

A written contribution to the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum

Dear Conference organizers and participants,

On May 5-6, 2009 in Prague, at a conference entitled **EASTERN PARTNERSHIP: TOWARDS CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM** organized by the Czech organization Association for International Affairs (AMO), participants discussed and prepared for the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum. As part of that conference, there was a session devoted to the issues of conflict transformation, confidence-building and peace-building.

The inclusion of this session was of paramount importance, given that there are unresolved conflicts in four out of six Eastern Partnership countries. The role of civil society in addressing those conflicts is crucial because civil society is more flexible than government when it comes to arranging meetings and discussions, finding common ground, and building a joint vision on how these conflicts can be resolved.

Our workshop in Prague was not easy: we had long arguments on how even to describe these conflicts or the areas where they occur: unrecognized states or partly recognized states; unrecognized areas; conflict areas; conflict regions; etc. Yet our deliberations were an important attempt to look, together, in to bridging the gap between the sometimes radically different interests of the parties to conflict. The results of our deliberations can be found here: www.epfound.am/files/policy_recommendations.pdf in the section **WORKSHOP B. Resolving Conflicts: Pre-condition for Development in other Areas? Thematic focus: Security and Peace Building.**

After the conference, the Eastern Partnership strategy toward conflicts became a focal point for a variety of European actors. So I wrote an essay where I attempted to summarize the EU's engagement via civil society in conflict transformation and peace-building in South Caucasus. In this essay I included recommendations on what could be done regarding Armenia and Azerbaijan and the Karabakh conflict. The essay can be downloaded from:

<http://rapidshare.com/files/299901544/euandconflicts09final.doc.html>

This essay is by no means the only source of information and analysis on conflict transformation issues in the Eastern Partnership countries. It is just an example. However, information about civil society activities on peace and confidence-building is still not easy to find. Conflict issues are often disregarded or overlooked. As a result of this omission, projects on democracy, economy and the environment do not deliver their expected results.

There is a need to build new generations of civil society peace-builders. Today, civil society peace-building can register some significant successes, such as in Armenian-Turkish civil society dialogue.

This leads me to suggest the Civil Society Forum create another Working Group or Sub-Working Group on Civil Society Peace-Building.

This cross-cutting Group will provide recommendations primarily to the Democracy, Good Governance and Stability Working Group, as well as to the Contacts Between People Working Group. It will also

mainstream peace-building needs in all of the Civil Society Forum's activities, since it is clear that if conflicts are not transformed into peace, democracy and economic development will not be sustainable.

The composition of this Group should include experts on the conflicts and civil society leaders with experience on peace-building projects. Its agenda can include further elaborating on the recommendations from the AMO Prague Conference's Workshop B, and developing an action plan to address issues related to conflict. If this suggestion is accepted, I personally will make every effort to ensure it is a functional and important addition to the Civil Society Forum. I am sure that many of my colleagues will be very interested in doing the same.

I encourage anyone who supports this idea to write to me by email at gtergabrielyan@epfound.am.

With very best regards,

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Country Director

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