



## EASTERN PARTNERSHIP Civil Society Forum

Statement of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum Steering Committee, 28 September 2012

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28 September 2012

### Belarus parliamentary elections were neither free nor fair, says Civil Society Forum steering committee: 'Free and fair elections are key to government legitimacy'

The Belarusian parliamentary election held on 23 September 2012 was by all accounts neither free nor fair. Yet again the Belarusian authorities have squandered an opportunity to give their government legitimacy. They have overseen an election that did not allow the country's citizens to choose their own government. Instead, restrictions on nominations of candidates, the low transparency in the work of the election commissions, and the lack of debate in the media threaten to see a new parliament that is de facto appointed by the authorities themselves.

The Steering Committee of the Civil Society Forum of the Eastern Partnership believes that legitimacy that derives from free and fair elections is the foundation of government. Such legitimacy is crucial in the Eastern Partnership initiative of the European Union, which aims to promote political and economic reforms bringing the partner countries closer to EU values and standards of living.

A parliament that is not elected but appointed through mechanisms that deprive the citizens of their right to choose their own government is fundamentally flawed. Such a parliament fails to command the respect possessed by freely elected assemblies. Such a parliament is also unable to deliver on the political and economic reforms to which Belarus and the other Eastern Partnership countries committed themselves when they joined the Eastern Partnership. Without free and fair elections, the Eastern Partnership can never fulfil the promise of change to which the Civil Society Forum is also committed.

This is why the Civil Society Forum is currently organising an "Election Task Force" as an important part of the Forum's activities to support free and fair elections along with the special attention the Forum is paying to the issue of media freedom and the fight against corruption.

Parliamentary elections in Armenia in May 2012 with the use of government-controlled agencies to build support for the country's rulers fell short of accepted electoral standards. The recent election in



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Belarus has shown little sign of improvement on previous elections. The CSF will be closely observing the 2012 parliamentary elections in Georgia and in Ukraine. For without free and fair elections in the Eastern Partnership countries the reform process is inherently unstable. The lack of “elections with integrity” threatens the internal security of the partner countries and the EU’s eastern neighbourhood.

**Steering Committee, Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum**