

## An Urgent Challenge for Today's Europe: The Eastern Partnership

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The Eastern Partnership (EaP) is the European Union's newest program for building relations with six countries from Eastern Europe – namely, Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine on the EU's border, and Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia in the Southern Caucasus. The EaP, a Polish–Swedish initiative, was officially launched in May 2009. Earlier (in 2004) there was the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), which embraced both Eastern Europe and the Southern Mediterranean.<sup>1</sup> Preceding the ENP were the New Neighbourhood and Wider Europe initiatives (2002–2003), which were originally conceived for Ukraine, Moldova, and Belarus. To one degree or another, all of these endeavours were a response to the »big bang« enlargement of 2004/2007, when the EU took in 12 new members, almost all of them from Central Europe. Back in the 1990s the EU pursued a rather undifferentiated policy vis-à-vis the post-Soviet countries.

There is a clear need for an appraisal of the EaP's role in relations between the EU and the six partner countries. However, since the EaP is a very new policy – it has been in place for only two years – this will be a difficult assessment. Nonetheless, the first fruits of the EaP may be gathered and evaluated and certain phenomena and tendencies can already be observed, including the approach of the many parties to their mutual relations. Moreover, the basic challenges the EaP faces have already become visible. We may therefore propose solutions to ensure that this new EU policy for the six Eastern European neighbors will lead to positive results.

The EaP must be viewed in the broader context of the EU's relations with other neighbors, global issues, and the EU's internal situation, which of course directly affects policy toward Eastern Europe. The question,

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1. The ENP embraced the following countries: Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Egypt, Georgia, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Moldova, the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Syria, Tunisia, and Ukraine.

whether the EaP will foster transformation in the six partner countries, remains unanswered. However, this question is all the more urgent as there is a yawning gap between the successful transformations of the Central European countries, the three Baltic states (which have all become liberal democracies) and the countries of Eastern Europe, where, even in the best case, democracy has yet to be consolidated.

## **The EU and the Six Partner Countries: The EaP as the Cornerstone**

There are a wide range of opinions, viewpoints, and expectations among the EU member countries with regard to the Eastern European countries embraced by the EaP.<sup>2</sup> This diversity stems from three issues of fundamental importance. The first is the matter of possible EU membership for the EaP countries, a subject which some EU member countries support, but which remains unacceptable for others. The second issue is that of Russia's place in relations with the countries of Eastern Europe. The third concerns the dispute over the extent of the EU's engagement to the east and to the south of its borders: that is, with both Eastern Europe and the Southern Mediterranean.

The divergences between EU member countries impact the position of EU institutions regarding relations with the EaP countries. This of course concerns the Council, made up as it is of representatives of the member countries. The differing opinions regarding the three issues outlined above also influence the position of the European Parliament and the European Commission. In attempting to characterize the distinctions between these EU institutions one may state that the Council is the most conservative in its views on Eastern Europe and the Parliament is the most progressive. The Commission is situated somewhere inbetween.

The past decade has clearly shown that the EaP countries' importance for the EU has grown since the 1990s. However, Eastern Europe is still not among the EU's top priorities.

Two events in particular contributed to the EU's changing approach to Eastern Europe over the past 10 years. The first is that of the »color revolutions«: Georgia's Rose Revolution in 2003, and Ukraine's Orange

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2. For a fuller account of the positions of the EU member countries and various EU institutions see the report published in this issue by Rosa Balfour.

Revolution in 2004. Their outcome impacted other Eastern European states. This became especially apparent in the case of the Southern Caucasus, which was not originally going to be embraced by the ENP. However, after the events in Georgia, there could be no question of excluding it. With Georgia's inclusion in the ENP, the EU could not disregard Georgia's two neighbors Armenia and Azerbaijan. Together, these three form the Southern Caucasus region.

