

THE EUROPEAN UNION'S EASTERN PARTNERSHIP: CHANCES AND PERSPECTIVES

Marcin Łapczyński*

Abstract

The European Union has recently introduced its Eastern Partnership initiative (EaP) as a tool to enhance the co-operation and support reforms in its Eastern neighbourhood. The initiative, jointly presented by Poland and Sweden, was an answer to the French efforts to promote and strengthen the Mediterranean Union. The initiative involves several important steps to encourage countries such as Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine to build a stable and valuable relationship with the EU. With the Czech EU Council's presidency the project has become a foreign policy priority of the Union and a lot of effort has been put in the launching and preparations. Nevertheless, the EU should not take for granted the partner countries' support and interest in the EaP and should permanently work towards ensuring that the offer presented to the partners is attractive and suited to provide assistance in reforms.

***Keywords:** European Neighbourhood Policy, European Union, Eastern Partnership, Eastern Europe, South Caucasus, Czech Presidency, Poland, Sweden*

Introduction

Four years have passed since the official inauguration of the European Neighbourhood Policy, which was tailored to provide assistance to European Union's near abroad during the period of transition and reforms, to promote key European values and to ensure security, stability and prosperity in a wider Europe. The European Neighbourhood Policy has not met everybody's expectations. Instead, we have a bargaining game of promoting various member states' regional interests. France has proposed a further implementation of the Mediterranean Union project with a special emphasis on EU's southern flank, and the Polish-Swedish tandem proposed the Eastern Partnership Initiative (EaP) which is focusing more on the eastern flank.

The European Council approved the Eastern Partnership, and the European Commission officially presented its proposals in December 2008. The Polish-Swedish initiative, now the official policy of the European Union, has become one of the priorities of the Czech Republic Council's Presidency in the first half of 2009. Unfortunately Czech enthusiasm and plans to

* **Marcin Łapczyński** is an expert on international security in the Casimir Pulaski Foundation in Warsaw (Poland). He received his M.A. in International Relations (Strategic and Security Studies) at the University of Warsaw. He studied also at Vilnius University (Lithuania), and Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO). He is now finishing his second degree at the Central European University in Budapest (Hungary).

foster the project have met unexpected problems, such as the financial crisis. It is still not sure if the project will be implemented in a full capacity.

European Neighborhood Policy today

The European Neighbourhood Policy was officially launched in 2004 in order to promote and ensure security, stability and prosperity in the European Union's close neighbourhood by "the use of incentives ('carrots') in lieu of sanctions ('sticks')"¹. The policy applies to EU's direct neighbours to the south - Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestinian Authority, Syria and Tunisia, and to the east – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

Although being a "historically significant step [that] came through a strong awareness of the need to do 'something more', [-] it is not a perfect set-up"². Since the beginning, the ENP has found itself under strong criticism. One of the main points raised by experts and politicians was that it is not possible and desirable to treat the southern and eastern neighbours equally due to strong geographical and identity differences between them. African countries such as Algeria or Syria are completely different from, e.g. Ukraine or Moldova, which are situated in Europe and share similar values to those promoted by the current EU members. The EU itself has throughout the last few years extended its Eastern neighbours certain offers, such as the promise to establish a visa-free regime in a longer perspective or the possibility to enter the Energy Community established for Western Balkan countries. Southern members have not received such promises and it is unlikely they will³.

Second, the European Neighbourhood Policy is not the only policy towards neighbours that the EU has developed. Apart from the ENP there are policies towards EFTA/EEA countries (Iceland, Switzerland, Norway, Liechtenstein) that are not focused on membership but rather a close co-operation, the enlargement policy towards the western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia) and Turkey, or strategic partnership with Russia, which definitely does not seek membership in the EU. The ENP countries have not received a promise of membership, although the ENP never excluded such a prospect.

There are also strong differences among EU member states on what future they see for the European Neighbourhood Policy and what the principles governing this policy should look like. Germany focuses mainly on free trade with ENP countries, visa exemptions, stronger cooperation on energy issues, migration control, fight against organised crime, strengthening of sectors such as good governance, rule of law, justice, internal security, transport and environment. France is willing to develop the ENP in terms of energy supplies, migration control or fight against crime. The United Kingdom sees ENP mainly as a tool for fighting

¹Esther Barbé and Elisabeth Johansson-Nogués, "The EU as a modest 'force for good': the European Neighbourhood Policy," *International Affairs*, vol. 84: 1 (2008): 81.

