



EASTERN PARTNERSHIP
Civil Society Forum

Recommendations from civil society organisations

Based on the discussions at the 8th Annual Assembly of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum

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**National Endowment
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Introduction

The following document of recommendations were drafted based on the stakeholder sessions of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum's Annual Assembly 2016 in Brussels. In a political climate when the security and future of the Eastern Partnership is at stake, it seemed adequate to centre the discussions on the theme of 'Building a Common Secure and Democratic Future'. The two high-level panels of the first day of the Assembly, featuring representatives from EaP governments, DG NEAR and the EEAS, outlined the context in which the Eastern Partnership will enter 2017 under the reviewed European Neighbourhood Policy. These discussions were complemented by stakeholder meetings based on the EaP CSF and working group priorities such as energy, EU funding, good governance, information society and education, as well as country-specific debates. During these debates civil society and stakeholders could share ideas as to how and where progress could be made. This document contains concrete recommendations drawn first from the thematic discussions, followed by recommendations according to country.

Policy Context

The Eastern Partnership Countries took great steps in deepening their cooperation with the EU in 2016. However, in light of the ENP review, the question of how the EU will pursue its relations with the EaP is on everyone's lips. The reviewed ENP will allow for more unique and diverse bilateral relations with partner countries in respect of their heterogeneity, while the multilateral dimension of the Eastern Partnership will be maintained. The elements of the new security dimension are yet to be clarified, but will be based on a soft power approach rather than a military strategy.

The future of the EaP in the medium term is unavoidably interlinked with the international context. The European Union is going through perhaps the most difficult phase since its foundation, and it is impossible to deny that the political climate is less favourable to the Eastern partners than when the EaP initiative was launched. To name just a few reasons of concern: the rise of populist, Eurosceptic political movements in Europe and more pro-Russian leaders; Brexit; the election of Donald Trump in the US and the upcoming French and German elections; terrorism; the migration crisis. In particular, the consequences of Brexit are still not clear and its impact on the future of the ENP remains an issue. Undoubtedly, internal problems will most likely be at the top of the EU agenda in coming years, and with the British exit from the EU the EaP countries will lose an important supporter of their cause. The uncertainty of the existing political climate poses a threat to

human rights and fundamental freedoms within Europe's borders, the Eastern Partnership countries and beyond, and at such a time it is important to remain focused on and united by the values on which the EU was founded. At this exact moment in time, considerable further integration of the Eastern neighbourhood countries within the Union appears, even from an optimistic point of view, rather unrealistic. That said, a way out can be found with a more practical and pragmatic approach to cooperation. All sides must maintain a momentum for reforms to demonstrate their commitment to the continued deepening of relations, and the EU must resolve any issues that are posing a barrier to these relations - particularly with regards to visa liberalisation for Georgia and Ukraine. Both the EU and EaP governments value civil society as a key partner in policy dialogue and financial support.

I. Theme-specific recommendations

1. Energy and environment

Context

A realistic assessment of the prospects for deepening EU-EaP cooperation in the area of energy and environment must take into account both the challenges posed by a fast changing international environment, where a weakened European Union has to face competing models - especially that launched by a more assertive Russia - and an increasing divergence among the EaP countries in terms of expectations, instruments and the scope of their dialogue with the European Union.

The EU and EaP interest in the area of energy and the environment are for the most part aligned. The Energy Union Strategy launched by the EU Commission intends to provide affordable, sustainable and competitive energy to European citizens by focusing on five major objectives: the security of energy supplies, an integrated market, environmental security, efficiency, technology and innovation. Each of these objectives has an obvious external dimension and the prospects for a mutually beneficial cooperation with the Eastern Neighbourhood are in theory enormous, especially in the area of infrastructure, energy efficiency, renewables - all areas where there is still potential for improvement. Energy security - meaning primarily the diversification of energy suppliers - stands as one of the major goals of the EU energy strategy. Ideally, successful energy diversification should result in an increased involvement of the EaP (and Central Asian) countries as suppliers and transit countries for future gas routes into Europe. The anticipated opening

of the southern gas corridor by 2019/2020 will represent a milestone in this direction. Ukraine has recently marked one year of independence from Russian direct gas supplies: a result which has been possible thanks to the support of the EU member states (Hungary, Poland and Slovakia) and which stands as proof of the potential benefit of closer ties with the European market.

