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Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum & how to improve it

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The aim of the present paper is to reflect on the experience of the functioning of the EaP Civil Society Forum to date. Perhaps more importantly, the authors would like to propose a number of recommendations, which (in our view) would make the Forum an even more effective instrument for civil society to contribute and shape the agenda of the Eastern Partnership. Our assessment of the Forum's activities as well as ideas on how to improve it are based on the results of a survey we have conducted among the participants of the two Forum meetings in Brussels and in Berlin. The direct involvement of the IPA in a number of Forum activities has been equally important, including drafting recommendations before the first meeting in Brussels, participation in both general meetings of the Forum and participation in the activities of working groups and sub-groups of the Forum. The IPA has also been active in encouraging a greater involvement in the Forum of some of our long-term partners through a number of civil society networks, especially through the Policy Association for an Open Society (PASOS) and the European Partnership for Democracy. Last but not least, our partnership with Heinrich Böll Stiftung has been crucial for the development of the present paper and the research which informs it. This intensive and extensive experience with the Forum has encouraged us to present some ideas of how this valuable initiative could be developed in order to more fully realise its potential. While acknowledging the contribution of our partners as well as all the respondents of our survey to the ideas presented in this paper, the authors accept full responsibility for all the opinions expressed in it.

STATE OF PLAY

The overall assessment of the Forum, both of its concept and its functioning, is positive. At the same time a number of challenges related to the Forum's institutional set up and working methods need to be addressed.

The most positive impact of the Forum work until now can be witnessed on the national level in EaP countries. National platforms have been created in all EaP countries. The Forum has resulted in a more intense exchange of information and more frequent development of common positions among different civil society organisations. This potential should not be wasted.

The Forum helps its participants, both individuals and organisations, to better understand the Eastern Partnership initiative. Thus it fulfils an important educational role in respect to the EaP. On the other hand, this demonstrates that there is still a deficit of information on the EaP among third sector organisations. This information deficit needs to be addressed, especially in view of the fact that civil society generally supports EaP developments. However, the Forum is often perceived as burdened with too many functions and expectations. These include the need to give civil society greater opportunities in the EaP agenda. This means that a way must be found to inform the participants of EaP developments on an ongoing basis without neglecting other crucial objectives, such as advocacy.

The Forum has also been successful in enhancing the networking among EU and EaP organisations. Nevertheless, it has not been a platform for CSOs to develop concrete projects. The question is whether the Forum could become an active platform for project networking and, if so, what should be done to achieve that.

A more general question concerns the primary goals of the Forum. The need of developing a Forum strategy is generally accepted by all stakeholders. The impact on decision makers is often declared as a priority for many participating organisations.

At the same time it should be noted that the Forum's participants (and especially CSOs which have chosen not to be involved) are frequently sceptical regarding the Forum's real influence and importance in the entire Eastern Partnership process. According to such opinions, the Forum has not been able to fulfil its role to enrich the government track of the EaP. Its impact on government platforms is below expectations. The reasons for this lie mainly outside of the Forum. The very restricted access to information on government platform activities as well as limited access for the Forum's representatives to government meetings limits significantly the Forum's opportunities to exercise any influence.

For these reasons the Forum needs to develop its advocacy potential. A number of ideas for increasing the Forum's impact have so far been discussed. These include access to information about the work of government platforms, participation in

EaP government meetings and others. Above all, the European Commission is expected to play a more active role in mediating between the Forum and the government platforms. Other relevant stakeholders and potential allies include the European Parliament and the European Economic and Social Committee.

A crucial element for increasing the Forum's impact is the strengthening of the national platforms' capacity. To this end, the financial resources for platform work should be identified and their pool of expertise needs to be increased.

The Forum's organisational structures draw critical attention and there is a general consensus that they require (in some aspects) significant changes and improvement. In particular, the working method of subgroups needs to be more result oriented and the role of moderators should be strengthened. Major criticism has been raised in relation to the efficiency of the communication practices within the Forum. On the other hand, there seems to be an overall approval for the current rules and procedures of selecting the Forum participants (rotation) as well as electing the steering committee members. Nevertheless, critics of the current system of rotation rightly point out that membership rules should not eliminate active and strongly contributing organisations, especially since there are relatively few EU based organisations thus far involved in the Forum, so excluding them could prove counter-productive. In general, the Forum needs to remain open to new participants but avoid the indiscriminate elimination of its most valuable contributors.

Finally, the fact that the next meeting of the Forum will take place in the city of Poznan under the auspices of the Polish presidency of the EU Council creates an especially high level of expectations among the stakeholders, in view of the fact that Poland has been one of the key actors in launching the EaP initiative and its development is one of the priorities of the Presidency. This year's meeting of the Forum has already been extended to three days and a number of Polish NGOs will coordinate additional activity. This creates an opportunity for carrying through major improvements to enhance the Future impact and functioning of the Forum.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to strengthen the Forum as an instrument of civil society's representative "voice" on EaP developments, several crucial steps in terms of advocacy and awareness raising as well as organisational structure and procedures can be envisaged. Below we suggest a number of ideas as to how such an improvement can be achieved. A special section is devoted to activities during the Polish Presidency.

Advocacy

- **The representatives of the Forum should be given a "permanent participant" status in the official platform meetings, thematic working groups and expert panels**, with prior access to draft policy documents. Such a policy is currently backed by the EC, member states and the EaP countries with the exception of Belarus. This would make it possible for the Forum to present its recommendations during the official part of the meetings and to stay up-to-date with the on-going EaP process. At the same time, the Forum members should work on developing good contacts with officials participating in lower level EaP meetings.
- In terms of financial resources allocation and the level of political commitments the bilateral track, and not the multilateral platform meetings, is still the most important for EaP. For this reason advocacy activities should be linked to both bilateral and multilateral tracks. National platforms in the EaP countries as well as EU-based NGOs should conduct advocacy on the national level.
- **The European Commission** (both the cabinet of Stefan Fuelle as well as sectoral DGs), **European External Action Service and the member states should be the main targets of the Forum advocacy efforts**. This task should be carried out by the Steering Committee, which would in turn require that its capacity in this area be strengthened.
- The Forum should **establish a permanent sub-group** (possibly as a part of the EaP CSF strategic thinking) **to coordinate advocacy on the EU financial instruments directed to civil society organisations** (i.e., EIDHR, Non state actors and local governments, Civil Society Facility). On the eve of the Multiannual Financial Framework negotiations, it is crucial to develop and present the Forum's position in this respect. In addition, this sub-group should propose a flagship initiative on civil society issues in the scope of the Eastern Partnership.
- The Forum should **establish close relationships with Members of the European Parliament, in particular** the Committee on Foreign Affairs, delegations to the EaP countries, the subcommittee for human rights, but also the MEPs responsible for energy issues, migration, etc. For this

purpose, the Steering Committee should map the MEP's interests and agendas in the areas of relevance for the Forum and the SC should also contact the Forum's participants who could advocate on Forum's behalf with their national MEPs (in the case of EU-NGOs) or with MEPs from delegations to the EaP countries (in case of EaP-NGOs).

- **Relations with the newly created Euronest¹ should be also established** and a representative of the Forum should participate in Euronest meetings. The Forum should advocate for its inclusion in the list of invited parties and be subscribed in the statute of Euronest. At the moment only the Committee on Social Affairs, Education, Culture and Civil Society of Euronest is obliged to cooperate with the Forum. However, no specific regulations have been created so far.
- The Forum should further **develop its contacts with European civil society networks**, especially those based in Brussels. This would enhance the effectiveness of its advocacy efforts and ensure the consistency of the postulates among EU and EaP CSOs.
- **Cooperation between NGOs from the EU and EaP countries should be further enhanced.** Common projects of EU and EaP organisations should be supported, e.g., through the Civil Society Facility.
- **The EU communication policy** should be **enhanced** on the aspects of EaP. A good practice would be to organise calls for proposals for awareness raising campaigns similar to those for enlarging countries. Cooperation between an EU and EaP organisation should be an obligatory grant condition.

Organisation of the Forum

- **Establishing a permanent Secretariat based in Brussels** is necessary to enhance the work of the Steering Committee (especially should it undertake new tasks, as suggested above). The Permanent Secretariat would take over the communication tasks and assist in contacts between the Forum and EU-institutions. The key tasks of the Secretariat should be: organising the annual Forum meetings and meetings of working groups and sub-groups during the year; ensuring communication between the Forum's participants and managing of the Forum's website; monitoring the activities of the EU-institutions relevant for the Forum; promoting the Forum and its activities in Brussels; facilitating contacts between the Steering Committee and EU member states as well as other possible donors to raise additional funds for the Forum's activities.

¹ Euronest is a multilateral Parliamentary Assembly consisting of 110 deputies: 60 deputies from the European Parliament and 10 deputies from each of EaP countries except Belarus, whose parliament is not recognised by the European Parliament.

- As regards the composition of the Forum, a **balance should exist between think tanks and grassroots organisations**. If the CSF would like to play a monitoring role and develop recommendations, a strong representation of think tanks needs to be ensured.
- **The general division into four thematic working groups in parallel to the governmental platforms should be maintained. However, the functioning of WG1 should be improved** (e.g., through shortened plenary meetings, and more time and resources to be devoted to subgroups). Sub-group coordinators and deputy coordinators could receive more recognition and a more formal role vis-à-vis the SC as well as European institutions and national administrations.
- **The working method of sub-groups** should be focused on arriving at concrete results, i.e., discussing common projects and developing concrete project proposals for funding; reacting to current challenges with position papers, resolutions and open letters; promoting the Forum's position in the media and at public events; other advocacy activities.
- Each of the sub-groups should prepare an annual working plan indicating the concrete plans for the recommendation the subgroup is working on and its advocacy strategy.
- **At the end of the Forum a final statement should be adopted and disseminated**. This could raise media and policy maker interest in the Forum and help it gain influence. A draft of such statement should be prepared in advance by the Secretariat and the Steering Committee and distributed to all participants, so that they could comment on it and discuss it during Forum meetings.
- **Communication between Forum participants and the Steering Committee** should be improved. Firstly, the website should be updated regularly with more concrete information about the EaP (also updated minutes from SC meetings and other useful information on Forum actions). It should include links to other useful websites on EaP issues and be widely promoted. Secondly, a CSF newsletter should be sent out at least once a month, if not more frequently. Thirdly, information about preparations for the Forum meetings (such as the draft agenda) should be sent out as early as possible.
- **Travel and accommodation costs of the EU-NGOs should be covered** as the EaP costs are covered now. This would encourage a larger number of EU organisations to apply for participation in the Forum.
- **The newly created national platforms should be strengthened in their operational capacity**. Firstly, statutory rules for platforms' work should

be established as currently they act without any legal base. Such status would enable them to acquire funding from external donors. Secondly, additional funding should be actively sought in order to further develop these platforms. The newly created Civil Society Facility should be explored in this respect. Thirdly, the EC should stay in close contact with the platforms by actively involving them in the consultation process on EaP programming documents (i.e., Country Strategy Papers, Action Plans). Such action would send an important message to the national governments that the recognition of civil society is crucial for democracy.

