



European Economic and Social Committee

REX/323
Eastern Partnership

Brussels, 16 June 2011

OPINION
of the
European Economic and Social Committee
on
The contribution of civil society to the Eastern Partnership

Rapporteur: **Mr Morkis**

In a letter dated 15 November 2010, the Council of the European Union asked the European Economic and Social Committee, under Article 304 TFEU, to draw up an exploratory opinion on:

The contribution of civil society to the Eastern Partnership.

The Section for External Relations, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 25 May 2011.

At its 472nd plenary session (meeting of 16 June), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 133 votes to 1 with 1abstentions:

*

* *

1. Conclusions and Recommendations

1.1 The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) attaches great importance to the Eastern Partnership (EaP) as a strategic necessity and political investment on the EU's part that will be of future benefit to citizens of the European Union and of its partner countries. The events in the Mediterranean region have proved that civil society's role remains pivotal in the transition to democracy, in constitutional reform and institution building. Therefore, the contribution of civil society to the Eastern Partnership should be supported and duly taken into account in order to ensure the success of this process.

1.2 The EESC welcomes the progress made in implementing the Eastern Partnership initiative, which was officially launched in May 2009. All the Eastern Partnership countries have improved and intensified their relations with the EU through dialogue on association agreements, free trade areas, relaxation of visa requirements and cooperation on security of energy supply and other issues. (Unfortunately, following the events after the presidential elections in December 2010, Belarus has taken a big step back in its relations with the EU.)

1.3 Contribution of civil society to the multilateral track of the Eastern Partnership

1.3.1 Participation in EaP intergovernmental thematic platforms

1.3.1.1 The EESC has been invited to participate in three of the four established intergovernmental thematic platforms of the EaP and it is able to express the views of civil society in these platforms. However, the EESC calls on the Commission to invite it to participate and

collaborate in thematic platform 3 for security of energy supply, given its expertise on this issue.

1.3.1.2 The Committee considers that representatives of the relevant working groups of the EaP Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF) should be allowed to participate in the meetings of intergovernmental thematic platforms.

1.3.2 The EaP Civil Society Forum

1.3.2.1 The Committee also welcomes the setting up of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum in November 2009. The Committee considers the national platforms of the EaP Civil Society Forum to be an eminently suitable instrument for implementing the Eastern Partnership in the partner countries in a way that involves civil society, but regrets that employers, trade unions and other socio-economic organisations (farmers, consumers) at national level are involved little if at all in the activities of the national platforms.

1.3.2.2 As the social partners are not at present adequately represented in the EaP CSF, the Committee calls for a revision of the Forum's rules of procedure, in particular those related to the selection procedure, so as to give significantly more prominence to participation in the Forum by employers' and employees' representatives, as well as those of other interest groups both from the EU and from the partner countries.

1.3.2.3 The Committee calls to review the setup of the Forum with a view to it operating more efficiently whilst at the same time using effectively the available funding. The emphasis could be shifted to continuous and project oriented action (in the context of the Forum's working groups and national platforms).

1.3.2.4 The Committee suggests that the number of representatives from the EU should increase in order to stimulate exchange of experiences and promote convergence with European values. The European Economic and Social Committee, with its 344 members representing the organised civil society of the EU is very well qualified to play an active role in the implementation of the EaP goals within the CSF if the rules of the CSF provide for its increased and permanent involvement both in the CSF and SC.

1.3.2.5 Given the growing scope of the Civil Society Forum's impact, and in particular the remit of the national platforms, the Committee is ready to contribute to the better functioning of the Forum. It also considers that it has become necessary to set up a secretariat, not least in the context of the work of the Steering Committee.

1.3.2.6 If the operation of the Forum would not eliminate its structural inadequacy, the Committee would consider another ways of mobilisation of the socio-economic players of the EaP countries for the implementation of the goals of the EaP.

1.4 Consolidation of civil society in partner countries and contribution to the bilateral track of the Eastern Partnership

- 1.4.1 The Committee is following the events in the southern Mediterranean closely. It firmly believes that the EU should support the process of democratisation and stabilisation in that region. At the same time, the EESC calls for a long-term, balanced approach to the EU's southern and eastern neighbours, including as regards financial aid for political and economic reforms, adaptation to EU standards and strengthening civil society.
- 1.4.2 The Committee considers that inadequate funding may lead to the expectations of the Eastern Partnership, as an important instrument to promote convergence with European values, not being met. In this respect, the EESC broadly welcomes the Commission's proposal to review the European Neighbourhood Policy but regrets that the Communication on "A new response for a changing neighbourhood" does not insist on creation of mechanisms for civil society consultations in the countries of the European Neighbourhood and makes absolutely no link to the EU's own Civil Society Institution and the role that the EESC can play in this process.
- 1.4.3 The EESC would welcome a proposal to create a European Endowment for Democracy and a Civil Society Facility. However, the EESC calls on the Commission to learn from the experience gained with the Civil Society Facility for the Western Balkans in order to avoid some shortcomings.
- 1.4.4 The Committee feels that it is extremely important to work together with independent organisations in the partner countries. Nevertheless, there is also a need to cooperate with existing organisations dependent on the Governments whilst at the same time supporting establishment of independent trade unions and employers' organisations that would be able to participate in a real social dialogue, disseminate ideas of democracy and of human and labour rights, and pursue the Eastern Partnership initiative's other goals.
- 1.4.5 The EESC considers that strengthening of dialogue between governments and civil society at national level is a prerequisite for the democratisation of societies in the Eastern Neighbourhood and for their convergence with European values. There is a particular need for strengthening the role of civil society in drawing up and implementing the ENP Action Plans.
- 1.4.6 The Committee calls for the establishment of mechanism of civil society consultation in all Eastern Partnership countries, such as Economic and Social Councils or similar organisations, taking into consideration the specific conditions of each partner country. In some EaP countries, the existing national platforms of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum could be a good basis for this process. The EESC is ready to share its experience with civil society in the EaP countries.