The change in attitude towards the EU's eastern neighbors also brought about the eastward enlargement of the EU in 2004 (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania – and Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary) and again in 2007 (Bulgaria and Romania). Following these two rounds of enlargement, interest in the eastern neighborhood rose markedly in the EU as a whole. The EU27 views Eastern Europe differently than did the EU15. We may say that the eastward expansion intensified the effect of the Color Revolutions in the EU15, as well. Indeed, across the entire expanded EU the conviction arose that »they« (the eastern neighbors) may be just like »us« (the EU member countries). Liberal democracy can also exist in those countries inasmuch as their societies have subjecthood and electoral democracy has taken root. This conviction in part grew out of the experiences of the Central European countries, as they have all successfully passed from authoritarian regimes to democracy.

The conviction was becoming stronger and stronger that the EU should pursue one policy toward the six countries later embraced within the EaP, and another vis-à-vis Russia. This was first and foremost because Russia itself wished to be treated as an equal partner by the EU, and not as a participant in an EU policy addressed to a larger group of states. For this reason Russia rejected the offer to take part in the ENP in 2003. This was coupled with the absence of any illusions that Russia would opt for a path of rapid democratic reform. The latest manifestation of that approach is the Partnership for Modernization (PfM), initiated jointly by the EU and Russia in 2010, in which questions concerning democracy only play a secondary role.

At the same time, the distinction between Eastern Europe and the Southern Mediterranean countries within the framework of the ENP was coming into relief. It should be recalled that this distinction had been discerned in the EU before the creation of the EaP, as reflected in the proposal »ENP plus,« which Berlin tabled as a German initiative before the German presidency of the EU in 2007. From a political point of view, however, the Polish–Swedish proposal for the EaP became acceptable

for the EU as a whole only after 2008, when France advanced its »Union for the Mediterranean« initiative. Thus, two policies were established: one for the East and one for the South, both still formally encompassed within the framework of the ENP.

Nonetheless, greater interest in the countries embraced within the EaP did not entail deciding whether the partner countries would have the opportunity to join the EU – or whether that possibility would be denied to them. But supporters within the EU of either option could accept the EaP in that it remains silent on the matter. For those EU countries supporting the possibility of EU membership (a minority) the EaP is a preparatory stage leading to membership, without mentioning that fact. For others it signifies something other than membership, or at the very least puts off the decision to confer candidate status indefinitely.

Both sides of this debate agreed to include within the EaP a package of very important proposals, one part of which had already been proposed to Ukraine and Moldova before the creation of the EaP. While the EaP was being devised these proposals developed into a coherent concept and an official package that was at least theoretically available for all six countries. The most significant of these proposals are:

- ▶ the possibility of signing an Association Agreement, an integral part of which is to include accords on a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA);
- ▶ the proposal of membership of the Energy Community created in 2006 for the western Balkans, and whose objective has been to incorporate the Balkan countries into the EU electricity and gas market being created.<sup>3</sup>

Last but not least...

- ▶ the suspension of visa requirements as a long-term goal.

Moreover, bringing the six partners closer to EU standards is to be promoted by the Comprehensive Institution Building program (CIB), which prepares the partner countries for the obligations that will result from the Association Agreement.

In accord with EU documents, the necessary condition for making these proposals a reality is the partner countries' democratization. One example

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3. It is worth stressing that, in matters of energy, the EaP proposes solutions not only concerning energy security, but also energy efficiency, something which has colossal importance for the incredibly energy-inefficient economies of the Eastern European countries.

of this may be taken from the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council from December 2008:

»a sufficient level of progress in terms of democracy, the rule of law and human rights, and in particular evidence that the electoral legislative framework and practice are in compliance with international standards, and full cooperation with the Council of Europe, OSCE/ODIHR and UN human rights bodies will be a precondition for starting negotiations and for deepening relations thereafter.«

This was repeated by the representatives of the EU and the partner countries during the first EaP summit in May 2009 in Prague:

»The participants of the Prague Summit agree that the Eastern Partnership will be based on commitments to the principles of international law and to fundamental values, including democracy, the rule of law and the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as to a market economy, sustainable development and good governance.«