²Tuula Yrjölä, "The EU's Interests and Instruments vis-à-vis Its Neighbours," *International Issues & Slovak Foreign Policy Affairs*, vol. XVI: 1 (2007): 15.

³Grzegorz Gromadzki, "Pięć tez o Europejskiej Polityce Sąsiedztwa" [Five Theses about European Neighbourhood Policy] (Policy Brief, Batory Foundation, Warsaw, October 2008): 3.

against terrorism. Poland promotes the establishment of a community of values and strengthening of civil society contacts⁴.

Different expectations and perceptions of the ENP by the participating states led to a situation where more and more politicians and experts started to call for a more diversified policy that would distinguish the southern and eastern dimensions of the EU's co-operation with its neighbours⁵. That is why the French president Nicolas Sarkozy proposed the Mediterranean Union, and the Polish and Swedish ministers of foreign affairs Radosław Sikorski and Carl Bildt offered the Eastern Partnership Initiative. Both options, in the opinion of Grzegorz Gromadzki, could be seen as a beginning of the end of European Neighbourhood Policy in its current shape⁶.

Eastern Partnership Initiative – A Step Forward?

The Eastern Partnership Initiative was officially presented for the first time on May 26, 2008 by the Polish and Swedish ministers of foreign affairs Radosław Sikorski and Carl Bildt at the EU General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC) in Brussels. One month later, on June 20, the European Council expressed its support for this joint initiative and asked the European Commission to prepare proposals for concrete measures and steps for further bilateral and multilateral co-operation.

During the presentation of the initiative Polish minister Sikorski said: “To the South, we have neighbours of Europe. To the East, we have European neighbours...They all have the right one day to apply [for EU membership]”⁷. The minister's statement was perceived as a clear line that distinguishes the Eastern Partnership Initiative from the Mediterranean Union proposed by Nicolas Sarkozy. Poland and Sweden stand on a position that if the European Union is going to strengthen its co-operation and support within the southern dimension, there will be a strong need to balance these steps by emphasizing also the eastern dimension.

This approach is especially characteristic for Polish foreign policy, which tries to put special attention on the unequal treatment of southern and eastern EU neighbours and actively tries to promote and support its eastern neighbours and partners, especially Ukraine and Georgia. Polish experts and politicians have always emphasized that one of the most important goals of Poland is to enhance European co-operation with eastern neighbours. That approach is based on the specific geopolitical situation of Poland. Even today, when the country is a member of NATO and the European Union, the unstable situation in Belarus, the uncertain situation in Ukraine and Russia's energy politics are increasingly important factors for Polish foreign

⁴ Barbara Lippert, “European Neighbourhood Policy: Many reservations – some progress – uncertain prospects,” (International Policy Analyses, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, June 2008): 10.

⁵ Jose Manuel Barroso seems to acknowledge the problem, as he said: „I know that some have questioned the logic behind the ENP, questioned whether countries with such different societies, histories and traditions should, or even can, be brought together in one policy approach...” See: Jose Manuel Barroso, “Shared challenges, shared futures: Taking the neighbourhood policy forward” (Speech at the European Neighbourhood Policy Conference, Brussels, September 03, 2007), <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=SPEECH/07/502&format=PDF&aged=1&language=EN&guiLanguage=en> (accessed February 23, 2009).

⁶ Grzegorz Gromadzki, “Pięć tez o Europejskiej Polityce Sąsiedztwa...,” op. cit.: 7.

⁷ Renata Goldirova, “Eastern Partnership” could lead to enlargement, Poland says,” *EUObserver*, May 27, 2008, <http://euobserver.com/9/26211> (accessed March 20, 2009).

policy. Poland has its own interests in the East, but they are more a result of its position in the European Union and they should be perceived and realised through this institution⁸. Moreover, politicians and experts in Poland “find it extremely difficult to accept a single political concept which encompasses relations with such countries as Ukraine and Morocco⁹”, and therefore believe that Poland should play a more active role in lobbying for further appreciation of the east.

Sweden was also asked to join the initiative in a later stage. Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk explained it by saying: “We asked Sweden because this is a very experienced country in terms of EU affairs and also because as a country it does not border our eastern neighbours¹⁰”. With the support of Sweden it was easier to seek approval for the project in Brussels. Sweden is going to hold the EU presidency in the second half of 2009, which may be important in implementing the initiative.

