

HOW CAN THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM STRENGTHEN ITS ADVOCACY FUNCTION?

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper has been commissioned by the Secretariat of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF). It seeks to analyse the advocacy record of the EaP CSF and its National Platforms at the EU level and in the EaP countries as well as offer practical recommendations on how the advocacy function of the Forum can be reinforced. The paper draws on the analysis of the Forum's documents (e.g. statements and resolutions, activity reports of the Steering Committee, National Platforms and Working Groups, notes of the Steering Committee meetings etc.), interviews with former and current members of the Steering Committee and coordination bodies of the National Platforms in the six EaP countries and recent studies on the EaP Civil Society Forum¹.

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¹ Hrant Kostanyan, *The Civil Society Forum of the Eastern Partnership: Four Years on Progress, Challenges and Prospects*, Report commissioned by the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, Brussels: Centre for European Policy Studies, January 2014.

1. INTRODUCTION: LOBBYING IN COALITION

The Forum is a large network with a fluid and very broad membership that brings together different kinds of civil society organisations (CSOs) ranging from NGOs and their networks, foundations and think tanks to business associations and trade unions from the six EaP countries and the EU member states. The structure of the Forum can be described as a network of networks. The EaP members are united in six National Platforms (NPs) which are networks of national organisations in the EaP countries. Most NPs have an open and inclusive membership policy, meaning that they welcome not only current members of the Forum, but in most cases all CSOs that stand upon European values or have even participated in the Forum annual assemblies (see Annex). They include capital-based think tanks and big professional NGOs, but also smaller and grass roots organisations from the provinces. Internally, the work of the Forum is structured in five Working Groups (WGs) convening EaP and EU organisations. The WGs deal with democracy and human rights; economic integration; environment and energy security; contacts between people and social dialogue. They are quite loose networks further divided in issue-specific subgroups (e.g. media freedom, election monitoring, visa facilitation, SME policy, youth, education). The Forum is governed by the Steering Committee which is a network itself consisting of up to 13 members (recently reduced from 19²) who also act as NP coordinators and WG coordinators elected for a one-year term. The EU organisations do not have a platform but they are represented in the Steering Committee by up to two EU coordinators elected by the plenary of the Forum from among the five EU WG co-coordinators. Since the reform of the Steering Committee endorsed by the sixth Forum's assembly in Batumi on 20-21 November 2014, the two EU coordinators have been specifically charged with an advocacy function, however, they are still to be elected.³

The diverse and extremely broad membership of the Forum is its biggest advantage for advocacy as it represents broad layers of pro-European civil society in the EaP region and the EU. But on the other hand, it is an extreme challenge for organisation of the Forum's advocacy as one of other functions of the Forum. While benefits of broad representation are the Forum's credibility, legitimacy and strong voice of civil society of the EaP and EU countries, the organisational costs of advocacy in such a big coalition are huge as it requires navigating across varied interests and needs of CSOs in six different countries with different political systems and environments for civil society and across the different thematic interests of CSOs which range from human rights, media freedom and fight against corruption to environment protection and energy security.

Advocacy is defined as one of key directions of the Forum's activity to implement its mission, namely to “promot[e] and strengthen 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”, as well as strategic goals and thematic priorities of the Forum.⁴

2 See EaP Civil Society Forum, 'Adopted Reform of Composition of Steering Committee and Governing Structure of EaP CSF that comes into force on 20 November 2014' http://eap-csf.eu/assets/files/Adopted_Reform_SC_eng.pdf

3 However, none of the EU coordinators was elected during the Forum in Batumi.

4 Strategy of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum for 2015-2017 endorsed at the sixth EaP CSF meeting in Batumi on 20-21 November 2014. See eap-csf.eu/assets/files/EaP-CSF-Strategy-2015-2017.pdf

