

The socialization potential of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum

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Abstract

This article assesses socialization in the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, an institutionalized civil society cooperation consisting of non-governmental organizations from the European Union and the Eastern Partnership countries: Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. The article argues that uniting the literature on socialization and on Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum adds considerably to scholarly knowledge about the role of the institutionalized civil society in the world. The analysis of the activities of the Civil Society Forum shows that the conditions for socialization are largely fulfilled. We conclude that the organisation and functioning of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum not only provides a passive framework for transmitting European values and norms, but also results in a middle degree of socialization between civil society organizations of the European Union and the Eastern Partnership countries. There is a large degree of internalization of European Union-sponsored norms and values among the participants of the Civil Society Forum: they fervently promote and defend such norms and values. The little-politicized environment in which discussions take place also allows civil society organisations to make ambitious statements, often more straightforward than political representatives (can) make.

Keywords: Eastern Partnership, Civil Society Forum

1. Introduction

This article aims to combine two elements of the literature in European Union (EU) studies, namely socialization and civil society in Europe. On the one hand, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, a large body of literature emerged

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on the role of civil society in, *inter alia*, democratic transition (Encarnación, 2003; Celichowski, 2004; Bhatt and Seckinelgin, 2012), in the Western Balkans (Greenberg, 2010; Bojicic-Delilovic *et al.*, 2013) and in the post-Soviet space (e.g. Henderson, 2003; Hemment, 2012; Ishkanian, 2013). On the other hand, since the early 2000s, studies on European socialization have contributed to the EU studies literature, providing insight in the processes driving change at different policy levels within and outside of the EU. Nearly all research on European socialization analyses adaptation of EU officials to group norms of the institutions (e.g. Beyers, 2005; Hooghe, 2005; Juncos and Pomorska, 2006) or norm transfer from international organizations to individual states (see e.g. Schimmelfennig, 2005; Schimmelfennig *et al.*, 2005; Lavenex and Schimmelfennig, 2011). Few have also studied norm transfer to specific institutions or actors in non-candidate countries (see e.g. Smith, 2011). However, the transfer of norms and values between actors from the Eastern Partnership (EaP) – Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan – and the EU through the Civil Society Forum (CSF) has received virtually no attention by the academic literature.

The European Commission communication of 2008 on the EaP put forward the idea of enhancing the EU's support to the civil society organizations (CSOs) in these countries, and in particular establishing a CSF "to promote contacts among CSOs and facilitate their dialogue with public authorities" (European Commission, 2008). Following months of consultations, the EaP CSF concept paper was endorsed at the first EaP Summit in 2009, describing the modalities of the Forum (EaP CSF, 2009a). Since its establishment, the CSF has held five annual General Assemblies. The active socialization between the CSOs resulted in the production of a considerable amount of statements, the substance of which correspond to the EU's position usually expresses in external relations dossiers.

We argue that uniting the literature on socialization and on EaP CSF could add considerably to scholarly knowledge about the role of the institutionalized civil society in the world. Consequently, this paper addresses two interconnected research questions: (i) which factors can contribute to the transfer of EU-promoted norms to CSOs from the EaP countries, and (ii) to what degree does socialization take place in the CSF? With regard to the second question, we apply the typology of socialization as discussed by Checkel (2005), distinguishing between strategic calculation, role playing and normative suasion. Thus, this article does not deal with the impact of the CSOs through the CSF on the substance of EaP policies as such, but analyses socialization and adherence to common norms within the CSF. Instead, with this contribution we make two main arguments on socialization within the EaP CSF. First, the CSF has become an inclusive platform for the EU and EaP CSOs that facilitates familiarization with the values and norms promoted by the EU. Second, the CSOs participating

in CSF conduct independent monitoring, issue declarations, and initiate actions that reflect the values promoted by the EU. On the other hand, there are divisions between the NGOs such as some EU CSOs vs. some EaP NGOs, between the CSOs of the EaP countries, and within some EaP country platforms. Therefore, we conclude that a middle level of socialization takes place in the CSF, i.e. between role playing and normative suasion.

The paper is structured as follows. First, we briefly discuss the definitions and characteristics of the different types of socialization. Subsequently, we outline the organization of the CSF. This section discusses the CSF instruments through which socialization can take place among the participating CSOs. In the next sections, we discuss the results of the EaP CSF through the lens of the socialization analytical framework. The conclusions discuss the main findings and suggest topics for further research.

