

**EASTERN PARTNERSHIP CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM
16-17 November 2009**

Speech delivered by Mr. S. Mackievic to the Foreign Ministers

Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is my honor and privilege to present to you the recommendations of the participants of the Civil Society Forum.

During the Prague Summit, one of key ideas set forth in the Joint Declaration was how the potential of civil society could best be used to achieve the goals of the Eastern Partnership. At a meeting in Brussels on 16-17 November 2009, more than 200 participants from the European Union and six EaP countries came together at the Civil Society Forum to address this challenge and jointly elaborated a series of recommendations. These were developed by working groups based on the four thematic platforms of the Eastern Partnership and then approved by the entire Forum.

I will highlight only a few points here, the complete document will be presented to the ministers.

The participants of the Civil Society Forum believe that civil society organizations should be treated as institutional partners of EU bodies, Member States and the EaP countries in the planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluation of EaP programs, on both bilateral and multilateral levels.

For their part, the EaP countries must strive to fulfil the Copenhagen Criteria and the conditions and recommendations made by the Council of Europe and the United Nations.

I would like to stress at this point that the Forum strongly condemns the holding of political prisoners in some EaP countries and appeals for their immediate release.

The Eastern Partnership provides an opportunity for the partner countries to integrate with the European Union by developing stable democratic structures, and by enabling stronger participation of civil society in areas such as human rights, electoral standards, media freedom, combating corruption, training and the networking of local authorities.

Allow me now to elaborate some of the recommendations made by the Civil Society Forum.

WORKING GROUP 1: DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS, GOOD GOVERNANCE AND STABILITY

The group took the decision to add “human rights” to its working title and suggests that the title of the first thematic platform of the Eastern Partnership also be changed to this effect.

1. The EU should encourage the authorities in EaP countries to introduce and strengthen democratic principles at national and local levels: it should encourage high standards of governance, supremacy of the law, effective civil controls over the implementation of laws as well as over prosecutors and the police. The EaP countries should strengthen judicial independence and ensure access to justice and effective mechanisms for combating corruption.

HUMAN RIGHTS

2. The EU should demonstrate the centrality of international human rights standards in its foreign policy and agreements with third countries by according human rights a distinctive space. Enforcing these human rights standards should be an integral part of the EaP.
3. The evaluation of human rights in EaP countries should be treated as a basic criterion for the overall assessment of their democratic progress.

In this respect, I regret to inform you that one of the Belarusian participants at the Civil Society Forum, Taciana Šapučka, who represented a youth NGO, was expelled from the Belarusian State University for taking part in the Brussels meeting. Moreover, in December there were several cases of kidnapping of the youth activists in Belarus. Such actions, which violate numerous human rights agreements and the Prague Declaration, seem to call into doubt the sincere participation of our country in the Eastern Partnership. I hope that the governments of Belarus and EU member states will ensure that those responsible for these completely unacceptable incidents are suitably held to account, repressions against youth activists will be stopped, and Taciana Šapučka will be readmitted to her university.

ELECTIONS AND ELECTION CAMPAIGNS

4. The EU should enhance effective assistance to the EaP countries to ensure free, fair and transparent elections,
5. It is the responsibility of governments and parliaments of the EaP countries to ensure a proper environment for elections that safeguards equal access of candidates and parties to public media and equality in exercising citizens' rights.

MEDIA

6. The role of the Eastern Partnership is to support media independence, pluralism and diversity and to ensure the rights of journalists, guaranteeing their security so they can perform their professional duties.

SECURITY AND PEACE BUILDING

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7. Stability and democratic change must be based on tolerance and security for all. A pragmatic approach aimed at conflict prevention, mitigation and resolution must not negate EU values, as our principle should be: “Democracy is the best policy for security.”

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Parallel to the peer review carried out on the basis of Council of Europe conventions, the Civil Society Forum should prepare country-specific NGO progress reports on democratic governance that will present an independent assessment of compliance with international standards and conventions in democratic governance.

