



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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Some remarks on the Eastern Partnership related to the themes of the conference panels

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Launching Eastern Partnership – strengths and weaknesses

The Eastern Partnership (EaP) is sometimes viewed as an EU response to the 2008 August Georgian-Russian war. However, the origin of the EaP dates back to the time before 2004. Already at the beginning of this decade, with a view to the eastward EU enlargement it became a necessity for the EU to reconsider its relationship with its future new neighbours. Even Central and East European EU candidates began to think over the issue, and the Polish ‘non-paper’ on the Eastern Dimension in 2003 can be considered as a very first trial to move ahead with the problem. Eventually, from 2003 to 2004 the new neighbours were integrated into one policy together with the old (southern) neighbours of the EU. Since then this decision was heavily criticized from within and outside of the EU by politicians and analysts of ex-candidate countries (subsequent new EU members) like Poland or Hungary. There were sound reasons for this criticism. Most of the new post-Soviet neighbours are to a great extent different from old southern neighbours, not only from a historical and geographical point of view but also in regard to their EU aspirations.

The 2008 EU decision to give two separate frameworks to the southern and eastern dimensions must be definitely approved. However, even with this decision things have not become easy: on the one hand, the new group of six countries is a very heterogeneous one incorporating voluntary EU candidates and countries that are in dire need of EU technical and financial support, and on the other hand, there are countries in this group with strong ties with and orientation towards Russia, and states that can (and want to) be independent of any significant international support. To make things even more complicated, there are serious

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political confrontations within the group of six countries which make the multilateral approach of the EaP rather challenging.

EaP has a twofold mission. First, it is aimed at getting eastern neighbours closer to the EU in economic, political, legal and cultural terms, including common 'European values'. Second, it is a European development policy to support transformation processes within the targeted region. The key word 'approximation' links the two major goals together.

The EaP is not only a framework or an abstract idea but a concrete form of financial support, including the concepts of 'ownership' and 'conditionality' as key guiding principles that have been borrowed from international aid policy theory and practice. However, due to the different aspirations towards the EU, following these principles in different partner countries may result in divergent efficiency. Though the Prague Declaration is about 'shared ownership', meaning joint EU – partner country formulation of a development path, and it is talking about 'differentiation and conditionality', one should note that in international aid practice these two principles (ownership and conditionality) may be inconsistent with each other.¹ In some partner countries these principles may work while they may turn to be rather inefficient in other ones. For example, conditionality may work well in those partner countries that show a strong commitment to the EU integration process like Ukraine, while it may fail for example in Azerbaijan which has formulated not only its own idea of a development path but also possesses the necessary financial sources.

Changing the perspective: the ENP from the Eastern partner countries' view

In general terms, the launch of the EaP is valued positively in all partner countries as it focuses on the problems of the region separating them from the dilemmas of the southern neighbours. This is especially good news for Belarus, a country that has not really benefited from the ENP. The EaP also provides more financial support than the original ENP framework although many experts think that the support is still insufficient.

However, two major problems regarding ENP and EaP should be mentioned. First, ENP itself, not speaking about the new initiative of the EaP, is hardly known in the targeted societies. The EU should make all efforts to make its program known among citizens (even on the EU as a whole there is only little knowledge and some misleading information persists, too). Second, those few who know about these endeavours are mostly disappointed about its content since EaP does not offer any solution to their two major dreams with regard

¹ According to experts on international aid „there is no doubt that conditionality works against national ownership” (A. Tujan – W. DE Ceukelaire: *Conditionality and ownership as seen from the South: More strings attached?*, <http://ibon.be/index2.php?option...>) Though EaP partner countries are definitely more developed and different from the countries of the South that international aid typically targets at, the argument is worth considering in their cases as well.

to the EU: 1. visa-free movement of people in the foreseeable future; 2. membership perspective.² The EaP foresees full visa liberalisation only in the long-term and avoids answering the question on possible future membership.

Two aspects for further consideration

1. Unfortunately the launch of the EaP coincides with the world economic crisis. Though its mission is not helping countries in trouble, due to the crisis it is apparently unavoidable to link EaP and financial support from the EU in order to overcome the current crisis in partner countries. The EU should make it clear that the goal of the new initiative is not to provide crisis-management sources but at the same time it should be helpful through other channels in a *visible way*. Otherwise those citizens of partner countries who are hit hard by the crisis may feel that in the case of emergency the EU can merely offer words and no real action.

2. The Prague Declaration emphasises that EaP “should further promote stability and multilateral confidence building” while not naming a most challenging question: the Russia issue. (It only states that “third states will be eligible for the participation on a case-by-case basis in concrete projects”. Furthermore, it envisages interaction with other regional initiatives like Black Sea Synergy also on a case-by-case basis.) Special economic and political relations of partner countries with Russia, whether they are friendly or hostile, cannot be neglected when formulating a policy towards the European post-Soviet region.³ Though this issue will probably – and understandably – not be raised by partner countries, a broader approach to the whole European post-Soviet space may be beneficial for them by contributing to the solution of many serious problems. Europe should address and overcome the ‘either or’ approach which means that EaP partner countries *either* belong to the sphere of influence of Russia *or* get as close as possible to the EU, and should replace it with a more co-operative policy stance. First signs of this kind of thinking can already be seen within leading European expert groups.⁴ More concretely, Russia cannot be neglected in the activities of several flagship initiatives like the one linked to energy security and infrastructure due to the strong presence of Russian companies in the partner countries’ energy sectors.

Finally, after several critical remarks one very positive recent step on part of the EU should be mentioned. While formulating the fourth package of progress reports on ENP partner countries, which will cover implementation in 2009 and which will be adopted in spring 2010 with the aim “to ensure maximum of transparency and objectivity” the European Commission

² The latter is evidently a problematic issue for Ukraine and some other partner countries, while it does not create disappointment for example in Azerbaijan or Armenia.

³ On the other side, rapprochement between the EU and Russia is not imaginable without significant steps towards solving the problematic issue of ‘common neighbourhood’.

⁴ See *Synergies vs. Spheres of Influence in the Pan-European Space* (2009) by Michael Emerson at CEPS.

invited all “interested parties, including non-governmental organisations and other interested organisations active in the fields covered by the ENP Action Plans to provide any information, reports or assessments”. This is a very valuable initiative that leads us towards a deeper understanding of how citizens and organisations involved in partner countries feel about EU programs and their implementation.