- 1.4.7 The Committee takes the view that the association agreements being negotiated between the EU and the partner countries should include provisions on the establishment of joint civil society bodies, in charge of monitoring the implementation of these agreements.
- 1.4.8 Regarding the negotiations and conclusions of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA), the Committee considers that civil society from both the EU and partner countries should be involved in drawing up a Sustainability Impact Assessment prior to the negotiations, and that civil society mechanisms should be included in the future DCFTA in order to monitor the implementation of provisions related to sustainable development.
- 1.5 The Committee hopes that 2011 will be a decisive year for the Eastern Partnership, as the Hungarian and, in particular, Polish, presidencies of the Council are expected to give the initiative new impetus.
- 1.6 The Committee addresses these recommendations to the heads of state or government and hopes that the Eastern Partnership Summit in Poland in autumn 2011 will give appropriate recognition to the contribution of civil society over the last two years and the progress made, but also make a critical evaluation of the shortcomings, related to poor involvement of social partners and inadequacy of CSF.

2. Contribution of civil society to the multilateral track of the Eastern Partnership

- 2.1 It is of vital importance to the European Union for its neighbours to the east to be stable and to have good governance and predictable policies, and for their economies to grow. The countries of Eastern Europe and the Southern Caucasus, for their part, are also keen to have a closer and more active relationship with the EU. The key factor in these countries making progress in aligning themselves with the EU lies in values and in the convergence of legislation and regulations. The Eastern Partnership should therefore be seen as a political investment by the European Union that will benefit EU citizens and foster general progress in the partner countries.

2.2 Participation in EaP intergovernmental thematic platforms

- 2.2.1 The European Commission's communication on the Eastern Partnership noted that civil society involvement should be given a particular role. The EESC has been invited to participate in three of the four established intergovernmental thematic platforms (platform 1 - Democracy, good governance and stability; platform 2 - Economic integration and convergence with EU sectoral policies; and platform 4 - contact between people) and it is able to express the views of civil society in these platforms. Nevertheless, despite its deep involvement in energy issues, the Committee has not been invited to participate in the important thematic platform on "Energy security".

- 2.2.2 The EESC considers that the platforms have made progress towards the achievement of the goals of Eastern Partnership initiative but regrets that the participation of civil society is limited. The Committee considers that representatives of the relevant working groups of the EaP CSF should be allowed to participate in the meetings of intergovernmental platforms. This will enable civil society to be informed about the work of the platforms and to produce more workable and concrete recommendations. The Committee calls on the Commission to engage in negotiations with partner countries with a view to introducing changes in the Rules of Procedure of intergovernmental platforms to grant permanent participant status to the Forum in those Platforms.
- 2.2.3 The Committee considers that the platforms could be related to projects which are of interest for civil society. One pertinent example of the involvement of business associations in the Eastern Partnership could be the EAST-INVEST programme, a joint venture between Eurochambres and partners in the Eastern Partnership states. This is a new three-year project geared to the Eastern Partnership aiming to facilitate trade in the region of the eastern neighbours and promote economic development and investment. 21 chambers from EU countries got involved in the project, implementing the objectives of intergovernmental platform 2 on economic integration and convergence with EU policy. The total budget of the project is EUR 8.75 million, 7 million of which come from the European Commission. It is to be hoped that this project will achieve its stated aims and make a real contribution to making the Eastern Partnership's goals a reality. This example could be used for concrete projects between EU and partner country organisations in other sectors such as farmers, consumers, environmentalists' organisations, etc.
- 2.2.4 The Committee considers also that solid involvement of companies, into the SME flagship initiative under platform 2 and organised business to business meetings could lead to the organisation of an EaP Business Forum which will increase the support from business organisations to the negotiations of the DCFTAs.
- 2.2.5 The Committee points out that social dialogue is not included in the work of any platform, although it is part of the Community acquis.

2.3 **EaP Civil Society Forum**

- 2.3.1 The Commission's proposal to establish a Civil Society Forum was met with wide support.
- 2.3.2 Nevertheless, most of the members of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum are think tanks and non-governmental organisations that do not represent the full variety of the civil society. Very few of the partner countries organisations represent the interests of business people and employees, as well as the social partners, i.e. business associations and trade unions or other socio-economic interests (farmers, consumers, science and academia, etc).

- 2.3.3 In the Steering Committee of 17 members, social partners from partner countries are not represented at all.
- 2.3.4 Over the past year and a half, national platforms of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum have been established in all the partner countries, so that the civil society organisations in each country can come together to implement the partnership's goals.
- 2.3.5 The Committee wholeheartedly approves the establishment of national platforms of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum and the contribution they have made to the Eastern Partnership Process. Several examples are worth mentioning:
- the Belarusian platform set up "Road maps under the Eastern Partnership for Belarus" in July 2010;
 - the Azeri platform has given rise to numerous events on issues of relevance to the government and civil society, e.g. Azerbaijan's accession to the WTO, alternative and renewable energy sources, energy efficiency, and the situation of small and medium-sized enterprises;
 - the National Participation Council, which served as the Moldovan National platform before such a platform was formally established, was able to take part in all of the meetings of Moldova's cabinet of ministers to put forward the Council's position on government decisions and proposed policy measures.

The Committee regrets, however, the fact that in these platforms, too, the social partners have only limited, if any, involvement at national level in the activities of the national platforms and due to this fact they do not cover the issue of social rights.

- 2.3.6 The Committee has identified several shortcomings in the functioning of the Forum and proposed to work with the Steering Committee to improve the Forum's performance.
- 2.3.7 The current composition of the Forum does not correspond to the Commission concept paper stating "Membership in the EaP Civil Society Forum should be open to civil society organisations i.e. grass roots organisations, trade unions, employers' organisations, professional associations, NGOs, think tanks, non-profit foundations, national and international CSOs/networks and other relevant Civil Society actors from EaP countries, but also EU Member States and international organisations/networks. CSOs from third countries may also be invited. The EESC and its equivalents in partner countries should play a key role, especially regarding business, employment, labour and social issues". The main European employees' and employers' organisations expressed their concern over this situation on 19 May 2010 in a letter to the members of the Forum. High-ranking representatives of the EESC and the European Commission have discussed the composition of the Forum and the fact that some of the objectives of the Eastern Partnership, especially those related to economic integration, could be achieved only if all relevant partners are involved in the work of the Forum.

