

**A Response to the European Commission and High Commissioner for
External Affairs and Security Policy's Joint Review of the European
Neighbourhood Policy**

***By the European Centre for Minority Issues, Caucasus, on Behalf of the
Eastern Partnership Minorities Network.***

INTRODUCTION

Following the European Commission and High Representative for External Affairs and Security Policy's announcement of their joint consultation on the future of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), the European Centre for Minority Issues, Caucasus (ECMI, Caucasus), presents a joint response to that consultation on behalf of the ECMI Caucasus and also on behalf of the Eastern Partnership Minorities Network (the Network).

This response is set out in three main Parts; the first of which, Part A sets out the rationale for this response, including the centrality of minority issues to the countries of the Eastern Partnership and the wider EU 'neighbourhood'. Part B then provides some background information on the origin and purpose of the Network, as well as on the participants in the Network themselves. Part C then details the Network's responses to the questions raised in the Commission and High Representative's consultation document, including in the provision of a series of recommendations, which we hope will help inform any future reformulation of the European Neighbourhood Policy or the Eastern Partnership mechanisms. Part C will consider in detail the issues prompting these recommendations; however, for ease of interpretation of the present paper, these are listed here:

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. The EU must ensure that it makes a concerted effort to reach out to minority communities in its partner states and, as part of this, that it publishes its communications and directs these effectively towards minority organisations and regions in a language which is understood by the intended recipients.*
- 2. The EU must acknowledge minority rights as forming an important element of its relations with the countries of the Eastern Partnership. Therefore, minority issues should be the subject of their own distinctive part of any restructured EU-Eastern Partnership/ENP frameworks, with a greater visibility than exists at present in terms of both political dialogue and EU funding streams and on the ground project programming.*
- 3. The Commission and the High Representative's Joint Consultation document states that the EU must better define its own aims and interests. In light of this, the EU must clarify for itself and then elaborate for its partners its understanding of the issues, needs and interests of minority communities in the partner countries, and its expectations of its partner states in the Eastern Partnership.*
- 4. Once the EU's aims in this field are established, it should develop a comprehensive approach to the issues it has identified in its partner states and must avoid ad hoc and divergent approaches in its bi-lateral relationships. The EU must explain the need for stated reforms and must then systematically follow up in its annual reporting those issues which it has chosen to raise,*

providing an explanation as to the absence of updates on previously raised matters and as to the circumstances which prompt newly raised issues.

- 5. To support this approach, the EU must develop, in collaboration with minority communities and partner states, a range of short, medium and long-term goals, each with clear, achievable and meaningful benchmarks to indicate success.*
- 6. The EU must avoid an over reliance on the creation or structures, laws and policies. Where it does focus on the creation of these, it must ensure that this is then subject to continuous monitoring and, where implementation is absent or ineffective, there must be a mechanism to withdraw or suspend any benefit received by its partner states in return for the creation of such laws or structures.*
- 7. Alongside advocating legal and structural adjustments in its partner states, the EU should place a significant and consistent emphasis on the creation of a positive environment for integration and measures to assist in improving attitudes among majority communities towards minorities.*
- 8. The EU should create a minority specific budget line in its ENP related financial commitment to its partners.*
- 9. In establishing a budget line in ENP financial commitments applicable to minority issues, the EU should ensure that such funding as is made available for minority issues is done so in a manner which ensures that minority organisations' capabilities and, indeed, their evident limitations are taken into consideration, so as to ensure that funding reaches into the heart of minority communities. Significantly, the EU should ensure that information*

on such funding is made available in a language widely understood in minority regions.