The current cooperation framework in the area of energy and environment presents however some matters of concern. Obstacles have emerged at both the regional and country level, stemming from internal factors and external pressure:

- The recent EU resolution on the OPAL pipeline has raised serious concerns in the Eastern Neighbourhood, and Ukraine in particular, as it excludes the EaP region from the major gas transport routes into Europe.
- With regards to energy and environmental security, the EaP region is vulnerable due to a high dependence on Russian energy supplies and technology, which is often beyond the control of national authorities. It remains unclear whether the opening of the southern gas corridor will suffice to reverse this trend.
- Belarus has had a privileged area of cooperation with the European Union so far regarding the environment, because this issue does not overlap with more sensitive matters, such as human and political rights. However, the concrete implementation of environmental legislation is yet to come. Environmental governance has never been considered a priority by the Belarusian government and the country lacks the proper institutional setting for delegating roles and responsibilities in the field of environmental legislation. The financial and environmental sustainability of existing policies remains unclear. The lack of reliable data and figures is one of the main problems faced by non-governmental organizations operating in the area of energy and the environment.
- Armenian civil society denounces corruption in the energy sector. Public energy companies are not aiming to benefit the local population, but are instead guided by the interests of Russian corporations and private companies owned by business tycoons or top officials. Armenia has been affected by an unjustified increase in electricity and gas prices, and an indiscriminate and inefficient use of natural resources - water and forests in particular.
- In Azerbaijan the environmental impact of increased deforestation, overfishing and overhunting have so far not been seriously addressed by national authorities, especially when these industries provide an alternative revenue for the Azerbaijani

population, hit by high unemployment rates and the lack of a sound social security system.

- In Moldova, the exploitation of the Dniester river supply and the lack of adequate sustainability checks behind the construction of electrical power plants pose a risk to the most important source of drinkable water for about 80% of Moldovan citizens. A similar situation has occurred in Armenia.
- Ukraine has achieved mixed results in the area of the environment this year. In particular, the Environmental Impact Assessment and Strategic Environmental Impact Assessment have finally been approved after long delays by the Parliament in 2016, in compliance with two EU Horizontal Directives to meet the requirements of the Association Agreement. However, the President vetoed both laws, so that their actual implementation will be further delayed. Changes to the Water Code to implement a Water Framework Directive were adopted by the Parliament and signed by the President. Overall, the implementation of EU environmental norms in Ukraine is still insufficient. Meaningful improvements will be dependent on an environmental governance reform at the central as well as the local level.
- As far as the issue of information and awareness raising on environmental problems among the local population is concerned, the NGO Good Deeds made significant progress in Ukraine in the area of recycling. While the initiative managed to reach an impressive number of citizens, it also reflected the difficulties in pursuing a fruitful dialogue and a rising interest in the environment in a context where the population suffers from particularly harsh living conditions and the backlash of an economic crisis.

Recommendations:

- Stricter control over the expenditure of EU funds in the area of energy and the environment must be ensured.
- The development of renewables in the region is highly desirable, as long as this is integrated into a sustainable and long-term energy strategy.
- Projects initiated upon receipt of EU funding should respond to environmental and financial sustainability criteria, while taking into account the needs of the local population.
- More attention should be paid to the social dimension of energy and environmental policies in the EaP countries.
- The population should receive more information about the short and long term implications of energy policies in EaP countries. A reform of the media landscape

should be a precondition to enable increased transparency and accountability of State bodies with regards to energy policy before civil society.

