

Brussels, 23 May 2016

**Address by the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum
at the Eastern Partnership Ministerial Meeting**

Dear High Representative, Commissioner, Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to address this Eastern Partnership Ministerial meeting on behalf of the Civil Society Forum and I thank you for this opportunity.

Our Forum is deeply concerned about the status of protracted conflicts in the region. The recent fighting in Nagorno-Karabakh shows how easily these can flare into life, threatening stability and resulting in human suffering and loss of life.

The fighting between the two EaP countries must be resolved peacefully, once and for all. People are dying almost every day along the line of contact in Nagorno-Karabakh. It is also essential that all sides respect the Geneva Conventions designed to protect prisoners and non-combatants in zones of conflict.

We welcome the fact that the High Representative Federica Mogherini is encouraging the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan to respect the ceasefire agreement and the EU's willingness to engage in further confidence building initiatives. We are ready to make a contribution by setting up a non-partisan fact-finding mission in Nagorno-Karabakh. This could supplement the OSCE investigative mechanism proposed during the negotiations on 16 May in Vienna.

These events show that the protracted conflicts in Georgia and Moldova, as well as the situation in Eastern Ukraine and Crimea must be given due attention. While these conflicts have yet to be resolved, I would like to stress the importance of preserving the human and political rights of civilians and people who were displaced as a result. In the past 25 years, human rights have not been promoted, monitored or respected in the territories affected by conflicts. Impunity is a norm there and the violators bear no responsibility for their actions.

There are also other impediments to progress in the EaP region. The recent referendum in the Netherlands casts doubt on the future of the EU-Ukraine AA/DCFTA and could lead to the "freezing" of its implementation. It would be bad news for the people of Ukraine, who have paid a heavy price for their European choice, but also for the EU which has already invested a lot in the stability of the country. In order to sustain public support for the EU in Ukraine the visa liberalization process must continue unhindered.

Certain actors are interested in keeping Ukraine and the Eastern Partnership region as a whole unstable. We hope that the EU will continue to play a positive role and will be more effective in promoting peace and stability.

Moldova continues to encounter serious economic problems as a result of corruption and bank scandals. These problems are destabilising the country. The lack of reforms, mass emigration and foreign propaganda threaten to transform Moldova from a 'success story' into a 'larger Transnistria'. Currently Moldovan society is dangerously divided while political elites continue to feed these trends.

As a civil society representative, I conclude that democracy is, unfortunately, losing ground in our region. In the last 25 years, zones of protracted conflict have been governed undemocratically while human rights and democracy have not been respected. This has discouraged people from placing their trust in democratic values and has encouraged those who control these territories to maintain the status quo. A failure to resolve these problems leads to even more difficulties.

This is why we continue to call on the European Union to promote human rights and democracy for all people, including for those trapped by protracted conflicts. This is also why the EU efforts for reforms in the EaP countries and for confidence-building measures in zones of protracted conflict must be more effective and, above all, long-lasting.

Thank you very much for your attention.

Delivered by Ion Manole, EaP CSF Steering Committee Member, Coordinator of the Moldovan National Platform, Chairman of Promo-LEX