



**Catherine Ashton,
Vice-President, European Commission,
and High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, European Council**

**Štefan Füle
European Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy**

**Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Eastern Partnership countries
Ministers of Foreign Affairs, EU member states**

Brussels, 15 November 2013

**Statement of Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum to
Eastern Partnership Summit, Vilnius, 29-30 November 2013**

Attached: - The Eastern Partnership Roadmap to the Vilnius Summit - An assessment of the
roadmap implementation by the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum
- European Integration Index 2013 for Eastern Partnership Countries

A democracy roadmap from Vilnius to Riga

To achieve sustainable democratic development, EU and partner countries must place inclusive policymaking, deep democracy, and monitoring of EU spending at core of relations in all partner countries – and launch public awareness campaigns to explain mutual benefits of closer European integration

Dear High Representative, Dear Commissioner, Dear Ministers,

The Vilnius summit should mark the launch of a new phase of European integration for the eastern neighbours of the European Union. For Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine, there is the prospect of initialling or signature of Association Agreements, including Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) Agreements, with the EU. For Azerbaijan, there could be the signing of visa facilitation and readmission agreements.

In the case of Armenia, the substantive progress made in finalising negotiations on the content of an Association Agreement and DCFTA Agreement with the EU must be built upon to renew its integration prospects, and solidify the clear support among civil society and the general public for European integration. Furthermore, EU engagement with all sectors of society with a view to sustainable democratic development and closer European integration should be a re-stated priority in EU relations with Belarus, and the European Dialogue on Modernisation should be strengthened, and its multi-stakeholder nature deepened.

The EU's active diplomacy towards Ukraine has been a welcome contrast to the negative diplomacy from Moscow, with its threats of cutting Ukraine off from Russian markets. Diplomacy and political will from the side of both Ukraine and the EU are needed to seize the chance of signing a historical agreement in Vilnius.

As set out in the resolution of the Civil Society Forum's annual meeting in Chisinau on 5 October 2013, "only those countries that respect human rights, including a free press, that seek to combat corruption, and that chose their leaders and lawmakers in a free and fair way, are inherently stable. The EU needs inherently stable, free, and prosperous neighbours in its eastern region."

The Civil Society Forum is convinced that **the mutual benefits of closer European integration must be given priority in all partner countries without differentiation with respect to the level of progress at the governmental level in working towards agreements with the EU.**

All six countries need to open up the policymaking process. Monitoring by the Civil Society Forum of developments in the partner countries during the period since the launch in May 2012 of the roadmap to the Vilnius summit shows that Georgia and Moldova are the only two partner countries whose policymaking process has been substantially open and receptive to policy initiatives from civil society and expert stakeholders, with limited receptiveness existing in Ukraine, and some signs of more openness in Armenia prior to the statement of intent to join the Customs Union made by President Serzh Sargsyan on 3 September.

As documented in *The Eastern Partnership Roadmap to the Vilnius Summit - An assessment of the roadmap implementation by the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum*, the secrecy around the negotiations of the agreements between the EU and the partner countries has weakened the EU's case for European integration: "An opportunity has been lost for public debate and for generating wide ownership of the European integration process among the citizens of the partner countries. This would not have stopped pressure from Moscow, but it would have strengthened the hand of those pushing for closer integration with the EU."

Moreover, civil society has been given a seat in regular trilateral forums - including government, the EU delegation and civil society - only in Georgia. While substantial initiative on the part of the EU to engage with civil society has been welcomed, efforts have been less effective in fostering dialogue between partner governments and civil society. Greater impetus from the EU side towards this objective is believed to be necessary by civil society actors in Armenia and Ukraine.

The Vilnius summit will indeed mark a new phase in relations between the partner countries and the EU, but all sides need now to recognise that any sustainable integration must include deep democratic change, and that must include the engagement of independent experts, civil society and the wider public in the drafting of policy reforms. A key challenge is the need to monitor the use of EU funds to the partner governments, primarily the Comprehensive Institution Building (CIB) programme funding.

The Civil Society Forum proposes the following steps:

- A mechanism should be developed to **incorporate dialogue between government and civil society into all CIB projects, and to ensure independent monitoring of the use and effectiveness of the funding allocated under the CIB programme**. In Belarus, capacity-building programmes for civil servants should be broadened to include other policy stakeholders (civil society and business associations), and to consult these stakeholders at the stages of design, implementation and monitoring of these programmes.
- A **permanent co-operation platform should be established to facilitate dialogue between the National Platform and EURONEST MPs** in the respective partner countries. Thematic working groups of non-government experts and stakeholders (e.g. business, human rights watchdogs) should be established to link civil society, EU representatives, and state agencies regulating corresponding policy areas.
- Renewed impetus should be dedicated to co-operation between the Partner countries to **realise more fully the multilateral component** that was always an intrinsic part of the Eastern Partnership initiative.
- **Greater transparency and public debate are required on the implications of the Association Agreements and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area Agreements**, including the creation and development of mechanisms of SME support in Partner countries with specific attention to local conditions.
- **A public awareness campaign around democratic values and the mutual benefits of closer European integration must be given priority in all partner countries.**
- The EU and its member states also have to make a **firmer commitment across all EU institutions for respect to free and fair elections and promotion of deep democracy** in the partner countries. A **complete review of the level and status of participation of MEPs in election monitoring is now essential** after a delegation of MEPs declared the Presidential elections in Azerbaijan free and fair - despite the OSCE ODIHR report stating that the election "was undermined by limitations on fundamental freedoms, lack of level playing field and significant problems on election day".¹ The Azerbaijan National Platform of the Civil Society Forum noted that "voting and counting were conducted with serious violations, as reported in the results of observation by OSCE/ODIHR, local observation organisations, and monitoring of the elections by the members of the National Platform".

¹ Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe).
<http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/106908>

Similarly, the efforts by the governments of Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine to meet the conditions of the Visa Liberalisation Action Plans, and the accompanying efforts of civil society to explain to the public and policymakers the benefits of visa-free travel to the EU, need to be matched by political commitment on the side of the EU member states. Without this, public opinion will turn against an EU that denies freedom of travel to its neighbours.

- **Short-term travel to the EU without visa requirements should be an achievable goal for Georgia and Ukraine before the Riga summit, and ahead of 2014 parliamentary elections in the case of Moldova.**

In the EU, no one doubts the benefits of an inclusive policymaking process, where stakeholders can conduct cost-benefit analyses and raise the perspectives of different sectors in society to improve the quality and sustainability of policy and legislation.

The third edition of the *European Integration Index for Eastern Partnership Countries*, finalised in May 2013, showed that “all six countries, with some exceptions, are on a positive track towards European integration. Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan intensified their links with the EU, Moldova kept its leading position, while Belarus registered no change, and only Ukraine had less intensive relations with the EU than last year.”

The roadmap plotting the trajectory from the Vilnius summit to the 2015 Eastern Partnership summit scheduled to take place in Riga during the Latvia EU Council Presidency should place centre-stage deepening democracy and participatory policymaking. A democracy roadmap is required for the journey to Riga.

Yours faithfully,



Boris Navasardyan
Acting Chair, Steering Committee
Civil Society Forum of the Eastern Partnership



Jeff Lovitt
Co-ordinator (EU), Working Group 1 – Democracy, Human Rights, Good Governance & Stability,
and editor/co-ordinator of *The Eastern Partnership Roadmap to the Vilnius Summit*
- *An assessment of the roadmap implementation by the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum*



Natalia Yerashevich
Director, Secretariat of the Steering Committee of the Civil Society Forum