



EASTERN PARTNERSHIP
CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM

13TH ANNUAL ASSEMBLY

of the Eastern Partnership Civil
Society Forum

KEY TAKEAWAYS

30 November - 2 December 2021



ROAD TO RECOVERY:

FOSTERING REFORM AND RESILIENCE FOR A STRONGER EASTERN PARTNERSHIP

The road to successful recovery from the several unprecedented crises that have continued to grip the region in the course of 2021 has to be just, inclusive and in line with the core values that are at the basis of the Eastern Partnership. This report presents the key takeaways from our flagship event that took place, for the second time, in a fully online format.

While 2021 has been a difficult year, it has also been a year full of hope. Civil society organisations have worked hard to promote transparency and hold governments accountable for their actions.



Respecting human rights and the rule of law, fighting corruption, overcoming discrimination, and celebrating the freedom of expression and assembly: these values define who we are and are the best investment for a prosperous, just and sustainable future. The EaP CSF will continue to be a vital partner on this path.

CHARLES MICHEL

President of the European Council

To ensure a fruitful and sustainable cooperation, the EaP policy must overcome current challenges and deliver equally over the Eastern Partnership region. There is a strong commitment to the region from the EU's side, but the EaP countries need to be open to push crucial reforms forward. Unless all parties commit to the new agenda set out by the EaP Summit, it will not be successful. While a sophisticated economic and investment plan is essential, it is pointless in environments which are filled with corruption. Further challenges related to democratic governance and rule of law also have to be addressed. Progress in these matters can be supported by imposing strict conditionalities, such as the freezing of investments if targets are not met.



One of the top priorities of the renewed EaP agenda is to support building resilience and fair societies that leave no one behind. Civil society engagement is essential for tapping the full potential of our new agenda. The EU will continue to support civil society as a vital driver for strengthening democracy and public accountability.

OLIVÉR VÁRHELYI

European Commissioner for
Neighbourhood and Enlargement



[Livestream of the
Opening Ceremony](#)

With civil society being a central part of the planning, monitoring and implementation of the EaP policy, it is essential for the EaP CSF to structure its work around a strategic role and vision. The new EaP CSF Strategy 2022-2030 has been developed during a crucial and challenging period of time and will ensure that the organisations working within the Forum are committed to its roles and values, such as the promotion of human rights, social justice and equity. Relying on evidence-based advocacy, the Forum works with data from different sources, among others the Eastern Partnership Index.



The EaP Index confirms the need for renewed commitments to sustainable reforms in the areas of rule of law, governance, anti-corruption, independent media and equality, which must be underpinned by core EU values and carried out in an inclusive manner.

KERRY LONGHURST

EaP Index Editor, EaP CSF;
Professor, Collegium Civitas

Over the last decade, the EU has worked with international institutions to develop more resilient economies in the EaP region. Although results have been favourable, more effort is required to mitigate the negative impacts of the

COVID-19 pandemic and to create a suitable business environment to attract new investments. To build a recovery that is socially and economically inclusive, it is important to support both the sectors that have suffered during the crisis, as well as the ones that have performed well, to further improve their quality and open the access to new markets.

The gas crisis hitting the EaP countries, and notably Moldova, also exposed the vulnerabilities of the energy market and supply setup in the region. Even though the mobilisation of EU support has contributed to the overcoming of the crisis, energy should not be allowed to be used as a geopolitical weapon. The EaP region is in need to be supported by EU stakeholders in improving its gas reserve capacities, compensation mechanism, and energy efficiency programs. Such support within this exposed and vulnerable region should aim to resolve such gas crises not only in the short-term, but long-term as well.



Civil society organisations work hard to help increase the transparency and accountability of government activities. This is key, especially in times of crises that we experience today.

MAIA SANDU

President of the Republic of Moldova

Although a good performance of the team driving the digital agenda at the Ministry of Digital Transformation of Ukraine can serve as an example for other EaP countries and even some EU member states - for example, the Digital Insurance Agenda's successful implementation has facilitated a fast track for Ukrainian Covid-19 passes' recognition in the EU - several challenges are still ahead. The year 2022 is a key year to implement all tasks outlined in Ukraine's current digitalisation roadmap and a "quantum leap" will have to be made so that all goals of the roadmap are reached by 2023 when the strategy expires. Civil society engagement is important for the implementation of the digital agenda in Ukraine and the EU as well as the Ukrainian government have to see how to improve civil society involvement in the implementation of the upcoming tasks in 2022.

Pavel Sheremet Award laureate, Yevheniia Motorevska, Editor-in-Chief at Hromadske.ua, outlined that even though journalists in Ukraine are able to conduct investigative journalism and ask inconvenient questions, more improvements remain to be done. In certain circumstances journalists face hostility while carrying out their work and some officials try to hinder their activities. It is important that journalists continue to raise their voices and contribute to exposing corruption.

The implementation of the deliverables for 2020, in terms of human rights and rule of law, is lagging behind the defined targets. Still, for the EU, the continued delivery on the reform agenda is, was and remains key and is the foundation of the partnership with the EaP region. Even if the new agenda indicates a more serious approach, especially regarding democratic governance, pressure by the civil society is crucial. The new EaP agenda puts a higher emphasis on civil society than before. However, marginalised groups are still being left out from the spectrum, which risks the agenda to leave people behind. The lesson is clear: more results can be delivered only through a more efficient approach. The performance of the EaP region and the countries has to be closely monitored in order to make sure the reforms are aligned in their process and the region is developing together in a consistent manner.

