

**EaP CSF as an opportunity to create a co-operation platform for the Eastern  
Partnership civil society organisations**

**The key challenge for the civil society organisations meeting at the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF) is to start a process whereby structures will be created that will enable efficient operation of a platform for co-operation among those organisations. Experience shows that formal institutionalisation is a necessary prerequisite for such platforms to operate effectively. Non-governmental co-operation within the framework of the Barcelona Process (and the Euro-Mediterranean Civil Forums which are part of it) may serve as an example – it started to produce tangible results only eight years on, when it was established as an international non-governmental organisation (INGO)<sup>1</sup>. The Eastern Partnership Civil Society Organisations (EaP CSOs) stand a chance to use this experience to optimise their organisational form and operation modalities from the very start.**

**1. Objectives of the EaP CSOs non-governmental co-operation platform**

Institutionalised co-operation among the EaP CSOs would facilitate achievement of the objectives identified during the European Commission's consultations with NGOs and presented in the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum Concept paper. The most important among those objectives are to:

- provide recommendations and consultancy for bilateral and multilateral undertakings at the governmental level;
- promote dialogue among the CSOs, enable know-how exchange among them (e.g. in fields such as human rights defence or NGO financing in the EU), and develop the civil society potential in the Eastern Partnership countries.

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

## **2. Final institutional form of the EaP CSOs co-operation platform**

**The most effective way to institutionalise the EaP CSOs co-operation platform would be to establish an international non-governmental organisation (INGO) grouping civil society organisations from the EU and the partner countries, which wish to actively participate in the Eastern Partnership.**

The establishment of such an international non-governmental organisation would:

- strengthen the status and autonomy of the EaP CSOs (by giving them legal personality respected in international relations);
- ensure co-ordination and continuity of the EaP CSOs' activities (non-governmental activity within the Eastern Partnership would go beyond the annual forum meetings);
- ensure that the participating entities are selected, and the co-ordinating bodies established, in a democratic and transparent manner (criteria of membership in the organisation and its management would be defined in the INGO's regulations);

**In addition to establishing an international non-governmental organisation it is extremely important to create a number of networks to enable effective co-operation among the EaP CSOs.** The character of these networks should primarily reflect the needs of the NGOs concerned and should not duplicate the governmental dimension of the Eastern Partnership (e.g. the division into four thematic platforms). The networks could be thematic (e.g. a network of human rights or education NGOs), professional (e.g. a think-tank network), subregional (e.g. organisations from the Southern Caucasus) or national (e.g. a network grouping all Ukrainian organisations).

## **3. The international non-governmental organisation (INGO) and the EaP Civil Society Forum**

The INGO would participate in the organisation of the annual Eastern Partnership Forums and ensure:

- adequacy (i.e. that the subjects discussed are relevant from the CSOs' point of view);
- representativeness (i.e. that the Forum really groups civil society organisations rather than other bodies);
- continuity (i.e. that the successive forums are not separate events unrelated in any way to the previous ones).

#### **4. Communication and financing**

**In addition to institutionalisation, the EaP CSOs non-governmental co-operation platform also needs good communication and financing in order to operate effectively.**

The question of communication could be tackled by **creating an interactive webpage** with information about the activities of the EaP CSOs co-operation platform, and with functionalities enabling direct communication among the participants of individual networks (through adequately designed discussion forums).

Transnational civil society activities entail particularly high costs which the smaller organisations are unable to afford and are thus prevented from participating. The EU financing mechanisms available to CSOs usually exclude the most needy organisations with the smallest budgets. In order for those organisations to be able to take part, they need to be able to obtain financial support from the Eastern Partnership budget; this option should also be available to the regional, subregional and thematic networks created by those organisations. **For this reason it is crucial to create a grant facility for small NGOs within the EaP framework.**

#### **5. Recommendations for the EaP Civil Society Forum:**

In view of the above proposals, during the first EaP CSF it would be advisable to:

- enable a debate about the tasks and operation modalities of the Forum and the EaP CSOs non-governmental co-operation platform,
- enable the formation of at least a steering committee legitimised by the participants,
- collect preliminary proposals concerning the CSO co-operation networks that the Forum participants would like to create.

**At this stage, the most important objective for the Eastern Partnership non-governmental co-operation platform is for the CSOs involved in this initiative to organise themselves. Once organised and self-defined, the EaP CSOs will gain legitimacy and be able to start substantive co-operation with the institutions representing the governmental dimension of the Eastern Partnership, as well as transnational co-operation among themselves.**