

21 June 2018, Minsk

**Address by the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum
at the 10th Eastern Partnership Informal Partnership Dialogue**

Plenary Session on the Harmonisation of Digital Markets

Dear Commissioners, Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour for me to welcome you to the 10th Eastern Partnership Informal Partnership Dialogue on behalf of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum and to share our views on the harmonisation of digital markets and civil society's contribution in the field.

The digitalisation of the economy is one of the most important drivers behind the profound transformation of the labour market and modern workplace. It will likely become even more significant in the years to come since the digital revolution is unfolding at a higher speed than earlier industrial revolutions. Therefore, the adjustment process also needs to be faster.

Developing a solid infrastructure for digital markets' progress in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries - such as strengthening telecommunications networks and providing equipment for broadband access - is essential for the further development of this sector. Broadband strategies should be developed, adopted, implemented and synchronised across the EaP region in order to provide online services for citizens, governments and businesses at a better price and with a greater choice.

The EaP 2020 crosscutting deliverable on structured engagement with civil society could be reflected in the part on Information Communication Technology (ICT) innovation and start-up ecosystems by adding the involvement of the civil society as one of the main actors. The Panel on Harmonisation of Digital Markets within the Platform 2 "Economic Integration and Convergence with the EU Policies" is one of the most active under the renewed EaP architecture. Frequent meetings organised under the EU4Digital initiative are a great testament to the importance that both the EU and EaP are giving to this issue. The Civil Society Forum is taking part in the workshops organised under this initiative and is ready to continue contributing to this process in a meaningful way. In addition to the business and other stakeholders, it is important to involve the civil society into the implementation of the deliverables in the field of HDM, as we provide a citizens' perspective in this highly technical field, and the citizens of the EaP countries are the final beneficiaries of this initiative.

Our members have already contributed to the draft Work Programme of Platform 2. Many of our recommendations have been included in the final version of the document, which we take as a positive sign that we are on the same page. Platform 2 should also provide guidance on the creation of digital infrastructure building blocks in the EaP countries to ensure the three

main instruments in addressing the elimination of existing obstacles and barriers to pan-European online services, cross-border e-Signatures, e-trade and digital corridor services.

In line with the major deliverable on the gender equality and non-discrimination, the gender-based approach is essential in terms of gender-impact analysis and women's empowerment.

Digital economy cannot be a success without a sustained effort in raising the level of knowledge and skills of citizens. To fully benefit from its potential both in terms of strengthening their economies as well as in terms of improving social situation of its citizens, it is necessary to develop programmes to foster digital literacy, encouraging citizens to broaden their skills on par with the demand of the labour market. It is important to promote clearer understanding of new skills needed for employment in a digital society and to provide a clear and sound orientation for all stakeholders who take decisions on recruitment, career paths, potential trainings, skills assessment. Promoting elaboration of digital skills strategies in the EaP countries is essential in this regard.

The Civil Society Forum is ready to be a catalyst in setting up an e-Competence Framework in the EaP partner countries, as an initiator and steward of national digital skills & jobs coalition in the EaP countries based on the EU's digital skills & jobs coalition model. On 8-9 November, the EaP CSF is organising the EaP Youth Conference "Youth for Entrepreneurship" in Vienna focusing on entrepreneurial skills, including digital skills, as a key competence. Young people are driving force of the society and future of the Eastern Neighbourhood countries representing a huge potential for innovation and reforming political and economic systems in their countries.

We see our specific contribution in empowering citizens to participate in digital economy and society through advancement of digital skills. Digitalisation should not further split the society into a few winners and many losers and contribute to an even more unequal distribution of wealth. In this context, sharing best practices with the EU member states could help minimise such unwanted aspects and risks of digitalisation.

Therefore we support the idea of the alliance in the framework of the EU4Digital initiative, involving all stakeholders - governmental institutions, business associations, civil society organisations and academic communities - and are ready to discuss effective civil society engagement on the national and EaP level in order to contribute to sustainable digital society and to bring the EaP countries and citizens closer to the EU.

*Delivered by Mikalai Kvantaliani, member of the EaP CSF Steering Committee,
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