The Forum's advocacy objectives are defined very broadly in the key documents of the Forum – the Concept Paper of 2012 and replacing it Strategy of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF) for 2015-2017 endorsed by the 6th Annual Assembly of the Forum in Batumi in November 2014. The Concept Paper envisaged that “[h]igh-level engagement with policymakers at the EU level, including behind-the-scenes advocacy, will be coordinated by the Steering Committee, with the support of the Secretariat”.⁵ High level advocacy events are to be organised “around presentation of joint projects of Forum participants, either linked to meetings of WGs or to EU summits/meetings focused on the EaP or policy areas of importance to the Partner countries”.⁶ The Forum is to lobby for the “channelling of EU resources towards the consolidation of CSOs, able and committed to promote democratic transition in the Partner countries”.⁷ The Forum is also to provide its “opinions, input and policy recommendations” to the EaP intergovernmental meetings on issues where it has “clear policy expertise, and/or the issue addressed is crucial to the roadmap for democratic transition for the Partner countries”.⁸ For that, the Forum will liaise 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 EaP, and to ensure that the Forum is accorded status as a key stakeholder in EU relations with the Partner countries”.⁹

The sections below will analyse the Forum's advocacy record from its initial stages until the present, at the EU level and in the EaP countries and the challenges which the Forum and its structures are facing on the way to more effective advocacy. Finally, the paper will outline main recommendations on how the advocacy function of the Forum can be strengthened.

2. LESSONS LEARNT FROM PREVIOUS ADVOCACY EFFORTS

One of the key advocacy successes of the Forum is related to its own establishment. While the idea of a Civil Society Forum within the EaP initially came from the European Commission, active members of the first Forum and other renowned civil society activists from EU countries successfully lobbied to ensure that the Forum functions on a permanent basis and has a Secretariat in Brussels to support its work and to obtain funding for the Forum activities beyond annual assemblies. The Steering Committee also advocated for the Forum to have a permanent participation status in the EaP multilateral bodies such as Multilateral Platforms. As a result, Forum members are invited not only to the Platform¹⁰ and expert panel meetings, but also to ministerial meetings, EURONEST gatherings and meetings with high-level EU policy-makers on the eve of the EaP summits. The Forum members use these opportunities to speak up about problems which civil society and democracy activists in the EaP

5 An Active Partner in Democratic Transition and European Integration: A Concept paper for the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, finalised by the Steering Committee on 29 January 2012.

6 Ibidem.

7 Ibidem.

8 Ibidem.

9 Ibidem.

10 The decision about the Forum's participation in platform meetings is taken by the Platform 1 on the annual basis.

countries are facing and channel civil society views on the course of reform in the EaP countries and relations with the EU.¹¹

The Forum effectively advocated for an increase of EU support to civil society actors in the Eastern neighbourhood. It was one of the strongest voices in favour of the EU's Neighbourhood Civil Society Facility introduced in 2011. The Forum also contributed to the design (insisting on the introduction of clear benchmarks) of the EU's Road Map for the Eastern Partnership Vilnius Summit in 2013¹² and conducted civil society monitoring of its implementation which involved all the NPs.

The Forum supported initiatives of its members which have subsequently become its own flagship projects such as the Eastern Partnership Media Freedom Index¹³ and Eastern Partnership Integration Index¹⁴ which are primarily monitoring tools, but also include an advocacy component.

The Secretariat also organises advocacy events on topical issues concerning the EaP and EU relations with the partner countries as well as raises awareness among policy-makers about political processes in the region. For example, in December 2013, an event assessing the post-Vilnius situation in the Eastern neighbourhood and the role of civil society was held at the European Parliament in Brussels and attended by 60 participants including EU policy-makers and civil society groups.¹⁵

Despite these achievements, much of the Forum's advocacy occurs on an *ad hoc* basis and depends on activism of the Steering Committee members. The Forum and its National Platforms regularly issue statements on crucial events affecting European integration, democracy and security in the EaP countries (e.g. on Russian military intervention in Ukraine, on imprisonments of Azeri civil society activists). The statements are published on the websites of the EaP CSF, the NPs and distributed widely to policy-makers in Brussels and in EaP governments. Written responses from EU institutions indicate that the statements are frequently acknowledged and attended to by the relevant recipients. However, it is difficult to gauge the extent of their impact as no follow up is made by the Forum, mainly due to the lack of such capacity among the governing structures of the Forum. The new position of Advocacy and Membership Officer at the Secretariat is promising in this regard.

