



EUROPEAN INSTITUTE OF ROMANIA

Conference

***The Eastern Partnership and the Black Sea Synergy:
How to cooperate, not to compete***

*November 25th 2008
Bucharest, Intercontinental Hotel*

- Summary -

The conference “*The Eastern Partnership and the Black Sea Synergy: How to cooperate, not to compete*” was organized by the European Institute of Romania and the Embassy of the Republic of Poland in Bucharest, with the cooperation of the Centre for Eastern Studies in Warsaw.

The conference benefited from important contributions of high officials of the Romanian and Polish Ministries of Foreign Affairs, European Commission and European Parliament and also representatives of the Romanian and Polish academic milieu.

The topics of debate integrated the presentation of the Eastern Partnership initiative, the main components, as well as the strong and weak points of the Black Sea Synergy, together with the challenges that the Eastern European Union’s Neighbourhood Area is facing nowadays.

A Polish-Swedish initiative, the **Eastern Partnership** (EP) was first presented in *May 2008*, as a cooperation framework between the EU 27 countries and the 6 Eastern European countries: Ukraine, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia and Belarus. An expression of a EU open to its neighbours, the Eastern Partnership proposal benefits from the Czech presidency support, an extended, more pragmatic and project-oriented proposal being delivered to all the EU member countries in October this year. The Eastern Partnership has a *positive, constructive agenda*, meant to help these six countries develop and harmonize with European standards.

There are a few issues that need to be highlighted. The six countries under the EP are very different, have rather diverse levels of development and also different aspirations. Some of them express their European vocation and EU membership perspective quite firmly, at the same time being more advanced in the process of economic and political reform, thus also imposing an *asymmetrical* approach. Based on the principles of *ownership and differentiation*, the Eastern Partnership proposal intends to be a positive policy. Often, there

is debate even regarding the difference between the terms: *European Neighbours* (when referring to the countries at the Eastern border of the European Union that, in fact, are part of Europe and should not be considered as neighbouring Europe) and *neighbours of Europe* (when dealing with the Southern neighbours, with no prospect of membership).

In the Polish view, the Eastern Partnership should be based on the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), but should also go beyond this. The EU's Neighbourhood Policy also refers to the six countries mentioned and a particular attention must be paid to the fact that it must not overlap with the EP. Another important aspect would be to avoid breaking-up the focus of attention into far too many cooperation initiatives that might have almost the same goals and identical instruments.

The Eastern Partnership is focusing on *deepened bilateral cooperation* with these countries, cooperation that needs to be visible to the society (visa facilitation and liberalization, mobility partnerships, deep and comprehensive free trade agreements negotiated individually are only a few of the areas where the EP is trying to bring progress). The EP is based mainly on a bilateral approach. Each country is to be referred to separately, taking into account its own specific features. The association agreements that could be signed with these countries should definitely go beyond the traditional Partnership and Cooperation Agreements; the new generation of Action Plans (already in place under the ENP) might represent an option, still depending on each country's choice.

The *multilateral cooperation* that the EP also foresees should be project-oriented, flexible and all the projects should be performed on a voluntary basis. There cannot and will not be any imposition either on EU Member States, or on the six Eastern partners.

The cooperation in the energy field is a key issue in the Eastern Partnership and the future provisions will be made in strict accordance with the EC's Strategic Energy Review.

The proposal envisages a variety of *financial sources*: the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument, additional funds from EBRD, bilateral assistance from some of the EU Member States and also from other partners, such as non-EU countries like Japan, Canada. There are a number of budget reviews coming up and the European Union should find credible financial sources and mechanisms to give substance to the EP. The present amount of financing in this area is 6 euro per capita, the intention on short term is to reach 12 euro per capita and also in the next financial perspective to attain the level for the Western Balkans, that is 20 euro per capita.

The risk of overlapping with other regional initiatives, one being the Black Sea Synergy, has also been a hot debate subject for the conference. The fact that the Eastern Partnership seems to be another initiative with almost the same objectives, along with Black Sea Synergy and other cooperation initiatives in the Black Sea Area brings into attention *the necessity not to overlap*, in order to assure *coherence* to the cooperation aims in the region.

