

EASTERN PARTNERSHIP: TOWARDS CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM

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POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EASTERN PARTNERSHIP SUMMIT

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POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EASTERN PARTNERSHIP SUMMIT

As formulated by participants of workshops of the conference “Eastern Partnership: Towards Civil Society Forum” on May 5, 2009.

WORKSHOP A

Building a Partnership of Shared Values?

Thematic focus: Democracy, Good Governance and Human Rights

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Interlinking progress in democracy and human rights with closer integration with the EU

- Clear benchmarks need to be set in order to assess progress in terms of democracy and the rule of law. Moreover, universal human rights standards need to be applied, so that country progress reports can address development towards democracy and target the required actions on the part of the partner governments for subsequent negotiations. In particular, the EU should include the assessments on democracy, electoral standards, and human rights by the Council of Europe, UN, OSCE/ODIHR, and civil society assessments, in its regular progress evaluations. The European Parliament should prepare its own monitoring reports to complement the Commission's reports.
- Regarding conditional mechanisms of reward or sanctions, well performing states should proceed with the negotiation of association agreements, while poorly performing states should seek reduced benefits or sanctions graduated according to the case. Where there is an insufficient progress in meeting the benchmarks, the EU should still assure the level of support to independent civil society (including capacity-building) to strengthen its impact on furthering democracy, human rights and the rule of law in the country concerned. People-to-people contacts and mobility should be increased regardless of governmental performance.
- The EU must further increase the size, capacity and expertise of its delegations and other personnel working with the EaP countries. Country reports should focus on implementation, not just adoption of laws or institutional arrangements. This requires follow-up support for implementation, including the public and civil society watchdog agencies.
- The legal framework and regulatory environment facing civil society development should be a subject of the political dialogue and also covered by the progress reports. Very specific conditionality has to be offered to different EaP countries, since the regulatory environment for civil society differs.

Support to civil society

- The civil society forum should be given a place in the operational structure of the Eastern Partnership, and should primarily comprise experts who will work in the respective Thematic Platform areas. Hence, the civil society forum should have four platforms to work with the four thematic platforms of the Eastern Partnership initiative. The Democracy, Good Governance and Stability thematic platform should be re-named Democracy, Good Governance, Human Rights and Stability thematic platform, and the respective civil society platform should be supported in undertaking independent monitoring that should be made public as annexes to the progress reports for each country. The level of expertise should be a criterion for participation in the forum.
- The forum should include a monitoring group (group of civil society experts from all the EaP countries) which will monitor implementation of individual action plans, in particular, where the issues of democracy, rule of law, and human rights are concerned. It should be a permanent watch-dog group that will present regular monitoring reports conducted according to a common methodology and set of indicators for all countries. Regular reports should be presented to the Thematic Platform.
- The civil society forum website should be created, and funded by the European Parliament in order to give it more independence from the respective partner governments. The website should highlight human rights, civic freedoms, and the rule of law, and infringements in the partner countries. This should be a key communications channel for the civil society forum. In parallel, the EU should strengthen its own communications outreach in the EaP countries to disseminate information about the EU's values-based approach to democracy and human rights, and its commitment to a values-based deepening or neighbourhood relations. In the medium term, the Civil Society Forum should diversify its sources of funding, so that it is not completely dependent on the EU funding.
- The civil society facility (an instrument under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance - IPA) should be offered to EaP countries, in particular to strengthen civil society capacity. The reporting requirements for funding under the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) should be further eased to make it possible for small organisations to apply.

WORKSHOP B

Resolving Conflicts: Pre-condition for Development in other Areas?

Thematic focus: Security and Peace Building

EU's greater emphasis on the role of civil society as it is suggested by the Eastern Partnership (EaP) should be welcomed. Civil society is a major stakeholder in a peace building process and has vital interest in solving conflicts which should contribute to democratization and development. Civil society has contributed to easing conflict tensions, establishing preventive and information sharing networks and bridging the divides.

