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Contribution of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum to the ENP Review

Introduction

This contribution draws on the discussions of the ENP review in all structures and meetings of Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF) since the consultation was launched on 4 March. Additional input was collected from the experts and members of EaP CSF National Platforms in various national fora focusing on ENP review, some of which were organized with national governments and others with other stakeholders. Finally, EaP CSF has held a conference on the security dimension of the Eastern Partnership, held in Kyiv in June 2015 where expert recommendations on various aspects of security were developed. Critical issues highlighted by CSOs have also been emphasized during the conferences of Working Groups (3, 1, 4 and 5) held in June 2015 in Brussels and Vilnius. EaP CSF has also actively engaged with the European Parliament's Foreign Affairs (AFET) Committee own initiative report on the future of ENP by rapporteur Eduard Kukan (SK, EPP) and several of its amendments have been included in the version of the report that was voted by the AFET Committee. It is our hope that the final report, to be voted in the EP plenary on 8 July will also include these results. EaP CSF members have actively expressed the main messages and demands during the EaP Civil Society Conference held in Riga in May 2015 and the EaP CSF Steering Committee shared its views in a meeting with DG NEAR Director General Christian Danielsson, with DG NEAR Special Advisor on Media and Civil Society Andris Kesteris and during the Media Conference in Riga, as well as in bilateral meetings with Heads of Units from DG NEAR and EEAS Heads of Division.

The **Eastern Partnership Index**, an annual monitoring report on the integration of the Eastern Partnership Countries with the EU is a key assessment tool that forms the opinion and positions of EaP CSF on many aspects of the Eastern dimension of ENP, particularly the success of bilateral cooperation initiatives and, by extension, the multilateral aspects.

This contribution will reflect on the key issues highlighted by EaP CSF members, addressing this way all the questions, but following the logic of priorities and key messages from the civil society active in the European Integration in the EaP and EU countries.

KEY MESSAGES - Summary

Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum calls on the EU to:

1) Build a partnership based on universal values and work towards deliverables:

- Recognise the right of Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia to apply for **EU membership in the long term**, following progress of adopting EU *acquis* - see the [Joint Statement of EaP CSF National Platforms](#) calling on the EU to recognise their countries' membership perspective;
- Approve **visa-free travel** for Georgia and Ukraine once all the technical requirements have been met;
- Recognise the **contributions of civil society to monitoring** and advocating for continuous reform and state-building in the challenging times;
- Carefully **differentiate between AA/DCFTA countries** by strengthening practical support and monitoring reform implementation by setting more clear indicators and using the more-for-more principle;
- Strengthen **practical support to countries implementing AA/DCFTA agreements** and monitoring of the reform implementation by setting more clear indicators and using the more-for-more principle;
- Ensure a common EaP trajectory and **support reform-minded actors**, especially in countries which have not/do not intend to sign AA/DCFTA.

2) Embrace, empower and engage civil society:

- Invest in **development of civil society** and civil dialogue mechanisms at all levels;
- Facilitate civil society participation in policy development, monitoring and awareness-raising through small global granting/re-granting schemes;
- Ensure participation of civil society in **EU-Belarus, EU-Azerbaijan and EU-Armenia bilateral dialogue**, set clear monitoring indicators and provide feedback to civil society input;
- Enhance **support to reform-minded activists** in countries with authoritarian regimes and condition cooperation on immediate release of political prisoners;
- Build **viable AA/DCFTA civil society monitoring platforms** recognising the special contribution of civil society to the process and respecting national reality.

3) Improve ownership, engage society and build capacity for communicating EU values:

- Develop a **communication plan to highlight benefits** of cooperation and integration with the EU;
- Invest in **people-to-people initiatives** and EU-focused academic and training programmes for public servants and civil society;
- Develop regional pilot initiatives on **awareness-raising and engagement programmes**;
- **Encourage EaP governments to financially support CSO** engagement in policy-making;
- **Increase the role of EU Member States** in implementation of EaP, building on successful initiatives;
- **Strengthen political party capacity-building** to ensure stability and progress;
- **Attract private sector, especially SMEs** in the rapprochement agenda.

4) Introduce a security dimension in the renewed EaP to strengthen country resilience to external challenges.

5) Build on the successful elements of the implementation mechanisms and strengthen peer learning and cross-region exchange.

Key messages expressed by civil society representatives

Eastern dimension of the ENP should emphasize the **membership perspective** upon implementation of the main requirements of the AA/DCFTA. This perspective should give a vision to the next round of EaP implementation and clarify the EU stance on both values and political direction. This should also be the foundation driving reforms in the EaP countries that have chosen approximation with the EU. Such a strong message was also required in the past by decision-makers in countries that have received candidate status from the Western Balkans.

The renewed ENP should include a **security dimension** and add to the palette of instruments for sustained and impactful reform of the states' security pillar, at least in the three countries that signed AAs/DCFTAs. It should also explore security dimension of energy cooperation, information security, effects of propaganda, combating corruption and strengthening the rule of law. In June 2015 the EaP CSF experts developed the [Position Paper on the EaP Security Agenda](#) and [Recommendations on the EaP Security Dimension](#).

These should be pinned further in concrete qualitative benchmarks and be discussed in **regular trilateral forums** (national government + EU + civil society representatives with expertise on the issue). Such fora will strengthen public awareness of the need for reform and link with EU approximation and will further strengthen the accountability of national governments.