It is worth emphasizing the unusual importance which the EaP attaches to relations with civil society, the most outstanding expression of which is the EaP's creation of the Civil Society Forum (CSF). Symptomatically, however, this element is found in the final place of the EaP's four thematic platforms, which are: (1) Democracy, Good Governance, and Stability; (2) Economic Integration and Convergence with EU Policies; (3) Energy Security; and (4) Contacts between People. This can give the impression that civil society is still perceived – by both the EU and the governments of the partner countries – as an afterthought compared to »serious politics.«

Besides the greater involvement of civil society, the EaP's twin-track basis is also noteworthy. On the one track, the EaP is built on bilateral relations between the EU and individual partner countries. It seems clear that this dimension is a priority for both parties. The second track encourages multilateral cooperation between the partner countries themselves, sometimes with the participation of the EU or third parties (for example, Russia). The basic venue for this type of endeavor is the four thematic platforms, which embrace the most important issues on the road to closer ties between the EU and the partner countries.

The EaP is often criticized as underfinanced, with a budget of 600 million euros up to 2013. However, it seems that no greater outlays

could have been expected from the EU budget for the EaP's first years. Here we need to recall that the EaP became a catalyst for additional assistance to be made available for all partner countries. One example of this is the EU support for Ukraine in renovating its transit gas pipelines; another is the help for Moldova amounting to 1.9 billion euros, as established at a special donors' summit.

To summarize, we may say that the EaP today constitutes an EU policy towards each of the partner countries individually, as well as toward the six as a region. Thus, the EaP is best perceived as the highest common denominator achievable within the EU in 2008, but also today. The basic measure of that common denominator is the agreement not only to deepen cooperation in the political sphere, but also to deepen integration in the economic sphere. Indeed, this was stated *expressis verbis* in the Joint Declaration at the Prague summit: »The main goal of the Eastern Partnership is to create the necessary conditions to accelerate political association and further economic integration between the European Union and interested partner countries.«

## **Things Could Be Much Better: The Situation in the EaP Countries**

The six countries of the EaP do not form a homogenous group.<sup>4</sup> Simple geography divides them into two parts: the first comprises the three countries with a direct border with the EU (Belarus, Ukraine, and Moldova), the second, the countries of the Southern Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia).

Much more important, however, is another dividing line, one stemming from the domestic situation in those countries. Here, we may distinguish two subgroups: that of the countries with autocratic governments, and the countries that are democratic to a significant degree. The first subgroup includes Azerbaijan, Belarus, and Armenia. The second includes Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia.

The past two years have seen no positive changes in the autocratic countries. We may even speak of a worsening of the situation. In Belarus, the political opposition is still shut out from official political life. The

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4. Detailed presentations of the situation in the individual EaP countries, their attitudes toward the EU, and especially toward the EaP (at both the governmental and societal levels) are found in the country reports published in this issue.

presidential elections of December 2010, in which Alexander Lukashenko<sup>5</sup> was elected for the fourth time, have made the authorities even more strident toward their political enemies. This is happening despite the EU's efforts to draw Belarus into cooperation. In Azerbaijan the political opposition plays a minimal role, and in March 2009 President Ilham Aliyev guaranteed himself lifetime rule in result of a referendum that abolished the two-term limit for the presidency. The situation in Armenia is somewhat better, with a healthier civil society than in the other two countries, but the opposition is confined to a marginal role. But in none of these three countries may we speak of free and fair elections. Moreover, NGOs and independent media outlets are subject to oppression across the board.

