



10 YEARS
EASTERN PARTNERSHIP
Civil Society Forum

11TH ANNUAL ASSEMBLY REPORT

**of the Eastern Partnership
Civil Society Forum**

December 4-6, 2019



EaP4EU: Joining forces for a win-win partnership



The 11th Annual Assembly – “EaP4EU: Joining forces for a win-win partnership”, took place on December 4-6, 2019 in Brussels, hosting over 300 civil society representatives from the EaP region and the EU as well as international stakeholders, key decision makers and journalists. Olivér Várhelyi, the newly appointed Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations opened the conference, stressing the importance of empowering civil society and strengthening its role at all levels of policy making in order to support better democratic processes and resilience in the Eastern Partnership countries.

In his first remarks at a public event after assuming the office, Mr. Várhelyi emphasised the importance of citizens'

engagement and civil society as the key actor in monitoring the implementation of reforms in EaP countries. He added that the next priorities for the Eastern Partnership will be shaped around the successes and lessons learnt from the current roadmap. The EU will continue focusing namely on strengthening the economy, connectivity, youth engagement and civil society. The Commissioner acknowledged the input received in response to DG NEAR's structured consultation on the future of the Eastern Partnership from civil society and EaP CSF in particular, as one of the main contributions to shape the EaP policy beyond 2020.



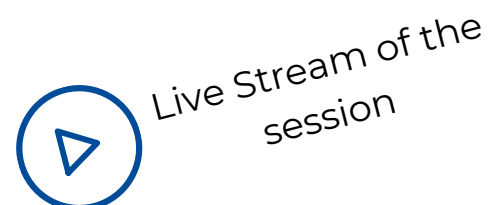
Live Stream of
the Speech



More than 25 Brussels based stakeholders, think tankers and experts debated with EaP CSF representatives in a participatory World Café format the key ideas EaP CSF submitted to the structured consultation focusing on Boosting economic development and human capital; Good governance, rule of law and security; Enhancing regional cooperation - inclusiveness and differentiation; and Enhancing visibility of EaP policy; and Civil Society. From civil society's perspective, the future EaP policy after 2020 should be focusing on re-balancing and strengthening the partnership between the EU, EaP governments and societies and increasing progress namely in the rule of law area.

This major issue became the focus of the high-level panel Future of the EaP: challenges ahead and enabling civil society. The State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality, Georgia - Ketevan Tsikhelashvili, reaffirmed Georgia's readiness

to continue the reform process toward closer EU integration. The EaP has been an effective framework in many ways and has delivered some impressive results, noted Tsikhelashvili. She also drew attention to the precarious situation of the population in the Georgian territories occupied by Russia where citizens have no access to medical facilities, graves of their loved ones and their farming lands. Rustam Badasyan, Minister of Justice, Armenia emphasised the commitment of Armenia to the Eastern Partnership policy. The Armenian government is seeking to improve delivery in the area of rule of law and has recently developed three sector strategies for judiciary, anti-corruption and penitentiary system reform. This confirms the path the country took after the Velvet Revolution in 2018, which facilitated the creation of new institutions based on the democratic principles and the respect for human rights.



In his intervention, **Luc Devigne**, Director, Russia, Eastern Partnership, Central Asia, Regional cooperation and OSCE, EEAS, underlined the resilience and adaptability of the EaP policy. A lot has been achieved in the past ten years and civil society played a significant role in this process. He underlined that there is consensus among all EU member states on the importance of the EaP policy as a policy addressing six EaP countries. **Lawrence Meredith**, Director Neighbourhood East and Institution Building, DG NEAR, European Commission

stressed that EaP governments should improve their performance in the area of rule of law, human rights and good governance. The EaP policy post-2020 should be citizen-centred and cater to the needs of populations. He emphasised that the EU is committed to strengthen its engagement with both established civil society actors as well as with smaller actors and grass root organisations.



Crucial areas of reform in the whole EaP region – good governance and the rule of law – new technologies, artificial intelligence and countering and neutralising hybrid threats were the spotlight of two thematic panel discussions on Digital Solutions for Good Governance and Developing Joint Agenda for Countering Hybrid Threats. Experts concluded the hybrid warfare in the region is a direct response to the EaP policy and its successes. EaP countries need to address their individual challenges and vulnerabilities.

Potential areas for enhanced regional cooperation and how the civil society can contribute to addressing the internal and external hybrid challenges was debated during this early-bird session.



Together with representatives of national governments and the EU institutions, EaP CSF delegates discussed in trilateral country stakeholders meetings the most pertinent issues for civil society. **Armenian** civil society representatives focused around EU-Armenia cooperation in the field of justice reform. **Azerbaijan** centered the talks on EU-Azerbaijani Partnership and Cooperation agreement. Delegation from **Belarus** explored on options for civil society participation in policy-making. **Georgia** dwelled on the current state of reforms and their future perspective. CSO impact and role in bilateral and multilateral policy dialogue was in the center of discussion for delegates from **Moldova**. **Ukrainian** civil society experts shared their experience and concerns on the issue of migration and brain drain from EaP countries into the EU.



As the current cycle of delegates ends with this Annual Assembly, the Working Groups took their time during WG meetings to evaluate the successes, shortcomings and future perspectives of each of the Working Group of the Forum and to elaborate recommendations to decision makers. For the first time, we presented the EaP CSF Extra Mile award, which recognises our most active member organisation who allowed us to go the extra mile through their active participation in Forum's activities. **Centre for Global Studies "Strategy XXI"** received the award for contributing to policy dialogue, consultations and internal discussions.





The General Assembly also adopted the Forum's 11th Annual Assembly Declaration, with recommendations aimed at the future of the EaP policy and preparations of the sixth Eastern Partnership Summit coming up in 2020.

A special guest, the mother of the murdered journalist Pavel Sheremet - Ludmila Sheremet, handed out our early Pavel Sheremet Award to the Association of Investigative Reporters and Editorial Security RISE Moldova, after delivering an inspirational address on the importance of freedom of speech as one of the main values of societies in the EaP countries. The EaP CSF Civil Society Award presented to Promo-Lex Moldova for the outstanding and courageous work in defending the human rights and core democratic values in Moldova and its break-away region Transnistria. Receiving the award, Ion Manole, President of Promo-Lex underlined the power of teamwork through which the civil society achieves results



The event has energised more than 300 participants, who exchanged new ideas, good practices, contacts, and laid a solid foundation for the joint work in the frames of the Forum in 2020. More results on the 11th Annual Assembly of the EaP CSF [here](#).

As the highest decision-making body of the EaP CSF, the General Assembly adopted the new Statute of the Forum, which will allow the Forum to make a next step in implementation of its ambitious internal reform focusing on ethical standards, transparency and accountability.

ABOUT THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM

The Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF) is a unique multi-layered regional civil society platform aimed at promoting European integration, facilitating reforms and democratic transformations in the six Eastern Partnership countries - Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. Serving as the civil society and people-to-people dimension of the Eastern Partnership, the EaP CSF strives to strengthen civil society in the region, boost pluralism in public discourse and policy making by promoting participatory democracy and fundamental freedoms.



Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum



#EaPCSF



@EaPCSF

www.eap-csf.eu