

Luxembourg, 20 April 2015

**Address of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum  
at the Eastern Partnership Ministerial Meeting**

Dear High Representative, Commissioner, Ministers, thank you very much for this opportunity to address you in the name of the Civil Society Forum of the Eastern Partnership.

The forthcoming Riga Summit comes as the Partnership programme continues to be tested by Russian aggression against Ukraine and amidst doubts in some member states as to the wisdom of continuing a policy which has resulted in the questioning of the post cold war settlement in the region.

However the CSF recognises the Partnership programme's historic achievement in leading to the Association Agreements and thus providing a treaty based blueprint for reform for Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine and has delivered hope for reformers in the three other Partnership countries Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus.

It is ironic that the Association Agreements which were after all a cautious and technical step designed to bring the legal systems in the partner countries closer to the EU's *acquis* have sparked a crisis of major proportions.

At the root of the present crisis lies the fact that the introduction of the rule of law in the region threatens the interests of corrupt business people and officials not only in the Partnership countries but also in Russia where the leadership sees the establishment of a reformed legal order in its vicinity as a threat to its own existence. Please make no mistake serious money which people are prepared to kill for is at stake here.

Nevertheless the European Union and its institutions must robustly defend the Association Agreements. Any further retreat on their implementation by the EU under pressure from Russia or local oligarchs will damage the EU's credibility in the eyes of people in the Partnership countries.

Some of them in Ukraine have lost their lives defending the ideals which the European Union represents or, are in prison, as in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus.

The CSF urges the European Union to maintain its sanctions against Russia until the issue of aggression against Crimea, Donetsk and Luhansk provinces is resolved to the satisfaction of all sides. Any further aggression against Ukraine must be met with additional sanctions. To these the CSF would add sanctions against media bosses in Russia who are responsible for mendacious propaganda at home and abroad.

It is no good hoping that friendly gestures towards Russia will be appreciated and will bring positive results. Such gestures are always taken by Moscow as a sign of weakness and risk provoking even more aggression.

The societies which are implementing the Association Agreements do not face an easy task. The CSF is arguing for the prospect of EU membership for countries which have signed the Association Agreements to be included in the conclusions of the Riga Summit. This will undoubtedly strengthen their resolve in implementing reforms.

Visa liberalisation for Ukraine and Georgia has to be put through as soon as they complete the second phase of their visa action plans. Support for reforms will be enhanced when people in these countries can easily travel to the EU to see that the reforms actually work.

CSF members are ready to play a role in monitoring implementation of the Association Agreements as well as other commitments made by Partner governments and to be involved in negotiations between their governments and the EU. The CSF welcomes the invitation to participate in the ongoing consultation on the future of the European Neighbourhood Policy.

EU member states must also work together with the European Commission and in Partner countries to combat pernicious Russian propaganda in the mass media.

And finally we must look at the issue of adding a security dimension to the Partnership programme. That way we will all feel safer in this turbulent time.

Thank you very much for your attention.

*Delivered by Krzysztof Bobiński, co-chair of the EaP CSF Steering Committee, on 20 April 2015 at the Eastern Partnership Ministerial Meeting in Luxembourg*