

## **Session IV: *European Neighborhood: Balkans. Eastern Partnership/ Euro-Atlantic relations***

### *– Background note –*

#### **Eastern Partnership**

Ten years ago, in May 2009, Heads of States or Governments of the Republic of Armenia, the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Republic of Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, the representatives of the European Union and the Heads of States or Governments of EU Member States launched, at the historic Prague Summit, a visionary partnership – the Eastern Partnership (EaP). This was a specific dimension of EU's external action and part of the European Neighborhood Policy, to be developed in parallel and in addition to the existing bilateral cooperation with these countries.

This joint endeavor to build a more resilient and prosperous region, was founded on mutual interests and commitments, bringing the Eastern European partner countries closer to the European Union, to the benefit of the citizens of the partner countries and respectful of their own strategic choices. Over the years, the Eastern Partnership has developed and matured, marking achievements that are today cornerstones of our relations – the Association Agreements, the Deep and Comprehensive

Free Trade Agreements, the visa free travel regime, the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreements or Partnership Priorities.

The EaP Summit in Brussels in 2017 marked a new era for the Eastern Partnership. A more pragmatic approach was adopted and 20 deliverables for 2020 were set as flagship goals for ongoing reforms. The cooperation within the partnership was broadened, deepened and rendered more focused. It was updated to align with the EU Global Strategy and to include the global commitments of Agenda 2030 and its Sustainable Development Goals, as well as the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

As we enter the anniversary year of the Eastern Partnership, there is an opportunity to take stock of the merits of the Eastern Partnership during its 10 years of existence, while looking towards the next Eastern Partnership Summit.

To support the work ahead, the Romanian Presidency of the EU Council intends to contribute by bringing together the EU Member States and EaP partners in celebrating the "EaP at 10" milestone.

In promoting further sectoral cooperation and by launching the reflection process on the post-

2020 EaP Agenda, the discussions on the future role of Eastern Partnership in better responding to the needs of the citizens in EaP region, could be focused mainly on two relevant topics:

- ***How to make better use of EaP and its tools to address some of the vulnerabilities of the respective countries?***

*Based on the lessons learned during this past decade, EaP's focus on areas like robust institutions, rule of law, fair access of the society to the instruments/DCFTA, promotion and adherence to the European values - would be crucial to enhancing partners' overall resilience.*

- ***What could be the most relevant priority areas and the "incentives" for the citizens and decision makers alike from the EaP countries, to be included in an overall package of the next EaP Agenda beyond 2020?***

*Some proposals have already been put forward, e.g. youth initiatives, increased technical assistance, and should be considered during the preparations for the next Summit in 2020.*

## Enlargement/Western Balkans

The future of Europe and the reinforcement of its role as a global actor is strongly related to its capacity to continue to project stability and

prosperity in its immediate neighborhood. This can only be achieved through offering a credible enlargement perspective to the European partners who are engaged and willing to pursue the transformation and democratization process. This comprehensive process aims at fostering truly European societies in terms of values and standards and thus expanding the European area of stability and prosperity.

2018 was a year of renewed opportunities for the enlargement policy. Since the beginning of the year, through the Enlargement Strategy – *A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans* – published by the European Commission on the 6<sup>th</sup> of February, the European future of the region was confirmed, being qualified as a geostrategic investment in a stable, strong and united Europe based on common values and in our ability to protect our citizens.

The Strategy has set out six flagship initiatives representing a significant enhancement of the EU's engagement with the Western Balkans, focusing on strengthening institutions, cooperation on security and migration, economic and social development, reconciliation or good neighborly relations. These priorities have been further developed and reflected through the Sofia Priority Agenda, on the occasion of the Sofia Summit (17<sup>th</sup> of May 2018).

As reaffirmed in the Council's Conclusions on enlargement and stabilization and association process of June 2018, following the Commission's Enlargement Package in April

2018, the EU remains committed to the enlargement policy, seen as a key policy of the European Union. The need for the ownership of the process by candidates and aspirants and the principles of fair and rigorous conditionality and own merits were also reaffirmed. On this occasion, the Council agreed to launch a calendar in order to allow opening accession negotiations with both Tirana and the Skopje in June 2019, as a positive answer to both countries' overall progress, provided that a set of conditions is met.

A new Enlargement Package is due to be published by the Commission in late spring 2019.

