

Security Challenges for the EaP countries in the new geopolitical context: civil society perspective, 10 April 2014

The event focusing on the security challenges for the Eastern Partnership countries organised by the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum took place in Brussels on 10 April, hosted by the office of MEP Werner Schulz at the European Parliament. The event provided a platform for exchanging views of the EaP civil society representatives on the newly arising regional security threats as well as the venues for the EU engagement in resolving the conflicts in the EaP region. The role of the civil society in addressing regional conflicts and campaigning for democratic reforms and European integration was also addressed. About sixty representatives of the EU institutions, Brussels-based INGOs, think tanks, independent researchers and students attended the event.

In her welcoming address, **Rebecca Harms**, Co-Chair of the Greens/European Free Alliance, at the European Parliament, focused on the challenges for the EU in the context of the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine, naming as the biggest challenge the ongoing amassment of the Russian troops at the border with Ukraine. In her opinion, the EU acted late on these developments, but in the end at least agreed on the adequate scale of sanctions. She expressed hope that Ukraine will be able to organise the presidential elections on 25 May without further interventions on the part of Russia that happened in Crimea.

Arnoldas Pranckevicius, External Policies Adviser to President of the European Parliament, noted that the Russia-Ukraine crisis has been both a necessary wake-up call for the EU to resurrect its cooperation on defence matters and re-energise discussions on working towards energy independence in the EU. At the same time, it has in many ways has given a real start to discussions on how the EU should review its approach to the EaP region. The Crimean crisis has accelerated the European integration of Ukraine, with the political part of the Association Agreement already been signed and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) to be signed right after the presidential election in Ukraine. He mentioned that the EU MS have considered a **deterrent “third-phase package of sanctions”**, in case of further escalation on part of Russia.

The EaP CSF representatives presented security challenges their respective countries are facing in the present changing geopolitical circumstances.

Oleksandr Sushko, Research Director at the Institute for Euro-Atlantic Cooperation and Member of the Ukrainian National Platform of EaP CSF, focused on the challenges to international order after the Crimea crisis. He draw a parallel between the present Putin’s strategy in the region and the doctrine” of “limited strategy” advocated by Leonid Brezhnev back in the Soviet times. According to him Putin has a strategy of creating a circle of dysfunctional “umbrella” states with governments controlled by the Russian hierarchy with regard to choosing the political directions and priorities for their

states. Sushko urged to launch an inclusive and transparent process of developing of a new constitution for Ukraine that would involve contributions from a broad range of stakeholders, including the constitutional experts and civil society representatives.

Viorel Cibotaru, Director of European Institute for Political Studies (Moldova), highlighted the consequences of the annexation of Crimea for Moldova and the Moldovan society. Cibotaru also presented the declaration adopted by the EaP CSF Moldova National Platform, condemning Russia's annexation of Crimea and urging to consider appropriate security measures for Moldova. The declaration calls on the Moldovan authorities to speed up the signing and implementation of the commitments under the Association Agreement. The declaration recognises the significance of the EU **membership perspective** for Moldova as the only way to secure the European choice for the country.

Vano Chkhikvadze, EU Integration Manager at the Open Society Georgia Foundation, underlined that although the EU integration is supported with 83% of the population and the Association Agreement is scheduled to be signed by June, Georgia is not completely free from the Russian leverage. The leverage includes military dimension (presence of military bases); borderisation process; energy dimension; and economic one including trade restrictions. Account should also be taken of the Russian-financed movements and organisations. Chkhikvadze reiterated the importance offering Georgia an explicit EU membership perspective. He also insisted that the statements about the EU consultations with Russia over the situation in the region need further clarification.

Boris Navasardian, President of Yerevan Press Club, elaborated on the information security issue, specifically referring to the political messages mainstreamed by the Russian TV Channels and their influences in the EaP countries, particularly in Armenia. For Armenia, the idea of "Russia the savior" and inevitability of joining the Russia-led Customs Union and Eurasian Union is being fed through the two Russian TV Channels – Russia 1 and Culture – that are freely broadcast in Armenia. With regard to the EU's engagement with the region, Navasardian **called for formulation of common interest and respective agenda that would unite the region despite a diversity of political environments.**

During the Q&A session, the speakers highlighted once again the role of the civil society in the ongoing political processes in the EaP region. The crucial involvement of the members of the EaP CSF Ukraine National Platform during Euromaydan was emphasized. The civil society has demonstrated its capacity to act in a manner which is not available for traditional political actors, in particular through self-organisation of professional groups and grassroots initiatives at the national level never experienced before.