

13 May 2015

**Statement of the Steering Committee of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum  
on a So-called Criminal Investigation against Promo-LEX and Other Independent  
CSOs in Transnistria**

*The Steering Committee (SC) of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF) condemns the initiation of a so-called criminal investigation by de facto authorities against the human rights organisation Promo-LEX and other independent civil society organisations working in Transnistria on the grounds that their activities are directed against the de facto authorities of the region.*

This investigation is the latest in a series of attacks on civil society organisations by authorities, first in Russia, later in Azerbaijan and now in the Transnistrian region of Moldova. The human rights organisations funded from abroad are accused of working to undermine the authorities in these places.

These attacks are designed to restrict the activities of human rights defenders in the countries and regions where, more often than not, it is the authorities who fail to respect human rights in direct violation of their own constitutional commitments and obligations which they undertook when joining international organisations such as the Council of Europe.

The irony of the present attack on Promo-LEX, which is a member of the Civil Society Forum, is even greater because it is the authorities of this region that have been violating Moldovan law by maintaining an illegal regime in Tiraspol, which refuses to accept the authority of the Republic of Moldova.

Organisations like Promo-LEX work to defend human rights and such activities require courage, determination and willingness to endure harassment and even prison sentences, as it is also increasingly the case in other Eastern Partnership countries, for instance, Azerbaijan.

The Steering Committee rejects the claims that the defence of human rights could be used to attack authorities in any country. We all have a right and a duty to defend fundamental freedoms and human rights and it is the authorities in countries where these rights are under threat who should be held responsible for such violations, not human rights defenders.

The Steering Committee also rejects the charges brought against civil society organisations that receive funding from abroad, based on the claims that they are working to undermine the authorities.

The Steering Committee fully supports the recent call on the OSCE by 38 Moldovan organisations to intervene with the *de facto* authorities in Tiraspol and to secure guarantees for CSOs working in Transnistria, as well as the call on the Moldovan government to consider the attack on Promo-LEX and other organisations as cases in which criminal charges could be brought against the perpetrators.

We also call for this case to be put on the agenda of the negotiations in the 5+2 format of the Transnistrian conflict settlement and urge all people of good will to condemn the harassment of civil society organisations by the authorities in Tiraspol. We encourage the government of Moldova and *de facto* Transnistrian authorities, with the support of the international community, to cooperate when human rights are violated.