- 10. The EU should ensure that the Civil Society Forum is open to a wide variety of minority actors, which, at present, it is not. The Civil Society Forum has a limited pool of minority organisations involved, and it must make greater efforts to reach out and engage with minority civil society. The creation of a minority specific platform either within the context of the Forum or as a separate entity within the Eastern Partnership should be a priority.*
- 11. The EU should reach out to minority organisations with smaller administrative capacities to avoid an over reliance on a small group of larger organisations. The EU should make greater use of small grants and assistance schemes to increase its interactions with and support for such organisations.*
- 12. The EU should cooperate extensively with its international partners on the ground in the Eastern Partnership, including, specifically, the OSCE, and the Council of Europe, in order to create a joined-up international approach, including through the setting of joint priorities and the creation of joint programming, in order that, collectively, they have a stronger, more concentrated influence on the development of minority governance within the states of the Eastern Partnership.*

PART A. BACKGROUND

As is evident from the European Commission and the High Representative's joint call for responses, the Ukrainian crisis lies at the heart of their rationale for initiating this review process. In responding to the Ukrainian crisis, senior EU officials and member state leaders alike called for a resolution to the crisis which, among other things, had to include, "respect for minority rights." Consider, as a prime example, the joint statement of Chancellor Merkel and President Hollande, shortly after the crisis began:

"The stabilization of Ukraine is an urgent priority for peace and security and is in the common interest of all the countries in the region. All efforts made by all interested parties and organizations, particularly the OSCE, to find a political solution to the crisis are welcome and must be supported and encouraged...We also wanted there to be a reminder of the constitutional reform essential in Ukraine, so that minorities and distinct identities are taken into account...In the coming days our priorities must concentrate on (inter alia):...constitutional reform immediately following the 25 May election, with a short timeframe, a process of inclusive consultation involving all the stakeholders concerned and the chief areas covered by the process (regional authorities' powers, minority rights, etc.)."

Hollonde, F and Merkel, A, 10 May, 2014

If resolving the crisis must be achieved through the recognition of the distinct identities of minorities; if the resolution of the crisis lies, in part, in the creation of a constitutional framework which recognises minority rights, then it is evident, that if the EU is to take seriously its stated goal of helping achieve a

peaceful, stable neighbourhood, then it must seek to act in this field *before* crises such as that in Ukraine break out.

Another of the principal reasons cited by the Commission and High Representative for the present review, is the role of the Russian Federation in its relations with the EU's neighbours. It is clear from the Ukrainian crisis that the instrumentalisation of minority communities and ethnic-difference has been deployed by the Russian Federation as part of the justification for the *de facto* annexation of the Crimean peninsula, and the its active support for the breakaway Republics in Lugansk and Donetsk.

At the same time, it is also clear that in its decision, as one of the first acts of the new Rada following the events of the Maidan, to repeal the 2012 Language Law, which provided for regions of Ukraine where non-state languages were spoken in significant numbers to adopt a second official regional language, that the new Ukrainian authorities armed the Russian Federation and its supporters in Ukraine with a justification for its actions which was based upon an actual loss of linguistic rights, which, in a country where over half the population speak Russian, was of particular significance for Russian speakers in Ukraine.

In the past (and, indeed, at present), such dynamics have also been evident in Georgia and Moldova, where Russian backing and state policy have coincided to lay the foundation for what are today referred to as the 'frozen conflicts' in Transdnistria in Moldova and in Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia, not to mention the 2008 war between Georgia and Russia, Europe's first inter-state war since 1945.

In its creation of the ENP process in 2004, the EU explicitly sought to foster the conditions for a stable neighbourhood around the EU's Southern and Eastern borders. If we consider today some of the crises which have caused the need to rethink this strategy, then the centrality of issues surrounding

minority communities is evident almost everywhere. In Iraq and Syria, the Kurds and the Yezidis are only two of the most well-known of the myriad minority groups to have suffered egregiously at the hands of so-called ISIS, not to mention the ethno-religious dynamics in the much criticised actions of the government's of both Iraq and Syria. The on-going failure to find a long-term resolution to Israeli-Palestinian problem lies at the root of much of the tension emerging from the Middle East and has done for some time. In Egypt, the Coptic Christian community is perhaps the most widely publicised (in the West) example of a religious minority group to have suffered from the chaotic governance in that country following the so-called Arab Spring.