Another illustration of Forum advocacy is campaigning to draw the attention of the European Union to Azerbaijan's repressive policies towards civil society. The Forum produced numerous statements on this matter, and its former Co-Chair in 2013 engaged in a letter writing campaign to members of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the European Parliament (EP) to protest against the human rights violations of Azerbaijan and non-fulfilment of its membership obligations in the Council of Europe. The Forum's advocacy contributed to the revision of the EP's initial decision not to send an observation mission to the 2013 presidential elections. Such a mission was deployed, though its

11 On the participation of the Forum in the multilateral framework see also Hrant Kostanyan, *The Civil Society Forum of the Eastern Partnership: Four Years on Progress, Challenges and Prospects*, Report commissioned by the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, Brussels: Centre for European Policy Studies, January 2014, p. 7

12 'The Eastern Partnership: A Roadmap to the autumn 2013 Summit', Joint Communication of the European Commission and High Representative Brussels, 15.5.2012 JOIN(2012) 13 final.

13 See <http://mediafreedomwatch.org>.

14 See <http://www.eap-index.eu>.

15 For more examples of Forum advocacy events, see 'Report on the activities of the Steering Committee and Secretariat of the EaP CSF November 2013- November 2014', available at http://eap-csf.eu/assets/files/Report_SC%202013-2014.pdf

observation record turned out controversial.¹⁶ The Forum members alerted the EU on the growing number of political prisoners in Azerbaijan. The Forum successfully nominated its member and former WG1 coordinator Anar Mammadli, Azeri democracy activist who was sentenced to five and half years in jail in May 2014, to the Václav Havel Award for Human Rights by the Council of Europe. The award was awarded to him despite Azerbaijan's chairmanship of the organisation during this period. While Azerbaijan's government has not ceased its persecution of civil society activists, "getting prizes is the only way to publicize the case of imprisonments", as one Forum member has pointed out.¹⁷

The advocacy record of the NPs of the EaP CSF varies greatly. First of all, it depends on the enabling environment for civil society and openness of the EaP governments to CSOs. In Georgia, Moldova and post-Maidan Ukraine, civil society members have access to policy-makers and their initiatives are often taken on board by the authorities. The relationship of pro-European CSOs with the Armenian government has deteriorated since the country decided to integrate with the Eurasian Union. Armenian CSOs fear that the government will tighten control over civil society and independent media.¹⁸ The governments of Azerbaijan and Belarus have hostile attitudes toward civil society and freedoms of association, expression and assembly are persistently violated. As noted by a member of the Azerbaijan NP, "In order to have any advocacy initiatives, we need to meet, to have space for that. Before we were meeting in the former NP coordinator's office, but now it is closed down and we do not have a place to meet. Civil society is paralysed. The main watchdog activists are either in jail, or have left the country, or their NGO bank accounts have been closed".¹⁹ Azerbaijan's government launched a crackdown on NGOs who are successful in advocacy: "Advocacy NGOs work with the Council of Europe. They pass them the lists of political prisoners. The government wants to stop this".²⁰ Moreover, due to the pressure on Azerbaijan NP members and incorporation of a number of GONGOs into the platform, advocacy in defence of civil society in the country has become even more difficult as demonstrated by the incident which occurred at photo exhibition on political repressions in Azerbaijan at the annual Forum in Batumi and the failure to pass a resolution on the situation in Azerbaijan at the same event.²¹

Secondly, the development of the NPs depends on activism of their chairs and members. With few exceptions, a common tendency is that the NPs are dominated by few strong NGOs and their leaders. On the one hand, it can be beneficial as their experience and activism can contribute to the NP's successes, but, on the other hand, it may limit the participation of other organisations (through the election procedures, but also due to the fact that other organisations see platforms as a continuation of the organisations of its active members or chairs) and paralyse the platform's work.

16 European Parliament. Election Observation Delegation to the Presidential Elections in Azerbaijan (9 October 2013), Report by Pino Arlacchi, Chair of the Delegation, http://www.europarl.europa.eu/intcoop/election_observation/missions/2009-2014/2013_10_09_azerbaijan.pdf; European Stability Initiative, "Disgraced. Azerbaijan and the End of Election Monitoring as We Know it", 5 November 2013 http://www.esiweb.org/pdf/esi_document_id_145.pdf.

