



## Declaration of the 11th Annual Assembly of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF) EaP4EU: Joining forces for a win-win partnership

Brussels, 4-6 December 2019

We, civil society organisations from the Eastern Partnership (EaP) and European Union (EU) member states, having gathered in Brussels, address this Declaration to the Heads of State and Government and the EU institutions in preparation of the sixth Eastern Partnership Summit.

### Preamble

- A. **We celebrate** the 10th anniversary of the Eastern Partnership policy, launched in 2009 by Sweden and Poland. The policy, in combination with other internal and regional processes, has changed the Eastern Partnership countries. It has brought up a new generation of active supporters of democracy and active citizenship, who are fighting for dignity and who starkly oppose corruption and bad governance. From Maidan to the central squares of Chisinau, Yerevan and Tbilisi, the protests had a common goal – to send a strong signal to the political elites about the societies’ desire to live in democracies based on the rule of law and respect of human rights.
- B. **We acknowledge** the year 2014 as a milestone year for the EaP region, which resulted in the signature of three Association Agreements (AAs) between the EU and Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. The AAs have set a framework and provided a roadmap for implementing reforms based on European values, and opened the way for more ambitious forms of cooperation.
- C. **We welcome** the signing of the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) between the Republic of Armenia and the EU in November 2017.
- D. **We understand** that inclusiveness and differentiation in relations to the EaP partners offers different opportunities, matching EaP countries’ levels of ambitions. It is important that different configurations of cooperation exist in parallel to, and without jeopardizing, the existing Eastern Partnership multilateral structure, and are built on regular consultations and comparative assessments of the progress in strengthening democracy, rule of law and good governance.
- E. **We adopted** an internal reform of EaP CSF in 2018, which strengthened the organisational capacity of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum at the national and regional level. We represent more than 1000 organisations from the EaP and EU countries, and we will continue our work as a partner devoted to the implementation of European values and standards in the EaP region. **We believe** nobody should be left behind; informing and involving all citizens of EaP countries is our top priority for the future.

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F. **We believe** that the EaP policy beyond 2020 must be framed around a renewed and stronger model of cooperation between the EU and democratically minded constituencies in the region who can support the democratic reform processes. **We argue** for a truly multi-stakeholder process, which can bring real results in promoting human rights, democratic participation, transparency and accountability. We encourage especially the inclusion of youth in decision-making processes and discussions on the future of the EaP. **We experience** lack of support in making the enabling environment for civil society a top priority for the EU and EaP governments, especially those of Azerbaijan and Belarus. **We plead** for at least 10% increase in funding allocated to the EaP policy within the next EU Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2021-2027 and the new *Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument* (NDICI), including for proportionally more funds for strengthening CSOs and their work. **We hope** the new European Commission and the Commissioner for the Neighbourhood and Enlargement will enhance their support to fundamental values and rights in the EaP region and advance the inclusive development of EaP societies without discrimination. **We ask** for further strengthening of our participation in the EaP architecture meetings and for better access to the policy-making processes at all levels.

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1. **Whereas** the EaP architecture, reviewed in 2017, puts an emphasis on promotion and implementation of the core European values that the EU citizens are enjoying, such as human rights, democracy, rule of law and good governance. Whereas the EaP architecture facilitates development of EaP economies and supports their competitiveness, so that they can access European single market and create more jobs. Whereas environment, energy security and interconnectivity is another pillar of the EaP architecture aiming to promote European standards of living for the EaP citizens. Whereas the EU is to launch an unprecedented Green Deal and the EaP countries have done very little to implement the necessary standards. Whereas the Eastern Partnership policy is an important tool for spreading European rules in the energy sector. Whereas the external dimension of the internal gas market and gas infrastructure does not end at the external borders of the EU.
2. **Whereas** mobility, visa liberalisation and more opportunities for youth are part of the EaP policy aiming to guarantee free movement of the EaP citizens within the European Union, facilitating cultural exchange, education, work experience sharing and improved labour standards for youth. Whereas 20.000 youth participated in Erasmus+ programme and strengthened their knowledge and capacities in various fields; whereas they share this knowledge and best practices in their home countries. Whereas the visa liberalisation for Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine enabled 5 million of EaP citizens to travel freely in the EU countries. Whereas the Creative Europe programme facilitated exchange among the cultural and creative sectors and professionals.



3. **Whereas** EU supported over 3.000 SMEs through various programmes in EaP countries and incentivized entrepreneurship, giving further possibilities to the EaP citizens to get better jobs and to the companies to export products to the European single market.
4. **Whereas** many challenges remain in implementing the EaP policy and its deliverables in all six EaP countries. Whereas those relate namely to modest results in the field of justice reform, which is a key to fighting high-level corruption and holding the governments accountable. Whereas EU support to the justice reform processes goes back to 2010, but the achievements have not been substantial. Whereas too little has been done by the EaP governments for the citizens to feel the real results of justice reforms and fight against corruption. Whereas following the Velvet revolution in Armenia in spring of 2018, legitimate parliament and government were elected but the Armenian judiciary, including the Constitutional Court still lacks legitimacy.
5. **Whereas** respect to human rights is a basic principle in the EU member states, the citizens of some EaP countries are deprived of them. Whereas there are cases of people arrested for protesting against the policies and actions of their governments in Azerbaijan and Belarus. Whereas Russian aggression towards Georgia and Ukraine, occupation of Crimea by Russian Federation and invasion in Donbas have led to large-scale violations of human rights, fundamental freedoms and dignity, and to numerous crimes against the civilian population, breaching the basic rules of international humanitarian law. Whereas some EaP countries are making progress on anti-discrimination, all partners have still a long way to go to ensure fair and safe environment for LGBTQI community, elderly, people with disabilities and other minorities. Whereas the Istanbul Convention is the most advanced legal instrument in the world to combat violence against women and the first treaty to add value to the international legal framework by providing a legally-binding definition of violence against women as a violation of human rights and a form of discrimination against women.
6. **Whereas** the EU has been strongly promoting media freedom in the Eastern Partnership countries on the course of the last 10 years but the propaganda and manipulation of public opinion by the internal and external non-democratic actors has been still leading to distorted parliamentary, presidential and local elections in various EaP countries. Whereas the security for journalists, bloggers and freelance journalists remains main concern and many of them are facing imprisonment, harassment and censorship. Whereas the lack of media freedom resulted to low level of understanding of the reforms and limited attention paid by the EaP citizens to the EU-funded projects and programmes implemented in the EaP region.
7. **Whereas** the EU carried out structured consultations on the future of EaP in all EaP countries and online in order to gather opinions on the priorities for the next cooperation framework with the EaP countries beyond 2020. Whereas EaP CSF also carried out consultations with its members in order to contribute to the EU structured consultations and bring in civil society ideas on how to improve the policy and how to strengthen the participation of civil society in the upcoming period.

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- I. The AAs and CEPA constitute serious engagements in implementing European values and democratic reforms. It is important that the EU and the EU member states recognize the European perspective for the EaP countries aspiring for it. **We propose** to update the approach towards the three EaP countries with AAs (Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine) and the one country with CEPA (Armenia) based on the progress that these agreements invoke in terms of the countries' EU integration. Peer-to-peer exchange, policy coordination and close dialogue with the EU institutions are all important parts of the agreements' implementation, which should be based on regular consultations and joint actions on governmental, parliamentary and civil society levels. Along with the AAs and CEPA follows the need to update the EU policy towards these countries, to offer a closer integration in line with the 'everything but institutions' promise. Legislative screening, integration into the European single market, inclusion into the cohesion policy (access to structural funds), extension of the infrastructure networks, strengthened cooperation in CSDP and area of freedom, security and justice are among the key elements. In this respect, **we also call on** EU institutions and the government of the Republic of Armenia to intensify negotiations on the visa liberalization.
- II. **We call** on the EU to continue applying stronger and more targeted pressure for further adoption and implementation of core accountability mechanisms - in the judiciary the attention should be focused on transparent selection and promotion of judges and fair disciplinary proceedings; for public officials the key anti-corruption measures should be in place (i.e. asset declarations); in the field of competition of political parties the EU should push for further adoption of legislative amendments to electoral laws and the party financing legislation in line with international standards. All elements mentioned above should be part of conditionality linked to disbursement of macro-financial assistance applied by the EU and other international organisations (CoE programmes funded from the EU budget) and financial institutions (IMF, EBRD and World Bank). The EU has invested much into training judges, investigators, prosecutors, prison staff, public defenders and lawyers in order to increase their skills in protecting rights of individuals. We suggest continuing these efforts by establishing a programme for judges with focus on accountability and independence allowing judges to meet their counterparts from the EU member states and EaP. CSOs with relevant expertise and at the relevant level (local, regional, or national) could also participate. **We acknowledge** the importance of the judiciary and electoral reforms in EaP countries as well as the negative consequences of the failure in their implementation. **We urge** the Government of Armenia and the Government of Georgia to implement a profound reform of the judiciary and to take urgent measures to resolve the crisis by forming a legitimate Constitutional Court that will enjoy full public trust.
- III. In order to achieve a deeper and more sustainable change in the rule of law in EaP countries and to support the citizens of EaP countries in enjoying their human rights, **we recommend** to the EU and the EU member states to increase financial support to individual human rights defenders and CSOs focusing on human rights, and support their participation in the implementation and assessment of

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reforms, for example via their inclusion into the Human Rights Dialogues with all six partners, following the already established practice with Belarus and Moldova.

- IV. **We propose** to support the regional collaboration and cooperation of women human rights defenders, working for the same goal in various countries as a viable strategy for the successful elimination of violence against women. The recent discussions in Belarus concerning the Istanbul Convention are welcome; the EU should encourage the governments of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Moldova and Ukraine to increase efforts in order to ratify the Istanbul Convention.
- V. **We call** on the EU member states to adopt the EU Magnitsky Act and apply it against individuals in EaP countries who are guilty of human rights abuses, state capture, and high-level corruption, and provide more consistent support to civil society organisations in their efforts to monitor fraud and money laundering. The reports assessing the state of rule of law should become more concrete, and a monitoring mechanism, similar to the rule of law scorecard used by the EU member states and candidate countries, should be introduced for the EaP countries.
- VI. **We suggest** to further develop and implement measures addressing the massive propaganda in the EaP region. The support to EU Stratcom East and projects and programmes enhancing media literacy, media freedom and security for journalists should be increased. Disinformation is most impactful on groups who have, for various reasons, less access to diverse and independent sources of information. The EU should focus on supporting projects identifying further these groups and specifying the biases and enablers for each of the groups, going beyond standard notions of vulnerable groups. The EU should subsidise the adaptation and broadcasting of European content to EaP countries (entertainment, educational, professional, documentary and other programmes and channels). Urgent measures should be taken to ensure the independence of the broadcast media by introducing a mandatory requirement for financial accountability of the owners thereof.
- VII. **We urge** the EU and EU member states to demand from the Russian Federation to immediately release all remaining Ukrainian political prisoners and stop the politically motivated persecution of Crimean Tatars and civic activists. The EU should also demand a full unrestricted access to the territory of the Russian Federation and the occupied Crimea for the Council of Europe's monitoring mechanisms and missions.
- VIII. **We assert** the EU to make joint efforts for reaching stability and security in the EaP area through enhanced security cooperation with partner countries, supporting mediation in settlement of all ongoing conflicts, prevention of new possible crises with the use of early warning mechanisms and development of confidence between the EU, EaP countries and other countries in the region.
- IX. **We encourage** the EU to send a strong and clear message to the EaP countries endorsing and encouraging the creation of single European gas market connecting the EU and the three EaP countries with AAs. The EU member states and Ukraine will be having the same obligations to implement EU acquis related to single gas market and this legislation should be enforced to the benefit of all sides.

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- X. We believe it is crucial to ensure better visibility of the EU support to the region. **We propound** the EU, EU member states and civil society to joint efforts reaching out to citizens of the EaP countries, especially in the regions. The EU should prioritise funding for local projects raising awareness about the EU in small towns and regions. It should go beyond university students and EU-minded cohorts, partner with civil society and capitalise on existing programmes, such as EU Young Ambassadors and Eastern Partnership Civil Society fellows. Opportunities stemming from AAs implementation should be used as an entry point to raise awareness about the benefits of EU integration and their positive impact on labour markets. **We recommend** strengthening support to entrepreneurial activity of women through a variety of financial and technical support mechanisms, aiming at gender equality and facilitating cooperation among the EaP countries and among the EaP countries and the EU.
- XI. **We expect** the results of the Structured Consultation on the EaP to become an integral part of the new cooperation framework with the EaP region. The framework should be based on clearly defined deliverables that can be easily monitored and measured for impact. New targets should be country-specific, measurable, and comparable in the short, medium, and long-term. They should be actor-tailored to allow a clear division of responsibility and be tied to clear deadlines, outputs, results and goals as well as allocated resources that are needed to achieve them. The new deliverables should bring real changes so much expected in the EaP countries in the field of justice, anti-corruption, human rights (with a focus on women, people with disabilities, elderly, LGBTIQI etc.), labour rights and progress on visa liberalisation. The renewed policy should deliver sound economic development with the focus on digital markets, better interconnectivity, energy security, environmental protection and adaptation to climate change. The policy should deliver opportunities for youth while keeping the EaP Youth Window in the next Erasmus+ programme, including the possibility to apply for KA1, KA2 and KA3 projects. **We also recommend** to continue the Creative Europe Programme and to encourage the EaP partners to join both the 'Media' and 'Culture' components.
- XII. **We assert** the EU and the EU member states should further empower the civil society and representatives of EaP CSF by facilitating their participation in high-level meetings in full, including Senior Officials Meetings and EaP Summits. A permanent dialogue should be facilitated not only in the Brussels meetings rooms but also in EaP countries where permanent interaction between the EaP governments and civil society should be enhanced.
- XIII. **We suggest** the EU makes the support to enabling environment for civil society a top priority by lending it and its statements, denouncing human rights violations and failure to respect the rule of law, firm and consistent political support and thereby strengthening and further legitimising their demands. The EU should enhance the role of civil society in EaP policy implementation to improve results and strengthen local ownership of reforms. The most effective measures for the EU to grant civil society a stronger role in policy implementation would be to assign specific roles to civil society actors, including EaP CSF and its National Platforms, in the new EaP post-2020 agenda and its individual targets. We recommend to establish permanent working groups, involving civil society and other non-governmental representatives tasked with supporting implementation and monitoring of cross-cutting deliverables, and to facilitate joint identification and development of



clear benchmarks for measuring reform implementation, a gap that is frequently identified by CSOs as an impediment to their efforts to hold governments more accountable.

- XIV. **We recommend** the EU to acknowledge clearly that a true partnership runs both ways. In the upcoming period, the partnership has to be seen as a two-way street where experience from EaP countries and its civil society has become increasingly relevant for the EU member states and can be shared for mutual benefit of both sides.

**Adopted on 6 December 2019**