



Open Society Foundations - Armenia

Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum Revisited

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List of Abbreviations

AA	Association Agreement
ANP	Armenian National Platform
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DCFTA	Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area
EaP	Eastern Partnership
EaP CSF/Forum	Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum
EaP six	European Union's six partner countries participating in the Eastern Partnership initiative: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
EU	European Union
GONGO	Governmentally-organised Non-Governmental Organisation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NP	National Platform
WG	Working Group

Introduction

In 2009 the EU launched the EaP initiative to bring its six partners closer to the European standards of governance and to exercise a stable borderline on the east. The initiative provides bilateral and multilateral platforms to increase interaction between the EaP six and the EU member states. Numerous country-programmes are funded in the framework of this initiative for a better institution building, access to European market and large-scale developments, making EaP one of the key objectives of the EU foreign policy (European Union External Action Service 2014).

The EaP CSF is established to promote dialogue with partner governments through a non-governmental initiative. In doing so, it also aims to strengthen civil societies in partner countries by boosting cooperation between organisations from the EU member states and from the EaP region. The participants of the Forum are CSOs from the EU and the EaP six. The General Assembly of the Forum meets once a year, gathering all participants involved in the EaP CSF governance structure, including members of the Steering Committee, six NPs and five WGs on Democracy, human rights, good governance and stability; Economic integration and convergence with the EU policies; Environment, climate change and energy security; Contacts between people and Social and labour policies and social dialogue. The EaP CSF is very big and its participants differ in their capacities, environments and modus operandi, which means it is difficult to provide research and monitoring projects that involve all Forum participants (Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum 2012).

This policy research is designed to make an enquiry to existing mechanisms that assess the impact and influence of the Forum in general, and on the civil society sectors of the EaP countries specifically. Focusing on Armenia, the research questions the impact of the EaP CSF on the development of Armenian civil society. This paper identifies the impact measurement mechanisms of the Forum, examines the indicators, which are utilized in drawing conclusions about the influence of the EaP CSF on partner countries, discusses the outcomes of the Forum in Armenia, with a specific focus on the ANP and provides recommendations on updating future policies for the attention of the EaP CSF policy and decision-makers.

Literature review

This section discusses a) previous research conducted to assess the role of EaP CSF in partner countries, and b) the Armenian civil society in the context of foreign assistance and cooperation.

Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum

The launch of the EaP in 2009, the Swedish-Polish initiative, is not only a means to deepen relations between the EU and EaP six. It is a tool to support democracy promotion in the neighbourhood to establish stability. One of the ways to do so is to enhance the active participation of civil societies of partner countries in the democratisation processes. The participants of the biannual EaP summits reaffirm their European path of development on the basis of common values embracing the rule of law, democracy and human rights,¹ as well as reiterate each other's commitments with increased action of non-governmental actors through the EaP CSF platform. The relationship of the EU and its partners on the east has been a subject of interest by a research community, whose members have focused on the establishment, development, challenges and analyses of future prospects of this multilateral cooperation (Agnieszka et al. 2008; Lapczyński 2009; Mikhelidze 2009; Schäffer and Tolksdorf 2009; Boonstra and Shapovalova 2010; Korosteleva 2011). According to recent research, notwithstanding the EU having paid significant

¹ Joint Declaration of the EaP Summit. Vilnius (November 29, 2013)

attention to the civil society sectors of EaP six, it should still enhance its financial support committed to the local CSOs of partner countries (Rihackova 2014).

As a fairly new developed platform, the EaP CSF has been in focus by some researchers. According to Forum overall assessment, there are number of challenges related to its institutional set up and working methods. Previous research argues that the Forum needs to develop its advocacy functions and strengthen national capacities (Kaca, Kucharczyk, and Lada 2011), while another study reflects positively about EaP CSF, as the platform facilitates the engagement of civil society actors and allows interaction between them. A number of remaining complications however are highlighted by authors, such as the difficulty to agree on the priorities and some partners' national governments' reluctance to allow a greater role for the Forum in the EaP (Kostanyan and Orbie 2013).

According to Delcour (2011) the EaP CSF is a participatory initiative which has been "extremely active" in linking civil societies of partner countries and the EU. The author bases her argument on the number of projects implemented within EaP CSF. At the same time however it is noted that the platform does not have a substantial financial mechanism to ensure its activities properly. Likewise, Forum's limited access to the policy processes is highlighted, which can be overcome by additional (institutional) support from the European Union (Delcour 2011). Analysing the advocacy record of the Forum, a recently commissioned paper by the EaP CSF offers recommendations to strengthen Forum's advocacy function. The report stresses the difficulty to follow-up on the impact of statements issued by the Forum participants to the EU officials, due to lack of capacity within Forum governing structure (Shapovalova 2015). To summarize, the EaP CSF assessments conducted so far mainly point to platform's limited impact (Kaca, Kucharczyk, and Lada 2011), modest success (Kostanyan and Vandecasteele 2013) and inactive outcomes (Kostanyan 2014).

Armenian Civil Society

The Armenian civil society sector is a subject of interest to Western major donors, namely the United States and the EU for the second decade now. The sector has been a subject of interest, in terms of huge amounts of assistance provided to promote CSOs' role, activities and capacities. The United States Government has been the largest donor focusing on civil society development in Armenia (USAID 2011) and has conducted two large studies of the sector in 2001 (Blue, Payton, and Kharatyan 2001) and 2004, describing it as donor driven (Blue and Ghazaryan 2004). But this too much funding for NGOs has also had a negative effect. As Armine Ishkhanian notes, "NGOization" has led to the de-politicization and taming of the emancipatory potential of civil society (Ishkhanian 2008).

