

CONTRIBUTION TO THE CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM FROM THE BELARUSIAN INSTITUTE FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES

The Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies (BISS) was created by leading Belarusian experts, journalists, and public figures, to establish **a platform for a dialogue** inside the Belarusian analytical community and between the expert community, the society, and the international community. By promoting a dialogue, BISS aims to develop a new vision for Belarus, generate positive alternative scenarios of the political, economic, and social transformation of the country, map out the European path of development for the country, and discover ways of **enhancing competitiveness of Belarus and providing a better quality of life to the Belarusian citizens.**

BISS recommendations on the Eastern Partnership were formulated in April 2009 in its joint policy paper with the Office for Democratic Belarus (Brussels) '[What Eastern Partnership Should Bring to Belarus.](#)' In reply to the particular call for contributions from the European Commission, we stress the following points as key to our proposals regarding the content and functioning of the Eastern Partnership and Civil Society Forum. BISS also confirms its support for the proposals submitted by the Policy Association for an Open Society (PaSOS) and the Civil Society Forum of the Belarusian Non-Governmental Organizations.

Recommendations on the civil society forum:

While a civil society forum is already part of the EaP architecture, it is essential that the role of civil society is not limited to just one platform. In fact, **a spirit and practices of partnership and cooperation between state and civil society should be nourished and promoted at all stages and in all programmes.** Ideally, civil society groups should have a voice in discussion of all main EaP activities and be a tool of control and transparency.

It is therefore essential that EaP programmes are not fully government-oriented and administered through centralised sources. Independent NGO groups ought to be fully-fledged participants in the EaP.

- The civil society forum shall therefore achieve a measure of independence and self-governance from its current position, when participants are selected by the European Commission and the full list of participants is not even known to each other. Members of civil society forum shall have full access to information about the Forum's work and agenda, and be able to fully take part in all the debates and activities of the forum, including preparation of the agenda, debate, and decision making.
- Civil Society Forum, from its first session in Brussels, shall independently decide on cooptation and rotation of its membership.
- A steering committee of the Civil Society Forum shall be elected at the first session in Brussels. The steering committee shall be responsible for
 - Communication of the position of the Civil Society Forum to the EU institutions;
 - Coordination of the common activities of the Forum's participants in the thematic platforms and between the platforms;
 - Representation of the Forum's position to the external audiences.
- The Civil Society Forum shall be assigned a legitimate role in providing expert assessments of the Eastern Partnership project, e.g. their environmental or human rights impact, and a role in formulating the agenda of the EaP through recurring consultations with the national government and EU institutions. A permanent platform for the dialogue between the representatives of the European Union,

partner countries, and civil society forum shall therefore be established for each thematic platform of the Eastern Partnership.

- Civil Society Forum shall be granted a role to monitor the political and human rights situation in the partner countries;
- A 'think tank caucus' inside the Civil Society forum may be established with the goal of coordination of expert activities necessary for the efficient functioning of the civil society forum.
- Civil society forum shall develop tools for dialogue, communication, and policy formulation, including fully-fledged web portal, mail lists, newsletters, etc., run and administered by Forum's participants.
- Civil Society Forum shall access and discuss with the representatives of the EU institutions and national governments the capacity building needs to ensure active participation of civil society in Eastern Partnership.
- The EU institutions shall encourage and support local initiatives aimed at establishment of national platforms for the EaP civil society forums, as well as encourage the creation of platforms for dialogue between civil societies and governments, particularly in countries with weak traditions of government-civil society dialogue and poor human rights record.

Recommendations on Eastern Partnership Structures

BISS considers Eastern Partnership as an opportunity to promote democratic institutions and good governance in the partner countries, many of which suffer from the severe democratic deficits. Although the bilateral track in the EaP has a clear priority, it is important to develop multilateral cooperation and deeper institutionalize the Eastern Partnership in order to promote uniform standards of democratic institutions and governance in all partner states. Participant countries have to be prepared to commit itself to the code of good behaviour vis-à-vis **the community of European partners**.

It is worth considering institutionalising such code of good behaviour at the multilateral level and to oblige partners from both sides to respect a set of common rules that would make the entire partnership configuration truly operational. These rules could, for example, include:

- Respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty of all partner countries;
- Respect for fundamental human rights and freedoms;
- Respect for free and uninhibited flow of information across the partner states;
- Respect for free movement of people;
- Respect for civil society's activities, including elimination of artificial barriers for civil society cooperation, humanitarian aid, educational exchanges, etc.

The Code of Conduct shall be formulated as a declaration of principles to be signed by the heads of states. BISS would suggest participants of the civil society forum to formulate such declaration and symbolically adopt it as a token of commitment to shared values and goals in participation in Eastern Partnership

BISS also recommends development of instruments for representation of democratic forces and civil societies in the work of the EURONEST, particularly for the countries that fail to carry out free, fair, and competitive elections at the national level.

Recommendations on policy areas covered by Eastern Partnership

BISS has specific recommendation for the agenda of the thematic platform on energy security.

- Development of the programs on restructuring of the power generation sectors with the goal of increasing efficiency of power generation and reducing dependence on imports of monopoly supply energy resources

- Development of the projects that ensure regional security in supply of energy, such as Southern energy corridor, Ukraine-Lithuania energy bridge; connection of the Northern and Southern branches of Druzhba pipeline (Baltic-Black Sea Collector) or linking Odessa-Brody pipeline to Mozyr refinery in Belarus;
- Development of regional cooperation in prevention and minimizing consequences of energy blockades (such as development of storage capacities, establishing linkages between pipeline systems of the participant countries with the EU pipeline networks and developing capacities for reversing the pipelines in occasion of energy blockades).
- Development of 'trust measures' to ensure transparency of the operation of regional transit networks;
- Development of proposal for legislative and regulatory reforms at national and multilateral levels to ensure regional cooperation in energy security and enhancing energy efficiency in partner countries.
- Development of national and regional programs in assessment of the potential of partner countries in the development of alternative energy sources, providing opportunities for independent expert analysis where such assessments are blocked by the regional governments;
- Providing a platform for the debate on regional cooperation in nuclear safety and development of nuclear power generation – particularly in the Baltic – Eastern European region