The Forum and the Polish Presidency Agenda

- The Polish Presidency as well as Polish NGOs should become **engaged in raising awareness of the EaP among EU-societies.**
- The **visibility of the Forum during EaP related events**, especially the EaP Summit, **should be enhanced.** In working plans of each sub-group the Forum participants should propose how the Forum recommendations can fit in their organisation's activities, i.e., conferences, workshops, advocacy.
- **During the summit in Warsaw the representatives of the Steering Committee should have the possibility to attend the meetings** and to meet off-the-record with Commissioner S. Fuelle and High Representative C. Ashton. In addition a side event focused on civil society developments in the EaP countries should be organised together with the summit.
- **The Forum in Poznań in 2011 should be supported not only by co-financing it, but also by ensuring that the prepared recommendations will reach the appropriate people in EU-institutions.** Furthermore the Polish foreign minister (as well as Commissioner Fuelle) should attend the Forum. It is important, however, that they not only give a speech, but listen to the participants' recommendations.
- **The proposals for organisational changes should be prepared by the Steering committee well ahead of the Poznan meeting** so that they could be thoroughly discussed and adopted during the Forum. Sufficient time should be reserved in the Forum agenda for a discussion of these changes.

THE CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM IN THE OPINION OF ITS PARTICIPANTS - SURVEY RESULTS

The Eastern Partnership (EaP) gave, theoretically at least, unusual importance to the voice of civil society. The Prague Declaration, signed on 7th of May 2009, set the basis for the creation of the EaP Civil Society Forum – the representative body gathering the civil society organisations (CSOs) from the EU and EaP countries. The detailed concept of the Forum’s functioning was designed by the European Commission in the Concept Paper.² According to this document, in order to promote contacts among CSOs and facilitate their dialogue with the public, the **Forum should contribute to the objectives of the Eastern Partnership primarily by enriching the governmental track of the EaP by providing a civil society perspective.** Notably, this should be achieved through “the regular provision of recommendations (input/evaluation/monitoring of the work of the EaP), including input in the work of ministerial meetings and multilateral platforms”. Other areas of the work of the Forum mentioned in this document were: the exchange of experience and knowledge; facilitating relations with EU institutions; strengthening of national civil societies’ and CSOs’ dialogues with authorities in the EaP partner countries and strengthening the institutional capacity building role of CSOs.

The EaP’s Civil Society Forum was convened twice – in Brussels in 2009 and in Berlin in 2010. It already has organisational structures and established work procedures. Once a year a plenary meeting of the Forum is held. The work is divided into four thematic platforms (Democracy, good governance, stability, border management; Economic integration, convergence with EU policies; Energy, climate change, the environment; and Contacts between people). Furthermore, meetings of the Steering Committee are organised four times per year, and the working groups once per year. In 2010 a website for the CSF was launched. More importantly, the Forum has led to the creation of national NGO platforms in each of the EaP countries.

The European Commission considers the Forum a successful instrument. The concept of the Forum was afterwards copied in the new proposals concerning the southern dimension of European Neighbourhood Policy. However, after two years of its existence the time has come to reflect on its functioning and effectiveness. More importantly, an assessment of to what extent the preliminary Forum goals presented by the European Commission have been achieved is in order.

This report tries to find these answers on the basis of the opinions of the Forum participants. In order to collect such opinions an anonymous Internet questionnaire was sent to the 389 Berlin and Brussels Forum participants in the period between February and March 2011.³ Sixty-four responses were collected,

² Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum Concept paper, http://eeas.europa.eu/eastern/civil_society/docs/concept_en.pdf

³ The questionnaire was constructed so, that it extends the issues already covered by the evaluation questionnaire prepared by the Steering Committee for the CSF 2010 and the conclusions from the 1st Steering Committee Report 2010.

which amounts to about 16% of the entire group. More than a half (58%) of the organisations that completed the questionnaire participated in the Forums both in Brussels and in Berlin, thus ensuring a wider perspective of the collected opinions. One fourth attended only the Forum in Berlin (26%), and 16% only the one in Brussels.

Two thirds of the respondents (66%) were representatives of nongovernmental organisations. One fourth represented think tanks (26%). **The majority of the respondents came from the EaP countries (80%).** On average in each of the Forums the percentage of EaP participants oscillated at around 73%. Therefore the proportionality of the responses collected from EaP and EU participants was almost maintained.

Table no 1. Number of CSF participants in 2009 and 2010 and number of collected responses from each country

	Number of NGOs participating in 2009	Number of NGOs participating in 2010	Total number of unique NGOs participating in CSF 2009 and 2010	Number of NGOs that responded to the questionnaire
Armenia	21	25	34	8
Azerbaijan	19	23	31	6
Belarus	29	25	43	9
Georgia	23	25	35	6
Moldova	18	23	29	11
Ukraine	30	28	44	11
UE	53	60	92	13
Third countries	6	9	10	0

Source: Institute of Public Affairs 2011

Expectations of the participants of the Forum

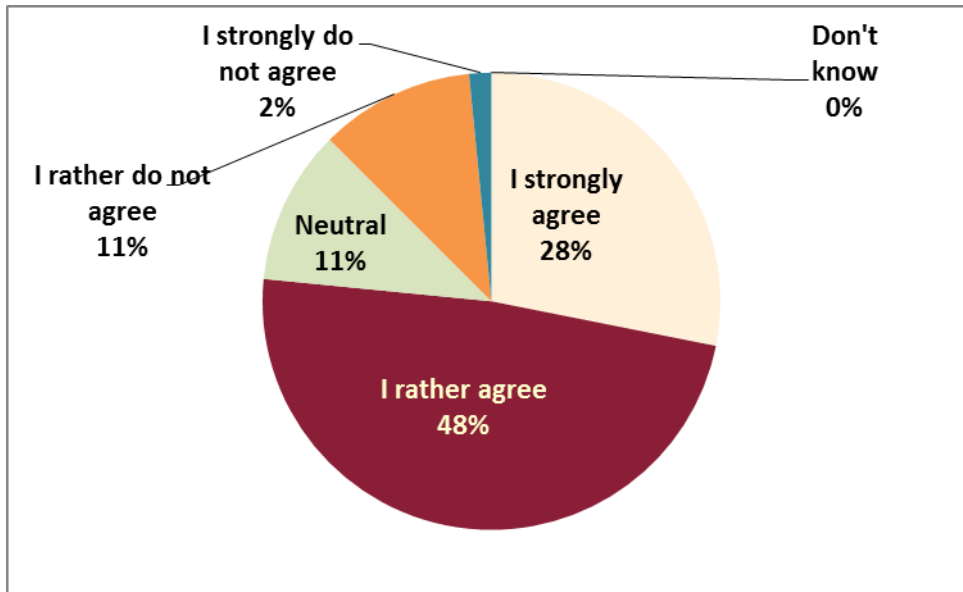
The general attitude of Forum participants towards the Eastern Partnership is crucial for their assessment of the Forum. One can assume that if the attitude is positive towards the EaP it is more probable its components will be assessed similarly. That is why the survey asked whether the respondents agree that the Eastern Partnership is an effective instrument in meeting its goals described in the Prague Declaration,⁴ including bringing the EaP countries closer to the European Union, in terms of both democratic and economic standards.

In total, 76% of the respondents agreed with that statement, while 13% disagreed. This is an extremely positive assessment considering the numerous critical opinions the EaP has received from experts. However, one should

⁴ According to The Prague Declaration, the main goal of the Eastern Partnership is to create the necessary conditions to accelerate political association and further economic integration between the European Union and interested partner countries

consider important factors that might have influenced this evaluation. The Forum participants as highly engaged CSOs might have a better opinion of its advantages and perspectives. One can assume that the general assessment of the EaP among the entire third sector would be worse.

Table no 2. Do you believe that EaP is an effective instrument in meeting its goals (described in the Prague Declaration), including bringing the EaP countries closer to the European Union, in terms of both democratic and economic standards?



Source: Institute of Public Affairs 2011

Some explanation can be found in the comments to this question. The respondents stress that the EaP, as a new mechanism, raises a great deal of hope as no other initiative exists. Even though it is not yet completely clear how it will work in the future, it has the potential to be developed. However, some of the respondents note that the EaP covers only the multilateral track of the EU and EaP countries' relations while it is the bilateral relations governed outside of the EaP that remain the most important element. The relation between the EaP and the European Neighbourhood Policy remains vague. Moreover, in order to improve the EaP and attract the attention of EaP governments, a greater amount of finances for technical assistance, cooperation and concrete projects should be allocated.

Expectations from the EaP Civil Society Forum

The aims of the Forum were first specified in the European Commission Concept Paper. Nevertheless, each organisation came to Brussels/Berlin with their own expectations.

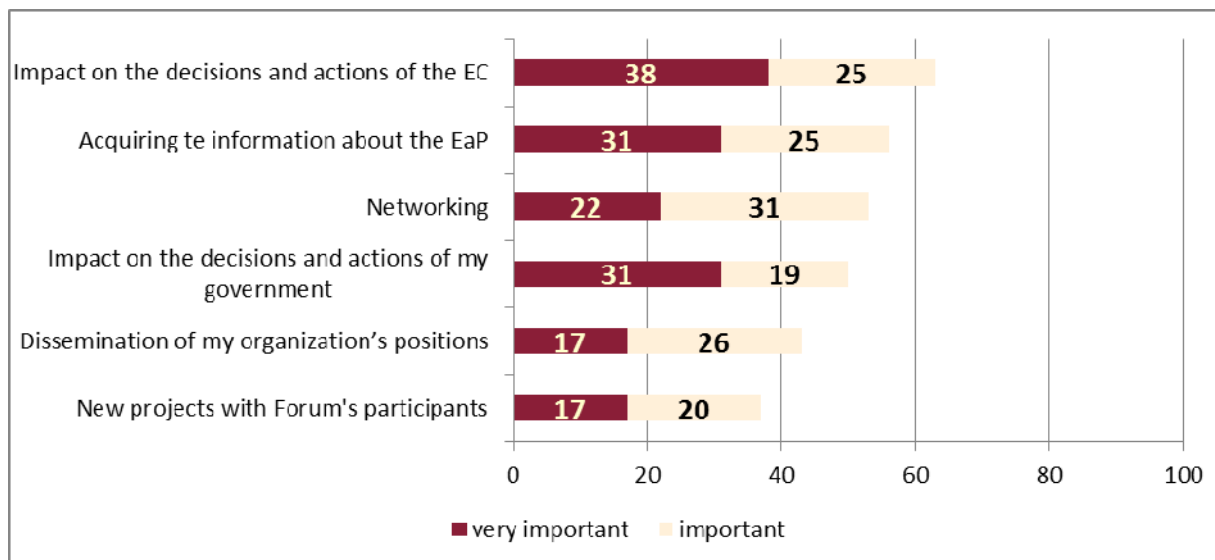
The survey results show that the most important respondent expectation was **to have an impact on decisions and actions of the European Commission undertaken in the scope of the EaP** (63% of all and 60% of EaP respondents). At the same time, for half of the respondents **the possible impact on the decisions**

and actions of their government undertaken in the scope of the Eastern Partnership played a huge role (50% of all respondents and 53% of EaP). Fewer respondents expressed hopes for the dissemination of their organisation's positions on further developments of the EaP (43% of all but 50% of EaP respondents). The answers clearly show that for the respondents the major motivation to participate in the Forum is advocacy activities and to have an impact on the EaP. It was often underlined in the Forum's recommendations. However, they see the European Commission as a partner for policy dialogue in the first place rather than their own governments. They also believe more in the Forum's possibilities to have an influence than in their own organisation's. That shows they understand that a common statement of civil society on the EaP can be more important than an individual one and perceive their own recommendations as a contribution to the Forum rather than as a way of self-promotion.

