

## **Written -Contribution to the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum**

### **I. Recommendations to the EaP Civil Society Forum**

1. The Forum needs a clear definition of common goals, priority lines and directions for future action
2. A Civil Society Forum would contribute to:
  - building democracy, supporting reforms, and facilitating dialogue among stakeholders in these countries, and of these countries with EU decision-makers
  - active dialogue on mutual expectations between the European Union institutions and the citizens/NGOs from the countries of the EaP
  - identification of specific needs in the counties and their relay on European level
  - sharing and promotion of good and effective practices, relevant for the situations in these countries
  - support to transnational cooperation, through bilateral and multilateral projects in key areas (social and economic development, environment, sustainable use of resources, cultural cooperation, capacity building)
3. The Participation in the Forum should involve main actors in civil society, formal and informal European networks which involve active members from the Eastern European countries (no individuals at the early stage but active, non partisan NGOs).  
The main challenges are:
  - identifying, mobilising, involving the participants and ensuring their **commitment** throughout the entire process
  - ensuring **bottom up** approach where the main ideas and energies should be generated either by the civil society or in cooperation with the institutions
  - ensuring a sufficient level of capacity of the Forum participants (some preparatory capacity building could be done in this respect)
  - ensuring knowledge sharing and spreading out the main ideas and good practices not only among the Forum members but throughout the EaP countries and regions. Overcoming lobbies for individual interests and “gate keeping”
  - coordination, representation and leadership of the Forum: who and how should manage and steer the entire process. NB: such initiatives have to be civil society ownership rather than lead by institutions

For ensuring continuity and pro-active participation, **clear principles of engagement** of the Forum members should be established.

A practical tool for enhancing the dialogue among the Forum members would be to have short profiles of the civil society organizations on the list.
4. The Forum visibility and outreach
  - involvement in the existing EU structured dialogue platforms
  - participation at the EU annual forums in the respective areas

- involvement in the EU thematic Years (e.g. Creativity and Innovation, Eradication of Poverty etc...)
5. The Forum should exist in both *physical* and *virtual* form.
- the ‘physical’ forum shall gather as suggested – around yearly conferences or meetings taking stock of progress made from one year to another (securing monitoring, evaluation, and mutual reporting/informing on reforms and change from both civil society and EU institutions). It should allow to use the Open Method Of Coordination (OMC) to facilitate learning and sharing of experiences, draw conclusions from good and bad developments in the countries in focus;
  - the ‘virtual’ forum shall provide a space for broader participation (also individual views), exchange, and expression of opinions, proposals and debates on the main focus topics, it should raise issues and develop papers, launch on-line debates and blogs etc. For the on-line forum a certain level of moderation should be envisaged.

## **II. Recommendations on the Eastern Partnership Structures**

6. To invest in mutual knowledge and research in order to tackle the right needs with the suitable instruments
7. To facilitate both the organisation (structure) of civil society within the Eastern European neighbourhood countries, and the contribution of civil society from the Eastern Partnership to European debates and policy making; involvement in a “relay” model of cooperation;
8. Cross-cultural and trans-sector involvement in the partnership is essential to help overcome geographical and political divides.

## **III. Recommendations on policy areas covered by EaP**

9. The Civil Society Forum should reflect the main priorities set up by the *European Agenda for Culture*, namely:
  - promotion of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue, including enhancement of mobility and strengthening intercultural competences;
  - Joint working groups in different areas may be established;
  - promotion of culture as a catalyst for creativity in the framework of the Lisbon Strategy for growth and jobs;
  - systematic integration of the cultural dimension in all external and development policies, projects and programmes, as well as promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions.

In this particular field the European Cultural Foundation could contribute with its experiences in civil society mobilisation, capacity building, promoting participative policy making, enhancing structure dialogue in Europe through the Platform of Intercultural Europe, as well as by providing mediation on the topics related to culture through the LabforCulture.