The alarming human rights situation in Belarus continues to worsen and the prospects for political change in the country are uncertain. Under such circumstances, the main approach to Belarus' participation in the Eastern Partnership is to strengthen the situation of civil society and integrate it into the EaP initiative. Four main pillars should be built on to create an enabling environment for democratic forces in Belarus: education and capacity-building opportunities, support of free media, effective inclusion of



[Livestream of the panel on
policy check ahead of the
Eastern Partnership Summit](#)



[Livestream of the launch of the
EaP Index 2021](#)

democratic forces into the EaP policy implementation, including the revised EaP architecture, and continuous support to civil society.

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EU's civil society support should focus on coalitions that can prepare reforms for the time when the situation in Belarus is favourable and the country will embark upon the transition to democracy.

TATSIANA KHOMICH

Coordination Council representative
for political prisoners, Viktor Babaryka
Team Coordinator

Entering into force in the beginning of 2021, the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) between the EU and Armenia will have many benefits for the socio-economic recovery and resilience of Armenia. Still, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Nagorno Karabakh, reforms have been slow. Looking ahead, the EU should continue its support to Armenia concerning humanitarian, human rights and security issues. In addition, Armenia needs to reinforce the focus on reform and the transparency and accountability of state administration systems.

In Azerbaijan, dialogue between civil society and the government was on hold during and after the 2020 Nagorno Karabakh war without any concrete roadmap for the future. To help address the fight against corruption, the promotion of the rule of law and human rights, and the rights of people with disabilities, it is vital to foster an enabling environment for civil society, notably regarding their registration, operations and access to funding. The EU is Azerbaijan's biggest economic partner, but even in challenging circumstances, will find creative ways to continue its support for CSOs in Azerbaijan.

Lastly, Georgia faces a tense situation of political polarisation. The high degree of confrontation between political forces hinders the country's development process, as well as the conduct of reforms vital for Georgia's European future. Communication between parties is key to solving the problem of polarisation and to push forward the reform agenda. Civil society should receive a more active role in political dialogue, since it can help increase transparency in this process.

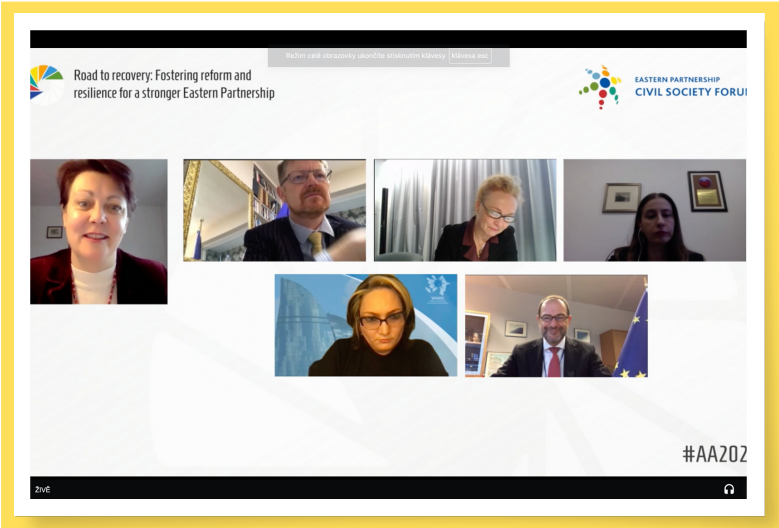
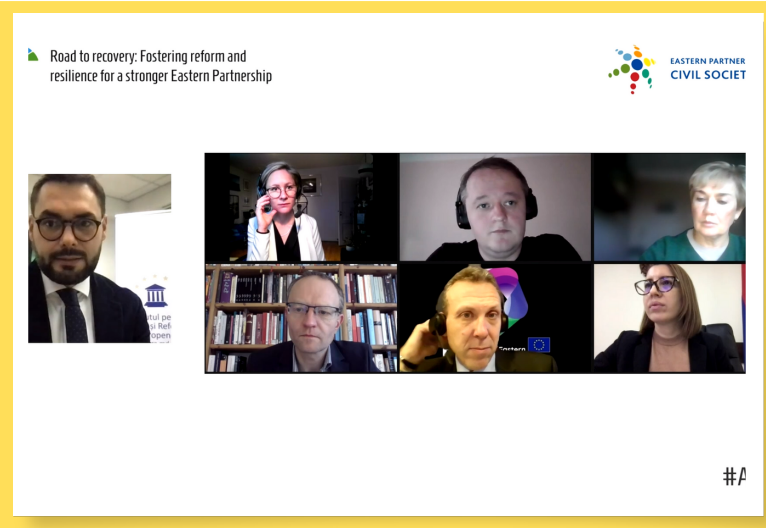


[Livestream of the panel on setting the EaP's economic recovery in motion](#)



[Livestream of the panel on democratic governance in the EaP - Strengthening transparency, accountability and monitoring for post-crisis transformation](#)

Ahead of the 6th Eastern Partnership Summit, the 13th EaP CSF Annual Assembly has gathered more than 340 CSOs, as well as EaP and EU decision-makers to discuss the last steps and challenges ahead of this major event, and also the ambitions and policy objectives set out in the new policy documents. We are grateful to all our members and guests who took part in the event for their insights and rich contributions and look forward to continuing our work together in the future.



ABOUT THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM

The Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF) is a unique multi-layered regional civil society platform aimed at promoting European integration, facilitating reforms and democratic transformations in the six Eastern Partnership countries - Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. Serving as the civil society and people-to-people dimension of the Eastern Partnership, the EaP CSF strives to strengthen civil society in the region, boost pluralism in public discourse and policy making by promoting participatory democracy and fundamental freedoms. The EaP CSF is a nonpartisan bona fide non-governmental organisation. For more information, please visit the EaP CSF website at www.eap-csf.eu.

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