A minority of the respondents responded that they expected to undertake common new projects realised in partnership with the other organisations participating in the Forum (37% of all and 38% of EaP respondents). It is surprising that starting new projects (usually a motivation for networking) with other Forum participants is mentioned relatively rarely. This means that until now the Forum is not a proper body to deliver such a work. On the other hand the Forum does not have the funding for launching projects. Therefore the respondents might regard it pointless to mention this option in the survey.

One should note that the expectations of the respondents from the EaP countries were not so much different from those from the EU.

Table no 3. What were your expectations towards the Forum, which made you take part in Forum work?



Source: Institute of Public Affairs 2011

Other expectations were mentioned individually in the comments to the question, such as: the exchange of knowledge and information about the situation

in EaP countries; recognition of CSOs on the national level and enhancing their cooperation on national platforms; acquiring information about the perceptions of the EU and the EaP among CSOs from EaP countries; and hope that the impact of the Forum on government decisions will increase in the coming years.

The expected role of the Forum

Taking the respondents' expectations into account **one should reflect on what role the Forum should fulfil in the future. Some ideas were suggested by the respondents in the open question concerning concepts for Forum development.** First of all, the need to **develop a strategy** was expressed very often by the respondents. The Forum should **define concrete and clear goals and targets, followed up by a concrete action plan.** Two strategic dimensions of further Forum development were proposed – those of its role as an advocacy actor and as a project initiating body.

In the first option, **the Forum should focus notably on advocacy activities.** It should engage more in monitoring of the EaP, i.e., association agreements agenda, deliver more shadow reporting on government platforms work, arrange face-to-face meetings with EU and government representatives, or work on better information flow between the government and the Forum. In particular, the Forum should work on different monitoring criteria such as indicators to determine the impact of Forum recommendations on the decision-making process, on the negotiations progress between the EU and the EaP governments and the criteria for assessment of the EaP countries' progress in implementation of the association agenda. Another advocacy theme can be work on the improvement of the civil society climate in the EaP countries. What is important, **the Steering Committee should provide feedback and guidance on the strategic principles, approaches as well as short and mid-term objectives.**

Some doubts were raised, however, whether the Forum can perform such advocacy activities and influence EaP national governments which are very resistant towards civil society issues. Also the concern was underscored that the role of the Forum should not be limited to producing numerous useless recommendations.

Even though the respondents rated initiating new common projects very low both in their expectations of the Forum and its ability to fulfil this task, in the open question they did mention **strengthening Forum activities as the initiator of common projects as another option for its role.** Such projects could be developed under the supervision of national coordinators and aimed at supporting NGO work in-country and across-EaP countries. Moreover, the Forum might ensure for instance support for joint research work on specific issues for sub-group experts from all six members of the Eastern Partnership.

Impact of the Forum on the participating organisations

Impact on the national level

It is important to see to what extent the Forum has influenced the CSOs on the national level. The Forum has contributed to the creation of national platforms in the EaP countries (see Table no 4). The consolidation of the CSOs in their countries is crucial for making their voice heard. The survey inquired about several aspects of such potential impact.

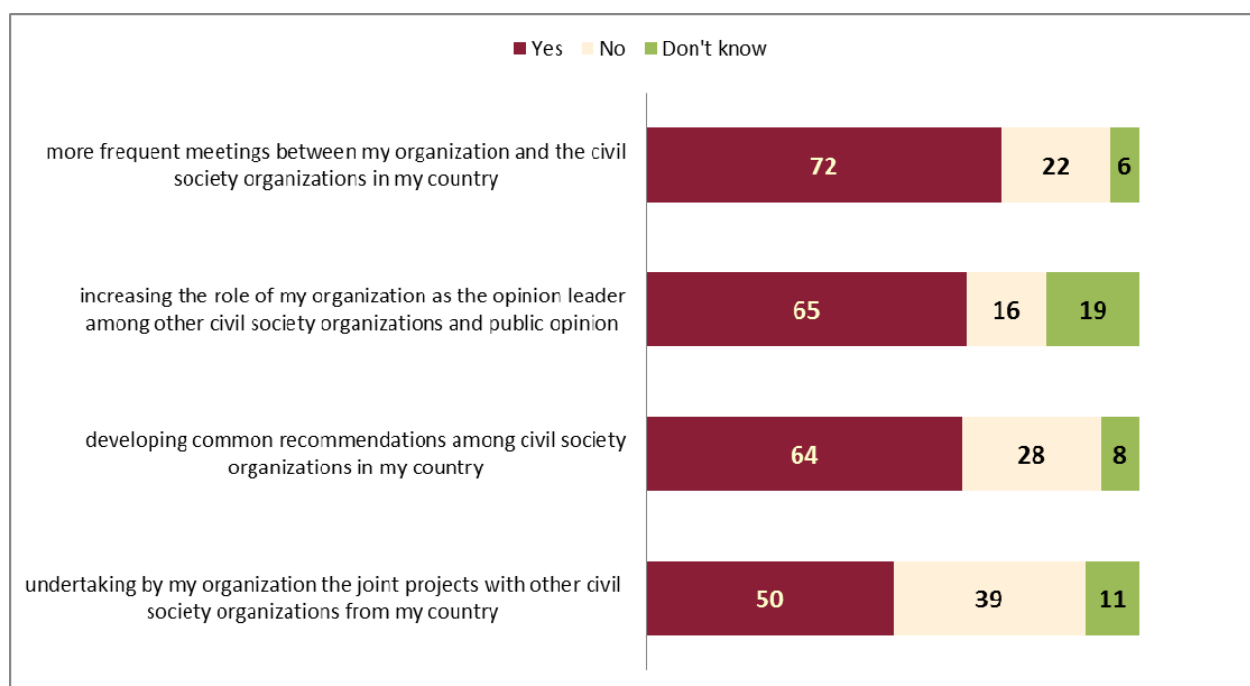
Table no 4. Number of CSOs in the EaP countries and information on national platforms

	Rough number of registered NGOs in the country	Number of NGOs participating in the national platform	Date of establishing the national platform
Armenia	4000-5000	145 No membership	June 2010
Azerbaijan	3100	40 Full membership	April 2010
Belarus	3000	120-150 No membership	July 2010
Georgia	No data	No data	November 2010
Moldova	6000	30	March 2011
Ukraine	6700	70 No membership	January 2011

Source: Institute of Public Affairs 2011

The survey results show that the respondents positively assess the impact of the Forum on the national level. **Three quarters of the respondents have assessed that more frequent meetings between their organisation and the civil society organisations in their country took place** (72% of all and 84% of the EaP respondents). Moreover, the majority of the respondents answered that that the Forum helped them to develop common standpoints with other organisations from their countries and become more opinion leading. This is a very good signal taking into account that in EaP countries the NGO sector is still very weakly consolidated in national networks.

Table no 5. The EaP Civil Society Forum has contributed to:



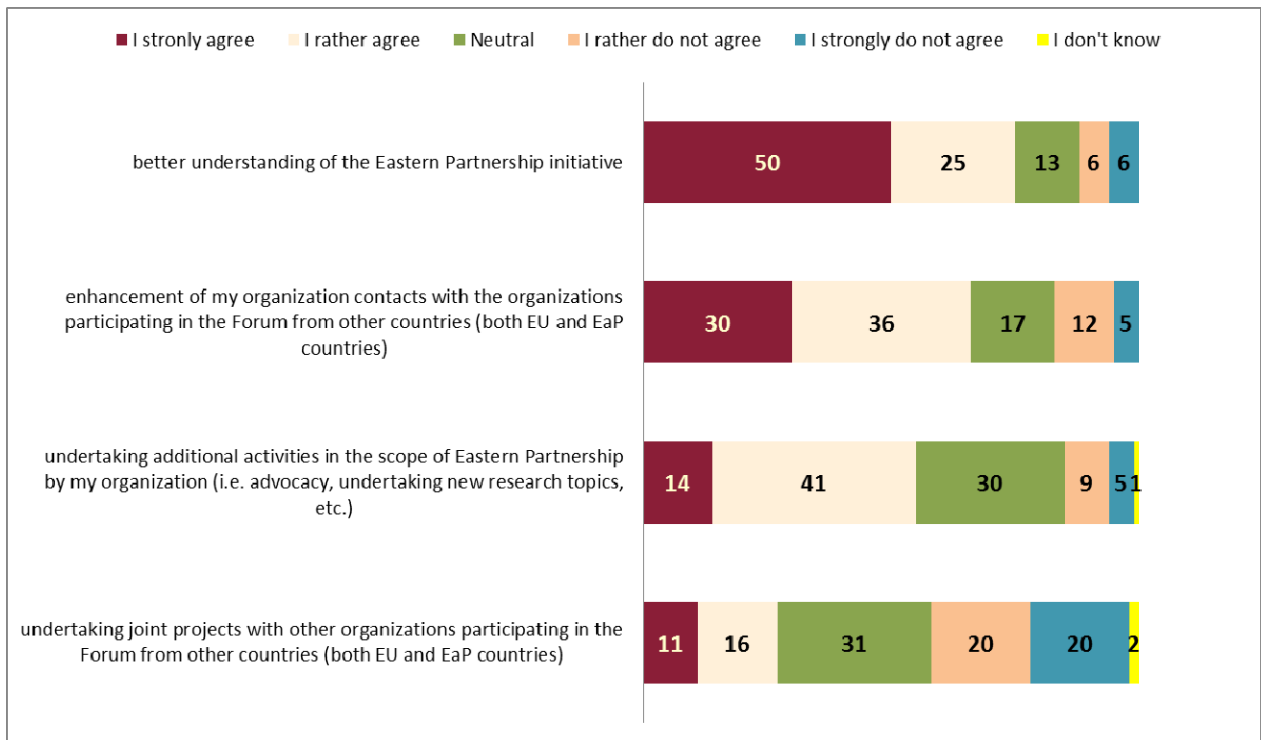
Source: Institute of Public Affairs 2011

The impact on the EaP and EU organisations' networking

Three fourths of the respondents claimed the Forum contributed to the **better understanding of the Eastern Partnership initiative** (75%, but only 57% of EaP). Nearly two thirds agreed that the CSF enhanced their organisation's contacts with organisations participating in the Forum from other - both EU and EaP - countries (66%, but only half of EaP respondents). This shows that the Forum is fulfilling its informative and networking role and participants' expectations.

