



10 years of Eastern Partnership

Welcome and Opening Statement (9.00-9.30)

Speakers:

Martin Povejšil, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs for Security and Multilateral Issues of the Czech Republic

Jaroslav Kurfürst, Special Envoy for the Eastern Partnership at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic

The founding fathers of the EaP had what remains a grand political vision in their vision for this partnership. One of the goals of the EaP, when it was established, was to bring not just the member countries closer to the EU but also each other. The partner countries have seen some great benefits, including an increase in trade, job creation, development of new relationships and freer movement to the EU. Despite the disappointments **Mr. Jaroslav Kurfürst**, Special Envoy for the Eastern Partnership at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic urged the EU and EaP members not to get discouraged and continue their hard work.

Mr. Martin Povejšil, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs for Security and Multilateral Issues of the Czech Republic, asked the speakers to critically evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the EaP thus far, emphasizing that this must be done candidly and sincerely. It should also be included in the evaluation to what degree the EU and partners have acknowledged and adapted their tools and policies to the different EaP countries. Further, Mr. Kurfürst suggests that the EaP could be used as an experiment of how standard EU foreign and security policies are reached and implemented as well as their success.

Both Mr. Kurfürst and Mr. Povejšil were adamant that the sometimes sensitive topic of Russia must not be avoided. It has broken international law and continues to stoke several frozen conflicts in EaP countries. They cautioned that it is essential that the EU is vigilant of Russia's behaviour and presence, especially in the EaP. In Mr. Kurfürst's opinion, a vital component of the EaP is about disrupting the geopolitics of limited sovereignty, or the Brezhnev Doctrine still being promoted by Russia.

This first decade has shown the uniqueness of each of the six members. Thus Mr. Povejšil invited the conference's speakers to give their honest views on how successful the EU and its partners have been in acknowledging this reality and adapting to it. Do the speakers believe



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that the Association Agreements, which some of the EaP countries have signed, will lead to an EU membership? Alternatively, do they perhaps feel that the EaP should remain as a separate partnership, a neighbourhood policy in relation to the EU? Assuming that the EU remains cautious and undecided regarding future memberships what motivations do EaP states have that likely to encourage them to stay in the EaP?

Both Mr. Kurfürst and Mr. Povejšil are positive about what the future may hold for the EaP while stressing that resilience of the EaP societies will be critical to the partnership's future successes.

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Taking Stock of the Eastern Partnership I (9.30-11.00)

Speakers:

Carl Bildt, Co-Chair of European Council on Foreign Relations, former Prime Minister of Sweden

Karel Schwarzenberg, Vice-chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the Chamber of Deputies, Parliament of the Czech Republic, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic

Mariia Symonova, GeneratiON CSO

Roman Banari, Vice President of National Youth Council of Moldova

Hovsep Khurshudyan, President of the "Free Citizen" Civic Initiatives Support Centre, Armenia

Moderator: **Ondřej Ditrych**, Director, Institute of International Relations Prague

The panel discussion *Taking Stock of the Eastern Partnership I* opened the day with a review of the past ten years of the EaP and hinted at its possible future developments. **Mr. Ondřej Ditrych**, Director of the Institute of International Relations and moderator of the discussion, began by saying that it might be easy to dismiss the EaP initiative, but that would not do justice to the reality on the ground. Mr. Ditrych, therefore, invited the speakers to consider the positives and negatives of the past ten years of the EaP initiative.

Mr. Carl Bildt, Co-Chair of the European Council on Foreign Relations and former Prime Minister of Sweden, summarized many of what he sees as positive outcomes of the Eastern Partnership. Before the brief 2008 Russo-Georgian war, which showed that the region remains unstable and that the Russian threshold for the use of force is much lower than had been imagined. Prior to these events, Eastern Europe had not been a primary region of interest for the EU. However, it decided to step in with its EaP initiative in the hopes of stabilizing the area and aiding its development in the face of an increasingly assertive Russia. Mr. Bildt considered the efforts as having been relatively successful. First, the initiative still exists, as do all of its eastern partner countries, which has not always been entirely certain. Second, despite the reasonably vague aspirations of the initiative's founding document, the EaP has registered many tangible achievements, such as those in trade liberalization and travel regimes. **Mr.**



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Karel Schwarzenberg, Vice-chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic and former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, concurred adding that the EaP has contributed to the economic development and democratization in the region. Third, the initiative has been instrumental in helping the growth of civil society in the partnership countries. While Mr. Schwarzenberg admitted that he and his colleagues had had higher hopes for the partnership, arguing that much more could be achieved had Western Europe, is too preoccupied with its separate issues. Instead, it should show more courage and initiative in its approach to the Eastern partners as well as Russia. The Eastern partner countries should similarly muster the courage to stop wavering between the East and the West and choose what they believe is best. In the coming years, extensive and in-depth cooperation across Europe would best ensure its stability and prosperity.

