

STATEMENT BY THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM (EAP CSF) STEERING COMMITTEE AND COORDINATION COUNCIL OF THE EAP CSF GEORGIAN NATIONAL PLATFORM ON THE SMEAR CAMPAIGN AGAINST EAP INDEX CIVIL SOCIETY EXPERTS IN GEORGIA

Brussels and Tbilisi, 31 January 2024 – The Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum Steering Committee and the Coordination Council of the National Platform of Georgia strongly condemn the smear campaign against the local Georgian civil society experts who contributed to the EaP CSF’s Eastern Partnership Index 2023 edition.

The Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum Steering Committee and the Coordination Council of the National Platform of Georgia jointly welcome the release of the [Eastern Partnership \(EaP\) Index 2023](#) edition on 24 January 2024 and endorse its policy recommendations. We commend the work ethics demonstrated by all civil society experts involved in the development of the EaP Index. Throughout its nine editions, the EaP Index has evolved into one of the most comprehensive analytical tools assessing the state of democratic reforms in each EaP country and their level of approximation with the European Union (EU).

Therefore, we are appalled by the defamation campaign carried out by the affiliated media of the ruling coalition member party (“People’s Power” movement)¹ against local Georgian civil society experts who contributed to the EaP Index 2023 edition. We also consider dangerous the recent statements made by individual members of the ruling party (Georgian Dream) against the civil society experts.

Attempts to discredit civil society, diminish our watchdog role, and portray activists as “enemies” of the country contradict the constitutional values of Georgia and its commitments towards European integration. A thriving enabling environment for civil society remains the backbone of any healthy democracy and country with EU accession aspirations. Building trust with civil society, encouraging academic freedom, and enabling constructive discussions on policy recommendations advanced by independent experts and activists can only contribute to a positive agenda of the government, better reforms, and ultimately a more robust democracy.

We *urge* all the perpetrators of the smear campaign against EaP Index civil society experts to cease their defamatory actions against civil society, in general, and EaP Index experts in particular.

We *call* on Georgian government to consider the assessments and policy recommendations provided by civil society regarding Georgia’ approximation with the Europe Union in their work and further engage in an open and constructive dialogue.

We *urge* European institutions to closely monitor Georgia’s implementation of reforms and commitments towards European integration, ensuring the participation and contribution of civil society in its diversity to consultations, discussions, and dialogues pertinent to Georgia’s European future.

We *call* on civil society and international organisations to stand in solidarity with all activists subjected to smear campaigns, such as the one directed against local Georgian EaP Index experts and publicly denounce such behaviours when they occur.

¹ The parliamentary group called “People’s Power” was the initiator of the draft law on “transparency of foreign influence” which sparked large street protests in Georgia in March 2023 and, ultimately, to the formal withdrawal of the bill.

“We, the independent Georgian civil society, have proved over and over again our unwavering commitment for a democratic and European Georgia. Resorting to intimidation, hate speech, and slander to marginalise and diminish the impact of our work towards democratisation, including the important monitoring work done by our EaP Index experts, contradicts our country’s aspirations for becoming a full-fledged member of the EU. This is why, we call on our government to embrace open dialogue with civil society and respect our diverse perspectives.” - Natia Kuprashvili, EaP CSF National Facilitator, Georgia

***Members of the Steering Committee of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum and
Members of the Coordination Council of the EaP CSF Georgian National Platform***