

AN ACTIVE PARTNER IN DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION AND EUROPEAN INTEGRATION:

A Concept paper for the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum

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1. What is the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum?

The Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum is recognised by the European Commission as a representative forum of civil society organisations from the Eastern Partner countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine) and EU civil society organisations active in the Partner countries. The Forum and its organs (national platforms, thematic working groups, and Steering Committee) are recognised as key civil society partners for the European Commission in the framework of European Union (EU) relations with the Eastern Partner countries, and with regard to the EU's commitment to support civil society actors in the Partner countries and to engage them as essential partners in democratic development.

Civil society organisations play a crucial role in the economic and social development of society, and the Forum works to support civil society organisations in their efforts to strengthen the diversity and plurality of public discourse and policymaking, by holding governments and public authorities to account, and by protecting and promoting human rights, fundamental freedoms, participatory democracy, market economy, sustainable development, and good governance.

The Forum works closely with the European Commission, the European External Action Service (EEAS), EU member governments, European Parliament and other EU institutions, and engages with Partner countries' governments, to:

- facilitate a roadmap for democratic transition in the Partner countries
- monitor developments in EU relations with the Partner countries
- promote the results and activities of civil society projects, and the participation of civil society actors to contribute to effective public policy outcomes
- foster the engagement of independent civil society expertise in the work of the expert panels/thematic platforms.

The Forum was initiated in May 2009 in Prague, Czech Republic, when the Eastern Partnership was launched with the objective of developing closer political and economic ties between the EU and the six Eastern neighbouring countries. The Forum held its first meeting in November 2009, engaging more than 200 civil society organisations from the Partner countries and EU member states. In addition to the annual Forum event, six national platforms are complemented by four thematic working groups (a fifth is to be launched at the end of 2012) and a range of sub-groups engaged in activities year-round, including projects monitoring progress in the implementation of agreements between the EU and the Partner countries.

The Forum brings together civil society actors working at national and international level to hold the EU and the Partner countries accountable to the commitments made in the joint declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership summit, signed on 7 May 2009 by the EU and six neighbouring countries. The parties agreed that "the Eastern Partnership will be based on commitments to the principles of international law and to fundamental values, including democracy, the rule of law and the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as to market economy, sustainable development and good governance".

2. Mission

To facilitate and strengthen the active and expert engagement of civil society in the Eastern Partnership and in the Eastern dimension of EU external relations policies, and in participatory governance and accountable policymaking with regard to the democratic transition and European integration of the Eastern Partnership countries, including prospective EU membership.

3. Vision

The Forum operates as an independent, inclusive, transparent and sustainable actor in the dialogue with all stakeholders of the Eastern Partnership. The Forum and its constituent parts are recognised as representatives of civil society, and as a key stakeholder in EU policy development and implementation with regard to democratic transition in the Eastern Partner countries.

4. Core Values and Principles

The Forum strives to promote:

1. respect for, and protection of democracy, diversity, human rights, and the rights of vulnerable groups
2. freedom of expression, organisation, movement and association
3. public participation in the policymaking process
4. good governance and the rule of law
5. broad-based, sustainable development and respect for the environment
6. a sustainable social market economy, public welfare and quality of life
7. commitment to share skills, knowledge and experiences across borders and boundaries

5. From founding concept to a strategy for active and expert civil society engagement

The work and composition of the Forum was launched on the basis of a Concept Paper developed in 2009 by the European Commission in co-operation with the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and with extensive contributions from civil society organisations from both Partner countries and from EU member states.

According to the Commission Concept, “civil society and non-governmental organisations play a crucial role, within their societies, in providing policy input, following new initiatives and in holding governments accountable. They can be active actors in promoting democratic and market-oriented reforms based on shared values, i.e. respect for democracy and human rights, the rule of law, good governance, principles of market economy and sustainable development”.

The Commission proposed “to support the further development of civil society organisations (CSOs)” and, in particular, “to establish an Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum to promote contacts among CSOs and facilitate their dialogue with public authorities”. The Commission invited “the European Economic and Social Committee to participate in the Civil Society Forum”.