Troublesome events are also taking place in Georgia and Ukraine, two of the three countries earlier defined as democratic. In Georgia, despite the authorities' assurances of a »new wave of democracy« declared in 2008 under pressure from the West, there has been no visible improvement of the situation. The opposition is confined to a marginal role, and the majority of electronic media outlets are controlled by the government. Added to this are the projected amendments to the constitution that would strengthen the position of the prime minister and government at the expense of the president's prerogatives. In itself, a change to the political system from a presidential/parliamentary to a parliamentary/presidential one is of course acceptable, but much seems to indicate that the change is being carried out with regard to the conclusion in 2013 of President Mikheil Saakashvili's second term. What this means is that the objective is not to improve the political system, but to ensure that power remains in the president's hands (as Saakashvili will probably become prime minister). In Ukraine, which may boast the best electoral democracy among the EaP countries, the activities of the new president and government since 2010 are prompting more and more reservations, as power is being concentrated in the hands of the president – for instance, via the decision of the Constitutional Court to annul the constitutional reform of 2004, which introduced a parliamentary/presidential system, thereby restoring the presidential/parliamentary system. In the opinion of many observers – both Ukrainian and foreign – the new authorities are restricting the freedom of the press.

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5. The constitutional referendum conducted in 2004 allows Lukashenko to campaign in presidential elections an unlimited number of times. Lukashenko has ruled Belarus since 1994.

Currently, in all five countries the authorities are focused on keeping power for themselves and rely on methods that are in stark variance with democratic standards. Such behavior is of course to be expected in the authoritarian countries (Azerbaijan, Belarus, and Armenia), but it is also apparent in two of the democratic countries, Ukraine and Georgia.

The country that stands out is Moldova, where democratic transformation was ushered in with the parliamentary elections held in the summer of 2009. However, with regard to the inability of the parliament to choose a president (because of the lack of the necessary majority), the work of the new government sometimes seems to be skirting the law. The new parliamentary elections of November 28, 2010 confirmed the pro-European coalition; in December, Marian Lupu was elected President of Moldova.

Concerning those in power in the six countries, the next issue distinguishing them is the matter of EU membership. The current government of Moldova unequivocally favors membership, which is reflected in the very name of the governing coalition: the Alliance for European Integration. Ukraine and Georgia continue to declare their wish to join the EU, but they are not making concerted efforts to that end. Azerbaijan and Belarus do not talk of joining the EU. In Armenia, there is no consensus regarding EU membership.

Nonetheless, an active part of the societies of the six partner countries evinces a pro-European attitude. This explains the relatively significant response on the part of civil society to the opportunity to participate in the EaP's CSF. NGOs see in the EU an important helper in their efforts on behalf of democratization in their countries. They perceive drawing nearer to the EU as a chance to carry out positive changes, although at the same time they fear that the EU will develop relations with their countries regardless of the bad political situation. This is why one part of them is critical of the EU for not applying enough pressure with regard to democratization. This standpoint is very clear in the cases of Azerbaijan and Armenia, too. NGOs are expecting openness on the part of the EU, especially with regard to visa policy, which is the most important issue for ordinary people in the partner countries. From their point of view the visa requirement should be lifted as soon as possible – although one may also note (for instance, in Armenia) a fear of greater emigration once visa requirements are lifted.

The absence of public debate on the EaP is plain in the partner countries. Such a situation is not surprising as discussion on and knowledge



about the EU is marginal to begin with. The appraisal of the EaP in opinion-making circles, in turn, is quite ambivalent. This largely results from the perception of the EU's many undertakings vis-à-vis the partner countries. It is easy to find wide-ranging views and opinions in each of the six countries. Hence, generalization is difficult. Nonetheless, we may say that, especially in pro-European milieus, the EaP is perceived as an insufficient proposal, albeit one that contains a change of rhetoric that is important from the perspective of the partner countries in that they are defined as »partners« and not just as neighbors, as was the case with the ENP. There is also major symbolic meaning in the opportunity to conclude Association Agreements.

We may therefore say that – with the exception of Moldova – the rest of those in power in the partner countries exhibit only a minor preparedness for genuine cooperation with the EU in the realm of democratization and the reforms necessary for establishing the rule of law. Those in power in Azerbaijan and Belarus have unequivocally rejected the EU's efforts in this area, seeing them as a threat to their existence and an inadmissible interference in internal affairs. Others (for instance, Armenia) are ready to talk with the EU about democratization and the rule of law, although in fact they do not wish to alter the present situation.

