

Brussels, 29 August 2014

**Jean-Claude Juncker, President-election, European Commission**

**Heads of Government, EU member states**

**Herman Van Rompuy, President, European Council**

**Ambassadors, Permanent Representations of EU member states**

**Proposals of Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum Steering Committee to Special meeting of the European Council, 30 August 2014:**

## **New European Commission needs a European Commissioner for Civil Society and Human Rights - EaP Civil Society Forum**

-----  
The Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum proposes<sup>1</sup>:

- **appointment of European Commissioner for Civil Society and Human Rights**
  - **unequivocal EU support for unity of Ukraine against Russian aggression**
  - **greater defence and security co-operation, including joint energy security policy, between EU and Partner countries**
  - **strong pressure from EU member states for immediate release of all political prisoners in Eastern Partner countries**
  - **a Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms to be signed by all Eastern Partner countries**
- 

Dear Heads of Government, Dear President of the European Council, Dear President-Elect of the European Commission, Dear Ambassadors,

We would like to commend the work undertaken by Commissioner Štefan Füle and High Representative Catherine Ashton, and European Union member states, for their commitment to human rights in the European Neighbourhood and for the fact that they have spoken up when these rights have been infringed. We believe that their legacy should be further strengthened in the new European Commission to take office on 1 November 2014 by **the institution of the office of a new European Commissioner for Civil Society and Human Rights** – to cover civil society and human rights within the EU and beyond, and to work hand in hand with the European Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy, and with the European External Action Service. The appointment in 2012 of the first EU Special Representative for Human Rights was a step in the right direction, and the Commissioner for Civil Society and Human Rights would place a top priority for the European Neighbourhood east and south at the heart of the Commission in a union whose very basis rests on a common commitment to democracy, human rights, and civil liberties.

---

<sup>1</sup> This statement builds on the proposals of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum Steering Committee to the Eastern Partnership ministerial meeting, 22 July 2014, and its statement on political prisoners in Azerbaijan, 6 August 2014

**We hope that the EU member states and EU Council will build on the sanctions imposed to date to send a clear, consistent and united signal to the Russian government that its military interference in Ukraine - its annexation of Crimea, arming of separatist forces and direct military incursions in eastern Ukraine - is illegal and unacceptable.** With the deaths of thousands of Ukrainian soldiers and civilians in the past three months, and the flight of thousands of Ukrainian civilians from Crimea and Eastern Ukraine, international humanitarian aid and political support is essential to stop the loss of human life and emerging refugee crisis on the EU's doorstep in Ukraine. Moreover, in recognition of the hard security issues at stake, we urge the EU to include the United States of America as a fourth partner to join Ukraine, the EU, and Russia in peace-building talks.

Regional security, stability and democracy should be given greater prominence as shared priorities for EU member states and the Partner countries. **The threat, in economic and security spheres, posed by Russia, should be addressed in a strategic, sustainable way, and should be supplemented by concerted efforts to counter one-sided Russian propaganda** through support for independent electronic media in local languages and for a new international broadcaster that should set new standards in reporting standards and news values in the Eastern Partnership region in both Russian and other major languages. The priority planned by the Latvian EU Council Presidency in 2015 for a focus on media freedom in the Eastern Partnership countries can give the issue the high attention it deserves.

The commitment expressed by both the EU and the Partner countries to democratic standards and respect for civil society is central to sustainable economic and social development. **It is unacceptable to have any political prisoners, and the persistence of political prisoners in Belarus, and the increasing number of political prisoners in Azerbaijan, including colleagues in the Civil Society Forum who have been imprisoned solely for speaking up for democratic standards and human rights, seriously undermines the prospects for European integration in the region.**

The Steering Committee calls on all Eastern Partner countries to sign a **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.**