2. The CSF as a facilitator of socialization?

According to Checkel (2005), socialization is a process during which socialized actors (socializees) are inducted into the norms and rules of a given community (socializers), with sustained compliance due to internalization of these norms as a result. The extent to which these norms are internalized can vary: Checkel identifies three degrees of norm internalization, corresponding with three mechanisms of socialization (Checkel, 2005; see also Schimmelfennig, 2005; Warkotsch, 2007).

The first and most ‘shallow’ mechanism is *strategic calculation*: the socializee displays desired behaviour in response to positive and/or negative incentives, which can be social (e.g. status, shaming) as well as material (e.g. financial assistance, sanctions). Strategic calculation alone does not lead to the internalization of norms, but it can be a first step towards preference change. This mechanism is most likely to operate when the socializee expects the benefits of adapting its behaviour (or pressurizing others, e.g. governments, to change their behaviour) to be larger than the costs.

A second mechanism is *role playing*, leading to a first step in norm internalization: the socializee behaves according to the group norms because it is considered appropriate in a certain setting, but its ideas and preferences remain unchanged. This type of socialization is most likely to occur in settings where agents have long, sustained and intense contacts with each other.

The third mechanism, *normative suasion*, leads to the highest level of norm internalization: agents (inter)actively and reflectively internalize new understandings of appropriate norms, and behave accordingly. Normative suasion mostly takes place when the socializee is in a novel and uncertain environment, has few prior beliefs that are inconsistent with the socializer’s message, when the socializer holds a dominant and authoritative position within the group to which the socializee belongs or wishes to belong, when the

socializer does not lecture or demand but acts according to principles of serious deliberative argument, and when interactions take place in less politicized and more informal settings.

As discussed above, socialization has thus far been mostly studied between the EU and individual governments or within the EU institutions. In this article, we extend the application of this framework to the study of cooperation and socialization at the level of CSOs. This research is relevant in a context where CSOs assume an increasingly active role in the external policies of the EU and EaP countries. The CSOs have consistently championed European norms and values. This is certainly the case for the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) participating in the CSF.

3. Structure and functioning of the CSF

3.1. History and membership of the CSF

The EaP constitutive Prague declaration endorsed the idea of civil society participation in the EaP and charged the European Commission with developing and proposing modalities for the establishment of an EaP CSF (Council of the European Union, 2009, 7 May). Between the Commission communication and the 2008 CSF concept paper discussed above, the interested parties both in the EU and in the EaP countries were invited to contribute in four areas, namely the CSF's 1) goals, 2) participation, 3) structures linked to the EaP multilateral framework and 4) the role of the Commission in the process.

The concept paper outlines the goals of the CSF that is set to enrich the EaP by adding the perspective of the civil society through input in the form of recommendations, evaluation and monitoring of the EaP activities including to that of the multilateral thematic platforms and ministerial meetings. The CSF provides a platform for sharing best practices of European integration and holding regular discussions on promoting the multilateral track of the EaP. To this end, the expertise of the NGOs is given particular attention. Institutionally, the creation of the CSF also aims to contribute to capacity building of the CSOs of the EaP countries through enhancing the dialogue with the EU CSOs, social partners, think tanks, EU institutions including the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), and international organizations. CSOs from the EaP countries and CSOs from EU member states active in one or more EaP countries are welcome to participate.

The first annual Assembly took place on 16-17 November 2009, to which over 200 CSOs participated. The CSF adopted four recommendations – one from each existing working group. The second annual Assembly took place in Berlin on 18-19 November 2010, where, *inter alia*, the Steering Committee's first report was presented (cf. more below). Prior to the Forum, representatives of Belarusian civil society groups also made a statement on Belarus (cf. more

below). The third and fourth annual Assemblies took place in Poznan in 2011 and Stockholm in 2012 (cf. more below). In 2013, the CSF took place for the first time in one of the EaP countries, i.e. Chisinau, Moldova and the next meeting is planned to take place in Tbilisi, Georgia.

3.2. Components of the CSF

The CSF consists of a number of entities: the Steering Committee, the Secretariat, five Working Groups with their respective Sub-Groups, National Platforms, and the annual Assembly.