The discussion then turned to the experiences of citizens from the partner countries themselves. **Ms. Mariia Symonova**, from GeneratiON CSO, drew on her experience from Ukraine. She notes that the EaP in many ways has surpassed the domestic expectations. Despite not initially being viewed as an instrumental framework, it is now producing tangible and positive results. This is evident, among other ways, in the impressive growth of Ukrainian civil society. While it is challenging to evaluate successes in more concrete terms, Ms. Symonova maintained that the people of Ukraine remain very positive about the Euro-Atlantic integration, which it has access to through the EaP. Although the initiative should not be perceived as an automatic ticket to the EU membership, it certainly helps the country by building a country which is more appealing for such aspirations as well as a long-lasting experience of cooperation.

Mr. Roman Banari, Vice President of National Youth Council of Moldova, and **Mr. Hovsep Khurshudyan**, President of the "Free Citizen" Civic Initiatives Support Centre in Armenia, largely agreed with Ms. Symonova. Mr. Banari stated that the material aspects of the Eastern Partnership, such as visa-free travel and Erasmus+ programme, are enjoyed by many Moldovans. However, most citizens do not see much of the positive developments at this stage, and thus, some are skeptical about the possible successes of the partnership.

Mr. Khurshudyan added that the initiative also lends the much-needed flexibility to any cooperation between the EU and Eastern Europe. The EaP also contributes to the buildup of an independent, prosperous and democratic Armenia. Importantly, it is one of the few things



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that helps bring the people of Armenia and Azerbaijan together, in spite of their differences over the question of the Nagorno-Karabakh frozen conflict.

The main challenge, the panellists agreed, facing the member countries are the problematic areas of the judiciary and the rule of law. It is mainly the courts and prosecutors that are resisting reforms, hindering the progress achieved elsewhere.

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Second panel: Taking Stock of the Eastern Partnership II (11.15-12.45)

Speakers:

Alexandr Vondra, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, former Minister of Defence of the Czech Republic

Andriy Veselovsky, former Representative of Ukraine to the EU

Avaz Hasanov, Director of the Society for Humanitarian Research, Azerbaijan

Tatia Jikidze, Proactive Group Georgia

Dzmitry Mitskevich, Analyst of Belarus Security Blog, editor of the Belarusian magazine Varta

Moderator: **Pavλίna Janebová**

The second panel, *'Taking Stock of the Eastern Partnership II,'* asked the panellists to reflect on what they saw as the essential benefits and disappointments of the EaP's first decade.

Mr. Andriy Veselovsky, former Representative of Ukraine to the EU and **Ms. Tatia Jikidze**, Proactive Group Georgia, highlighted the benefits and opportunities now available to the younger generations as a result of the EaP. It has helped facilitate transnational communication and the exchange of ideas with EU countries in a way that was not previously possible. All the member states have seen positive developments, to varying degrees, in terms of their economy, living standard and visa-free travel which was hailed by the panel as a key for continued growth and change at home.

Mr. Veselovsky pointed out, the partnership was an alternative to EU membership offered to the former Soviet member states to show them that there are routes for cooperation with the EU other than membership. The EaP states all face their own unique, yet similar challenges of low levels of democratization which is mostly due to oligarchical systems and corruption within the national governments, small civil societies and their historical relationships with Russia. **Mr. Alexandr Vondra**, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, former Minister of Defence of the Czech Republic, used the 2008 Russo-Georgian to reflect on the relationship and influence of the two main regional actors. Examining the conflict in the context of soft versus hard power policy and how these different approaches tend to be utilized



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by Russia and the EU. He contrasted Putin's reactions to the situation in Georgia with the traditional soft power policy stance of the EU as an example of how a situation may be read and handled in radically different ways, emphasising that the outcome can never truly be predetermined. In the case of the EU the overarching idea was to do something rather than nothing, and so the EU offered assistance in democratisation which was anticipated to eventually lead to increased stability, security and a healthier civil society in Georgia.

Ms Jikidze, however, presented a rather positive evaluation of what she called the "excellent" EU-Georgian relationship. Arguing that were it not for the EU's interventions in 2008 more territory would have been lost. In her view, the EU is committed to continuing to support increased prosperity, improvements in the agricultural sector, visa free travel as well as academic and professional exchange programmes. Further, the EU is now also providing support in the protection of the Georgian borders. According to Ms Jikidze, most of the expectations of the Georgians have been exceeded by how much they have thus far gained from the EU-Georgian cooperation through the EaP. Mr Veselovsky warned, however, that Russia retains a level of influence in the EaP states stronger than that of the EU at this time.