Democracy building and conflict resolution is closely interconnected. Progress made in other areas of EaP concern (e. g. economic development or energy security) is not sustainable unless transformation and conflict resolution is achieved. EaP has a potential of becoming a

platform to enhance Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) access to the decision making process regarding conflicts, negotiation processes etc.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Given the failure of conflict resolution processes so far EaP Civil Society Forum (CSF) should create greater and more inclusive space for the CSOs (including those representing IDPs) engagement in conflict resolution and peace building.
- EaP needs to engage CSOs from the conflict regions.
- Institutionalized dialogue should be created between the EU, CSOs and EaP governments (i.e. those of six partner countries) on conflict transformation. CSF could be a vehicle for this.
- EaP should help CSOs build effective mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation of the national/governmental and international policies and processes of conflict resolution.
- EaP should provide an avenue for transfer of positive examples of European experience and lessons learned in conflict transformation and addressing the issues of competing sovereignty claims and identity politics.
- Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) done by CSOs should be supported and implemented in various formats. Empowering the CSOs to put greater effort into elaborating and prioritizing CBMs should be given particular emphasize in the EaP/EaP CSF framework.

WORKSHOP C

EU Role in Economic Convergence of EaP Countries

Thematic Focus: Economic Integration

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The global financial crisis brought recession to the entire region challenging macroeconomic and social stability. The EU should help in providing adequate macro financial assistance packages to countries in need, through the IMF, other international financial institutions and through its own sources.
- Economic cooperation and integration of EaP countries with the EU should be primarily based on bilateral basis with individual countries having a right to decide on the speed and depth, legal and institutional forms and sectors involved.
- Progress in economic integration should evaluate on each individual country achievements and its particular economic conditions rather than on group performance.
- Clear prospects of FTAs should be offered to those EaP countries that are the WTO members and are ready and express willingness to enter these arrangements.
- The deep and comprehensive FTAs supported by extensive assistance packages should aim at strengthening the EaP countries competitiveness in the most important industries. If a partner country is willing, an FTA should move beyond trade in goods,

to envisage free trade in services, free movement of capital, as well as regulatory and institutional convergence in such areas as competition, energy, transport, standardization and removal of other non-tariff barriers.

- The deep and comprehensive FTAs will also involve cooperation in some sectors of key importance for both sides such as energy, telecommunication, transportation and other infrastructure services, financial services, etc.
- Facilitation of labour mobility between EaP countries and EU is equally important as a free trade in goods and services especially for those countries where remittances constitute a substantial share of GNP and current account.
- There is necessity to assist in designing market access strategy to the countries that are not WTO members yet and facilitate for those who already are WTO members.
- Special attention should be paid to needs of EaP countries that are currently not covered by or have limited access to ENPI.
- Giving priority to bilateral track, multilateral aspects of economic cooperation like the Neighbourhood Economic Community (NEC) should be further explored. Content and form of NEC should be subject of a substantial feasibility study and discussion with the EaP countries.
- NIF represents a great opportunity to promote public investments in infrastructure and regulatory convergence in EU social, institutional and economic standards. Therefore specifications of NIF objectives and the assessment criteria are needed to be further elaborated in order to support projects that are efficient and sustainable.
- The ENPI and other EU funds should also support cross-border investment projects both between individual EaP countries and between them and EU partners.
- The role and involvement of civil society organizations (CSOs) of EaP countries should be eminent and their engagement should be institutionalized, particularly at following stages:
 - 1) Planning (e.g. CSOs could be consulted before launch of negotiations or launch of multilateral initiatives);
 - 2) Implementation of commitments (e.g. monitoring and evaluation of Action Plans, new agreements with the EU, ENPI funding);
- CSOs should be supported in acquiring knowledge and expertise in the fields of economic integration and internal reforms.