The annual Assembly, which gathers a large number of CSOs, is the most mediatized and most well-known entity of the EaP CSF. This annual meeting elects the Steering Committee, which is accountable to the Assembly. Members of the Steering Committee are elected from the Working Groups and National Platforms, and complemented by three EU coordinators. The Forum elects two representatives from each Working Group, one person from the EU, and one from each EaP country. In addition, every EaP country elects a country facilitator to become member of the Steering Committee. The Steering Committee has two co-chairs, one from the EU and another from one of the EaP countries.

The Steering Committee is the governing board of the CSF. Externally, the Steering Committee is the representative body of the CSF. Internally, the Steering Committee meets four times a year and has a role to develop the strategies for the development of the CSF by outlining guidelines for action. More specifically, the Committee is charged with developing and promoting the principles and values of the CSF, participating in the EaP platforms and panels, keeping contacts with the members of the CSF Working Groups and Sub-Groups, participating in the selection of the delegates for the annual Assembly, and communicating with all the stakeholders.

The establishment of the Secretariat of the Steering Committee in the beginning of 2013 finalized the institutionalization of the CSF (EaP CSF, 2012a). It provides daily support to the work of the Steering Committee and the annual Assembly. It serves as the CSF's hub of coordination, information sharing, and institutional memory. The Secretariat is also a contact point for the relations with EU institutions, such as the European Commission, the European External Action Service (EEAS), and the EESC. As opposed to the Steering Committee, which meets only four times a year, the Secretariat works on a permanent basis. This sustained contact with the various bodies of the CSF facilitates socialization and makes deeper norm internalization more likely.

There are currently five Working Groups operating within the CSF.

1) The Working Group on democracy, human rights, good governance and stability is the largest group with the biggest number of members. The Working Group advises that the EaP facilitates integration of the Eastern

partners into the EU through its support of the development of sustainable democratic structures. To this end, it suggests that civil society contributes in the areas of electoral processes, human rights, freedom of media, fight against corruption, and working with local authorities.

Working Group 1 is composed of seven Sub-Groups that conduct substantive work in their respective areas.

While acknowledging that there are differences in the level of judicial reforms within the EaP countries, the *Judiciary Reform Sub-Group* works toward a set of common goals. These aims, presented in the forms of recommendations, include calling for greater transparency of the EU funding allocated in the justice sector reforms and working towards the creation of a specific mechanism for civil society engagement in judicial reforms from planning to implementation. The Sub-Group also aims to conduct monitoring and issues specific recommendations concerning the implementation of the commitments made by the EaP countries' governments.

The *Public Administration Reform Sub-Group's* objectives include advocacy aiming to decrease the administrative burden on taxpayers, inclusion of the civil society in the process of decision-shaping on the National Strategies for Local Self-Government, and Public Administration Reform in consultation with civil society organizations. The Sub-Group also advocates for independent monitoring of the Comprehensive Institutional Building Programmes' (CIB) good management.

The *Fight against Corruption Sub-Group* focuses on monitoring the state of corruption in the EaP countries and contributing to the anti-corruption policies through taking common initiatives by NGOs from the EU and the EaP. Moreover, through building partnerships with the donor organizations, the Sub-Group advocates for inclusion of the CSOs in the distribution of international and in particular European aid to the EaP governments.

Acknowledging the problems stemming from the lack of transparency in the visa dialogue conducted between the EU and the EaP countries, the *Visa Facilitation Sub-Group* monitors the process of this visa dialogue and advocates for visa liberalization as a potential success story of the EaP.

The *Media Sub-Group* works on recommendations related to bringing the EaP countries media legislation to the EU's standards, support national journalists to cover the activities of the Forum. In addition, it monitors public broadcasting in the EaP countries, including the possible monopolizing of media through the use of digitalization of TV broadcasters or restricting the activities of local TV broadcasters.

The *Human Rights Sub-Group* advocates for human rights issues to be on the agenda of intergovernmental meetings. It also monitors whether the state-of-paly of human rights in the EaP countries corresponds to the respective governments' commitments.