- The EaP civil society calls for a more active role of the European Union in its control over the implementation of signed agreements, amendments to national legislation and commitments taken by the EaP countries' political authorities. These should be used as a condition for further negotiations, especially in countries where data on energy efficiency, financial sustainability and environmental impact are not publicised.
- The EaP civil society expresses the hope that the resolution on OPAL will not undermine the priority of a diversified energy supply by signalling a regressive shift in the EU energy strategy towards an increased dependence on Russian energy supplies.
- The EaP civil society welcomes the Luxembourg Declaration of Ministers for the Environment of EU member states and EaP countries as an instrument providing high-level political support to the environmental agenda and environmental policy integration, especially because it offers possibilities for a tripartite dialogue between the EU, EaP national governments and civil society to formulate and achieve concrete objectives and define clear targets required to improve the state of environment. Such targets shall be included in the Action plan for the implementation of the above Declaration.
- EU member states and their Eastern Neighbours share the same concern when it comes to environmental security, especially with regards to the Russian-funded nuclear power projects in the region. Cooperation could allow for the establishment of higher security standards.
- The civil society of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus call for a stronger presence of the European Union in support to local environmental NGOs, especially when national authorities are less responsive to their requests or have clear conflicts of interest, and they advocate for a relaunched dialogue with the European Union to build a proper framework for cooperation in the environmental sector, alternative to the Association Agreement format.
- In Georgia, civil society advocates for an increased cooperation with the European Union for the protection of critical infrastructure, the continuation of both technical and financial cooperation aimed at the development of sustainable energy projects, and for the creation of an EaP platform on security and defence policy where these matters could be properly discussed.

2. Youth

Recommendations from the EaP Youth Conference in Bratislava were presented.

3. EU Funding to the Eastern Partners

Context

Following the ENP review, the EC is revising the Association Agenda with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. New partnership priorities are under development for Armenia and Belarus; negotiations on Azerbaijan will follow next year. The published mandate for negotiations on a new EU agreement with Azerbaijan clearly defines the role of civil society.

The EU's strong side is in supporting the creation of an enabling environment. Future support to the EaP countries envisions support to pilot regions based on 4 country priorities. The experience of those regions can then be replicated in other regions in the future.

There are 6-9 months left to influence and inform the future programming for 2017-2020. Lessons learned from the previous cycle will be taken into consideration.

Civil society involvement in the planning, implementation and evaluation of the EU support to the EaP countries is crucial.

Recommendations:

- Accountability and the rule of law should be a precondition for support programmes of the EU.
- If there are no positive developments, sanctions should be used
- More attention should be paid to revising the legislative frameworks in relation to civil society to ensure an enabling environment for the operations of CSOs and donor agencies in the countries.
- To provide extensive support to human rights defenders in accordance with the EU Human Rights Defenders Guidelines, to assist in the upholding of human rights in EaP countries.
- Support to EaP should differ from the support for developing countries; it is a partnership based on values and should not be regarded as international cooperation but rather approximation and integration with the EU. Assistance should serve to create an environment for reforms.

- The role of civil society is crucial, as often the authorities do not represent the needs of the population. Unfairly elected governments should not be provided with EU funds for the development of the civil society. Key preconditions should be met before introducing support mechanisms, and conditionality should be enforced throughout the whole programme cycle.
- Additional mechanisms for involvement of civil society are needed. Civil society can offer feedback for society at large as well as expertise in a variety of areas. The role of civil society needs to be formalised and institutionalised. Civil society should be given a mandate allowing it to be accountable and responsible in order to create a constructive environment for engagement.
- Donor priorities should undergo a serious and continuous reality check. The conducting of needs assessment is important. Donors should not only focus on the priorities of the EaP governments. Intermediary structures between Brussels and EU Delegations in the EaP countries can help identify priorities and risks.
- Just involving civil society is not enough; increasing the capacity of civil society is crucial.
- To enforce the provisions of the Gender action plan 2016-2020 in the Eastern partners.
- Better tailored communication strategy for each EaP country and better outreach to direct beneficiaries of the EU support is needed will both raise the awareness on EU and EU support among the society at large and will make the whole process of EU funding more transparent and the governments more accountable to both the funding providers and direct beneficiaries.