17 Author's interview with representative of member of the Forum from the EU, 31 October 2014.

18 Author's interview with Armenia's National Platform Coordinator, 24 October 2014; Annual activities report of the Armenian National Platform October 2013-October 2014.

19 Author's interview with representative of the National Platform of Azerbaijan, 23 October 2014.

20 Ibidem.

21 A part of Azerbaijani NP members protested against an exhibition about political repressions in Azerbaijan organised by other members of the Forum. Moreover, the veto of the Azerbaijani NP blocked the adoption of a Forum resolution in defence of civil society in Azerbaijan. See 'Statement of the Steering Committee on incident at sixth EaP CSF annual assembly side-exhibition', Batumi, 21 November 2014, <http://eap-csf.eu/en/news-events/news/statement-of-the-steering-committee-on-incident-at-sixth-eap-csf-annual-assembly-side-exhibition1/>

In the case of Georgia, the most successful example of the NP's advocacy was the design and preparation of the EU Integration Communication and Information Strategy for 2014-2017 in cooperation with the Office of the State Minister for European & Euro-Atlantic Integration. The idea of the strategy came from the NP and its members were involved in drafting the strategy and its working programme. The strategy was adopted by the Government of Georgia on 6 September 2013 and serves as a blueprint for the Government's communication of benefits of European integration to the wider public.²² Moreover, as a result of participation of the NP members in the hearings of the parliamentary committees and executive agencies, a number of recommendations and legislative amendments proposed by the NP were taken into account by the government in the spheres of surveillance, media, visa liberalisation, labour law and youth employment.

In Ukraine, the National Platform was one of the actors advocating for and consistently stressing the need to sign the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement. It has been also involved in providing feedback to the ENP Country Progress Reports and the development and subsequent monitoring of the EaP Road Map. Ukrainian CSOs also led on development of the Eastern Partnership Integration Index which later became one of the flagship projects of the Forum. In Moldova, CSOs united in the NP focus on monitoring and advocacy of government's reform efforts.

In Belarus, the NP submitted its proposals to EU institutions on the development of the European Dialogue for Modernisation, an EU initiative for Belarus launched in 2012. However, as members of the NP note, they have achieved their goals only to a limited extent.²³ The NP also supported efforts of CSOs and education experts advocating for the postponement of Belarus' accession to the Bologna process as the country did not meet some of the fundamental criteria. "The function of the NP was a loudspeaker. As a result, they managed to get their issue heard and prepared an alternative report on the state of the Belarusian higher education which was included in the agenda of the Bologna ministerial conference in 2012, along with an official report of the Ministry of Education of Belarus", as NP coordinator describes.²⁴

The NPs of Armenia, Georgia and Moldova have launched public awareness campaigns in line with their advocacy objectives. In Armenia, the need to target broader public has become particularly relevant after the government decided to halt European integration and the key political parties chose not to challenge this choice. The members of the NP decided to refocus their advocacy to wider audience using independent media and reaching out to grass roots civil society and Armenian regions in order to better explain the benefits of European integration to the citizens. In Georgia, the NP organised a public concert in support of European integration in Tbilisi. The Moldova NP and a number of member organisations launched a public awareness campaign on European integration and the benefits of the EU-Moldova Association Agreement. The Platform members conducted over 30 public debates on two radio channels on issues ranging from economic development and the business environment, to democracy and human rights, the fight against corruption and justice reform etc. They

22 Author's interview with Georgian National Platform coordinator, 30 October 2014. See also the Office of the State Minister of Georgia on European & Euro-Atlantic Integration, "The Presentation of EU Integration Communication and Information Strategy of the Government of Georgia for the period of 2014-2017", 24 October 2014, <http://www.eu-nato.gov.ge/en/news/4917>

23 Author's interview with Belarus National Platform Coordinator, 31 October 2014.

24 Author's interview with Belarus National Platform Coordinator, 25 September 2013.

also organised tours to Moldovan municipalities, including Gagauzia, to speak to ordinary people about European integration.²⁵