The Eastern Partnership Initiative is not the first initiative launched by the European Union that directly involves the EU’s eastern neighbours. So far, the Black Sea Synergy¹¹ from 2007 has been a tool complementary to the European Neighbourhood Policy involving countries of the Black Sea region, and the Northern Dimension from 1997 was aimed to help, the Baltic States and Poland (which were not EU members at the time), but also Russia in launching necessary reforms and programmes aimed at stability and peace in the Baltic Sea region.

In the opinion of both ministers, the proposal should practically and ideologically strengthen the existing policy towards countries that have some prospects for membership in the EU, but deals with the problem of “enlargement fatigue” which is emphasized by some European countries, such as France or Germany. According to Sikorski, the initiative is not directed against Russia. Moreover, he suggested that “(...) these are very practical things that Russia will also be able to profit from...¹²”

Content and Proposals

The Polish-Swedish initiative is focused on Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine and aimed at enhancing the European Union’s bilateral relations with these countries in a way that would move beyond the existing European Neighbourhood Policy and on to creating a permanent formula for multilateral co-operation with the region. The primary focus

⁸ Roman Kuźniar, “Geopolityka i polityka bezpieczeństwa Polski” [Geopolitics and Poland’s Security Policy], *Sprawy Międzynarodowe*, nr 1 (2008): 59-60, 63.

⁹ The result of comparing ENP Eastern dimension and Southern dimensions in terms of EU financial support (MEDA and TACIS programmes plus integrated funds) for the years 2007-2010 shows that the support for EU’s Southern neighbouring countries is about 2,5 times greater than for Eastern neighbours. See: A.K. Cinciara, “Does the Strengthened European Neighbourhood Policy Restore the Balance Between Southern and Eastern Partner Countries?,” (“Analyses and Opinions” No.2, The Institute of Public Affairs of Poland, March 2008): 4-5.

¹⁰ Witold Żygulski, “Poland Pushes for New 'Eastern Partnership,’” *The Warsaw Voice*, June 11, 2008, <http://www.warsawvoice.pl/view/18068/> (accessed March 21, 2009).

¹¹ The Black Sea Synergy involves Armenia, Azerbaijan, (Bulgaria), Georgia, Moldova, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine and was aimed to develop concrete initiatives in transport, energy, environment, fishery, migration or organised crimes.

¹² Jacek Pawlicki, “Mr Tusk’s Eastern Partnership,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, May 21, 2008, http://wyborcza.pl/1,76842,523-3125,Mr_Tusk_s_Eastern_Partnership.html (accessed March 20, 2009).

is put on Ukraine, and the other countries “would follow according to ambition and performance¹³”. When it comes to Belarus’ participation in the project, it was initially stated that this country would be involved at a technical and experts level with the possibility for future enhancement. After holding several high-level EU-Belarus meetings and issuing an invitation for president Lukashenka for the Prague summit in May 2009, it seems that the prospects for full participation of this country in the initiative are increasing¹⁴. Projects realised within the EaP could also be extended to Russia at some time in the future. Therefore, the whole project involves 27 EU members and “5+1 countries” in the Eastern Neighbourhood – Ukraine, Moldova, Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Belarus.

The enhanced bilateral co-operation with these countries would include: 1) co-operation on **migration issues** with the possibility to introduce a visa-free regime in a long-term perspective and easier visa-facilitating process in a short-term perspective; 2) creation of a **Free Trade Area** based on free-trade agreements with participating countries and the EU; 3) providing EU support for sector reforms, intensifying students’ exchange, promoting **civil society**, local and regional co-operation etc.; 4) drafting and signing a **new generation of Action Plans** with each country that could include “clear benchmarks and linkage to the alignment towards the EU legislation, standards and norms¹⁵”. Here, the new enhanced agreement with Ukraine should serve as a reference for all agreements; and finally 5) ensuring a distribution of **assistance funds** to the partner countries in a way that would reflect the progress in implementing reforms and according to the principle of differentiation;

The multilateral co-operation, according to the Polish-Swedish proposal, would be based on the implementation of concrete projects. The involvement in such projects would be voluntary and dependent on the interest of states in realising them. The aim of the initiative is to become a complementary project with already existing initiatives – Black Sea Synergy and the Northern Dimension. Possible projects are divided into 5 sub-categories: 1) **political and security**, which includes: promoting democracy, common values, rule of law, co-operation in the field of foreign and security policy, civil service and local administration; 2) **borders and trans-border movement**: regulating migrations, making visa regimes more flexible, improving border infrastructure; 3) **economic and financial**: implementation of reforms foreseen in the Action Plans; economic integration, removing trade barriers between the EU and the Eastern neighbourhood; development of transport and telecommunication networks, tourism; 4) **environment**: countering climate change, environment-friendly technologies, developing ecological consciousness; 5) **social**: cross-border co-operation, people-to-people contacts, development of co-operation between NGOs, educational programmes, joint research projects etc.