Finally, the *Election Monitoring Sub-Group*, which is also one of the CSF's flagship initiatives, focuses on election monitoring in the EaP countries. These activities are coordinated with the respective National Platforms of the CSF.

2) The Working Group on economic integration and convergence with EU policies is called after the similar multilateral platform and works primarily towards economic integration of EaP countries into the EU through the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (DCFTAs). The Working Group also supports those Eastern partners that are not member of the WTO to become one. The Working Group deals with specific issues such as enhancing the social security, eradication of poverty, sustainable development, and climate change. It also aims to assist the consumer organizations, enhance business contacts, a better regulatory framework, and quality standards in the EaP countries. Within this Working Group, there are six Sub-Groups, five of which have a similar name to the intergovernmental panels operating under the EaP multilateral Platform 2. The sixth Sub-Group deals with territorial, regional and cross border cooperation.

3) The Working Group on environment, climate change and energy security mirrors the work of the EaP multilateral Platform 3. In addition, the Working Group deals with environment and climate change. Transferring the EU knowhow to the Eastern Partners is the focus of the group. The areas include support for the EaP countries to integrate environmental aspects into the national policies, promote energy efficiency, combat climate change and work towards diversification of the energy supply. The three thematic Sub-Groups are Energy Security, Climate Change, and Environment Protection.

4) The 'Contacts between people' Working Group mirrors the 4th multilateral Platform and deals with issues such as visa dialogue, education, youth and culture. The group's goals include dissemination of information and opportunities provided by the EU, promoting cooperation between the EU and EaP CSOs, and understanding of the shared values. It works on the visa dialogue advocating for simplified visa procedures, increasing funding of internships and volunteer work and exchange programmes, and encourage engagement of youth in attaining the goals of the EaP. The Working Groups includes three Sub-Groups specializing in culture, education youth.

5) The Working Group 'Social & Labour Policies and Social Dialogue' is the latecomer and was established only at the fourth CSF meeting in Stockholm in November 2012. This is the only Working Group that is not modelled after any of the EaP multilateral platforms. The members of the group therefore advocate establishing a multilateral Platform or at least a panel on the issues of employment and social protection. The priorities and goals of the group are still under debate.

Besides the Steering Committee and the Working Groups, the National Platforms play an important role within the Forum. They have been established in all EaP countries in order to ensure the input of the CSOs in achieving the goals of the EaP. To this end, the National Platforms are also a tool to facilitate a dialogue between the CSOs, their respective governments, and the EU institutions. The technical issues such as the format and decision-making rules of the Platforms are left to be worked out by the each National Platform. All the CSOs are in principle eligible to become members of a National Platform. The members elect a Country Facilitator, who is charged with coordinating the work of the Platform and represent it in the Steering Committee.

The Armenian National Platform was the first Platform to be initiated in 2009 and it is currently involved in all the working groups of the CSF. Its institutionalization was completed with the establishment of the Secretariat. The National Platform of Azerbaijan contains the smallest number of CSOs. The format of the Belarusian National Platform does not follow the composition of the Forum's Working Groups. Instead, it has formed a Coordinative Council consisting of nine members that guides the work of the platform. Although the limited participation of Belarus in the intergovernmental EaP has negative effects on the functioning of the Belarusian National Platform, Belarusian CSOs are actively engaged in the Forum. The Georgian National Platform, established in 2010, adopted an open door policy and has welcomed all the interested CSOs to join the Platform if they take the responsibility to work on Georgia's political, economic and social integration into the EU. The secretariat of the Platform opened in the beginning of 2013. Moldova's National Platform was established in March 2011. The platform is open to all CSOs that are active for two years. The Ukraine National Platform that was founded in January 2011 and structures its activities around the themes of the Working Groups and Sub-Groups of the CSF.

3.3. Factors contributing to norm transfer in the EaP CSF

The EaP CSF has reached a high level of institutionalization in a relatively short period of time. Its structure resembles the EU-Russia CSF, which shows that the EU uses a standard model for multilateral organizing cooperation between CSOs. This is a first step in socializing the CSOs of the partner countries: it provides an institutional and organizational template to which these organizations adapt.

