

CRISP, 2023

Strategic Plan for Work in the Eastern Partnership Region



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1 Preamble

Since 2007, CRISP has been actively involved in transforming conflict-torn societies into spaces where people can thrive and fulfil their potential. We have been inspiring and have inspired by the citizens who, despite challenging or even unbearable living and working conditions, distrust, corruption, and oppression, have chosen to make a positive impact within their communities and beyond. These individuals, usually referred to as civil society, have the potential to break long-standing structural violence and challenge cultural norms that justify force and crime.

Guided by a commitment to promote democratic values, we have been working towards developing robust and equitable societies right from the beginning of our involvement in the region in 2008. The Strategic Plan 2023–2028 is built on this foundation, with a focus on innovative approaches to strengthen democracy, foster inclusivity, and enhance resilience.

As a learning organization with a differentiated approach to each region, we aim to support civil societies in the Eastern Partnership countries with attention, advice, and above all, cooperation at eye-level.

Mission and Vision: We develop and implement projects and trainings, promoting non-violent conflict transformation. We use the potential and dynamics of conflicts to create constructive solutions from which the involved parties can actually benefit. Human rights, good governance, gender equality, social inclusion (of vulnerable groups in particular) and environmental sustainability are the backbone of strong states and resilient societies. They constitute the cross-cutting principles of our work.

2 Plan of Action and Execution

CRISP's overarching goal in the Eastern Partnership is to actively contribute to the democratization process in the EaP countries, while strengthening the role of civil society in driving positive change.

We see the EU as a prominent actor and partner in the democratization process in EaP and therefore define the overall and specific goals of our Strategic Plan 2023–2028 as following:

2.1 Overall objective:

To support alignment of EaP countries with EU values on the way of sustainable progress and development.

2.2 Specific objectives:

SO1. Strengthen convergence between the Eastern Partnership and the European Union, mutual understanding, and cooperation.

SO2. Empower civil society actors, especially on the grassroots level, to lead and sustain positive change within their communities.

SO3. Foster recovery and resilience-building in conflict-affected societies and vulnerable communities.

2.3 2.3 Guiding principles:

Our work in the Eastern Partnership region is counseled by the following guiding principles:

- Nothing about them without them: All interventions are implemented based on a needs assessment and in close cooperation with local partners.
- Owning the outcomes and responsibility: As activities lead to reaching the set goals yet they may also bring about undesired effects. We are conscious and responsible for both, and act according to the do-no-harm and conflict sensitivity principles.
- Strong partnerships for development: All projects have an end, but good partnerships last and make an impact, especially in decolonizing knowledge transfer. We learn from our partners as they learn from us.
- Sustainable approach: This approach involves designing projects with a focus on ownership transfer, empowering partners and participants to take charge of the desired changes after the funding period. We maintain strong connections on the ground, collaborating as equals, and providing ongoing support whenever needed, especially in times of crises.
- Intersectionality: We recognize the influence of gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and other overlapping aspects on peacebuilding and democratization efforts. Therefore, we design tailored solutions to address diverse challenges faced by individuals and communities in EaP region, as well as advocate for policies that are sensitive to these complexities.
- Condemning the Russian aggression and supporting democratic forces: Even in the face of Russia's aggression and destructive politics in the region, Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova continue to uphold their democratic and progressive values, and much of this resilience can be attributed to the strength of the civil society. We admire these people and will continue supporting them on the ground, as well as strengthen their voice in the European Union.

2.2 Working packages

Aligned with SDGs of the United Nations and European Commission's Political Guidelines 2019-2024 and based on the lessons drawn from our experience in Eastern Partnership and other regions, we adhere to the following working packages for years 2023-2028 and beyond.

Referring to SO1

1. Contributing to EU accession

Inspired by the EU's incentive-based approach, our action focuses on Armenia, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, since these countries have shown the biggest progress in fulfilling the requirements for EU accession. Our actions are planned taking into consideration the frameworks – association agreements with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine and the comprehensive and enhanced partnership agreement with Armenia. Additionally, EU Roadmaps for Engagement with Civil Society set a path for civil society cooperation. We pay

a special focus to communication of a common European narrative, based on shared values and benefits for citizens in the EU and the partner countries.

EU image in EaP: Country-specific visibility campaigns with respective EU hashtags and brands, communication in local languages, emphasis on the common values, embedding knowledge about EU in non-formal education, facilitating EU-models on actual topics and simulation games on EU functions and processes – these are the measures of a non-exhaustive list to facilitate the image of EU in EaP.

EaP image in EU – cultural diplomacy: A positive image of Eastern Partnership countries in the EU can contribute to regional stability and security. By showcasing EaP commitment to democratic values, the rule of law, and good governance, we can not only increase trust towards EaP, but also give incentives for EU citizens to value democracy more. To counter stereotypes about EaP countries, which are fed by misinformation campaigns coming from Russian state-funded media, we have a strategy of communication EaP in the EU. This includes digital storytelling and offline presentations of project results from EaP, study visits, conferences, exchanges and joint projects translating educational materials developed in EaP to English and German etc.