The EU's approach in the promotion of civil society in Armenia has initially been somewhat different. The European bilateral and multilateral donors interacted with Armenian society through third actors, mainly the government. The EU interaction with Armenia has generally focused on building strong relations with state and elite actors at the expense of engagement with non-state actors (Raik 2006). This approach changed when the ENP and EaP programmes were launched followed by an establishment of multi-level contacts between the EU as an individual actor, the EU member-states and the Armenian civil society.

The internal challenges to Armenian civil society versus European and American influence were put forward in discussing the Armenian road to democracy. The authors conclude positively that the efforts of international organisations may bring the country on the path of effective democratization (Freire and Simão 2007). However, some studies examining the impact of selected reforms in the context of the EU's influence [on Armenia's democratisation process], claim the EU policies and resources to be unsuccessful in democracy promotion in Armenia (See, for example Smith 2012).

The quote, “We dreamed of civil society and got NGOs”² perfectly depicts the current state of the Armenian civil society sector, which is full of more than a total of 5000³ registered CSOs, most apparently, with over half of these either overwhelmingly passive, or non-existent at all (Paturyan, Gevorgyan, and Matevosyan 2014). The recent study on Armenian civil society depicts that the post-communist legacy of low membership and distrust toward the third sector persists in Armenia until today (Paturyan and Gevorgyan 2014) notwithstanding, as we may conclude, the persistent efforts and amounts of resources provided by international donors. Armenia is in an urgent and definite need of not seeking, but finding ways to be able to exercise a healthy, independent and a strong society.

Methods

This section discusses research methods applied for the purpose of this study, which employs qualitative research design with two components: content analysis and semi-structured interviews.

Content Analysis

The content analysis was chosen as a method to analyse the main EaP CSF documents to reveal the mechanisms that measure impact of the Forum.

Units of Analysis

The ENP, EaP and EaP CSF’s founding and procedural documents were selected as units of analysis from five complete years: from Forum establishment in May 2009 to November 2014. The selected documents include EaP CSF founding texts, concept papers, roadmaps and annual reports of the Steering Committee, NPs and WGs. Within the ENP and EaP main documents, the Forum-related commentary was identified for analysis (See Appendix 1 for the list of documents). A total of 48 documents were selected (See Table 1). The review of selected documents was conducted in advance with the aim to develop a framework for analysis.

The documents not included in the content analysis are Forum resolutions, statements, position papers, speeches, reports of meetings, minutes of meetings, national platforms reports on specific issues (for example: *election monitoring in Belarus*), newsletters and other similar target-specific documentation. The exclusion of these documents was applied as these are recognised to be success-measuring mechanisms per se. Also, the overall aim of the study is to look for formal existing mechanisms that indicate any impact measures of Forum operation as a whole.

Table 1 Documents used for content analysis

	<i>Document</i>	<i>Quantity</i>
1	ENP & EaP Main Documents	12
2	EaP CSF Main Documents	6
3	Steering Committee Annual reports	4
4	Working Groups Annual reports	9
5	National Platforms Annual reports	17
	Total:	48

Note: Documents accessed via EaP CSF website: <http://eap-csf.eu/>

Conceptualization: Impact Measurement (IM) Stage-frame

In order to operationally define the framework for analysis an IM stage-frame was developed containing four stages of activity development. The IM stage-frame has sought for impact measurement indications and meanings to make sense of the data and to facilitate reader’s understanding of the emergent categories most frequently used in the main Forum documents. The

² A quote cited by Timothy Garton Ash (2004), as cited in A. Ishkanian 2008, p.24

³ Armenian State Registry Data as of February 01, 2015

groups of words were identified according to the IM frame, which defines the stages in the IM process leading to progress, as an outcome. The following four stages are identified in the IM stage-frame: (1) *What* (an IM activity conducted to examine the EaP CSF success), (2) *How* (a tool by which the IM is implemented), (3) *What* (a result, as a consequence of the tool applied to implement IM activity), (4) *Outcome* (a change, or progress achieved as a result of the previous three steps). A total of 50 words were identified to reflect the sections possibly referring to IM activities, tools, results and progress. Table 2 groups the words identified for each stage.

Table 2 The Impact Measurement Stage-frame

<u>(A) Activity</u>	<u>(B) Tool</u>	<u>(C) Result</u>	<u>(D) Outcome</u>
Assessment	Criterion/a	Effect	Accomplishment
Analysis	Indicator	End-product	Achievement
Check	Instrument	End-result	Advancement
Estimation	Mechanism	Impact	Appraisal
Evaluation	Method/ology	Influence	Attainment
Examination	Procedure	Outcome	Change
Follow-up	Rating	Output	Contribution
Measure/ment	Scaling	Result	Development
Monitoring	Scoring		Enhancement
Regulation	Tool		Enrichment
	Statistics		Expansion
			Fulfilment
			Growth
			Improvement
			Progress
			Promotion
			Reaching
			Realisation
			Success
			Sustainability
			Upgrade

The grouping of words helped developing patterns in recognising any potential IM indicator/s and progress in phrases and statements in texts. Using the computer based *Ctrl-F* search tool each word in the IM stage-frame was searched throughout the selected documents. The paragraphs in which the words were found have been selected for analysis. Research leader and research assistant conducted the search independently, to double-check the results by comparison and minimise subjectivity. The cases of mismatches were discussed and clarified. See Appendix 2 for the list of words frequency.