The benefit of the Eastern Partnership Initiative, according to the authors of the proposal, would be a multilateral co-operation that would foster regional links between participants of the initiative and which would be able to address issues that go much further than issues

¹³ Full text of the initiative can be found under: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Poland, “Polish-Swedish Proposal: Eastern Partnership,” June 2008, <http://www.msz.gov.pl/Polish-Swedish.Proposal.19911.html> (accessed March 20, 2009).

¹⁴ David Marples, “Javier Solana Visits Belarus,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*. Vol. 6, issue 41, March 3, 2009, [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=34652](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=34652) (accessed April 22, 2009); Andrew Rettman, “Rogues and has-beens invited to EU Summit,” *EuObserver*, April 17, 2009, <http://euobserver.com/24/27958> (accessed April 24, 2009).

¹⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Poland, “Polish-Swedish Proposal: Eastern Partnership,” op. cit.

concerning the Black Sea and Baltic Sea regions. The second benefit would be an offer for Belarus, which has not been included in any EU multilateral initiative yet, and would create an opportunity for “inclusion of various social groups, e.g. the youth, SMEs and junior officials in the co-operation with the European Union¹⁶”.

When it comes to the financial support for the new initiative, the Polish and Swedish ministers claim that the strengthening of the eastern dimension will be neutral for the EU budget due to the fact that money will come from already available resources. The EU funds could be supported by EIB and EBRD credits and various resources from willing EU member states and EEA partner countries. The institutional framework, according to the authors, should be as light-weight and goal-oriented as possible, involve appointing a Special Coordinator, creating working bodies such as conferences or round tables, and might also include ministerial meetings or parliamentary co-operation.

Reactions, Positions and Critique

The idea was generally met positively. Foreign minister of Germany Frank-Walter Steinmeier called the proposal an “example of how, working together, we can take Europe forward¹⁷” and expressed his will to work towards linking the European Neighbourhood Policy, Eastern Partnership Initiative and Black Sea Synergy in order to enhance stability in the region. In 2007 the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs under Steinmeier prepared a similar proposal, the so-called ENP Plus, which was intended to become a part of the “Neue Ostpolitik” (“New Eastern Policy”) of the German government¹⁸. That idea was not implemented, as the priority status within the “Neue Ostpolitik” was granted to Russia. Also France, which held the EU presidency in the second half of 2008, expressed its interests in Eastern Partnership initiative. Bernard Kouchner said that “it is no sin to go East and South at the same time¹⁹”.

The Polish-Swedish project was especially warmly welcomed by the Czech Republic, which holds the EU presidency in the first half of 2009. The Eastern Partnership Initiative has officially become one of the priorities of the Czech presidency²⁰.

These countries – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine and Belarus – generally expressed their interest and warmly welcomed the new initiative²¹. Ukraine, which was

¹⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Poland, “Polish-Swedish Proposal: Eastern Partnership,” June 2008, op. cit.

¹⁷ Speech by Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier at the 13th German-Polish Forum, December 5, 2008, <http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/diplo/en/Infoservice/Presse/Rede/2008/081205-BM-DeuPolForum.html> (accessed March 24, 2009).

¹⁸ Iris Kempe, “What are the pillars of the “New Ostpolitik” during the German EU presidency?,” *Caucas Euronews*, March 6, 2007, http://www.caucas.com/home_eng/breve_contenu.php?id=304 (accessed April 22, 2009).

¹⁹ Ahto Lobjakas, “EU: New Initiative Suggests East Is Edging Out South In ‘Neighbourhood’ Tussle,” *RFE/RL*, May 30, 2008, <http://www.rferl.org/content/Article/1144518.html> (accessed March 21, 2009).

²⁰ Alexandr Vondra, “Priorities of the Czech EU Presidency” (Remarks by Deputy Prime Minister for European Affairs of the Czech Republic Alexandr Vondra, Czech-German Discussion Forum on the Czech EU Presidency, Berlin, December 2, 2008), <http://www.vlada.cz/scripts/detail.php?id=46806> (accessed March 21, 2009).