- 2.3.8 The Committee considers also that the role of the EU civil society organisations in the Forum should be strongly enhanced. Their representation is so far limited not only due to the relatively small numbers assigned to the EU participants in the Forum (from 230 organisations invited to Berlin CSF only 80 were from the EU) and in the SC (seven places from 17). The EU civil society participation is also limited from the territorial point of view. The organisations from some member states close to the Eastern borders prevail. There are only few EU civil society organisations that have special projects or programmes for the EaP partners.
- 2.3.9 The Committee is ready to use its capacities, experience, know-how and contacts to contribute to the correction of existing imbalances in the CSF. The 344 members of the Committee represent a vast potential that can be used to enhance the cause of the EaP in the EU institutions, all member states and all spheres of the civil society including especially the social partners.
- 2.3.10 To enable the Committee to play this role it must be duly represented in the CSF structures. The standing rules do not provide the perspective of permanent and efficient involvement of the EESC in the CSF and should therefore be changed to allow the permanent and increased EESC participation in the Forum.
- 2.3.10.1 Enhanced participation of the EESC and other socio-economic actors could contribute also to achieving a more balanced participation in the working groups of CSF. Currently most of the organisations are involved in the working groups on "Democracy, good governance and stability" and on "Contacts between people". Meanwhile the working groups on "Economic integration and convergence with EU policies" and on "Environment, climate change and energy security" do not have sufficient number of participants that is in contradiction with the importance of the subjects covered by them to the successful implementation of the EaP. The Committee would be capable in this regard to bring its contribution.
- 2.3.10.2 The EESC considers that the Forum's work needs to be more project-oriented. Some working groups such as that on "Economic integration and convergence with EU policies" have tried to develop specific projects but have not succeeded for lack of financing and a sufficient number of partners. The potential and the administrative capacity of the EESC could be useful for the development of concrete projects. Jointly drawn-up studies and projects could also help strengthen the contribution of civil society to the EaP.
- 2.3.10.3 The EESC suggests that the Steering Committee be elected for two years in order to improve its efficiency and to give it sufficient time to implement projects and ideas. In addition, the Committee also considers that it has become necessary to set up a secretariat for the Steering Committee.

2.3.11 If the operation of the Forum remains unsatisfactory, the Committee would consider another ways of mobilisation of the socio-economic players for the implementation of the goals of the EaP.

3. **Consolidation of civil society in partner countries and contribution to the bilateral track of the Eastern Partnership**

3.1 Recent events in North Africa and the Middle East have made it clear that regimes can fall, even though they play a key role in the region's security and stability and receive financial support from western democracies, if they neglect the population's economic and social situation and abuse human rights and freedoms. The global community can now only watch political developments in the region with concern and speculate on the global consequences. Recent events in the region need to be analysed carefully, and the lessons learned should be examined and conclusions drawn.

3.1.1 There are significant differences between the countries in the Eastern Partnership in terms of political circumstances and the situation for civil society organisations. They are at varying levels of development with regard to democracy, human rights and civil liberties; their levels of economic and social development and even their geopolitical outlooks differ. There are equally significant differences between these countries' efforts to align themselves with the EU and between their aims in participating in the Eastern Partnership. Neither does civil society in the various partner countries have the same opportunities to take part in the partnership. The partner countries therefore need to be examined individually before it will be possible to assess the progress they have made, the extent to which civil society is involved in this initiative and what options are open to it¹.

3.2 Out of the partner countries, it is Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia that have really learned to tap into the potential of the Eastern Partnership in particular areas. If the gap between these three countries and the remaining Eastern Partnership states continues to grow, however, the long-term future of the Eastern Partnership as a regional project in Eastern Europe may be undermined. In view of this, the European Commission and civil society in the remaining three countries have an important part to play in ensuring that the gap does not widen further. Belarus certainly presents the greatest problems, but its membership of the Eastern Partnership should not be challenged, particularly in view of its particular domestic political situation.

3.3 The Committee acknowledges that it will only be conceivable for the Eastern Partnership to undertake activities in the fields of regional security, stability, economic integration, environmental protection, energy security, contacts between people, etc., once the partner countries respect human rights and freedom of association and once true social and civil

¹ See appendix.

dialogue is taking place. Greater attention should therefore be paid to these issues, particularly in the case of Belarus, though the other partner countries also have problems in this regard.

- 3.4 It is quite clear that the Eastern Partnership States do not have genuine social dialogue and mechanisms of consultation with civil society: often, only organisations established and run by the governments are counted as partners for social and civil dialogue. The Committee understands that it is extremely important to work together with independent organisations in the partner countries. However, there is also a need to cooperate with existing organisations recognised and sometimes dependent on the Government supporting them in the way of evolution and at the same time establishment of the independent trade unions and employers' organisations where they still do not exist to enable them to participate in a real social dialogue, disseminate ideas of democracy, human and labour rights, and pursue the Eastern Partnership initiative's other goals.
- 3.5 More active involvement of civil society could help to speed up implementation of the Eastern Partnership's goals in the partner countries; moreover, the Eastern Partnership and the involvement of civil society in it could help to strengthen civil society. When programmes are being developed to boost administrative capacity, the public sector must be made aware of the importance of civil society and the social partners, and of the experience that the EU and its Member States have in ways of involving civil society in the decision making. The experiences of organisations in the countries of central Europe could prove extremely useful in building the capacities of governmental and non-governmental organisations in the Eastern Partnership countries. The EESC is also ready to provide its know-how to the Eastern Partnership governments aiming to create a suitable legislative framework for social and civil dialogue.
- 3.6 In this respect, the EESC broadly welcomes the Commission's proposal to review the European Neighbourhood Policy but regrets that the Communication on "A new response for a changing neighbourhood" does not insist on creation of mechanisms for civil society consultations in the countries of the European Neighbourhood Policy and makes absolutely no link to the EU's own Civil Society Institutions and the role that the EESC can play in this process.
- 3.7 The EESC also welcomes the proposal to create a European Endowment for Democracy and a Civil Society Facility, as this will no doubt help boost civil society's participation in political life. At the same time, however, we call on the Commission to learn from the experience gained with the Civil Society Facility and other forms of support to civil society under pre-accession assistance. In the EESC's contribution to the Commission's ongoing "Review of the EU's support to civil society in the Western Balkans and Turkey", we emphasised that more attention needed to be paid to the social partners, especially trade unions, who in some cases have been almost completely ignored. In concrete terms, this means focusing not just on projects but also on institutional development and the overall sustainability of organisations.

