

***Tangible Results for People:
Envisioning the Eastern Partnership in 2020 and Beyond***

Civil Society Declaration

addressed to the 5th Brussels Eastern Partnership Summit of the Heads of State and Government

***Eastern Partnership Civil Society Conference 2017
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We, civil society organisations from the Eastern partnership (EaP) and European Union (EU) countries, having gathered in Tallinn, address this Declaration to the Heads of State and Government ahead of the 5th Eastern Partnership Summit in Brussels.

We believe in the European future of the EaP countries, based on shared values, rule of law and respect for democratic principles and public accountability. We believe the perspective of closer integration with the EU in line with Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union (ToEU) should be granted to all the EaP countries voicing their European aspirations and committed to deliver on the expected progress in complying with the accession criteria.

We welcome continuous efforts to refine the Eastern Partnership as a comprehensive policy bringing positive change to the people of the EaP countries and added value for the EU. We support the recognition of the strengthened and crosscutting role of the civil society in achieving the goals of the Eastern Partnership, and underline the importance of enabling environment for civil society allowing it to perform its functions and engage in implementing the reform agenda bringing tangible results for people.

We acknowledge the positive achievements of the policy proving the relevance of ambitious agenda for change. We understand that differentiation and pragmatism are the guiding principles of the adopted policy approach for the future. At the same time, we express our concern over millions of citizens in the EaP countries still being prevented from freely exercising human rights and enjoying fundamental freedoms, alienated from democratic values, on which the Eastern Partnership is built.

We reiterate the importance of the multilateral dimension of the Eastern Partnership allowing for the beneficial exchange and experience transfer not only between individual partners and the EU, but also among the EaP countries, creating stronger links and strengthening their resilience. We see its benefits for the civil society successfully working together on regional challenges and often developing consolidated positions, supporting each other in difficult times.

We stand ready, willing and able to contribute with our fair share to the progress in reforms implementation. We commit to work tirelessly, monitor progress, offer policy solutions and expertise, report and communicate results. We commit to keep promoting the European values even at our personal risk, reaching out to the citizens of the EaP countries. We commit to changing the EaP societies and people's lives for the better.

Preamble

A. **Whereas** the principle of differentiation determines the EaP policy approach for the future and pragmatically reflects the political, economic and social dynamics and aspirations of individual EaP countries. Whereas adherence and commitment to the values and principles stated in Article 2 of the ToEU are enshrined in the Association Agreements and elsewhere.

B. **Whereas** the implementation of reforms has shown that only limited and reversible results can be achieved if the democratic principles, human rights and rule of law are not respected.

C. **Whereas** the reform of judiciary and democratic electoral process are the cornerstones of strengthening institutions and good governance in order to create fair and stable societies for the generations to come.

D. **Whereas** the enabling environment for civil society has been recently deteriorating. Whereas in Armenia, politically motivated persecution of activists is carried out to stop peaceful protests, the authorities apply a selective approach to cooperation with the CSOs, and their voice is heard only on certain occasions and topics. Whereas in Azerbaijan, representatives of civil society, independent journalists, and bloggers systematically become targets of political repression, inhuman or degrading treatment, and other attacks on their freedom. Whereas the authorities continue legally obstructing the activities of CSOs and donors in the country, as well as delegitimising independent media. Whereas in Belarus, CSOs operate under highly restrictive legal conditions, while harassment and persecution of civil society activists, members of independent trade unions and media, for political reasons is a never-ending threat. Whereas in Georgia, the government failed to ensure thorough, transparent and effective investigation of the abduction of foreign human rights activists residing on its territory. Whereas the environment for civil society in Moldova continues to deteriorate with public figures intentionally discrediting the whole non-profit sector, and further legal obstacles to CSOs' activities are to be put in place. Whereas in Ukraine, the anticorruption activists are facing administrative obstacles to their work, threats and even physical violence, while the sense of impunity for the actions against the civil society representatives is pervasive

E. **Whereas** the European Neighbourhood Policy sets ambitious objectives based on mutual commitments of the EU, its Member States and the EaP countries to common values, including the respect of and support for the sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity of the partners and the region, as well as compliance with international and European norms and principles.