²¹ Claire Bigg, “EU Enhances ‘Eastern Partnership’ - But Is There Less Than Meets The Eye?,” *RFE/RL*, December 4, 2008, http://www.rferl.org/Content/EU_Enhances_Eastern_Partnership_But_Is_There_Less_Than_Meets_The_Eye/1356313.html (accessed March 29, 2009).

“carefully following” the debate believes that the initiative “(...) should envisage a clear EU membership perspective to those European neighbours of the EU who can demonstrate seriousness of their European ambitions through concrete actions and tangible achievements²²”. Azerbaijani foreign minister Elmar Mammadyarov expressed a will to work with the EU on specific programmes at the bilateral level within EaP²³. Belarus perceives the initiative as “(...) another step to boost pragmatic co-operation with the countries in the European Union’s immediate neighbourhood”. The foreign ministry expressed its will to work “(...) in conjunction with the European Commission to mould the Eastern Partnership (...) along a number of mutually beneficial directions including trade, energy, transport, cross-border crime, environment, and agriculture²⁴...”

Nevertheless, the Eastern Partnership Initiative has found itself under critique as well. Some publicists argue that the proposal is not necessary as there is already the European Neighbourhood Policy and therefore there is no need to create something new. In their opinion the EaP is duplicating already existing mechanisms, such as trade agreements, energy deals, and assistance for civil society or student exchanges. Thus, the areas of action proposed by Poland and Sweden have already been launched or are just about to be launched.

Some experts notice that the idea proposed by Poland, with Sweden joining later, has been a part of a “power struggle between Sarkozy and Tusk”, or rather “Old Europe” versus “New Europe” as the project is supposed to be a Polish answer to Sarkozy’s Mediterranean Union and his plans to move more funds towards the Union’s southern neighbours²⁵.

Among the EU members, the initiative faced the critique mainly from Bulgaria and Romania, who are afraid that the project will undermine their efforts invested in the Black Sea Synergy, as well as from Spain and Italy, who are more interested in the Mediterranean dimension of the ENP²⁶.

Much criticism has been also observed when it comes to a possible strengthening of the co-operation with the authoritarian regime in Belarus, which is the only post-Soviet state that does not have any contractual relationship with the European Union²⁷. The critique is part of a wider debate on what the EU should do for Belarus and on how to deal with Lukashenka and his administration. Grzegorz Gromadzki notices that so far the EU’s Eastern Neighbourhood Policy has not provided any adequate strategy for Belarus and the Union’s policy towards this country has been implicitly considered as a failure. As in many other cases, there is a sharp division between member states on what should be done. It could be seen clearly in 2006 after the presidential elections that were declared “rigged” by the Western

²² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, “Statement Of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine Regarding The Development of the Eastern Dimension of the European Union Foreign Policy,” May 26, 2008, <http://www.mfa.gov.ua/eu/en/news/detail/13105.htm> (accessed March 21, 2009).

²³ *APA Press Agency*, “Minister: Azerbaijan views Eastern Partnership initiative as very positive,” December 9, 2008, <http://en.apa.az/news.php?id=93383> (accessed March 21, 2009).

²⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belarus, “MFA Press Secretary Andrei Popov comments for the media on the Brussels-showcased presentation of the EU’s Eastern Partnership Policy,” December 3, 2008, <http://www.mfa.gov.by/en/press/news/f65ae7713490b10b.html> (accessed March 21, 2009).

²⁵ Katerina Safarikova, “Poland: Eastern Promises,” *Transitions Online*, March 6, 2008.

²⁶ Agnieszka K. Cinciara, “Does the Strengthened European Neighbourhood Policy,” op. cit.: 3.

²⁷ Ian Klinke, “The European Union’s Strategic Non-Engagement in Belarus. Challenging the Hegemonic Notion of the EU as a Toothless Value Diffuser,” *Perspectives. The Central European Review of International Affairs*, vol. 14: 2 (2006): 25.

observers. Some EU members such as Poland, Lithuania, Czech Republic or Slovakia called for taking stronger actions than freezing the accounts of the regime's officials and impose a ban on entry to the EU. Other countries, such as Germany, opted for milder sanctions²⁸.

The situation repeats itself now. Some countries are clearly against setting any contacts with Belarus, some show a certain interest in providing Belarus with help and assistance but only when there are democratic changes and the will to co-operate. The Polish-Swedish proposal seems to be a compromise. Benita Ferrero-Waldner said: "(...) the EU is ready to engage with Belarus, but Belarus must do its part too – by continuing recent positive trends", which she sees in recent steps allowing "certain opposition media to print within the country", and in seeking "advice on improving electoral legislation²⁹".