- 3.8 In order to investigate the extent to which civil society organisations are involved in the Eastern Partnership and in the ongoing dialogue with national governments, the EESC asked these organisations to fill in a short questionnaire. The results of the survey show that there is a lack of dialogue between national governments and civil society organisations, not least in relation to Association Agreements and the implementation of ENP action plans. Governments do not sufficiently consult organisations about issues relating to the Eastern Partnership. The main information sources in this area are the delegations of the European Commission in each country and the media. Of course, the situation varies from country to country. Dialogue between the authorities and civil society is most advanced in the Republic of Moldova, whereas the most difficult situation in this respect is that in Belarus. The Committee calls for the establishment of mechanism of civil society consultation in all Eastern Partnership countries, such as Economic and Social Councils or similar organisations. The existing national platforms of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum could be involved in this process. The EESC is ready to support civil society in the partner countries in setting up institutions for civil dialogue by using the experience it has gained from recent enlargements.
- 3.9 The Committee takes the view that the association agreements being negotiated between the EU and the partner countries (currently negotiations with all partner countries except Belarus are ongoing) should include in their institutional provisions the establishment of joint civil society bodies, in order to allow civil society to monitor the implementation of these agreements. These bodies could be consulted by the Association Councils created by the Association Agreements or make recommendations on their own initiative. Ideally, they would take part as observers in the meetings of the Association Councils. They should be composed of representatives of civil society and should include socio-economic partners and NGOs. The EESC should be represented in an adequate manner.
- 3.10 The European Commission has already started negotiations on a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) with Ukraine and foresees the negotiations with Georgia, Armenia and Moldova when the conditions for such negotiations are met. The DGFTA could have significant impact on business climate and social conditions in partner countries. Therefore the permanent dialogue with civil society during the negotiation process is of foremost importance.
- 3.11 Regarding the negotiations and conclusions of the DCFTA, the Committee considers that civil society should be involved in drawing up a Sustainability Impact Assessment prior to the negotiations. This involvement will help to raise public awareness of the benefits of the DCFTA. In addition, civil society mechanisms should be included in the future DCFTA in order to monitor the implementation of provisions related to sustainable development.
- 3.12 Nearly two years after the establishment of the Eastern Partnership it remains unclear how it is supposed to tie in with the regional Black Sea Synergy initiative (2007), with mostly the same partner countries participating in both initiatives. At civil society level, cooperation

between the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum and the Black Sea NGOs Forum could be established.

3.13 **The contribution of the European Economic and Social Committee to the Eastern Partnership**

3.13.1 The EESC regards the Eastern Partnership as extremely important, as a strategic necessity and political investment on the EU's part that will be of future benefit to citizens of the European Union and of its partner countries.

3.13.2 The EESC has been concerning itself for five years now with the state of civil society in all the partner countries from a number of angles, including freedom of association, registration requirements, tax laws and procedures, freedom of expression and the operation of tripartite consultations. It has drafted relevant opinions and made a variety of recommendations on the following subjects: "Wider Europe - Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours"², "Belarus Civil Society"³, "The EU's relations with Moldova: What role for organised civil society?"⁴, "EU-Ukraine: a new dynamic role for Civil Society"⁵, "Setting up civil society organisations networks in the Black Sea region"⁶, and "Civil society involvement in implementing the ENP Action Plans in the countries of the Southern Caucasus"⁷. On the request of the Czech Presidency the Committee drew up an exploratory opinion on "Involvement of civil society in the Eastern Partnership".

3.13.3 The EESC has developed contacts with civil society organisations in the EaP countries and has organised a number of seminars on importance of social dialogue and consultation with civil society. During these seminars the EESC has also insisted on the necessity of civil society involvement in implementing the ENP Action Plans.

3.13.4 The EESC organises annual seminars in Ukraine in conjunction with the Ukrainian National Tripartite Social and Economic Council on subject of common interest and hopes that such annual events could be set up in the coming years also with the other EaP countries. The EESC is ready to facilitate the organisation of annual review seminars of civil society in all EaP countries aimed at assessing the progress made with the implementation of the ENP Action Plans.

2 OJ C80, 30.3.2004, p.148-155

3 OJ C318, 23.12.2006, p.123-127

4 OJ C120, 16.05.2008, p.89-95

5 OJ C77, 31.3.2009, p.157-163

6 OJ C27, 3.2.2009, p.144-151

7 OJ C277, 17.11.2009, p.37-41

3.13.5 The EESC supports the priority given to the Eastern Partnership by the current Hungarian presidency and the future Polish Presidency of the Council and is contributing with two other opinions, namely *Energy security: what kind of Neighbourhood Policy do we need to ensure security of supply for the EU?*, and Eastern Partnership and the Eastern Dimension of EU policies, with particular emphasis on EU agricultural policy. The EESC hopes that its three opinions on the Eastern partnership will receive wide support and will contribute to the achievement of some of the EaP goals and objectives.

Brussels, 16 June 2011.

The President
of the
European Economic and Social Committee

Staffan Nilsson

*

* *

N.B. Appendix overleaf.

APPENDIX

Political situation in partner countries, the state of civil society and its participation in the Eastern Partnership

4. General characterisation

- 4.1 After the collapse of the Soviet Union 20 years ago, the six partner countries got state independence, yet have inherited weak civil society and institutions from the Soviet period. The political changes that took place were national rather than social. Three countries in the South Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia) and Moldova have been affected by local and regional conflicts. The following are common features of the post-Soviet period in these countries: the centralisation of political and economic power in the hands of a political elite with its roots in the former Soviet political system, crony capitalism, corruption, Soviet-style bureaucracy and political culture, state-dependent judiciary, state-controlled media and/or state-related businesses, unfair elections, weak democratic and social institutions, and growing socio-economic disparities.
- 4.2 In the course of the last decade there have been signs of positive change taking place in the six partner countries. Even though the current global economic crisis had a serious effect on their economies, most of them have reported positive economic growth over the last couple of years. Local and regional conflicts in Abkhazia, Nagorno Karabakh, South Ossetia, and Transnistria have not yet been settled, but the fact that there is no fighting at the moment means that there is no direct negative impact on socio-economic developments in the countries concerned, i.e. Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Moldova. Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia and Armenia still have weak democratic institutions; political unrest is common together with the misuse of state power against political opposition, independent civil society organisations and the media (especially in the course of the elections); local and regional self governance is absent, etc., these countries are becoming increasingly pluralistic democracies, in which groups of organised citizens, including political parties and civil society organisations, can present and defend their interests. Azerbaijan and Belarus are the last remaining Eastern partner countries, which are still ranked as "not free countries"⁸ or "authoritarian regimes"⁹ by independent institutions.

8 Source: "Freedom in the World" (Freedom House, 2010: <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=363&year=2010>); "Freedom in the World" is an annual report by the [Freedom House](#) (U.S.) that measures the degree of [democracy](#) and [political freedom](#) in every country and significant disputed territories around the world, and produces annual scores representing the levels of political rights and civil liberties in each state and territory, on a scale from 1 (most free) to 7 (least free). Depending on the ratings, the countries are then classified as "Free", "Partly Free", or "Not Free".

9 Source: "The Democracy Index" ([Economist Intelligence Unit](#), the Economist, 2010: http://www.eiu.com/public/topical_report.aspx?campaignid=demo2010). The Democracy Index measures the state of [democracy](#) in 187 countries. It is based on 60 indicators grouped in five different categories: electoral process and pluralism, civil liberties, functioning of government, political participation and political culture. The Index was first produced in 2006, and updated in 2008 and 2010.

- 4.3 As a result, too, the pressure exerted by international organisations, including the EU, OSCE, Council of Europe, United Nations, and the International Labour Organisation over the course of last decade; most governments of Eastern partner countries introduced legislation that improved the position of civil society organisations. The tripartite dialogue of social partners became a reality at least formally in all six partner countries. Employers associations and trade unions were able to establish confederations and thus become partners with the governments in social dialogue. The number of NGOs grew exponentially over the last decade in all six partner countries.
- 4.4 The European Commission's offer to establish a Civil Society Forum (CSF) with the aim of strengthening the multilateral track of the Eastern Partnership via the involvement of CSOs from both the EU and partner countries has been met with great enthusiasm¹⁰. 439 CSOs have declared their interest in taking part in the first meeting of the Eastern Partnership CSF (EaP CSF), which was held in Brussels in November 2009. Due to the European Commission's technical and budgetary limits, the total number of CSOs invited to participate in the first meeting was 230 CSOs of which 150 CSOs were from partner countries. 530 CSOs expressed their interest in taking part in the second CSF meeting that was held in Berlin in November 2010. 153 CSOs from partner countries (of the total of 230 participating CSOs) were represented at the second meeting of the CSF. The numbers of CSOs from partner countries was as follows: Armenia - 26, Azerbaijan - 23, Belarus - 27, Georgia - 25, Moldova - 23, and Ukraine - 29.
- 4.5 According to the list of CSOs invited to the second EaP CSF Berlin Forum¹¹, the majority of CSF members from partner countries are non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and think tanks active in various fields of public interest. Only 3 out of the 26 Armenian CSF member CSOs represent socio-economic interests, i.e. business associations and/or trade unions (Chamber of Commerce and Industry of the Republic of Armenia, Republican Union of Employers of Armenia, and the Union of Armenian Governmental Employees). Similarly, 3 out of a total of 23 Azerbaijan CSOs represent socio-economic interests at the CSF (Azerbaijan Lawyers Confederation, Azerbaijan-Turkey Business Association, and the Ganja Agribusiness Association). 6 out of a total of 27 Belarusian member CSOs represent socio-economic interests (Belarusian Association of Journalists, Belarusian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions, Belarusian Trade Union of Workers of Education and Science, Business Union of Entrepreneurs and Employers named after Prof. Kouniavski, and the Federation of Belarusian Trade Unions). One out of 25 Georgian CSOs that are members of the CSF represent socio-economic interests (Confederation of Georgian Trade Unions), while none of the CSOs from Moldova and Ukraine attending the second meeting of the EaP CSF represented socio-economic interests.

¹⁰ "Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council: Eastern Partnership", COM (2008) 823 final (Brussels: European Commission, December 3, 2008; <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:52008DC0823:EN:NOT>).

¹¹ The list of CSOs invited to participate in the second meeting of CSF is available on the European Commission's website: http://eeas.europa.eu/eastern/civil_society/second_csf_meeting_2010_en.htm

4.6 At the CSF's first meeting in Brussels in November 2009, four working groups were created, in line with the structure of the EaP's official thematic platforms. The aim of the working groups is to produce policy recommendations for the work of the official EaP platforms. Each working group is led by two coordinators, one of whom is a representative of a CSO from the partner countries. The first Brussels forum of 2009 also elected the CSF Steering Committee, which consists of 17 members: 8 are working group coordinators, 6 are national coordinators elected by the national delegations of partner countries' CSOs to the CSF, and 3 are representatives of CSOs from the EU member states, including international networks. In total, 10 out of the 17 members of the EaP CSF are representatives of CSOs from partner countries¹². However, none of the members of the CSF Steering Committee represent a social partner CSO from the partner countries.

5. **Armenia**

5.1 The Republican Party of Armenia - the party led by the then Prime Minister Serzh Sarkisian - won 65 of 131 seats in the May 2007 National Assembly elections. Two other pro-presidential parties took a total of 41 seats, giving the government a clear majority. The next parliamentary elections are to be held in the spring of 2012. In the February 2008 presidential elections, Serzh Sarkisian was elected President of Armenia for a five-year period (until 2013). In both elections, opposition parties were put at a disadvantage due to lack of media coverage and the abuse of state resources ahead of the vote. Opposition demonstrations that began after the first round of presidential elections turned violent when the police clashed with protesters: according to the OSCE, 10 people were killed and more than 200 were injured. The current political situation is relatively stable and has enabled the government led by Prime Minister Tigran Sargsyan to implement its manifesto. The Armenian government considers that European integration is a foreign policy priority and sees full EU membership as the future for Armenia.

5.2 In 2010 there were about 3 300 CSOs registered at Armenia's Ministry of Justice. These CSOs are active in various fields of public interest, yet international institutions estimate that many are not active in a meaningful way. The central trade union organisation, which represents workers' interests in social dialogue, is the Confederation of Trade Unions of Armenia (CTUA). The CTUA was established in 1992 as a successor to the former Soviet trade unions. In 2007 it included 23 republican trade unions, 808 professional organisations, and 29 665 trade union members. The Union of Manufacturers and Businessmen (Employers) of Armenia is an umbrella association of 131 corporate members that represent employers' interests in social dialogue.

