

## European Commissioner Štefan Füle in Chisinau: Civil Society is at the Core of Eastern Partnership

*October 5, 2013, Chisinau*

**„The role of civil society in promoting the idea of European integration in Eastern Partnership member-states is crucial. Each defender of human rights, each member of civil society is more important than 10 European Commissioners because they work with people and they are the ones to explain to people the meaning of European integration and its benefits”, said the European Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighborhood Policy Štefan Füle at the opening of the Civil Society Forum which started its works today in Chisinau.**

„Without civil society organizations, we would not have had the success and impact we have now in the Eastern Partnership. This is the branch which makes the connection between the efforts of authorities and society and is the driving force which moved the Eastern Partnership initiative forward”, said Štefan Füle.

Speaking about the Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius in November, Štefan Füle stressed its importance as the EU will for the first time try to apply two extremely efficient mechanisms in its relations with the countries from the East after enlargement– the Association Agreement and the creation of a Free Trade Area. „ This is a good possibility to redefine the relations with eastern neighbors”, said Commissioner Füle during the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum „Together for a European Future”.

„In addition, the Summit is important for the next steps to differentiate eastern partners. Each partner should decide on the level of involvement and identify its own European vector. As we advance on the differentiation in the EU member-states, there will be no difference in our treatment of the civil society from these states. And I promise you that EU’s support to civil society will be even stronger where they are under the pressure of authorities,” said Commissioner Füle with reference to the situation in Armenia and Belarus.

The European Commissioner for Enlargement noted that post-Vilnius stage will be more important than preparations for the summit. „ It will be a challenge both for authorities and civil society to work together to enhance the quality of relations with the EU and undertake reforms assumed by partner countries. A larger involvement of the civil society is needed in communication with people to present the full image of EU assistance to Eastern Partnership countries. The websites of the European Commission and EU Delegation should not be the only source of information about how the funds are spent. This can be done by the civil society as well- it is the only way to take the development of your country in your own hands and provide real information about the impact of our projects on people”, said Commissioner Štefan Füle.



The European official mentioned that the signing of the Association Agreement with Ukraine and the initiation of Association Agreements with the Republic of Moldova and Georgia means changing of game rules with these countries. The positive signals in achieving commitments for visa regime liberalization can bring „concrete results in 2014” to the Republic of Moldova.

In his speech at the Forum, Štefan Füle used the opportunity to praise again Moldovan wines and criticized Russia’s ban of the wine imports from the Republic of Moldova. „The fact that I feel very well, after having consumed Moldovan wine yesterday evening, is a safety sign for Rogozin that the Moldovan wines are of a high quality”, said Štefan Füle at the Forum „Together for a European Future”.

The 5th Annual Meeting of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum is organized with the support of the European Commission / the European External Action Service, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration and Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania, Government of Sweden, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, Transparency International Moldova and East- European Foundation.