It is often difficult to distinguish between advocacy conducted by the NPs and by their member organisations. In some cases, the Forum's ownership is visible, while in others, EaP CSOs perform advocacy on their own or in other civil society coalitions and platforms, either issue-specific or tailor-made to lobby certain reforms. For example, in Georgia the NP members carry out a big advocacy campaign against illegal surveillance and taping, but they do it outside the auspices of the National Platform. In Ukraine, many CSO members of the NP also work in the Reanimation Reform Package, a coalition of civil society activists, experts and journalists to speed up reforms in post-Maidan Ukraine. As a member of the Ukraine NP notes, the coordinators of the NP usually use their Forum affiliation when they are invited to attend events in the capacity of Forum members, while in other public activities, they use their organisational affiliation.²⁶

Moreover, there are different views on what the NPs should lobby for. Given a variety of CSO platforms in some EaP countries which advocate for reforms (e.g. Reanimation Reform Package in Ukraine) or are created for broader participation of civil society in policy making (e.g. National Participation Council in Moldova), the value of the NPs is seen in its communication channel with the EU institutions. Most interviewees agree that the role of the NPs is to carry out advocacy on issues related to the agenda of bilateral relations between the EU and the respective EaP country at both the EU and domestic arenas. They also see the importance of reaching out to EU institutions and member states in order to try to put pressure on their authorities via the EU in those areas in which the government does not deliver (so called "boomerang" pattern of advocacy²⁷) and push for policy outcomes that are stalled by the EU and its member states.

3. CHALLENGES TO EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY

Most challenges to a more strategic approach to the Forum's advocacy are rooted in the Forum structures, their composition and the operating environment, especially as far as advocacy in the EaP countries is concerned. While these internal and external challenges are outlined elsewhere²⁸, I focus on those which specifically relate to advocacy.

25 Author's interview with Moldova National Platform Coordinator, 27 October 2014; Moldovan National Platform: Annual Activity Report October 2013 - October 2014.

26 Author's interview with member of Ukraine NP, 29 October 2014.

27 It usually occurs when channels between domestic groups and their governments are blocked or hampered or where such channels are ineffective for resolving a conflict, then domestic groups reach out to international advocacy networks to influence their governments. See Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink. *Activists Beyond Borders. Advocacy Networking in International Politics*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998.

28 They are well described in Draft Strategy of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum for 2014-2016 distributed at the fifth EaP CSF meeting in Chisinau on 4-5 October 2013.

How can the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum strengthen its advocacy function?

The Forum was established in line with the EU's top-down logic of establishing multilateral institutions in the EaP rather than as a result of an interest among its members to advocate together for common interests.

At the same time, it is a bottom-up structure accountable to its members who elect their governing bodies and chairs. Thus, it is expected that the Forum members will be the owners and drivers of the Forum's advocacy efforts. However, this does not always happen in practice. CSOs participate in the Forum for many reasons, and though impact on policy making is a primary objective for a majority of them, it is not the only one.²⁹ The way the Forum was born is reflected in its structure and work. While the Forum's division in Working Groups largely mirrors the architecture of the EaP multilateral track, the EaP bilateral track has been more important for the EaP civil societies from the outset. The strength of the NPs and uneven activity of the WGs is the result of this.

The foremost challenges to the Forum's advocacy work:

Key advocacy objectives are not well defined

There is a lack of clarity as to what the strategic objectives for the Forum's advocacy are at the EU level, but also at the NP level. While annual assemblies adopt plans of action which are driven by the interests of the Working Groups and Subgroups, it is less clear what the Forum's advocacy priorities should be. The strategic documents of the Forum, such as the Concept Note of 2012 and Strategy of 2014 offer only a broad outline of such objectives.

In the Steering Committee and NPs, advocacy priorities tend to be formulated *ad hoc*, usually by the organisations chairing the Forum or its most active members. There seem to be different views among the NP members on what the NP (and the Forum) should advocate for. Most of the NPs seem to agree that the NPs should advocate on issues connected to bilateral relations between the EU and EaP countries as well as the EaP agenda more broadly. Given the recent developments in the EaP, particularly in the countries which did not conclude Association Agreements, NP representatives are puzzled by the uncertainty or lack of clear agenda of their country's relations with the EU. In the countries which concluded the Association Agreements, CSOs have shifted their focus on participation in and monitoring of their implementation.

