

**Eastern Partnership – Civil Society Forum  
Brussels, 16-17 November 2009**

**Recommendations of the Forum's Polish Participants**

We read with great interest the recommendations prepared by the non-governmental organisations from Ukraine and Belarus participating in the Forum.

Below we set out a number of recommendations developed by Polish organisations, including those participating in the event itself as well as others who are interested in the future of the Eastern Partnership.

1. Regarding Events in Proceeding

We believe that the proposed programme for the first Forum, which will happen in November, lacks a scheduled discussion of how the Forum itself will function. For example, the division into four thematic platforms forces this event to work in the mode agreed for the Partnership as a whole, at the governmental level. For us, from the perspective of civil society representatives, this division is by no means intuitive. Even if it were to be accepted eventually, it would still need to be discussed at the meeting itself. We recommend that time and space for discussing this issue is allotted in the published agenda.

2. Regarding Matters of Strategy

- We believe that **using the experiences of other civil platforms created within the EU** is of great importance, including learning from their errors. An example which we believe is particularly interesting is the Euro-Mediterranean Civil Forum, which functioned under the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership<sup>1</sup>.

In our opinion, this experience indicates the need to discuss and **formalise/institutionalise the Forum**<sup>2</sup> as quickly as possible. This will enable the establishment of the representation of civil society organisations and the creation of a permanent partner for governments and the European Commission in working to construct and realise the Eastern Partnership. This concerns, *inter alia*, questions regarding the secretariat, permanent working groups and their themes, calendars of operation, etc.

We recommend the commissioning of a special (fifth) working group, whose task will be to develop propositions regarding the above, before each successive annual Forum.

- Discussions on the theme of structure, though important, should not take precedence over other vital discussions about the **priorities, tasks and functions** which the Forum should set itself.

We see the **specific roles of the Forum** within the Eastern Partnership (EaP) as a whole to be the following:

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on the cooperation between civil society organisations in the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, see: Isaias Barrenada, *Measures to strengthen the participation of civil society in the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership through NGOs*, in Ivan Martin, *Bringing the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership Closer to Europe* <http://www.eco.uc3m.es/immartin/35proposalsfinalisima.pdf> or on the website of the Euromed Non-Governmental Platform: <http://90plan.ovh.net/~euromedp/spip/>

<sup>2</sup> Provisional propositions of Polish partners can be found on <http://vi.rorive.be/EaP/default2.htm> and [http://www.zagranica.org.pl/index.php?option=com\\_docman&task=cat\\_view&gid=64&Itemid=138](http://www.zagranica.org.pl/index.php?option=com_docman&task=cat_view&gid=64&Itemid=138)

- recommendatory and consultative activity for EaP (evaluation of the activities carried out by the EU and partner country governments, evaluation of the relations between the EU and partner states, proposing new ideas and recommendations for the EU).

- independent monitoring of the situation in EaP partner countries, e.g. in human rights, civil society, etc.

- assistance in establishing contact, cooperation, and competence-sharing activity between NGOs from EU countries and those from partner and other countries; assistance in the cooperation of partner country NGOs between themselves (e.g. in the South Caucasus).

This list does not exhaust the catalogue of operations/problems/platforms in which civil society organisations should be involved under EaP. However, these are in our opinion the areas in which civil society organisations can and should play a leading role as initiators and main actors.

Although we consider the debate on the thematic platforms/divisions of the Forum to be still open, at this stage we see a number of themes which **in our opinion are worth considering as priority areas** which deserve the special attention of the members of the Forum.

- Establishing visa-free travel as soon as possible between the EU and partner countries;
- Treating the evaluation of the human rights situation in EP countries as one of the basic criteria for overall evaluations of these countries;
- Supporting the creation/development of local self-government and local civil society in partner countries;
- Promoting youth exchanges and volunteering between the EU and partner countries;
- Supporting the development of independent media, including the internet and new media, in partner countries;
- Increasing energy savings.

We are convinced that the Eastern Partnership – including the non-governmental sector – should above all answer to the needs of the partner countries. We agree with and support many of the suggestions made by Ukrainian and Belarusian NGOs. We are also open to any new propositions from other countries in the Eastern Partnership.

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