



What is the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum?

The Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum is recognised by the European Commission as a representative forum of civil society organisations from the Eastern Partner countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine) and EU civil society organisations active in the Partner countries. The Forum and its organs (national platforms, thematic working groups, Steering Committee, and Secretariat) are recognised as key civil society partners for the European Commission in the framework of European Union (EU) relations with the Eastern Partner countries, and with regard to the EU's commitment to support civil society actors in the Partner countries and to engage them as essential partners in democratic development.

Civil society organisations play a crucial role in the economic and social development of society, and the Forum works to support civil society organisations in their efforts to strengthen the diversity and plurality of public discourse and policymaking, by holding governments and public authorities to account, and by protecting and promoting human rights, fundamental freedoms, participatory democracy, market economy, sustainable development, and good governance.

The Forum works closely with the European Commission, the European External Action Service (EEAS), EU member governments, the European Parliament and other EU institutions, and engages with Partner countries' governments, to:

- monitor developments in EU relations with the Partner countries
- promote the results and activities of civil society projects, and the participation of civil society actors to contribute to effective public policy outcomes
- foster the engagement of independent civil society expertise in the work of the expert panels/thematic platforms.

The Forum was initiated in May 2009 in Prague, Czech Republic, when the Eastern Partnership was launched with the objective of developing closer political and economic ties between the EU and the six Eastern neighbouring countries. The Forum held its first meeting in November 2009, engaging more than 200 civil society organisations from the Partner countries and EU member states. In addition to the annual Forum event, six national platforms are complemented by five thematic working groups and a range of sub-groups engaged in activities year-round, including projects monitoring progress in the implementation of agreements between the EU and the Partner countries.

The Forum brings together civil society actors working at a national and international level to hold the EU and the Partner countries accountable to the commitments made in the joint declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership summit, signed on 7 May 2009 by the EU and six neighbouring countries. The parties agreed that “the Eastern Partnership will be based on commitments to the principles of international law and to fundamental values, including democracy, the rule of law and the respect for

human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as to market economy, sustainable development and good governance”.

FORUM PARTICIPANTS

Who is eligible to become a Forum member?

Membership of the Forum is open to all civil society organisations within the Partner countries and civil society organisations in EU member states that are active in the Partner countries. This can include grassroots organisations, trade unions, farmers' and consumer organisations, think-tanks, employers' organisations, professional associations, non-profit organisations, faith-based organisations, non-profit foundations, national and international civil society organisations/networks across the Partner countries and EU.

Applicants for Forum membership must be based in an EU country or in one of the six Partner countries. The applicant should also be engaged on at least one of the issues on the Eastern Partnership agenda, and be willing and able to contribute actively to the Forum by participating in meetings, responding to requests for input, drafting discussion papers, and similar activities.

All organisations that have taken part in Forum annual events become Forum members. Nobody can exclude an organisation from Forum membership unless the organisation itself announces its withdrawal from the Forum. Exceptions will be where the Steering Committee decides that an organisation is bringing the Forum into disrepute by actively working against the core values and principles of the Forum (a decision which can be revoked by appeal to the whole Forum).

Expression of Interest to participate in Forum annual event:

The selection procedure takes place once a year. To participate, a civil society organisation must submit an expression of interest to join. When the Steering Committee receives the expression of interest, they will apply the agreed criteria to consideration of the application. When the Steering Committee has made a decision, the interested civil society organisation will be duly informed.

Criteria for Participation in annual Forum events:

1. Geographic Origin or Nationality

A majority of Forum participants should come from civil society organisations of the six Partner countries.

However, the number of civil society organisations from each country must be balanced. A proportion of civil society organisations from EU member states that are active in the Partner countries are encouraged to participate to share their experience and expertise of EU affairs and policies. The Forum should also strive to promote a wide variety of participants from Partner countries and from EU member states.

2. Diversity and Proportionality

Participants should represent a wide variety of civil society organisations, including independent democratic social partner organisations, from the Partner countries and from the EU. Participating organisations should be able to take part in one or more of the working groups.

3. Experience in EU/European Neighbourhood Policy/Eastern Partnership

Past and current activities, as well as achievements and results, will be taken into account.

Each participating organisation must be committed to achieving the objectives of the Eastern Partnership.

FORUM STRUCTURE

The Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum is registered in Belgium as the Secretariat of the Steering Committee of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum; registration number 848169582. The statute of the Secretariat can be found here [http://www.eap-csf.eu/assets/files/Documents/StatutesCSF_Secretariatfeb2012_eng%20\(1\).pdf](http://www.eap-csf.eu/assets/files/Documents/StatutesCSF_Secretariatfeb2012_eng%20(1).pdf)

Annual Forum

The annual Forum is the highest decision-making body of the Forum, at which up to 13 members of the Steering Committee are elected for a one-year term.

