



Strategy
of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum
for 2015-2017

Contents

Summary	2
Context.....	2
Strategic goals.....	3
Thematic priorities.....	6
Directions of activity	7
Annexes.....	10
ANNEX I. What is the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum?	10
ANNEX II. FORUM PARTICIPANTS	11
ANNEX III. FORUM STRUCTURE	12

Summary

This Strategy of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF) for 2015-2017 replaces the previous Concept paper for the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum “An Active Partner in Democratic Transition and European Integration”, which defined the mission and objectives for the period of 2012-2014. The Strategy is based on a wide process of consultation with the Working Groups of the Forum and its National Platforms in all six countries of the Eastern Partnership concerning the general priorities, advocacy tasks, and priorities of thematic groups both at the national level and at the level of the Forum.

The Strategy defines the mission, strategic goals, thematic priorities, and lines of activity of the Forum in the new political context. The Eastern Partnership faces a number of new challenges, including: decrease in ranking of the initiative on the European Union’s agenda, open challenges to regional security, crisis of relations between Russia and the EU, a widening gap between those EaP countries that have signed and those that have not signed the Association Agreements (AAs), the risks of “pragmatization” of the EU’s relations with the countries, which have not signed the AAs with the EU, the diminishing role of civil society and the weakening of the democracy and human rights dimension in the Eastern Partnership.

In such a situation, expressing its adherence to the mission, the Civil Society Forum of the Eastern Partnership will direct its actions to the strengthening of civil society’s institutional and political role in relations between the EU and the Eastern Partnership countries; it will promote the development and cooperation of the EaP CSF National Platforms, support implementation of sectoral reforms through the activities of the EaP CSF Working Groups and in general strengthen the monitoring and expert component in the activity of civil society organizations so as to provide their full-blown participation in the democratic transformations and European integration of the partner countries.

Context

The new Strategy will come into force at the point when the Eastern Partnership programme sees a drop in importance on the European Union’s agenda. There are several factors pointing to this direction. First of all, the European Union is increasingly pre-occupied with internal issues, such as the rise of euroscepticism and the far-right in several of its member states and a decline in democracy in some of the EU member states. Secondly, renewed escalation in the Middle East and Iraq is diverting the attention of the EU policy-makers from the Eastern Neighbourhood. Thirdly, of critical importance is the situation in the EU’s Southern Neighbourhood, which is posing a double-edged challenge to the EU: on the one hand, it must not divert its focus away from the east, and on the other should perhaps reinforce the importance of building on what has already been achieved in terms of Association Agreements being in place in the three EaP countries, and sustaining strong EU engagement. Fourthly, the crisis in Ukraine has made more prominent the differences between EU member states in their positions vis-à-vis the region and Russia, which hinders the EU’s ability to form a coherent policy towards EaP countries and Russia and keep the region high on the EU agenda. Fifthly, the departure of the founding fathers of the Eastern Partnership programme, Radoslaw Sikorski and Carl Bildt, from their respective positions as foreign ministers in Poland and Sweden may result in a lower priority given to the EU’s engagement with the region, especially if coupled with greater euroscepticism. Finally, increasing “pragmatism” of international relations in the post-cold war era may lead to a weakening of the democracy and human right dimension of the Eastern Partnership.

The following three major developments in the EaP region will have direct implications for the activities and priorities of the EaP CSF:

1. Open challenges to security in the EaP space and the problems related to it, including dismemberment of a country as a consequence of its European choice; safety of citizens and refugees from the affected regions; an energy crisis and other economic consequences stemming from the conflict. Moreover the focus on defense and hard security issues has led and will continue to lead to a re-orientation of resources and policy focus away from the reform process and thereby pose a direct challenge to democracy-building.
2. Russia's role in the region and relations with the EU (involvement in conflicts, using military bases and troops as a tool of manipulation, Eurasian Union, Customs Union and Energy Monopoly). The events in Ukraine have demonstrated a failure of existing EU bilateral institutions and policies of engagement and dialogue with Russia.
3. Signing of the AAs and DCFTAs with three EaP states (Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia), while a positive result of the EaP, it presents several risks, including a widening divide between signatory and non-signatory states in the EaP region; reducing the agenda of the Association Agreements to a "realist" logic of cooperation with non-signatory states (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus). A withdrawal of "difficult" issues such as human rights from the new bilateral agreements, as well as a diminished role for civil society in the EaP process in both signatory and non-signatory states, may lead to a worsening human rights situation in the region. In the latter case, this may be due to an 'oligarchisation' of government structures and some civil society activists joining the government, while in the former, it may be due to a decline in the prominence of the human rights agenda from bilateral relations with the EU and less attention being paid to the issue of democratization.