A year-round, multi-layered Forum

Building on this initial concept, basic principles and criteria were laid out for the procedure for selecting Forum participants, the Forum was conceived as a recognised partner for the EU and Partner governments, and the following constituent parts of the Forum were established:

- Four working groups were established to complement the Eastern Partnership intergovernmental panels (a fifth, a Social Dialogue Working Group, will be launched in 2012)
- Working group co-ordinators (in each case one from the EU and one from the Partner countries) to manage the work process in each of the groups
- Sub-groups were established, with their own co-ordinators
- Country Facilitators were elected from each Partner country, and national platforms established to ensure local ownership and direct civil society input at the country level
- A Steering Committee was established as a representative body of the Forum, comprising the eight Working Group Co-ordinators (ten from 2012), six Country Facilitators, and three EU Co-ordinators
- An annual Forum event was established, alongside separate working group meetings.

A strategy for active and expert civil society engagement

After the second year of the Forum's existence, a strategy for civil society engagement has now been outlined, comprising the following short-term and medium-term objectives.

Short-term objectives (2012)

- Professionalisation of the Forum through establishment and legal registration of a co-ordinating Secretariat to support and guide the work of the Forum and build stakeholder relations with EU institutions and Partner country governments, securing of start-up funding, and preparation of a sustainable future funding model
- Strengthening of the national platforms as effective, well recognised civil society fora at the country level, and establishment of the national platforms as essential partners for all stakeholders in the Eastern Partnership
- Through continued lobbying further development of the new EU Neighbourhood Civil Society Facility to finance the capacity of civil society organisations, and support dialogue between civil society organisations and government
- Transformation of the Forum at the working group meetings and annual Forum into a dynamic, grassroots-driven hub of national and international initiatives to facilitate through civil society expertise and projects a more participatory policy-making and democratic transition in the Partner countries, and to bring about policy change to improve the quality of life of citizens of the Partner countries
- Recognition of the annual Forum event and working group meetings as leading, agenda-setting events on the civil society/EU policymaking calendar, and key networking events with other civil society organisations and stakeholders in EU-Eastern Partner relations
- Effecting policy change through provision of well-timed, constructive contributions to the Eastern Partnership intergovernmental platforms and expert panels
- More informed civil society organisations through dissemination to them of well-presented, up-to-date, essential information about developments in the Eastern Partnership through the website and electronic bulletins
- Strengthened activities of the sub-groups of the working groups, through support of the Secretariat and through work with EU stakeholders
- Increased participation of civil society actors to contribute to effective policy outcomes, and monitoring of implementation, in the fields of democratisation, human rights, social and economic development, and good governance, and to foster the engagement of independent civil society expertise in the work of the expert panels/thematic platforms
- Improved inclusion of independent democratic social partners in the Forum through launch of a Social Dialogue Working Group.

Medium-term objectives (2013-2014)

- Recognition of the Forum and its constituent parts as key representatives of civil society and as partners of the EU and the Partner countries in the democratic transition of the Partner countries
- Development as a partner with EU institutions and Partner country governments of a roadmap for democratic transition for the Partner countries, and for closer political and economic integration of the Partner countries with the EU
- Enhanced policy influence through establishment of an Advisory Council of political and think-tank figures who can strengthen the advocacy work and analytical depth of the Forum, in particular policy and strategic advice.
- Effecting policy reform through establishment of the sub-groups of the working groups and the national platforms as key drivers of civil society engagement and expertise in a locally driven, decentralised Forum
- Consolidation of professional support for the work of the Forum, and for building stakeholder relations with all relevant actors through securing of sustainable funding and office space for a Secretariat with the necessary staff
- Strengthened functioning of the national platforms through securing of sustainable funding and necessary resources
- Facilitation and demonstration of the essential contribution of civil society - at national and international level - to the process of strengthening political and economic ties between the EU and the Partner countries through co-ordination by the organs of the Forum and, where necessary, securing of funding by the Secretariat, for:
 - flagship projects monitoring democratic transition
 - sustaining permanent participant status at meetings of official intergovernmental platforms, thematic working groups, expert panels, and flagship initiatives
 - facilitating direct input and submission of written opinions and recommendations in the early stages of draft policy plans and priorities between the EU and the Partner countries, preparation of practical policy recommendations, and advocacy for them
 - evaluation and analysis to monitor progress in implementing commitments and agreements made between the EU and the Partner countries in the framework of the Eastern Partnership
- Facilitation via EU delegations of trilateral dialogue at the national level concerning bilateral agreements, including priority-setting in European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) funding and review of financial perspectives, and prior access to draft plans and priorities that are subjects of the Action Plans and Association Agreements
- Securing of concrete policy changes in the EU and the Partner countries on key policy areas across the four thematic platforms, generating measurable improvements in the quality of life, democratic participation, and human rights in the six Partner countries.