4. Information society

Context

The EU digital market should be opened up to the Eastern Partnership countries, as reiterated in EaP Summit in Riga priorities and ENP Review. The HDM (harmonization of digital markets) panel has been extremely successful thanks to active engagement of all partners, including the EaP CSF. The funding is provided by DG NEAR via the EU4Digital program. The EaP summit conclusions need to acknowledge the progress in the HDM area.

Recommendations:

- All EaP countries are lagging behind in digital skills and digitalization, especially in rural areas. Access to the internet is problematic and also uneven according to gender. Female entrepreneurs and women in rural areas should be targeted with capacity building to improve access to the digital market and digital skills.
- There are institutional shortcomings in some EaP countries since the agencies that would be responsible for compliance with international norms and would be responsible for digital market issues have not yet been established.
- E-commerce is a promising area but consumer protection is generally at a very low level across the EaP. Improvements in this area should go hand in hand with the further development of e-commerce and e-payments.
- Major initiatives in the digital market area are coming from EaP businesses, but there is a need to maximise this potential. A business forum for EaP on digital business and ICT should be organized on regular basis.

5. Formal and non-formal education in the EaP countries

Context

In the Eastern Partnership countries, formal education is strictly regulated by legal frameworks reminiscent of Soviet education structures. There is a widespread limitation of reforms due to: resistance of tradition, contradictions in values, corruption, and university dependency on the central state. The links between formal and non-formal are still blurry and need defining, as well as the links between education and the labour market. Formal education in the EaP is lacking relevance to the modern job market. Some non-formal education structures exist such as arts, sports, but few of these focus on career orientation, and they function in parallel with formal structures (not in combination). Non-formal education is non-institutionalised and generally not promoted. Among the authorities, the term is poorly understood and confused with vocational training. Currently, qualifications and certifications of non-formal education are not recognised.

Recommendations:

- Formal education regulations and policies should be more flexible and should integrate non-formal structures, so that the two function in combination and not in

parallel. Formal education institutions should institutionalise non-formal education methods and recognise the resultant qualifications or certifications.

- An electronic monitoring system should be introduced based on the ELA in Poland (Ekonomicznych Losow Absolwentow or the National Monitoring System of the Economic Situation of Graduates). This provides information on the status of graduates within the labour market including their salary, duration of job hunts etc. according to region and economic sector.
- A quality assurance tool such as the National Student Survey in place in the UK should be introduced. This should be independent of the university and its staff and could provide unbiased information on facilities, courses and other issues.
- Technology should be used to address mobility issues. Distance learning means that educators can be employed from a wider area and engage with a greater number of students by using an online platform.
- Better EU funding for civil society is needed as civil society is the main provider of non-formal learning. National legal frameworks need strengthening to create a space large enough for civil society to operate.
- In Moldova, the Ministry for Education and the Ministry for Youth and Sport currently share the responsibility for non-formal education. Better cooperation and understanding is required between the 2 ministries in sharing this responsibility.
- In Belarus, many formal structures of the Bologna process have been adopted but not fully implemented. Higher education reform can act as the driver for broader educational reforms and thus the implementation of Bologna processes must continue to be monitored.

6. Media

Context

A non-existent common identity in the EaP region has been enforced by the absence of a common information space, as well as a lack of resistance to external (Russian) propaganda in the media. Another issue is the shortage of alternative voices and information on EU policies. Public broadcasters in the EaP countries are either highly politically influenced or not involved in the public debate. The digital switchover has led to positive developments only in Georgia and potentially in Ukraine. The cases of violence against journalists are not properly investigated.

Recommendations:

- Consultations between the EU and RFE/RL, as well as European media companies, having audiences in the post-Soviet states, on producing effective alternative to Russian propaganda is needed. Media in EaP countries should be encouraged to cover not only national issues, but also the regional ones.
- Media standards should be improved in the EaP countries and EU to fight propaganda.
- Russian language news exchange should be explored further, though country specific content describing EaP developments, EU policies should be produced for each national audience.
- Supporting media sustained on market terms rather than initiating project from scratch to resist propaganda should be considered.
- The protection of journalists should be improved by challenging the impunity of violators.

