



Нацыянальная платформа

Форум грамадзянскай супольнасці Усходняга партнёрства

To the delegates of the 5th meeting of the EaP Civil Society Forum in Chisinau

To the National Platforms of the EaP Civil Society Forum

To the Steering Committee of the EaP CSF

Appeal of the Belarusian National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum

Minsk, September 30, 2013

What to expect from the 5th meeting of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum?

We, representatives of the civil society in Belarus, members of the National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, on the eve of the 5th meeting of the Forum call on our colleagues in civil society organizations in the partner countries and the European Union with an overview of the current state of the Eastern Partnership, as well as with our view on the challenges and prospects for its development as an important long-term initiative of the European Union in its relations with the neighboring countries, and for the development of the EaP Civil Society Forum as an important part of this initiative. We sincerely count on the discussion of the estimates and proposals expressed in this document at the meeting of the Forum in Chisinau.

Overview of the situation in the Eastern Partnership

The Eastern Partnership is currently on the threshold of a new stage of its development. After the Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius in November 2013, all the Eastern neighboring countries of the European Union will be divided into two unequal parts: signatories and non-signatories of the EU Association Agreement. The difference between these countries will be not only in more or less close relations with the EU, but also in the degree of concentration of the European Union's attention on the relations with these two groups of states. The agreements signed by the countries provide for the implementation of comprehensive reforms in a wide range of areas: politics and governance, law and judicial system, economy and trade, environment and energy, mobility and migration, etc. This process will force the EU to make significant efforts to promote

reforms in the associate partner countries. The main challenges for the EU policy in this issue will be not in the level of financial assistance to the reforms, but on the need to dive deep enough in the reformation processes and in the political situation on the ground.

Anyone familiar with the specifics of life and organization of governance in the post-Soviet countries is well aware that all the formal framework of legal regulations (including already signed international agreements) is not necessarily put into practice of their implementation. All institutions familiar to Europeans have deviations, sometimes very significant, from normative functions, goals and purposes. For example, regarding the judicial system of Ukraine, which functions normally in some cases, but in other cases renders politically motivated decisions (the Tymoshenko case is the most striking example), a term "selective justice" is currently applied. The term indicates such deviation from normality. At the same time, it is, perhaps, slightly taken into account that even in the leader countries of the rapprochement processes with the EU there is a "selective democracy", "selective separation of power", "selective regulation", "selective self-governance", "selective market economy", "selective judicial independence", "selective civil society", and there is generally little existing in its normal forms.

The challenges described above are complemented by traditional difficulties of power relations in the partner countries, by existence of clans and patronage networks, various forms of corrupt ties, intricate relationships between lobby nomenclature groups, etc. Successful implementation of the reforms will require detailed work with these issues, while the EU will have to understand all these difficulties and to be able to contribute to this work. Thus, the European Union will need good knowledge of the internal situation in the countries, strong and clever diplomacy, qualified specialists - all of this hasn't been required until recently by the EU, as it was enough following the formal aspects of progress in the signing of agreements and supporting the process of negotiations.

A new period after the signing of the Association Agreement with the EU by a number of countries will implicate less attention from the EU towards the second group of non-associated EaP partner countries regarding their situation and challenges. At best, everything will remain at the same level - the EU will continue contributing to the progress of formal signing of the agreements, at worst - the European Union will put relations with these countries in "standby mode" and wait until the partner countries' internal motivation changes. For Belarus as for the most lagging country in terms of the development of relations with the EU, and for its civil society, this situation does not bode well. Ideally, it is necessary that the EU, on the contrary, increase its attention to the problems of our countries, guided by the Eastern Partnership principle of regionalization. For the European Union, the loss of Belarus, Azerbaijan or Armenia out of the EU rapprochement process undermines the geopolitical sense of the partnership. It will lead to strategic defeat, even in the presence of temporary tactical victories.

Opportunities for the civil society and the objectives of the Forum

A new stage of the Eastern Partnership and challenges for the Eastern policy of the EU, arisen with it, opens up new opportunities for the civil society. The civil society as the closest ally of the EU in the partner countries, which is short of human resources and knowledge about the partners, could become a major source of expertise and advice to the national governments and

the EU, an extensive bank of trained specialists, could act as a stakeholder for the implementation of special works in the reform processes. All of this can strengthen the role of civil society and give it the prospects for expansion of its influence on strategic decision making processes.

The Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum is designed to coordinate the efforts of civil society organizations in the EaP countries and their partners in the EU, to promote broad involvement of civil society in the reform processes. Political task of the Forum should also become using the energy of motion of associated countries to "pull out" the laggards. In practice, the Forum and the civil society must provide:

1. Lacking knowledge of the situation in the partner countries. It is necessary to return to the Roadmap concept and the Open Method of Coordination as a tool of tracking and managing the dynamics of movement in the reform processes' framework in the partner countries. In addition, there is need of special knowledge about the internal situation in the sense of specific material: people, structures, processes.
2. Staff, expertise: reform projects, research, monitoring, evaluations, shadow reports.
3. Facilitation of promoting reforms' processes: round tables, public hearings, engaging experience.
4. Expansion of horizontal cooperation and exchange of practices and relevant experience of reforms.
5. Tools for a broad dialogue between the EU and Civil Society of the participating countries of the Eastern Partnership.

In recent years the Civil Society Forum has solved the major structural issues, but it has lost the political and strategic dynamics which should be restored. Thus, to solve this issue, along with the Secretariat, acting and gaining potential, there is need of a strong and politically motivated composition of the Steering Committee, being able to fulfill this function.

Capacity building and internal communication within the Forum

At present, we have to state that **the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum still uses its internal capacity in an incomplete degree, which results in a lack of effective interaction of the EaP Civil Society Forum Steering Committee with the National Platforms in the partner countries and the thematic Working groups.** Today, these interactions are largely selective and irregular. They do not implement all the possibilities of the Forum structural elements in the form of the National Platforms and the thematic Working groups. These are, however, able to timely contribute to the discussion and resolution of the issues related to the strategic development of the Forum and its promotion as an important player in the relationship with other stakeholders of the Eastern Partnership. In particular, for the past two years the Belarusian National Platform has repeatedly appealed to the Steering Committee with proposals for discussion on how to strengthen cooperation between the Steering Committee and the National Platforms. Common ground on this issue, however, has not been found.

In mid-September 2013, the Steering Committee of the Forum offered a new version of the Strategy of the EaP CSF for 2014-2016, intended to replace the previously adopted Strategy for 2012-2014. It is expected that this document would be discussed and may be adopted by voting at the 5th meeting of the EaP Civil Society Forum in Chisinau. In this regard, we want to take the opportunity to convey our position to the Forum participants and to all interested parties and to make a few comments on this initiative of the Steering Committee:

- Adoption of a new version of the Strategy of the EaP CSF is relevant and necessary step in the life and work of the Forum. However, the documents of this level should be adopted through appropriate procedure of familiarization and discussion at the Forum, presented and reviewed at meetings of the National Platforms and the thematic Working groups of the Forum. Today, on the eve of the 5th annual meeting of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, this work hasn't yet been done. **The Forum participants in the partner countries haven't yet had any procedural opportunity to make their submissions to the new edition of the Strategy, any time to discuss the options and provide feedback.** This approach challenges the awareness and desirability of adopting this document in an accelerated mode at the meeting in Chisinau.
- The presented version of the Strategy for 2014-2016, from our point of view, contains a number of significant changes and controversial proposals in relation to the previous version (in particular, the mission statement has been greatly changed; it is proposed the creation of a new body - the Advisory Board, the reduction of the Steering Committee, changing the content of the framework of some of the thematic Working groups, etc.). **Such changes are strategic (non-technical) and therefore require broad discussion and consideration of alternatives**, before they can be offered to make a decision at the level of all the participants of the Forum.
- Offering a new Strategy of the EaP CSF falls on the time when there is **no complete certainty on the outcomes of the current phase of development of the Eastern Partnership and its priorities for the future. Exactly this certainty is intended to be brought by the Eastern Partnership Summit** to be held in Vilnius in late November 2013.