Although looking at the frequency of selected words is interesting and also reliable (See, for example Krippendorff 2004), the frequencies alone cannot allow researches for a meaningful conclusion. Upon developing separate files with paragraphs containing selected words, the data was then grouped based on the meaning patterns in which these words occurred. This categorisation was followed by an analysis based on both the frequency of words and the type of context, looking for rhetoric when it comes to Forum IM indicators and its progress as a result of these.

Interviews

A total of 14 semi-structured interviews were conducted with representatives of the EaP CSF, NPs, WG members, civil society representatives, EU coordinators and officials. The questions were focused on Forum's success measurement strategies, impact assessment, difficulties in/and cooperation and interaction within the EaP CSF structure and civil societies of EaP six and comparative performance of NPs (See Appendix 3 for the interview guide). The interviews were

conducted through November 2014 to February 2015 in Batumi, Yerevan and Warsaw. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed (each lasted 30 minutes on average). The analysis was conducted using MAXQDA qualitative data analysis software. See Appendix 4 for the interview-indexing scheme.

Research Questions

This policy paper addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the mechanisms that measure EaP CSF impact on the six partner countries?
2. What are the follow-up mechanisms to make sure the EaP CSF activities reach intended outcomes?
3. What is the EaP CSF impact on Armenia?
 - 3.1 What are the outcomes of cooperation between the EU and the Armenian civil society in the framework of the EaP CSF?
 - 3.2 What is the EaP CSF's contribution to the development of cooperation between local civil society organizations in Armenia and the Armenian government?

Content Analysis

This section provides an analysis of the main EaP CSF documents with a purpose of partially contributing to answering the research questions.

Among the words grouped under the first category of IM stage-frame Activity (A), *monitoring* and *evaluation* warrant attention. *Monitoring* has the most frequent reference in documents, appearing in various contexts. The mentions significantly refer to the EaP-organised monitoring of bi and multilateral interaction of partner countries, mainly of the budgetary support, the flagship initiatives, AA performance and visa facilitation issues. Similarly, numerous statements make a reference to NPs and WGs conducting monitoring activities aimed at democratic advancement of the EaP six. As per the most popular 'item' whether in the process of monitoring, or to be monitored, it is roadmap. *Roadmap monitoring* is a subject of reference throughout the documents, either in a form of a general statement on its importance, or as an indication of an already conducted activity by every NP. *Monitoring* also appears extensively in the names of projects, workshops and CSOs. The *EaP CSF NPs and WGs being active in monitoring activities* is the fifth most popular context involving *monitoring*. There are few reflections on the importance of civil society (other than NPs) inclusion in the monitoring process.⁴ Unlike some general statements about importance of monitoring as a process, a context defining the importance of capacity building for EaP CSF participants in the implementation of the monitoring function is encountered just once in the 2015 – 2017 draft strategy (Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum 2014).

Apart from *monitoring*, the documents also contain *evaluation* highlights of separate EaP countries, in a target-specific context (for example, *evaluation* of progress in the field of environment and climate change in Moldova), followed by general category highlighting the importance of *evaluation* of EaP countries' progress, Forum bodies, their activities conducted and documents issued. The most frequent contexts using *assessment* are statements on importance of establishing and promoting effective mechanisms of environmental impact assessment.

References on *how* the monitoring function is actually conducted are limited. The main tools through which Forum conducts monitoring are the European Integration Index⁵ and expert support.

⁴ A total of five cases were identified.

⁵ Available at: <http://www.eap-index.eu/> (Accessed February 05, 2015)

Numerous mentions highlight the importance to establish control *mechanisms* by the civil society over certain activities and procedures of the EaP countries' governments. The only NP found to be mentioned possessing fewer mechanisms to influence their national government is the ANP (EaP CSF Armenian National Platform Annual Report 2014).

The words examined under the third category of the IM stage-frame seem to be almost non-existent, with an exception of *result* per se, which has the most frequent mention from the group (C) (and is the forth in the top five most frequently used words⁶). The analysis of texts indicating *results* show somewhat positive picture. Many contexts refer to a variety of mentions including result: a) in a target-specific context, such are successful elections and anti-corruption policies, b) as an output, for example *monitoring results discussed in seminars or presented to public*, c) as an outcome, signing of DCFTA as a positive result. Some other references include importance of promoting results and activities of civil society projects, EaP CSF achieving results in the fields of legislative proposals and advocacy, specifications of *results* in the context of European Integration Index and so on.

The measurable results used by the EaP CSF include presentations and discussions of EaP Roadmap monitoring methodology, its implementation process and discussion of methodology of possible monitoring on the EaP priorities. An example of clearly understandable 'product' is *a launch of a news website to report on the rights of journalists and media freedom situation in the EaP six*. There are however no mentions about any follow-ups conducted to learn about the impact and tangible value of such results.

The fourth group of the IM stage-frame is the most attractive in terms of the amount of data generated. But it is also the most intangible. The top five most frequently used words within the range of possible inferences selected are *development, monitoring, change, result and progress*, with the three words falling under the forth category. The most frequent references are made to the importance of exercising democratic, political, social and economic developments in the EaP six. The abstract indications are followed by more concrete statements on the importance and necessity of a concept, strategy, roadmap and recommendations to be developed by the EU agencies, and the EaP CSF specifically. The *change* is the second most frequently used word from the fourth category. But the frequency of the main context is manifested either in a *climate change*, or a title of the WG3 subgroup.⁷ It is also used with a reference to democratic, political, social and economic changes as general statements.