These issues and their minority related dynamics, from Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine, to North Africa and the Middle East, are not new, yet, in our view, the ENP process has not taken adequate cognisance of such issues in its relations with its neighbours, and, rather than dealing head-on with such issues, the EU has downgraded the importance of minority issues in its relations with a number of its neighbours. Whilst the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements with the former Soviet republics, for example, included explicit reference to the importance of minority issues in these states and in the EU's relations with them, the ENP process left out such mention and has, rather, included them in bi- and multi- lateral relations largely by implication.

It is our view that, given the centrality of minority issues to many of the most violent crises which have befallen the European continent since the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War (Nagorno Karabakh, Transdnistria, the break-up of Yugoslavia and the resultant wars in Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Kosovo, the Chechen Wars, the civil war and de facto secession of South Ossetia and Abkhazia in Georgia, the 2008 Russo-Georgian war, the current crisis in Macedonia, and, now, in the context of Ukraine, the annexation of Crimea and the civil war and violent secessionism in Donetsk and Lugansk),

that the EU should not relegate these issues to an after-thought or an implication; as a sub-branch of its interests in the promotion of democracy and human rights. The governance of ethnic diversity and the de-securitisation of minorities is not only a human rights issue, it is far more complex and it must be given the priority to which the consequences of failure in this field demand. The EU should and must place the governance of ethnic diversity at the heart of its relations with its neighbours, if it is genuinely interested in helping to foster the conditions for a stable and secure neighbourhood, as it aspired to at the outset of the ENP process.

The EU is not unaware of these issues. Its delegations throughout the ENP region are particularly well placed to understand the dynamics at play, yet this, to date, has not and does not translate into a course of action which reflects the significance of these issues. We would encourage those undertaking the review process, whilst considering our response, to consider also the recent analyses of the minority situation conducted in 2014, firstly, by the European Parliament DG External Policies, in their “in-depth analysis” of the minority situation in the South Caucasus; secondly, the assessment and recommendations by Thomas Hammarberg in his capacity as EU Special Adviser on Constitutional and Legal Reform and Human Rights in Georgia; thirdly, the EU Delegation commissioned report on the EU’s minority rights projects in Georgia from 2014; and, lastly, the Network’s 2014 Report ‘The Eastern Partnership: Partnership for all? Measuring the impact of Eastern Partnership on minorities’.

In the European Parliament report, the author summarised the central findings of the analysis thus:

“One of the most multi-ethnic regions on Europe’s periphery, the South Caucasus’s bumpy path to democracy has often been accompanied by ethnic conflict, stoked by nationalism. Since acquiring independence from the Soviet Union, secessionist movements have grown among

local minorities in the areas surrounding the countries' new, sovereign borders. The lack of state mechanisms to channel such sentiments has led to violent ethnic clashes with long-lasting consequences. Today still, a lack of experience in conflict resolution and power-sharing between dominant and minority communities hinders the development of common ground and democratic co-existence. Mechanisms which promote parliamentary representation, law-making and the oversight of minority rights are still largely absent. Although reforms in the South Caucasus have pushed for new laws to create greater accountability, instruments promoting inclusive dialogue with the minorities require further development. For the minorities of the South Caucasus, the most pressing issues are a lack of respect and the protection of their rights. For the sake of state-building and democratic development of the region, inclusive policies must be implemented with respect to ethnic minorities, through their political participation, including them in the higher levels of decision-making.”

It is clear that much work remains to be done in the Southern Caucasus region in terms of minority governance and inter-ethnic relations. As part of his review of human rights in Georgia for the EU, Thomas Hammarberg noted the position of minority rights in the country, alongside a number of other key human rights concerns. Many of Hammarberg's conclusions echoed those of the European Parliament's DG External Affairs. Perhaps most significantly of all was Hammarberg's introduction to his review of the minority rights situation in Georgia, which is perhaps equally applicable to all of the EU's partners in the Eastern Partnership region; for Hammarberg was in no doubt about the significance of minority issues to Georgia, stating that, “(A) high price has been paid for wrong decisions taken in the past decades with regard to the treatment of minorities.”