Capacity for EU level advocacy is lacking

Where action in the EaP countries is concerned, advocacy strategies are mainly developed and implemented by CSOs chairing the NPs and the few active members. However, in the case of EU level advocacy of the Forum, the situation is more complicated. The four annual meetings of the Steering Committee are mainly focused on the Forum's operations and preparations of the annual assemblies. As a result, advocacy of the Steering Committee in Brussels largely depends on the activism of its members who often lack incentives, time or the capacity for active engagement.

²⁹ Kostanyan 2014, p. 5; See also Elżbieta Kaca, Jacek Kucharczyk and Agnieszka Łada, *Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum & how to improve it*, Warsaw: The Institute of Public Affairs, 2011, pp. 10-12.

How can the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum strengthen its advocacy function?

Whereas the NPs are the main pillars of the Forum and should serve as the main sources of inputs for EU-level advocacy as well as its main owners and beneficiaries, the reality is far from an ideal picture. The links between the NPs and the Secretariat largely depend on the Steering Committee members who represent the NPs. If activism of the Steering Committee members is low, it is very difficult to involve the NPs in an advocacy process. Moreover, within the NPs strong CSOs can conduct EU-level advocacy on their own (they have access to EU Delegations and EU member state embassies and often also to Brussels and other European capitals due to their own networks), while smaller organisations do not necessarily see EU-level advocacy as a necessary part of their work.

The Secretariat does not have enough capacity to facilitate advocacy initiatives of the Forum members, let alone design and lead advocacy initiatives of the Forum. Despite the fact that it is based in Brussels and can have access to policy-makers, its presence in the heart of the EU remains largely unexploited. A two-person staff of the Secretariat is burdened with administrative tasks and logistics. The introduction of a new staff member – Advocacy and Membership Officer – starting from 2015 can thus be seen as a positive development.

Advocacy in the EaP countries largely depends on environment for civil society and activism of the NP chairs and members

In some EaP countries, CSOs face existential threats or severe obstacles to their functioning, let alone advocacy (Azerbaijan, Belarus). In the EaP countries with a more favourable climate for civil society, the NPs, which operate as broad CSO networks, have difficulties in getting their members mobilised for advocacy on common issues, thus advocacy is designed and carried out by leading CSOs and often takes place outside the NP framework. In these countries (Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine), the NPs also compete with other civil society platforms which often gather the same CSOs to lobby the government and the division of labour between various civil society platforms sometimes requires more clarity. While it CSOs in these countries have influence on public policy, it is less clear where the added value of the NPs lies.

Furthermore, the NPs of the three EaP countries which signed Association Agreements with the EU, face potential competition with the Civil Society Platforms envisaged by these agreements to provide input and recommendations on the implementation process. There are different approaches and views on the role of the NPs in these platforms. While the Georgian NP will be the part of the new platform, the agreements with Ukraine and Moldova refer to “representatives of civil society”. Thus, there is a risk that the newly established bilateral civil society platforms will overlap with the NPs to a great extent.³⁰

³⁰ Fifteen members from the Ukrainian side of the EU-Ukraine Civil Society Platform were elected by the Constituent Assembly on 7 November 2014 in Kyiv. Fifteen working groups corresponding to the chapters of the Association Agreement and mostly overlapping with the WGs and sub-groups of the Forum were also created. The preparatory work was done by the Coordinating Committee which included members of the NP, but also other CSOs. However, the NP was not involved as an institution raising controversies. The situation seems to be a result of the position of the European Economic and Social Committee which has a very particular vision of the Civil Society Platform and prefers to draw it upon its own design and introduce quotas for trade unions, employers' associations and other civil society groups. Civil society organisations from the Ukrainian NP oppose this design as Ukraine does not have strong and independent trade unions and employers' associations. In Moldova and Georgia, discussions on the future composition of the Civil Society Platform are ongoing. To deal with the ambiguities of the Association Agreements, the 6th Annual Assembly of the EaP CSF in Batumi adopted a Statement on the Joint Principles for the Establishment of Civil Society Platforms between the European Union and Ukraine, Republic of Moldova, and Georgia. See [http://eap-csf.eu/assets/files/Batumi_Resolution_newplatforms\(3\).pdf](http://eap-csf.eu/assets/files/Batumi_Resolution_newplatforms(3).pdf)