F. **Whereas** destabilisation and conflict brought by Russia upon several EaP countries remains one of the major challenges for the development of the countries in the region. Whereas the Joint Communication "A Strategic Approach to Resilience in the EU's External Action" provides a more integrated approach towards the stability and security of the neighbouring countries.

G. **Whereas** free media is essential for facilitating transparency, accountability and strengthening the checks and balances within the societies.

H. **Whereas** the regional economic integration falls short of expectations and further incentives and coordination should be ensured.

I. **Whereas** support to SMEs is one of the flagship initiatives advancing under the Eastern Partnership multilateral track. Whereas SMEs in the EaP countries prominently contribute to the economic growth, allowing for integration of national economies into the global market. Whereas SMEs create jobs and drive the progress towards a green and digital economy offering new opportunities in innovative sectors bringing profit. Whereas a vibrant SMEs sector is a valuable remedy against oligarchisation of the economy.

J. **Whereas** digitalisation and harmonisation of digital markets (HDM) brings additional economic opportunities and triggers changes in education system and on the job market. Whereas the governance in the HDM area in the EaP countries is weak, and the awareness and competences to harness the benefits of harmonisation should be improved. Whereas only an insignificant number of studies, reports and indicators in HDM area is produced in the majority of the EaP countries. Whereas the cross-border e-trade and e-commerce is weak in the EaP region.

K. **Whereas** the state of the environment in the EaP countries is continuously degrading, manifested in the pollution of waters, soil and air, biodiversity loss, depletion of natural resources and climate change consequences, combined with low priority of environmental agenda for the governments and absence of adequate environmental institutions.

L. **Whereas** hydro energy is an increasingly popular alternative and renewable source of energy in the EaP countries, however, its excessive development causes rapid decrease of water resources in rivers and has a negative impact on drinking water supply and on aquatic ecosystems of the rivers in entire regions.

M. **Whereas** climate change affects the whole EaP region, whereas sustainable environment is integral to human rights, such as the right to life, proper nutrition, health and water, the conceptual solutions for mitigation and adaptation to climate change are urgently needed in order to guarantee human rights.

N. **Whereas** the Russian Federation exercises political and economic control in the region through, *inter alia*, energy production or supply chains. Whereas Russian companies such as Gazprom, Rosneft, Inter RAO UES or Rosatom, abusing their dominant market positions, attempt to gain control over critical energy assets and infrastructure via questionable deals and corrupt cross-border networks and influencing the decision-makers to oppose or delay the implementation of the EU supported policies. Whereas Russia encourages extortion and unpaid use of energy resources by certain separatist regions, creating artificial debts, later turned into a powerful political instrument for pressuring companies or the whole countries. Whereas such policy is a major threat to energy security, sovereignty and stability of the EaP countries, as well as several EU Member States.

O. **Whereas** there are numerous advantages of both formal and non-formal education and relevant policies recognising a diverse range of skills can enable greater access to employment. Whereas the EHEA Bologna Process was designed to ensure compatibility of the standards and quality of higher education qualifications between the countries, and full implementation of this process enables labour mobility.

P. **Whereas** the EaP countries should guarantee that children and young people of all backgrounds have equal access to education and employment free from discrimination based on their gender, ethnicity, religion, economic status, sexuality or disability.

Q. **Whereas** many vulnerable groups are not fully integrated into the labour market, while discrimination and gender pay gap are still a common practice in the EaP region.

R. **Whereas** labour rights are not fully enforced and monitored in the EaP countries.

The EaP and EU civil society organisations call upon the European Union and the Member States:

- To introduce effective **multi-speed approach**, reflecting reform dynamics in individual EaP countries, leaving the door to the **EU membership** open provided the partner countries demonstrate enduring commitment to the values and principles enshrined in Article 2 of the ToEU.
- To emphasise the link between the **good governance and institutional resilience**, including corruption-free environment, human rights, professional and accountable civil service, impartial and non-partisan administration of justice, and security of the EaP countries.