The different bodies ensure frequent contacts between the participating CSOs, which facilitates a certain degree of socialization. The most advanced level of socialization is likely to occur, since several conditions for role playing and even normative suasion are fulfilled: the CSOs from the EaP countries were initially new in the framework, which had been set by the EU. In addition, there are no indications that these organizations would have pre-existing beliefs inconsistent with the values promoted by the EU; they were thus receptive for

social learning. The composition of the different bodies of the CSF indicates that the EU does not 'lecture', but that discussions take place on the basis of equality. Finally, given the very nature of CSOs, interactions in the CSF are not highly politicized.

4. The Forum at work

This section discusses the work leading up to and including the CSF annual Assemblies that have taken place thus far. We find that the participants of the CSF have adopted a number of increasingly significant documents in the different components of the CSF and in the annual Assemblies, which to a very large extent reflect the values promoted by the EU.

4.1. The First Assembly, 16-17 November 2009, Brussels

The four existing Working Groups presented their recommendations in the first annual Assembly. Recommendations of the Working Group on 'Democracy, Human Rights, Good Governance and Stability' urged the authorities to treat NGOs "as natural institutional partners of the EU institutions, Member States and the Eastern Partnership (EaP) 6 authorities" at all the stages of decision-making started from planning to implementation of the EaP on both tracks of the partnership (EaP CSF, 2009b). The document argues for a larger role of CSOs in the monitoring of the progress achieved by the EaP countries. The working group condemned the existence of political prisoners in EaP countries and called on the EU to encourage democratic values, political and civil rights, through mainstreaming human rights in the EU's policies, harmonization of the legislation, and inclusion of the civil society in the EaP. The recommendations also tackled the elections and electoral campaigns, independence and pluralism of the media, issues of security and peace building, and good governance in general (EaP CSF, 2009b).

The recommendations of the Working Group on 'Economic Integration and convergence with the EU Policies' called on the authorities of the EaP countries "to create the necessary institutional and procedural arrangements for efficient operation of social and civil dialogue in their countries" (EaP CSF, 2009c, p. 1). The Working Group argued that public awareness and acceptance of the social and economic reforms is the key to endure the positive effects of the partnership. To this end, the Working Groups saw an important role for CSOs. The separation of powers, independence of the judiciary and primacy of the rule of law "are basic conditions for good functioning of the economy, investment and achievement of economic growth" (EaP CSF, 2009c, p. 1). Some recommendations of this Working Group, such as on impact assessments for the DCFTAs, have been taken up by the European Commission. The recommendations stress the need for the EU and EaP governments to support

cooperation between Chambers of Commerce, Agricultural chambers, scientific and educational institutions as well as business and entrepreneurship, in particular small and medium enterprises (SMEs). The need to assist consumer protection organizations in ensuring product safety in the EaP is also addressed by the recommendations of the Working Group (EaP CSF, 2009c).

The recommendations of the Working Group on ‘Environment, climate change and energy security’ argued for deeper engagement of the EaP CSOs in energy and environmental matters, and provided a preliminary roadmap for action. The recommendations address issues related to infrastructure and outline the expectations of the EaP governments as well as EU institutions and the member states. The Working Group sees its overarching goal in supporting “the integration of environmental aspects into all national policies of EaP countries (e.g. industry, transport, regional development, budget, agriculture, forestry, EU acquis compliance)”. The Working Group calls on the EaP governments to increase public awareness through information campaigns, education, and capacity building (EaP CSF, 2009d).

The Working Group on ‘Contacts Between People’ put the stress in its recommendations on visa free travel of the EaP citizens to the EU. Beyond visa dialogue, the Working Group advocates for favourable conditions for education, volunteering, internships, etc. The recommendations furthermore discuss issues related to youth, culture, research and media (EaP CSF, 2009e).

4.2. The Second Assembly, 18-19 November 2010, Berlin

On the road to institutionalizing and carving out the substantive elements of the CSF, the meeting in Berlin was significant, in particular, for the presentation of the first Steering Committee Report. It sums up the work of the first year of the CSF, including the reports from the coordinators of the four Working Groups and Sub-Groups and the EaP country facilitators, summarizes the activities of the Steering Committee, and sets a vision for the future of the CSF (EaP CSF, 2010a).