These mistakes need not be carried forward into the future and into the future relations of the EU and its partners in the region. For the EU to succeed in

assisting its neighbours is realising a peaceful, stable and prosperous future for the entire region, it must take up minority issues with a renewed vigour and energy. It must reflect honestly upon its efforts in this field to date and to equally ask itself, does this past action represent our best efforts and does it point the way forward? For our part, we believe that this document represents a possible starting point to that process.

PART B. THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP MINORITIES NETWORK

The Eastern Partnership Minorities Network is a network of international and local minority community groups organisations and advocates, set up as part of a three-year pilot project established in 2013 and co-funded by the European Commission (contract number ENPI/2012/304-332).

The co-ordinating partner in the Network is the **Minority Rights Group Europe** (MRGE), with headquarters in Budapest, though also operating on the ground in the Eastern Partnership in Tbilisi. MRGE lobbies governments and international organisations alongside, and on behalf of, minorities, minority groups, individuals and advocates, publishing authoritative reports widely valued by academics and journalists. MRG has consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and observer status with the African Commission for Human and Peoples' Rights.

The four core partners of the Network are:

Analytical Center for Interethnic Cooperation and Consultations (ACICC), which is based in Tbilisi and seeks to improve integration and civic and political participation of community-based minority organizations in Georgia.

Analytical Centre on Globalization and Regional Cooperation (ACGRC),

which is based in Yerevan and supports public sector reforms and the development of good practices in local governance, produces expert assessments and analysis of conflict transformation and regional cooperation issues.

ECMI Caucasus, based in Tbilisi, though with a Caucasus-wide remit, works to improve the competencies of minority organisations and assists regional governments in building institutional capacities to develop and implement policies on national minority issues.

No Borders Project/Social Action Centre, which is based in Kiev, and provides legal support for refugees from Central Asia and for victims of hate crimes and discrimination, and runs a project on hate speech monitoring.

However, the project is not limited to these actors, as it brings together over 80 minority organizations and civil society leaders across Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. The Network is open to activists and civil society organizations, including ethnic, linguistic, national, religious minorities, indigenous peoples and visible minority communities.

The stated goal of the Network is to build the capacity of minority organisations in the region to undertake effective human rights advocacy at the national and European level, in particular by ensuring the full participation of minorities in the Eastern Partnership process. This is achieved through the provision of training, seminars, information and advocacy campaigns, national monitoring reports and advice on best practice.

In keeping with this goal and in light of the presumed significance which this review process will have on the ENP as well as the Eastern Partnership processes, the Network's contribution to this review is seen, therefore, by the minority communities and organisations represented by the Network as being

of crucial importance, in particular, in ensuring that the voices of minority organisations in the region are represented and heard in this process.

PART C. CONSULTATION RESPONSE ON BEHALF OF THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP MINORITIES NETWORK

In light of the broad scope of the consultation document, the ECMI, Caucasus, in consultation with its partners in the Network, has, rather than seeking views and responses on each of the several dozens of questions contained therein, chosen to focus its response specifically on those particular areas of the consultation which are of greatest significance to those represented by the Network.

Some of the questions set out in the consultation document cut across a number of issues impacting upon minority communities in the countries of the Eastern Partnership. Therefore, we have adapted the questions set by the Commission and the High Representative in order to best suit the minority community audience. The results of the responses are summarised by broad theme.

C1. ENP/Eastern Partnership in General

The EU is clearly a major partner for most countries in the Eastern Partnership. However, in terms of minority communities, the EU is a poorly understood actor. Knowledge of the EU in general is limited and knowledge of the ENP and the Eastern Partnership processes are even less well understood. From those partners who were able to comment on these processes, there was a general feeling that the processes to date had proven to be a failure and that they had brought little benefit to minority communities.

Part of the issue for the EU, as regards the interpretation of these processes among national minorities is in the lack of information made available in the Eastern Partnership states in minority languages, or in languages commonly understood by minorities (for e.g. Russian); a flaw which is compounded by a lack of effective outreach to minorities in these countries.

RECOMMENDATION

The EU must ensure that it makes a concerted effort to reach out to minority communities in its partner states and, as part of this, that it publishes its communications and directs these effectively towards minority organisations and regions in a language which is understood by the intended recipients.