¹² For more info about the activities of the EaP CSF see the website: <http://www.eap-csf.eu/en/about-eap-csf/the-steering-committee/>

5.3 The Armenian CSOs that participated in the first meeting of the CSF in Brussels in November 2009 were the first to create a national EaP CSF platform. 138 Armenian CSOs participated in the first meeting of the Armenian EaP CSF Platform that was held in Yerevan in June 2010. At the first meeting they elected a Coordination Group consisting of 20 members and adopted the rules of procedure. The Yerevan Press Club took a leading role in providing information about EaP activities by launching a weekly electronic newsletter (in Armenian) covering the developments of the EaP and the CSF activities. However, the Armenian national platform failed to manage the process of selecting CSOs for the second meeting of the CSF in Berlin in November 2010. A misinterpretation of the rules of procedure resulted in something of a crisis for the platform. At present there are around 145 CSOs participating in the activities of the national platform. There are two business associations involved, but no trade union organisations. The government of Armenia has said it is willing to cooperate with the platform, but there does not seem to be a regular and effective dialogue in place¹³.

6. Azerbaijan

6.1 In March 2009 President Ilham Aliyev consolidated his rule with a referendum that eliminated presidential term limits, allowing him to run again in 2013. Aliyev easily won a second term in the October 2008 presidential election, taking 89% of the vote amid a 75% turnout, according to official results. Most of the political opposition chose to boycott the poll, citing barriers to meaningful media access and the overwhelming influence of administrative resources deployed by the ruling New Azerbaijan Party (NAP) led by President Aliyev. The NAP party won the November 2010 parliamentary elections with 45.5% of the vote. The next parliamentary elections will be held in 2015. Azerbaijan states that cooperation with the European Union is one of its foreign policy priorities. The European Union and Azerbaijan are strong partners on energy policy. The main project is building a pipeline to connect the Caspian oil supply to Europe, providing a viable route for oil and gas to reach consumers. Oil-rich Azerbaijan sees the EU as the key market for its hydrocarbon exports.

6.2 Governmental and NGO figures for the exact number of registered NGOs in Azerbaijan vary from 2 600 to 3 220. Most sources agree that only 70–80% of registered NGOs are active. Legal amendments enacted in 2009 require NGOs to register their grants with the authorities, and foreign NGOs to reach agreements with the government before opening offices in the country. Despite progress in certain areas, the NGO sector faces restrictions due to latent government interference, especially during election periods. The Azerbaijani Trade Union Confederation (ATUC) is the main trade union association in Azerbaijan, and participates in the tripartite social dialogue. It has approximately 1.5 million members in 26 federations. Trade unions are prohibited from engaging in political activity but can draft legislation on

¹³ From this point onwards, information about activities of the national platforms of the EaP CSF in partner countries has been obtained from the following main sources: first, information provided by the national coordinators of EaP CSF who were elected at the second Berlin Forum in November 2010, and second, the CSF's website: : <http://www.eap-csf.eu/en/about-eap-csf/the-steering-committee/>

labour, social and economic matters. The National Confederation of the Entrepreneurs (Employers') Organisations of Azerbaijan Republic (AEC) was established in 1999 and represents employers' interests in social dialogue. More than 4 000 businesses as well as about 50 economic associations are currently members of AEC. State-owned enterprises are the leading employer in Azerbaijan, which is why the AEC's capacity to represent employers' interests independently of the government is rather limited.

- 6.3 The Azerbaijan national platform of the EaP CSF was established in April 2010. 40 CSOs became full members. The rules of procedure which were approved in December 2010 state that in order to be eligible for full membership, CSOs must have participated at least in one of the EaP Civil Society Forums. Other organisations are also eligible to apply for membership as associate members. The Azerbaijan CSF national platform includes CSOs representing socio-economic interests. The platform's Coordination Council consists of 5 individuals elected by the members. The platform has established four working groups in line with the structure of the CSF working groups as well as EaP thematic platforms. Each working group has a coordinator who represents the group in the Coordination Council. The platform has given rise to a number of events which are relevant to the government and civil society: e.g. Azerbaijan's accession to the WTO, the use of alternative and renewable energy sources, energy efficiency, and the situation of small and medium-sized enterprises. Government representatives participated in the events organised by the Azerbaijan national platform of the EaP CSF.

7. **Belarus**

- 7.1 Aleksandr Lukashenka, the President of Belarus, has ruled the country since 1994. He started his fourth term as president in January 2011. The announcement of the presidential election result in December 2010 was followed by violent clashes in the capital Minsk between the security forces and thousands of opposition demonstrators protesting about alleged vote-rigging. More than 600 demonstrators, including 7 opposition candidates, have been arrested. The OSCE described the elections as seriously flawed, and OSCE observers criticised both the counting of votes and the violent backlash against opposition candidates. The Belarus government responded by shutting down the OSCE office in Minsk.
- 7.2 In 1997 the EU decided to freeze its relations with Belarus, in response to the authoritarian style of rule of President Lukashenka's regime: the opposition and civil society are politically repressed, and the citizens of Belarus have experienced violations of fundamental human rights and freedoms. A couple of years ago however there was some hope that EU-Belarus relations might improve. In 2008 the Belarusian authorities released all political prisoners and there was a warming in EU-Belarus relations. The EU has invited Belarus to participate in the Eastern Partnership. However, the events that followed the December 2010 presidential elections have worsened these very badly. On 31 January 2011, the Council of the EU decided to impose sanctions on Belarus in response to the violent arrests and imprisonment of

opposition politicians following the December elections. The sanctions target 158 top Belarusian officials, including President Alexander Lukashenka and his two elder sons. The sanctions include travel bans to the European Union and freezing all the European bank accounts of Belarusian officials.