Launching of the Official Commission's Proposal

On June 19-20, 2008, the European Council adopted the respective Polish-Swedish initiative. Because of the war in Georgia in August 2008, on September 1 the Council asked the Commission to present its proposals earlier than it was scheduled. On December 3, 2008, the European Commission, following the consultations with EU eastern partners, officially presented the Eastern Partnership Initiative to the public. On March 20, 2009 the Eastern Partnership was officially launched.

During the presentation in Brussels Benita Ferrero-Waldner, Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighbourhood Policy stated:

"The time is ripe to open a new chapter in relations with our Eastern neighbours... Building on the progress of the last years we have prepared an ambitious and at the same time well-balanced offer. The security and stability of the EU is affected by events taking place in Eastern Europe and in the Southern Caucasus. Our policy towards these countries should be strong, proactive and unequivocal. The EU will continue with the successful approach of tailor-made programmes on a new scale and add a strong multilateral dimension³⁰ ..."

The president of the Commission José Manuel Barroso added that:

"Only with strong political will and commitment on both sides will the Eastern Partnership achieve its objective of political association and economic integration. We need to make an even greater investment in mutual stability and prosperity. This

²⁸ Grzegorz Gromadzki, "A Difficult Case. Belarus as the Part of the European Neighborhood Policy," *International Issues & Slovak Foreign Policy Affairs*, Vol. XV: 2 (2006): 39-41.

²⁹ Benita Ferrero-Waldner, "Ambitious New Partnership for the East" (Speech in the Polish Parliament, November 27, 2008), <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=SPEECH/08/672&format=PDF&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en> (accessed March 23, 2009).

³⁰ "The Eastern Partnership – an ambitious new chapter in the EU's relations with its Eastern neighbours," EU Press Release IP/08/158, December 3, 2008, <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/08/1858&format=PDF&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en> 9 (accessed March 22, 2009).

*will be quickly compensated by important political and economic benefits and will lead to more stability and security both for the EU and for our Eastern partners*³¹.”

In a “Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council³²”, the Commission presented a detailed scheme of bilateral co-operation, framework of multilateral co-operation, and provided details on resources and founding of the new Eastern Partnership Initiative based on a joint Polish-Swedish proposal.

On a bilateral level the Commission proposed the following concrete steps in 5 main areas of co-operation:

- **New contractual relations:** new individual and tailor-made *Association Agreements* (AAs) that would be negotiated with those partners, who wish to make a far-reaching commitment with the EU. These agreements would establish a closer link with EU standards and *acquis communautaire* as well as advance co-operation on Common Foreign and Security Policy/European Security and Defence Policy; emphasising progress in democracy, rule of law and human rights that will be a precondition for deepening relations with EU; developing a *Comprehensive Institution Building Programme (CIBP)* that would help partner countries to meet all conditions settled by the EU by improving administrative capacities in all sectors of co-operation.
- **Gradual integration into the EU economy:** goal of establishing a deep and comprehensive free trade area only after partner countries join the WTO and covering all trade, including energy; creation of a network of bilateral agreements among partners possibly leading to a creation of “*Neighbourhood Economic Community*”; envisaging an Agricultural Dialogue with partners; and strengthening of intellectual property protection.
- **Mobility and security:** offering partner countries tailor-made “*Mobility and Security*” *pacts* covering fighting illegal migrations; upgrading asylum systems to EU standards; setting up border management structures; assistance in fighting corruption and organised crime; a new visa policy that should lead to visa liberalisation together with financial assistance to partners; agreements on visa facilitation accompanied by readmission agreements; possibility of introduction of additional facilitations including waiving a visa fee for all citizens; developing a plan to improve member states’ consular coverage in partner countries; opening a dialogue about future visa-free travel.
- **Energy security:** inclusion of “*Energy interdependence*” *provisions* in the AAs; completion of negotiations on Ukraine’s and Moldova’s membership in the Energy Community; conclusion of *Memoranda of Understanding* on energy issues with Moldova, Georgia and Armenia; support for full integration of Ukraine’s energy market in the EU’s market; enhance political engagement with Azerbaijan, which is the only gas producing country in EaP; finalisation of EU Commission-Belarus declaration on

³¹ *ibidem*

³² “Eastern partnership: Communication from the European Commission to the European Parliament and the Council,” COM(2008) 823, December 3, 2008, http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/eastern/docs/com08_823_en.pdf (accessed March 22, 2009).

energy; and encouraging all partners to participate in the Intelligent Energy Europe Programme.