Whilst several minority community activists note that the EU was seen as an organisation which took the issue of minority protection within the EU itself seriously, and that closer integration with the EU could ensure a move in Eastern Partnership states towards a “higher quality” of European standards in minority rights and protections, there was a widespread belief that the EU did not take minority issues seriously in its relations with its Eastern Partnership partners. Whilst some minority issues were noted in, for example, the Visa Liberalisation processes in Moldova and Georgia, the respondents did not feel that the EU’s engagement on these issues adequately reflected the situation on the ground in those countries. There was a general feeling that the EU’s insertion of minority related issues in its relations with these states was no more than declarative.

RECOMMENDATION

The EU must acknowledge minority rights as forming an important element of its relations with the countries of the Eastern Partnership.

Therefore, minority issues should be the subject of their own distinctive part of any restructured EU-Eastern Partnership relations, with a greater visibility than exists at present in terms of both political dialogue and EU funding streams and on the ground project programming.

C.2 Bilateral Relations

Although the EU does raise some issues relating to minorities and minority rights and protections, it does not include minority issues in its political dialogue and in its various instruments (Association Agreement, Visa Liberalisation, EU-Georgia Human Rights Dialogue etc) in a systematic way. For example, in Georgia, from 2005 onwards, the EU consistently raised in its annual Progress Reports the lack of signature of the European Charter on Regional and Minority Languages (ECRML), yet, despite including this issue within the Visa Liberalisation Action Plan (VLAP), the EU removed the issue from its annual Progress Reports in 2013, despite its non-ratification.

In its political dialogues and in the annual Progress Reports which accompany them, the EU continuously raises issues in isolation, often without preface and, in subsequent rounds of reporting, without follow-up. There is a lack of clarity and consistency as to what the EU understands by its own insistence upon including minority protections as an element of its political dialogue with its Eastern Partnership partners.

When the EU does intervene on particular minority issues in its relations with these countries, this is often in a particularly vague manner, one which tends to simply highlight a perceived gap in policy or a particular issue relevant to the year in question. Yet, despite noting such gaps, or highlighting particular instances of, for example, raised tensions in a region or episodes of intolerance, there is a distinct lack of direction, or actionable advice in the EU's interventions. The EU sets few benchmarks for progress and ultimate

objectives in its interventions are reserved only for the creation of legislation and bureaucratic structures at the level of the central government.

RECOMMENDATION

The Commission and the High Representative's Joint Consultation document states that the EU must better define its own aims and interests. In light of this, the EU must clarify for itself and then elaborate for its partners its understanding of the issues, needs and interests of minority communities in the partner countries, and its expectations of its partner states in the Eastern Partnership.

Once the EU's aims in this field are established, it should develop a comprehensive approach to the issues it has identified in its partner states and must avoid ad hoc and divergent approaches in its bi-lateral relationships. The EU must explain the need for stated reforms and must then systematically follow up in its annual reporting those issues which it has chosen to raise, providing an explanation as to the absence of updates on previously raised matters and as to the circumstances which prompt newly raised issues.

To support this approach, the EU must develop, in collaboration with minority communities and partner states, a range of short, medium and long-term goals, each with clear, achievable and meaningful benchmarks to indicate success.

Where the EU is considered by many to have had a significant impact has been in its utilisation of its so-called 'conditionality', i.e. by linking some minority issues to the granting of visa-free travel to the EU for Eastern Partnership states' citizens. However, whilst the VLAP process does contain a monitoring element, this is not as comprehensive as that contained in, for example, the Association Agreement process, which has a built in system of

routine high level dialogue through the creation of Association Councils, detailed Association Agendas and annual monitoring. Furthermore, the VLAP process, which includes minorities in its human rights strand, applies only a very limited focus on such issues.