7. Local government

Context

Public administration reform is a priority in each of the EaP countries. Empowering local governments can stimulate civil society and joint projects.

Recommendations:

- It is crucial to decentralize public administration at regional and local levels.
- Local government should be a pillar of the future development of the Eastern Partnership.
- Public administration reform should have a civil society dimension. We would like to see more engagement and consultations, especially from the side of the EU Delegations.
- Projects between local governments and CSOs should be supported.
- Administrative and fiscal decentralization should take place.

II. Country-specific recommendations

Azerbaijan

Context

The declining price of oil, the devaluation of Manat and the ENP Review with an emphasis on differentiation were the main incentives for the recommencing of dialogue between the EU and Azerbaijan. From the EU side, a scoping exercise was carried out on what the new EU-Azerbaijan agreement should encompass, and a mandate was drafted and approved by the EU Council in November 2016. Also the HR dialogue was resumed and a “frank exchange” took place during the last meeting. The negotiating mandate also provides a framework for a parallel exercise of establishing partnership priorities under the ENP review. The Partnership priorities will lead to a new multiannual strategic framework for strategic cooperation, and, most likely, the new framework will include cooperation with CSOs. The impact of these processes on the civil society is positive, and several political prisoners have so far been released. New legislation on the funding of the CSOs should be adopted. There have been no positive developments in the electoral processes in Azerbaijan, and there is lack of communication between OSCE/ODHIR and the government.

Recommendations:

- The negotiations with Azerbaijan are very important. The EU should not waste this opportunity, particularly when the younger generation sees the EU as a modernising force. There is a need to reach out to the Azerbaijani people and this can be done through a sustainable dialogue with the government and civil society, facilitated by EaP CSF.
- The political prisoners should be used as a bargaining tool; the EU should ensure more people won't get jailed whenever the government requires more from the EU.
- There is a need to engage and involve the EaP CSF National Platform in the negotiations on the bilateral agreement. The revision of civil society legislation should be a precondition for opening the negotiations; access of genuine CSOs to foreign funding should be secured.
- The Open Government Partnership initiative is insufficient; all stakeholders should be involved in the assessment exercise, including genuine civil society.
- A clear timeline for bilateral negotiations should be established. It is clear that the Azerbaijani government has tried to shirk on commitments particularly in the area

of human rights. The current process of negotiations is new and should have a huge impact on the implementations of human rights standards and democratization.

- The EU needs to push for reforms and for liberalization of the economy, as there is no market economy in Azerbaijan and the government has so far only imitated reforms. There is a need to support the diversification of the economy.
- The election legislations in the EaP countries should be revised.
- Communication between Azerbaijani government and OSCE/ODIHR should be improved. During the negotiation process the EU should encourage Azerbaijan to be more open to the OSCE/ODIHR and EU recommendations.
- The EU should develop special policies to protect judges and lawyers involved in political cases.

Armenia

Context

Negotiations on the new EU-Armenia Agreement are ongoing. The EU is discussing with authorities and civil society the new Partnership Priorities and Support Framework beginning in 2017. There have so far been 5 rounds of negotiations. The prior text has been used as the basis for negotiations. The pace of discussions is good, but there are elements where a united position is yet to be reached. The Agreement requires further commitment from Armenia to human rights and liberties; the fight against corruption; justice, freedom and security - including a commitment to the major international human rights convention. The Agreement will incorporate areas for trade cooperation based on WTO standards, regulatory norms, and mutual protection of investment agreements. However, it does not mention LGBT rights nor freedom of expression.

Political dialogue will be carried out at ministerial meetings. Other structures envisioned by the agreement are the Cooperation Council, committees and subcommittees, parliamentary committee, and the civil society platform. Civil society has a consultative role and can provide recommendations to the Cooperation Committee. Similar functions and structures are envisioned - as in Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. A dialogue between the EU, Armenian government and civil society is currently not envisaged, and all negotiations take place in the form of a dialogue (the EU-Armenian authorities; EU-Armenian civil society)

In 2016 the attitudes of the Armenian population towards the EU and an Agreement with the EU have become more positive and the attitude vis-a-vis the Eurasian Union (38% in 2014-2015 versus 23% in 2016) has worsened. A large proportion of Armenians still consider Russia as a friendly state, but among those many favour the European orientation of Armenia.