Mission

The Civil Society Forum of the Eastern Partnership is aimed at:

- promoting and strengthening the full-fledged and qualified participation of civil society in the management, control, and development of the Eastern Partnership initiative and the EU Eastern Neighborhood Policy in the direction of the democratic transformation and European integration of EaP countries, including the prospect of membership in the EU.

Strategic goals

Within the framework of the implementation of its mission, the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum establishes the following **strategic goals** for the period of 2015-2017:

1. Securing of concrete policy changes in the EU and the Partner countries on key policy areas across the four Eastern Partnership thematic platforms, generating measurable improvements in the quality of life, democratic participation, and human rights in the six Partner countries.

1. The establishment and strengthening of mechanisms of tripartite dialogue between the European Union, national governments and civil society of EaP countries so as to provide full-blown participation of civil society organizations in relations between the EU and EaP countries;
2. The strengthening of the institutional and political role of the EaP CSF, its National Platforms and Working Groups in relations between the European Union and the Eastern Partnership countries, in particular:
 - 2.1. The expansion of participation of the EaP CSF in dialogue aimed at revising the main objectives, structure, and mechanisms of the EaP initiative;
 - 2.2. The establishment of the EaP CSF, its National Platforms and Working Groups as institutional partners of national governments of EaP countries and the EU in the implementation of Association Agreements at all stages of the process (planning, implementation, and monitoring);
 - 2.3. The establishment of the EaP CSF and its National Platforms as key platforms for communication of the EU with civil societies of EaP countries;
 - 2.4. The specification and institutionalisation of the role of the EaP CSF and its National Platforms in relations of the European Union with the governments of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Belarus.
3. The strengthening of the institutional and political role of the EaP CSF and its National Platforms in the Eastern Partnership countries, in particular:
 - 3.1. Assistance for the establishment of National Platforms as platforms for public discussion concerning the questions of strategic development of the EaP countries;
 - 3.2. Assistance for the consolidation of civil and political groups supporting European values and the idea of European integration in EaP countries around National Platforms and the formation of a civil-political pole on their basis in order to introduce an alternative agenda into the official course of the governments of EaP countries;
 - 3.3. Development of EaP CSF and National Platforms with its Working Groups in EaP countries as reliable partners and strong players in the promotion of European integration, Association Agreements, and advantages of the Eastern Partnership;
 - 3.4. Creation of Civil Society Platforms within the framework of the Association Agreements with Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine on the basis of the National Platforms and Working Groups of the EaP CSF and creation of a network to exchange reform experiences between the National Platforms of Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine.
4. The development of the monitoring function of the EaP CSF, its Working Groups and its National Platforms, in particular the:
 - 4.1. Advancement of a specific institutional role for National Platforms and their thematic Working Groups in the monitoring of the EU's support to the governments of EaP countries, including budget support programs;
 - 4.2. Institutionalisation of the role for the EaP CSF in the course of monitoring the implementation of Association Agreements, as well as the implementation of democratic reforms, guarantees of human rights and other commitments of the governments of the partner countries and the EU within the framework of the Eastern Partnership;

4.3. Capacity building of EaP CSF Working Groups and National Platforms in the implementation of the monitoring function, including the monitoring of budgetary support, the monitoring of the performance of Association Agreements in concrete thematic spheres, the monitoring of elections, the monitoring of the execution of visa facilitation and visa liberalization agreements, as well as other commitments of the governments of the partner countries and the EU.