The content analysis revealed *progress* to be existent throughout the document. The contexts are somewhat scattered, but they show interesting results. The main references are made to a) the importance of WGs working in parallel with NPs for *progress*, b) the importance of monitoring *progress* in implementing agreements between the EU and EaP countries, and c) discussing EaP *progress*, as a process and a general statement. The documents also refer to more tangible statements on *progress*. These include the importance of mapping the *progress* over the Roadmap for democratic transition, a *progress* achieved on target-specific issues (for example, *an adoption of an anti-corruption law*), and mentions on importance of evaluation of common and individual *progress* within the EaP initiative.

The paragraphs containing *promotion* and *achievement* also warrant attention due to the frequency of mention (apart from all remaining words in this category) and the manners these were used in. Indications on the importance of promoting European values, European integration, the EaP, EaP CSF, and DCFTA are extensively encountered. Promotion of democracy and diversity of cultural expressions are widely used by the WGs and NPs. The achievements by the EaP CSF bodies are

⁶ See Appendix 2 for words frequency totals.

⁷ WG3 Thematic Subgroup 2: Climate Change and Environmental Protection.

defined as, for example an establishment of sub-groups, expert studies, an invitation of experts, creation of a preliminary agenda and report preparation. The achievements of the Forum (with no specific mention) are an important outcome for its goals and objectives, and a necessity, which are to be reached by the work of the Steering Committee and NPs.

The content analysis was conducted with an aim to seek for (formal) availability of mechanisms to measure the impact of the Forum on partner countries. Also, to reveal the existing follow-up procedures conducted by the Forum governance structure. Multiple indications of *monitoring results* and the process of conducting monitoring exist throughout the documents. The ways, instruments and impact of extensive monitoring however are not to be found, except for widely referenced Eastern Partnership Index (and other Indexes⁸). The idea behind introducing the Index is to compare countries' performance in their quest of aligning with European values and standards. European Integration Index defines criteria for countries' progress, which is extremely important for exercising an evidence-based knowledge on countries' comparative performance. An instrument however that would delve into each partner's internal problems, analyse these and design concrete steps to solutions is what some of the EaP six need for a better progress.

Qualitative Analysis

This section provides an analysis of the primary data collected through semi-structured interviews with representatives of the EaP CSF. The section discusses EaP CSF difficulties and achievements, its impact on civil societies of partner countries; considers measures of impact assessment, the relationship between the EU, civil society sectors and national governments, and reflects on the EaP CSF Armenian National Platform.

EaP Civil Society Forum: role, difficulties and achievements

The EaP CSF is an institute to promote EU integration in EaP states by, at the same time, serving an instrument to monitor the way governments implement what they should in the framework of the EaP programme. One of the most popular definitions, when it comes to describing the role of the Forum, is societies holding their governments accountable and influencing decisions on a state level. The Forum is an opportunity to institutionalise civil society and strengthen its role in the policy-making of EaP six.

When speaking of EaP CSF success opinions vary. Firstly, *success* warrants definition. Success of the Forum is manifested in getting civil society a participatory status in the decision-making processes. It influences the level of public awareness, ensures availability of communication channel with European organisations and is a source of feedback, and thus empowerment. Empowerment of the EaP six lies with the voice being heard at the levels where it was not heard before. Apart from its current condition, results and achievements, it is perceived as “...one of the most successful voices given in the context of the EaP.”⁹

According to the majority of participants, the main idea behind establishing EaP CSF was to ensure the process of implementation and monitoring of AAs with the help of public support, oversight mechanisms and, mainly, through an advocacy function. Therefore, over half of participants perceive success of the Forum in terms of signing DCFTA: it is a success as the three countries¹⁰ have signed the agreement, while it is a failure due to the inability of the remaining three to do so. Nevertheless, the necessity for the EU to stay focused on the region remains. According to an

⁸ Multiple (N=38) references are made to various types of Indexes (Media Index, Visa liberalization Index etc.)

⁹ Author's interview with an EaP CSF Steering Committee member, November 20, 2014

¹⁰ Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine

interviewee, “The distinction that exists between the two EaP camps today relates to the political elites, not people.”¹¹ This is important for the Forum to realise in planning its future policies.

Some participants prefer discussing Forum’s contribution, not success. The EaP CSF brings a portion of positive changes in the lives of societies of post-Soviet countries. For example, the initiative is definitely a success for Georgia, as the Georgian National Platform has become a primer civil society platform for the Georgian society and government, as well as an important actor, permanently being consulted on a wide range of issues before their implementation. This is the level of authority that every NP should be aiming for. Achievements of the Forum are conditioned by the amount of resources delegated to its activities. Large amounts mean it is a success, as perceived by some participants. In an interviewee’s words, “The Forum is merely a financing mechanism,”¹² claiming all it really does is provision of funding.

Speaking of difficulties and according to over half of participants, for NPs to become effective in their operations, the Forum should warrant a clear composition of each platform, withstanding from inclusion of governmentally organised CSOs. Participants are not sure whether balancing the composition of NPs by independently operating NGOs with GONGOs is a good thing. So far such experience did not bring NPs closer to their critical missions. Selection of reliable ways for NPs’ and national governments’ cooperation is a problem. This is a challenge, especially in those EaP countries whose national governments do not treat their civil society actors as equal partners in cooperation for societal development at large.

EaP CSF impact on the development of civil societies in partner countries

Claiming the importance of the EU civil society platform impact on the development of societies of EaP countries, a significant part of this research refers to uncovering whether there is such an impact. In this regard, the opinions of participants vary to a great extent and require examination.

Overall seeing the Forum as a positive initiative, interviewees engage in theoretical elaborations based on dispositional arguments. These include an increase in civil societies’ experience through exchange of it, expansion of partners’ range, and information sharing in terms of discovering channels that strengthen advocacy and fundraising capacity. According to some participants, the impact is great as the Forum helps organisations with decreased capacities to come out, learn and progress (by means of their inclusion into NPs).

