

**EIGHTH MEETING OF THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP
PLATFORM 1: Democracy, Good Governance and Stability
November 15, 2012**

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Steering Committee of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum

Dear colleagues,

I'd like to start with some thank you words.

First and foremost, on behalf of the CSF Steering Committee, I would like to thank the European Commission and Commissioner for Enlargement Štefan Füle, as well as EU/ EaP partner countries for the continuous support to the Forum. We are also glad to be involved in the thematic platform meetings – I am happy to be here today and speak on behalf of the Working Group 1 and the whole Steering Committee.

Equally, we extend our gratitude for cooperation to Euronest- for including the CSF in the Baku 2012 Euronest plenary meeting and to the EC for invitation of the CSF co-Chairs to the July ministerial meeting.

We'd like to thank the European Commission/EEAS, and government of Sweden for supporting this year's Forum meeting taking place in Stockholm on 29-30 November. The agenda of the event will cover a broad range of questions relevant to the EaP developments and the contribution of civil society actors to the process of reforms in the six EaP states. We have invited embassies in Sweden of EU and EaP countries and also contact points in the MFAs of EU countries to join us in Stockholm. If you have not received those invitations, please inform the Steering Committee.

Finally, we thank the government of Poland for hosting last year's Forum. We are grateful to the Czech MFA for supporting projects in CSF Working Groups 1 and 4, as well as to the Visegrad Fund for its EaP project funding, and to the EC as a whole for the introduction of the Civil Society Facility - whose projects will start in the coming months.

We are pleased to announce that the 2013 Forum will be hosted for the first time in a partner country - Moldova - and we thank the government of Moldova for being responsive to our suggestion and to the Lithuanian MFA for its active engagement to link up the Forum and the EaP Summit that will follow in Vilnius in November 2013.

On our side, we are proud to inform you that CSF has registered its Secretariat as an international NGO in Belgium and is now hiring its Director. The Secretariat will link up civil society in the six countries with developments in Brussels and help to strengthen communications across the CSF National Platforms and Working Groups. The Secretariat will be based in Brussels and with support of the European Commission will become fully operational as of January 1, 2013 at the latest.

With all six national platforms now in place, the CSF has more and more expert analysis

underway in the Working Groups. As an example, the *European integration index* is being produced on regular basis; the *Energy security index* is underway; the *Economic integration index* is planned. Increased analytical capacity enables added value input to, in particular, the EaP roadmap interim assessment that is planned to be prepared for the May 2013 Euronest plenary meeting in Brussels, and the comprehensive assessment planned for the November 2013 EaP summit in Vilnius.

The engagement of the Working Groups has been greatly enhanced by the ability to participate in the thematic platform meetings, and we believe we are increasingly able as a Forum to add value to the work of the intergovernmental meetings, and will work to bring civil society engagement, grassroots perspectives, and expert analysis to the official agenda.

Our flagship initiatives will be showcased at the Stockholm Forum - not only the integration indices mentioned above, but also the recently launched flagship initiatives on *corruption, media, and elections*.

Speaking specifically of the WG1 work, I would like to describe some very concrete actions by our Sub-groups that have been undertaken over the past year.

You may recall numerous recommendations by our Sub-working Groups for the past panel meeting that took place in July. During the July 6 WG meeting, a new Sub-group was created that will address questions related to **Election monitoring**. It is planned that a special CSF Task Force consisting of representatives of different countries (both EU and EaP) will observe the elections process – including engagement and discussions with various stakeholders in the respective EaP country where an election is taking place (international organizations and missions, local civil society, political parties, expert community). The Task Force shall consist of CSF representatives with experience in election observation, electoral law, party financing, media monitoring. The Task Force will produce a report on its findings. Among other things, it will assess how previous recommendations by ODIHR have been or have not been taken into account.

The Sub-group on **Local government and public administration reform** produced and circulated reports and monitoring papers. This information has been made available to the EU and Council of Europe institutions and other stakeholders.

Funded by the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs, CSRDG (Centre for Strategic Research and Development of Georgia) coordinated the project "Promoting Citizen Participation in Local Governance in 6 EaP Countries".

Through the project, a report with information on the national legislation of EaP countries and their application in practice in terms of citizens' participation at the local level has been produced in scope of the "European Charter of Local Self-government", "Additional Protocol to the European Charter of Local Self-Government on the Right to Participate in the Affairs of a Local Authority", "Strategy for Innovation and Good Governance at Local Level", and "The Code of Good Practices of Citizens' participation". This report will be published in the coming months and made available to all relevant institutions and stakeholders.

The SWG also produced an Assessment on Fiscal Decentralisation, which is available on the CSF web-site.

The Sub-group on **Visas** has developed the visa liberalisation index that is to be launched on 20th of November. It is an Internet tool that helps visualise the progress made by the Eastern Partnership states towards visa-free regime with the EU. Up today only two out of six Eastern Partnership countries have started visa liberalisation dialogue with the EU and have been granted such Action Plans.

Under the project, a team of national experts investigates and evaluates the pace of reforms in each of the EaP states. The results can be found at www.visa-free-europe.eu. It will be updated every three-four months and regular reports on the progress made and challenges still in front of the EaP states on their way to visa-free travel will be sent out to the media, decision-makers and opinion-leaders.

Major findings up to date: Moldova has fulfilled the criteria of the 1st (legislative) phase, Ukraine is just slightly behind; Georgia has made considerable progress on migration management and is to receive the Action Plan soon; Armenia has also made a considerable progress over the past year.

In October, the SWG members took part in a conference-seminar on migration and asylum in Eastern Partnership that was organised in Chisinau by the European Commission, the governments of the Republic of Moldova and the Republic of Poland in co-operation with the Swedish Migration Board and Kyiv's IOM (International Organization for Migration) office. The SWG presented its expertise also at a conference in September in Yerevan that was co-organised by the Analytical Centre on Globalization and Regional Cooperation (Armenia) and the Stefan Batory Foundation (Poland) with the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic. It gathered representatives of civil society organisations from both the European Union and Eastern Partnership, as well as journalists, and offered a view on EU visa policies towards Eastern Partnership countries from the perspective of people-to-people relations, which are so often hampered by visa barriers.

Similarly, other Sub-groups – on **Judicial reform, Fight against corruption, Media** and **Human Rights** - continuously implement projects that contribute to the work of WG1 and participate in the process of transformation and approximation with EU standards in all six partner countries. I once again invite you to join us for the Forum in Stockholm and learn more about the existing projects in each of the areas covered by this Platform.

Thank you, again, for the opportunity to be here today and speak about the contribution of the Forum. I look forward to our next meeting. In the meantime, the Steering Committee remains available to answer all your questions and supply detailed information on the Forum's activities.

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