However, only half of the respondents admitted that the Forum helped their organisations in undertaking additional activities in the scope of Eastern Partnership (i.e., advocacy, undertaking new research topics, etc.) (55% of all and 53% of EaP respondents). Moreover, **only one quarter** of the respondents admitted that the Forum contributed to their organisation's undertaking joint projects with other civil society organisations from other - both EU and EaP - countries (27%). One should note that a similar percentage of the respondents had responded that undertaking projects was their expectation regarding the Forum. Therefore it shows that the Forum is not perceived by the respondents as a body offering opportunities for concrete NGO cooperation.

Table no 5 b. The EaP Civil Society Forum has contributed to:



Source: Institute of Public Affairs 2011

Two important facts were raised in the respondents' additional commentaries. The respondents observed that there is a general need to clarify **what role civil society organisations from the EU countries are supposed to play in the current Forum framework**. This aspect of the civil society partnership between EU and EaP countries needs to be developed. It is strongly linked to the question of **what the proportion of the EU and EaP participants should be**.

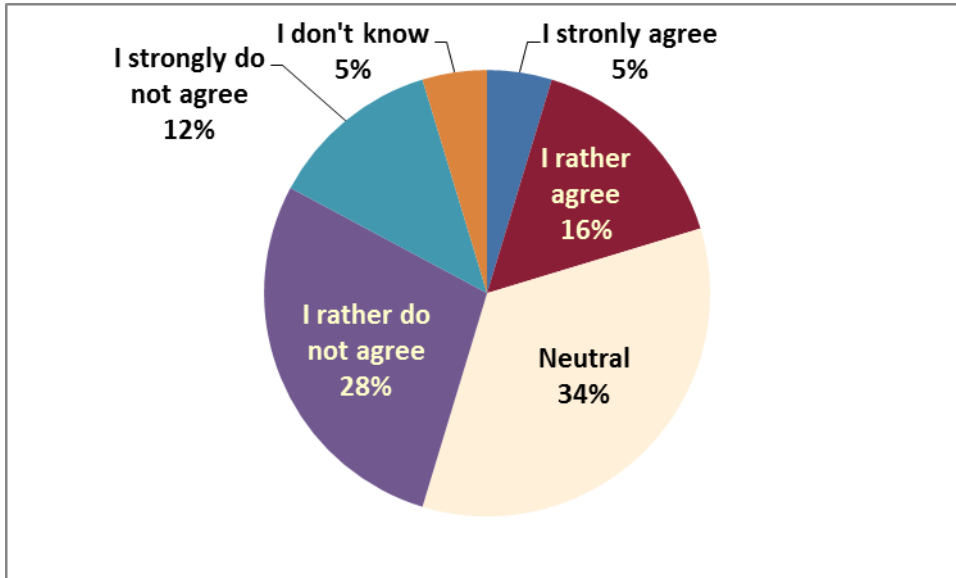
Impact of the Forum on the political process

The major role of the Forum was supposed to be enriching the governmental track of the EaP by providing a civil society perspective. The representative of the first Forum in Brussels, Sergei Mackievic, had an opportunity to present the Forum recommendations during the government platform meeting. However, notably due to the veto of Belarus, the Forum representatives were denied the opportunity to participate in the governmental track of the EaP. Since then Forum representatives can participate in panels and workshops together with government officials (i.e., the anticorruption panel held in Poland in 2011) only on an ad hoc basis. In addition, besides the official working plans of government platforms there is no regular flow of information between the government level and the Forum. For this reason, the Forum cannot react to governmental plans, which was its original goal.

A large number of respondents (40%) admit the Forum did not have much effect on decisions and actions of the EaP government platform. Only one fifth

(21%) see such an impact. In their comments the respondents stressed that currently CSOs have no real access to government platforms and information. Some of them raised their concern that member states and/or the European Commission want to keep the CSF outside of the decision-making process.

Table no. 6. To what extent do you believe that the EaP Civil Society Forum has an impact on decisions and actions of the Eastern Partnership government platforms?



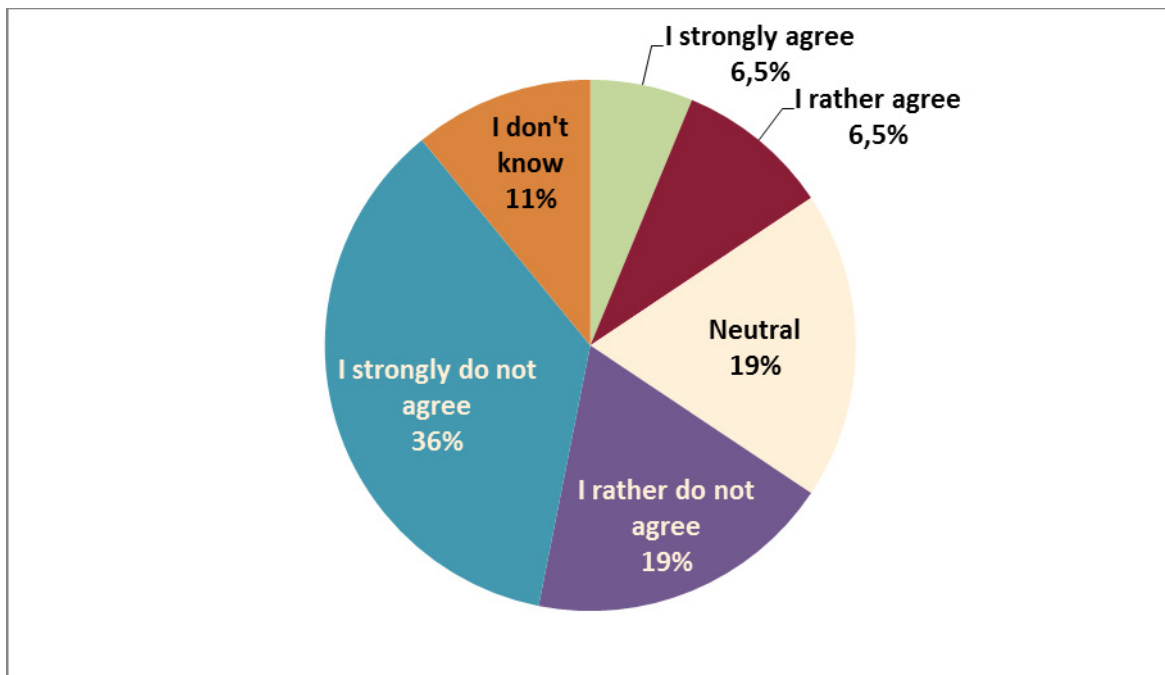
Source: Institute of Public Affairs 2011

One should bear in mind that securing the impact of the Forum on the decisions and actions of the EaP was one of the crucial recommendations made by CSOs in the course of consultations both during the Forum's development as well as afterwards. The research results show that the implementation of this objective has failed.

The Forum's impact on NGOs' relations with government

Thirteen percent of all respondents claimed the CSF resulted in the intensification of contacts with their country's government (16% of EaP respondents). **Fifty-five percent did not observe such contacts (57% from the EaP countries)** This is not surprising as the CSOs consultation mechanisms in EaP countries are very weak or nonexistent.

Table no 7. To what extent has the participation of your organisation in the Forum resulted in the intensification of contacts with your country's government?



Source: Institute of Public Affairs 2011

Some examples of contacts with the government were mentioned in the comments to the question. For instance, the Moldovan government was active in contacting Forum participants. It sent some documents for comment (i.e., draft laws on local self-government) as well as implemented some joint actions with CSOs. As a result the government included a number of proposals of the civil society organisations in its Programme for 2011-2015 (Moldova). Other participants (from the EU or Moldova) noted that the Forum has not influenced their relations with the government, as they were already well established. One respondent mentioned they have to compete with their government who has made attempts at substituting CSOs with GONGOs.

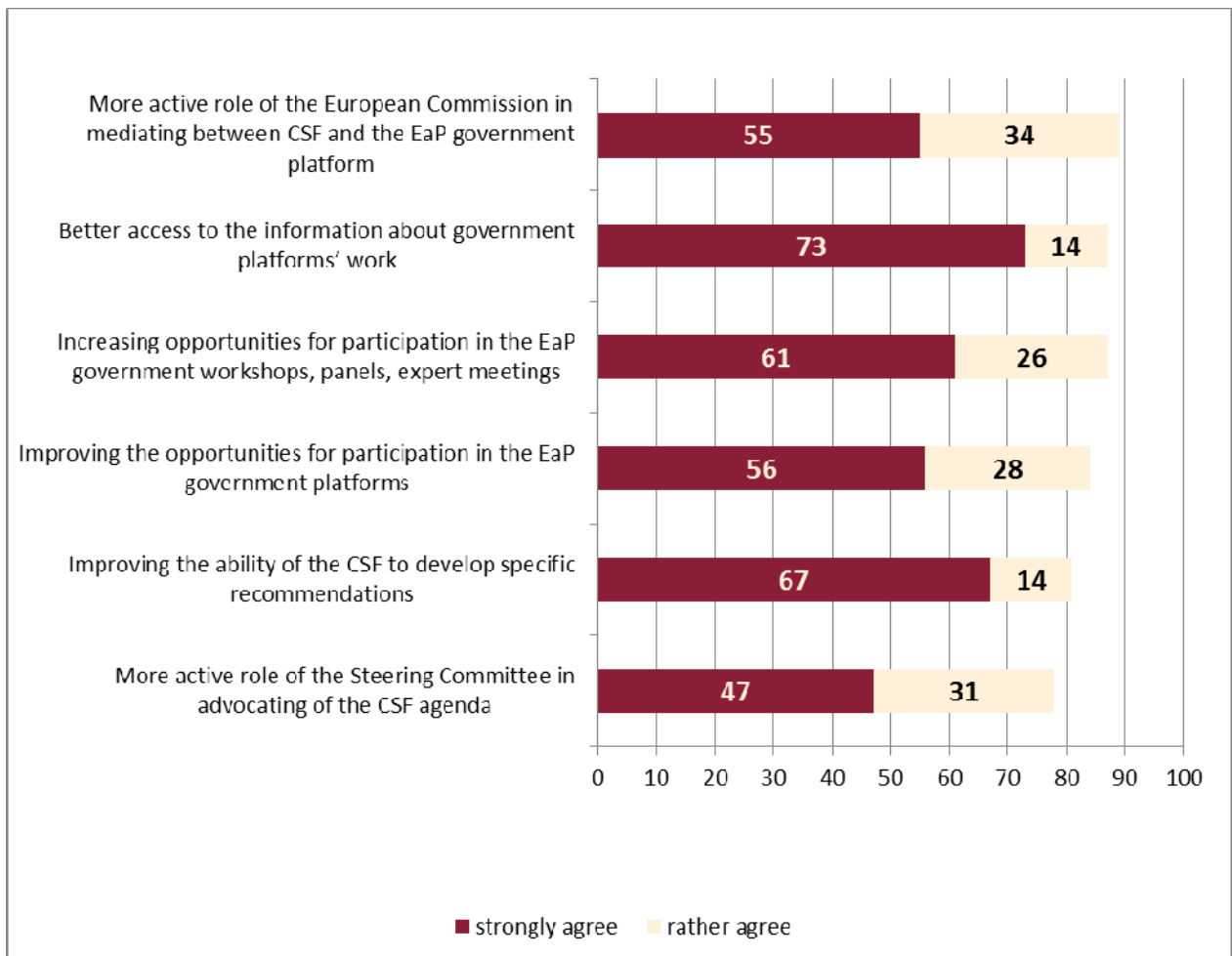
Methods of increasing the Forum's impact