5. The provision of analytical, research, and expert support in the implementation of the EaP initiative, in particular the:

5.1. Development of research and expert activity aimed at the inventory and «mapping» of civil society's activity in EaP countries, including the definition of a circle of really independent civil society organizations, the evaluation of the level of interaction and dialogue between the governments of EaP countries and civil society organizations, the evaluation of the level of civil society's participation in the interaction of the governments of EaP countries and the EU;

5.2. Provision of research, analytical, and expert support to bring EaP countries closer to the EU space and to implement Association Agreements in various thematic spheres, including an econometric evaluation of Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area agreements.

6. The promotion and increase of the level of awareness of European values, European integration, the Eastern Partnership, Association Agreements, the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area and the questions connected with them, in particular:

6.1. Increasing popular awareness in the partner countries = of the Eastern Partnership initiative, Association Agreements, Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, possibilities of free movement of people and liberalization of the visa regime for citizens, the questions of European integration, advantages and challenges connected with them, as well as the obligations of the governments of the Eastern Partnership countries;

6.2. Increasing popular awareness in the partner countries of the Eurasian Economic Union and the Customs Union and their possible positive and negative effects to prevent possible manipulations of public opinion;

6.3. Promotion of European values (multinational culture, tolerance, non-discrimination, pluralism of opinions, democracy, etc.);

6.4. Provision of the preservation of priorities in the sphere of democratization, human rights, and rule of law in the way it is reflected in Association Agreements, including the draft version of the Association Agreement with Armenia, Declarations of the Eastern Partnership Summits, and other agreements of EaP countries with the EU.

7. The strengthening and development of horizontal cooperation between the six National Platforms and their Working Groups, as well as establishing a stronger cooperation between the country thematic Working Groups with regional Working Groups, in particular:

7.1. Assistance in the exchange of experiences and «best practices» between National Platforms and civil society organizations of the Eastern Partnership;

7.2. Creation of a network to exchange experiences on the reform process within EaP countries and the strengthening of cooperation of National Platforms with a focus on the thematic areas of their Working Groups and their operation in general

7.3. Strengthening the capacity of the regional Working Groups by linking them closer to the in-country Working Groups and facilitating the exchange of experience in their respective thematic areas

8. The improvement of the legal and political framework for the activity of civil society, including counterracting attempts to introduce in EaP countries the "standards" of the Eurasian integration project into national legislation and practice of acceptance of political decisions in relation to civil society, in particular:

8.1. All partner countries' signing of the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms – enshrining promotion and protection of human rights, freedoms of association, assembly, and speech, safeguards for independent media, and the right to participate in free and fair elections. The Charter should fix the main principles, the infringement of which by the EaP countries should lead to corresponding sanctions from the EU.

Thematic priorities

Within the framework of the thematic directions of the Eastern Partnership in 2015-2017, the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, its National Platforms and Working Groups establish the following **priorities for the development of regional cooperation and support to sectoral reforms** in the partner countries:

1. Working Group 1 "Democracy, Human Rights, Good Governance and Stability":
 - 1.1. Promotion of transparency/freedom of expression/freedom of information as a tool to fight corruption;
 - 1.2. Advancement in EaP countries of reforms of the judiciary, prosecution and law enforcement bodies.
 - 1.3. Advancement in EaP countries of questions of provision of good governance, transparency of decision-making and administrative reform;
 - 1.4. Provision in EaP countries of decent implementation of the decentralization strategy in the local self-governance system.
2. Working Group 2 "Economic Integration and Convergence with EU Policies":
 - 2.1. Promotion of general economic liberalisation and economic freedom;
 - 2.2. Promotion of advantages of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area with the EU;
 - 2.3. Development of the potential of civil society organizations in questions of the implementation of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement with the EU.
 - 2.4. Promotion of multilateral economic cooperation in the Eastern Partnership region, including the creation of the Free Trade Zone in EaP countries and the creation of a European Common Economic Area, DCFTA implementation in the EaP countries, taking into account challenges of trade with the EU and Russia, including questions of searching for a balance between Russia and the EU.