- 7.3 The independent Portal of Belarusian NGOs¹⁴ estimates that there are 2 225 Belarusian NGOs. However, freedom of association in Belarus is severely restricted. More than a hundred of the most active NGOs were forced to close down between 2003 and 2005. In December 2005, President Lukashenka signed amendments to the penal code that criminalised participation in an unregistered or liquidated political party or organisation. These amendments allowed further punitive measures against groups that refused to shut down. As a result, most human rights activists operating in the country face potential jail terms ranging from six months to two years. Due to persecution, some NGOs moved their offices abroad, e.g. to Vilnius, Warsaw, and Kiev. Regulations introduced in 2005 banned the provision of foreign assistance to NGOs, parties, and individuals deemed to have promoted "meddling in the internal affairs" of Belarus from abroad. The government signalled a slight thaw in relations with these groups in 2008, however, no relevant improvements have been seen over the last two years.
- 7.4 There are two trade union organisations in Belarus. The Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus is the largest association of workers of Belarus, with circa 4 million members. Belarusian Congress of Democratic Trade Unions, created in 1993, is the only recognised member organisation in Belarus by ITUC, ETUC, and PERC. As regards Belarusian legislation, workers have a right to protect their interests but these rights are not respected in practice. The government has adopted a fixed-term contract system, involving transferring all government employees onto short-term contracts and not extending employment contracts for trade union activists. This contract system is used to dismiss independent union members and opposition political activists. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) Commission of Inquiry criticised the government of Belarus for interfering in trade union activity and urged it to address the ILO recommendations to stop interfering in the unions. The Ministry of the Economy of Belarus responded by cancelling the ILO's technical assistance project with the unions.¹⁵ EU has imposed temporarily withdrawal of gsp references for Belarus since June 2007. The cooperation of Belarusian state authorities with the ILO improved between 2009 and 2010, however, the capacity of trade unions of Belarus to defend workers' interests in social dialogue remains very limited. After crackdown in December 2010 the president of the Federation of Trade Unions is on the list of Belarusian officials banned from entry in the EU.
- 7.5 The Belarusian Confederation of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs (Employers) - the CIE - represents employers' interests in social dialogue. This confederation was created when the Belarusian Confederation of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs (BCIE) was reorganised by the

14 See website: <http://www.ngo.by/>

15 The Barometer of Human and Trade Unions Rights, Education International: http://www.ei-ie.org/barometer/en/profiles_detail.php?country=belarus

Public Association into a non-profit organisation. It has about 700 members and 16 000 associate members. As most businesses in Belarus are still state-owned or state-controlled, the capacity of the CIE confederation to present the real interests of entrepreneurs and employers in Belarus independently of the government is far from being a reality.

- 7.6 The Belarusian national platform of the EaP CSF was established at the conference on Eastern Partnership Roadmaps for Belarus in July 2010. Conference participants representing 32 Belarusian CSOs, including independent trade unions and business associations, agreed on topical objectives for civil society in Belarus and set forth the substantive priorities for work within four thematic areas of the EaP. These priorities serve as reference points for the "road maps", which will be worked on further after the CSF national platform. The platform has established four working groups in line with the structure of the EaP CSF and the EaP thematic platforms. Even though the Belarusian national CSF platform did not approve formal rules of procedure, it managed effectively the process of selecting CSOs for the second CSF Forum in Berlin in November 2010. 94 CSOs from Belarus expressed their interest in taking part in the second meeting of the CSF in Berlin in November 2010. There are around 150 CSOs involved in the activities of the Belarusian CSF national platform. The Belarusian national platform has issued several statements calling on the government to respect human rights and to release political prisoners. This group gives its own independent statements and opinions about all recent developments in Belarus as well as participation of Belarus in EaP, and this position is not welcomed by the authorities. As yet, the government has ignored any activities of the national platform of the EaP CSF. As a counterweight to the national platform the group of officially recognised business and other organisations initiated establishment of so called nationwide platform of civil society.

8. **Georgia**

- 8.1 Towards the end of 2007, the rule of President Mikhail Saakashvili – who led the "Rose Revolution" and became the President in 2004 – faced a major challenge when allegations of corruption and organising a murder triggered a wave of mass protests calling for early elections. Nevertheless Mikhail Saakashvili brought forward the presidential elections to 5 January 2008, which he won in the first round (the election period ends in 2013). His party, the United National Movement, went on to win a landslide victory in parliamentary elections in May 2008 (the next elections will be held in 2012). The conflict with Russia in August 2008 led many Georgians who had previously been critical of Mr Saakashvili to rally behind him. After the conflict however, criticism of his role in starting the conflict increased, and several mass rallies were held by the opposition, demanding for him to step down. In October 2010, parliament passed constitutional changes curbing the power of the presidency, and boosting those of the Prime Minister and the government. Currently, Georgia's political system is undergoing transformation from a post-Soviet presidential system to a parliamentary system. The current government of Georgia states that relations with the EU are its foreign policy priority and sees full EU membership as the future for the country.

- 8.2 An estimated 10,000 NGOs are registered in Georgia. One trend which has been occurring over the last few years is the growing divide between larger, more professional organisations and smaller, institutionally weak and passive NGOs, which make up the majority of the sector. NGOs are able to register and operate without arbitrary restrictions. They play an active role in public debate, though their influence has decreased somewhat under the current administration. Workers' interests in social dialogue are represented by the Georgian Trade Union Confederation (GTUC), which consists of 31 sectoral unions. These unions claim to have over 500 000 members. The GTUC is not affiliated to the government and receives no government funding. Political polarisation has increased over the past couple of years, yet the GTUC has maintained its independence, advocating social dialogue. Employers' interests in social dialogue are represented by the Georgia Employers' Association (GEA). The GEA was founded in November 2000, and soon became the official social partner of the government and trade unions.
- 8.3 The Georgian national platform of the EaP CSF was established in November 2010. It has adopted rules of procedure. Four working groups have been established in line with the structure of the CSF and the EaP thematic platforms. The Coordination Council of the national platform consists of nine members, i.e. one national coordinator and eight working group coordinators (each working group is represented by two coordinators). As of February 2011, circa 80 Georgian CSOs are members of the EaP CSF national platform, including trade unions, business associations and CSOs representing socio-economic interests. The government of Georgia is willing to cooperate with the national platform of the EaP CSF. In February 2011 the members of the Coordination Council held a meeting with the minister for Euro-Atlantic Integration of Georgia. The minister and his office said that they were willing to assist the members of the EaP CSF national platform in Georgia, including facilitating the platform's dialogue with state authorities and agencies.