Recommendations:

- The U-turn taken by the Armenian authorities has shown that more involvement of civil society in the negotiation and implementation of the Agreement is needed. The role of the civil society should be clearly formulated.
- More feedback should be provided to CS by the EU for example - on which CS suggestions were taken into consideration.
- The development of a triangular relationship (the EU, Armenian government and civil society) should be ensured
- A clear answer is needed from the Armenian authorities on how they plan to balance their membership of the Eurasian union with the EU Agreement? Their ambiguity affects the effectiveness of all the programs.
- The EU should be more actively involved in conflict resolution, in particular by promoting people to people contacts and civil society cooperation.
- The future civil society platform envisioned under the EU-Armenia Agreement should not necessarily be based on a principle of proportionality between NGOs, employer associations and trade unions, as the latter two of these cannot be regarded as representative of Armenian civil society. It is important to take into account both positive and negative experiences from Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova and involve civil society in creating an adequate platform.
- The issue of post-July detentions should remain high on the EU agenda.
- The new Election code has decreased the powers of observers and the media; and they are denied access to public TV broadcasting.
- More attention should be paid to the freedom of the media: after the switchover to digital television, there is only 1 regional government-controlled TV station available to the population.

Belarus

Context

The EU-Belarus Coordination Group includes CSOs that have been selected by the MFA. Most of them implement projects and represent an expert community. Ulad Vialichka was the only member to represent a group of CSOs. The MFA is the most open ministry to civil society, with others are not being used to consultations, but many issues still cannot be raised in meetings. Moreover, there is a climate of uncertainty due to possible changes to the MFA management and the possible change in their policy towards civil society. The EEAS will not push for increased civil society participation in the Human Rights Dialogue due to the fragility of EU-Belarus relations at this point in time.

Recommendations:

- The mechanism of consultations with civil society should be incorporated as a legal obligation of the government in national legislation.
- Right to decide who represent civil society during consultations should be transferred to respective civil society actors.
- More time and information should be given to civil society to be able to prepare good quality proposals
- The consistency of the MFA's approach to dialogue with CSOs should be ensured.
- Civil society participation in the Human Rights Dialogue is crucial.

Georgia

Context

Georgia has come a long way with reforms and improvements in recent years. This has been helped in part by a cooperation memorandum between the Georgian National Platform and the Georgian government, which has allowed for civil society and governmental representatives to meet and discuss issues. 2016 was an important year, as the Association Agreement entered into force in July. The EU plans to shift the focus of its assistance for 2017-20 to the implementation of the DCFTA to ensure legislation and parameters align with EU standards. Still, political goals would be included. The Association Agenda is still being finalised and the EU welcomes suggestions from civil society on what this should encompass.

Recommendations

- Hate crime targeting women, minorities and the LGBT communities is a serious issue. Police are poorly trained to deal with hate crime and are even guilty of violence towards these groups themselves. An independent mechanism should be introduced to scrutinise police conduct. A gender mainstreaming training should also be introduced.
- There needs to be a greater availability of media in minority languages so that communities do not become vulnerable to Russian propaganda.
- Local election commission members are often lacking competence. They should undergo capacity building. In minority regions, the election commission members do not always speak the local language, so locals should be recruited and trained.
- Decentralisation reforms are currently not mentioned in the Association Agenda but this is a crucial issue, as local government is often closely affiliated with the central powers. New mechanisms should be introduced to allow greater civic participation, and transparency of local-level institutions should be monitored.
- So far, a low number of countries have signed the bilateral mobility partnership agreements between EU Member States and Georgia. Mobility partnerships are a good instrument for regulating and encouraging legal and circular migration and EU Member States should adopt initiatives to enable this. The EU must implement visa liberalisation for Georgian citizens as soon as possible.

