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Conference Report 3/2014

Eastern Partnership Five Years On: Time for a New Strategy?

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May 2014

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The International Conference “Eastern Partnership Five Years On: Time For a New Strategy?” was held in Prague, Czech Republic, on April 25, 2014. The conference has been co-organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic.



Ministry of Foreign Affairs
of the Czech Republic

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Conference Report 3/2014

Eastern Partnership Five Years On: Time for a New Strategy?

–
May 2014

Introduction

The [conference](#) was dedicated to the fifth anniversary of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) and evaluated successes, failures and the oncoming challenges of the project. It was organized by the Association for International Affairs (AMO) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic in cooperation with the Delegation of the European Commission to the Czech Republic, the European Endowment for Democracy, the Senate of the Parliament of the Czech Republic, and the Embassy of Sweden in the Czech Republic. It was held under the auspices of the President of the Czech Republic Miloš Zeman on 25th April 2014 in the premises of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Recommendations

- The long-term perspectives of the EU membership should be given to the six EaP countries. The possibility of the enlargement should remain the powerful instrument to transform the neighbour countries.
- The advantages of the European integration should be explained to the population of the partner countries to challenge the information war coming from Russian Federation. The encouragement and support for the pro-democratic forces should be provided during the oncoming elections in Moldova to prevent the infringement to the elections by undemocratic external actors.
- The EU should assist the EaP countries to face the potential economic shocks brought by the implementation of DCFTAs. Central and Eastern European countries should share their experience from the period of their joining the European market. The transformation experience of CEE EU members should remain the example, as CEE countries have faced difficulties on the way to democracy and modern and prosperous economies.
- The clearer message should be given to Russia, that the military confrontation is not the way how to communicate with the neighbourhood with the goal to influence free choices of independent countries.
- The advantages of economic liberalisation should be repeatedly emphasized in the logic of positive sum game. The absolute gains stemming from economic liberalisation should be prioritized.



Conference Report 3/2014

Eastern Partnership Five Years On: Time for a New Strategy?

–
May 2014

- The newly appointed European Commission should come up with the new grounds for building an agenda and a legal framework of cooperation within the EaP. The legal framework should be flexible according to the needs of the EaP countries.
- The EaP civil society policy should focus on guaranteeing the functional structures of the civil society, but it should not command the civil society what to do. The strategy should not be oriented on the structures only, but it should include the intensification of direct contacts among societies and people exchange. The self-organisation of the EaP should be pursued.
- The tool how to communicate with the societies in the post-Soviet countries should be establishing of high quality Russian language TV channel. It should be the tool how to communicate with the societies in the post-Soviet countries, in order to challenge the official Russian propaganda and sustain direct contact with Russian speaking people.
- People from the EaP countries with the direct experience from living in the West should be encouraged through the EaP to spread the ideals of democracy, rule of law and fight against corruption to improve the situation in their countries.
- The participation in EaP should be offered to Russia. The EU should use the EU-Russia Summits to discuss the long-term perspectives of Europe, which the EaP should be important part of. The common vision of the EU-Russia borders should be debated without following the logic of spheres of influence.
- EaP should be presented more as beneficiary to Russia, because the stable and prosperous neighbours bring every country better future.

Achievements of the EaP

The continuation of the individual approach and the flexibility of the EaP framework derived from the heterogeneity of the partner countries were one of the repeatedly emphasized principles of the EaP throughout the conference. Minister Zaorálek and Commissioner Füle expressed the conviction that the further differentiation and the principle more for more are necessary due to the different goals of the partner countries vis-à-vis the EU and other international actors.

Mr. Füle emphasized the significant progresses in establishing multilateral tracks, sector cooperation, and the practical political outcomes as preliminary signing of the Association Agreements (AAs) and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (DCFTAs) with Georgia and Moldova and the progresses in the visa liberalization with other countries as



Conference Report 3/2014

Eastern Partnership Five Years On: Time for a New Strategy?

–
May 2014

well. Mr. Chiveri agreed and highlighted the visa free regime established in April 2014 as one of the major achievements of the EaP for Moldova. Ambassador Kop perceived the successful implementation of AAs and DCFTAs as a way to get the EaP countries to the sovereign choice to apply for the EU membership. Mr. Füle repeatedly argued the Eastern Partnership should be a prospect of the partner countries on their way towards the EU. European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in the current form presents the partnership not so different from Membership Action Plans.