9. **Moldova**

- 9.1 2009 was a turning point in the recent political history of Moldova: it ended the period of the Communist Party's rule since 2001. The parliament elected in April 2009 failed to [elect a new President](#). The total number of seats in the Moldovan parliament is 101, of which 51 votes are needed to elect the [Speaker](#) and [Prime Minister](#), and 61 votes to elect the [President](#). For this reason, the parliament was dissolved and early elections were held in July 2009. Even though the [Communist Party](#) won with 44.7% of the vote with 48 MPs, 53 seats went to four opposition parties – the Liberal Democratic Party, Liberal Party, Democratic Party, and Our Moldova Alliance – which together formed the new government under the name of Alliance for European Integration. After the early [2010 elections](#), the Alliance increased its majority from 53 seats to 59 seats. Although the Our Moldova Alliance did not return to parliament, the leaders of the three remaining parties of the Alliance for European Integration signed a new coalition agreement on 30 December 2010. The next parliamentary elections are scheduled for 2014. The re-elected coalition government led by Prime Minister Vlad Filat has launched an ambitious reform programme with the aim of improving Moldova's economic

performance as well as strengthening democratic standards in domestic politics. EU accession is a foreign policy priority for Moldova: it is as an intrinsic part of the country's complex modernisation process to move in line with European standards.

9.2 A total of 7 000 Moldovan NGOs are registered at national and local levels. NGOs are active in a broad range of fields, although almost half are involved in the social and education sectors. Collaboration between the government and civil society has increased, beginning with the July 2009 parliamentary elections and the formation of the new governmental coalition Alliance for European Integration. NGOs and parliamentary commissions increasingly work together in the legislative drafting process and in ad hoc working groups. About half of the work force in Moldova is unionised. Two union confederations, the independent Trade Union Confederation of Moldova (TUCM) and the former communist government-sponsored Confederation of Free Trade Unions Solidaritate (Solidarity) vied for members, with the government reportedly pressed union members to move the latter. Since 2007 trade unions in Moldova have been unified in a single national organisation-National Confederation of Trade Unions of Moldova (CNSM). The new coalition government formed after the July 2009 elections stopped interference in trade union affairs. Employers' interests in social dialogue are represented by the National Confederation of Moldovan Employers (NCME), which is a member of the International Organisation of Employers.

9.3 The Moldovan national platform of the EaP CSF was established in March 2011. It has formed four working groups in line with the structure of the CSF and the EaP thematic platforms. The EaP national platform cooperates with the National Participation Council. The fact that the National Participation Council was created demonstrates the political willingness of the Moldovan government to cooperate with CSOs. As from the July 2009 parliamentary elections, CSO representatives have been involved in drafting strategic government documents in the field of European integration, e.g. the activity programme of the Moldovan government on European integration: "Freedom, Democracy, Welfare"; the medium-term development action plan "Rethink Moldova"; the Economic Stabilisation and Recovery Program 2009–2011, etc. Cooperation between the government and CSOs was strengthened through the establishment of a permanent platform for dialogue on European integration called the National Participation Council (NPC), which is made up of 30 CSOs working in various fields. The NPC chair has the right to attend all meetings of the Moldovan Cabinet of Ministers and to voice the NPC position on governmental draft decisions and policies. The majority of the NPC organisations are members of the EaP CSF and, at the same time, the NPC Chair is a member of the Steering Committee of the EaP CSF. However, as yet no trade unions or business associations have become a member of the Moldovan national platform of the EaP CSF.

10. **Ukraine**

10.1 The 2010 presidential elections in Ukraine ended the period of rule of political leaders who were brought to power by the "Orange Revolution" in 2004. Between 2004 and 2009,

Ukrainian politics was affected by a conflict between former President Victor Yushchenko and former PM Yuliya Tymoshenko, which did not allow for the required reforms to be implemented and consequently led to growing public disappointment. Victor Yanukovych, the political leader of the Party of Regions, won the 2010 elections and was made President in February 2010. In September 2010 the Constitutional Court of Ukraine concluded that the amendments to the Ukrainian constitution that were made on 8 December 2004 were unconstitutional. This act has restored a presidential system in the Ukraine with a high concentration of power in the hands of the President and the President's office. The Party of the Regions (180 MPs), together with the People's Party (20 MPs), Communists (25 MPs) and a group of independent MPs, form a majority coalition known as Stability and Reform which consists of 235 MPs out of a total of 450 MPs. The government, led by PM Nikolay Azarov, managed to get a standby loan from the IMF in order to cope with economic crises and to push for some important reforms, such as a reform of taxation, administration, and the judiciary. The next parliamentary elections are to be held in 2012 followed by the presidential elections in 2015. European integration remains a top foreign policy priority, but it is stressed that this cannot be done at the expense of good relations with Russia.

- 10.2 According to government statistics, the number of registered CSOs in Ukraine is around 52 000. Ukraine has one of the most vibrant civil societies in the region. Citizens are increasingly taking issues into their own hands, e.g. protesting against unwanted construction, exposing corruption, and advocating their interests at both national and local level. In Ukraine, there are two major trade union associations that are part of social dialogue with the government and employers. The Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine represents 40 national-level industrial trade unions, while the Confederation of Free Trade Unions of Ukraine has 69 trade unions as members, though only 6 are national-level unions. Employers' interests in social dialogue are represented by the Federation of Employers of Ukraine (FEU), which was established by 23 employers associations in 2009.
- 10.3 The Ukrainian national platform of the EaP CSF was established in January 2011. The founding conference was attended by participants representing more than 70 CSOs, including some trade union organisations. The participants adopted Memoranda on the creation of the EaP CSF National Platform in Ukraine. The conference established four working groups for the national platform, in line with the structure of the four EaP thematic platforms. The Coordination Council – which consists of 9 members including a national CSF coordinator for Ukraine – was also elected. Although representatives from business and employers' organisations were also invited, they have shown limited interest, due to their perception that the National Tripartite Social and Economic Council of Ukraine already has a sufficiently strong role. At the same time, major business organisations and trade unions are complaining that they are not given enough information on the Eastern Partnership. Establishing regular dialogue with the government remains one of the main tasks for the Ukrainian national platform of the EaP CSF.