Given the above circumstances, the members of the Belarusian National Platform propose to abandon the intention to adopt the Strategy of the EaP CSF for 2014-2016 in an accelerated way at the meeting of the Forum in Chisinau on October 3-5, 2013 and **to organize systematic and qualitative discussion on the new version of the Strategy with the National Platforms and thematic Working groups in the next six months.**

A particular concern of members of the National Platform is the absence of the text of the Position of the Forum to the EaP Summit in the agenda and among the working documents of the meeting of the EaP Civil Society Forum in Chisinau. **Preparation and adoption of such Position of the EaP CSF for the EaP Summit, from our point of view, is one of the priority objectives of the meeting in Chisinau.**

In order the Position of the Forum to be heard and taken into consideration in the framework of the third Summit of the EaP countries in Vilnius, it must be submitted to the Secretariat of the Summit no later than the end of October 2013. We urge the Steering Committee and the

Secretariat to promptly organize the work on preparation of such a document and discussion of its main provisions with the participants of the meeting of the Forum in Chisinau.

In order to give to the Eastern Partnership a new impetus able to provide achievement of the goals and objectives put for this initiative, the Belarusian National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum expresses its readiness for a more detailed presentation of the above items at the 5th meeting of the EaP CSF in Chisinau on October 3-5, 2013. It expresses its readiness, as well, for a more active and regular participation in the dialogue on the development of the Eastern Partnership as a whole and the Civil Society Forum in particular, with the European Commission, the European Parliament, the EU Council, as well as with all the other EaP actors, and primarily with the Steering Committee, the Secretariat and the National Platforms of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum.

Signatures:

Ulad Vialichka, chairman of the Coordination Committee of the National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, International Consortium "EuroBelarus"

Yaroslau Bekish, member of the Coordination Committee of the National Platform of the EaP CSF, member of the Steering Committee of the EaP CSF, Green Alliance

Andrei Yahorau, member of the Coordination Committee of the National Platform of the EaP CSF, coordinator of the first expert working group of the European Dialogue on Modernization, Centre for European Transformation

Siarhei Mackievic, member of the Coordination Committee of the National Platform of the EaP CSF, Assembly of Pro-Democratic NGOs of Belarus

Oksana Shelest, member of the Coordination Committee of the National Platform of the EaP CSF, Humanitarian Techniques Agency

Alexander Volchanin, member of the Coordination Committee of the National Platform of the EaP CSF, Union Chernobyl-Belarus

Piotr Kuzniatsou, member of the Coordination Committee of the National Platform of the EaP CSF, Gomel Democratic Forum

Tatsiana Zialko, Public Association of Belarusian Pensioners "Our Generation"

Elena Tonkacheva, Enlightenment Institution "Legal Transformation Center LAWTREND"

Irina Sukhy, Public Association "Ecohome"

Ihar Rynkevich, Enlightenment Institution "Democracy Development League "Civic Verdict"

Ales' Krot, Human Right Group "Students' Council"

Tatiana Poshevalova, Public Association "Center for social innovations"

Ekaterina Sadovskaya, Belarusian branch of Pskov regional public association "Veche"

Zhana Litvina, Belarusian Association of Journalists

Iryna Zhykhar, National Public Association "Belarusian Organization of Working Women"

Miraslau Kobasa, Enlightenment Public Association "Leu Sapieha Foundation"

Aliaksei Khatsko, Establishment "Strategic Thought"

Nastassia Doliushka, The Society of Belarusian Students

Dmitry Karpievich, Association of Life-Long Learning Education and Enlightenment

Aliaksandr Karalevich, Public Union "Education Center "POST"

Siarhej Drazdouski, Enlightenment Human Rights Establishment "Office for the Rights of People with Disabilities"

Nina Karakina, National Council of Youth and Children Organizations RADA

Olga Smolianko, Foundation for Legal Technologies Development

Antonina Yelistratova, Republican Youth Public Association "Next Stop – New Life"

Ihar Lednik, Human Rights Movement "Our Belarus"

Artur Finkevich, Movement "Young Belarus"

Sergei Shavtsov, Civil Initiative "For Religious Freedom"

Nikolai Kvantaliani, Youth initiative «New Group»

Ellada Gukasova, Youth Public Charity Association "The Seeing Heart"

Evgeny Shevko, Public Association "Republican Wheelchair Users Association "

Anatoly Shvetsov, Public Association " Protection of Rights of Parents and Children"

Nina Slavatava, «ASDEMO»

Yauhen Boika, Civic initiative "Mogilev Education Initiative"

Dmitry Gomenyuk, Information and Enlightenment Institution "GEDEUS"

Anna Gerasimova, Belarusian Human Rights House in exile in Vilnius

Uladzimir Zueu, Environmental and Regional Studies NGO "Nerush"

Valadar Tsurpanau, Mahiliou Centre "Civic space"