The annual Forum approves the by-laws, conflict-of-interest rules, and any changes to these core governance documents. Between annual Forum events, the delegates to the previous Forum act as the highest decision making body, and can make decisions by majority vote through email voting.

The annual Forum is a leading annual civil society event, providing networking and experience-sharing opportunities for civil society representatives. It also links them with representatives of the European Commission, EEAS and other EU institutions, Partner country governments, and EU civil society organisations and international networks.

The Annual Forum includes meetings of all working groups and subgroups of the Forum, and the annual event provides space for showcasing national and international initiatives where civil society expertise and projects facilitate a more participatory policy-making and democratic transition in the Partner countries.

Working Groups

Within the Forum, five working groups have been set up and are functioning to discuss issues pertaining to the four intergovernmental thematic platforms, and to contribute to the agenda of the platforms. The working groups of the Forum are working in parallel to the platforms and should contribute to the progress of the platforms' programmes.

The working groups are:

- WG 1. Democracy, human rights, good governance and stability
- WG 2. Economic integration and convergence with EU policies
- WG 3. Environment, climate change and energy security

- WG 4. Contacts between people
- WG 5. Social Policy and Social Dialogue - to focus on social rights and social dialogue, labour market and other social and economic issues pertinent to the Eastern Partner countries.

The Forum working groups are provided by the European Commission with the resources to organise at least one working group meeting per year in addition to participation in the annual Forum event.

It is essential that Forum participants are continued to be invited to be active participants in the meetings of the expert panels and intergovernmental platform meetings. To provide more concrete and substantial input and communication, each working group can establish one or several thematic sub-groups on particular policy areas or themes. The subgroups can work on an autonomous basis but within the framework of the working group format and goals. They can nominate their own sub-group co-ordinators to facilitate the process. Some of the groups can become complementary to intergovernmental expert panels or other intergovernmental fora outside the format of the platforms.

The programme of the annual Forum event also reflects the division and agenda of Forum participants within working groups and thematic sub-groups.

Co-ordination and synergy between the Forum Steering Committee and working group participants is provided by the Working Group Co-ordinators (two per working group - one from EU civil society organisations or international networks, one from the Partner countries).

Working Group Co-ordinator

The Working Group Co-ordinator is the participant from the Partner country or from the EU member state or international network elected by the members of the working group at the Forum annual event for the period of one year. His/Her major task is to co-ordinate the activities of the members of the working group, to represent the Forum, or identify relevant experts from the working group to represent the Forum, at the intergovernmental thematic platform meetings and expert panels, and to represent the working group in the Forum Steering Committee.

National Platforms

It is self-evident that the implementation of the Eastern Partnership initiative in the six Partner countries and in the EU can be more effective if the Forum includes national platforms in all six Partner countries. The Steering Committee will consider ways of increasing the engagement in the Forum of EU civil society organisations.

Options under consideration might include an EU civil society platform.

Each Partner country's platform can decide on the format and mechanism of establishing and functioning of their platform. At the same time, there can be only one national platform in each country recognised by the Forum, and the national platform should adhere to the mission, vision, core values and principles of the Forum.

If there is no national platform, the Steering Committee encourages the development of a national platform as an expression of grassroots democratic participation (with an openness to all eligible applicants). Where similar bodies already exist, they may act as the national platform, provided they observe bottom-up democratic principles in their organisation and decision-making.

Since mid-2011, national platforms have existed in all six Partner countries.

Membership in the national platform is open to all eligible civil society organisations, and confers access to information and the ability to apply for the annual Forum event.

All national platforms should correspond to the following requirements:

- share the aims and objectives of the Forum and organise activities for their implementation at national level
- operate inclusively, in a non-discriminatory manner, showing openness towards all eligible civil society organisations in the country
- provide access to information to all members
- members not only have rights but also responsibilities
- a chair/facilitator/co-ordinator (or even Steering Committee) should be elected
- only organisations (not individuals) are eligible for national platform membership
- the national platform should engage with all four working group topics (five from 2012)

The composition and division of responsibilities within the national platform should correspond to the composition of the Forum as a whole (division into working groups and thematic sub-groups, etc.) Co-ordination and synergy between the Forum Steering Committee and the national platform or Forum participants from the Partner country is provided by the Country Facilitator.

Country Facilitators

The Country Facilitator is the participant elected to this function by the delegation of the respective Partner country at the annual Forum event for the period of one year. His/Her major task is to co-ordinate the activities of the members of the country delegation in the framework of the Forum and to represent them in the Steering Committee.