To one degree or another, all six are interested in economic cooperation (even though it is often grasped selectively) in areas where there are immediate effects. All are interested in the participation of the EU in modernizing their countries, but this is typically understood as technological modernization and EU financial assistance – for example, in infrastructural investments and so on – and not as reforms leading to liberal democracy.

## **The State of the Partnership**

In attempting to present a balance sheet on the EaP only two years after its introduction it must be clearly understood that, on the majority of issues, any successes we may list concern processes that are still under way and so we simply cannot say how they will turn out.

The largest number of positive developments may be seen in Moldova. On January 12, 2010, Brussels and Chisinau commenced negotiations on an Association Agreement. This was followed on March 17, 2010 by Moldova's accession to the Energy Community, while on June 15 talks began on visa-free travel.

On April 22, 2010 the EU launched a high level advisory group composed of nine advisors who assist the Moldovan authorities in developing and implementing sectoral policies that meet EU standards and practices. The EU's advisers will help the Moldovan authorities in negotiating the Association Agreement, implementing the governmental Plan for Economic Stabilization and Development, reforming public administration, drafting strategic policies, and offering advice in the areas of human rights, democratization, and good governance. On May 13, 2010, the European Commission and the Moldovan government signed a Comprehensive Institution Building Program for Moldova with funding in the amount of 41 million euros. This will assist the Moldovan government in preparing national institutions for the implementation of the Association Agreement. The Comprehensive Institution Building Program is planned to start in June 2011.

The acceleration of efforts in Moldova demonstrates the key role played by active involvement on the part of the partner country.

In the case of the other participants in the EaP we should mention the commencement of negotiations on Association Agreements with the countries of the Southern Caucasus (July 2010), the signing with Georgia of an agreement on facilitating visas (June 17, 2010), and Ukraine's joining the Energy Community in September 2010.

The Civil Society Forum (CSF) enjoyed relatively substantial success in the first year of its existence. The involvement of NGOs from the partner countries was striking. The Steering Committee (selected with a one-year mandate at the first meeting of the CSF in Brussels in November 2009) functioned smoothly. Moreover, the thematic groups have been working on the four thematic platforms.

Nonetheless, the first two years of the EaP's existence have revealed a large number of problems on both sides. One example is the lack of progress in negotiations on the DCFTA with Ukraine. The new Ukrainian authorities are taking a hard line, although they themselves deem it »pragmatic.« On the EU side, there is still no consensus regarding road maps leading to visa-free travel for Ukraine and Moldova. Also worrying is the sidelining by both sides of democratization issues. One important example is the priorities of the first thematic platform confirmed by the six partner countries and the European Commission for 2009–11.

## Seven Challenges

With regard to the situation that presents itself in the EU and the six partner countries, along with the first fruits of the EaP, we may come to the conclusion that the Eastern Partnership faces at least seven fundamental challenges.

### The First Challenge: Advancing Democracy

The most important issue is democratization. Without laying the foundations for democracy (especially in Azerbaijan, Belarus, and Armenia) or strengthening them (Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia) even partial integration with the EU will be impossible. Indeed, the EaP's basic documents give democratization fundamental significance. This poses an enormous problem for the governing elites in the partner countries, which are often reluctant or even hostile with regard to democratization. None of the partner countries as yet have a functional tripartite division of powers that includes, for instance, judicial independence.

The problems with democracy exist not only at the central level, but also at the local level. The self-government of local communities (decentralization) is a requirement – also for the development of civil society. But this challenge is very difficult for at least two reasons: first, the continuing legacy of the former system, from Soviet times; and second, fears of separatist tendencies: for most of the partner countries this is a real threat. At the same time, it provides a convenient excuse for not permitting greater local government.

