**SEMINAR FINAL DOCUMENT
East and West: Civil Societies in Cooperation**

**Concept of the Seminar**

Peipsi Centre for Transboundary Cooperation ([www.ctc.ee](http://www.ctc.ee)) organised a seminar “East and West: Civil Societies in Cooperation”, it took place in Tartu, Estonia, 28-29 September 2017. The event took place under the auspices of the Estonian Presidency of the Council of the European Union; with the financial support from KÜSK (National Foundation of Civil Society and in cooperation with Tartu University J. Skytte Institute.

**Target Area and Beneficiaries:** NGO-s and social entrepreneurs working with environmental, social, educational, and community development issues outside capital regions in Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan; and also in the Baltic States and Poland. In total we had around 45 participants on the seminar day.

**The aim** of the seminar is to help to strengthen the civil society (especially in rural areas) and involve them in discussion on the implementation and planning of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) policy. The seminar provides a platform for discussion on problems and challenges both of the EU and bilateral funded cross-border projects face. The participants work for formulation of common interest and standpoints.

The seminar offers a chance to tell your story and share your experience with the EU and EaP colleagues, as well as to build up a network.

**Topics and themes:**

* Policy-orientated presentations on topics related to Government-civil society relations in the EaP region, funding programs and their priorities
* Participants case studies on both EU and bilateral funded cross-border projects. Lessons learned and proposals for improvements
* Group work on main challenges of CBC projects, EU – EaP civil society partnership, funding
* Field trip to South Estonia - best case studies on community development projects.

**Preparation and before the event/communications**

As part of the seminar an article was published in Estonian online media. As well as that, our partners and participants were constantly informed about the ongoing events and developments.

**Main focus of the presentations and the discussions**

The first panel highlighted the specificities of the EaP rationale and specific tools of action. The presentations highlighted of the partnership is based on the commitment to the principles of international law and fundamental values - democracy, the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms. It also encompasses support for a market economy, sustainable development and good governance. The specific significance of the partnership for Estonia and the ongoing Presidency of the Council of the EU was also highlighted. Throughout the panel the idea of “more for more” as the leading principle behind the EU’s commitment to cooperate with Eastern Partners has been discussed, along with the priorities with respect to each specific country. In this respect, specific attention has been devoted to the nature of the EU action with non-democratic governments with the objective to maximize the support to emerging civil society without undermining the relations with the local governments. The future developments of the EaP, within the framework of the recent review of the Neighbourhood policy, was also discussed. In this specific context, the EU is offering to refocus relations with its neighbours in order to address the political priorities regarded by both sides as the basis of the partnership. The options on the table are to be discussed with partners. The aim is also to involve Member states more intensively in the definition and implementation of policy in neighbourhood countries.

The discussions continued on a similar track, with personal experiences taking the focal point. For full programme and the description of the panels, see <http://www.ctc.ee/running/eap-conference/program>.

**Results of the Seminar**

**Main Problems NGO-s face in EaP countries**

 **Trust-building** with international partners and community representatives takes time. Most programmes do not support the continuous nature of these partnerships.

 **Implementation** of EU directives in EaP countries is still lacking and slow. The activities supporting implementation often have the obligation to involve government sector or administrative bodies. Those take costs up, but do not often guarantee results.

 **Problem-solving** often enough problems that arise are not worked on enough by the partners. Instead of a working problem-solving plan, best practices etc; the efforts die out when obstacles are faced. The guarantees and securities provided by the programs, national and EU policy do help, yet the procedure is often enough too burdensome to risk having to rely on those securities.

 **Competitiveness with big NGO-s and networks.** Smaller countries and NGO-s have less access to EU funded projects due to lower capacity and limited partnerships.

 **Burdening partners with bureaucratic obligations.**

**Offered Solutions and Policy Options**

* Activities supporting implementation for NGO-s are often most successful whilst dealing with regional (rural) communities. Best results are often when local people are mobilized towards a common gain (e.g. cleaning a river that spans many villages and communities)
* Further supporting the multi-phased projects. That means support for pilot projects with fixed or probable lead-ups for the best implementations.
* ENI is mostly focused on bilateral cooperation. Even CBC under ENIP is focused on neighbours though can be trilateral. When it comes to civil society regional activities are present, yet they could do better under the current policy and future policy should encourage regional network-building even more.
* Government- Civil Society relationship can differ from region to region. It can influence the political situation as well, thus whilst dealing with small-scale projects more emphasis should be on building up working communication between EaP administrative bodies and the civil society (and NGOs)
* Often small-scale projects with clear and well defined objectives are likely to deliver more tangible and long term results than well-funded large initiatives with little connection to the local dimension, as they run the risk to be “hijacked” by government-organized non-governmental organization (GONGOs).
* Projects that are based on differentiated sources of finances are more likely to prove sustainable in the mid- and long-term.
* Much of the success of the projects – especially when it comes to activities focussed on the local and regional dimension – is the capacity to persuade both the public and the local authorities respectively of the tangible benefits and of the political profitability of the initiatives.