

**Address to the EaP Informal Ministerial Meeting
on behalf of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum**

by **Kakha Gogolashvili**, Deputy Chairman of EaP SCF Georgian National Platform, Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies (GFSIS)

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Your Excellences, Commissioner, Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honor for me to address the Eastern Partnership Ministerial meeting in Tbilisi on behalf of the civil Society Forum.

The fact that such an event is taking place in the capital of an Eastern European country shows the growing common interest to strengthen the Partnership.

We acknowledge the realities of the momentum, fragility of the global peace and would like to assure you that CSF will use all of its human resources and influence across the civil society and the wider public in our countries to support the governments in keeping strong stance in their fight against terrorism and confronting spillover of radical ideologies, hate and intolerance, fed via misleading messages and hostile propaganda against European values.

We condemn the November 13th terrorist attacks on peaceful population in Paris and consider this an attack against the whole Europe, to which we all belong.

The severe the forces challenging democratic ideals behave, the stronger becomes consolidation of our societies around the democratic values, economic and social reforms, aiming at sustainable development, peace and security. Therefore strong civil society should concentrate on its inherent responsibilities - monitor the process of reforms, assists the governments in listening to critical voice and try to improve the common work together.

In this regards, allow me to bring to your attention some country specific developments that the forum participants observed and consider important to mention before you:

Country Specific Topics

Armenia

Civil society in Armenia considers unacceptable the way the ruling party uses public resources for staying in power. They also warn about planned Constitutional Changes that may deteriorate the climate for defending human rights and fundamental freedoms, local self-governance as well as environmental policy and the proper use of natural resources. We also welcome the ongoing attempt by EU and Armenian government to overcome negative implications of not signing the Association Agreement and that the new contractual

framework will deepen economic cooperation between Armenia and EU with all other Eastern partnership states.

Azerbaijan

Civil Society in Azerbaijan requests the government to reconsider its policy of oppression of civil society activists accused in tax fraud in reality not engaged in the business activities at all. Civil Society Forum calls also Azerbaijani authorities to revise the national legislation regulating the activities of non-governmental organizations, and to restore rules which will enable civil society to work in a normal way. It is important to start the dialogue between civil society and the Government in order to normalize relations between the parties and empower civil society to exercise its duties of pushing for reforms and democracy. At the same time we believe that the establishment of new contractual relations between Azerbaijan and EU would promote conditions for more Europeanization of the country and increased respect for political values.

Belarus

Belarusian National platform and civil society at large welcome recent release of political prisoners in Belarus as liquidation of one of the key barriers affecting EU-Belarus relations at all levels. Within the new window of perspectives in EU-Belarus dialogue civil society suggests to and expects from Belarusian authorities to step forward in developing real dialogue between civil society and authorities in Belarus on wide agenda of issues related to EU-Belarus relations (Human rights dialogue, Monitoring of EHEA roadmap, de-facto implementation of Convention of rights of people with disabilities, etc.) but also recovery and intensification of internal dialogue between different stakeholders in Belarusian society.

Georgia

During the last few years Georgia made considerable progress in protecting human rights through comprehensive legal and institutional reform. Nevertheless, certain setbacks in the functioning of the court system became apparent, in particular, questioning the existence of impartial justice in the country. Current court proceedings with the most critical to the government TV broadcaster caused serious concerns and doubts in the society regarding the impartiality and political neutrality of the proceedings. Other concerns go to the electoral law, which provides for such a distribution of parliamentary seats that does not duly reflect actual picture of public support to political forces. At the same time, Georgian civil society is convinced that the Government has made huge successful efforts to comply with the VLAP. Granting visa free regime to Georgia would play decisive role in raising motivation and support for European Integration and respective reforms in the country. Recently EaP National Platform has signed memorandum with GoG that would allow the wide range of NGOs to strengthen their participation in supporting and monitoring the reform process in the country.

Moldova

Moldova has advanced on the way of European Integration marked by Visa Free regime with the EU and Association Agreement including Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade area. Nevertheless, the civil society in the country is concerned due to a slow speed of implementation of provisions of the AA Action Plan. It is necessary to demonstrate concrete evidence of reforms and benchmarks of the progress achieved especially in the areas of fight against corruption, de-politicisation of the state institutions and de-concentration of broadcast media, in order to increase support for promoting European Union's image in Moldova and countering disinformation about the EU among Moldovan citizens.

Ukraine

Ukraine undergoes very difficult process of stabilizing the state on the background of actual annexation of Crimea and volatile peace in the South- East. In this situation it is important to continue supporting the country with technical and financial assistance. At the same time the authorities of Ukraine are requested to accelerate the reforms in all spheres, taking as a base the provisions of the association agreement. Elimination of corruption at local and central levels, professionalism in the public sector, consolidation of power and consensus based decision making are the issues that still need to be achieved.

Some General Topics

We would like to focus your attention on importance of the governments to accelerate development of food safety mechanisms and pay due attention to the consumer protection.

Other important challenge is the counteraction to the climate change and effective adaptation to its consequences that should become priority for active and daily policy in EaP countries.

An active transition to the use of renewable energy sources should be duly treated in development strategies both at state, regional and local level.

The partner countries should observe their international obligations concerning the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

We welcome reform of the ENP, which should follow the changing context and to be as efficient as possible. Differentiation should serve as a tool to encourage competition between countries and by no means discourage those with less progress and ambition at this moment.

Regional consolidation and searching of the ways for rapprochement and deepening cooperation should continue despite of emergence of other cooperation formats and regional arrangements.

We strongly believe in the European way and will do our utmost our countries to follow it.