

## Civil Society Forum for the Eastern Partnership initiative

*Recommendations for the operations, activities, and objectives of the Forum submitted to the European Commission, DG RELEX, by PASOS (Policy Association for an Open Society), 24 April 2009*

### BROAD, LOCAL OWNERSHIP & SUPPORT FOR INDEPENDENT MONITORING

- The activity focus, and representation, of the Civil Society Forum should reflect the prioritisation of "progress in terms of democracy, the rule of law, and human rights" in line with the condition for new agreements and deepening of relations, as stipulated in the EC Communication (3 December 2008)<sup>1</sup>.
- The activities of the Civil Society Forum should be co-ordinated by a steering committee for each thematic platform, with representation from all six countries. Representation should take into account regional and gender balance.
- Empower the Civil Society Forum country steering committee as partner for dialogue between government and civil society in each partner country.
- Establishment of a web portal offering full information about the Eastern Partnership and EU agreements with the respective partner countries, and a multi-lingual service directly targeted at civil society, setting out the ways civil society can participate and providing information on funding opportunities.
- Ensure outreach to a wide cross-section of civil society, including the business community and regional grass-roots groups, through ongoing activities organised by local civil society actors.
- Provide clear budget allocation for the Forum's monitoring activities, and ensure that the majority of funding is for ongoing activities of grassroots organisations, in particular monitoring of implementation of partnership agreements, and capacity-building to support these activities, not for annual forum meetings.
- Strengthen EC delegations so that there are adequate personnel and funding, including dedicated civil society liaison staff, in all the partner countries. Until the delegations are strengthened, the embassies of the country holding the EU Presidency at the time should provide a supporting role.
- Further develop and test the plans for the Civil Society Forum at the "*Eastern Partnership: Towards Civil Society Forum*" meeting, held under the auspices of the Czech EU Presidency in Prague on 6 May 2009.

### FIRST STEPS

Clear terms of reference need to be outlined, including the national and international scope of the Civil Society Forum - engagement in local priority-setting, in regional co-operation at the level of the six partner countries, in consultations with EU bodies and member states - and the type of activities and outputs envisaged. ***The budget for the Forum must also be clearly set out, and transparently administered.*** To ensure that the Forum is a real partnership between the EC and civil society actors in the partner countries, ***it is essential that EC delegations are strengthened so that there are adequate personnel and funding, including dedicated civil society liaison staff, in all partner countries. As a temporary interim measure, this role could be supported by the embassies of the country holding the EU Presidency at the time (or their alternate where they do not have an embassy).***

<sup>1</sup> "A sufficient level of progress in terms of democracy, the rule of law and human rights, and in particular evidence that the electoral legislative framework and practice are in compliance with international standards, and full cooperation with the Council of Europe, OSCE/ODIHR and UN human rights bodies will be a precondition for starting negotiations and for deepening relations thereafter." 3.1. New contractual relations, page 5: COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL, Eastern Partnership, Brussels, 3.12.2008, COM(2008) 823 final, {SEC(2008) 2974}

*PASOS promotes and protects open society values, including democracy, the rule of law, good governance, respect for and protection of human rights, and economic and social development, by supporting entities that individually and jointly foster public participation in public policy issues at the European Union level, in other European structures, and in the wider neighbourhood of Europe and Central Asia.*

**Chair:** George Tarkhan-Mouravi    **Executive Director:** Jeff Lovitt

*PASOS is a not-for-profit association registered in the Czech Republic*

*Sdružení pro podporu otevřené společnosti – PASOS, registrováno Ministerstvem vnitra ČR pod č.j. VS/1-1/58 438/04-R*

*sídlo: Prokopova 197/9, 130 00 Praha 3, IČ: 26 67 54 04*

*PASOS (Policy Association for an Open Society) is a network of 39 independent, non-governmental, non-partisan policy centres spanning 24 countries in Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia. As well as 14 member institutes in 10 EU member states, PASOS includes 11 member institutes from the Eastern Partnership countries. PASOS supports evidence-based policy research and public participation in policy dialogue. Due to its geographic coverage, PASOS serves as an interface between old and new EU members, and the countries of the EU's eastern neighbourhood, in pursuing its mission to support human rights, democracy and the rule of law, and economic and social development.*

## STRUCTURE AND COMPOSITION

In each country, the activities and functions of the Civil Society Forum should be determined by a meeting open to all civil society representatives, and by national meetings on the four specific thematic platforms, again open to all interested representatives of civil society. The national thematic platform meetings should be the primary events for setting the agenda of Civil Society Forum activities. ***The international steering committee for each thematic platform should include four representatives of civil society from each partner country.*** EC and European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) representatives, and civil society representatives from EU member states, should be observers on the committees, but ownership of the agenda should lie with independent civil society representatives from the partner countries.