The EU must ask itself if it is up to the task of protecting its member and neighbouring states. It has a catastrophic track record of handling security issues along its borders, Mr Vondra warns. It failed in Ukraine, because it was preoccupied with irrelevant issues which allowed Putin to swoop in. **Mr Avaz Hasanov**, Director of the Society for Humanitarian Research in Azerbaijan, concurred. There is a paramount need for the EU to place a stronger emphasis on security. Using the Nagorno-Karabakh frozen conflict as another unstable situation which is at risk of flaring up.

Though the EaP and the Association Agreements have enabled the EU to build closer relationships with the EaP countries much of these relationships are founded on financial investments, interests and subsidies from the EU. One example is Azerbaijan with its energy riches and large economy. Near fifty percent of investments in the country come from the EU and the two parties have signed an energy security agreement. Yet the relationship lacks depth, Azerbaijan hopes that it can count on EU support in future security challenges. However, reviewing the EU's track record in Georgia, it is unclear whether Azerbaijan would receive any support and how useful it would be.



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Most of the panelists touched on the apparent disconnect between EU and EaP members expectations on the nature of the partnership. **Mr Dzmitry Mitskevich**, Analyst of Belarus Security Blog, editor of the Belarusian magazine Varta, stressed the foundational misunderstandings between Belarus and the EU's expectations of the partnership. The Belarusian government has a very pragmatic, monetary based, approach and does not understand nor share the EU's value based system. Thus, Belarus does not understand what the EU really wants from it which is largely to blame for the lack of progress Mr Mitskevich suggests. The intensified infringements on press freedom and the prosecutions of several human rights activists concerns Mr Mitskevich deeply. The EU must recognise that the EaP states have histories, oligarchic political systems and corruption largely foreign to the EU. Mr Mitskevich argued that corruption and EU fraud remain fundamental hurdles to development for all EaP states. Thus the oligarchs cannot remain in power but how they should be dealt with divides the panel, still they agree that it must be up to the people not the EU. It is essential that change comes from the grassroots, enabling the people to create the change they seek.

Despite the many issues Mr Vondra insisted that the partnership has had a stabilizing influence and encouraged democratic tendencies and he hoped this will continue. To date the partnership's most significant achievement, in Mr Veselovsky's opinion, is that it has opened the doors between civil societies, because that is how true change can come about.

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10 Years of Eastern Partnership – Lessons Learned and Where to Go Next?

Speakers:

Eugeniusz Smolar, Board Member of the Centre for International Relations, Warsaw

Victoria Bucataru, Executive Director of Foreign Policy Association (APE), Chisinau

Dmytro Shulga, European Program Director at International Renaissance Foundation, Kyiv

Jeroen Willems, Deputy Head of Unit responsible for Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus and the Eastern Partnership, European Commission, DG NEAR, Brussels

NOT PRESENT: **Richard Giragosian**, Founding Director at Regional Studies Center, Yerevan

Moderator: **Lucia Najšlová**, Lecturer at the Institute of International Studies, Charles University, Prague

The panel's discussions centred around the following two core questions, posed by the moderator Lucia Najšlová, Lecturer at the Institute of International Studies at Charles University, what do you personally think the partnership has delivered during its first ten years? What on the other hand do you find to have been most disappointing?

The Association Agreement was a great achievement for Moldova claimed **Ms Victoria Bucataru**, Executive Director of Foreign Policy Association (APE), Moldova. When the agreement was signed in 2014 it was sold to the people as their saviour. To the Moldovan people the EU was a union of rich welfare states, thus after joining people expected an increased living standard, better jobs, salaries and a stronger social security network. There has been some progress in these areas. The Association Agreements has meant the start of the creation of a welfare state in the country. A positive thing in Ms Bucataru's view, as the living standards remains low and the job market difficult. The EaP partnership has allowed Moldovans access to visa free travel within the Schengen area. Academic, education exchange programmes and the ability for professionals to work in the EU are great steps forward and will help bring about change at home through the spread and adaptation of EU values.

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Nevertheless, Ms Bucataru finds it very concerning and discouraging that many of those going abroad choose not to return due to governmental instabilities and political crises at home. As she firmly believes that successful change must come from the grassroots. Only the people of Moldova can create the change the country needs to grow and prosper.