Human Rights and Rule of Law

- To demonstrate **consistency** in its approach towards **impunity** for human rights violations.
- To assist in the upholding of **human rights and rule of law** in the EaP countries; introduce, and enforce strict conditionality in the sphere of human rights, rule of law and democratic freedoms through all financial support instruments benefiting the EaP countries.
- To call for the release of **civil society activists, journalists and other persons imprisoned on politically motivated charges**, and to ensure that civil society is free to monitor human rights violations, including the human rights related to the environment, without a fear of persecution. To provide extensive support to **human rights defenders** in accordance with the EU Human Rights Defenders Guidelines.
- To call for the readmission of students expelled from universities for political reasons. To ensure that **student rights** are not violated and more students will not be expelled for their active stance in the future.
- To promote the rights of **vulnerable groups, including children**, senior citizens, conflict-affected population /IDPs, especially women and girls, affected by the conflict, in the Human Rights Dialogues with the EaP countries, as well as through civil society support actions in order to protect their dignity and ensure social inclusion.
- To prevent the growth in **gender-based violence** and femicide, and promote effective victim protection and assistance in the EaP countries.

Enabling Environment for CSOs and CSO Monitoring

- To include **concrete targets and benchmarks** on improving the environment for operation of the civil society in the EaP countries through both the ongoing political dialogue and technical support programmes of the EU and EU Member States.
- To develop **support mechanisms** based on realities of each EaP country, ensure support, including financial one for independent CSOs in the conflict regions, as well as in countries where the independence of CSOs is compromised through adopting restrictive laws.
- To further increase the role of CSOs in **implementation of the EaP agenda**, particularly in the fields of rule of law, anti-corruption, judicial reforms, human rights and democratic governance, human security, anti-discrimination and gender equality. To safeguard the meaningful participation of the CSOs as an integral part of the implementation process.
- To ensure that civil society, as a beneficiary of the projects under the **ENI Civil Society Facility**, is regularly consulted and can participate in shaping the calls for proposals and projects at key stages.
- To reconsider 20 per cent co-funding requirement for CSOs when implementing technical support projects.

Security and Peacebuilding

- To adopt relevant measures aimed at engaging the EaP partners into the **Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)** more actively, for example via broadening the scope of the CSDP panel, as well as find other mechanisms of dealing with a wide range of **security** issues in the EaP as provided by the EU Global Strategy paving the way towards the political and security association of the EaP countries with the European Union.
- To create, in joint effort with the governments of the EaP states and the EU institutions, a comprehensive **mechanism for assessment of societal resilience** by the civil society.
- To support **peacebuilding and conflict transformation**, and to cooperate with other international bodies on setting up platforms for dialogue across conflict divides. To introduce civilian peacekeeping missions on the territories plagued with protracted conflicts. To initiate reconciliation commissions on the territories recovering after armed conflicts.
- To facilitate and ensure the participation of civil society in shaping the **peace negotiations**. To enhance the support to CSOs working on peace journalism, media literacy, conflict sensitivity and peace education, as they are instrumental in preventing and countering online hate speech, fake news and other hybrid threats.
- To support **peacebuilding and security initiatives** aimed at reducing hatred and promoting confidence building. To advance **women's participation** in negotiations and implementation of confidence building measures in the framework of the UN Resolution (S/RES/1325) on women, peace and security. To take advantage of **cultural events** to address peacebuilding related messages using cultural aspects to unite people.
- To support development of initiatives at local and community levels, as well as regional cooperation among CSOs in developing **peacebuilding and security initiatives**.
- To insist on human rights monitoring and promotion of democratic values in the **conflict zones**, which are excluded from these processes. To guarantee and create a framework for the civil society and in particular human rights activists in the respective regions.