All six Sub-Groups of the first Working Group submitted reports. *The Anti-corruption Sub-Group* highlighted that the anti-corruption efforts take a top-down approach and argued that the EaP governments do not show a political will to genuinely fight the corruption but engage in imitation. Therefore, there is a need for public ownership of the reforms in the area of anti-corruption. Consequently, the Sub-Group suggests, *inter alia*, to include the EaP CSOs in assessing the fight against corruption.

The *Public Administration Reform Sub-Group* stressed that external pressure should be exerted on the institutions to reform, while arguing for the valuable contribution that CSOs can bring in the process (EaP CSF, 2010a, pp. 11-13).

The *Judiciary Reform Sub-Group* advocated for a greater transparency of the EU funding directed to the reform of the EaP countries' justice system and for the creation of expert groups that would draw a joint report – with participation of the CSOs – on the progress of the reforms.

The *Visa Liberalization Sub-Group* calls on the EU member states “not to forsake the issue of visa liberalization” and calls for decoupling the technical aspects from the political ones (EaP CSF, 2010a, pp. 14-15).

The Human rights and Media Sub-Groups see their mission, among other things, in lobbying for the inclusion of human rights and media related issues in the EaP agenda (EaP CSF, 2010a, pp. 13-17).

The Working Group on ‘Economic integration and convergence with the EU Policies’ in particular highlighted the need for balanced representation of the NGOs and social partners in the work of the group, “in order to be able to elaborate recommendations which take into account all socio-economic implications in the EaP countries” (EaP CSF, 2010a, p. 20). The Working Group on ‘Environment, climate change and energy security’ criticized the lack of access to the preparatory documents of the multilateral Platform. It also pointed to the lack of own recourses. The Working Group 4 sees its contribution in bringing the civil society position on the issues related to youth, education, culture, research and media (EaP CSF, 2010a, p. 28).

In the run up to the second Assembly, the members of the Belarusian National Platform issued a joint statement on the situation in Belarus, highlighting the problems faced by the CSOs in Belarus, which “cannot be seen as complying with European norms and principles that govern relations between the civil society and the state; it certainly requires changes that would allow enhanced capacity for a constructive dialogue on equal terms” (EaP CSF, 2010b). The statement clarifies that the Civil Society Advisory Council, which operates under the auspices of the Presidential Administration of Belarus and has shown an interest in joining the activities of CSF, is not to be considered as a civil society body (EaP CSF, 2010b).

Next to the reports from all six EaP National Platforms, the CSOs from the EU also presented their concerns, including the (too) limited number of NGOs involved from the EU side. The EU CSOs were involved in every Working Group as co-chairs (EaP CSF, 2010a, p. 43). The members of the Steering Committee also lobbied European institutions such as the European Commission, the Council of the EU and the Council of Europe. The Committee's Communications Sub-Group engaged in informational activities, including the creation of the CSF newsletter. The Steering Committee formed a Flagship Initiative Sub-Group, but had difficulties with its implementation in the first year of the CSF (EaP CSF, 2010a, pp. 45-53).

The Steering Committee elected during the Berlin Forum put forward specific recommendations in a letter addressed to Catherine Ashton, EU High

Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and European Commission Vice President for External Relations and to Stefan Füle, Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy. The Committee asked for the possibility of being present in all the intergovernmental platforms and panels, to be informed on the agenda of the meetings, and to receive the minutes of the platform meetings. The Steering Committee also requested assistance for developing multi-country projects and support for the CSOs to meet more often for the purpose of information and expertise sharing (EaP CSF, 2010a, p. 58). The Steering Committee's request to set up a permanent Secretariat has materialized in 2013.

4.3. The Third Assembly, 28-30 November 2011, Poznan

The third annual Assembly took place during the Polish Council Presidency and was hosted in the Polish city Poznan. Poland very much promoted the strengthening of EU-EaP relations during its Presidency, so the 2011 Assembly took place in a climate where the EaP was high on the EU's agenda. The forum discussed two main documents.

First, the participants exchanged views about the role of the EaP CSF and its future directions, based on a document called 'A Strategic Roadmap for Civil Society in the Eastern Partnership' (EaP CSF, 2011b). The document pointed to the reviewed European Neighbourhood Policy, took stock of the EU's relations with each of the EaP countries and compared this with EU relations with other countries, discussed the upcoming European Endowment for Democracy, and reflected on the achievements and future challenges of the CSF. In the overview per country, the authors noted that the bilateral agenda for cooperation with the EU is not included in the national reform plans, which means that European integration is not viewed as a domestic strategy but rather as a parallel process (EaP CSF, 2011b, p. 12).