The cooperation should carry a **more political stance** (where EU delegations could coordinate better with Member States on positions vis-à-vis controversial or politicized issues) and the principles of differentiation and more-for-more should be applied in a consistent manner. Furthermore, this differentiation could also explore stronger mechanisms of supporting active civil society willing to contribute with any positive measure in the interest of advancing democracy and the rule of law by applying a similar flexibility principle to financial programming. Such tools could help raise public awareness and strengthen the voice of civil society on issues where political leadership is weak or unwilling to take a stance. In addition, for the countries which have been careful or chose not to approximate with the EU, sectoral cooperation should be seen as means of opening up dialogue on politically sensitive issues. However, if such dialogue will “use” separate consultation with civil society and fail to create a trilateral discussion approach with government + civil society + EU representations, then such dialogue will be weak and prone to manipulation or, in some cases, failure and thus will discredit the approach the EU takes. Experience with Belarus on this issue has been a proof of this point.

EaP CSF believes there is room for improving the implementation processes of the cooperation with EaP countries, where the **annual progress reports** could be more focused on concrete priorities set for the year and the results on those priorities, while specific sectoral analysis and reporting should go deeper into analysing the context and consequences. For example, the **visa liberalization** process contains very concrete step-by-step action plans with benchmarks that are known by civil society and have helped advance reform in certain areas. Hence, the Council should discuss the priority matters twice a year while intense bilateral cooperation between line DGs and respective national authorities in EaP countries, with high level of openness to involving civil society representatives could be a way forward. Annual progress reports generally draw on existing data and might unnecessarily bureaucratize the process. What could be useful is to gather independent assessment experts from among stakeholders (civil society actors, think tanks and political analysts publishing own assessment) and organize strategic discussion between Stakeholders and institutional representatives from EU and from EaP countries.

The ENP Eastern dimension should diversify incentives for the EaP countries to continue further reform and integration. The current situation has highlighted that the EaP has been a positive policy initiative but lacked sufficient tools to keep the motivation going in transforming governance and society. The role of **EU member states with recent accession experience** and similar historic legacy has proved crucial for the three AAs/DCFTAs countries and their reforms track should be explored and their role strengthened in the renewed ENP.

The EU should strengthen its support to Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine with a careful differentiation to **make AA/DCFTA agreements a success** in the next phase of ENP/EaP implementation. Reformed tax policies directed towards tackling the issue of using off-shore companies for corrupt activities, in particular money laundering, should be particularly encouraged.

At EU level, institutions should develop **more proactive public communication approaches with interested actors, including civil society groups**. In the current framework, EEAS and DG NEAR, the two coordinating parts of European Institutions in relation to the EaP implementation have generally been very open to bilateral meetings. However, their communication strategy mostly focuses on the EaP countries and could benefit from strengthening an EU dimension. For example, more conferences on key challenges in the EaP countries could be explored both in Brussels and in the capitals of the EU member states. This would help dispel myths and apprehensions about the EaP countries in the EU and could stimulate the EaP decision-makers' accountability.

The EU should put in place an **improved communication strategy to demonstrate the benefits of EU integration** based on values and tangible impact. More information and engagement with the population is needed through awareness-raising campaigns explaining the **benefits of AAs/DCFTAs versus the Eurasian Economic Union**. The EU communication strategy should involve civil society, strengthening ownership of the communication agenda at national, regional and local levels. The communication should also allow for both the visibility of the EU actions and possibilities for the citizens' engagement with the reform agenda, providing relevant feedback.

The EU should use the flexibility principle and address it through a mix of policy and communication tools, with strong involvement of reform-driving civil society actors. **Regional pilot initiatives** could be implemented in cooperation with actors such as EaP CSF by developing **targeted awareness raising and engagement programmes** in the challenging reform fields where economic interests of political elites would directly suffer and they drag or simulate reform, sometimes causing society fatigue with the EU integration process or even discredit the EU as a space based on a set of values, freedoms and democratic principles.

Possible initiatives could include **information bulletins for the EaP businesses** that would increase their awareness on the EU quality standards, certification processes and potential partners. Implementation of regional and national peer exchange initiatives such as **Europe Awareness Week and other people-to-people initiatives** in education, culture, social and sports fields should be supported.

The EaP CSF media experts presented a range of **recommendations for countering information propaganda**, including an EaP News Agency creation aimed at establishing and coordination of the EaP Media Hubs in each country; establishing a study visits exchange program with study trips to EaP countries for journalists, bloggers, media activists, students and civil society; permanent **monitoring of Russian media messages** and their dissemination in the local EaP media; providing national governments with more support in the media sector reforms, media ownership transparency, demonopolisation of media markets and establishing genuine public service broadcasting. Another proposal on the joint response to the Russian propaganda suggests the **clarification of the journalism standards in Europe** to

prevent manipulation by holding a conference of European regulators to develop a new Code of Conduct.

The future ENP should be more closely following a **political approach based on mutual respect**, regardless of Russia's agenda vis-à-vis the EaP region and each country separately, since the past years have shown that what is more crucial is the trust, motivation and drive that is built inside the EaP countries on their relations with the EU, rather than on what way corrupted or controlled political elites are swayed by coercive Russian policies.

Finally, the EU should aim to overcome the status quo of **frozen conflicts** through enhanced people-to-people cooperation mechanisms in the countries.

Please see the full [EaP CSF Position Paper on the future of the ENP](#) for many ideas expressed by representatives of Civil Society from the Eastern Partnership countries.