



Speech by Natalia Yerashevich, Director of the Secretariat of the Steering Committee of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, to Euronest Parliamentary Assembly on 28 May 2013 in Brussels.

Thank you very much for this opportunity to address the annual Euronest assembly. I am Natalia Yerashevich, the head of the Civil Society Forum Secretariat based here in Brussels. The establishment of the Secretariat of the Forum is a visible sign that the Forum, thanks to the support of the European Commission, is becoming more professional and more efficient.

The Civil Society Forum is a network of civil society organizations from 6 Eastern Partnership countries and EU member states. Though Forum holds its assemblies once a year, this year in October in Chisinau, the work of the National Platforms, Working Groups, and the Steering Committee is going on throughout the year. This year we are engaged on monitoring the Eastern Partnership Road Map and will be reporting on our conclusions before the Vilnius Summit in November where we hope to see a number of Association Agreements, including the one with Ukraine, signed or initialed.

This will open a new phase for the Eastern Partnership when the partner countries will have promised to implement new rules and laws which will approximate their legal, governing and social systems to that of the European Union member states.

This is why the Forum places such emphasis on election monitoring. This year we assessed the presidential elections in Armenia and will be taking a close look at the elections in Georgia and Azerbaijan. We are especially concerned about the threat to civil rights which is currently evolving in Azerbaijan.

Problematic elections will produce leaders who enjoy low prestige. The decisions they make and the reforms they implement will as a result not be well respected by the people. And the whole Eastern Partnership process will have less impact, than we would like to see.



The fight against corruption and for a free media are also very important for us and these are the themes of our two other flagship projects.

Euronest has an important role to play here. Interaction between deputies from the Eastern Partnership countries and the member states should strengthen the resolve of parliamentarians to bring meaningful democratic changes in the Eastern Partnership countries. And we as civil society representatives will be happy to cooperate with Euronest to achieve these goals.