Mr. Sargsyan appreciated the achievements of the EaP, also because the goals of the Prague Summit 2009 were very ambitious and many of them were actually reached. One example is the very important establishing of the horizontal ties between societies and institutions. He came up with the disagreement with the preceding statements in the matter of perspectives of the EU membership for the partner countries, as it was not intended during the launching of the project.

Mr. Shushko highlighted the renewed mutual cooperation of the partner countries as the very important aspect of the EaP. Before launching of the EaP the post-Soviet countries had very few connections apart from the mutual post-Soviet identity and they lacked common agenda. Similarly, President Margvelashvili stressed that the EaP was also European cultural choice for the post-Soviet countries.

Problems of the EaP

Minister Zaorálek evaluated the whole (ENP) being in trouble. His conviction comes firstly from the unsuccessfulness of the implementation of the transformation policies at the Southern border after the Arab Spring and secondly from the uncritical trusting to the technical procedures and approaches at the Eastern border.

Mr. Zaorálek doubted the tools used during the enlargements 2004 and 2007 could be used within the Eastern European countries. EaP according to his viewpoint lacks clear timetable, assessment of social-economic impacts and the support of society. Mrs. Arbatova added to this problem the dimension of the rootedness of the European identity in the CEE countries, which is not actually inherent to the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) area. Ultimately, the EaP imposed the “either – or” choice on the EaP countries.

Mr. Margvelashvili slightly challenged the stance of Mr. Zaorálek on applying the technical tools of the 2004 enlargement. He underlined that the implementation of the DCFTA, i.e. opening of the Georgian market, will require the assistance from the EU since it will bring shocks for the economy. Amb. Kop agreed. The implementation of the DCFTAs will bring the direct competition to the Moldovan, Georgian and Ukrainian companies for the first time



Conference Report 3/2014

Eastern Partnership Five Years On: Time for a New Strategy?

–
May 2014

ever, which will lead in failures of many of them. Mr Füle added that the unique experience of CEE countries in the transition process shows us also the instruments how to face the social impact.

Mr Füle opened the discussion concerning the energy security, which implies further diversification of the energy resources and lowering the dependency of EU member countries and the partner countries on the single resource. However, Mr. Füle signified the energy relations between the EU and Russia are mutual and Russia should not forget about it. The energy dependency has been considered during the conference as one of the major aspects of the EaP. Georgian participation in the EaP opens the EU the way to the energetically interesting region of the Caspian Sea and to prospective markets in Asia. The issue of Ukrainian gas supplies and lowering of the dependency on Russia needs further negotiations according to Mr. Duleba, because for instance Slovakian capacities and contracts are dependent on the contract with Gazprom. Mrs. Alieva commented on corrupting the society via oil revenues in Azerbaijan as other aspect of the energy business.

Mr. Lang argued despite many mentioned practical impacts the EaP did not bring any deep and comprehensive change in the partner countries, what can be evaluated as one of the big failures of the project. Mr. Sargsyan argued the EaP did not bring the security and the stability to Europe, because there are deep causes rooted in the differing interests of the partner countries. Mr. Sargsyan noticed Brussels did not address the security threats faced by Armenia, which, moreover, do not come from Russia but from Turkey.

Ukraine crisis and the EaP consequences

Mrs. Arbatova's geopolitical perspective marked the conflict in Ukraine as the first and predetermined conflict between Russia and the EU over their regional strategies, because Ukraine is the central part of the EaP and Euroasian integration as well. According to Mrs. Arbatova the EaP's internal weakness was among others not including Russia to the project and she considered it as the cause of the Ukrainian conflict. She also took the Crimea involvement as beginning of the end of the Eurasian Union, which being one of the anti-Western projects is doomed to fail as history shows.

Mr. Lang perceived the Ukrainian conflict differently, because he understood it as an encounter of postmodernity and geopolitics with the narrative of modernization, reforms and non-zero sum game on the one hand, and the zero-sum game and loosing the influence on the other hand. According to him, the soft power has its strategic dimension, which influences the Russian acts.



Conference Report 3/2014

Eastern Partnership Five Years On: Time for a New Strategy?

–
May 2014

Mr. Zaorálek stressed the necessity of being absolutely clear in the responses to the brutal breaching of international law, territorial integrity and sovereignty during the Ukraine crisis. Mr. Füle added that being it the most serious crisis since 1945, it brings new urgency to reconsidering the relations of the EU and Russia and reconsidering whole project of the EaP. It was designed also as a tool for improving the relations of the partner countries with third countries and an endeavour to help the partner countries to be modern and sovereign.

According to Mrs. Arbatova, the annexation of Crimea had not been the part of the Putin's plan from the very beginning. The turning point was grounded in the personal insult from breaking the compromise of the 21st February between the Ukrainian president and the opposition leaders, because Putin had invested a lot to come to this agreement.

Mr. Füle identified the dissuasion of the Ukrainian people by military presence and economic coercion from the Russian side of borders. Russia attempts to block the implementation of the EU policies in the partner countries. The application of the principle of the geopolitical zero-sum game and the logic of the spheres of the influence do not follow the way how the politics is conducted in the 21st century. According to him the EaP is still presented as a choice between the East and the West, but it should not be.

Mr. Duleba argued that to mediate the conflict Ukrainian government should seek for domestic allies and aspire for nationwide dialogue to reform the constitution and the government. The lack of basic domestic agreement will lead to the continuation of the course of events in Eastern Ukraine and possible intervention of Russia.

Mr. Shushko noted, the support of the EaP project in Ukraine was not very high and the neglect of the EaP in the Ukraine came from the perception that the Ukraine had reached many political results bilaterally before the EaP had been launched.

Russia and the EaP

Mrs. Arbatova looked for the roots of the clash between the West (NATO and EU) and Russia. The first source is the mistrust from the 90s', when the West tried to separate the CIS countries from Russia after the difficult stabilization in this area in the post-bipolar era. The second source of the clash was decline from applying the rules of the behaviour derived from the Helsinki principles and preference of the national interests. She argued, the future of EU-Russia relations was bleak and the cooperation among these actors would be difficult for many years. Amb. Kop added there had to be basic agreement on the EaP with Russia, because it would not survive without the agreement. According to him Russia acts from the position of weakness and fear not from the position of the strength.



Conference Report 3/2014

Eastern Partnership Five Years On: Time for a New Strategy?

–
May 2014

Mr. Lang disagreed with Mrs. Arbatova viewpoint on the Russian initial willingness to be included in the ENP, because the instruments like the EaP were presented from the beginning as the relation of asymmetry. Adoption and implementation of the EU acquis was expected. On the other hand, Russia would prefer the interdependence and equality.

Mr. Zubov elaborated the deep historic and domestic consequences of the current Russian behaviour. He opposed the generally accepted viewpoint that Russia had always been the problematic actor of the European security system. Actually, Russia was one of the creators of the system after The Napoleonic Wars. He argued the situation changed dramatically after November 1917, when the Bolshevik ideology penetrated the Russian foreign and security policy. According to his viewpoint, current Russian approach towards the EaP and its “Near Abroad” is still influenced by the Soviet style of thinking and the set of values. The implementation of the old geopolitical thinking is now being revived. This Russian foreign policy towards the EaP countries is influenced by the fear of encirclement, the striving for the protection of the “Heartland” and the domestic sources. Putin responds to the domestic demands. His acts in Crimea tremendously raised president’s popularity in Russia; hence, the further continuation of such behaviour is expectable.

Mr. Zubov suggested that the recipe to overcome the aggressive foreign policy in the Russian neighbourhood was the de-communization and de-etatisation of the people’s minds via influencing the young generation. Mrs. Vakhrusheva argued there was a potential among the young generation to respect democracy, rule of law and so on. However, Europe should not isolate the Russian people and should encourage the spread of independent information. The risk is that young people will become conformist and accept the authoritarian principles.

Russian involvement in the EaP countries takes many forms. The economic pressure was a powerful instrument for Russia to influence governments and people in the partner countries. Mr. Chiveri gave an example of the exports of the Moldovan wine, which have been generally blocked for several months. Russia circumvents the general authority and imports the products from selected regions only, what poses pressure on the government from outside the country as well as from inside.

Mr. Navasardian opened the discussion about the information war and how to face it. Mr. Füle confirmed that the EU was unequipped for such war and was not winning. The Russian propaganda is more intensive than the Cold War propaganda, because it does not have to cross the Iron curtain. The more proactive policy fighting the myths around the EaP spread should be adopted. Mr. Navasardian argued the infringement of the Armenian media by the Russian influence was very strong and media had difficulties to differ propaganda from objective news. Mr. Chiveri added the example of the Moldova experience with the Russian channels, which attack every step of Moldovan government towards the European integration. Mr. Chiveri indicated that the conflict Transnistria is a part of the information



Conference Report 3/2014

Eastern Partnership Five Years On: Time for a New Strategy?

–
May 2014

war. The conflict is actually artificial as the tension comes from the involvement of the Russian Federation. Mr. Chiveri also pointed out the role of the generally trusted Orthodox Church, which supports the Eurasian integration and has huge impact on the Moldovan population.

Mr. Dubrovskiy pointed, that if the reforms in Ukraine were successful, Putin's regime would not survive. According to him that is the reason, why Putin perceives the EaP as such threat. The modernization has been evolving in Ukraine, so it brings fear to Russian policymakers, because it can undermine their position in Russia. Mr. Vimont commented on this issue further. The long-term visions are absolutely necessary, because they are the only way of preventing repeating such crisis like the Ukrainian conflict.

Economic aspects of the EaP

Mr. Becker commented the positive aspects of the DCFTAs, which are first of all beneficial for the people of the EaP. European market in general is more beneficial than Russian market from the economic viewpoint. The economic cooperation brings the overall modernization to societies.

Mrs. Zarnaускаite illustrated some aspects why Russia itself arguably, and against its latest claims, did not perceive EU-Ukraine economic liberalisation as the zero-sum game between the EU and Russia in economic terms. She referred to Putin's and EU leaders' jointly promoted idea of economic integration spanning as wide as from Lisbon to Vladivostok and including the common neighbourhood in-between. This idea was only recently overtaken by the events in Ukraine. Furthermore, Russia's own aspirations for closer economic approximation to the EU are represented by many tools in the economic cooperation between the EU and Russia already in existence, the EU-Russia Partnership for Modernisation being one of them. As for the EU's intentions in the Eastern Partnership, they were never directed against Russian interests or existing free trade relations with the EaP countries. The EU wished to establish its own preferential free trade relations with these countries. Such EU and Russia bilateral free trade areas with the neighbours are not mutually exclusive and can perfectly co-exist, as is the case in many other regions. Against this background, Mrs. Zarnaускаite raised a question, why now Russia seemed to have a problem concerning the EU's free trade aspirations with the EaP countries, alluding that the answer may be best sought beyond the realm of economics. One of the key economic complaints presented by Russia was a predicted increased competition from the EU on the Ukrainian market. However, competition is a natural phenomenon of the current globalised world and should be met as an opportunity and not only as a threat by Russia, commented the speaker.



Conference Report 3/2014

Eastern Partnership Five Years On: Time for a New Strategy?

–
May 2014

However, Mr. Sargsyan mentioned that the DCFTA had been presented to Armenia as the choice between either the DCFTA or the Customs Union with Russia. Armenian strategic trade interests are connected with Russian energy supplies and markets. Hence, Armenia decided to choose the Eurasian integration.

Mr. Duleba mentioned that the EU companies' business in the EaP countries was dependent on the political stability. The predictable legal environment being brought by the EaP is a necessary precondition for the investment. In this regard, the DCFTA implementation means extensive approximation of the *acquis*. Mr. Becker added that not only the legal framework is necessary, but the predictability and the safe environment are other important components of the willingness to invest.

Societies of the EaP countries

EU's communication aimed at the political leaders and not at the ordinary people, what was the root of the problems according to Mrs. Arbatova. The EU was not able to present the advantages and finalities of the EaP to broader public successfully. Mr. Sushko gave a similar notice arguing, the EaP had bad reputation for many members of the civil society, because the cooperation was directed to corrupted leaders and people did not understand the benefits of the cooperation. Mrs. Alieva stressed the Azeri case: the significance of the direct elite contacts with the EU and circumvent of the ordinary people.

Amb. Kop framed the EaP as a tool for psychological flip after the demise of the Cold War to bring the societies in the EaP countries to the values of democracy, human rights, the rule of law, and fight against corruption. Amb. Kop commented the propaganda issue from the perspective of values. The central value according to his viewpoint is the general desire to live in the countries without endemic corruption and without the lack of freedom to express their opinions, which they already know, because they have personal experience and information about them. Mr. Sargsyan mentioned that democratic and liberal reforms are usually not conducted because the governments owe these reforms to Brussels. The reforms are implemented, because the citizens of the EaP countries want to live in more liberal and open environment.