- The initial steering committee members (four members for each thematic platform in each country) should be elected through a call for nominations open to all local civil society actors. ***Four representatives should be chosen by a direct vote of civil society representatives at each of the four thematic platform launch meetings*** held in each of the respective partner countries. Each nominee would be required to demonstrate her/his experience directly relevant to the respective thematic platform (including contribution to progress in terms of democracy, the rule of law, and human rights protection in the case of two thematic platforms)<sup>2</sup>; and both regional and gender balance should be made a priority in the selection procedure. Within the respective countries, regional meetings should provide additional steering committee members where conflicts prevent travel to the national meeting (e.g. Nagorno Karabakh, Abkhazia, Transdniestr).
- ***The format of the national thematic platform meetings should be built around watchdog and monitoring activities***, and the agendas should be determined by the key policy priorities facing the respective country, as determined by the national meetings. All national forum meetings should be results-oriented, focusing on generating policy recommendations and on generating independent analysis and monitoring of implementation of agreements between the governments and the EU, and monitoring of progress in terms of democracy, the rule of law, and human rights. Local priority-setting will allow greater flexibility to adapt to changing situations. The meetings should be organised by those selected through tenders published by the EC delegations.
- The steering committee in each country should be empowered to conduct consultations and dialogue between government and civil society for the respective thematic platform in each respective country.
- ***There will be an international civil society committee for each thematic platform (24 members comprising four representatives from each partner country for each thematic platform, selected on the basis set out above)***, with regular rotation of the national representatives (at least every two years) to ensure broad local ownership and inclusion.
- Meetings of the international Civil Society Forum (where practical, with all four thematic platforms meeting in parallel, with some joint meetings, at a single event) should take place by rotation in the six partner countries, not in the EU.

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<sup>2</sup> respectively democracy, good governance and stability; and contacts between people.

## **A YEAR-ROUND FORUM FOR ENGAGEMENT IN KEY REGIONAL POLICY DIALOGUE**

The Eastern Partnership initiative puts new emphasis on multilateral approaches, and the Civil Society Forum can take a key role in working internationally with other key stakeholders working on international and cross-border issues of importance to the partner countries.

*The forum will organise policy roundtables in the partner countries, as well as in Brussels and in the country of the respective EU Presidency holder, with the explicit intention of linking up independent policy centres and other non-state actors (e.g. non-state watchdog agencies, environmental groups) with EU think-tanks, watchdog groups, other non-state actors, and EU policymakers. The four thematic platforms should provide a framework for these policy roundtables and accompanying monitoring and analysis, including monitoring progress in terms of democracy, the rule of law, and human rights. Such activities must be timed so that civil society actors can submit proposals and recommendations at a time when they can be considered for incorporation into agreements reached within the framework of the Eastern Partnership.*

## **NATIONAL AND LOCAL DEBATES ON PRIORITY-SETTING**

The Forum will draw up a national agenda around the economic and social development priorities of the country, and *organise debates that should precede priority-setting for Action Plans/New Partnership Instruments, as well as subsequent evaluation.* The debates and activities should:

- address the legal framework and administrative conditions facing civil society, and the freedom of civil society to act in accordance with international human rights accords
- include roundtables and working groups, comprising non-state actors in both creation and planning of policies, in particular indicative Action Plans/New Partnership Instruments
- ensure clearer priority-setting procedures and measurable benchmarks
- ensure outreach to a wide cross-section of civil society, including the business community, through ongoing activities organised by local civil society actors in the respective partner countries
- engage civil society, in particular policy centres, in the Comprehensive Institution-Building plans (negotiated bilaterally between the EU and each Eastern Partner government)
- address, with the active participation of policy centres and grassroots organisations, regional development strategies.

## **NATIONAL MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF PRIORITIES/PROGRAMMES**

The European Commission should ensure that funding is provided to support *transparent evaluation and monitoring by civil society of the implementation (by both the EC and the partner country) of the Action Plans/New Partnership Instruments* against empirical benchmarks. *Appropriate capacity-building should also be provided to maximise the effectiveness of the monitoring activities.*

Independent monitoring is a key element in ensuring local ownership and accountability. *A tender could be issued for independent civil society actors to develop and implement an effective methodology to bring effective monitoring within the Civil Society Forum.*

Monitoring and evaluation should include:

- civil society monitoring of EC policy, including presenting regular briefings on its progress
- monitoring and advising on how the EU communicates policies in the partner countries
- roundtables and working groups, including non-state actors in independent monitoring of implementation by their respective governments, in providing input to progress reports, and preparation of country reviews.

## **WEB PORTAL AND INFORMATION SERVICE**

A web portal should serve to maximise transparency concerning the activities of the Civil Society Forum, and also as a first-point-of-call information service concerning all aspects of the Eastern Partnership initiative, wherever possible providing information in local languages.

*The website should provide clear information about country priority-setting procedures, the commitments and obligations of the participating parties (partner governments and EC), progress reports, and independent monitoring.* As much information as possible should be made available in local languages. It should also provide information on how civil society actors can participate in the forum, and inform citizens of the partner countries about EC funding mechanisms, both in the framework of the Eastern Partnership and other EC programmes (e.g. EIDHR).

**DIALOGUE ON CORE EC PROGRAMMES TARGETED AT THE REGION**

- Regional and national civil society actors should be invited to participate in the mid-term review of key EC programmes, in particular ENPI and EIDHR.
- The Eastern Partnership should also provide a forum for enhancing EC support to both the capacity-building of civil society actors in the partner countries, and for encouraging multi-country projects with a strong focus on core challenges facing the region (regional conflicts, energy policy, democracy, rule of law, human rights, media freedom, migration, etc) within the framework of the four thematic platforms.
- Business associations should also be engaged to help kick-start more private sector initiatives, and foster more entrepreneurialism and small businesses.
- Support for capacity, training, and projects involving the media should be a priority, in order to deepen and widen debate and dissemination about national and regional challenges, and the engagement of the EC and the partner countries in tackling these challenges.
- Support for civil society similar to the EACAE grants on active citizenship (for EU members plus Croatia) should also be considered. The intention would be to create more regional co-operation, crucial to most of the partner countries if they are to settle persistent problems.