### The Second Challenge: Buttressing Civil Society

Closer cooperation and partial integration of the partner countries with the EU may come about only through the involvement of society in those countries. Not only must governments integrate with the EU, but also their populations. Relations with society cannot be treated as an afterthought. This is why finding a proper place in the EaP has enormous significance for representatives of civil society in the Eastern European countries. And this will be all the more difficult due to the reluctance of most of the partner countries to allow civil society to get involved in relations with the EU. Nor may we overlook the weaknesses of civil society in the EaP countries: it is often fragmented, sometimes dependent on

the authorities (GONGOS<sup>6</sup> instead of NGOs), or interested above all in obtaining funds for particular endeavours rather than doing anything concrete.

### The Third Challenge: Setting Conditions

The EU realizes that democratization is crucial, and at the same time that inordinate pressure in that direction can prove counterproductive and discourage at least some of the partner countries from close cooperation with the EU. This is a classic »catch 22«: while, on the one hand, democratization is necessary for integration, on the other hand, too strong an emphasis on democratization can obstruct integration.

The EU is therefore faced with the need to solve the serious political dilemma of whether to proceed with the further integration of the partner countries in the absence of democratization, or to back away from integration. Nor is it clear whether the EU will be able to apply the principle of conditionality (which bore positive results in the case of the candidate countries) inasmuch as the partner countries are not being offered the incentive of membership.

### The Fourth Challenge: Maintaining Credibility

There is a real danger that the EaP will degenerate into a program of smoke and mirrors based on carrying out projects that will not change anything in the partner countries, but will nonetheless be hailed as successful. The EU also faces dangers which might arise from postponing decisions, especially in the matter of visa-free travel.

Many politicians, both in EU institutions and in member states, hold that – in the situation presently reigning in the partner countries – nothing can be done. Such an attitude has become possible especially because of the growing disillusionment in many member states and EU institutions over the outcome of the color revolutions in Ukraine and Georgia. The disillusionment is visible even in those countries and milieux which hitherto have strongly supported the European aspirations of their Eastern neighbors, particularly Ukraine.

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6. Acronym: »Governmental Non-governmental Organization« – that is, organizations that wish to be seen as independent of the authorities, but in fact are controlled or even created by them.

If the above negative scenario comes to pass, the credibility of the EU would suffer greatly. After all, the EaP is a link in a chain of other difficult EU obligations in its relations with the external world, including the integration of the western Balkan countries and accession negotiations with Turkey. The lack of real progress in integrating the countries of the EaP as a consequence of the EU's shortcomings would result in a serious deterioration in credibility vis-à-vis external partners in the international arena and indeed within the Union, as well. The European Union would be made to look incapable of achieving its aims.

### The Fifth Challenge: Ensuring Follow-through on Commitments

One serious problem is the preparedness of the partner countries to take advantage of the EU offer contained in the EaP. This largely depends on the current political situation and that is why it may undergo serious changes in the future. Nonetheless, it is difficult to imagine any country but Moldova exhibiting such preparedness any time soon. Of course, in many countries – for example, Ukraine – the representatives of the authorities are quite willing to rapidly reform their economies. However, this is seldom coupled with a willingness to reform the state and build democratic institutions.

The partner countries continue to find it difficult to implement their accepted obligations. Signing a document is treated as a crowning success and the end of the matter. Implementation proceeds with enormous difficulty because of the weakness of the rule of law and effective state administration.

It must be remembered, however, that the EaP countries face a serious challenge with regard to the real costs of adapting themselves to European standards, especially as regards future implementation of the Association Agreements, including the DCFTA. After all, these costs are rising year by year, as the EU becomes ever more sophisticated.

Thus, lack of popular faith in the ability of the partner countries to carry through reforms is extremely dangerous. This fear is present even among people with pro-European attitudes.

### The Sixth Challenge: Preventing the EaP from Shrinking into a PfM

This challenge concerns the relationship between the EaP and the Partnership for Modernization (PfM) addressed to Russia. The two programs

have a basic difference. Within the EaP, modernization is conceived as applying to both the state and the economy, and democratization is essential in both spheres. However, within the PfM modernization means above all the transfer of technologies and know-how from the EU to Russia without the need for democratization.

