

## Contribution to consultation: "Towards a new European Neighbourhood Policy"

### *Background*

This contribution to the consultation "Towards a new European Neighbourhood Policy" has been developed through "The Swedish Civil Society Network for Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, and Russia". The network aims to contribute to a democratic development in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) region through increased cooperation between Swedish CSOs and through strengthened cooperation with CSO from EaP countries.

On April 14<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup>, 2015, the network organised a series of events in Stockholm to raise awareness about issues facing civil society in the EaP region and to discuss the review of the European Neighbourhood Policy. The discussion involved representatives of Swedish civil society organisations and state institutions, as well as civil society representatives from the EaP countries. These answers to a select number of questions in the consultation paper are based on a session which involved interactive discussions on the future of the neighbourhood policy, as well as input from the members of the Swedish Civil Society Network. Recommendations pertain to the eastern dimension of the ENP, the Eastern Partnership.

### *The focus of a revised ENP*

1. *The EU should always prioritise the fundamental values underpinning the ENP (democracy, rule of law and respect of human rights) in relations to its partners, but should otherwise adopt a flexible approach in determining the focus of relations based on the needs of the population in each partner country.*

In the past, the EU has sacrificed human rights and democratic values in Eastern Partnership countries for the benefit of peace and stability in EU member states. In the future, the policy towards the EU's eastern neighbours needs to be firmly based on democratic values. The message communicated from the European Union needs to offer unified and clear support to democratic forces and to protection of human rights in order to build trust in its intentions and in the benefits of a closer relationship. Economic integration and closer relations between the EU and its neighbours can act as an incentive for governance and other reforms, but democratic values should not be sacrificed for the benefit of economic considerations. In addition, increased emphasis should be placed on border issues and visa liberalisation to promote freedom of movement, increased people to people contacts and opportunities for the population in partner countries.

Other than a clear focus on democratic development, the sectors which should be in focus in EU relations with its neighbours must be adapted to the needs of the different partners. The need for reform in various sectors varies between and within states and therefore, the EU should adapt to this variation to continue to be a relevant partner.

### *Types of cooperation needed*

2. *The EU should continue to give both technical and financial support to partners in implementing institutional reform.*
3. *Progress should be measured according to clear indicators and more emphasis should be put on clear communication of results to the population in partner countries.*

EU's relations to its partners need to focus generally on democratisation and institutional reform, rather than solely on EU approximation and the prospect of EU membership. In development and implementation of these reform policies, partners need both financial and technical support and in offering support, there is a need for clearer measurements of success. Monitoring and evaluation of targets should be clearly stated and communicated to enable oversight on the side of civil society and other societal actors.

It is vital that the EU continue to promote security and stability in the EaP region through cooperation with partner countries. However, this support should not come at the cost of reduced support to institutional reform processes.

### *Inclusion of civil society actors*

4. *The EU should continue to support the EaP Civil Society Forum, but should also engage in other modes of dialogue with a broad representation of civil society actors in order to ensure that a variety of voices are heard.*

There are currently not enough forums for civil society to take part in the formation and implementation of the ENP. Above all, the EU has a responsibility to consult a variety of civil society actors through different avenues, and to ensure that many different and independent voices are heard both on the national and multilateral level.

The Eastern partnership Civil Society Forum (CSF) is one of the forums through which civil society may be heard and involved. The EU should continue to support it as one of the structures through which civil society may be involved in the development and implementation of policy. However, for some purposes, the CSF and its national platforms are too bureaucratic, time consuming and rigid. In addition, some actors lack resources to access structures such as the CSF, especially if located far from the capital, lacking experience of EU institutions, or lacking financial means to participate in national and multilateral meetings. Some issues and societal groups are poorly represented at the CSF and in national platforms, notably organisations working for gender equality, sexual orientation and sexual identity issues and for the rights of minorities.

For these reasons, the EU needs to build a number of different bridges connecting civil society in the EU and in the EaP region to the policy making and implementation process. In addition, it should continue to enable people to people contacts and confidence building measures.

### *Involvement of population in partner countries*

5. *The EU should contribute to clear communication to populations in partner countries of the benefits of closer relations between the EU and partner countries.*
6. *The EU and partner countries should involve civil society in undertaking consultations on different policy areas to maximise involvement of the population in partner countries.*

The objectives of the ENP for each partner country, as well as the implementation and results of the partnership need to be communicated clearly to the population. Increased transparency is also needed on the multilateral cooperation. In order to promote ownership and transparency, public consultations should be undertaken generally as well as on specific topics. These consultations can be made with the help of CSF national platforms, but should also involve a broader societal representation. The aim of consultations should be to maximise involvement of populations in partner countries and to enable inclusive and responsive policy making. In general the EU should support both access to public information and freedom of expression in the region in order to enable

increased public scrutiny of the reform process and of partner relations. Dialogue is an essential European value, which should be promoted in relations with partner countries.

It is crucial that the benefits of closer relations between the EU and partner countries are made clear to the population. This is especially important considering continued information campaigns by other actors which aim to put both relations with the EU, democratic reforms and human rights into question.

Civil society can play an important role in involving partner populations. It is the responsibility of civil society actors themselves to learn the tools for influencing policy, but the EU must also continue to support this process. In addition, the EU and partner countries may cooperate with a broad representation of civil society to involve different parts of the population in partner countries in the policy making process.

***Organisations submitting the contribution:***

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