Another indication of Forum’s positive impact relates to the increased ability of CSOs to influence their governments, as the interaction between NPs and national governments is most of the time ensured by the EU influence, at times also through its pressure (although a soft pressure, in accordance with EU’s decade-long prudent foreign policy). Thus a format of oversight and control over national governments on behalf of civil society is formulated, which would be not possible without EU’s influence.

When speaking about Forum’s impact on societies of EaP countries it is also important to distinguish between the two country-camps. It seems to have impact for Moldova and Georgia, who clearly pursue the European course of development. The civil society sectors of these countries represented by numerous CSOs are unanimous in pursuing policies toward European integration. This is why the Forum is perceived as having a useful impact on the societies at large. The Armenian, Belarusian and Azerbaijani societies however are not seriously influenced by the Forum, except for the selected organisations in NPs perhaps, with civil society sectors still in question. Ukraine happens to be an outlier in this context. Its crisis started on the eve of Ukraine signing

¹¹ Author’s interview with an EaP CSF Steering Committee member, November 21, 2014

¹² Author’s interview with a CSO representative, January 27, 2015

DCFTA (“*the most boring document to ever spark a revolution*”)¹³ and this case is largely approached through the prism of EaP’s success: the tragic, but eventual winning defined as freedom, as “...Ukrainians are proud to have found a way to look for a free Ukraine.”¹⁴

The impact of the Forum on the societies of EaP countries is largely conditioned by the current situation of a given society. Some of the societies have obvious problems related to lack of information and different type of mentality uphold by national characteristics. This is the target where the Forum should be seriously aiming at for a greater impact.

Measuring EaP CSF impact in partner countries

There is a limited feedback on measuring Forum performance, activities and its overall impact. The European Integration Index of the EaP countries, frequently quoted by majority of participants, is the leading tool to measure the impact of the Forum. Another initiative, the Assessment of the Roadmap implementation by EaP CSF, is seen as a useful success measuring mechanism. The Roadmap implementation monitoring was conducted by each EaP member state.¹⁵

Similarly, when it comes to examining the availability of follow-up activities conducted in the framework of achieving the main objectives of the Forum, measurement mechanisms are limited to various Indexes prepared to observe the progress of the countries per sector. For example, the Visa Facilitation subgroup of the first WG on Democracy, Human Rights, Good Governance and Stability has followed up with the Visa Liberalization Index,¹⁶ which shows progress of the EaP countries related to the visa-free travel. Another example is the Media Freedom Index measuring the level of media freedom in the EaP six. Other examples of follow-up activities include side events (as a follow-up to a general meeting) and statements made and distributed by NPs (as a follow-up to information gathering and preparation of documents that precede the announcement).

The number of CSOs applying to NPs is considered to be a leading indicator of success according to half of participants. Other available indicators, to measure the impact of activities and efforts of EaP CSF members, include reports and feedback forms, which analyse communication links with Forum’s member organisations and activities jointly developed.

The participants stress that many of the EaP CSF projects and activities do not reach the “follow-up” stage. It is unanimously agreed that assessing the impact of EaP CSF operation is essential. It is vital for an overall success and for success of agreements implementation specifically. There is no one and large evaluation system within the Forum itself that would serve as a tool to measure its impact on the countries’ civil societies and their progress to reform. There are no structural indicators that would point to the EaP CSF success, which has been so far based on expert opinions and analyses. The Indexes introduced are valuable contributions in terms of indicating countries’

¹³ Quote by the EaP CSF Steering Committee Co-Chair at the meeting organised by the ANP and the EU Delegation Armenia, February 2015

¹⁴ Quote by the representative of the Ukrainian National Platform at the 6th EaP CSF General Assembly held in Batumi, Georgia 2014

¹⁵ Road Map Assessments Available at: Armenia: [http://eap-csf.eu/assets/files/News/Armenia-roadmap-monitoring-csf-nov-2013-\(2\).pdf](http://eap-csf.eu/assets/files/News/Armenia-roadmap-monitoring-csf-nov-2013-(2).pdf); Azerbaijan: [http://eap-csf.eu/assets/files/News/Azerbaijan-roadmap-monitoring-csf-nov-2013-\(1\).pdf](http://eap-csf.eu/assets/files/News/Azerbaijan-roadmap-monitoring-csf-nov-2013-(1).pdf); Belarus: [http://eap-csf.eu/assets/files/Articles/Web/Roadmapreports/Belarus%20roadmap%20monitoring%20csf%20nov%202013%20\(3\).pdf](http://eap-csf.eu/assets/files/Articles/Web/Roadmapreports/Belarus%20roadmap%20monitoring%20csf%20nov%202013%20(3).pdf); Georgia: [http://eap-csf.eu/assets/files/Articles/Web/Roadmapreports/Georgia%20roadmap%20monitoring%20csf%20nov%202013%20\(2\).pdf](http://eap-csf.eu/assets/files/Articles/Web/Roadmapreports/Georgia%20roadmap%20monitoring%20csf%20nov%202013%20(2).pdf); Moldova: [http://eap-csf.eu/assets/files/News/Moldova-roadmap-monitoring-csf-nov-2013-\(1\).pdf](http://eap-csf.eu/assets/files/News/Moldova-roadmap-monitoring-csf-nov-2013-(1).pdf); Ukraine: [http://eap-csf.eu/assets/files/Articles/Web/Roadmapreports/Ukraine%20roadmap%20monitoring%20csf%20nov%202013%20\(2\).pdf](http://eap-csf.eu/assets/files/Articles/Web/Roadmapreports/Ukraine%20roadmap%20monitoring%20csf%20nov%202013%20(2).pdf)