The discussion about the mutual relations between government, civil society and business was initiated by the Mr. Zugravu's comment, that representatives of the civil society were the actors, who had the potential to enlighten the people and modernize their countries. These representatives have taken several seats in the governmental offices in Moldova recently, what has been a positive sign of the growing influence of the civil society. Mr. Navasardian argued that the civil society should be structured differently; it does not have to be only the NGO sector. Ad-hoc coalitions of the young activists can influence the



Conference Report 3/2014

Eastern Partnership Five Years On: Time for a New Strategy?

–
May 2014

policy making as well. Mr. Navasardian stressed that the EaP supported the civil society in their efforts to preserve the basic freedoms of association and assembly and to block all the attempts to limit using of internet and social networks. He warned that we tended to forget the undemocratic part of the civil society, which had the potential to fragment the civil society.

Frequently discussed topic was the level of the corruption in the EaP countries. It was marked as a problem, which needs to be fought with the overall powerful instruments. The cohesion of oligarchs and the government blocks the development of the civil society, according to Mr. Navasardian. Mrs. Alieva stressed that the small business is necessary for the development of the civil society as well. The willingness of the EaP countries' oligarchs to support the civil society is naturally low because of the ties with government. Oligarchs are often governmental ministers. The other problem of fostering the influence of the civil society is the lack of natural political allies, who could promote the goals of the civil society. Mr. Matskevich argued that the EaP connected the Belarusian civil society sector with the European organisations and ignited the cooperation through ties among other post-Soviet countries.

Mr. Pomianowski challenged Mr. Zaorálek's pessimistic perception of the EaP in the context of civil society. He identified the major successes of the project: the Civil Society Forum and the European Endowment for Democracy, which represent institutionalized forms of the cooperation. Both are signs of the new trends in the ENP.

Speakers

Leila Alieva, Director, Center for National and International Studies; Member of the Steering Committee, Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, Baku

Nadezhda Arbatova, Head of Department on European Political Studies, Institute for World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO), Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow

Torbjörn Becker, Director, Stockholm Institute of Transition Economics, Stockholm School of Economics, Stockholm

Valeriu Chiveri, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration of the Republic of Moldova, Chisinau

Petr Drulák, First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, Prague

Vladimir Dubrovskiy, Expert, CASE – Center for Social and Economic Research Ukraine, Kyiv

Alexander Duleba, Director of the Research Center, Slovak Foreign Policy Association, Bratislava

Štefan Füle, European Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy, Brussels



Asociace
pro mezinárodní
otázky
Association
for International
Affairs

Conference Report 3/2014

Eastern Partnership Five Years On: Time for a New Strategy?

–
May 2014

Dirk Jan Kop, Ambassador, Special Representative for Russia and the Eastern Partnership, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, The Hague

Petr Kolář, Former First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, Prague

Kai-Olaf Lang, Head of Research Division on EU Integration, German Institute for International and Security Affairs, Berlin

Petr Mareš, Special Envoy for the Eastern Partnership, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, Prague

Giorgi Margvelashvili, President of Georgia, Tbilisi

Uladzimir Matskevich, Head of the Board, International Consortium “EuroBelarus”, Minsk

Boris Navasardian, President, Yerevan Press Club; Member of the Steering Committee, Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, Yerevan

Andrejs Pildegovičs, State Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, Riga

Jerzy Pomianowski, Executive Director, European Endowment for Democracy, Brussels

Vigen Sargsyan, Chief of the Presidential Administration, Office to the President of the Republic of Armenia, Yerevan

Jiří Schneider, Former First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, Prague
Oleksandr Sushko, Research Director, Institute for Euro-Atlantic Cooperation; Member of the Steering Committee, Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, Kyiv

Ksenia Vakhrusheva, Project Coordinator, Environmental organisation “Bellona”; Member of the Steering Committee, EU-Russia Civil Society Forum, St. Petersburg

Pierre Vimont, Executive Secretary General, European External Action Service, Brussels

Lubomír Zaorálek, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, Prague

Ruta Zarnauskaite, Policy Officer, Strategy Unit, DG TRADE, European Commission, Brussels

Andrey Zubov, Professor of History, Moscow

Gheorghe Zugravu, Senior Project Officer, The Resource and Consultancy Center “Ograda Noastra”, Cahul



Asociace
pro mezinárodní
otázky
Association
for International
Affairs

Conference Report 3/2014

Eastern Partnership Five Years On: Time for a New Strategy?

–
May 2014

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- support the interest in international relations among broad public;
- cooperate with like-minded local and international institutions.

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