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Ministers of Foreign Affairs, EU member states**

Brussels, 23 July 2012

***Civil Society is Ready to Monitor Implementation of Roadmap, and invites
Eastern Partner governments and EU Delegations to 2012 Civil Society
Forum in Stockholm:***

**Proposals of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum Steering Committee to the Eastern
Partnership ministerial meeting, 23 July 2012**

Dear High Representative, Dear Commissioner, Dear Ministers,

The Steering Committee of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF) welcomes the increased engagement with both EU and Eastern Partnership governments in the governmental platforms and ministerial meetings through the extension of permanent participant status for the CSF.

We also very much welcome the inclusion in the *Eastern Partnership: A Roadmap to the autumn 2013 Summit* of recommendations from the CSF, in particular the EU's stated commitment to strengthening support to civil society actors, and the role of the CSF national platforms in monitoring implementation of the roadmap. Civil society actors are well-placed to take up the role as independent watchdogs, monitoring and evaluating the effective use of resources, and observance and strengthening of democratic reforms, human rights, and the rule of law.

The commitment to the roadmap by both the EU and the partner governments is particularly welcome, as we face persistent challenges in meeting democratic standards and human rights commitments in the partner countries. Some political prisoners have been released in Azerbaijan and Belarus, but it is not acceptable to have any political prisoners in the Eastern Partnership countries, and we call for the

unconditional release of all. On 26 June 2012, the Council of Europe called for resolution of the cases of more than 80 political prisoners in Azerbaijan alone, and we must not forget that next week marks the anniversary of the imprisonment of Ales Bialiatski, a courageous human rights defender in Belarus.

The Civil Society Forum will continue to mobilise national and international awareness of both progress and shortcomings in partner countries, and at the same time we are committed to playing a full part, engaging with governments and with EU delegations, particularly in three flagship areas: monitoring of elections, freedom of the media, and tackling corruption.

Free and fair, democratic and pluralistic elections held in accordance with European standards are a cornerstone of the success of the Eastern Partnership process. The CSF is planning to undertake election observation missions in the forthcoming parliamentary elections taking place in 2012 in Belarus, Georgia, and Ukraine.

The CSF is ready to engage with both partner governments and with the European Commission and European External Action Service (EEAS) in these key areas, and also in others, such as visa liberalisation, Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area Agreements, and Association Agreements, where dialogue with civil society should be conducted by partner governments and the relevant European Commissioners.

We welcome the increased engagement of EU delegations, and in some partner countries the establishment of ties between the CSF national platform and the Euronest delegation, and would like to see the establishment of trilateral fora for regular consultations with the respective partner government, the EU delegation, and representatives of the national platforms of the CSF. These fora should consider, assess, and monitor implementation of, policy developments in relations between the EU and the respective partner countries, and public consultations should be held to reach out to all sectors of civil society and the wider public. The structured dialogue now being launched by the EU delegations is very welcome in this respect, and we support the promotion of regular meetings of representatives of both EU civil society and civil society of the partner countries as envisaged in the Association Agreements under negotiation.

We look forward to welcoming high-level representatives of the six Eastern Partner countries to join with Commissioner Štefan Füle and the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden, Carl Bildt, in engaging with us by accepting our invitation to the Civil Society Forum in Stockholm on 29-30 November 2012, where we will prepare a debate to assess the first six months of the roadmap, as well as in-depth sessions on elections, media freedom, and the fight against corruption. We would also be delighted if the heads of the EU Delegations in the six partner countries were to attend.

We welcome the Council decision to establish the European Endowment for Democracy to support independent civil society actors. In addition, we look forward to the further development of grant mechanisms through the new neighbourhood civil society facility for independent watchdog, analysis and monitoring activities - including monitoring and evaluation of use of ENPI (European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument) and CIB (Comprehensive Institutional Building Programmes) funds allocated by the European Commission to Eastern Partner governments.

The bilateral agreements between the EU and the partner countries should be subject to clear, publicly available timetables for each stage in the process - so that civil society can exercise an effective watchdog function of monitoring the procedure of first policymaking, and then policy implementation. Access to policy documents should be made fully public at key stages of the decision-making process to ensure adequate time is provided for feedback from civil society actors and the wider public.

As stated in the Joint Communication on the Roadmap, "civil society input is also crucial in terms of monitoring of the implementation of the Partnership and the pace of reforms in partner countries through its yearly assessment reports".

The CSF intends to evaluate the achievements in a European Integration Scorecard (building on the work by participants in the CSF in producing a European integration index). Qualitative and quantitative indicators will be developed for all six Eastern Partner countries. The results could help shape partner country policies and EU funding decisions, building on the "more for more" principle laid out in the review of the European Neighbourhood Policy in June 2011.

The progress on visa facilitation agreements with Armenia and Azerbaijan are very welcome, along with the launch of the visa dialogue with Georgia and the action plans towards visa liberalisation for Moldova and Ukraine. In line with the underlying motif of the Eastern Partnership to bring the peoples of the six countries closer to the EU, we would ask the Council to give high priority to the waiving of visa fees as soon as a visa facilitation and readmission agreement is in place (already the case in three partner countries), and to the introduction of online application procedures for Schengen visas.

Yours sincerely

on behalf of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum Steering Committee



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