaP CSF Steering Committee