Communication and Media

- To support **freedom of speech and expression** and diversity of opinion within the media environment. To ensure quality of media.
- To protect **journalists' rights** by challenging the impunity of violators.
- To ensure the survival of the independent media in the EaP countries by providing **additional support** for their activities.
- To strengthen the role of the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) in promoting the principles of **diverse, independent, quality-driven, and ethical media**.
- To strengthen the **EEAS StratCom East Task Force** with the positions of the EaP officers and support initiatives by the EU Member States in the field. To strengthen the strategic communication capabilities in the EaP countries and enhance the interaction with the reinforced StratCom East Task Force.
- To address the **visibility gap** between the EaP countries and the EU itself, and thus provide an increased support for communication activities on the EaP policy and EaP countries in the EU Member States.
- To further promote **self-regulation of media**
- To support **cyberspace literacy** and **critical thinking** of the population as resources for protection from propaganda and other hybrid threats.

Regional Economic Integration

- To establish a separate format for meetings between the representatives of the EU, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine on the implementation of the DCFTAs agendas. The meetings in the **3+1 format** can be dedicated to deepening the cooperation among the DCFTA countries, exchanging experience on the reform process, synchronising regulatory policy reforms, and extending the cumulative rules of origin to the three countries, forming “**Neighbourhood Economic Community**” (NEC). To open such a format to other EaP countries upon institutional and legal compliance. To extend the additional **multi-year zero-tariff quotas** for the EaP countries to other sectors, in particular for those countries implementing AAs/DCFTAs in order to support modernisation of various sectors by providing a permanent support to the industries lacking competitiveness on the EU market,

SMEs

- To promote and demonstrate **benefits of entrepreneurship** in the region. To encourage the EaP citizens, especially women and youth, to implement their business ideas. To launch effective tools providing support to start-ups and SMEs. To cooperate with the EaP governments and civil society on the promotion of entrepreneurial spirit.

Harmonisation of Digital Markets

- To focus on improving the **digital skills and internet access** for the population in rural areas, especially women and socially excluded communities. To train female entrepreneurs in rural areas in order to improve their entrepreneurial capacities, digital skills and access to the digital market.
- To speed up the harmonisation of **telecom rules**, including the **roaming tariffs**.
- To capitalise on the potential of HDM by organising regular regional **EaP E-business Fora** with the focus on digital business, digital marketing and ICT tools.

Environmental Governance

- To closely observe the dangerous trends of **reforming environmental institutions** in some EaP countries where ministries of environment are downsized or even shut down (e.g. Belarus and Moldova).
- To implement the **Luxembourg Declaration** aiming at better environmental governance with more transparency, participation, accountability, effectiveness and better functioning institutions; continue efforts to implement the Luxembourg Declaration Action Plan. To include where possible the environmental and energy security objectives into the overall **conditionality approach**.

Renewable Energy and Climate Change

- To incentivise other renewable energy solutions and support **hydro energy projects** only in case the environmental impact assessment was carried out and the local communities and wider public support the project.
- To promote meaningful **reforestation** actions in the whole EaP region by increasing the share of forested lands by a minimum of additional 10% of forest coverage as of 2017 in each of the EaP countries by 2030. To put an end to illegal logging aimed at illegal timber exports, which is currently a major cause of deforestation in the EaP region.
- To intensify support for **energy efficiency projects** in the EaP countries.

Energy Security

- To strengthen energy security in the region by cooperating with the EaP governments on improving **interconnection and diversification of gas and electricity supplies**, and to support the enforcement of the EU law in the operations of the **Russian companies** in the region.
- To follow a consistent approach towards Gazprom operations by **avoiding exemptions from the EU rules** for projects like Nord Stream 2 or OPAL (Ostsee-Pipeline-Anbindungsleitung) pipelines.
- To enhance the financial support for **energy security** in the EaP countries on the condition that they adopt and implement relevant energy sector reforms.

Mobility and People-To-People Contacts

- To enhance the existing **visa dialogues** and mobility partnerships with the relevant EaP countries and start visa liberalisation process on case-by-case basis with Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus. To incentivise the EaP countries via the visa dialogues to implement the relevant reforms as in case of Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.
- To encourage mutually beneficial **legal labour migration** between the EaP countries and EU, especially c, through activation of the mobility partnerships.
- To assist the EaP governments in encouraging entrepreneurship by extending education programmes similar to **Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs** to the EaP countries.
- To continue supporting **exchange and research programmes** and ensure that those target the population of neglected areas, including rural ones.

