

Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum Revisited

The growth of civil society in any country is conditioned by the level of its inclusion in state's policy-making processes. Armenia has numerous difficulties for its civil society sector to progress in this regard. Armenian civil society is characterised by limited opportunities in terms of Civil Society Organisations' (CSO) inclusion in the decision-making processes, while their engagement as a public accountability tool is critical for the country with centralised political and economic powers.

Key Findings

The EaP CSF is an institution with great potential, which has yet to be **'activated' in some EaP countries**

The EaP CSF contribution to the development of cooperation between local civil society organisations and the Armenian government is **limited to formal meetings**

It is crucial for National Platforms (NP) to become more representative on national levels and **better recognised by their national governments**

It is important to establish public control mechanisms by civil society over activities of national governments. If the EU wants to make the civil society a good partner, its support in intermediation is crucial to aim for the strongest possible involvement of society in **oversight of budgetary support** for reforms to be successfully implemented

The capacity building for EaP CSF participants in the **implementation of monitoring function** is a potential area for improvement for those EaP partners lacking success

Recommendations

■ More power to National Platforms

Increase in the authority of the NP is needed for more power. To reach that aim lagging-behind NPs have to be delegated with more powers to become equal partners in the EU - national government/s - civil society triangle. This should be possible through the **EU backing, support and targeted intermediation, whenever needed.**

■ Reconsider Armenian National Platform's membership principles and selection procedures

Shaping a relevant NP is a priority for exercising better advocacy. The Forum and the Armenian NP (ANP) should employ a new stricter mechanism on the ANP membership principles and selection procedures. Representation of governmentally organised CSOs in the platform should be possibly minimised. Inclusion of non-operative (passive) organisations, as a consequence of an open membership procedure, is also a challenge for increased impact. New criteria should be developed to select organisations for NPs,

Summary: This policy research¹ makes an enquiry to existing mechanisms that assess the impact and influence of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF) on the civil society sectors of Eastern partnership (EaP) countries, specifically focusing and questioning the impact on Armenia. The research identifies the EaP CSF impact measurement mechanisms, discusses outcomes of the Forum in Armenia and provides recommendations for EaP CSF officials and decision-makers.

committed to EU values with a capacity to take responsibility of an improved advocacy. **Fewer CSOs making a better impact is more preferable than being the biggest NP of the EaP region with no impact whatsoever.**

■ Monitoring function capacity building for CSOs in partner countries

The advocacy impact assessment is one of the hardest types of impact assessment. NPs seem to lack capacities for employing impact assessment. An effective impact assessment of platforms' performance on national levels is important for an overall increased impact of the Forum in partner countries. **Capacity building for CSOs of partner countries in the implementation of monitoring function** should contribute to improvement of the EaP CSF operation and ensure its every activity has a follow-up.

■ EU should plan its cooperation beyond National Platforms targeting other civil society representatives

The EaP CSF should remain an important mechanism for EU integration setting new principles for those EaP countries having had major obstacles and difficulties so far. Therefore, cooperation with active CSOs is required beyond NP members. The Forum has to create opportunities for also other CSOs of EaP countries (not parts to NP) to engage and be heard internationally. Stronger EU leadership and engagement are needed for that. **The EU should aim working with civil society sectors also beyond NPs. Otherwise the influence is minimal.**

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