The respondents very strongly supported all of the various solutions for increasing the impact of the Forum on the policy process. The most often chosen answer was a **more active role of the European Commission in mediating between the Forum and the Eastern Partnership government platforms is needed (89%)**. This shows that the respondents strongly believe in the EC's impact on EaP developments and place hope for support from the EU-side in this respect. Moreover, it correlates with their expectations towards the Forum, as the majority of the respondents anticipated that the Forum would have an impact on European Commission decisions and actions.

Other factors of equal importance are the need for **better access to information about government platforms' work** and the **increase of**

opportunities for participation in the Eastern Partnership government platforms, workshops, panels, expert meetings. At the same time the respondents see the need to strengthen the Forum’s advocacy capacities. Such results show that the advocacy role of the Forum is highly supported among the respondents.

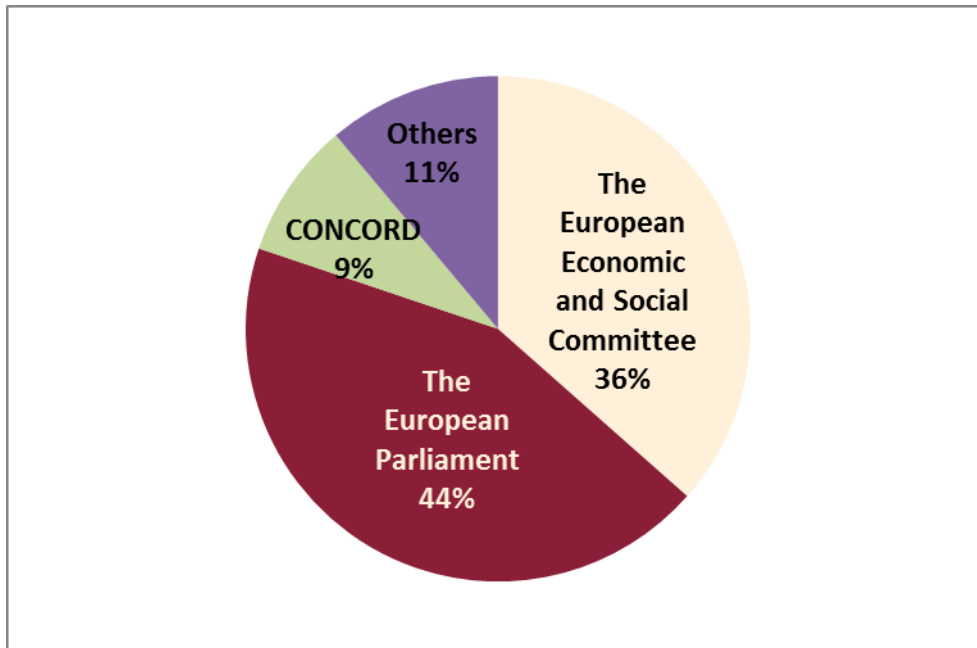
Table no 8. What actions should be taken in order to increase Forum impact on decisions and actions of the Eastern Partnership government platforms?



Source: Institute of Public Affairs 2011

In order to increase its impact on decision makers, contacts with other institutions should be enhanced. The European Economic and Social Committee and the European Parliament were at the top of the respondents’ list. An important suggestion made by one of the respondents was that contacts should be institutionalised and mandatory, not held on a voluntary basis. This way there would be a chance for real change.

Table no 9. With which institutions/organisations should the Forum enhance its contacts at first in order to increase its impact on decision makers?



Source: Institute of Public Affairs 2011

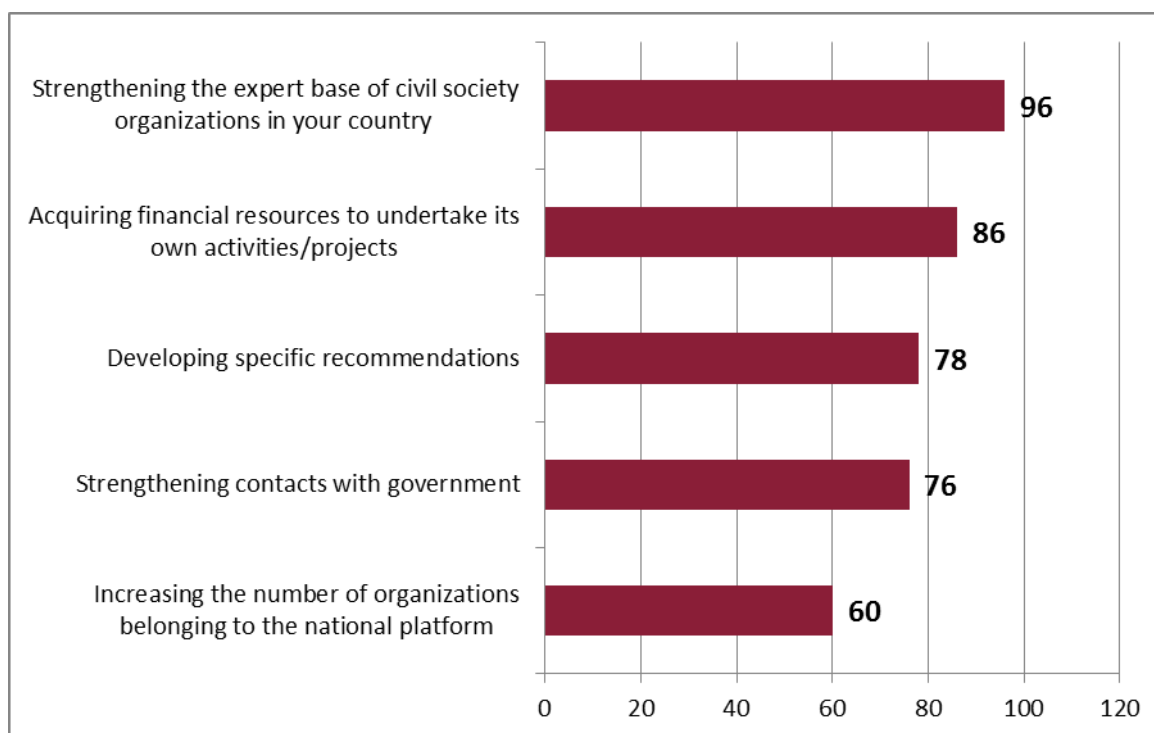
These answers support the recommendations formulated during the meetings in Brussels and Berlin. They show how important it is for the Forum's participants to be taken more seriously by their national governments and EU institutions.

Strengthening the national platforms

Crucial for enhancing the impact of the Forum would be strengthening the national platforms. The survey asked respondents to rank the factors by their importance. According to the respondents the strengthening of **the expert base of civil society organisations in their countries is highly needed (96%)**. A stronger expert base would help in developing specific recommendations, which is highly desirable in advocacy work.

A relatively low percentage of organisations mentioned that the number of organisations belonging to the national platform should be increased (60%). This might result from the conviction that more organisations would make the work of the platform more complicated. Also new organisations joining the platforms could be perceived as competitors. One should not ignore, however, the fact that an increase in the number of different NGOs in national platforms leads to the higher representativeness of the platform. Therefore the legitimacy of the platform propositions via government and other stakeholders is enhanced.

Table no 10. Can the following concrete actions contribute to the continued effective functioning of the national platform in your country?



Source: Institute of Public Affairs 2011

Assessment of the Forum's organisation

The organisation of the Forum is crucial to ensure its effectiveness. The survey tried to assess several aspects of its organisation such as the role of the European Commission, procedures of participants and Steering Committee selection, communication as well as the structure of its work.

The role of the European Commission

The European Commission is an institution which is hoped to be a facilitator for the Forum to link its activities with Eastern Partnership activities. The EaP is an EU initiative – for that reason the EC should be responsible for delivering proper consultation mechanisms for civil society organisations.

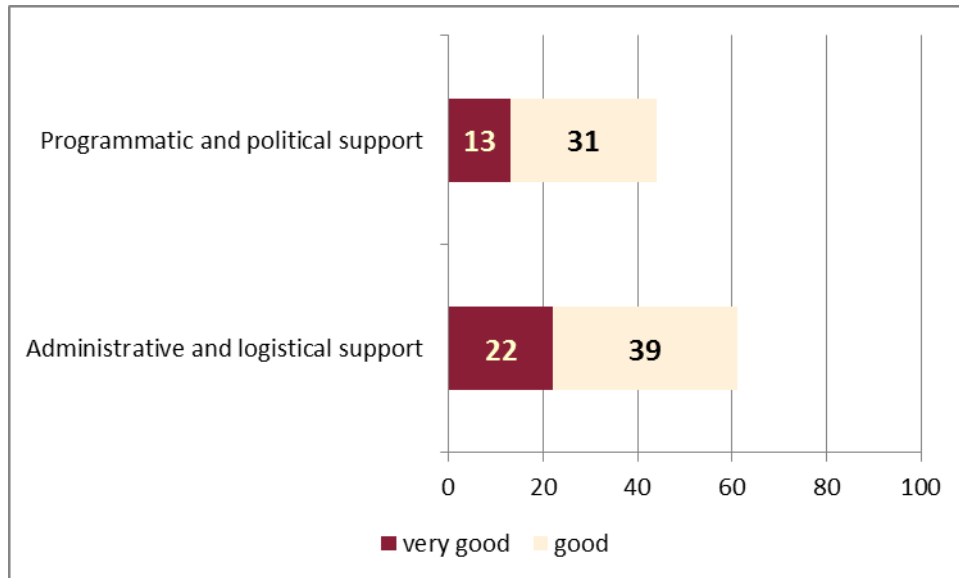
The assessment of the EC political and programmatic support is a mixed one. **Forty-five percent of the respondents assess it positively while one fifth is dissatisfied (19 %).** As the comments to the question point out, the EC should give the Forum more information on the EU and EaP as such and clearer **guidelines** as to what exactly it expects to receive from the recommendations. The current format is not very clear.