The EaP and EU civil society organisations call upon the EaP governments:

Human Rights and Rule of Law

- To introduce and to ensure the **human rights-based approach** in public policymaking and implementation.
- To demonstrate **intolerance against violations of human rights** of any kind, including by educational institutions, against discrimination and guarantee respect for human rights and pluralism.
- To refrain from interventions into the institutional and individual **independence of judiciary** and its members, and to maintain the equality in the eyes of law.
- To introduce comprehensive **gender equality** policies in the EaP countries. To differentiate between the results in the field of gender equality and non-discrimination in different EaP countries and introduce specific projects fostering women's economic empowerment (WEE) and specific programmes focusing on the access to finance, increasing financial, and business development literacy for women in the EaP countries.
- To implement **decisions of international courts** such as the European Court of Human Rights.
- To ensure the **right to Internet access** for each individual in order to enjoy the rights to freedom of expression and opinion.
- To acknowledge the right of **children and youth** to participate in decision-making processes having an impact on their future in a particular community and society in general. To support programmes and initiatives allowing children and youth to fully enjoy their social and civil rights.

Enabling Environment for CSOs and CSO Monitoring

- To create enabling **environment** for CSOs in the EaP countries and introduce measures discouraging the EaP partner countries from repressing CSOs.
- To encourage a more **structured engagement** with civil society and genuine consultations on policy reforms at the national level. To strengthen the civil society's mandate, capacity and accountability in monitoring the implementation of bilateral agreements. To introduce closer dialogue between the EaP governments, EU Delegations and EaP CSF National Platforms.
- To avoid introducing excessive **measures limiting the CSOs activities** and introducing undue control over them (for example, declaration of assets for CSOs).
- To abolish laws restricting the activities of independent CSOs, namely those preventing them to receive funding from domestic, foreign and international donors.

Good Governance and Anti-corruption

- To introduce criminal liability for **electoral fraud** in the criminal codes of the respective EaP countries where relevant.
- To review **election codes** and laws on political parties to clarify norms on political party funding campaign financing eliminating any discrepancies; to introduce **mandatory provision for parties** to publish information on the donations sources ; to strengthen the **legislation** by introducing more severe sanctions for noncompliance.
- To introduce clear criteria and procedures for **appointment, disciplinary sanctions and removal of judges** based on international standards.
- To provide for **administrative and fiscal decentralisation** of public administration at regional and local levels with the civil society dimension in order to make the local government a pillar of the future development of the Eastern Partnership. To support projects with the cooperation of local governments and CSOs.
- To overhaul governance systems by **fighting corruption** and further involve CSOs in this process; to enhance the trust of the population in the authorities and the credibility of the EaP states internationally.
- To ensure that the agencies responsible for the implementation of legislation on **declaration of assets and conflict of interests** are independent from the government.
- To ensure that **assets recovery and management** offices **of** can be established and can function effectively based on the implementation of GRECO recommendations and specific recommendations for each EaP country.

Security and Peacebuilding

- To bring **security policies, command and control structure** in line with NATO norms and standards.
- To involve civil society in the EU effort to create resilient states in its neighbourhood and create a **comprehensive mechanism** for **resilience assessment** with the civil society involvement.
- To introduce formal and non-formal educational programmes with a peace-building component in order to **combat stereotypes and support a more tolerant younger generation**.

Communication and Media

- To contribute to a functioning **common information space** in the EaP region.

- To support production of high-quality content and support balanced reporting and ethical journalism as an **alternative to the Russian propaganda** in the national languages of each EaP country targeting the most vulnerable audiences, including young people.
- To strengthen the efforts to combat **hate speech in the media of the EaP countries** by introducing relevant legislation, code of ethics or other measures.
- To enhance the collaboration with **independent media in Russia** and ensure their presence in the media sphere of the EaP countries.
- To address the **media concentration** in the EaP countries and ensure transparent ownership and financing of the mass media.

