



**European Movement  
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Եվրոպական Շարժում**

**EMI Yerevan Congress**

**“Fostering Civil Society’s role for further**

**European integration in the Eastern Partnership countries”**

**20-21 October 2011, Armenia**

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## **FINAL DECLARATION**

On 20-21 October 2011, 150 civil society delegates, high level experts and decision makers gathered in Yerevan, Armenia, at a Congress organized by the European Movement International (EMI) in cooperation with its National Council in Armenia (EMA), to discuss the theme “Fostering Civil Society’s role for further European integration in the Eastern Partnership”.

The participants came from the six countries of the Eastern Partnership (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine), as well as from ten other European countries. They all responded to the call launched by the European Movement because they believe that our identity as Europeans does not require us to be less of who we are, but rather permits us to be more of who we wish to be; because they value diversity as an important aspect of contemporary European values, and solidarity as a fundamental cornerstone of European integration; and because they wish to deepen the network and roots of civil society, encouraging it to educate, to motivate and to advocate.

With this motivation, and sharing beliefs in a pluralist democracy, in multi-party systems, based on free, open and fair elections, in the rule of law with a separation of powers between the executive and the judicial branches of government, in respect for individual human rights and the dignity of the person, and in the classic freedoms of expression, association and religion, the participants engaged in a dialogue and agreed on the following conclusions:

### **1. Development of and EU support for the Civil Society**

In order to foster further development of the Civil Society in the Eastern Partnership countries, the participants think that the European Union should consider the possibility of providing long-term (multiannual) financial support, especially to local and national civil society organizations which promote the aims and objectives of the Eastern Partnership in general and, in particular, to those promoting Democracy and Human Rights. This should not

replace, however, the need for the states concerned to develop coherent and transparent schemes to support civil society organizations in their own countries.

Especially in a region where education is going through major, not always very successful changes, non-formal education provided by civil society organizations should, according to the participants, be seen as an important element in bridging the gaps in the formal education system and, as such, fully recognized and adequately supported, not only through financial means, but also through a legal framework that favors the fulfillment of its potential.

The participants also expressed their support for the European Parliament resolution on the review of the European Neighbourhood Policy – Eastern Dimension, of 7 April 2011, and, in particular, to its paragraph 49 calling on the Vice President/High Representative and the EEAS “to develop more confidence-building measures and programmes, including the launching of new missions and public communication strategies and the consideration of pragmatic initiatives and innovative approaches such as informal contacts and consultations with the societies of the breakaway territories, while conserving the EU’s non-recognition policy, in order to support civic culture and community dialogue”.

## **2. The Process of National Reforms**

While recognizing the tremendous efforts and the huge progress made by all the six countries in comparison to their starting points 20 years ago, the participants observed the need for an increased pace of reforms in all the policy fields covered by the Eastern Partnership and in all the countries concerned. Specifically as regards relations with Civil Society, the obstacles to the registration of civil society organisations (particularly in Belarus), to the capacity of these organisations to generate and keep their own funds (for instance in Armenia), to the ability of these organisations to freely operate and express their opinions (in Azerbaijan and Ukraine), and the difficulties in generating interest among citizens who have been raised in totally state-led systems (all the countries concerned) were some of the issues raised at the Congress. Parallel to these, the issues of freedom of expression and of independence of the media were also mentioned to be crucial in the context of further reforms.

The participants agreed that one of the possible answers to these problems lies in more efforts being put into alliance-building among civil society organizations working on similar projects and sharing the same objectives, which would hopefully increase the efficiency of their work but would also contribute to a stronger position when engaging in a dialogue with the Government and other public authorities. In this respect the role that could be played by National Councils of the European Movement in the countries of the Eastern Partnership as a meeting point and forum for exchange for all civil society organisations working in favor of European integration was underlined.

### 3. Visa Liberalization and People-to-People Contacts

The participants took note of the progresses made in the negotiations towards Visa Liberalization (Moldova and Ukraine) and Visa Facilitation agreements (Georgia), as well as welcoming the recent proposal of the European Commission to initiate negotiations on Visa Facilitation with Armenia and Azerbaijan. While noting that common problems exist, participants recognized that solutions need to be sought in the context of very different circumstances in each one of the countries; therefore, while believing that the Eastern Partnership provides a platform for a regional approach to European integration, each state in the region carries its own responsibilities on a case by case basis to implement the necessary reforms to facilitate progress.

Acknowledging that visa restrictions are a significant obstacle to people-to-people contacts and that these hinder the development of dialogue and cooperation between civil society organizations from the Eastern Partnership countries and the member states of the European Union, participants proposed a set of recommendations including: the encouragement of the exchange of information on established practices (e.g. Moldovan migration strategy and Ukrainian experience in monitoring the Visa Liberalization Agreement) and promoting good practice (e.g. the establishment of Common Visa Centres in Moldova); encouraging civil society organizations to establish and/or join alliances advocating visa-free actions and implementing common projects; asking the European Union member states to grant “home student status” to all the students coming from the European Partnership countries; asking Armenia and Azerbaijan to abolish visa restrictions for EU citizens.

In concluding, the participants thanked the Armenian authorities and the National Council of the European Movement in Armenia for their warm hospitality; thanked the “Gagik Tsarukyan Foundation” and the Delegation of the European Union to Armenia for their support; and called on the European Movement International, together with its National Councils in the countries of the Eastern Partnership, to encourage on-going opportunities for discussion and exchange of opinions, and promoting cooperation and greater solidarity among civil society organisations throughout Europe.

Yerevan, 21 October 2011

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