Even though the Forum is currently run by the Steering Committee, the European Commission still plays a crucial role. First, it is responsible for organisational issues - it employs an external company to organise the Forum. The Steering Committee cooperates closely with the EC in this respect. Also the EC

sponsored the creation of the Forum's website. **The majority of the respondents (58%) assess the EC relatively positively in this respect, while only 8% are dissatisfied.**

The respondents' opinions show that while the organisational role of the EC is relatively well assessed, more should be done by this institution in terms of political support for the Forum's work.

Table no 11. How do you assess the cooperation of the European Commission with the EaP Civil Society Forum in the following areas:



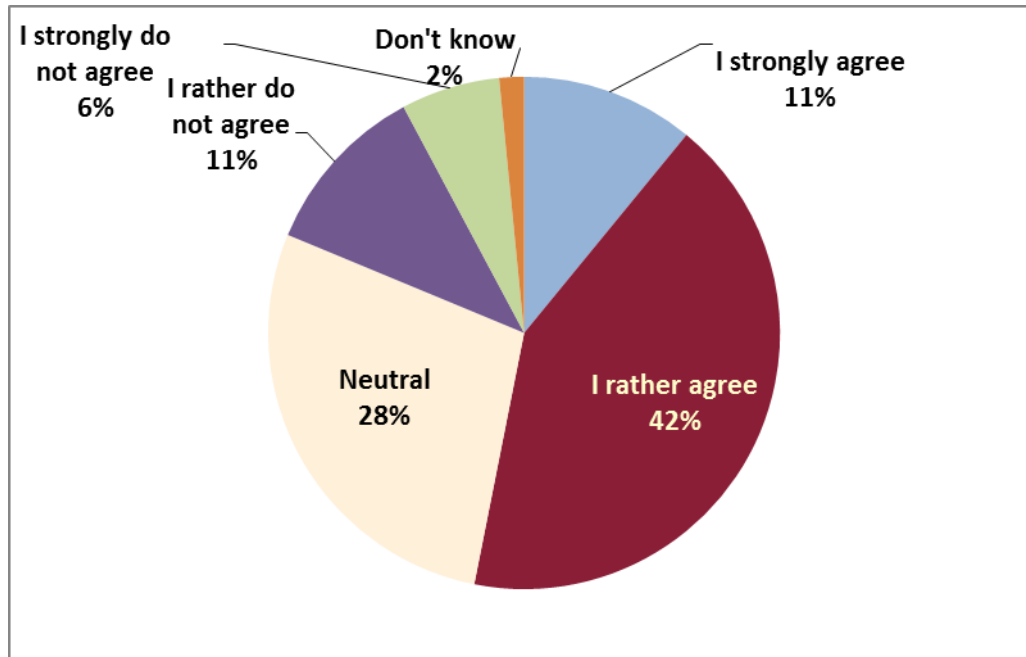
Source: Institute of Public Affairs 2011

Organisation of the Forum

The current organisation of the Forum mirrors the governmental structure of the platforms. The Forum has the same working groups as the government: W1 Democracy, good governance, stability, border management, W2 Economic integration, convergence with EU policies, W3 Energy, climate change, the environment, W4 Contacts between people. These working groups are divided into 12 subgroups (see table no 13).

Half of the respondents believe such division to be an efficient structure (53%), one fifth are dissatisfied (17%), 28% have no clear opinion. The EaP organisations are more satisfied (60%) than the EU ones (23%).

Table no 12. To what extent do you think that current work format of the Forum is effective?



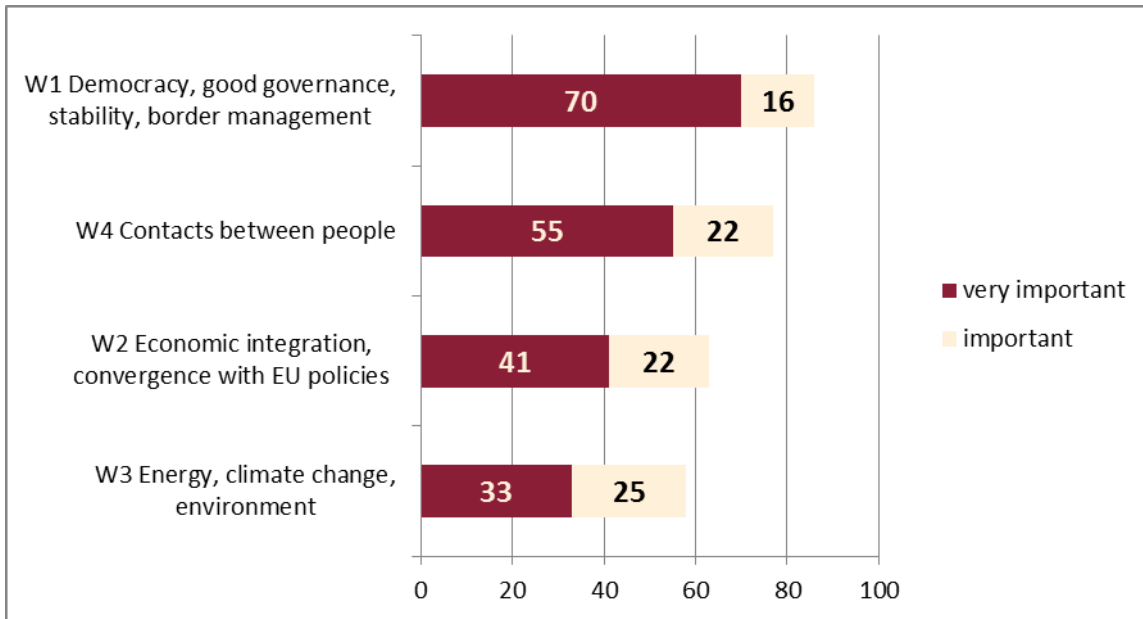
Source: Institute of Public Affairs 2011

According to the respondents' comments, the division into four working groups remains controversial. The critics say that this division is artificial as it is not proportional to the capacities and the interests of civil society. The most important for CSOs is the first working group which is very large (about 120 people). There were some opinions expressed that it covers too many issues which is not conducive to efficient work. In order to make it more functional it should be divided. On the other hand, supporters of the existing division claim it should be maintained for the reason that it enables the Forum to relate its activities with those of the government. Moreover, the current Forum structure should be given more time to prove its efficiency. A flexible approach should be applied, however, – there should be opportunities to create new subgroups when needed. Many comments suggested more time for work in the sub-groups.

Working groups and sub-groups

The respondents were asked in the survey about the importance of each of the working groups and subgroups. According to the survey results, **the most important working groups are Democracy, good governance, stability, border management (86%) and Contacts between people (77%).** Economic integration, convergence with EU policies received 63%, while Energy, climate change, environment 58%. This last working group also received the largest percentage of the opinion that it is not important (22%). Such an interest can be explained by the fields of specialisations of NGOs participating in the Forum.

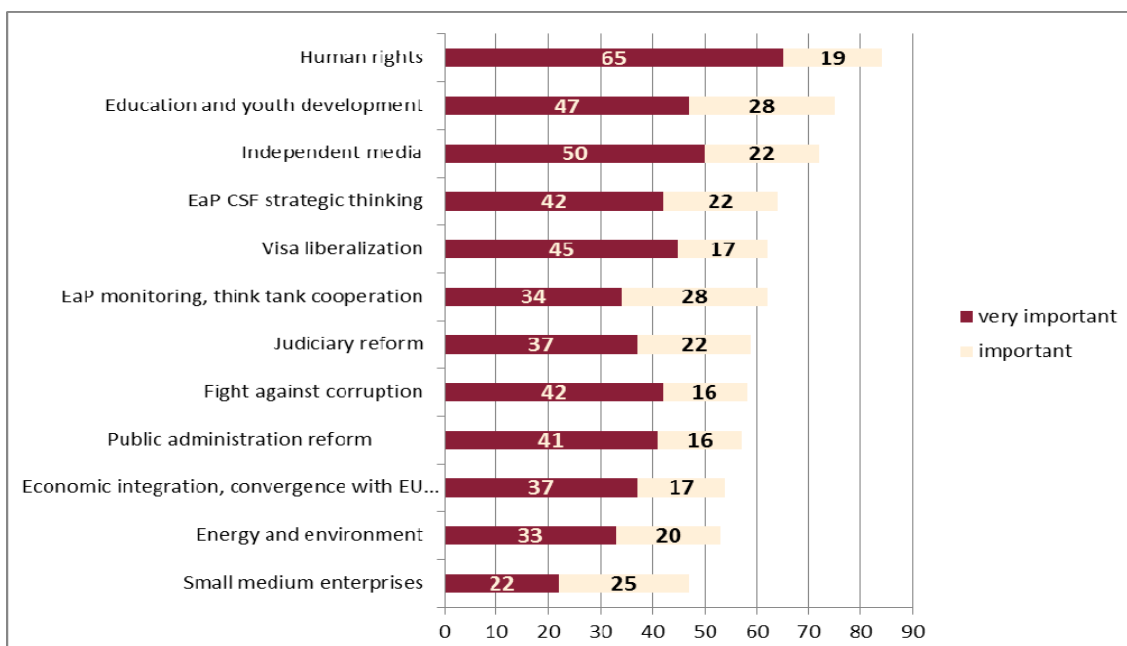
Table no 13a. To what extent are the above mentioned Forum working groups important from your organization point of view?



Source: Institute of Public Affairs 2011

The most important subgroups according to the respondents are those under the 1 and 4 Working Groups: **human rights, education and youth development, independent media, EaP monitoring, think tank cooperation and visa liberalisation**. The least important is small medium enterprises, which also received the largest percentage of responses that it is not important (30%).

Table no 13b. To what extent are the above mentioned Forum sub-groups important from your organisation's point of view?