Moldova

Context

Considered until recently as the finest success story of EU policy in the Eastern Neighbourhood, Moldova is now at a crossroads. As the result of the presidential election has highlighted, the country faces an unresolved internal political division as well as a growing disorientation and unclear strategy within the pro-European segment of its civil society. What's more, the Russian military presence in Moldova is perceived as a threat to the stability and territorial integrity of the country. Major progresses in the settlement of the Transnistrian issue appear unlikely in the near future. In addition, mass emigration and a "brain drain", triggered by the lack of reforms and prospects for growth, have heavily affected the country over the years and deprived Moldovan society of a major force for change. Widespread corruption remains one of the major problems preventing reforms. Scandals involving the pro-European elites, a widespread perception of impunity and the

seeming unwillingness of European Union authorities to openly detach themselves from corrupt national leaders have led to a sharp decrease in trust among citizens and the unpopularity of European integration for an increasing proportion of the Moldovan population. Finally, Moldova lacks a free and diversified media landscape, with broadcasting channels being owned by oligarchs who are also political party leaders.

Recommendations:

- Moldovan civil society must build on past experiences in order to take more definitive action and have a voice in both the legislative and executive processes. Civil society must influence political decision making, surpassing its traditional role as a watchdog in the reform process.
- Civil society must be provided with proper instruments for action. For this purpose, Moldovan civil society advocates for continuous support from the European institutions in the development of a culture of social dialogue in the country.
- The fight against corruption must be considered as an absolute priority and as a means to prevent emigration in the long term. In this regard, as a response to recent political scandals which have seriously undermined the credibility of the country's political elite, Moldovan civil society calls for international involvement in the investigation into the bank fraud case with respect to national and international law.
- To prevent a further loss of trust in the European project, the European Union authorities are called to cease engagement with local politicians suspected of engaging in corruption.
- The allocation of European funds should be dependent on the implementation of the Agreement. The European Union is invited to have a more active role in monitoring of the implementation of reforms and to use this as leverage to trigger a real reform process in the country. The EU is then invited to revise its criteria for the allocation of financial support. The same applies to single Member states providing financial assistance to Moldova, especially Romania.
- Financial support is needed for advocacy platforms which, depending on their status, cannot apply for EU funds according to current EU legislation.
- The dispersal of information to counter rising populist movements remains one of the major goals of the pro-European civil society in Moldova. Civil society would welcome more decisive action by the European Union to reach a larger segment of the Moldovan population.
- The European Union must take greater action to support non-governmental organizations working in difficult conditions, and especially for those operating in the territory of Transnistria.

- A better use of trilateral cooperation instruments (EU- Moldova - Member States) is desirable for profiting from the successful experiences of countries from Central-Eastern Europe, without neglecting the uniqueness of Moldovan society, politics and recent events.

Ukraine

Context

In view of Russia's actions causing the destabilisation of eastern Ukraine, the EU imposed economic sanctions in July 2014 and reinforced them in September 2014. In March 2015, the European Council linked the duration of these economic restrictions to the full implementation of the Minsk agreements.

The EU remains ready to reverse its decision and re-engage with Russia once the latter starts to actively and unambiguously contribute to finding a solution to the Ukraine crisis, however, there are a range of varied factors fuelling the crisis itself. Added to this is the difficulty for Ukraine to uphold its commitments to the EU in a time of instability, and the questionable effectiveness of the sanctions against Russia.

Recommendations

- The EU must adopt the adequate terminology in their approach by maintaining that no intrastate conflict or civil war is taking place in Ukraine. It has been clearly expressed by the European Parliament, as well as the International Criminal Court that this is a war concerning Russia, Russian aggression and Russian military intervention. The idea that this is a civil war or domestic conflict is rejected.
- With due consideration to the growing number of political prisoners in Russia as a result of their intervention in Crimea and war against Ukraine, the EU should consider additional sanctions on Russia in order to reduce the number of human rights abuses.
- The local elections in Donbass are essential for allowing the voices of the local people to be heard, but not at the expense of security in the region. The current unstable climate would not allow for free and fair elections, and there is a risk that mock elections legitimising the separatist regime could occur.



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. For more information, visit www.eap-csf.eu