The danger exists that the EaP will devolve in the direction of the PfM. And we may be quite sure that some of those in power in the partner countries (for example, presidents Aliyev and Lukashenko) would be pleased with that turn of events.

For some of those in power in the partner countries the differences between the EaP and the PfM can be seen as proof that the EU is applying a double standard: Russia gets what it wants from the EU without introducing any reforms at all, but the countries of the EaP have to implement painful reforms – including democratization – in order to receive anything at all.

The EaP must be perceived in the broader, global context of relations between the democratic world and modern authoritarianism. The EaP countries are still seeking a developmental model that suits them. They do not have to choose the model proposed by the EU. It is possible, after all, for authoritarian countries to endure, and even develop and modernize, without democracy. In this context Russia may represent an attractive partner for them, at least in the short- to medium-term perspective.

## The Seventh Challenge: Settling Regional Conflicts

We cannot forget about »hard« security, one manifestation of which is frozen (to a greater or lesser extent) conflicts. The EU faces the challenge of determining how to correlate EU involvement in those issues with the EaP. After all, the EU's focus on matters included within the EaP cannot entail a diminution of EU involvement in settling the conflicts in Eastern Europe. It is worth adding that settling these conflicts will be far easier in the case of the partner countries' successful modernization and growing welfare – which the EaP is meant to foster.

## What Should Be Done – Eight Proposals

The challenges we have presented lead to a very important conclusion: the EU should shoulder a heavy responsibility in that it often must be the motor in dialogue with partner countries. This situation differs from that pertaining to the Central European countries in the 1990s, as they enjoyed the prospect of EU membership and thus often carried out difficult reforms without needing much pressure from the EU.

1. There is an obvious need for the EU to establish a well-oiled machine. Such a machine should feature implementation of promised programs without delays, for example, as a result of red-tape. Such an approach on the part of the EU will be extremely important for the partners not only at the government level, but also for other relevant actors in relations with the EU (for example, business and civil society) as proof of the EU's serious commitment to the six countries. But smooth operations cannot be an end in themselves. What is also needed is political will on the part of the EU for deep involvement in relations with the EaP countries.

2. As already emphasized, the key to such relations lies in the fate of democratization in the countries of Eastern Europe. The EU must take a clear stand vis-à-vis anti-democratic actions by the authorities in the partner countries.

Thus, the message must be coherent, both at the level of EU institutions (for example, the European Commission) and among the various actors within the EU (for example, the member states). There can be no differences of appraisal or failure to speak out on obvious violations of the principles of democracy by any of the partner countries. The EU must clearly communicate to the partner countries that progress on the road to integration will be impossible without deep democratic change. Indeed, this is what civil society in all six partner countries expects.

3. The EU should support the greater involvement of civil society in the partner countries of the EaP. This will require a stronger defense of non-governmental organizations in their relations with state authorities. As the absolute minimum we should expect a refusal to accept bad legislation concerning social and non-governmental organizations. In the case of the partner countries' social organizations, including political parties, EU support in their capacity building would be extremely important. This includes the need to earmark more funds from both the EU budget and individual member states to support the non-governmental sector. Financial support is not appropriate for political parties, but closer

cooperation between political parties in the EU and their kindred parties in the partner countries is both possible and desirable.

It is also necessary to increase the funding for the permanent activities of the CSF. More money must be provided to the Steering Committee, which must have a small office – ideally in Brussels. It would also be strongly desirable to finance the work of the thematic groups which have already emerged within the CSF. Indeed, for relatively little money the EU can obtain a significant partner in support of its endeavours in the partner countries, and also in increasing interest in Eastern Europe within the EU, inasmuch as the CSF also includes NGOs from EU member countries.

The next years may well prove crucial for the CSF. Following its first, relatively successful year it is necessary to strengthen its institutions; without that, the CSF is in danger of stalling – and even faltering.

In order to take advantage of civil society potential a change of mentality is needed on both sides: not only in the partner countries, but also in the EU. Thus, the EaP must leave the offices of politicians and reach out to the active part of society in the partner countries.

