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УСХОДНЯГА ПАРТНЁРСТВА

## The main outcomes of the 5th meeting of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum: a view from Belarus

The document has been presented and discussed at the conference of the Belarusian National Platform "Future of the Civil Society Forum in the focus of the III Eastern Partnership Summit", Minsk, November 4, 2013

*This document is a reflexive attitude and subjective assessment of the main strengths and weaknesses of the recent fifth meeting of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum in Chisinau (October 4-5, 2013), made on the part of the Belarusian delegation participants.*

*We expect that the expression of such kind of feedback and positions will contribute to the more effective work of the Forum and its Steering Committee, as well as its Working Groups and National Platforms.*

*We also call upon our colleagues from the EU and the Eastern Partnership countries to publicly express their attitude towards the last meeting of the Forum, as well as their vision of what should be considered or changed in the Forum's work, for the most effective performance of its role of the concerned party of the Eastern Partnership that represents our countries' civil society.*

The fifth meeting in Chisinau (October 4-5, 2013) was an important moment in the development of the Civil Society Forum on the eve of the third Eastern Partnership Summit. A number of positive aspects should be noted that characterize the regular meeting of the EaP Civil Society Forum, namely:

- Broad and balanced representation across the sectors and forms of civil society organization;
- High level of representation of guests and interested parties;
- Wide opportunities for networking;
- High level of support and engagement in the activity of the Forum by the European Commissioner Stefan Fule;
- Presentation of a range of products created under the Forum for tracking and development of the Eastern Partnership processes (in the first place, presentation of monitoring of the EaP processes);
- The obvious and visible aspect of cooperation between some delegations on a number of issues (for example, joint resolution of Belarus and Azerbaijan on the situation with human rights).

However, along with important positive aspects of the meeting in Chisinau, we consider it important to draw attention to the major gaps and shortcomings in holding of the last meeting of the EaP Civil Society Forum:

**1. A clear message to the Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius failed to be formulated at the Forum in Chisinau.** This task was evident, and this was a priority for the fifth meeting of the Forum, but the Resolution adopted in the end of the Forum has been quite weak, it does not contain provisions that could advance the Eastern Partnership and strengthen the role of civil society in the initiative. This result raises questions about the role and the political importance of the Forum in the framework of the Eastern Partnership program as a whole.

**2. Organization of the electoral procedures at the Forum (partial discrepancy of election procedures to the described rules) got a lot of criticism from the participants, what reduced the legitimacy of the election to the Steering Committee, and has damaged the credibility of this element of life and activities of the Forum.** The return to the Steering Committee of the people who have recently\previously been in its composition which takes place more than a year, also carries a contradictory message to a wide range of participants, it highlights the dependence of the Forum from a limited number of people.

**3. Absence of preliminary work on the draft resolutions prepared by various members of the Forum led to the adoption of a large number of the documents similar in content and the erosion of the basic messages of the Forum.** In addition, poor organization of the process of discussion and adoption of resolutions at the meeting of the Forum itself drastically reduces status of the documents, deprives them of their instrumental value, and is bad for the image of the Forum.

**4. There was almost no space under the Forum for communication on the activity-related matters, including the issue of the strategic development of the Forum.** An attempt to discuss some aspects of the Forum's new draft strategy at an accelerated rate has been the most striking example, but not the only one. As a result of these oversights, the value of the Forum's work has substantially decreased.

**5. A number of important presentations that should be obligatory present in the program, were missed at the Forum:** in particular, a presentation of progress of the joint project on development of the Forum and its National platforms, a Forum's Secretariat report on its activities for the past year, a report on the activities of the Steering Committee, and others.

As promising areas that could have a positive impact on the change of the situation, we would like to note the following:

- **Undertaking the necessary efforts to return the EaP CSF its strategic and political role in the framework of the Eastern Partnership** in dialogue with other stakeholders, resisting the erosion of the content and the formalization of the CSOs in the structure of the Forum.

- **Increasing activity-based communication and intensification of communication between the Steering Committee and the National Platforms** of the Eastern Partnership, thus division

of responsibility between them for the further development of civil society engagement in the processes of the Eastern Partnership.

- **Activation of the role of National Platforms and Working Groups of the Forum in the development and decision-making processes**, including the periods between general meetings of the Forum. Development of horizontal linkages and bilateral relations between National Platforms, holding joint meetings of National Platforms.

- **Development of direct partnership of the Secretariat of the Forum with National Platforms**, holding joint events in Brussels with the participation of stakeholders and partners of the Eastern Partnership initiative.

- **Ensuring formation and launch of the European platform of civil society organizations** in the coming year as lacking structure in the composition of the EaP Civil Society Forum, able to provide regular and intensive communication between CSOs of the EU on the current agenda, coordinating their actions in period between meetings of the Forum and its Working Groups.

- **Creating a shared agenda of the Forum for the coming year, providing public access to this agenda**, creating a calendar of events, schedules of work of the European Commission that require a response or intervention by the Forum. This will give the opportunity to be pro-active in activities, to ensure closer cooperation with National Platforms of different countries, as well as with experts.

Signatures:

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