



## **Remarks for discussion for the conference:**

### **“How to improve the European Neighbourhood Policy? Concepts, perceptions and policy recommendations for its Eastern dimension”**

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## **Potentials and challenges for the ENP’s Eastern dimension – which added-value from recent developments?**

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With the official launch of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) on 7 May 2009 the relations between the EU and its Eastern and South-Eastern neighbours Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, implemented in the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), were at least symbolically put on a new stage. Will the EaP also substantially bring an added-value to the existing ENP framework both for the EU and the Eastern partners? While primarily aiming at giving a brief overview of the current status of the Eastern Partnership, this paper argues that the EaP can offer something new to the existing ENP by envisaging deeper integration, comprehensive institution building and multilateral cooperation that can promote mutual trust through socialisation processes. On the other hand it also points to a number of challenges the EaP is facing, some of which are recurring and have already been mentioned in the context of the ENP, while others are specific for the EaP.

By pointing to these potentials and challenges of this new EU policy initiative towards the East, it is the aim of this paper to set out possible fields of discussion for the conference.

### **Potentials**

First, although the Eastern Partnership will not have any new institutional setting (unlike the Union for the Mediterranean with its own Secretariat) and thus be integrated in the existing ENP structures especially the four multilateral thematic platforms<sup>1</sup> on

- Democracy, good governance and stability,

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<sup>1</sup> The first round of meetings took place in June 2009, the second round takes place in October/November 2009.

- Economic integration and convergence with EU policies,
- Energy security, and
- Contacts between people,

which are supported by more issue-specific panels<sup>2</sup> but also the annual foreign ministers meetings<sup>3</sup>, the newly established EURONEST Parliamentary Assembly of the European Parliament<sup>4</sup>, an "Eastern Europe and South Caucasus Local and Regional Assembly"<sup>5</sup> and a Civil Society Forum<sup>6</sup> offer the potential for long-term socialisation and informal political dialogue which can promote mutual trust and joint ownership between the different stakeholders involved.

Second, the prospect to negotiating new association agreements can further the rapprochement of the partner countries to EU standards and facilitate the latter's gradual involvement in EU structures and policies. These opportunities are mainly interesting for Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, though.

Third, the new involvement of Belarusian actors can contribute to the strengthening of the democratic forces there.

Fourth, the EaP's flagship initiatives offer the possibility to enhanced cooperation in fields of common interest such as energy security but also border management, SME development, disaster management and environmental issues.

Fifth, the Comprehensive Institution Building Programmes (CIBs) can improve the partner countries' implementation capacities and fight corruption.

Sixth, with the announcement of additional financial support of 335 million € until 2013 the Commission seeks to guarantee the implementation of the EaP's goals, especially with regard to the CIBs and regional development.

Finally, the –already rapid implementation of the EaP (e.g. with the approval of the East-Invest and cultural programmes) in comparison to the Union for the Mediterranean demonstrates a functional and pragmatic approach which focuses on concrete project-based ideas and thus avoids disputes over strategic open questions.

On the other hand there are still many open questions and challenges with regard to the EaP which may hinder the achievement of its goals, especially with regard to stability in the neighbourhood.

## **Challenges**

First, the EaP may lead to duplication with existing structures and strategies such as the Black Sea Strategy or the Danube Cooperation Initiative which have similar objectives.

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<sup>2</sup> The first panel on Integrated Border Management took place on 15 October in Odessa.

<sup>3</sup> The first meeting will take place on 8 December in Stockholm.

<sup>4</sup> The EURONEST Parliamentary Assembly had its constitutive meeting on 30 September 2009.

<sup>5</sup> The Committee of the Regions was invited by the European Commission to establish such an assembly and held a first Forum on local and regional dimension of the Eastern Partnership on 16 June 2009.

<sup>6</sup> The first meeting will take place in Brussels on 16/17 November.

The proclaimed complementarity between the EaP and these latter is too vague. In the long run, this could also prove true for the relationship between the EaP and the UfM on the one side and the ENP on the other side, of which some researchers say that it has been made redundant.

Second, the EU still has no clear approach on how to deal with the frozen conflicts in which some of the partner countries are involved. It remains hesitant, ambiguous and passive and concentrates on post-conflict engagement rather than conflict prevention and resolution. It remains unclear with the EaP as before, exactly what kind of role the EU wants to play in its foreign policy towards the neighbours.

Third, it remains vague how the EU will complement differentiation with regional development considering the heterogeneity of the countries involved and in view of e.g. almost inexistent regional trade between the six partners.

Fourth, the EU has avoided defining how Belarus should be involved in the EaP. In this regard the involvement of domestic civil society, not only in Belarus but also in the Caucasian countries remains an open question.

Fifth, the unanswered question of the involvement of and relationship with third parties such as Turkey and especially Russia can contradict some of the EU's goals since these have an influential role in the respective regions.

Sixth, it remains to be seen if the announced incentives of gradual integration into the EU economy, long-term easier travel to the EU, energy security cooperation and regional development will be attractive enough for the partner countries to further their reform efforts.

Seventh, the announced financial support might not be sufficient and an effective implementation of the EaP could be further threatened by the current economic and financial crisis and thus budgetary constraints in the EU member states that keep them from allocating additional funding.

Eighth, corruption, bad governance and authoritarian political structures in some of the partner countries hinder the implementation of the EaP and pose a problem to the EU's value-based approach. Furthermore, the EU lacks effective monitoring mechanisms with regard to the allocation of its funds.

Finally and most importantly, the unclarified strategic approach and objectives of the EaP and thus ambiguous signals of the EU and its member states especially with regard to the accession perspective could threaten the effectiveness and success of the EaP in the long run.

## **Conclusion**

By offering deeper integration and a pragmatic approach, in a positive scenario the EaP can act as a driving force for reform and Europeanisation processes in the partner countries which is in the interest of the EU. With the backing of Sweden and Poland, one older and one

newer member state, the EaP has influential supporters for its implementation. On the other hand - alike the ENP - by once again avoiding to give clear messages to the partner countries with regard to the accession perspective or the EU's engagement in frozen conflicts, the EaP initiative can lead to frustration, confusion and discouragement in the partner countries which can impede reforms. In order to address the complementarity challenge, the synergies between the different strategies should be used and a clear responsibility and strong co-ordination mechanism in the European Commission should be installed<sup>7</sup>. Through the EaP, the EU has clearly re-emphasised its interest in the stability of the region. Still, the EU has to clarify its approach towards Russia and concerning Russian involvement in the EaP. With regard to the answering of the open questions and challenges, a lot will depend on the political will of the actors involved, including the upcoming EU Presidencies (Spain, Belgium, Hungary, Denmark and Poland) and a likely new EU President and High Representative, and on the prioritisation of the EaP on their political agendas. Finally, the fact that there are different answers among the EU member states and the partner countries to the question of the added-value of the EaP is a challenge in itself.

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<sup>7</sup> The Polish Foreign Minister even proposed to include the EaP into the portfolio of one Commissioner then responsible "for ENP, enlargement policy and EaP".