WORKSHOP D

Connecting Neighbours: From Infrastructure to People-to-People Contacts Thematic Focus: Communication, Transport, Visa Facilitation

Although the success of the Eastern partnership (EaP) heavily depends on the engagement of the Eastern partners (EaPs) themselves and their commitment to the principles of democracy, rule of law and good governance, the EU can and should essentially increase its engagement in the region, thus helping the states and societies in their modernisations and reforms. The present situation, characterised by visa obligation for the EaPs citizens planning to visit the EU, low level of people-to-people contacts between the societies of the

EU and the EaPs, poor transport architecture and unfriendly border crossing, is highly unsatisfactory. It hampers the development of economic ties as well as tourism between the EU and the EaPs. Among the EaPs societies it also diminishes the attractiveness of the European model of development. Therefore promoting people to people contacts should be regarded as a key-strategic area for the EaP, since this will provide a huge incentive for changes in behaviour and mentality of the societies of the EaPs.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Given these circumstances, the EU and its member states should:

Visa liberalization

- Consider abolishing visas for all citizens of the EaPs as an ultimate strategic goal;
- Waive fees for Schengen visas starting with 1st January 2010;
- Promptly present road maps regarding visa liberalization with specific conditions to be fulfilled by all EaPs;
- Facilitate visa application procedures in all EaPs, including model such as the Common Visa Application Centre in Chisinau;
- Provide persons having positive visa history with long-term multiply visas on the basis of already existing legal regulations (their present implementation leaves a lot to be desired);
- Promote e-applications as an auxiliary tool which can speed up the procedure of visa issuing;
- Pay special attention to the selection of the EU consulate staff and provide them with obligatory courses in order to improve their understanding of the region's specifics;
- Introduce and develop an effective monitoring mechanism of visa issuing and treatment of the applicants ("Visa Watch") as well as create a "Code of Conduct" for the consulate employees.

Transport

- Render financial assistance to the creation (building or renovation) of modern railway connections between the EU and the EaPs preferably with the European medium-gauge standards;
- Promote further liberalisation of the air movement between the EU and the EaP;
- Make the EU-EaP borders more friendly and the procedures of their crossing faster.

People-to-People Contacts

- Promote knowledge about the EU's exchange and assistance programmes and make them easier accessible for the EaP NGOs, local governments and citizens with the special focus on the underdeveloped regions;

- Adopt special Eastern Partnership student and youth exchange programmes, allowing gifted students to make short or long term study-related visits to the EU or to the EaP;
- Enable students from the EaPs to participate in the international *Erasmus* exchange programme, not only *Erasmus Mundus*;
- Promote voluntary service between the EU and the EaPs;
- Supporting the participation of the EaPs partners in the *Jean Monnet* programme and extending knowledge about the EU, as well as promoting cooperation with the EaPs scholars, including a fuller use of the 7th EU Framework Program should be established;
- Provide the EaPs societies with alternative sources of information to counter local media, spreading antidemocratic and anti-western ideas.

WORKSHOP E

Eastern Partnership and Energy Security Thematic Focus: Energy Security

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- With the Eastern Partnership being launched, the window of opportunity opens for deeper engagement of both the EU and the partner countries in energy dialogue;
- In energy field, as well as in several other sectors, the EaP could deliver benefits to both the EU and the partner countries within multilateral formats of cooperation (such as the Black Sea Synergy);
- The rules of game in accordance with the Energy Charter Treaty should be developed with the partner countries first, while keeping the door open for other formats of multilateral consultations drawing on rules and achievements developed within the EaP;
- Extension of the (legally binding) Energy Community should be preferred to non-binding Memoranda of Understanding ;
- The administrative capacity, good governance, transparency, and empowerment of consumers belong to the areas that should be given priority in the energy sector and supported by the Comprehensive Institution Building Programme (CIB);
- The ENPI Regional Programme East should cover urgent projects related to energy security (e.g. joint storage, two-way interconnections, energy conservation);
- Energy efficiency, technology transfer, and renewable energy should be endorsed as one of the major „flagship initiatives“ envisaged for the EaP;
- Intelligent Energy Europe Programme should be extended to the partner countries;
- The Civil Society Forum should be used as a preferred and consistent mechanism for articulating the expectations and obligations of the EaP countries with the aim of broadening the base of stakeholders within each partner countries´ society.