- **Supporting economic and social development:** conclusion of *Memoranda of Understanding* on regional policy; launching pilot regional programmes with additional funding; supporting direct transnational programmes in the regions; and extending the current ENPI-funded cross-border co-operation to the borders of Eastern partners.

A new framework for multilateral co-operation is intended to support the partner states' progress in bilateral relations with the European Union and to become a forum of sharing information and experience. It would also facilitate reaching common positions and initiate joint activities. The structural framework has been set at four levels: a) **meetings of the EaP heads of state/governments** held every 2 years; b) annual **meetings of ministers of foreign affairs** attached to the EU General Affairs and External Relations Council, aimed at reviewing the progress made and provide policy guidance; c) four **thematic platforms** corresponding to the main areas of co-operation at the level of senior officials from policy areas, held at least twice a year: Democracy, good governance and stability; Economic integration and convergence with EU policies; Energy security; Contacts between people; and d) **panels** to support the work of the thematic platforms in an as yet undefined format.

The Commission believes that the objectives of the new Eastern Partnership could be advanced through implementing certain “flagship initiatives”, that include: “Integrated Border Management Programme; an SME Facility; promotion of regional electricity markets, energy efficiency and renewable energy sources; development of the southern energy corridor; and cooperation on prevention of, preparedness for, and response to natural and man-made disasters³³”.

Implications

First of all, by launching this initiative Sweden and Poland forced their European partners to admit that EU's Eastern neighbours, including Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia from the Caucasus, are all located in Europe. Thus, according to the principles set down in the Rome Treaty of 1958, they are all theoretically eligible to apply for EU membership and to be admitted as members. Radosław Sikorski during the meeting of 26th of May admitted that the “European Union has European neighbours in the East, whereas to the South, there are just neighbours of Europe³⁴”. By saying this, the Polish minister tried to show that the EU cannot deny the European aspirations of its eastern neighbours which have a certain European identity and share common values.

Secondly, it is important to emphasize that the initiative and the Commission's proposal include several important steps and solutions that would certainly help eastern partners in their democratic transitions and in implementing reforms. The possible creation of a Neighbourhood Economic Community seems to be one of the most significant. The Community would take its inspiration from the European Economic Area and in the longer term would offer full access to the single market. The EU would provide partner countries

³³ “Eastern partnership: Communication from the European Commission,” op. cit.

³⁴ Ahto Lobjakas, “EU: New Initiative Suggests East...,” op. cit.

with technical and financial assistance in order to ensure the progress and reforms in these countries. Besides economic and security proposals, the creation of an EaP Civil Society Forum seems to be a good step forward. The Forum would promote the further development of civil society organisations and their relations with authorities and would become a platform for contacts with partners from the EU.

Thirdly, although the Polish-Swedish proposal stated that there would be no new funds needed, there will indeed be new funding involved. The initiative will require supplementing the current ENPI with about €350 million for 2010-2013 as the Commission intends to progressively raise current ENPI funding for eastern partners from current €450 million to €785 million in 2013. To address the most immediate need, the Commission proposes to re-focus the ENPI Regional Programme East to sustain the EaP multilateral dimension. Therefore the funds available now under this programme could be used to start the most important initiatives immediately. The Commission proposes that €250 million could be re-programmed for 2010-2013 time period. According to the Commission a total amount of €600 million, both fresh and re-programmed funds, will be devoted to the implementation of the Initiative.

The Czech Presidency and the Eastern Partnership

The first controversial issue that the Czech Presidency has to deal with is the involvement of the authoritarian regime of Alyaksandr Lukashenka of Belarus. Despite the criticism that has been observed within the EU member states, the EaP seems to be a compromise. The first steps to engage the Belarusian authorities into the implementation of the project and to soften the regime have already been taken. On February 19, 2009 the EU High Representative for CSFP, Javier Solana, visited Minsk and met with Lukashenka. This visit was followed by several others, including prime minister of Latvia Godmanis and Polish vice-prime minister Pawlak. These steps were perceived as the beginning of the liberalisation of the regime and at the same time as a consideration by the EU of the “issues of human rights and democracy in the interests of deeper engagement³⁵”. The Belarusian leader, who surprisingly announced that “(...) Europe does not see its future without Belarus...³⁶”, was officially invited to the launching summit in Prague in May.