6. Resources and Funding

The meetings of the working groups and Steering Committee have from 2009-2011 been funded by the European Commission, while the annual Forum events have been supported by the European Commission, the host government, and some private foundations. The European Commission funding covers participants from the Partner countries, and also the EU Steering Committee members. Funding should be sought to support the attendance of all Forum participants, including EU participants active in the Partner countries, at Forum annual events and working group meetings. A diversity of sources of funds is required for the sustainable funding of the national platforms and the Secretariat, as well as for projects carried out by the national platforms and working groups.

Sources that will be targeted include:

- EU member governments
- EU Neighbourhood Civil Society Facility
- European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights
- future European Endowment for Democracy
- private foundations
- other sources, including self-funding.

7. Services

A range of well-targeted services will be developed by the Secretariat, conducting and then drawing on a survey of the needs of the Forum, e.g. on capacity-building/training needs, project partner search, understanding EU policymaking, effective techniques to open up dialogue with policymakers at the national and local level.

In addition to the functions of the Steering Committee set out in the appendices, the Secretariat will:

1. Provide regular communications with national platforms and thematic working groups, updating them on decisions and activities of the Steering Committee
2. Conduct advocacy activities to raise awareness of the values of the Forum, disseminate its statements and initiatives, and promote to key stakeholders and policymakers flagship projects implemented by the Forum and/or its participating organisations
3. Liaise with the European Commission, EEAS, EESC and other EU institutions, and Partner country governments, to monitor EU-Eastern Partnership developments, and share new developments (expert panels, bilateral agreements) with working groups, sub-groups and Country Facilitators as appropriate through website and Forum bulletins
4. Organise meetings of Forum representatives with European Commission, EEAS and other officials
5. Information services to Forum participants about planned events at the Partner country level, and also about EU and other funding opportunities for civil society organisations.

8. Advocacy And Communications

High-level engagement with policymakers at EU level, including behind-the-scenes advocacy, will be co-ordinated by the Steering Committee, with the support of the Secretariat. Over time, it might be supported and sometimes even driven by a top-level Advisory Council of public figures from the political and think-tank world with interests in European integration and EU external relations, especially towards the Eastern neighbours.

Activities, in line with needs identified by the annual Forum, the national platforms, working groups and/or Steering Committee, might include:

- High-profile public advocacy events around presentation of joint projects of Forum participants, either linked to meetings of working groups or to EU summits/meetings focused on the Eastern Partnership or policy areas of importance to the Partner countries
- Effective lobbying for channelling of EU resources towards the consolidation of civil society organisations, able and committed to promote democratic transition in the Partner countries
- Ongoing liaison with key EU institutions and stakeholders, and Partner country governments, to ensure and sustain recognition for the Forum as a key representative of civil society with regard to the Eastern Partnership, and to ensure that the Forum is accorded status as a key stakeholder in EU relations with the Partner countries
- A range of effective communications tools, including the website and regular electronic bulletins targeted at (a) Forum participants, and (b) EU and Partner country policymakers and other key stakeholders
- Submission of opinions, input and policy recommendations targeted to expert panels, intergovernmental platform meetings, etc., where the Forum (working groups, sub-groups, national platforms) has clear policy expertise, and/or the issue addressed is crucial to the roadmap for democratic transition for the Partner countries
- Commissioning and well-targeted presentation of policy briefs/op-eds from Forum members (where a reputation or body of knowledge already resides) on issues of key importance to the roadmap for democratic transition for the Partner countries.

