

# EASTERN PARTNERSHIP: TOWARDS CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM

Official side-event of the Czech EU Presidency under the auspices of H.E. Mirek  
Topolánek, Prime Minister of the Czech Republic

International Conference, 5-6 May, 2009, Prague

# Organizers and Partners

The event is organized by the Association for International Affairs in cooperation with Prague Security Studies Institute (CZ), Institute for International Relations (CZ), Institute for Security and Development Policy (SE), Polish Institute of International Affairs (PL), East European Democratic Centre (PL), Open Society Institute, Black Sea Trust, Heinrich Böll Foundation, European Partnership for Democracy, European Council on Foreign Relations, Policy Association for an Open Society, Pact, Office for a Democratic Belarus and others.

The conference is supported by the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs and recognized as an official side-event of the Czech EU Presidency.

Partners, invited institutions and experts from the EU-27 and EaP-6 countries are expected to draft recommendations, to submit policy papers and concrete proposals regarding policy instruments and projects in the framework of the Eastern Partnership (EaP).

## Summary

A group of NGOs and policy institutes put forward an initiative to organize a conference on the eve of the Eastern Partnership Summit - to be held on May 6, 2009 in Prague. Representatives of the civil society from all countries involved (EU-27 + 6 EaP) will be invited to the conference. Main purpose of the conference is to highlight the expected benefits of the EaP for both the EU and partners involved, to bring forward suggestions and new impulses for further development of the EaP and to acknowledge a potential of civil society in enhancing the EaP.

## Background

The proposed event related to the "Eastern Partnership Summit" would be in line with EU Commission's recommendations<sup>1</sup>, directly supporting further development of civil society organizations and their mutual contacts and dialogue with the public administration. The "Eastern Partnership Summit" is expected to adopt a Political Declaration establishing the Partnership. The conference will suggest possibilities of civil society contribution to the EaP (including concrete proposals and projects). The individuals and institutions represented at the conference would contribute to the foundation of the "Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum", which may become a formal tool of cooperation with the EU.

## Main Objectives

- To promote and keep on the track goals of the Eastern partnership in coming years especially in perspective of current economic crisis.

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1 SEC (2008) 2974, 3/12/2008

- To establish a platform for discussion, networking and opinion exchange of civil society representatives from the EU and the EaP countries – under the umbrella of “Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum”
- To demonstrate civil society’s support for the EaP, to enable its representatives from the EaP countries to present their ideas and suggestions regarding the EaP, and to send a strong signal that the EaP is to deliver benefits to the citizens of neighbouring countries.
- To submit recommendations to the Commission, the Council and the Swedish Presidency, namely concrete proposals how to shape and effectively use the EaP tools and new projects how NGOs should be effectively involved in the EaP.

## Form of the Event

| 5 May 2009  | 6 May 2009  |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Workshops: Finalizing draft recommendations</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Conference (plenary session, thematic panels)</li> <li>▪ Conclusion: Presentation of the recommendations to the representatives of the Presidencies (CZ, SE) and the Commission</li> </ul> |

The conference is designed as a two-day event.

On **Tuesday, 5 May 2009**, experts from the region will meet for closed afternoon workshops in order to finalize draft recommendations regarding the EaP, including ideas about the Civil Society Forum. The drafts will be prepared in advance by e-mail consultations; chosen civil society representatives from the EaP countries will be asked to submit their proposals. *(Please note that the workshops are designed as rather small closed working groups. For the list of workshop participants please see the conference program.)*

On **Wednesday, 6 May 2009**, the plenary sessions will be held. Final session will be devoted to the presentation of recommendations (the outcome of the Tuesday workshops).

# Conference Agenda

Topic A (workshop/panel)

## Building a Partnership of Shared Values?

Thematic focus: Democracy, Good Governance and Human Rights

The EaP provides another political instrument (along with those of Council of Europe and OSCE) to assist Eastern European countries in developing stable democratic institutions and enhancing good governance. through stronger participation of civil society in areas such as human rights, electoral standards, freedom of the media, combating corruption, training and networking of local authorities, and democratic institutions building (law enforcement agencies - judiciary, police). Implementation of good governance standards is particularly important for business environment in the region, including the conditions and opportunities for European companies and their development.

- How to encourage governments to work with civil society and vice versa?
- How to support watchdog activities (election monitoring, good governance monitoring etc.) of civil society through EaP?
- How to strengthen civil society actors in EaP countries with unfavourable environment?
- How the civil society could contribute to improvement of the business climate in the EaP countries?