¹⁶ Available at: <http://monitoring.visa-free-europe.eu/> (Accessed February 11, 2015)

progress in comparative perspective. The EaP CSF however is very big and a specific approach is required to make evaluation visible. The impact of performance of each EaP CSF constituent body should be sought followed by provision of an answer to *what to do next* question. The Forum is an advocacy platform. But in order to be effective it should grow as a cooperation platform, implement monitoring and constantly work based on the result-oriented plans. In the words of an interviewee, “The Forum is busy monitoring what others do and the impact they achieve, but nobody is monitoring the EaP CSF itself.”¹⁷

The EU – Civil Society – EaP National Governments relationship

In conducting a research on forms and matters related to a foreign policy platform, examining the dynamics of relationship between its main actors is essential. This relationship becomes central especially in the context of understanding the impact of this interaction and its contribution whether to a progress or failure of a given country.

EU’s role is that of a facilitator in the relationship between civil societies of EaP countries and their national governments. But the EU’s behaviour in relation to NPs is approached doubly. The EU is very supportive, but also extremely prudent when it comes to interaction with national governments. There are number of spheres according to members of NPs that a direct EU interference would have yield a positive result, for example in matters such as election monitoring and funding provision. The EU should be cautious toward the reform implementation process upon receipt of amounts of funding on behalf of national governments. In doing so, according to majority of civil society representatives, stricter criteria of reform performance indicators for national governments are needed.

Acceptance of European values should be the end-goal of the partnership. It is right here where civil societies of EaP six have to play an important role by serving an educating function and contributing to the end-goal. Therefore they have to be empowered by a formal mechanism backed by the EU to raise their voice, and become respected by the national governments.

EaP CSF Armenian National Platform

The establishment of the ANP was conditioned by problems. The formation of the platform has witnessed a manifestation of highly unethical and unprofessional experience of the first ANP elections. The clashes of members of governmental and non-governmental CSOs were an outcome of an unhealthy battle for power within the platform. These pressures ended up in members pointing at each other, which was “...the most negative thing I have seen” as quoted by an interviewee.¹⁸

The views are contradictory when it comes to activities and operations of the ANP. The success of the Armenian platform is conditioned by the inclusion of large number of CSOs, which, according to the majority of participants is a loosely operating entity, more of a formality. The Armenian platform was the first EaP CSF NP developed, and it has the largest amount of CSOs compared to other partner countries. The quantity however, is not an indication of quality in this case. One third of a total of 198¹⁹ organisations is actually engaged and active in promoting the mission and objectives of the Forum.

The dynamics of relationship between the main actors has not been perfect either. According to participants, the EU – ANP relationship is explained through the EU’s behaviour on restating that the platform has to find its own ways to influence the government, if the national authorities are not willing to cooperate. The interaction between the Armenian government and the ANP has most of

¹⁸ Author’s interview with an EaP CSF Steering Committee member, November 21, 2014

¹⁹ Information requested from the Secretariat of the ANP.

the time been initiated by the later and was limited to ‘meetings’ format being largely a formality. The mechanisms and opportunities for the NPs’ were not developed at their maximum capacity. It was supposed that NPs develop by themselves, which, unfortunately has not been the case of the Armenian platform.

There is a critical need for the platform to develop its capacities to influence government, especially when it is close to impossible to have an impact on the state-level decision-making as the decisions on the state-level are purely arbitrary, and the public is not even informed about them in advance.²⁰ Every EaP CSF NP has to achieve a level of authority that would allow influence on the governmental decision-making, whereas so far the lack of leadership of the Armenian platform has not been effective at this. The activities of NPs have to gain public demand, and be a subject of reference for the national governments. The Armenian platform needs strong and independent member organisations with increased capacity to engage public and make their voice heard throughout the country, and the relevant levels.

After September 2013²¹ - the biggest disappointment for the EU, the vision of the AA system for Armenia collapsed, leaving no room for any relationship between the ANP and government. In its current form, there are difficulties for the platform to understand its role. “It is obvious that in today’s situation, there are no specific agreements and commitments with the EU, we have no opportunities to develop mechanisms, and the government is not interested in that.”²²

The EaP CSF and Armenia need reconsideration of the ANP structure, for an increased impact. A decision-making is required over a new selection procedure for NP guaranteeing a thoughtful selection of CSOs willing to be more than a formality, and having resources, backing and public trust to enact for this purpose. The formation of a NP composed from professional CSOs dedicated to tangible progress might be not preferable for some national governments dedicated to maintaining their power. But this has to be preferable for the EU, in case it sees the advocacy and oversight of the European funding implementation by the civil society sector as a priority. The EU should be an important backing for NPs, and it should be concerned with exercising an availability of a platform with strong, independent and trusted by public organisations. For the Forum would, hopefully, like to see CSOs joining NPs for the purpose of reforms, not resources.

Summary of Findings

There are no mechanisms or tools foreseen by the EaP CSF founding bodies in advance, to measure the impact of the Forum and to orient the EaP CSF participants in achieving success. The European Integration Index, currently is the only measure of performance tracking the developments of EaP six, and is limited to presenting the findings in comparative perspective. The Forum also employs provision of reporting forms, which however do not guarantee strict rules and are considered not enough. Examples of clearly understandable ‘products’, such as *a launch of a news website*, or *a presentation of results*, do not foresee any follow-ups to learn about the actual impact and tangible value of such results. Since advocacy is the main function of the Forum, most of the time the spread of information defined as distributing an announcement, is considered to be an achievement per se. Nevertheless, it is necessary to have a mechanism that would follow-up on a given activity to look at the impact of the announcement spread. For example, did the announcements actually reach the target population, which proportion of the population is informed? Similar enquiries are important

²⁰ Multiple references were made to Armenia’s “U-turn” over the decision not to sign the DCFTA.