In terms of recent developments in the region, the historic example of reconciliation and good neighborly relations set through the conclusion and swift implementation of the Prespa Agreement represents a true inspiration for the whole region and a concrete proof of EU's transformative power.

In this context, current discussions regarding the enlargement policy center around the following challenges:

- ***How to consolidate EU's capacity to respond to achievements and progress made?***

*When our partners – candidates and potential candidates – deliver, the EU needs to be able to respond accordingly to these achievements. EU needs to remain credible and deliver on its promises, acknowledge efforts and respond accordingly to positive evolutions. This process is not an easy one, as decisions on*

*enlargement are taken by unanimity and each of the 28 EU member states has its own assessments. In order to support this process, it is particularly important that the situation of each candidate and potential candidate be assessed objectively and based on merits, enabling positive decisions where they are deserved and thus sending a positive message to the whole region.*

- ***How to maintain partners engaged and committed to the European integration process?***

*The EU needs to find the best mix of instruments to maintain partners' motivation and advance the reform agenda. The Commission's six flagship initiatives are a good incentive in this regard, but the focus on sectoral cooperation and obtaining concrete and tangible benefits for citizens, businesses and societies should not replace the main objective of the process – European integration.*

- ***How to better communicate with citizens?***

*A strong European Union, promoting credible policies and acting as a credible global actor is key in order to reestablish and consolidate the trust of our citizens, but also of citizens in the region, in the European project. Communication remains essential for the success of the process: European citizens need to be informed objectively and correctly about the advantages of enlargement as a fundamental tool for expanding the European area of security and prosperity, while citizens in the respective enlargement countries need to be more exposed to factual information about the EU and its positive actions, including through projects funded through Pre-Accession Programmes.*

## Orientation Paper – EU - US relations

The European Union and United States are longstanding allies. The transatlantic partnership is based on solid political, cultural, economic and historic ties, underpinned by common interests and values.

Over the years, this special relationship has steadily developed and has been substantiated by close cooperation and joint actions in various policy areas. As like-minded partners, the EU and US work together on foreign policy aspects and global challenges of mutual concern, promoting peace, democracy and sustainable development around the world.

The security and defence dimension plays an important part in transatlantic links, particularly in the current international context marked by common challenges, conflicts and other security threats. While NATO remains the main guarantor for the collective defence of its members and for the security of the transatlantic area, the EU has recently strengthened its own security and defence capacities and instruments, highlighting the importance of maintaining a close and complementary EU-NATO partnership in this field.

The EU and US are also mutually indispensable trade and investment partners. The strong economic ties have generated unequalled economic benefits and opportunities that helped create millions of jobs on both sides of the Atlantic. EU-US economic ties account for approximately half of global GDP and one-third of world trade. This remains the largest bilateral trade and investment

relationship and is undoubtedly a central driving factor in today's global economy.

Moreover, the transatlantic partnership covers a wide spectrum of sectoral areas, in which cooperation is ensured through regular dialogues, both at political and technical level, in fields ranging from cybersecurity, justice and home affairs, digital and financial issues, to climate change and environment, energy, culture and education, as well as science and technology.

As in any comprehensive partnership, divergences can sometime surface [in aspects such as international trade, the nuclear deal with Iran, Paris Agreement on climate change, energy security in Europe, burden-sharing on defence spending or contrasting visions on global multilateralism].

The last year imposed US tariffs on steel and aluminium have led to EU adopting rebalancing measures in response. The objectives and solutions identified during the EU-US leaders' meeting in July 2018, between EU Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker and US President Donald Trump, have indicated that there is a joint commitment to address outstanding issues in trade relations. An executive working group was established to advance discussions in this direction, as well to start preparing negotiations on a potential trade deal for industrial goods.

Despite these setbacks, the long-term foundation of transatlantic relations remains strong. That is why the Romanian EU Council Presidency has set out to work towards consolidating the transatlantic partnership over the next months. In a global challenging context, unity is of paramount importance, both

within the EU, as well as with our American partners.

Discussions on what would be the best approach and means to advance the EU – US cooperation agenda could focus on the following questions:

- ***What should be the main priority areas for further engagement and deeper cooperation between the EU and US?***
- ***What would be the best ways to maintain a positive climate for EU-US relations, while managing areas of divergence or differences in approach and ensuring better mutual understanding?***
- ***How could we turn current challenges into opportunities for consolidating the transatlantic partnership?***