Though the partnership as a whole has been a disappointment in Ms Bucataru's eyes **Mr Jeroen Willems**, Deputy Head of the Unit responsible for Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus and the Eastern Partnership, European Commission, DG NEAR in Brussels, has a different framing. Arguing that the partnership thus far has been a success. The reform agenda set out in the partnership has been and continues to be successful highlighting: job creation across the nations, spreading the economic benefits beyond the big cities and the increase in trade. During these first decade trade between EU and EaP countries has increased by almost seventy five percent. Making the EaP the tenth largest trading partner of the EU. Mr Willems believes that greater cooperation and communication between the members and the EU is paramount to the continued success of the EaP. Which the "twenty deliverables by 2020 framework" is intended to facilitate through the strengthening of economies, growth in trade, boosting civil society and increased democratization in EaP countries. If these developments take place they are anticipated to improve cooperation between the partnership countries. However, Mr Willems accepts that such a process will not be easy or happen at any great speed.

Crucial to the success of the EaP and the deliverables Mr **Eugeniusz Smolar**, Board Member of the Centre for International Relations in Warsaw, suggested is the issue of near inherent corruption in EaP government. Arguing that increasing monetary contributions would only make the oligarchs richer and strengthen their corrupt regimes rather than creating transformational change for the people. There are no plans put in place for how to handle the oligarchs, to implement democratic change they must go but how will this be handled? How, for example, could oligarchs be expected to remove their influence over judges only for that judge to come under the influence of another? Mr Smolar warns that the complexity of the situation is severely underestimated by the EU, and this is likely to lead to failures in implementation and standstill in the democratization process. These are the types of hurdles that the EaP states have to find ways to answer, perhaps with assistance from the EU. Meanwhile, Mr. **Dmytro Shulga**, European Program Director at International Renaissance Foundation in Ukraine, warns that democratization must not be forced upon people if they opt to keep the status quo of the oligarch system.



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Mr. Smolar sympathizes with concerns of EU member states regarding the possibility of the EaP states future membership. These states all have significant issues to deal with at home, and the developments have not been encouraging. Thus, it is understandable that they may be perceived as liabilities and obstacles. The EU does not need a relationship with the EaP states; rather, it is they and their development that would truly stand to benefit from the Association Agreement. As the EaP countries share many similar challenges, the EU ought to develop a strategy for how to handle these; no such coherent strategy exists at this time. A fundamental issue which the EaP and EU must address is Russia, its role in these states, historical and political connections.

Several of the panellists raised concerns regarding Russia's influence in the region as well as the EU's approach to Russia. For Mr. Shluga, the reinstatement of Russia's vote in the Council of Europe is concerning. He sees it as an illustration of the apparent disconnect between the realities faced by the EaP states and the perception of other European countries. That Russia regained its seat at the table so quickly does not bode well for the future of Ukraine and the EaP. How does it bode for the complex conflicts in Georgia and Ukraine? Mr. Shluga asks.

This evaluation of the partnership's first decade summed up the general position of the panel. It acknowledged that significant changes and much progress had been made. However, what people and politicians do from here on in will have a paramount impact on the success of the partnership and its members relationships with the EU and Russia.

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Reflection of the State and Engagement of Civil Society in the Eastern Partnership Policy: Missed Opportunity or Constructive Approach?

Speakers:

Giorgi Oniani, Deputy Executive Director of Transparency International Georgia, Tbilisi

Jerzy Pomianowski, Executive Director of European Endowment for Democracy (EED), Brussels

Mehriban Rahimli, Black Sea Trust for regional cooperation, a program of The German Marshall Fund of the United States, Baku

Gabriela Svárovská, Deputy Director and Programme Director (Grants) of Prague Civil Society Centre, Prague

Ulad Vialichka, Director General of International Consortium “EuroBelarus”, Minsk

Moderator: **Věra Řiháčková-Pachta**, Advocacy Manager of Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, Brussels

The last panel invited the speakers to reflect on the effect that the EaP policy has had on civil society efforts in their respective countries. The engagement of civil society has been an integral element of democratization and reform efforts in the EaP. However, as all things are easier said than done, the speakers were asked to review the actual development of the engagement and state of civil society in their countries. The first point, meeting, addressed the efficiency of civil society and asked if it has achieved its role as a partner to the EU and some EaP partners. The second point discussed the environment of civil society and whether it is conducive to task-fulfilment and, if not, how it can be improved.