SMEs

- To simplify the **taxation system for micro enterprises**.
- To provide for most of the **SMEs-related administrative services** to be conducted electronically in order to save resources, diminish corruption risks and increase transparency. To introduce effective use of e-signature and other e-services in order to lower administrative costs for entrepreneurs.
- To provide a transparent and efficient **access to funds** for SMEs.
- To create a friendly environment for **SMEs and start-ups** launched by young people through establishing support mechanisms such as tax reductions and preferential loans.
- To strengthen public-private dialogue on SMEs development issues, start-ups and entrepreneurship in general.

Harmonisation of Digital Markets

- To engage more actively in improving **HDM governance and coordination** - to elaborate national HDM policies, strategies and action plans, to create national roadmaps promoting HDM ecosystem development. To establish agencies responsible for compliance with digital market rules and norms. To develop and implement national digital skills strategies, in line with similar EU strategies. To form national coalitions for digital jobs based on the EU digital skills & jobs coalition. To conduct feasibility studies in order to assess needs for further studies, reports and indicators in HDM area. To dedicate resources for conducting the identified studies and reports.
- To improve significantly **consumer protection** within the promising area of e-commerce; to ensure a sufficient level of consumer protection as a condition for further developing e-commerce, e-payments and related services.
- To create relevant logistics and infrastructure for a functioning **cross-border e-commerce**. To establish rules for cross-border consumer protection.

Environmental Governance

- To prioritise and integrate environmental and climate change policies in the decision-making process, to green the economy and achieve **sustainable development** of the EaP region.
- To implement the **Luxembourg Declaration** aimed at better environmental governance with more openness, participation, accountability, effectiveness and better institutions; continue efforts to implement the **Luxembourg Declaration Action Plan**.
- To implement compulsory **Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Sustainability Impact Assessment (SIA) procedures** in order to allow for or freeze investments in hydropower plant construction, as well as into any other infrastructure projects and/or mining projects.

Climate Change

- To implement integrated **water resources management** as one of the key instruments for adapting to the climate change.
- To achieve the objectives of the Paris Agreement through increasing energy effectiveness and using renewable energy sources.

Energy Security

- To fully meet the commitments on aligning the **legal and regulatory framework of the energy sector** with the EU directives and implement the transposed legislation in close cooperation with the Energy Community Secretariat.
- To implement energy efficiency policies and use renewable energy sources available in the EaP countries to diversify the supply and ensure the development of energy markets, **diminishing the dependence on the Russian gas** as a primary energy source.

Mobility and People-to-People Contacts

- To encourage broader **recognition of non-formal education**, particularly in the following areas: civic education, inclusion, democracy, environmental issues.
- To invest more resources in modernising education and adequate training for teachers at all levels ensuring the access to **quality education** in the EaP countries.
- To support both **theoretical and practical methods** in the education process with the option of combining studies with work experience, volunteering or internships.
- To strive for a comprehensive and unbiased implementation of the Bologna process reforms, including the **guarantees for the academic freedoms of students and professors**, autonomy of the higher education institutions and student self-governance.
- To prevent **discrimination in access to education** and employment by allowing these to be monitored by CSOs with access to national educational institutions statistics, to promote and support the data collection by independent think tanks on issues related to inclusion, tolerance and diversity in education and workplace.
- To support **employability of young people** through better skills matching, better awareness of the labour market needs and opportunities, labour rights and European values among young people.

Workers' Rights and Social Dialogue

- To ensure full **respect of fundamental workers' rights**, as guaranteed by International Labour Organisation (ILO) conventions, through strengthening of relevant labour institutions and improving social dialogue at all levels.
- To provide for gender mainstreaming and adequate **inclusion of vulnerable groups** into the labour market. To work towards **closing the gender pay gap and** to fight discrimination.
- To ensure **just transition**, by bringing together workers, communities, civil society, employers and governments in a dialogue to drive concrete plans, policies and investments necessary for a fast and fair transformation.
- To guarantee access to basic **public services** at affordable price for everyone.
- To create conditions for operational environment of **independent trade unions**.

Signatories: