

Conference of the Ukrainian National Platform
Remarks by Ana Furtuna, Director of the EaP CSF

Kyiv, 1 November 2022

Dear colleagues and friends,

I am honoured to speak to you today on behalf of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum. Since this is the first occasion that I have to address all of you at once - even if from a screen this time - since taking on my role as Director at the EaP CSF, I want to first pay tribute to the immense courage and determination with which YOU and all Ukrainians are fighting this terrible and unjust war. You, both as citizens of this great country, but also as representatives of civil society have been working tirelessly, facing incredibly harsh conditions:

- to help people in need,
- to support the European future of YOUR country,
- to advocate for the right kind of support from the international community, all while struggling with relocation, loss and immense psychological pressure.

Words don't do justice in truly describing what you have been going through since the start of the war on 24 February, however the whole independent world stands united in saying loud and clear: Slava Ukraini! Glory to Ukraine!

As Ukraine proceeds on its European path, I want to stress the importance of having **Ukrainian civil society maintain a key role in the promotion of European integration, during the war and after, when peace will return- and this will definitely happen!**

Civil society is a key player in any democratisation process and a key partner in the sustainable democratic development of Ukraine. As indicated by the European Commission's assessment, **rule of law and good governance should remain key pillars of the reform process.** As Ukraine transitions towards EU integration, a solid partnership between the government and civil society remains essential: democratic reforms are a long and arduous process, we can never be complacent with progress, and we must continue trying to secure the strong rule of law, an independent judiciary and solid anti-corruption laws and institutions. This means advocating for transparent and democratic practices, and being vocal for civil society to be included in the reform process. While there is no doubt the war puts everyone, both institutions and people, under severe pressure, it can also be a trigger to establish a new, improved partnership between government and civil society, laying the foundations for strong cooperation in the reconstruction of Ukraine.

Internationally, civil society also has a key role to play, through the Eastern Partnership policy and its fora.

I know the Eastern Partnership has not been very popular among some in Ukraine, including due to fears that being part of the EaP brand would slow down Ukraine's European integration process.

Today I would like to attempt to dispel those concerns and offer a new perspective through which the opportunities that the policy offers to civil society and Ukraine can be viewed. This is

particularly important because, to all intents and purposes, the Eastern Partnership policy will stay. This has been reconfirmed by all actors in Brussels - European Institutions, EU member states - and in the EaP, including by the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who has backed Ukraine's continued engagement in the policy.

First of all, **as Ukraine progresses towards enlargement, the EaP policy remains a key instrument for engagement with civil society.** As you may be aware, the enlargement process is, by design, an intergovernmental one only, which sees the involvement of the EU on one side, and of the national government on the other. There is no structured space for civil society engagement in the enlargement process, similar to what we have within the Eastern Partnership. The continuation of the policy will be absolutely instrumental to ensure the continued engagement of civil society in EU processes. **We want to have more channels of communication, not fewer. We want to have stronger and more active involvement, not weaker.**

Secondly, **the policy can - and should - strengthen further the synergy between the EaP and the enlargement agenda.** Discussions about how to reprioritise the EaP and its areas of cooperation are now in full swing. Consensus has emerged on energy, environment, security, interconnectivity and people-to-people contacts. All these areas are key to Ukraine's present and future, with clear direct and indirect benefits. More energy interconnectivity is key now to sustain Ukraine's energy markets. Green reconstruction should be based on European international best practices and standards. Security cooperation is essential to ensure that Ukraine has the best possible support in the war effort but also that the whole region, including Ukraine and its direct neighbours, are more resilient to Russia's threats, both physical and digital. We now have the chance to shape these discussions further and I encourage you to be active in these discussions, to make sure that the EaP can support Ukraine's future as much as possible. We, at EaP CSF, will do our utmost best to ensure that the EaP policy is your friend in your enlargement aspirations, not your foe.

Thirdly, the EaP multilateral framework already offers a mediated space for continuous dialogue between state and non-state actors alike, increasing chances for conciliation, reconstruction, rehabilitation, and, hopefully, societal healing.

It is no secret that relations between EaP countries have been tense at times: Armenia and Azerbaijan fought a very painful war; Ukraine was invaded from Belarusian territory, which, consequently, increased tensions between the populations of the 2 countries. Creating Working groups focused on confidence building measures, involving EaP civil society as a key actor in this process and providing capacity building on peace and trust building, is a must, and this will give EaP countries the opportunity to work towards better neighbourly relations.

To conclude on this part, I want to stress that we value our cooperation greatly and I look forward to cooperating even more closely in the future.

As you may have seen, from our part, we have been as active as possible to advocate for Ukraine and its civil society within the fora we have here in Brussels. We have redirected entirely our regranting funds to Ukraine for this year, giving out 220 thousand euros to projects tending to the needs arising from the war and in the form of core support to civil society organisations that need to continue doing their precious work. Is this enough? I know it is not, but I also know that this was all the money we had allocated for regranting this year.

Some of you may remember that in the immediate days after Russia launched its war of aggression, some donors froze their support to ongoing projects on the grounds that they could

no longer be implemented, leaving many CSOs with active projects in even more dire conditions. We advocated strongly with different donors, including the European Commission and we were happy to see that thanks to our efforts, the decision was reversed.

Since 24 February, we have been calling for more military, financial and humanitarian aid to Ukraine, for stronger sanctions on Russia, for the seizing and selling of all assets belonging to Russian oligarchs in Europe and for their profits to be used to fund Ukraine. We have been calling out the slow reaction of the UN and have repeatedly raised the problem of the loss of trust in the International Red Cross that emerged in the first months of war.

We have been advocating for Ukraine to obtain EU candidate status in formal events, in op-eds and I am very happy and proud to see Ukraine steadily heading towards democratic reform in spite of all the difficulties arising from the war.

As you know, we will soon have our Annual Assembly, which will be focused on the future of the region and will honour Ukrainian civil society in various ways.

I look forward to meeting many of you in person in December or at the earliest possible occasion. Please always know that you have a close ally in us at the Secretariat and I encourage you to approach us with your initiatives.

Thank you for having me today and I wish you a great continuation of the conference.

Slava Ukraini!