9. Co-operation with EU institutions, Partner country governments, and intergovernmental institutions

A mapping will be conducted of the different EU institutions, Partner country governments, and their relevance to the policy areas of the four thematic platforms of the Eastern Partnership, and to progress on the roadmap for democratic transition for the Partner countries. In particular, this will include a guide to key policymakers/officials in the EU and the Partner countries, and guidelines as to how the EU policymaking process functions in the context of the Eastern Partnership.

These institutions might include, among others:

- EuropeAid Development and Co-operation Directorate-General of the European Commission
- European External Action Service (EEAS)
- European Parliament (in particular MEPs with a focus on the Partner countries and on development policy and democracy and human rights, and members of the EURONEST parliamentary assembly)
- Ministries of Foreign Affairs of EU member states
- Permanent Representations to the EU of EU member states
- European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)
- Committee of the Regions
- EU Delegations to Eastern Partner countries
- Missions of Eastern Partner countries to EU
- Members of Parliament in Eastern Partner countries
- Eastern Partner country ministries, government departments and public authorities
- Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)

- Council of Europe
- United Nations Development Programme
- Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation.

10. Challenges And Policy Dilemmas

As a relatively new organisation, the Forum and its constituent parts face various challenges in finding a model for sustainable growth and effective operations. The challenges vary across countries and depend on the policy focus of the civil society organisations, and vary between the different working groups and their sub-groups.

1. Inclusivity. The participants in the Forum differ greatly in their capacities, environments, specialisation, and modus operandi. This means that it is extremely difficult to design research and monitoring projects that involve all Forum participants. One solution is to encourage a national strategic plan on the part of all the national platforms to establish common priorities and projects; another is to decentralise to the sub-groups of the working groups as much as possible, and for the Secretariat to work in a supportive role to all sub-group coordinators managing multi-country projects of the participants of the Forum.

2. Competition. Equal involvement of all Forum participants in joint activities, or in particular joint projects, remains a huge challenge, against the background of the great diversity of the participating civil society organisations. Another key challenge for the Forum relates to the effective regulation of the relationship between the participating civil society organisations and the Forum Steering Committee so as to exclude unnecessary conflicts of interest, and between the participating civil society organisations and the Forum Secretariat, for instance in applying for funding to the same donors. There is a need for clear and transparent procedures in any applications for funding on the part of the Forum to guard against perceived and actual competition with the Forum participants without excluding the Forum from raising funds in the knowledge that it will inevitably target some of the same donors focused on the region.

3. Professionalism and balance. A serious challenge is posed by the fact that the Steering Committee comprises volunteers who have highly demanding positions in their own organisations. On the one hand, it is obvious that the Forum needs a full-time Secretariat. On the other hand, allocating resources to a Secretariat has to be balanced with a transparent, decentralised approach to setting thematic and country priorities that should drive the advocacy and communications focus of the Secretariat and Steering Committee. Striking the right balance requires good planning and careful timing of policy initiatives, as well as a parallel strengthening of services to the Forum participants alongside the establishment of an effective level of human resources in the Secretariat.

4. Local sustainability and legal environment. In many of the Partner countries, the legal environment for civil society organisations curtails a range of modus operandi, including legal structures, such as branches of international organisations, and sources of funding, especially international funding, making it difficult to secure sustainable funding. This is an area where the Secretariat can work with intergovernmental organisations and international civil society networks to lobby more effectively for reform of the legal environment in the respective countries. This might also include working with the funding units of the European Commission to find flexible ways of funding that are not proscribed by the restrictive legal environments in the countries concerned.