The second document focused on the judicial independence in four of the six EaP countries (EaP CSF, 2011a): Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, and Georgia. The report concluded that progress in these countries towards an independent judiciary left much to be desired. Interestingly, Ukraine was not included in the report, despite the heavy criticism voiced by the EU on this country as a consequence of the arrest and detention of former Prime Minister Timoshenko.

4.4. The Fourth Assembly, 29-30 November 2012, Stockholm

The fourth annual Assembly took stock of the activities of the CSF throughout the year (EaP CSF, 2012c). The relations with the EU-EaP Parliamentary Assembly had been strengthened and flagship initiatives had been launched. The Steering Committee had provided input to the EaP Roadmap for 2013 and to the meeting EU and EaP Foreign Ministers in June 2012, during

which it had called for the unconditional release of political prisoners in the EaP region. It had consistently requested a more significant role for civil society in EaP policies, and was successful in doing so: the EaP Roadmap included commitments on behalf of the EU to strengthen the support to civil society actors and to involve the National Platforms more actively in monitoring the implementation of the Roadmap (EaP CSF, 2012b).

4.5. The Fifth Assembly, 4-5 October 2013, Chisinau

The Steering Committee elected in Stockholm, had its first report on January 2013 (EaP CSF, 2013b). The report presented documents such as statements adopted by the Steering Committee, minutes of the Steering Committee, the CSF participants' selection procedure, advocacy, flagship initiatives, and monitoring of the implementation of the Eastern Partnership: *A Roadmap to the autumn 2013 Summit*.

The CSF also adopted a number of resolutions and recommendation to the Vilnius Summit, and the working groups 1, 2 and 3 presented their annual reports. After June 2013 the newly formed Working Group 5 on Social & Labour Policies and Social Dialogue held its first meeting (EaP CSF, 2013a), the working groups members met in CSF in Chisinau. However, because of internal disagreements between social CSOs and representatives of the unions, the group failed to elect a co-chair from the EaP countries.

The CSF in Chisinau presented a new Strategy for the Forum. The Strategy confirms the main goals and the short- to long-term action of the CSF. It also proposes a number of changes and innovations: it suggests to create an Advisory Board and to eliminate the positions of EU coordinators, thus decreasing the number of members of the Steering Committee. The Secretariat of the Steering Committee will have a one more staff member, i.e. Advocacy Officer. Because of the protests during the Forum from some of the CSOs, the CSF postponed putting the strategy for a vote, asking for more time to prepare a better proposal.

5. Discussion and conclusions

An analysis of the activities of the EaP CSF shows that the conditions for the most advanced form of socialization are mostly fulfilled. We conclude that a socialization level between role playing and normative suasion occurs in the EaP CSF: cooperation takes place in a standard model promoted by the EU, there are frequent contacts between the different CSOs, the CSOs from the EaP seem to be receptive for social learning, and they cooperate in a climate of equality. The participants of the EaP CSF promote norms and values that are advocated by the EU as well, and there are no signs showing that these would not be genuinely internalized. The little-politicized environment in which

discussions take place also allows CSOs to make ambitious statements, sometimes more straightforward than political representatives (can) make.

This article provides a first general account of the functioning and practices of the EaP CSF. This topic has not been discussed earlier in the academic literature; we suggest two main areas for future research, to which the present article could be a first contribution. First, we have found that the EaP CSF has from the outset consistently pushed to be more involved in the implementation and evaluation of EaP policies, and has been successful to a certain extent. References to civil society involvement are included in official EU documents, and the CSF cooperates with and provides input to other structures of the EaP, such as the EU-EaP Parliamentary Assembly, the EU-EaP meeting of Foreign Ministers and intergovernmental Platforms. Further research could focus on the actual impact of the CSF on these EaP policies, e.g. through (comparative) analyses of specific countries or projects. A second area for further research could make use of interviews and/or participant observation in order to map the interaction processes between the different CSOs. This could provide insight in possible two-way socialization, where CSOs from the EaP countries would transfer norms to their colleagues in the EU.

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