The second problem for a successful implementation of the Eastern Partnership Initiative and one that the Czech Presidency will probably not solve before the end of its presidency in June 2009 is the financial crisis and problems with financing the project. Initially, as stated earlier, the European Commission proposed to allocate €600 million for the years 2010-2013 to implement the initiative. With the economic crisis the situation has become unclear and there are more doubts whether the EU could afford to allocate these funds. A high ranked Czech diplomat told *Gazeta Wyborcza*, the biggest daily newspaper in Poland, that some of the supporters of the EaP have already agreed to reduce the funds and what is needed is the political impulse to start the project³⁷. Nevertheless, the scepticism towards the EaP is rising,

³⁵ David Marples, “Javier Solana Visits Belarus,” op. cit.

³⁶ *Belarusian Telegraph Agency*, “Aleksandr Lukashenko: Javier Solana’s visit will help improve Belarus-EU relations,” February 24, 2009, <http://www.belta.by/en/news/president?id=337909> (accessed April 22, 2009).

³⁷ Dominika Pszczółkowska, “Partnerstwo Wschodnie zagrożone” [Eastern Partnership in Danger], *Gazeta Wyborcza*, February 21, 2009, http://wyborcza.pl/1,75477,6302603,Partnerstwo_Wschodnie_zagrozone.html (accessed March 29, 2009).

especially among Mediterranean member states like Spain, Portugal or France which are afraid of spending too much money on the East instead of supporting the Mediterranean Union. Germany and the Netherlands are afraid that it would not be reasonable to spend too much money during the crisis.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The Eastern Partnership Initiative, initially proposed by Poland and Sweden, could become a great success of the Czech Presidency and the European Union as a whole. The project is important both for the member states and the eastern neighbours of the EU. But to prevent the initiative from becoming another failure there are several steps that might be taken.

First, Poland and Sweden should play a more active role as advocates of the eastern neighbours within the EU, and co-operate closely with member states in promoting and implementing the EaP, especially with Germany. Poland should continue its efforts to bring Ukraine and Belarus closer to Europe and to contribute to the EU's understanding of the so-called "East". The "new" member states, including Poland and the Czech Republic, should work closely to ensure a high level of political consensus among all EU member states when it comes to the EU eastern neighbourhood

Second, the new Eastern Partnership Initiative should bring a united and clear "political message of solidarity of the EU with additional, tangible support for democratic and market-oriented reforms and the consolidation of partners' statehood and territorial integrity"³⁸, as Benita Ferrero-Waldner said. As the success of EaP will depend mainly on the political will of both EU member states and partner countries, it is necessary to ensure that the multilateral framework for communication is used in an efficient way. The EU member states should support the Czech and Swedish presidencies throughout 2009 in their efforts to create a stable and effective framework of co-operation with the eastern neighbourhood. When it comes to the partner countries, the EU should tailor its offer for Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine and possibly Belarus to each partner's needs and capacities and should offer its help to all interested countries that are not yet ready to undertake negotiations or implement a Free Trade Area but wish to do so in the near future. What is of significant importance is that the EU should ensure the equal treatment and support for its southern and eastern neighbourhoods and work towards ensuring that the EU will still be a "pole of attraction"³⁹ for its neighbours.

Third, the EU should not take for granted partner countries' support and interest in the EaP and should permanently work towards ensuring that the offer it presents to its partners is attractive and suited to provide assistance in reforms. Member states should emphasize support for Belarus in democratic changes. A clear set of rules that would make co-operation with the Belarusian regime possible should be established - ensuring the right of people to independent information, elections, respecting rights and freedoms including the freedom of

³⁸ Benita Ferrero-Waldner, "Ambitious New Partnership for the East," op. cit.

³⁹ Eneko Landaburu, "From Neighbourhood to Integration Policy. Are there concrete alternatives to enlargement?" (Policy Brief, no. 95, Centre for European Policy Studies, Brussels, March 2006): 3.

expression, making a good use of the offer provided by the OSCE and other organisations⁴⁰. The EU should consider the opening of an EU delegation office in Minsk in order to promote the EU and provide assistance in implementing possible projects within the EaP.

Finally, the EU should stress that the EaP initiative is not directed against Russia and stress that partner countries need to maintain good relations with this country as well. The EU should continue its efforts in finding solutions to the frozen conflicts in Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno-Karabakh.

⁴⁰ EC Non-Paper, “What the European Union could bring to Belarus,” http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/belarus/intro/non_paper_1106.pdf (March 21, 2008).