²¹ Armenia’s President announced the decision to join the Eurasian Custom’s Union, by thus withdrawing from Association with Europe, after years of negotiations and preparations.

²² Author’s interview with a member of the ANP, November 21, 2014

in delivering tangible results, based on indicators, such as number of people informed. Monitoring, as a process per se is recognized as very important by Forum participants. The highlights however on the importance of capacity building for EaP CSF participants in the implementation of monitoring function are lacking. This can be a potential area for improvement for those EaP six lacking success.

The EaP CSF was established to influence both the civil societies and national governments of EaP countries. In Armenia, Forum impact has so far been limited to some organisations included in the ANP. The experience has shown that Forum did not live up to its purpose to be able to influence state-level decisions in Armenia. The ANP has a problem of becoming a recognised civil society institution. For the Forum to exercise a measurable impact in Armenia, it has yet to get credibility and more respect from both the society at large and the Armenian government.

There are no major outcomes as a result of cooperation between the EU and the Armenian civil society in the framework of the Forum. The cooperation has been limited to formal meetings, funding provision and CSOs participation in events organised by the EU. The EaP CSF has no influence on the development of Armenian civil society. It does contribute to the development of selected CSOs in terms of providing opportunities for their own development through interaction with CSOs from other countries. This type of development however is limited to selected organisations, members of the platform.

The ANP possesses insufficient mechanisms to influence Armenian government, which does not recognise ANP as an equal partner in cooperation. The Forum's contribution to the development of cooperation between local civil society organisations and the Armenian government is limited to formal meetings with selected CSOs within the Armenian platform.

Conclusion and Recommendations

An initiative, once established, has to effectively operate to bring closer the outcomes once aimed for by the founding idea. Having this enquiry in mind, this research was designed to look for measures used to identify the outcomes of the EaP CSF, with a focus on Armenia, where it happens to be largely a formality so far.

The growth of civil society in any country is to a great extent conditioned by the level of its inclusion in state's decision-making processes. Some EaP countries were able to exercise a high level of this inclusion, resulting in compliance with Forum's mission and objectives; some were not. Armenia has numerous difficulties for the civil society sector to progress in this regard. Armenian civil society is characterised by limited opportunities in terms of CSOs 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.

The EaP CSF however is an institution with great potential, which has yet to be 'activated' in those EaP countries, whose elites possess less political will and courage to do so. It is crucial for the lagging-behind NPs to become more representative on national levels and better recognised by their national governments. The most realistic way to achieve this is through permanent EU backing and support of active CSOs, excluding GONGOS (and passive organisations) from NPs, in order to hear the voice of legitimate civil society.

It is important to establish public control mechanisms by civil society over certain activities of EaP national governments. If a society is incapable to grow new elites, then it has to at least be capable to provide a format of oversight and control by the civil society actors pertaining to a healthy

operating system of checks, balances and trust. If the EU wants to make the civil society a good partner, its support in this regard is crucial in terms of intermediation by employing necessary mechanisms aimed for the strongest possible involvement of society in oversight of budgetary support for reforms to be successfully implemented.

A prerequisite for Forum impact is an increased civic discourse. Currently, achieving a level of public demand on convergence with the EU values and standards is a challenge for ANP. For a greater Forum impact on societal level public has to formulate its choices. In order to formulate its choices people have to be informed. The lack of public information (apart from political orientations of the elite) is considered to be a reason for lack of Forum impact. The ANP has to look for ways of increasing the scope of communication channels aiming broader levels of society, via for example, visiting people in regions of Armenia. Here openness and collaboration with other CSOs will be critical, targeting ordinary people, seemingly far from involvement in vital policy-making processes of their country.

It is true that Forum's success is conditioned by time. On the other hand however even a lot of time will not bring any results if no attention is paid to some rearrangement and introduction of possible options to be ripe for the future. One of the peculiarities of the EaP region is that it is not static, as it might seem to be. This is why the EU should be permanently engaged in the region financially, policy-wise and, importantly through increasing capacities of civil societies of underperforming EaP countries.

Armenia in its relations with the EU is looking forward to the 2015 EaP summit, which should outline a new direction in this relationship based on a new plan of actions, and political courage to implement these. For Armenia, it will be a check, to show that the commitment it has toward the EU is the one based on values, not the financial resources offered.

This paper puts forward the following recommendations:

■ **To reconsider Armenian National Platform's membership principles and selection procedures**

The Forum and the ANP should employ a new and a stricter mechanism on the ANP membership principles and selection procedures. Representation of governmentally organised CSOs in the platform should be possibly minimised. Shaping a relevant NP is a priority for exercising better advocacy. Inclusion of non-operative, passive NGOs, 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, committed to EU values with a capacity to take responsibility of an improved advocacy. Fewer CSOs making a better impact will be more preferable than being the biggest NP of the EaP region with no impact whatsoever.

■ **More power to National Platforms**

The experience has shown that EaP CSF didn't live up to its purpose to be able to influence state-level decisions in Armenia. The ANP has a problem of becoming a recognised civil society institution. Increase in the authority of the NP is needed for more power, to become equal partners in the checks and balances system of governance involving the EU, national government and civil society, represented by the ANP. To reach that aim ANP has to be delegated with more powers to become an equal partner in the EU-Armenian government-*civil society* triangle. This should be possible through the EU backing, support and targeted intermediation, whenever needed.