4. The moment must be seized. Given the complex and fluid situation in the partner countries, time cannot be wasted, lest the window of opportunity for conducting crucial changes be shut forever. The EU must exhibit a willingness to act swiftly: what is essential here is the political will of both the member states and EU institutions, above all the European Commission.

5. Also necessary are concrete achievements in changing the relations between the EU and the countries of the EaP. One such achievement must be a change in visa policy, for this is issue number one for the societies of Eastern Europe. Indeed, it is a litmus test of the EU's good will. The possibility of traveling to the EU is the cheapest way of Europeanizing the societies of the partner countries, and of convincing them of the need to carry out internal reform – with democratization at the top of the list. The experience of the Central European countries, which carried through their transformations successfully, shows that the importance of freedom to travel was fundamental. This is why new conditions for visa-free travel should be defined as soon as possible for Ukraine and Moldova – and talks should begin on suspending visas for Georgians. In the case of the remaining countries of the EaP visa agreements should be hammered out as soon as possible. It is important to remember that visa policy is a policy vis-à-vis societies, not those in power. This is why the principle of conditionality (including progress in democratization)



can be waived. This of course does not mean that the EU would withdraw from demanding the introduction of EU standards concerning, for example, passport security and proper controls along its borders. The suspension of visas should be a medium-term goal.

6. Association agreements should be signed with Ukraine and Moldova as soon as possible. This would set a positive example for other partner countries.

A strong signal of support must also be sent to the partner countries regarding the process of implementing the obligations to be agreed upon within the Association Agreements, especially the DCFTA. The creation of the Comprehensive Institution Building program (CIB) was a very important step, albeit an insufficient one, in terms of the scale of changes to be introduced by associating the countries of Eastern Europe with the EU.

7. The future relations of the EU with Eastern Europe largely depend on the changes in the energy sector of the EaP countries. Without introducing energy efficiency it will be impossible to reform those countries' economies. One promising harbinger is that of the pilot programs supported by the EU in this realm. Nonetheless, increased EU involvement is clearly needed. We need to bear in mind, however, that these matters have a long-term character.

In the short term what is needed is the full implementation by Moldova and Ukraine of the obligations resulting from membership in the Energy Community. This will be a test of the partners' credibility with regard to whether they are truly ready to meet the EU's principles and norms. Belonging to the Energy Community will have a positive influence on the transparency of the energy sector (gas, above all) in those two countries.

8. First and foremost, in all of the endeavours directed towards the six countries of the EaP we need to be mindful of maintaining the greatest possible differentiation in their treatment. Each of the partner countries is responsible only for itself in relations with the EU. Multilateral cooperation is important, but in augmentation of bilateral relations. The EU needs to reward those who truly wish to cooperate. Thus, a healthy rivalry between the partner countries for the title of »leader« would be a good thing.

## Conclusion

No one in the EU questions that the countries embraced by the EaP should become more similar to the member countries, with regard to both their political and their economic systems. This is why the democratization of the countries of Eastern Europe is of fundamental importance. But without deeply involving the societies of those countries in that process the goal will not be achieved. This is why the EU should put a bigger premium on contacts with civil society in the partner countries and recognize those contacts as being just as important as relations with governments.

The feeling of exhaustion is becoming more and more pronounced on both sides. This often leads to needless complaints and lack of involvement. Here we must not forget that the EaP needs to exhibit successes sooner rather than later. Without real benefits it will be significantly harder (perhaps even impossible) to integrate the countries of Eastern Europe with the EU. Concrete measures must be taken in the EU's relations with each of the six partner countries. What is needed is success with at least one EaP country – and quickly, in the upcoming year or two. That kind of success would be a good example for the others. In order for that scenario to become reality serious work is needed on both sides. The EU should forgo viewing relations with Eastern Europe as merely a long-term goal and propose concrete solutions, for example, to the issue of visa-free travel, deeming it something attainable in the near future. The partner countries, in turn, must carry out genuine reforms, not just appear to do so.