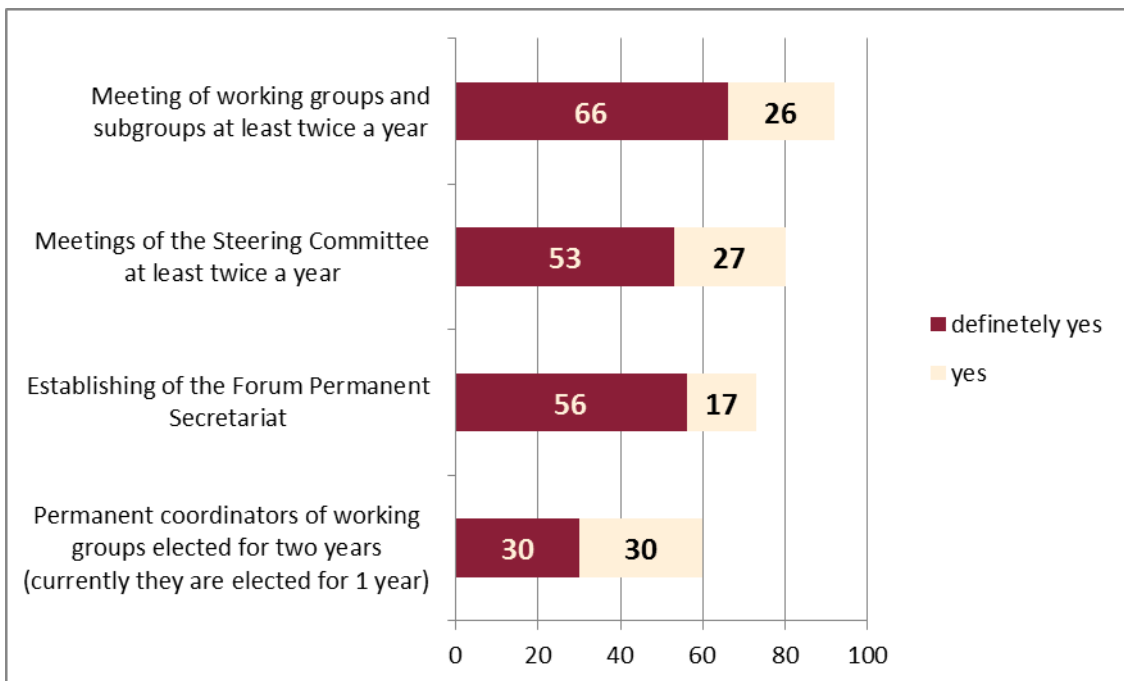
Source: Institute of Public Affairs 2011

According to respondents' comments, the establishment of sub-groups is a positive development but the quality of subgroups differs greatly. The priority for them should be to focus on showcasing/initiating well-targeted projects and accompanying policy recommendations/monitoring reports.

The factors of the continuity and effectiveness of the Forum

The respondents were asked to what extent several actions would contribute to ensuring the continuity and effectiveness of the Forum's work. They considered the most important action to be **meetings of working groups and subgroups at least twice a year (92%)**. This is consistent with the opinion expressed in the previous section that too little time is devoted during the Forum for discussions among participants and meetings in the sub-groups. Respondents also supported the existing arrangement of meetings of the Steering Committee during the year.

Table no 14. Can you assess to what extent the following actions would contribute to ensuring the continuity and effectiveness of the Forum work?



Source: Institute of Public Affairs 2011

In the comments some of the respondents elaborate further on the idea of the creation of the Secretariat. They believe it would strengthen the Forum's advocacy and operational role. The debate on the Secretariat is still ongoing.

The context is as follows: Currently the Steering Committee is in charge of the development of the strategy, advocacy activities, communication with Forum participants and organising the next plenary meetings. Due to the fact that the members of the SC are volunteers fulfilling their tasks in addition to their permanent posts, they cannot devote themselves fully to the Forum's work. As a

result of these logistic and organisational constraints the potential of the CSF cannot be fully developed. A solution could be the creation of a permanent Secretariat to support the activities of the Forum and ensure sustainability, which was already voiced as a recommendation during the Brussels and Berlin Forums. The Secretariat could guarantee stability and maintain continuity of the Forum's work. The European Commission and the EAAS seem, however, not to be in favour of such a solution. First, it would entail additional costs. Second, a clear strategy of the Forum's development is expected before establishing a Secretariat. In the meantime, the idea of the Secretariat may gain support of some EU member states. The Czech Republic has already notified its readiness to engage financially.

In the respondents' comments the working methods of the Forum were strongly criticised. First, the disproportional groups are a problem (too large 1 WG). Second, the current structure is assessed as inefficient in achieving results, preparing effective documents and engaging participants in such a task. In addition frequent changes in the subgroups' participants hinders the sustainability of work.

The respondents' recommendations were developed in an open question asking about the participants' ideas for improving the Forum's work. In terms of the Forum's organisation several steps should be taken. To this end, the working method can be improved by following actions and suggestions:

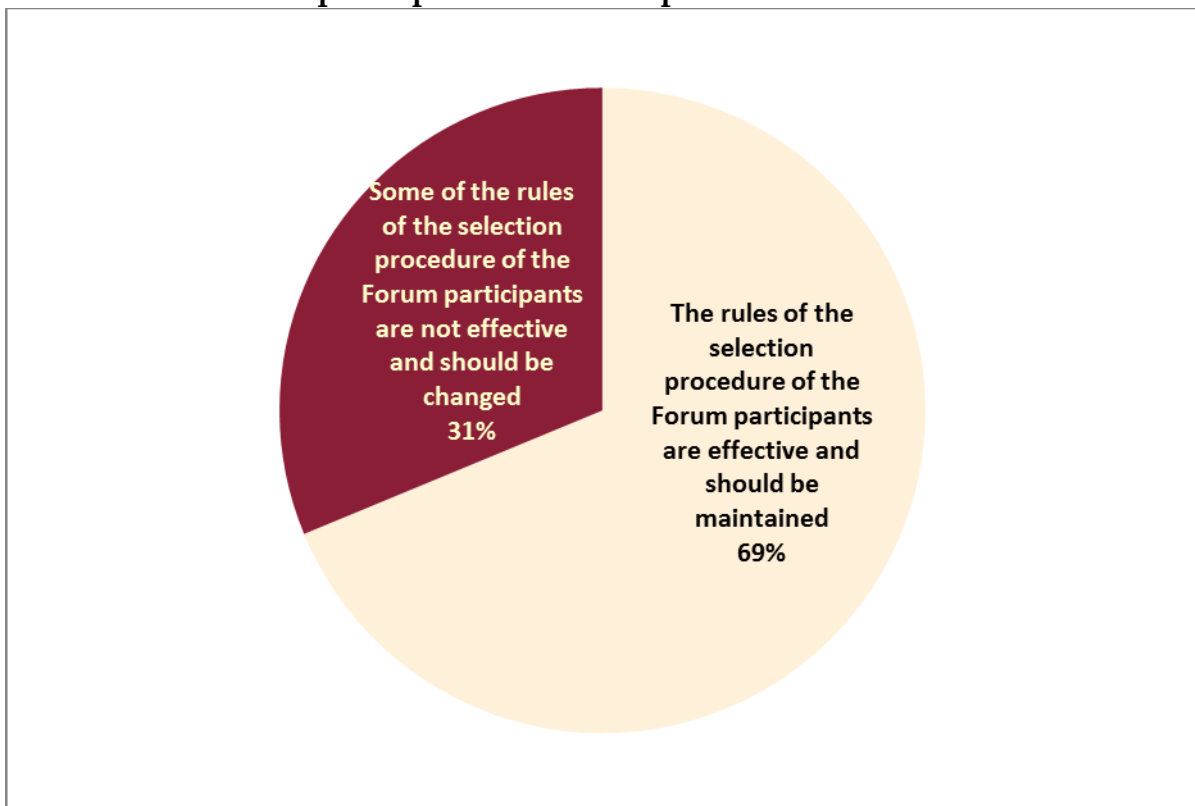
- a better preparation of the agenda; devoting more time for discussion in the working groups
- more room for the ideas from EaP participants as well as interactive communication (i.e., time for informal conversations should be ensured)
- basing the work of the subgroups on a specific pre-agreed agenda - *"It is important to prepare more in details and strategically all meetings, develop the real goals and short-term actions"*.
- a crucial aspect of the effectiveness of working groups and subgroups is skilled moderation, very often being a source of complaint in the survey. In addition, one of the respondents noted: *"At the Berlin meeting, the questions to Fule and Westerwelle were stage-managed and just allowed from the Steering Committee"*.
- in order to sustain the work in subgroups the national coordinators should be elected for two years
- The time devoted to work in subgroups should be definitely increased. Conversely, respondents questioned overly lengthy plenary sessions - *"The high-level speakers should not take up most of the time in the forum, since their speeches usually resemble press releases and can be found elsewhere"*; *"Ideally at least half a day should be devoted for bilateral contacts and i.e. for discussing new projects"*; *"The Forum should also offer more informal contact-opportunities between participants through dinners etc, rather than the short coffee breaks and lunches"*

- the working groups' online communication should be intensified and the CSOs should be provided with regular feedback from Steering Committee meetings.

The selection procedures

The selection procedures of the Forum participants consists of the following rules: diversity of the spheres of activity; involvement in ENP/EaP-related matters; nationality (min 10% participants from each EaP country and min 25% from the EU); participation in the previous Forum (a minimum 40% new participants and maximum 60% of those who participated in a CSF meeting in previous years).

Table no 15. Forum's participants' selections procedure



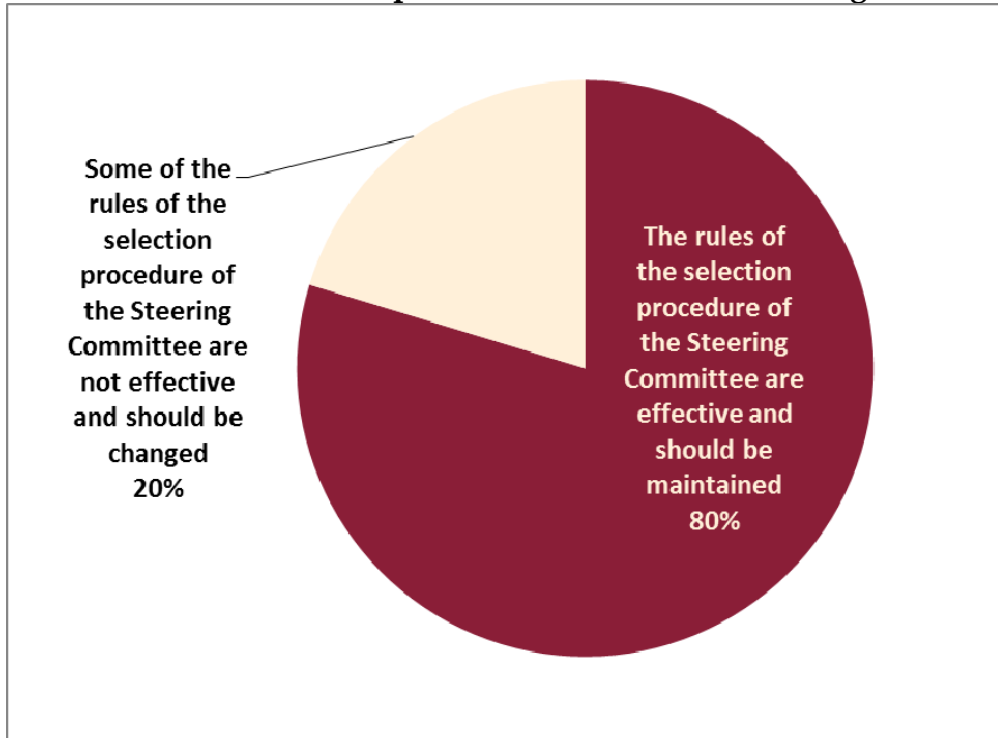
Source: Institute of Public Affairs 2011

A large majority of respondents agreed that the rules of the selection procedure of the Forum participants are effective and should be maintained (69%), while one third of the respondents think that some of the rules of the selection procedure of the Forum participants are not effective and should be changed.