APPENDIX I. FORUM PARTICIPANTS

Who is eligible to become a Forum member?

Membership of the Forum is open to all civil society organisations within the Partner countries and civil society organisations in EU member states that are active in the Partner countries. This can include grassroots organisations, trade unions, farmers' and consumer organisations, think-tanks, employers' organisations, professional associations, non-profit organisations, faith-based organisations, non-profit foundations, national and international civil society organisations/networks across the Partner countries and EU.

Applicants for Forum membership must be based in an EU country or in one of the six Partner countries. The application should also be engaged on at least one of the issues on the Eastern Partnership agenda, and be willing and able to contribute actively to the Forum by participating in meetings, responding to requests for input, drafting discussion papers, and similar activities.

All organisations that have taken part in Forum annual events become Forum members. Nobody can exclude an organisation from Forum membership unless the organisation itself announces its withdrawal from the Forum. Exceptions will be where the Steering Committee decides that an organisation is bringing the Forum into disrepute by actively working against the core values and principles of the Forum (a decision which can be revoked by appeal to the whole Forum).

Expression of Interest to participate in Forum annual event:

The selection procedure takes place once a year. To participate, a civil society organisation must submit an expression of interest to join. When the Steering Committee receives the expression of interest, they will apply the agreed criteria to consideration of the application. When the Steering Committee has made a decision, the interested civil society organisation will be duly informed.

Criteria for Participation in annual Forum events:

1. Geographic Origin or Nationality

A majority of Forum participants should come from civil society organisations of the six Partner countries. However, the number of civil society organisations from each country must be balanced. A proportion of civil society organisations from EU member states that are active in the Partner countries are encouraged to participate to share their experience and expertise of EU affairs and policies. The Forum should also strive to promote a wide variety of participants from Partner countries and from EU member states.

2. Diversity and Proportionality

Participants should represent a wide variety of civil society organisations, including independent democratic social partner organisations, from the Partner countries and from the EU. Participating organisations should be able to take part in one or more of the working groups.

3. Experience in EU/European Neighbourhood Policy/Eastern Partnership

Past and current activities, as well as achievements and results, will be taken into account. Each participating organisation must be committed to achieving the objectives of the Eastern Partnership.

APPENDIX II. FORUM STRUCTURE

Annual Forum

The annual Forum is the highest decision-making body of the Forum, at which all 17 members of the Steering Committee (19 members from the annual Forum event in 2012) are elected for a one-year term.

The annual Forum approves the by-laws, conflict-of-interest rules, and any changes to these core governance documents. Between annual Forum events, the delegates to the previous Forum act as the highest decision-making body, and can make decisions by majority vote through email voting.

The annual Forum is a leading annual civil society event, providing networking and experience-sharing opportunities for civil society representatives. It also links them with representatives of the European Commission, EEAS and other EU institutions, Partner country governments, and EU civil society organisations and international networks.

The Annual Forum includes meetings of all working groups and subgroups of the Forum, and the annual event provides space for showcasing national and international initiatives where civil society expertise and projects facilitate a more participatory policy-making and democratic transition in the Partner countries.

Working Groups

Within the Forum, four working groups (a fifth to be launched in 2012) have been set up and are functioning to discuss issues pertaining to the four intergovernmental thematic platforms, and to contribute to the agenda of the platforms. The working groups of the Forum are working in parallel to the platforms and should contribute to the progress of the platforms' programmes.

The working groups are:

- WG 1. Democracy, human rights, good governance and stability
- WG 2. Economic integration and convergence with EU policies
- WG 3. Environment, climate change and energy security
- WG 4. Contacts between people
- WG 5. Social Dialogue - to focus on social rights and social dialogue, labour market and other social and economic issues pertinent to the Eastern Partner countries (*to be launched at the annual Forum in 2012*).

There are a number of challenges facing the working groups. Civil society organisations have a great opportunity to participate, while the EU and the Partner countries can benefit from civil society expertise. It is essential that Forum participants are invited to be active participants in the meetings of the expert panels and intergovernmental platform meetings. Representatives of the working groups should be invited on a regular basis to take part in the appropriate platform meetings that match their expertise.