The NP representatives also note that the importance of the EaP Multilateral track has decreased in the eyes of their governments and civil societies. They look forward to the revision and adaptation of the EaP to new geopolitical realities. At the same time, all the interviewees agree that there must be stronger advocacy at the EU level and more opportunities for CSOs in the EaP to communicate directly with EU policy makers in Brussels and EU member states.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Forum has an extensive record of advocacy in the EU and EaP countries level and there is a number of success stories for which the Forum deserves merit. However, there is also a widely shared perception that the potential of the Forum as an advocate of civil society interests in the EaP countries and the EU has not been fully exploited and that the Forum's brand may be underappreciated. One potential remedy is to strengthen the advocacy function of the Forum, not only in the EaP countries, but also in the EU. While the Forum is a complicated structure with many organs, there is a common view that its vision, hearing and speech in Brussels should be strengthened. While many respondents underline that a general reform of the Forum's structures is needed, the strengthening of advocacy should be one of goals of such reform. The current structure is not conducive to the Forum functioning as an effective international advocacy network (to a greater extent due to the difficulties of dealing with a fluid and extremely broad membership debilitating feeling of ownership, different perceptions of what the Forum is about and what it has to do among its members, different needs and interests of CSOs in the EaP and EU countries).

Such reform would require to revisit the relationship between the Forum members and the structures of the Forum. It may turn into a long-term process that demands a major rethinking of the EaP and the role of civil society within it. The Forum should also initiate its own review of the EaP state what it wishes to see as the EU policy towards EaP countries.

A time-effective strategy would require some restructuring, without fundamentally revisiting the Forum's institutions. It can be done via:

- advocacy priorities for EU-level action should be few, but broad enough to matter for all six EaP countries. Examples that have been frequently raised by the interviewees are: 1) security (from hard security and defence to soft security such as energy and environment); 2) human rights, democracy and good governance.
- strengthening the advocacy capacity of the Secretariat which will lead on advocacy in Brussels by engaging interested and active members of the Forum and the NPs and will facilitate EU-level advocacy and help to build the advocacy capacity of the NPs. There is a number of ways in which it can be done: by bringing necessary strategic planning and advocacy skills to the Secretariat, installing liaison officers for the NPs/WGs in the Secretariat, reinforcing the secretariats of the NPs to provide timely and quality input etc.

How can the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum strengthen its advocacy function?

- strengthening the capacity of the Steering Committee to ensure strategic guidance and oversight of the Forum's advocacy, including a definition and overview of key advocacy objectives, evaluation of progress etc. The Steering Committee members should be empowered to gather input and be advocates themselves. Some incentives should be introduced to compensate for this function which requires abandoning a part of the duties within their own organisations.
- at the NP level, the Forum should support NP initiatives if they require an EU-level advocacy component ("boomerang" pattern). It can be achieved by facilitating the advocacy of NPs in Brussels, but also designing joint campaigns or improving their advocacy capacity via trainings and information sharing.

ANNEX

TABLE. PARTICIPATION IN NATIONAL PLATFORMS

National Platform	Number of members	Membership principles
Armenia	197 members	Any Armenian civil society organization can become a member of Armenian National Platform by expressly stating its intention to join it.
Azerbaijan	52 full members	Organisations which have attended at least one of the Civil Society Forums are eligible to apply for full membership. Other organisations are also eligible to apply as associate members.
Belarus	69 members	Open to organisations which share goals and values of the EaP and signed the Memorandum of Cooperation within the Belarusian National Platform
Georgia	128 members	Open to organisations which share goals and values of the EaP National Platform; are registered in accordance to the Georgian legislation no later than 2 years before the submission of membership application to the EaP National Platform; have at least 1 year working experience in any field of at least one of out of four thematic platforms of the EaP; have relevant human resource for stable participation in the platform's activities.
Moldova	Around 100 addresses in the mailing list, out of which 35 organisations regularly participate in the NP meetings	Open to organisations which have ever participated in the Civil Society Forum annual meetings
Ukraine	185 members	Open to organisations who practically implement the priorities defined in the EaP programme documents, to develop policies or research on certain aspects of the EaP.

Source: Compilation by the author based on the data from National Platform Country Reports for 2013-2014, National Platform websites and interviews with NP coordinators