WORKSHOP F

A Role for the Civil Society Forum in the Eastern Partnership

Thematic Focus: Agenda and Design of the EaP Civil Society Forum

Purpose

- The aim of the Civil Society Forum is to contribute to the implementation of the EaP goals through the involvement, development and strengthening the Civil Societies in all EaP countries as well as to bridge Civil Societies from the EU and EaP countries.
- The Civil Society Forum should be based on cooperative approaches and its activities should accompany the effort of the Commission, the member states of the EU, national governments of EaP countries and other participating actors from the EU (like Euronest and Local and Regional Assembly) in achieving the goals of the EaP.
- The Civil Society Forum should aim to contribute to the better use of existing instruments and tools of the EaP and to ensure that they are open to the participation of the Civil Society actors.

Agenda

- The Civil Society Forum should be included in the planning of the Action Plan goals (or new partnership instrument that should succeed the Action Plan) and activities on national level in the EaP countries.
- The Civil Society Forum should be invited to participate and to monitor the work of joint EU-EaP countries' joint sub-committees that are supposed to serve as a feed back mechanism between the European Commission and National Governments of the EaP countries.
- The Civil Society Forum should be invited to participate and to monitor the work of national EaP countries authorities in implementing AP/NPI priorities (at the national level).
- The Civil Society Forum should be given an opportunity to consult both the position documents of the EaP countries on their national Action Plans as well as the progress reports of the European Commission. In addition, it should stimulate Civil Society actors to elaborate independent assessments and recommendations.
- The Civil Society Forum can initiate discussion and come up with recommendations on how to improve criteria for the evaluation of the EaP countries' performance.
- The Civil Society Forum should develop tailor-made strategy to support a sectoral integration of EaP countries with clear benchmarks.
- The Civil Society Forum should initiate discussion with the European Commission on its participation in the structured approximation process and to ensure that representatives of civil society from the EaP countries are involved into the Comprehensive Institution-Building Program (CIB).
- The Civil Society Forum should elaborate programme on multilateral expert events and projects on issues envisaged under the four thematic platforms in order to

facilitate cooperation and exchange of know how between respective expert communities from the EU and EaP countries.

- The Civil Society Forum should elaborate proposals on specific thematic panels on the fourth operational level in order to contribute to the work of thematic platforms.

Institutional design¹

- The Civil Society Forum should be established by civil society organizations from the EU and EaP countries in a partnership with the European Commission and the European Economic and Social Committee.
- The Civil Society Forum (CSF) of the EaP should have an operational and flexible institutional design comprised of its EU and EaP elements. Its composition should be balanced in order to ensure an adequate representation of Civil Societies of both the EU and EaP countries. The CSF General Assembly should meet at least once a year alternatively in the EU and an EaP country to evaluate the overall process of implementation of EaP.
- In order to contribute to the implementation of bilateral agenda of the EaP, the CSF of the EaP should create its national sections. The Civil society actors in EaP countries should create open national EaP platforms in order to facilitate both the participation of all interested NGOs and to agree on free and fair criteria and procedures for selection of national representatives to the CSF General Assembly and other CSF bodies.
- When it comes to the participation of other Civil Society actors from the EU countries, the Commission should make a call to invite interested NGOs. The same procedure should be applied to EaP countries where are difficulties of political or legal nature with a creation of national EaP platforms.
- The activities of the Civil Society Forum should be supported by the administrative body (a Secretariat), created by the Commission in cooperation with the European Economic and Social Committee. The administrative body should provide organisational and communication (web site) services to the Civil Society Forum.

SPECIAL PANEL ON MOLDOVA Statement on Political Crisis in Moldova

We express support to the initiative, launched by the civil society in Moldova, proposing a roadmap for national reconciliation and European integration of this country. We call upon the Presidency of the European Union to consider this document in promoting democratic settlement of political crisis in Moldova. We encourage Moldovan civil society to become a driving force for the Europeanization of Moldova. We also encourage government of Moldova to work closely with Moldovan civil society.

¹ This text was drafted by the Coordinator and Rapporteur of the workshop. Consensus of workshop participants was not reached.