The Forum working groups are provided by the European Commission with the resources to organise at least one working group meeting per year in addition to participation in the annual Forum event.

To provide more concrete and substantial input and communication, each working group can establish one or several thematic sub-groups on particular policy areas or themes. The subgroups can work on an autonomous basis but within the framework of the working group format and goals. They can nominate their own sub-group co-ordinators to facilitate the process. Some of the groups can be complementary to intergovernmental expert panels or other intergovernmental fora outside the format of the platforms.

The programme of the annual Forum event also reflects the division and agenda of Forum participants within working groups and thematic sub-groups.

Co-ordination and synergy between the Forum Steering Committee and working group participants is provided by the Working Group Co-ordinators (two per working group - one from EU civil society organisations or international networks, one from the Partner countries).

Working Group Co-ordinator

The Working Group Co-ordinator is the participant from the Partner country or from the EU member state or international network elected by the members of the working group at the Forum annual event for the period of one year. His/Her major task is to co-ordinate the activities of the members of the working group, to represent the Forum, or identify relevant experts from the working group to represent the Forum, at the intergovernmental thematic platform meetings and expert panels, and to represent the working group in the Forum Steering Committee.

National Platforms

It is self-evident that the implementation of the Eastern Partnership initiative in the six Partner countries and in the EU can be more effective if the Forum includes national platforms in all six Partner countries. The Steering Committee will consider ways of increasing the engagement in the Forum of EU civil society organisations. Options under consideration might include a EU civil society platform.

Each Partner country's platform can decide on the format and mechanism of establishing and functioning of their platform. At the same time, there can be only one national platform in each country recognised by the Forum, and the national platform should adhere to the mission, vision, core values and principles of the Forum.

If there is no national platform, the Steering Committee encourages the development of a national platform as an expression of grassroots democratic participation (with an openness to all eligible applicants). Where similar bodies already exist, they may act as the national platform, provided they observe bottom-up democratic principles in their organisation and decision-making.

Since mid-2011, national platforms have existed in all six Partner countries.

Membership in the national platform is open to all eligible civil society organisations, and confers access to information and the ability to apply for the annual Forum event.

All national platforms should correspond to the following requirements:

- share the aims and objectives of the Forum and organise activities for their implementation at national level
- operate inclusively, in a non-discriminatory manner, showing openness towards all eligible civil society organisations in the country
- provide access to information to all members
- members not only have rights but also responsibilities
- a chair/facilitator/co-ordinator (or even Steering Committee) should be elected
- only organisations (not individuals) are eligible for national platform membership
- the national platform should engage with all four working group topics (five from 2012)

The composition and division of responsibilities within the national platform should correspond to the composition of the Forum as a whole (division into working groups and thematic sub-groups, etc.)

Co-ordination and synergy between the Forum Steering Committee and the national platform or Forum participants from the Partner country is provided by the Country Facilitator.

Country Facilitators

The Country Facilitator is the participant elected to this function by the delegation of the respective Partner country at the annual Forum event for the period of one year. His/Her major task is to co-ordinate the activities of the members of the country delegation in the framework of the Forum and to represent them in the Steering Committee.

EU Co-ordinators

Three representatives of EU civil society organisations and international networks are elected by the whole annual Forum. They are elected to represent EU civil society in the Forum, and their role is to strengthen advocacy and relations towards the EU institutions and member governments, to foster greater engagement of EU civil society organisations and networks in the Eastern Partnership process and the Partner countries, and to lobby for effective and sustainable support for civil society in the Partner countries through EU funding mechanisms. The three EU Co-ordinators are elected for a one-year term.

