

Brussels, 22 April 2016

**Address of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum
at the Eastern Partnership Multilateral Platform 1 „Democracy, Good Governance and
Stability”**

Dear participants,

Thank you and good morning

I would just like to express our Civil Society Forum satisfaction that stability and security have gained such prominence in the work of the Eastern Partnership.

And I take it as read that human rights should play a key role in this context. It is clear to us that no society can be stable or secure without due regard for these rights. Societies which do not respect these rights and the rule of law are inherently insecure. Also, transparent cooperation with civil society is an important aspect of this.

I say this because there are concerns among our members that while the European Union is right to work for good and fruitful relations with partner countries, this policy will be less than successful if the human rights aspect is set aside.

In this context I would like to welcome recent decisions by the Azerbaijani authorities to free several human rights defenders, including all of the members of the EaP CSF National Platform, and allowing Leyla Yunus and Rasul Jafarov to travel abroad for treatment for their health. We also would ask for remaining political prisoners to be released and the ongoing review of the restrictive conditions on the activities of civil society to be completed to the satisfaction of both the authorities and our civil society friends.

Tragically, the recent outbreak of fighting on the line of contact in Karabakh and the consequent violations of the Geneva Convention governing treatment of military personnel as well as treatment of civilians threatens these internal developments in Baku. For us, a just and peaceful resolution of this conflict is crucial to the future stability and security of the region and we stand ready to promote confidence between the two sides in Karabakh.

We also welcome the positive way in which the Georgian authorities are cooperating with our National Platform on implementation of Association Agreement related legislation and the cautious search for a *modus vivendi* between civil society and the authorities in Belarus. Here we are looking forward to a free and fair election in the autumn as a test of the good will of the authorities in Minsk.



Finally we want to reiterate that civil society in the EaP would be happy to help with the shaping and implementation of bilateral programmes but for this to happen it is essential that the degree of transparency from the EU and its delegations and the partner governments must improve radically.

Thank you for your attention!

Delivered by Krzysztof Bobiński, co-chair of the EaP CSF Steering Committee