WORKING GROUP 2: ECONOMIC INTEGRATION AND CONVERGENCE WITH THE EU POLICIES

1. The Civil Society Forum supports the core objectives and program of work approved by the thematic platform for economic integration and convergence with EU policies. The program of work calls for civil society organisations to be involved in the work of the thematic platform and of the panel on trade and trade-related regulatory cooperation linked to Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas.
2. The Civil Society Forum draws the attention of the EU and EaP countries to the necessity of including the following economic and social issues into the agenda of the Eastern Partnership:
 - a) Increasing the performance of social security and social protection systems and intensifying the fight against poverty;
 - b) Introducing the principles of sustainable development and adequate responses to climate change;
 - c) Facilitating labor mobility and flexicurity;
 - d) Supporting the efforts of those partner countries that are not yet members of WTO to become members;
3. Support for consumer protection organisations as an important player in the market economy should become part of the new national action plans.
4. A new flagship initiative to put in place a program aimed at upgrading the support of business contacts, internationalization and market access, including the transfer of know-how from the chambers of commerce and industry and the business associations of EU member states to their partners in the EaP countries should be developed.
5. The support for the social partners and for the social dialogue should become part of the legal approximation between the EU and EaP countries including the implementation of core labour standards.

WORKING GROUP 3: ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENERGY SECURITY

ENERGY SECURITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

1. Shape an integrated sustainable energy policy for the EaP region, which takes into account national interests and aims to improve environmental protection (including biodiversity), energy efficiency, as well as the capacity to face climate change and to mitigate dependency on energy imports.
2. EU Member States and EaP countries to work together towards higher security of energy transportation. The European Initiative on Gas Transparency should be promoted as a pilot project within the Eastern Partnership, open to third countries as a mechanism for crisis prevention.

ENVIRONMENT, BIODIVERSITY, AND AGRICULTURE

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3. Support the integration of environmental aspects into all national policies of EaP countries (e.g. industry, transport, regional development, budget, agriculture, forestry, EU *acquis* compliance), in particular through promotion of Strategic Environmental Assessment

INFORMATION, EDUCATION, CAPACITY BUILDING, AND AWARENESS RAISING

4. Implement the principles of education for sustainable development in national educational systems; promote the transfer of knowledge from EU to EaP countries.

WORKING GROUP 4: CONTACTS BETWEEN PEOPLE

1. Promote and disseminate information on EU issues and the opportunities provided by the EU by developing an information society and by enlarging the network of European Information Points.
2. Address specific situations and levels of development of civil society in each EaP country, in particular through using existing leaders' networks (such as Euclid Network and the Civil Society Leadership Network) for strengthening common understanding, sharing of values, and cooperation between NGOs from EaP countries and EU Member States.

VISA FACILITATION AND LIBERALISATION

3. The EU and its member states should offer all six EaP countries roadmaps towards visa free regimes and waive visa fees as soon as possible. As a first step simplify visa procedures and provide multiple-entry long term visas.

EDUCATION

4. Facilitate non-formal education and increase significantly funding for internships and volunteer opportunities, school exchange programmes and distance learning.

YOUTH

5. Enhance the active participation of young people in decision making processes at all levels and develop mechanisms for involving them in the achievement of the EaP goals. Develop special programmes for peace and intercultural education for young people in post conflict areas.

CULTURE

6. Foster cultural exchanges and cooperation between EU and EaP countries and encourage ratification/fostering implementation of the UNESCO *Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions* in the six EaP countries.

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Participants of the Civil Society Forum clearly stated that the role of civil society should not be limited solely to making recommendations. The majority of participants see the Civil Society Forum not as a single meeting, but as an equal and active partner in the dialogue between national governments and the European Union.

In order to achieve this goal, the Civil Society Forum 2009 elected a Steering Committee, which consists of eight thematic platform coordinators and nine country facilitators. The first meeting of the Steering Committee will take place on January in Brussels. Its main mission is to provide further development and the implementation of an appropriate strategy for the participation of Civil Society in bilateral and multilateral relations within the Eastern Partnership.

Civil Society representatives expect a supportive and participatory approach to dialogue both from EU institutions and from national governments, which will help to include a broad range of interests

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and increase levels of support and understanding for the Eastern Partnership among citizens of EU and EaP countries.

Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you for your kind attention and for considering the recommendations of the Civil Society Forum. I will be happy to answer your questions.

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