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Conference Report 6/2015

Two Years after Euromaidan: Success and Failures

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Introduction

The international conference titled [“Two Years after Euromaidan: Success and Failures”](#) sought to retrospectively review the events preceding the 2013-2014 Revolution of Dignity as well as to assess and critically evaluate the progress and accomplishments of the Ukrainian reform efforts achieved since then. Against the backdrop of the war lingering in the east of Ukraine and increasingly contentious and crisis-driven international security environment, the Prague event aimed to draw attention to persistent challenges faced along the EU’s eastern edge, bearing in mind that preventing relapse and consolidating Ukrainian stability and prosperity remains crucial to upholding peace and security of the EU itself.

The event was organized by the Association for International Affairs (AMO) in cooperation with the Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung in Prague, the U.S. Embassy Prague, the NATO Public Diplomacy Division and the Representation of the European Commission in the Czech Republic. The conference took place on December 7, 2015 in the premises of the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic.

Conclusions and Recommendations

- When approaching its neighborhood, the EU should keep its interests and values as close as possible. Economic cooperation should not come at the expense of values and norms the EU represents. Stability in the neighborhood can only be based on solid democracy, accountability, the rule of law and dignity of people.
- The coordination and “division of labor” among individual EU bodies and among member states should be improved. Ukraine, for its part, should provide a clear strategic framework for donor assistance to ensure that the aid which is being delivered is in accordance with the needs on the ground.
- In order to make better use of the Visegrad Group’s assistance capacity, the grouping should consider setting up a forum banding together all the actors engaged in the reform process in Ukraine.
- Ukraine should elaborate a detailed, well-thought-out and coherent roadmap for reforms, reconciling all the action plans proposed by individual state institutions and civil society actors, which would be also in line with the Association Agreement and the IMF requirements. The processes of national reconciliation and effective reform need to proceed in parallel and cannot succeed separately.



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- Ukrainian civil society ought to continue performing its advocacy and watchdog roles in the transformation process. Constant bottom-up pressure from the grassroots level for further change serves as a guarantee of continuous implementation of genuine reforms.
- At this stage, the effort and attention of external donors should be devoted to concrete issues to be tackled and specific policy areas where the performance can be improved instead of overemphasizing the final goal of the cooperation itself. Unless Ukraine transforms into a functioning state with a well-performing economy, joining Western integrational structures will remain out of the question.
- The implementation of progressive but painful reforms in Ukraine should be accompanied by an effective public information campaign and educational work with the citizens. Lack of communication between Ukrainian authorities and society risks eroding public support for undertaking costly reforms and undermines the credibility of pro-European political elites.
- There cannot be any concessions or trade-offs with Russia on Ukraine in exchange for cooperation in the fight against ISIS. Lifting of the sanctions should remain conditional upon Russia's full adherence to the Minsk agreements and its withdrawal from Crimea. The West cannot afford to choose between the two fronts; it needs to stay relevant in tackling both challenges.
- In the long term, a modus vivendi between the EU and the EEU should be searched for. Unless the issue of political interrelationship and legal and technical compatibility between the two distinct integration frameworks is addressed, a new dividing line will emerge in Europe. In the meantime, however, the initial steps that would enable moving forward should be taken by Russia, as it was Moscow whose aggressive policy effectively brought about the freezing of mutual relations.
- Rather than trying to create a counter-propaganda against Russia's disinformation campaign or attempting to debunk every single message, the West should stay united and have its own narrative. In order to be better able to withstand Russian propaganda, the West should focus on heightening public awareness and level of knowledge about the situation and realities in the post-Soviet space.



Prelude: Reaching Out to the Neighbors

Two years after the November 2013 Vilnius Summit it remains obvious that the chain of events sparked by the then Ukrainian government's decision to suspend talks on signing of the Association Agreement (AA) with the EU has been still incomplete. However, what resulted in the illegal annexation of Crimea and the military conflict in the eastern part of the country could not have been foreseen back in 2009 when the EU's Eastern Partnership (EaP) initiative had been launched, R. Sikorski recalled.

The EaP was essentially a Central European idea, inspired by the Visegrad Group, Sikorski explained. In addition to bilateral negotiations with the European Commission (EC) which the prospective partner countries were having already, a new common forum was supposed to allow these countries to collaborate among themselves as well as with the EU. The initiative was meant to be a useful anteroom, a trial period of how clubbable the six eastern neighbors could be.

The EaP was not conceived as an offer of a membership perspective *per se*. Sikorski underlined that it was rather believed that if the partners proved willing and capable of cooperating among themselves with all the differences and even conflicts, they might perhaps become candidates for EU membership in the distant future.

Sikorski and Füle tried to dissipate a common myth that the EaP was coined by the EU to serve as a geopolitical tool directed against Moscow. Sikorski stressed that at the time when the EaP was proposed, there was a vision of two parallel intensive processes –multilateral platform for six eastern neighbors, and a promising approximation of Russia, gradually overcoming its post-Soviet culture and adapting to international legal and trade standards. However, Russia itself at a certain stage stopped negotiating its Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA), an analogy of AAs proposed to EaP members.

By the same token, Š. Füle accentuated that the EU did not set out on a geopolitical, but a transformational mission in its neighborhood. The EaP was not supposed to serve as an anti-Russian instrument in a struggle for zones of influence, it did not force its members to choose between Brussels and Moscow at the expense of the other one. The initiative's purpose was rather to strengthen capacities or create conditions for the partners to make their own sovereign foreign policy choices. Sikorski concluded that though the EU could have devoted greater effort to signing the AA before Russia started pushing back, at the end of the day, it was President Yanukovich himself who miscalculated badly, partly encouraged by Putin's generous offer of economic assistance, cutting the gas price and providing support for the ruling kleptocracy.



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In P. Luňák's point of view, a division of Europe into two distinct value-based systems has become increasingly visible. When deciding between the rule of law, democracy and human rights on the one hand, and corruption, kleptocracy and disrespect for fundamental freedoms on the other, Ukrainians chose a pro-reform path and will ultimately succeed in their democratization effort, Luňák opined.

When contemplating about what might be triggering Kremlin's assertive foreign policy behavior, Sikorski as well as Luňák underlined that sources of Russia's conduct are essentially domestic. In order to divert attention of Russian public away from the gloomy economic and social situation at home, Moscow tries to create an illusion of the country's international standing of new imperialist glory, Sikorski explained. If Ukraine manages to become a stable, democratic and prosperous country, it might instigate a catharsis Russia itself never had. Ukrainian success would thus have a significant impact on how Russia internally functions, Luňák argued.

Euromaidan and Ukrainian Reform Endeavor: A Glass Half Full...?

The far-reaching and multilayered transformation process that began in the midst of the Revolution of Dignity has been anything but finished. According to Y. Fedchenko, what could be perceived as the most tangible change, signifying an important break with the past, is the civil society's growing self-confidence and determination to actively participate in the political process and defend its interests in the public sphere, which was further bolstered by the war in the east.

O. Halushka underlined that it is precisely the non-governmental sector which serves as the principal driving force for transformation and zealously performs its watchdog function. Civil society representatives are engaged in the whole reform process from advising on drafting legislation and advocating its adoption in the parliament, through communication with wider public and monitoring the progress, to taking part in the implementation itself.

According to Halushka, the institutional basis for undertaking reforms is relatively solid. Ukrainians elected a new president, the 2014 parliamentary elections validated Ukraine's pro-European course and on the basis of the recent November 2015 local elections, also local authorities are being rebooted. Around 46% of the current MPs are essentially new faces. The parliament has become more transparent and open, largely thanks to the will of the speaker Volodymyr Groysman, as well as owing to the pressure of young MPs with civil society or journalistic background (like Hanna Hubko, Svitlana Zalizhchuk, Serhiy Leshchenko, Oksana Syroyid).



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Though the government itself has not been very pro-active in terms of pushing for reforms, O. Halushka accentuated that activity of each ministry is reinvigorated by the so-called agents of change, i.e. groups of reformists who focus on specific issues and try to ensure quick wins, thereby inspiring wider public to press for further progress. Halushka, however, admitted that reforms without strong leadership and support among authorities have been largely stalled. The issue of pursuing reforms is further complicated by the fact that no coherent unique common all-Ukrainian action plan has been elaborated so far.

As for concrete achievements, the launch of an electronic platform for public procurement, traditionally one of the biggest black corrupt holes for taxpayers' money, was underlined. Owing to the First Deputy Minister for Education and Science Inna Sovsun, financial and administrative autonomy to higher education institutions has been granted. Halushka also praised the patrol police reform under the guidance of the First Deputy Minister for Interior Eka Zguladze as well as decentralization efforts driven by Volodymyr Groysman.

Though the window of opportuning is closing day by day, Halushka stressed that according to recent polls, 36% of Ukrainians are still ready to suffer inconveniences related to the painful transformation process.

...Or Half Empty? Caught Between Revolution and Reformation

Ukraine is fighting on two fronts at the same time. Externally it is struggling to restore and secure its territorial integrity and sovereignty, internally it is grappling with entrenched corruption and the old ineffective but resilient system. Discussants, however, disagreed to what extent it is possible to undergo reforms while simultaneously combat foreign occupation.

On the one hand, Š. Füle argued that none of the battles can be put aside. Lack of genuine reforms will make the country weak when overcoming internal divisions and resisting external aggression. In a similar vein, P. Luňák stressed that Ukrainians do not have the luxury of postponing reforms for the sake of waging the war in the east, both goals need to be championed in parallel. B. Jackson maintained that such an endeavor is rather doomed to failure. Reaching peace and reconciliation at home must precede reforms, he asserted.

Ukraine is in fact caught between two contradictory agendas, B. Jackson pointed out. The Euromaidan itself represented a confusion of ideas, a sea of various –isms: idealism, anti-oligarchism, nationalism, populism, democratic socialism, anti-Russianism, etc. The sole



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factor that the movement was enthusiastic and with a spirit of change does not automatically provide a clear guidance on reforms.

Whereas revolutions aim to destroy the existing political structures and the ruling class, the reformation process strives to preserve the order and institutions by making them better. While proponents of revolutionary goals nowadays often express their frustration that authorities are not enough arresting and prosecuting adherents of the former regime, reformists do not intend to achieve such radical goals.

The controversy over the role which oligarchs are supposed to play in the future social and economic life of Ukraine proves the point. Whereas revolutionaries prefer erasing the class as such, reformists intend to preserve the wealth-creating class, potentially able to provide employments to 5-7 million internally displaced persons in Donbas, but strive to limit the influence of big business in politics. In a similar vein, B. Jarábik opined that the importance attached to oligarchs is overestimated, while the wider context is misunderstood. The role oligarchs performed at the Euromaidan is largely overlooked. The revolution could not have happened without their defection, Jarábik stated.

Upon outlining an analogy between the Euromaidan and various democratic revolutions in Western history, B. Jackson pointed out that rather than being associated with the protection of rights of men and the sanctity of property as in the West, the Ukrainian Revolution was more vocal about revenge and ousting Yanukovich than about upholding rights. In his viewpoint, the Euromaidan stands in stark contrast to the roundtable talks in Poland and the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia which were distinguished by their forgiveness to their fellow citizens and non-violence in pursuit of political change. Jackson stressed that the success of reforms and societal transformation are always largely determined by the motivation and the moral character of the revolution itself.

B. Jarábik stated that despite the fact that a lot of effort is taking place, there has not been significant progress. Though the post-Maidan authorities received immense legitimacy in the eyes of the citizenry, the latest local elections showed that public support is gradually eroding away. Dissatisfaction with the pace of reforms and tangibility of achievements reflects a dire economic situation the country finds itself in. In the course of the last two years, Ukraine became in fact wholly dependent on the Western aid and support. Despite depicting the DCFTA with the EU as a panacea, the overall drop-off in trade with Russia amounting to approx. 20 billion euro per year is unlikely to be sufficiently substituted by commerce with the EU.

Similarly, fighting corruption has been mostly a rhetoric exercise, Jarábik argued. The Ukrainian business environment has been characterized not by the rule of law, but rather by the rule by law. O. Halushka, however, pointed out that recently new anti-corruption



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structures were created, the selection of the staff was transparent and public was also involved in the process which helped to make the institutions trusted. It is still too early to assess how effective the new bodies will be in tackling corruption.

But generally, communication between authorities and the wider public is rather weak, chaotic and lacking a clear strategy. The implementation of necessary but painful reforms should be accompanied by better instructiveness and educational work, Halushka opinioned. Another disturbing fact is that according to the polls, a majority of Ukrainians are actually not determined to push for reforms and prefer to submit the task wholly to authorities.

The EU's Approach Towards Its Neighborhood: On the Right Track?

Both R. Sikorski and Š. Füle expressed their conviction that there could hardly be any more politically feasible encouragement given to Ukraine from the West's side. Though the EU has been reluctant to apply the most powerful transformational instrument it has in its disposal – the membership perspective, Sikorski pointed out that Ukraine in fact has more in terms of Europe's commitment and promise than Central European states did when they signed their AAs at the beginning of the 1990s.

Poland managed to include only its own declaration into the text, stating that the AA was considered by Warsaw a stepping stone towards a full membership. Ukraine, on the contrary, received a promise by the Council of the EU that the AA will not be the last step in mutual relations. Neither having a frozen conflict on the territory needs to be an impediment to enlargement, taking into account there have already been precedents of accepting countries like Cyprus or Ireland, Sikorski reminded. Whereas Central Europe was setting out into the unknown with the shock therapy, Ukraine has been offered concrete plans of action – the IMF adjustment program and the AA with the EU.

B. Jackson, however, opinioned that the West's approach is essentially flawed. Jackson argued that the “cash-and-carry” approach does not focus on challenges Ukraine needs to handle at this stage. The drive for reforms must be self-initiated, home-grown and organic to the society, not a reaction to an externally conceived plan of action backed by financial support. On the contrary, O. Halushka underlined that Ukrainians strive to build a stable and prosperous state for themselves and their future generations, not to satisfy Western donors. She praised the West's conditionality policy and the more for more principle for creating additional pressure on ruling authorities to start implementing politically unpopular reforms. In a similar vein, Füle stressed that though the AA represents a blueprint for actions, the change must come from



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within the country itself, responsibility for transformation cannot be imposed from the outside and outsourced.

What, according to Jarábik, poses one of the greatest challenges for the EU when approaching Ukraine, is its fragmentation and inability to speak with one voice. On a positive note, the EU quite unexpectedly managed to rapidly and effectively respond to the crisis by creating new or reinvigorating old structures like the EU Advisory Mission for Civilian Security Sector Reform in Ukraine, the Support Group for Ukraine, the EU permanent delegation mission or the Normandy format for the implementation of the Minsk agreements. The performance of these institutions is, however, questionable, Jarábik stated.

Jarábik underlined that the fragmentation and coordination problem applies also to the Visegrad Group. The International Visegrad Fund, the only institution the format has, is also the sole platform which makes Central European NGOs cooperate. No single forum banding together all the actors engaged in Ukraine exists. Even though there is a high Visegrad capacity, it has not been utilized fully so far. On the other hand, the areas where the performance of the V4 proves to be outstanding is the facilitation of people-to-people contacts via issuing visas, and enabling the reverse flow of gas, which, according to the Ukrainian ministry of finance, helped the country save 3 billion USD.

The trap of the V4's assistance, however, is that it is headed in a wrong direction and not delivering what is actually needed on the ground, an opinion shared by both Jarábik and Jackson. Instead of focusing on a final goal of the cooperation and trying to offer lessons learned of how to enter Euro-Atlantic institutions, at this stage, the effort and attention should be rather devoted to concrete issues and specific policy areas where the performance can be improved. Jarábik and Jackson stressed that what remains of paramount importance for Ukraine for the time being is rebuilding the social contract at home, reconciling and uniting the nation and reconstructing the state. Unless Ukraine transforms itself into a functioning state with a well-performing economy, joining Western integrational structures will remain off the table.

Ukraine's Security: A Pawn on a Geopolitical Chessboard?

Depicting the world scene as a chessboard implies that Ukraine is only an object, not a sovereign subject of international affairs, P. Luňák stressed. Such a view is, however, in sharp contrast to the intention of building Europe free, united and at peace, the idea that served as a guiding principle for the past 25 years.



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Playing chess and pulling strings is exactly the scenario preferred by Kremlin, Sikorski and Luňák argued. The vision of a new Yalta II when the powerful and big ones would be reordering the world at the expense of smaller countries is a part of the anachronism and lack of realism in Moscow's thinking. Yalta was a mechanism of legitimating a situation that had been decided beforehand by the force of arms, R. Sikorski explained.

Recently, Ukrainian security and the West's commitment to stand by Kyiv have been put under further strain. The terrorist attacks in Paris have revived fears in Ukraine and beyond that the interest of the West might start shifting towards the war in Syria at the expense of the conflict in Donbas. The unsettling question arose whether the West might be willing to soften its sanctions regime in quest of joining the forces with Kremlin against ISIS.

Sikorski admitted that making trade-offs is exactly what Putin desires. Moscow is playing a weak hand rather well, getting a lot of attention and influence from a limited deployment of resources, he explained. Russia's engagement in Syria is supposed to cover the failure in Ukraine and distract domestic attention. This, however, does not mean that Russia should be entirely excluded from the West's thinking on Syria, Sikorski stressed. Luňák emphasized that NATO does not have the luxury of choosing between the southern and eastern front, it needs to stay relevant in tackling both challenges.

In today's globalized world, no country can hide itself behind an iron curtain, Luňák pointed out. Moscow is a significant trading partner, an energy supplier, and it can be helpful in many areas, such as the Iranian nuclear deal. Russia is not a status quo power as the USSR in the 1970s and 1980s, its behavior rather resembles Kremlin's conduct in the formative years of the Cold War when the code of practice had not been set yet. The West should keep its course and again prevail in imposing rules of the game, Luňák accentuated.

In his viewpoint, Ukraine should keep on implementing the Minsk agreement, even if Russia chooses not to. Though not ideal, it is the only basis how to restore Ukrainian sovereign control over its own borders.

According to Š. Füle, the conflict lingering in the east of Ukraine should be looked at from a wider perspective. Roots of the crisis have not been addressed yet. The implementation of the Minsk agreement should be understood only as the first step. Füle underlined that Ukrainian aspirations would gradually transform the country, but they would not relocate it geographically.

In the long term, unless the political interrelationship, and legal and technical compatibility between two distinct integration frameworks – the EU and the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) - are addressed, a new dividing line will emerge in Europe, this time along the Ukrainian eastern boundary. By creating an economic zone from Lisbon to Vladivostok,



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Russia would be given an opportunity to play a constructive role in European issues and the artificial pressure on the EaP partners to choose between the two projects would be released. Füle accentuated that cooperation with Armenia, a member of the EEU, but with a very intimate knowledge of the EU acquis, values and norms, could serve as one of the pillars needed to build bridges between the structures.

Lost in the Fog of Russia's Propaganda

Apart from the protracted military conflict in its eastern territories and coping with its own daunting internal structural weaknesses, Ukraine's security has been further afflicted by information warfare skillfully used by Russia. The media and the public space have become a murky and confusing playground where political discourse is being co-created, ultimately affecting also foreign policy choices.

Moscow has been trying to create a virtual reality, portraying Ukraine as a country which is not fitting into any kind of European architecture, not capable of meeting the values the EU expects and permanently in a total disarray. However, it has not been only Ukraine, but also the war in Syria, the recent terrorist attacks in Paris as well as the shot-down of the Russian plane in Turkey which have been skillfully framed and manipulated by Russia, Y. Fedchenko argued.

Fedchenko and Luňák underlined that the purpose of Russia's propaganda is not to boost Moscow's image *per se*, but rather to pollute the information space with half-truths, fabrications, instigate confusion and frustration and keep the West busy trying to get to the root and reveal the truth. P. Luňák, however, stressed that Russian propaganda has in fact not been as effective as argued. Rather than trying to create a counter-propaganda or attempting to debunk every single message, the West should stay united, have its own narrative and thereby exert pressure on Russia. Fedchenko, nevertheless, emphasized that uncovering pieces of propaganda helped to build an understanding that Russian propaganda actually exists and is supported, sponsored and governed by Kremlin. In the past, any disinformation was referred to simply as a bad journalism.

R. Harms expressed a more skeptical view about the extent to which Russia's disinformation campaign has been influential and succeeded in infiltrating into foreign policy discourse. She pointed out that the myth of blaming the EU for the precarious situation in which Ukraine finds itself is still widespread. Even though official structures under the portfolio of the High Representative for Foreign Affairs tasked with tackling propaganda already exist, some myths seem to be even more deeply seated than a year ago, she confessed.



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During the upcoming Dutch referendum on the AA with Ukraine, scheduled for the next year, propaganda will play a major role, Harms stressed. West Europeans are, however, unprepared to deal with such a challenge. The general level of knowledge of the post-Soviet space is extremely low in the EU, which makes it more susceptible to Russia's disinformation campaign. The letter of Jean-Claude Juncker, the European Commission chief, written to Russian President Putin, proves how influential Moscow's propaganda is in the very heart of the EU. Apart from expressing resolve not to allow Washington to allegedly push the EU into any policy towards Russia, Juncker also proposed to synchronize lifting of the sanctions with the implementation of the Minsk agreement.

The recurring dilemma about the prolongation of the sanctions reflects the EU's internal ideological differences, further reinforced by Russian propaganda, and the weight that is attached to economic interests. The EU has repeatedly managed to reaffirm the sanctions regime as a result of the conviction that sanctions represent the only viable alternative to deploying military means. But the sole necessity to re-discuss the utility of the sanctions over and over again despite lack of any progress in the implementation of the Minsk agreements is not supportive of democratic forces in Ukraine, Harms accentuated. She questioned the determination of the EU to long for the fulfillment of the agreement. Instead of helping Ukraine to maintain control over the demilitarization zone, only the OSCE observation mission was sent.



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Speakers

Yevhen Fedchenko, Co-Founder and Director, StopFake.org, Kyiv

Henry Foy, Central Europe Correspondent, Financial Times, Warsaw

Štefan Füle, Former European Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy, Prague

Olena Halushka, International Relations Manager, Reanimation Package of Reforms, Kyiv

Rebecca Harms, MEP, The Greens/ European Free Alliance, Brussels

Bruce Jackson, President, Project on Transitional Democracies, Washington D.C.

Balázs Jarábik, Nonresident Scholar, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Brussels

Petr Luňák, Deputy Head of Engagement Section, NATO Public Diplomacy Division, Brussels

Jan Michal, Head, Representation of the European Commission in the Czech Republic

Radosław Sikorski, Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Poland, Warsaw

Vlad'ka Votavová, Director, Association for International Affairs (AMO), Prague



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In order to achieve its goals AMO strives to:

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- arrange international conferences, expert seminars, roundtables, public debates;
- organize educational projects;
- present critical assessment and comments on current events for local and international press;
- create vital conditions for growth of a new expert generation;
- support the interest in international relations among broad public;
- cooperate with like-minded local and international institutions.

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Founded in October 2003, the AMO Research Center has been dedicated to pursuing research and raising public awareness of international affairs, security and foreign policy. The Research Center strives to identify and analyze issues crucial to Czech foreign policy and the country's position in the world. To this end, the Research Center produces independent analyses; encourages expert and public debate on international affairs; and suggests solutions to tackle problems in today's world. The Center's activities can be divided into two main areas: first, it undertakes research and analysis of foreign policy issues and comments on AMO blog; and second, it fosters dialogue with the policy-makers, expert community, and broad public.

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