Topic B (workshop/panel)

## Resolving Conflicts: Pre-condition for Development in other Areas?

Thematic focus: Security and Peace Building

The War between Russia and Georgia over the breakaway regions Abkhazia and South Ossetia in August 2008 and other unresolved conflicts in Transnistria, Crimea and Nagorno-Karabakh hinder Eastern European countries closer approach to the EU. Support for civil society, confidence building measures in conflict regions and across ceasefire lines and civil society expertise may help eventually overcome deeply-rooted disagreements at the highest political level.

- Is progress in the Eastern Neighbourhood possible without undertaking substantial efforts to find a solution to the conflicts, which have remained frozen since the early 90's?
- Does Civil Society have potential to eventually contribute to final conflict resolution?
- What kind of Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) should be implemented by Civil Society actors (NGOs/Think-tanks/Policy Centers)?

Topic C (workshop/panel)

## EU Role in Economic Convergence of EaP Countries

Thematic Focus: Economic Integration

Economic integration is supposed to be one of the core assets of the EaP. New initiative would eventually speed up negotiations on deep and comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (FTAs). However, bringing markets together demand substantial reforms in areas like combating corruption, new legislation adoption, set up of free market standards etc. Mutual economic interests are good starting point but without progress in above mentioned fields EaP would fall far behind its initial expectations.

- What role do economic interests play in further integration between the EU and its Eastern neighbours?
- What can civil society do for promotion of free market economy in the EaP countries?
- How can the EU assist the convergence of EaP countries legislation governing business and investment climate with European standards?

- Is complying of EU businesses with local conditions in contradiction with promoting democracy and the rule of law in EaP countries?
- Can civil society assist in promotion and monitoring of freedom to private property, transparency of privatization processes, combating corruption in economic sphere?

Topic D (workshop/panel)

## **Connecting Neighbours: From Infrastructure to People-to-People Contacts**

Thematic Focus: Communication, Transport, Visa Facilitation

There is a broad range of issues related to connection and/or contacts between peoples of the EU countries and Eastern Neighbours of the EU. One of the most important is Energy Security of both EU and its Neighbours. However, this issue is also closely related with state of infrastructure with basically non-existent transport networks between the EU and Eastern Neighbours. Then we are not too far from people-to-people contacts with limitations imposed on fluent movement of individuals by current visa regime(s). Significant improvement in connectivity would support substantially progress in all other issues tackled by EaP.

- What are the greatest obstacles for connectivity from the perspective of civil society (Infrastructure limitations, Visa regimes)?
- What could be role of civil society in promoting and facilitating progress in connectivity?

Topic D (workshop/panel)

## **Eastern Partnership and Energy Security**

Thematic Focus: Energy Security

Amongst others, the conflict in Georgia in 2008 clearly demonstrated the EU's precarious energy security as it threatened key diversification routes such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (BTE) and Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipelines. In the aftermath of the war several Caspian states, such as Azerbaijan, also decided to sell more of their energy supplies to Russia rather than to the EU, which would, undoubtedly, also affect the viability of the EU's planned Nabucco pipeline. In January 2009, the EU's energy security took yet another dive with the Ukrainian-Russian gas row. What initially appeared as the traditional annual bilateral clash between the two swiftly degenerated into a veritable pan-European gas crisis. The conflict lasted nearly 20 days and shut down gas supplies to 18 European countries for almost two weeks, leaving thousands of households to face a particularly cold winter and seriously disrupting European industry.

- To what extent do the latest crises call into doubt the EU's energy diversification strategies?
- What lessons should the EU draw from the events in Georgia and Ukraine?
- What are the implications for the Caucasus states in the field of energy co-operation?
- Is there a contradiction between the efforts of the EU to promote the transformation in the ENP countries and the energy policy interests of individual member states of the EU?
- How can the EU enhance its effort in increasing its energy security and offer partnerships to ENP countries in the field of a sustainable energy co-operation? What role can energy efficiency and renewable energies play in this context?

Topic F (workshop only)

## **A Role for the Civil Society Forum in the Eastern Partnership**

Thematic Focus: Agenda and Design of the Civil Society Forum

The Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum proposed by the European Commission will become a formal tool of cooperation of the European Union and the civil society of the Eastern Partnership region countries. The aim of the workshop is to formulate recommendations on how the Civil Society Forum should be designed regarding its agenda (priority topics for civic engagement) and institutional structure (country representation and nomination mechanisms to the Forum).

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