3. Working Group 3 “Environment, climate change and energy security”
 - 3.1. Promotion of energy security by setting ambitious targets to improve energy efficiency and develop renewable energy as well as to advocate for transparency and competition in reviewing national energy policy;
 - 3.2. Promotion of public participation in environmental decision-making through the introduction of an effective mechanism of environmental impact assessment in compliance with relevant EU standards and raising the effectiveness of public consultation procedures;
 - 3.3. Support to establish effective institutions of civic control over the impact of the implementation of Association Agreements with EaP countries on sustainable development and environment;
 - 3.4. Promotion of environmental policy integration in EaP countries by raising the importance of environmental issues in bilateral political dialogues and providing respective technical and advisory assistance.
4. Working Group 4 “Contacts Between People”
 - 4.1. Launch of regular monitoring of the implementation of the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of Cultural Diversity in the EaP countries;
 - 4.2. Creation of a collaboration framework for exchanging/debating new cultural policy standards, best practices, reform experiences/tools applied, etc. among civil society actors, public institutions, experts, policymakers from all EaP countries and EU member states and European/international institutions concerned;
 - 4.3. Support to establish an Independent Eastern Partnership Foundation to support, promote and give access to cross-border cooperation, networking, capacity building and participative cultural policy reform for sustainable cultural development across the region.
5. Working Group 5 “Social Policies and Social Dialogue”
 - 5.1. Promotion of mechanisms of public-private dialogue;
 - 5.2. Promotion of a transparent and inclusive European approach to social policy for the EaP governments and to monitor policy-making in this process.

Directions of activity

In order to implement the mission, strategic goals, and thematic priorities, the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum in 2015-2017 organises its activity in the following directions:

1. Strategic communication with EU institutions, the governments of the partner countries, and intergovernmental institutions.

The Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum - its Steering Committee and Secretariat - represents the interests of the annual General Assembly of the Civil Society Forum of the Eastern Partnership, its National Platforms and Working Groups in relations with EU institutions, EU Member States, the

governments of the partner countries, and international organizations that implement separate lines of activity within the framework of the Eastern Partnership. In particular, the Forum establishes and develops relations with:

- European Commission;
- European External Action Service (EEAS);
- European Parliament;
- Euronest Parliamentary Assembly;
- Ministries of Foreign Affairs of EU Member States;
- Constant Representatives in the EU from EU Member States;
- European Economic and Social Committee (EESC);
- Committee of Regions;
- EU delegations in EaP countries;
- Missions of EaP countries in the EU;
- Parliaments of EaP countries;
- Governments of EaP countries;
- Ministries, governmental departments, and other public authorities of EaP countries;
- Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE);
- Council of Europe;
- UN Development Program;
- other relevant structures.

2. Advocacy

The Civil Society Forum of the Eastern Partnership - its Steering Committee, Working Groups, National Platforms and Secretariat - carries out actions aimed at promoting civil society's interests, in particular:

- organises actions aimed at a concrete definition of the status and the institutional fixation of the role of civil society organizations, the EaP CSF and its National Platforms in relations between the EU and EaP countries;
- initiates and advances the idea of working out a respective "road map" of involving civil society in processes of cooperation within the framework of the Eastern Partnership, including the definition of mechanisms of participation of the EaP CSF, its Working Groups and its National Platforms in relations with EU institutions, EU delegations in EaP countries, the national governments of EaP countries, and international organizations at all levels of decision-making (planning, execution, monitoring);
- develops and initiates the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding by the European Commission, Parliaments and Governments of EaP countries and the National Platforms of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum;
- organises public actions representing joint projects of participants of the Forum, its Working Groups, and National Platforms, or those connected with EU summits/meetings concerning the topic of the Eastern Partnership or other events that have great value for partner countries;
- carries out effective lobbying of the purposeful use of EU resources towards consolidation of civil society organizations that are able and obliged to promote democratic transformations in partner countries;
- submissions 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 the democratic transition of the Partner countries.

- carries out other actions to ensure and sustain recognition of 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.

3. Public expertise and monitoring

The Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum organises expert support and monitoring of bi- and multilateral interaction within the framework of the Eastern Partnership, in particular:

- supports and develops the European Integration Index for the Eastern Partnership Countries (EaP Index);
- organises monitoring of the process, execution of obligations, and achievement of results within the framework of the Eastern Partnership, including monitoring of multilateral interaction, bilateral relations, execution of signed Association Agreements and other agreements within the framework of the Eastern Partnership;
- organises and supports the process of monitoring the EU's assistance programs for EaP countries, including the provision of transparency of the EU's budget support to the governments of the EaP countries;
- organises and supports initiatives aimed at expert support, monitoring and evaluation of rapprochement of the EaP countries with the EU in the thematic areas;
- organises and supports initiatives aimed at evaluating the development of civil society development in the EaP countries, the level of interaction of civil society organizations with the national governments of EaP countries and EU institutions, the inventory and «mapping» of civil society's activity in EaP countries, including the definition of a circle of really independent civil society organizations.