■ **Monitoring function capacity building for CSOs in partner countries**

The advocacy impact assessment is one of the hardest types of 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. NPs seem to lack capacities for employing impact assessment. Capacity building for CSOs of partner countries in the implementation of monitoring function should contribute to improvement of Forum operation and ensure 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 EaP countries having had major obstacles and difficulties so far. With this aim, cooperation with active CSOs is required beyond NP members. The Forum has to create opportunities for also other CSOs of the 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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Appendix 2 List of Word Frequencies

<i>Word</i>	<i>Frequency</i>
1. Development	314
2. Monitoring	159
3. Change	76
4. Result	66
5. Progress	53
6. Mechanism	46
7. Evaluation	45
8. Regulation	41
9. Promotion	39
10. Index	38
11. Instrument	33
12. Method/ology	32
13. Assessment	31
14. Achievement	28
15. Influence	28
16. Tool	28
17. Success	26
18. Analysis	25
19. Criterion/a	24
20. Contribution	21
21. Improvement	15
22. Effect	14
23. Outcome	13
24. Impact	12
25. Advancement	11
26. Output	10
27. Indicator	8
28. Reaching	8
29. Expansion	7
30. Follow-up	7
31. Growth	7
32. Measure/ment	5
33. Fulfilment	4
34. Realisation	4
35. Statistics	3
36. Attainment	2
37. Check	2
38. Examination	2
39. Sustainability	2
40. Appraisal	1
41. Enhancement	1
42. Scoring	1
43. Upgrade	1
44. Accomplishment	0
45. End-product/end-result	0
46. Enrichment	0
47. Estimation	0
48. Procedure	0
49. Rating	0
50. Scaling	0

Appendix 3 Interview Guide

EaP CSF Revisited OSI Policy Research Fellowship Initiative_Research leader Valentina Gevorgyan (vgevorgyan@aua.am)

Name, Surname _____

Date _____

Position _____

Location _____

- **What is the Eastern Partnership (EaP) Civil Society Forum (Forum)** (if you were to describe with one sentence.) What is its main mission/aim?

Success measurement/impact assessment

- Is Forum a success? What in your opinion are the indicators of Forum's success (if any).
Please be specific
- What are the main outcomes/results (so far) of the Forum's operation in your country? What are your main achievements as a result of being a part to the Forum?
Please support your answer with example/s.
- What were the problems/obstacles you encountered so far in your work as a part of the Forum?
Please provide an example.
- What is Forum's impact on the civil societies in respective countries (if any)? Could you provide specific examples of the development or progress of the civil society sector? How do you define success in this regard?
- Do you have a strategy/mechanism to measure the success of your institution's operation? How do you measure success?
- Are there any follow-up mechanisms pertaining to the specific projects initiated? If so, what are these? *Please provide an example of an activity and its follow-up activity.*

Forum cooperation/interaction

- What is EU's role (if any) in promoting/assisting local civil society organizations in partner countries? *Please provide an example.*
- What is Forum's contribution (if any) to the development of cooperation between local civil society sectors and national governments?
- How do you assess the work/operation of your [*name of the respective governance body*]? Do you think there are areas/things that can be improved? What are the gaps that can be improved?
- How would you assess the work of the national platforms in a comparative perspective? Who is doing better? (*country-wise, sector-wise*). What are the main factors to positively distinguish partner countries one from another.

Final reflections

- Would the availability of a mechanism (to measure the success of Forum's activities) make things better? (probe: *if there was a pre-thought mechanism*) If so, what it should be like? (prompt: *a checklist, control tool, regular monitoring etc.*)
- What are the main three useful outcomes for the partner countries so far as a result of Forum's operation since its establishment? Also, please name the main people/departments/institutions that were instrumental in achieving the results. *Please provide examples.*
- What are the main three drawbacks for the partner countries as a result of Forum's operation since its establishment? Also, please name the main people/departments/institutions that were obstacles hindering the progress of implementation of any activity. *Please provide example/s.*
- What would be the most cherished success achieved as a result of Forum's operation in general?
- Recommendations.

Appendix 4 Interview Indexing Scheme

MAXQDA Coding: Semi-structured interviews with EaP CSF members_Indexing scheme

EaP CSF Revisited OSI Policy Research Fellowship Initiative_Research leader Valentina Gevorgyan (vgevorgyan@aua.am)

1. EaP CSF story

- 1.1 EaP CSF: role
- 1.2 EaP CSF: goals, objectives
- 1.3 EaP CSF: activities
- 1.4 Conceptualising Forum success
- 1.5 Achievements/success (so far)
- 1.6 Problems; difficulties; obstacles

2. Impact assessment

- 2.1 Indicators of success
- 2.2 Indicators of impact measurement
- 2.3 Assessing the work of a relevant body
- 2.4 Forum impact on civil society in partner country
- 2.5 Availability of impact assessment mechanism (yes/no)
- 2.6 Availability of impact assessment mechanism (good/bad: why)

3. Cooperation/interaction

- 3.1 Tringle data (EU-Civil Society-National Governments)
- 3.2 EU's role in assisting civil society sectors
- 3.3 EU's role in assisting NPs
- 3.4 Comparative data (EaP six)
- 3.5 EU + Armenia = relationship
- 3.6 Other specific material on Armenia/ANP

4. Final reflections

- 4.1 Three main useful outcomes
- 4.2 Three main drawbacks
- 4.3 Most cherished success (to be)
- 4.4 Recommendations to improve (what to change)
- 4.5 Quotes
- 4.6 Interesting material