According to respondent comments, the significant rotation of organisations leads to a situation where the succession and effectiveness of the work is lower. A solution could be earlier selection and more information for the newcomers. Also, active members who contribute to the discussions, formulating recommendations, intensifying and expanding networking and who take initiatives should be accepted for a longer term. Last but not least, it is very important that the EU ensures participation of real NGOs in the process and not GoNGOs and/or pocket NGOs under the control of non-democratic and corrupt governments.

The selection procedure of the Forum Steering Committee consists of the following rules: four platform representatives from EaP 6 countries (elected by the working groups); four platform representatives from the EU (elected by the working groups); six country facilitators – one participant from each of the EaP 6 countries (elected among and by participants from each EaP 6 country); three representatives from the EU countries elected by all members of the Forum (both EU and EaP countries).

Table no 16. The selection procedure of the Forum Steering Committee



Source: Institute of Public Affairs 2011

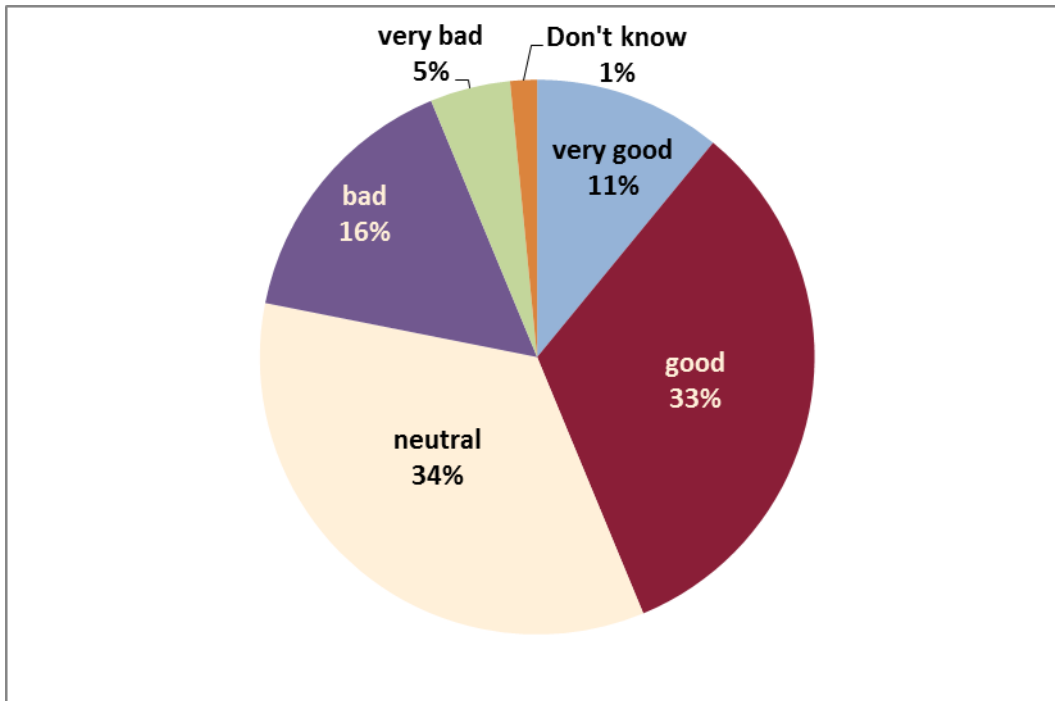
Eighty percent of the respondents agree that the rules of the selection procedure of the Steering Committee are effective and should be maintained. Only 20% think that some of the rules of the selection procedure of the Steering Committee are not effective and should be changed.

The comments suggest that the positive side of current procedure is that it allows for two different approaches – the platform and the country one. Also, it ensures performance of specific objectives on different levels – program, EU and EaP country. However, the role of EU representatives and EU organisations should be clarified. Also there is a need to prevent GoNGOs from taking over the initiative. Fairness in participation could be achieved by the strengthening of the national platforms. Organisations which would like to support and be actively involved in Forum activities should be respected even if they are not "elected".

Communication channels

One third of the respondents (34%) assesses communication as neither good nor bad, while only 44% think the communication is good or very good. One fifth of the respondents assesses it negatively.

Table no 17. How do you assess the effectiveness of the communication in the scope of the Forum (website, newsletter, mailing between the Steering Committee and Forum participants)?



Source: Institute of Public Affairs 2011

Suggestions are given in the commentaries to the question. With the full understanding of the Steering Committee's limits, the participants advise launching preparations earlier. Past Forum experience shows that information was released too late especially for newcomers who did not have time for preparation. In some cases even the urging of moderators didn't help to receive necessary information.

The website which should be the main source of information is the main source of complaints. Even though at the time the survey was carried out the website was fully functioning several respondents still complained about its absence. The website is assessed as inefficient and unpopular as it is not updated. There are also delays in uploading CSF recommendations and activities on the web-site. There is an understanding that the Steering Committee has insufficient human resources to deliver such results. The problem of human resources responsible for administration was faced in the effort to create a newsletter. One of the organisations was involved in preparation of the regular newsletters. As it judged this work was "not sufficient but it was maximum it was possible to do under the conditions that it required a lot of time, there were no resources for doing this job, and

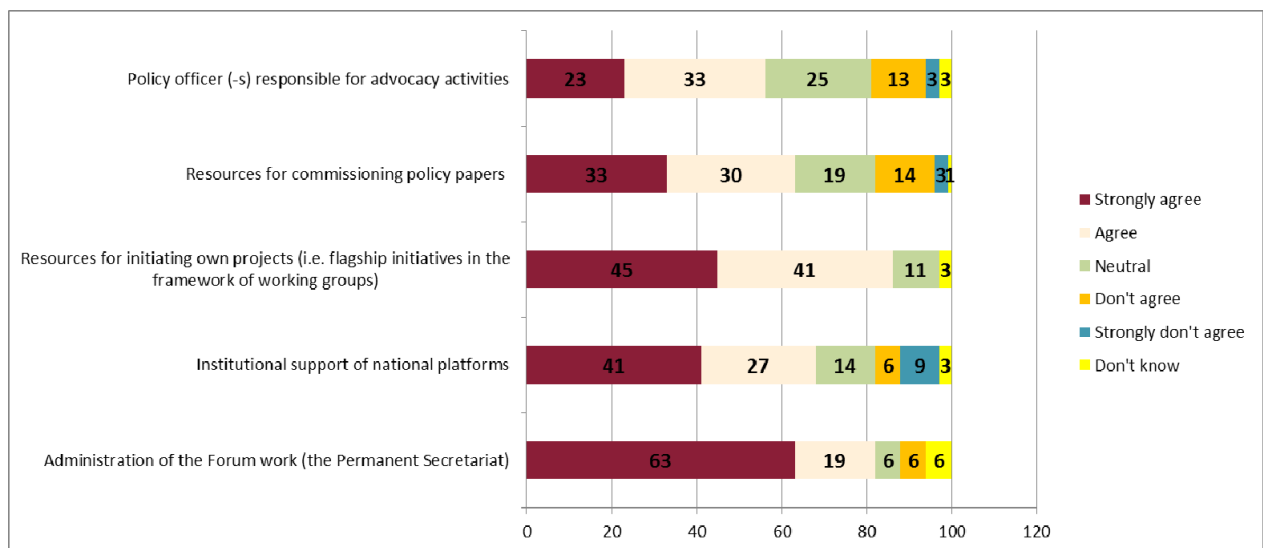
there was very little participation from majority of other members of the working group to contribute or support this activity. The secretariat might be an option to deal with this, but there should be real motivation by the participants of the Forum to contribute otherwise it won't be possible to make its work really effective."

In the comments to the open question on needed improvements in the Forum's work, communication via email was mentioned very often. Mailings should be more frequent in between the meetings. For instance the respondents noted that – "I am surprised not to receive communication from the two coordinators of the working group on Energy and Environment. More than three months have passed since the Berlin Forum"; or "Overall, the communication is insufficient. There is lack of information and frequent updates on the Forum website." The Forum communication should also reach its past participants.

Finances

As the Forum advocates for the EU funding of its activities, the question is what kind of expenditures are needed by the Forum in the first place. The majority evenly supports expenditures for administration of the Forum and resources for initiating its own projects.

Table no 18. What kind of Forum expenses should be covered by the European Commission from the EaP budget at first?



Source: Institute of Public Affairs 2011

The issue is how to secure funding for the Forum. Currently the Forum does not have any financial resources at its disposal. Some information can be derived from the answers to the open question concerning the sources of Forum financial support other than EU budget.

Several options for securing financial resources for the Forum were pointed out. Primarily, the Forum should search for funding on the level of national governments and particular development agencies or programmes (i.e. SIDA, DANIDA, NED, USAID, Polish Aid, Norway, Germany, UK). EU funding should be also explored, notably the European Instrument for Democracy and Human

Rights. A solution can be also accumulating the resources from the Member States and third countries in order to create a special EaP Civil Society Fund.

Other sources of funding mentioned less frequently were the political foundations, Soros funding, UNDP, The World Bank, European financial institution grants, Group of EaP Friends, business. Last but not least, some respondents proposed introducing a system of membership fees or contributions to the Forum by its participants. Only one respondent raised concern that the Forum's role is not to search for funding but to create an environment that facilitates networking for project partners.

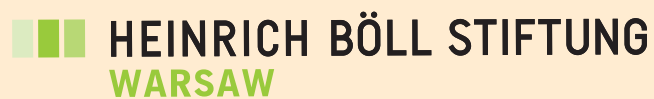
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This report was written as part of the project “The evaluation of the Eastern Partnership” realized in the cooperation with Heinrich Böll Foundation in Warsaw.



Support for organizations active at European level in the field of active European citizenship in the framework of the Europe for Citizens' Programme.



Proofreading: Elena Rozbicka

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