Steering Committee

To provide co-ordination of Forum work between the meetings of the Forum, there is a need to have an effective and representative Steering Committee. The Steering Committee is the permanent representative body, with a mandate from civil society in the Partner countries plus civil society representatives from the EU member states and representatives from the four thematic platforms. The 17 members (19 from 2012) of the Steering Committee are elected by the members of the Forum for a one-year term. The Steering Committee meets three to four times per year to guide the activities of the Forum, to plan ongoing engagement with EU and other counterparts, and to work towards creating a sustainable funding basis and a professional Secretariat to support the activities of the Forum as a whole.

The Steering Committee is structured as follows:

- Each working group elects two representatives, one person from the EU/international networks and one from Partner countries
- Each Partner country delegation at the Forum's annual meeting elects a representative to become the Country Facilitator
- Three EU Co-ordinators, elected by the whole annual Forum.

Responsibilities of the Steering Committee:

1. Serve as the governing Board of the Secretariat of the Forum, the legally registered entity established upon the decision of the Forum
2. Participation at thematic platform meetings, where possible
3. Participation in selection of the Forum's representatives for all panel/seminar meetings where the Forum is invited
4. Recognition and support of one national platform per Partner country
5. Regular communications with national platforms and working groups
6. Creation of concepts on Forum strategic development

7. Development of procedures to choose participants for the next annual Forum meeting
8. Regular sharing of information within the Forum and with the broader stakeholder community
9. Lobbying activities to raise awareness of the values of the Forum and promote its initiatives.

The Steering Committee has to be guided by the by-laws of the Forum, terms of reference and procedures for the Steering Committee, conflict of interest rules, and adequate funding to fulfil the expected tasks. The by-laws should spell out the overall expectations and tasks of the Forum. Reflecting that the Forum is a bottom-up approach to European policy making, the by-laws should be submitted for consideration and a vote of the whole Forum.

Secretariat

The effective functioning of the Forum and the Steering Committee requires a full-time Secretariat. The Steering Committee comprises volunteers who have demanding positions in their own organisations. To co-ordinate communication between the Steering Committee and Forum participants, to liaise with the European Commission, EEAS, and other EU institutions, and monitor EU-Eastern Partnership developments, to promote the results and activities of civil society projects, and to organise meetings of Forum representatives with EU officials, etc, the Secretariat will be established in Brussels. The Secretariat of the Forum will be established as a legal entity. The governing Board of the Secretariat of the Forum will be the Steering Committee. Board membership terminates upon the annual election of the new Steering Committee, whereupon the new members of the Steering Committee become members of the Board of the Secretariat of the Forum.

Core functions of the Forum Secretariat staff:

- manage legal reporting requirements and accounting, reporting to donors
- support Steering Committee in representing the Forum in official correspondence, and liaise with the European Commission, EEAS and others in preparation of meetings of Steering Committee and working groups
- monitor intergovernmental platform meetings, other expert meetings, and other developments at EU level (EU Council, Commission, EEAS, Parliament, EESC, bilateral meetings in Brussels, other Brussels stakeholders, e.g. civil society networks)
- support the sustainable development of the national platforms
- set up meetings with European Commission, EEAS and others for visiting Forum experts/delegations
- prepare advocacy calendars, maintain project database of civil society activities, and support presentation of projects at Forum events and to key EU stakeholders
- Monitor and update Forum official website www.eap-csf.eu in co-operation with Working Group Co-ordinators, Country Facilitators, and EU Co-ordinators.

Outputs:

- (i) Timely preparation of Steering Committee meetings and annual Forum event
- (ii) Regular monitoring of Eastern Partnership developments - thematic platforms, expert meetings, bilateral agreements, etc. - and liaison with the European Commission and EEAS to strengthen civil society inputs and participation
- (iii) Effective organisation of advocacy initiatives and accompanying meetings with key EU and Eastern Partnership stakeholders - Steering Committee meetings, expert presentations, civil society project presentations - and advocacy calendar (matching civil society projects with key calendar events)
- (iv) Promotion, and showcase, of civil society projects/programmes/initiatives, and work of national platforms and working groups
- (v) Timely presentation of Forum news on Forum website, and communications to Forum participants and external partners through regular electronic newsletters.

The Secretariat is an executive body that reports directly to the Steering Committee.