Where the EU has focussed on minority issues, there is a distinct lack of a comprehensive and consistent approach to such issues. In the case of the Moldovan VLAP process, for example, the EU made the ratification of the European Charter of Regional and Minority Languages (ECRML) by Moldova an issue throughout the process. However, despite its routine mention of this issue, the EU granted visa-free travel to Moldova despite its non-ratification of this key minority related international Charter; an omission on the part of the EU which clearly undermined its commitment to minority issues in general and to the Charter in particular and, in the process, damaged the credibility of its conditionality and the process itself when it comes to issues of significance to minorities.

In terms of perceptions of the EU's impact in this field, when it does engage with its partners on minority related issues, the consensus is that where the EU is able to utilise its influence in, for example, in pressing for the creation by Georgia of a new anti-discrimination law in 2014, this results in the creation of a 'toothless' piece of legislation, the sole purpose of which is to satisfy the demands. The EU places too little emphasis on the follow-up to such creations; to issues of implementation and the longevity of reforms. The EU can provide the influence to pass needed reforms; however, it seems uninterested in deep-rooted reforms and actual change on the ground.

In Georgia, the EU was similarly seen as instrumental in the creation of a new law in relation to the repatriation of the Meskhetian people who were deported from their homeland during World War II. Having failed to create such a law following its accession to the Council of Europe in 1999, despite having undertaken to do so, the Georgian government finally introduced such a

measure in 2007 in the face of, what was widely perceived to be, concerted EU and international pressure.

However, despite this EU pressure and the ultimate enactment of the law, the process put into place by the new law has been, ultimately, a failure, with only several hundred of the 9,000 or so Meskhetians who applied for resettlement obtaining, by 2015, full repatriation. Despite the evident failure of the policy, the EU has never raised the issue with Georgia in the context of its annual monitoring or in its political dialogue with Georgia since the law was passed.

In the eyes of the region's minority communities and advocates, such a focus on the creation of instruments and structures, coupled with the lack of subsequent monitoring of criticism fundamentally brings into question the efficacy of the EU's approach to such issues.

RECOMMENDATION

The EU must avoid an over reliance on the creation or structures, laws and policies. Where it does focus on the creation of these, it must ensure that this is then subject to continuous monitoring and, where implementation is absent or ineffective, there must be a mechanism to withdraw or suspend any benefit received by its partner states in return for the creation of such laws or structures.

Integration is clearly a key issue for both majorities and minorities in the Eastern Partnership and in the creation of stable societies. However, the EU's approach to minority issues throughout the Eastern Partnership is overly legalistic, as noted above, and in general it fails to consistently highlight issues of integration as a matter of priority for its partners. Whilst the EU does periodically highlight, for example, a particularly tense period in the relationship between the government or the majority community and a

particular minority community or a minority region, such mentions are fleeting and are rarely the subject of detailed follow up.

RECOMMENDATION

Alongside advocating legal and structural adjustments in its partner states, the EU should place a significant and consistent emphasis on the creation of a positive environment for integration and measures to assist in improving attitudes among majority communities towards minorities.

The EU was generally seen to be an organisation with the capacity to positively influence its partners, not only through its political dialogue; but, also, as a strategic partner for and funder of civil society. However, the vast majority of minority organisations find it exceptionally difficult to access the various EU sources of funding through the ENP/Eastern Partnership and, for example, the EIDHR. It was noted throughout, that despite the EU's myriad funding streams which are available to civil society organisations in the Eastern Partnership, there is no funding stream specifically targeted towards minority issues such as integration or minority protections.

RECOMMENDATION

The EU should create a minority specific budget line in its ENP related financial commitment to its partners.

Part of the issue identified by minority organisations as regards funding is also that the criteria established by the EU in its funding arrangements seem geared towards a particular set of NGOs operating in national capitals, primarily operating in the state language with the administrative capacity to complete large scale applications in English or French. Whilst this may suit the EU, as well as these larger organisations, it is clear that the criteria set are

disadvantageous for minority organisations on a number of levels. For example, a great many minority communities are located outwith the capitals in the Eastern Partnership. The civil society groups operating in these minority regions are often small scale, operating with limited staff, administrative capacity and linguistic capabilities to operate either in the medium of the state language or those of the EU.