The first EC Communication on the EU's initiative **Black Sea Synergy** was issued in April 2007. Bringing together Romania, Bulgaria, Ukraine, Turkey, Russia, and Georgia, also the Republic of Moldova, Greece, Armenia, Azerbaijan, the Black Sea Synergy represents the

EU's vision upon the cooperation with the partner states in the Black Sea Area, initiative focusing on the *regional component*, an important element that was lacking from the European Neighbourhood Policy. Main areas of cooperation deal with democracy, respect of human rights, good governance, movement of persons, improving security, solutions for the frozen conflicts, energy, transport, environment, trade and so on. An important role in further developing the strategy is given to cross-border cooperation. The European Commission's Communication in June this year, regarding the report on the first year of implementation of the Black Sea Synergy, recognized the substance of several sectoral partnerships (environment - with active contribution from Romania, transport, movement and security, civil society) and agreed that Black Sea Synergy will continue to function on very sound foundation.

The European Commission will also deliver a *Communication on the Eastern Partnership in early December this year*, this being considered an important step in order that this ambitious proposal becomes an applicable reality. During the conference, the representative of the European Commission focused upon the *need for complementarity*. In his view, while the Black Sea Synergy is regarded more as a regional cooperation initiative (countries around the Sea, brought together by geography, by classic cooperation opportunities such as environment, energy, infrastructure), 'the Eastern Partnership's guiding idea is the wish and will of these countries to develop closer ties with the European Union and to develop a new quality in the links between the region and the EU, this process of approximation having a strong bilateral track'.

Romania supports the Eastern Partnership initiative and awaits the Commission's Communication on EP for further developments. The Romanian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Lazăr Comănescu underlined that "*complementarity* with other cooperation initiatives (such as Black Sea Synergy) *is a must*", since the Black Sea Synergy is most appropriate for multilateral cohesion, and the Eastern Partnership could focus on bilateral relations. A particular attention must be given to finding appropriate financial allocations for EP, any other financial sources being welcomed, given the fact that EU Eastern border initiatives bring additional stability, prosperity and even predictability in the area.

Fully supporting the Black Sea Synergy project from the very beginning, **Romania** is confident that both initiatives can be further developed. Differentiation should be correlated to performance and a particular attention must be paid to the areas eligible for each of the two initiatives. While the Eastern Partnership focuses on assisting the Eastern countries on their path to reaching the European standards, the Black Sea Synergy is based upon confidence-building projects, equally important to the area.

Among the **challenges for the Eastern European Union Neighbourhood**, there were identified: the rivalry between these initiatives in the region, the traditional manner of the countries in this area of dealing with the problems internally, (even) the definition of "*shared Eastern EU neighbourhood*", the economic challenges and the problems generated by the conflict in Georgia this year, the fact that Russia had expressed reserves regarding the European project and is now waiting for the Eastern Partnership to become a real EU initiative, the necessity to enhance the support offered to the Eastern area, especially in the

field of education (preparing future leaders and specialists in political science, international relations), the energy security issue. Mr. Adrian Severin, MEP, also added two other challenges determined by Russia's reluctance to deal with the EU as a whole, preferring to deal separately with EU Member States and by the difficulty to solve frozen conflicts, given that 'they are fruits of the marriage between the geopolitical and geoeconomic challenges of the Eastern EU Neighbourhood area'.

The European Union needs to be *coherent* as regards Russia and also in respect to the new initiatives of cooperation at its Eastern border. Another aspect that needs further clarification is the opposition between the fact that, on the one hand, the Eastern Partnership could be a way of 'simulating' a pre-accession phase (by its instruments and goals of approximation with EU standards), and, on the other hand, it does not entail pre-candidate status to the Eastern countries involved.

In the concluding remarks, Adrian Severin acknowledged that 'There is still need for a *truly* European Union *Common* Foreign and Security Policy, achieved by a *political* Europe that is moving ahead, with a *consistent* strategy which gives to the neighbours a *realistic* perspective'.

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