The moderator, Věra Řiháčková-Pachta, jumped right into the first topic, weighing out the achievements of civil society and its contribution to policy. **Ms. Gabriela Svárovská**, the Deputy Director and Programme Director of the Prague Civil Society Centre, took the floor reflecting on the development. Though the situation may not be ideal, there is a reason to be satisfied with the progress that has been made. Civil society is a vital part of the integration process, and the EU continues to have pull-factors that work as goals of pursuit, and the EaP

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has, indeed, created a conducive framework for civil society efforts. However, issues persist on the side of national governments, a sentiment echoed by **Mr. Ulad Vialichka**, Director General of International Consortium “EuroBelarus.” It seems that civil society in EaP partner states receives more feedback and cooperation from the EU than from national governments, an important aspect to improve. Civil society remains complementary to government action, a somewhat reactionary force that is not taken seriously. All speakers agreed that the EaP had ambitious aims for civil society, but that much had to be improved, both in the short-term and long-term. **Mr. Jerzy Pomianowski**, Executive Director of European Endowment for Democracy (EED), highlighted the need to uphold direct dialogue between societies, while **Mr. Giorgi Oniani**, Deputy Executive Director of Transparency International Georgia, expressed his concern over the general shrinking of civil society on a global scale. **Ms. Mehriban Rahimli**, representing the Black Sea Trust for regional cooperation, quite gravely, raised awareness over the attack on and lack of protection for civil society. Overall, the sentiments concerning the development of the initiative remained positive, although the outlook and perception of the reality were rather grim.

The second round of speeches focussed on the state of civil society. The moderator shed light on general attacks on civil society by governments, especially in Georgia and Moldova. Mr. Oniani agreed, pointing out the fallacies that politicians use to attack and diminish the role of civil society organizations in his country. The main reason for this is increased political corruption and the powerlessness of institutions against high-ranking officials. Ms. Rahimli added that the EU must take a central role in combating this, using its political leverage, to the extent that it can define its capacities, to uphold civil society where it is systematically devalued. The shrinking space for civil society is directly linked to unwelcoming national governments and goes against what the majority of nations, who have expressed widespread approval of civil society organizations, want. The EU, Mr. Vialichka stressed, should support a mental shift towards a more civil society. To do this, it is vital to define who civil society is and its role and strategy in the policy. Mr. Pomianowski and Ms. Svárovská ended the panel by agreeing on the problem of dependence on international donors and the achievable effects and efficiency of organisations when they are supported. Legitimation requires constructive and responsible communication between governments and civil society, as these organisations are an important channel for communication for the people that want to voice their concerns.

Civil society allows people to mobilise their attention and experience their own impact and the cause continues to be an important one. However, several hurdles persist, most notably



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through national governments that disrupt the efforts of civil society organizations and an ongoing intensification of high-level corruption. There remains a massive conflict between the values of civil society and European integration and the harsh reality that persists, and the strategy must adopt long-term efforts to combat this. However, one must remain optimistic. The tools to influence the situation to exist, but they must be implemented, both on the side of the EaP partners, as well as the EU.



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Final Remarks

Jaroslav Kurfürst, Special Envoy for the Eastern Partnership at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic

Mr. Jaroslav Kurfürst, the Special Envoy for the Eastern Partnership at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, took the floor to conclude the conference, reflecting on the main points that were brought up during the panels. The first strategic perspective of the EaP, where divisions along many lines, such as the promotion of democracy, freedom, and the rule of law, remain. The second point looked at the achievements and failures of the partnership. On the one side, the EaP has accomplished visa-free travel and Association Agreements, while on the other hand, the capacities of the partnership were overestimated and the lack of support on the domestic level persists. Furthermore, there is the fear that the EU's influence is diminishing, and the general EU acceptance is losing ground. Thirdly, the question of security hit on Russian interests and the weakness of the EU and EaP to act against frozen conflicts. The fourth package concerned civil society as the main driver for change, although the hope for EaP countries is in the generational shift. Especially the relationship with independent media and governments remain difficult. The fifth point of the discussion presented the cases in different countries, to compare and contrast several perspectives. Finally, there were general observations on how civil society organizations and EaP members need to act and learn from history.

The conference concluded with a few recommendations by Mr. Kurfürst. The first is to state the course of the EaP. Implementation was the second field for advice, whereby reforms for democracy and judiciary must be worked out together by the government, EU, and civil society. Thirdly, the guests were urged to remain present and to activate the missions and embassy. The fourth point, one of the strongest messages, was the support for civil society, as it takes a central role in politics. The next element was to connect the civil society forum and the EaP to governments. The sixth recommendation was to place more attention on hybrid threats and resilience-building. The last point regarded the membership perspective and the question on how to get back on a path with EU membership on the horizon, which may help improve the civil society efforts in respective nations. All in all, Mr. Kurfürst remained optimistic about the efforts and urged everyone else to keep a positive outlook.