2. **Greening Eastern Partnership**

Already before the adoption of the Green Deal in the EU, our projects and initiatives have been designed in a climate-friendly way and include environmental aspects wherever possible. Continuous support for EaP civil society towards a more sustainable path, where economic and social growth goes hand in hand with taking care of the environment stays crucial to our engagement in the region. For 2023–2028, we engage further in helping EaP countries tackle climate change and build a better, greener future via a bottom-up approach. This approach to localizing the green agenda in EaP fosters joint efforts of EU and EaP to tackle shared environmental challenges.

3. **Implementation of Feminist Foreign Policy**

Women's empowerment and their active and eye-level participation is the core to inclusive and effective efforts in all spheres, from humanitarian aid to peacebuilding or climate protection. Therefore, we will continue integrating gender perspectives into all our activities. This means recognizing and addressing the unique challenges faced by women and girls, while also leveraging their strengths and contributions. We support local and national initiatives in our target countries in their fight against exclusion, all kinds of violence, and injustice. Through collaboration, education, and targeted initiatives, we aim to foster an environment where women can thrive and actively participate in decision-making processes, shaping the future of the EaP region.

Referring to SO2

4. **Strong and resilient civil society**

Acknowledging the potential of the civil society in democratization processes, we are determined to support active citizens in the Eastern Partnership countries in being a capable and visible actor. For this goal we offer professionalization measures, including the topics of conflict and context analysis, inclusive and responsible project management, monitoring and

impact measurement. By delivering input and accompanying our target groups during implementation of their projects, we ensure qualitative and sustainable experience of international cooperation. We aim to increase quality of CSOs work, support development of their own strategies, which add up to a holistic democratization process. Here we focus on small-scale re-granting, in which grassroots organizations lacking capacities to operate big grants can implement qualitative interventions.

5. **Education**

We believe that school and life-long education is a key to open society, capable to reach sustainable goals. With our expertise in formal and non-formal education, we will continue supporting teachers and trainers in EaP to reflect on their own role and positions, and increase their capacities in human-rights based education. We do this by collaborative development of educational material, study visits, conferences, trainings and other formats. In all interventions in educational sphere, we try to connect to the local ministries and embed the projects in the planned reforms, where these are taking place (Ukraine, Georgia). By establishing connections between educators from the EaP and EU we aim at enhancing knowledge transfer in both directions.

6. **Youth work**

Recognizing the key role of youth in driving positive transformations within their communities, in the years 2023-2028 we keep empowering young leaders with the tools and skills necessary to create lasting change. By providing educational opportunities, encouraging youth-led initiatives, providing mentorship and platforms for active engagement, we are nurturing a generation of civically engaged individuals who can lead and sustain positive impacts. It is important that the young people act not only as beneficiaries of our projects, but also perform the role of multipliers, scaling up the interventions and developing a sense of ownership and responsibility for the future of the societies they live in. Since 2014, CRISP has hosted volunteers from EaP within the European Solidarity Corps and will continue this involvement, which has proven to be highly impactful for youth participation and leadership.

Referring to SO3

7. **Coordination and professionalization of peacebuilding interventions**

In frames of our contribution to SDG 16, "Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions" we emphasize the necessity of coordinating peacebuilding interventions and doing them professionally. A lack of coordination often leads to a fragmented understanding of the conflict dynamics and either brings no result or even harm. We work with beginning and experienced peacebuilders, enhance reflection of peace practice, collaborative conflict analysis, communication with other implementing bodies and local authorities, promote lessons learnt and proven practices from other regions and always promote the necessity and responsibility for qualitative conflict-transformative interventions.

8. **Countering disinformation**

Taking into consideration the scale of disinformation campaigns targeting the EaP countries and the destructive effect they have on the societies, we increase our efforts in fostering media literacy among young people as well as non-digital natives and develop new approaches to counter disinformation. Here we focus on dealing with the modern history and

heterogeneity in the society, as well as emphasize the role of socio-cultural relations within the region. CRISP will continue working with media representatives to support conflict-sensitive journalism and decrease the spread of conflict-supportive narratives.

3 Conclusion

Our Strategic Plan for 2023–2028 is not just a roadmap for our work in the Eastern Partnership region, but also a commitment to our partners and beneficiaries. We adhere to continue our efforts in promoting democratic values, strengthening civil society, and fostering resilience in the face of regional and global anti-democratic threats.

We will continue to develop and adjust, ensuring that our interventions are qualitative, impactful, and responsive to the needs of our target groups. We will strive to uphold the identified principles in all our actions.

We are confident that, with the continued support of our partners and the unwavering commitment of the civil societies in the Eastern Partnership countries, we can contribute to a future where democracy, human rights, and social justice are not just ideals, but realities for all.

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