EU Advocacy Co-ordinators

Up to two representatives of EU civil society organisations and international networks are elected by the whole annual Forum from already elected WG Coordinators from the EU side. They are elected to represent EU civil society in the Forum, and their role is to strengthen advocacy and relations towards the EU institutions and member governments, to foster greater engagement of EU civil society organisations and networks in the Eastern Partnership process and the Partner countries, and to lobby for effective and sustainable support for civil society in the Partner countries through EU funding mechanisms. The EU Co-ordinators are elected for a one-year term.

Steering Committee

To provide co-ordination of Forum work between the meetings of the Forum, there is a need to have an effective and representative Steering Committee. The Steering Committee is the permanent representative body, with a mandate from civil society in the Partner countries plus civil society representatives from the EU member states and representatives from the four thematic platforms. The up to 13 members of the Steering Committee are elected by the members of the Forum for a one-year term. The Steering Committee meets up to 3 times per year to guide the activities of the Forum, to plan ongoing engagement with EU and other counterparts, and to work towards creating a sustainable funding basis and a professional Secretariat to support the activities of the Forum as a whole.

The Steering Committee is structured as follows:

- Each working group elects two representatives, one person from the EU/international networks and one from Partner countries; one of the 2 represents the WG in the SC
- Each Partner country delegation at the Forum's annual meeting elects a representative to become the Country Facilitator
- Up to 2 EU Advocacy Co-ordinators, elected by the whole annual Forum from WG Coordinators from the EU MSs.

Responsibilities of the Steering Committee:

1. Serve as the governing Board of the Secretariat of the Forum, the legally registered entity established upon the decision of the Forum
2. Participation at thematic platform meetings, where possible
3. Participation in selection of the Forum's representatives for all panel/seminar meetings where the Forum is invited
4. Recognition and support of one national platform per Partner country
5. Regular communications with national platforms and working groups
6. Creation of concepts on Forum strategic development
7. Development of procedures to choose participants for the next annual Forum meeting
8. Regular sharing of information within the Forum and with the broader stakeholder community
9. Lobbying activities to raise awareness of the values of the Forum and promote its initiatives.

The Steering Committee has to be guided by the by-laws of the Forum, terms of reference and procedures for the Steering Committee, conflict of interest rules, and adequate funding to fulfil the expected tasks. The by-laws should spell out the overall expectations and tasks of the Forum. Reflecting that the Forum is a bottom-up approach to European policy making, the by-laws should be submitted for consideration and a vote of the whole Forum.

Secretariat

The effective functioning of the Forum and the Steering Committee requires a full-time Secretariat. The Steering Committee comprises volunteers who have demanding positions in their own organisations. To co-ordinate communication between the Steering Committee and Forum participants, to liaise with the European Commission, EEAS, and other EU institutions, and monitor EU-Eastern Partnership developments, to promote the results and activities of civil society projects, and to organise meetings of Forum representatives with EU officials, etc, the Secretariat will be established in Brussels. The Secretariat of the Forum will be established as a legal entity. The governing Board of the Secretariat of the Forum will be the Steering Committee. Board membership terminates upon the annual election of the new Steering Committee, whereupon the new members of the Steering Committee become members of the Board of the Secretariat of the Forum.

Core functions of the Forum Secretariat staff:

- manage legal reporting requirements and accounting, reporting to donors,
- support Steering Committee in representing the Forum in official correspondence, and liaise with the European Commission, EEAS and others in preparation of meetings of Steering Committee and working Groups,
- monitor intergovernmental platform meetings, other expert meetings, and other developments at EU level (EU Council, Commission, EEAS, Parliament, EESC, bilateral meetings in Brussels, other Brussels stakeholders, e.g. civil society networks),
- support the sustainable development of the national platforms,
- set up meetings with European Commission, EEAS and others for visiting Forum experts/delegations,
- prepare advocacy calendars, maintain project database of civil society activities, and support presentation of projects at Forum events and to key EU stakeholders,
- Monitor and update Forum official website www.eap-csf.eu in co-operation with Working Group Coordinators, Country Facilitators, and EU Co-ordinators.

Outputs:

(i) Timely preparation of Steering Committee meetings and annual Forum event

(ii) Regular monitoring of Eastern Partnership developments - thematic platforms, expert meetings, bilateral agreements, etc. - and liaison with the European Commission and EEAS to strengthen civil society inputs and participation

(iii) Effective organisation of advocacy initiatives and accompanying meetings with key EU and Eastern Partnership stakeholders - Steering Committee meetings, expert presentations, civil society project presentations - and advocacy calendar (matching civil society projects with key calendar events)

(iv) Promotion, and showcase, of civil society projects/programmes/initiatives, and work of national platforms and working groups

(v) Timely presentation of Forum news on Forum website, and communications to Forum participants and external partners through regular electronic newsletters.

The Secretariat is an executive body that reports directly to the Steering Committee.