4. Support of the activity of National Platforms, Working Groups, and subgroups of the Civil Society Forum of the Eastern Partnership:

The Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum – its Steering Committee and Secretariat - offers comprehensive support to the activity of National Platforms, working groups, and subgroups of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, in particular through:

- implementation of regular communication with National Platforms and thematic working groups, providing them with the actual information on the activity and decisions of the Steering Committee and Secretariat.
- carrying-out of awareness-raising events and actions aimed at increasing the awareness of the values of the Forum, distribution of statements of the Forum and its initiatives, and presentation of flagman projects implemented by the Forum and/or the organizations participating in it to the key interested parties.
- maintaining connections with the European Commission, EEAS, EESC, and other EU institutions, the governments of the partner countries, with a view to carrying out the monitoring of development of the partnership between the EU and the Eastern partner countries and mutually informing on the latest developments (expert panels, bilateral

agreements) with working groups, subgroups, and National Platforms, or by the web-site or with the help of the Forum's bulletins.

- organization of meetings of representatives of the Forum with the European Commission, EEAS, and other officials.

- provision of participants of the Forum with information services on planned actions at the level of the partner countries and on possibilities of financing civil society organizations from the EU and from other sources.

5. The organization of the work of the annual Forum, working groups, the Steering Committee, and the Secretariat

The Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum - its Steering Committee and Secretariat - organises an annual General Assembly (annual Forum) as the supreme decision-making body, periodic meetings of the Steering Committee during the period between annual Forums, and meetings of the Forum's working groups and subgroups. The Secretariat of the Civil Society Forum organises its work on a constant basis.

6. Information distribution

The Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum recurrently distributes information among the population of EaP countries, representatives of civil society organizations, and other interested parties about the Eastern Partnership initiative, Association Agreements, the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, possibilities of free movement of people and visa regime liberalization for citizens, the questions of European integration, its advantages and challenges, and the obligations of the governments of EaP countries by:

- supporting the activity of the web-site, mass mailing of regular bulletins and other information materials of the Forum;

- organizing educational and awareness-raising campaigns so as to explain and help authorities, civil society organizations, private enterprises, and other relevant groups to adapt to the EU's standards of regulation, including new rules of trade, providing the analysis of their potential influence, the evaluation of possible losses and acquisitions;

- organising public hearings, multilateral dialogues, and informational actions concerning the consequences of the implementation of Association Agreements in various thematic spheres (free trade, environment, culture, etc.) with participation of various interested parties;

- organising other informational campaigns to promote European values, European integration, and advantages of the Eastern Partnership for the population of the partner countries.

Annexes

ANNEX I. 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, Steering Committee, and Secretariat) 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, the European Parliament and other EU institutions, and engages with Partner countries' governments, to:

- 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 five thematic working groups 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 a 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”.

ANNEX II. 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 applicant 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.

ANNEX III. FORUM STRUCTURE

The Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum is registered in Belgium as the Secretariat of the Steering Committee of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum; registration number 848169582. The statute of the Secretariat can be found here [http://www.eap-csf.eu/assets/files/Documents/StatutesCSF_Secretariatfeb2012_eng%20\(1\).pdf](http://www.eap-csf.eu/assets/files/Documents/StatutesCSF_Secretariatfeb2012_eng%20(1).pdf)

Annual Forum

The annual Forum is the highest decision-making body of the Forum, at which all 19 members of the Steering Committee 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, five working groups 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 Policy and Social Dialogue - to focus on social rights and social dialogue, labour market and other social and economic issues pertinent to the Eastern Partner countries.

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.

It is essential that Forum participants are continued to be invited to be active participants in the meetings of the expert panels and intergovernmental platform meetings. 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 become 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 an 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 Coordinators, 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.