



*European Economic and Social Committee*

Conference on

***2020 AND BEYOND: CIVIL SOCIETY'S VISION OF THE FUTURE  
OF THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP***

***EESC, 5 September 2019, 10.00-13.00***

**Concept note**

**Background**

2019 marks the 10th anniversary of the Eastern Partnership, a specific dimension of the European Neighbourhood policy that aims to deepen and strengthen relations between the EU, its Member States and the six Eastern European and South Caucasus partner countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine<sup>1</sup>.

Launched at the Prague Summit in May 2009 as a joint initiative, the Eastern Partnership offers a solid framework for both bilateral and multilateral cooperation. The summit meetings of heads of state or government have been held every other year, and over the last ten years the policy has greatly evolved: its substance has broadened, deepened and been adapted to changing realities and political context.

At the most recent Eastern Partnership summit, held in November 2017 in Brussels, all partners reiterated their commitment to delivering tangible benefits for the daily lives of the citizens by focusing on achieving "20 Deliverables for 2020". This work plan identified four priority areas for cooperation: stronger governance, a stronger economy, greater connectivity and a stronger society. In addition, cooperation between the EU and the partner countries features several cross-cutting deliverables, with **engagement with civil society** at the top of the list.

Representing the voice of Europe's civil society and with a substantial history of cooperation with all six Eastern Partnership countries, the European Economic and Social Committee set itself the main objective in the region of facilitating the dialogue between civil society organisations from the EU and its Eastern Neighbours. Following its commitment to support civil society both inside

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eastern-partnership/>.

and outside Europe, the EESC established an Eastern Neighbours Follow-up Committee back in 2004. In addition, the Association Agreements with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine gave the EESC a mandate to establish monitoring mechanisms with these three partners. These mechanisms comprise civil society platforms and domestic advisory groups whose role is to monitor the implementation of the Agreements from the point of view of civil society. The EESC is involved in steering the establishment of a civil society platform with Armenia.

As strengthening the enabling environment for civil society is identified as one of the major challenges of the Eastern Partnership, it is crucial that all stakeholders, first and foremost organised civil society from both EU and six partner countries, are structurally involved in the agenda-setting processes and meetings in the context of the Eastern Partnership. Therefore, acknowledging the importance of this extensive dimension of the EU Neighbourhood policy, the EESC will hold a high-level conference focused on the Eastern Partnership at its headquarters in Brussels.

### **Timeline and deliverables**

The high-level conference of the EESC will precede the adoption of the Committee's own-initiative opinion reflecting on the achievements and shaping the future of the Eastern Partnership policy. The event will take place during the External Relations section meeting in September 2019. The timing will enable it both to include the results of the series of high-level stock-taking anniversary events held during the first part of the year, and to highlight the future policy vision of civil society before the start of the new European Commission term, just a few months after the inaugural session of the new European Parliament. 2020 will be a milestone year for the policy, and the outcomes of the conference will feed into the agenda for the 2020 Eastern Partnership summit. They will be presented in a post-conference document summarising the main conference messages and including specific calls for further action at EU level to promote and empower civil society in the Eastern Partnership countries.

### **Participants**

Civil society representatives from the Eastern Neighbourhood countries

EESC members

High level officials from the EU Institutions

Representatives from the main international and European civil society umbrella organisations

Diplomatic corps