RECOMMENDATION

In establishing a budget line in ENP financial commitments applicable to minority issues, the EU should ensure that such funding as is made available for minority issues is done so in a manner which ensures that minority organisations' capabilities and, indeed, their evident limitations are taken into consideration, so as to ensure that funding reaches into the heart of minority communities. Significantly, the EU should ensure that information on such funding is made available in a language widely understood in minority regions.

C.3 Multilateral Relations

The ENP and the Eastern Partnership contain no formal minority related institutions or forums. The Eastern Partnership Minorities Network, however, is seen as positive creation, one which allows minority communities the opportunity to learn from one another and to share experiences of dealing with governments and international actors, especially as regards lobbying and advocating policy change.

The multilateral framework which would seem naturally placed to incorporate a minority civil society voice in the Eastern Partnership, the Civil Society Forum, is widely perceived as being inaccessible for smaller minority organisations. It is described by some as an elite group; one which selects its own members and excludes would-be participants on a seemingly arbitrary

basis. Whilst there are several minority groups within the Forum's various National Platforms, in general these are seen as being uninterested in minority issues.

A minority specific forum within the framework of the Eastern Partnership was seen as a remedy to the problems identified above, one which would highlight best practice across the region and provide a focal point specifically directed towards minorities and minority organisations in the context of their countries' relations with the EU.

RECOMMENDATION

The EU should ensure that the Civil Society Forum is open to a wide variety of minority actors, which, at present, it is not. The Civil Society Forum has a limited pool of minority organisations involved, and it must make greater efforts to reach out and engage with minority civil society. The creation of a minority specific platform either within the context of the Forum or as a separate entity within the Eastern Partnership should be a priority.

The EU should reach out to minority organisations with smaller administrative capacities to avoid an over reliance on a small group of larger organisations. The EU should make greater use of small grants and assistance schemes to increase its interactions with and support for such organisations.

The EU is one of many international organisations present and active on the ground in most of the countries in the Eastern Partnership. Whilst there is a recognition that many of these international organisations cooperate at some level with one another, as regards minority issues, there is very little evidence on the ground that the EU and its international partners coordinate to any great degree, with a resulting dilution of their individual effectiveness in

bringing about improvements in the situation of minorities in each of the Eastern Partnership states.

RECOMMENDATION

The EU should cooperate extensively with its international partners on the ground in the Eastern Partnership, including, specifically, the OSCE, and the Council of Europe, in order to create a joined-up international approach, including through the setting of joint priorities and the creation of joint programming, in order that, collectively, they have a stronger, more concentrated influence on the development of minority governance within the states of the Eastern Partnership.

Finally, as regards the role of the Russian Federation in the on-going relationship between the EU and the countries of the Eastern Partnership, it is essential that the multi-lateral element of any reformulated ENP or Eastern Partnership is de-politicised and becomes a forum for the purposes of thematic cooperation in fields like minority rights and so on. Politics must be left to the bi-lateral dimension in order to allow minority communities and others to fully engage with the process secure in the belief and knowledge that the framework is not a political tool in an international competition between the EU and its member states on the one hand and the Russian Federation on the other.

CONCLUSION

The present ENP and Eastern Partnership processes are not perceived by minority activists as having a significant impact on the lives of the minorities of the Eastern Partnership. These processes, as highlighted above, suffer from a number of fundamental problems. Principally, the EU has a problem in making itself and the benefits of EU integration widely known in minority communities throughout the region. The multi-lateral frameworks and the bi-lateral relations within the Eastern Partnership incorporate minority issues only sparingly and without apparent conviction or appropriate follow-up when they are incorporated.

However, it is noteworthy that, despite the presence of a number of recommendations for adjustments in the EU's approach to minority issues in the Eastern Partnership, partners were also generally agreed that the EU had the potential to play a positive role in the development of appropriate minority rights standards and actions in the region. It is our hope, that in setting forward our recommendations, that the EU will set about its review of the ENP process armed with a greater understanding of the task it faces in this particular field and of the steps necessary to help foster a more tolerant, equitable, and more stable 'ring of friends'.

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