



## 'One swallow does not make a summer' – some thoughts on the occasion of the Warsaw EU Eastern Partnership Summit

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Poland, one of the original initiators of the Eastern Partnership, the Eastern dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy covering EU relations with six post-Soviet countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine), luckily received the opportunity to host the second EU Eastern Partnership Summit held at the end of September 2011.<sup>1</sup> A consequence of the failure of diplomatic efforts to find a date suitable to all of the principal participants during the Hungarian EU Presidency, fans of the EU's Eastern Partnership initiative welcomed the decision. It was widely believed the most success could be achieved under the Polish mantle. Though Poland presumably did her best, the timing of the second summit could have been even worse than a half year before. Both presidencies have been conducted in the context of serious threats: First, the emergence of the wave of political instability in the Arab world and second, the basic problems within the Eurozone which had become even more critical by the beginning of the Polish Presidency and represented a key challenge for the larger project of European integration. Most efforts had to be dedicated to the treatment of these problems, which also resulted in increasing limitations on additional financial sources for other goals. In light of these unfortunate circumstances, the second Eastern Partnership summit was a success. It was professionally prepared, well-organized and spiced with some new though not sensational ideas such as the business forum held as a side meeting of the main event, or the newly launched Conference of Regional and Local Authorities. The summit also published a joint declaration. With 29 points, it was more detailed than ever, evidence of Polish diligence

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<sup>1</sup> The first EU Eastern Partnership summit was held in Prague in 2009 and was the official launch of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) initiative as a whole. The EaP is intended to foster reforms in partner countries, with a view to establishing political associations with them and bringing them closer to the EU in an economic sense as well as by means of economic integration.

and accomplishment. However, this declaration, in reality, does little more than list already existing processes and previously defined goals. In the eyes of the Eastern partners, the summit was a definite failure. It failed once again to give answers to key questions and it did not put any significantly new proposals into the basket. But then what happened at the summit? Were there any results?

The summit made it clearer than ever before that the EU's approach toward its Eastern partners is thorough and gradual. None of them can expect a sudden forward movement. The EU will proceed along and already predetermined path, perhaps at an even slower pace than previously expected. Two country-groupings have been emerging more and more clearly from among the six states: Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia on the one hand, and Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus on the other. The former are the frontrunners of the initiative, with Ukraine still the pioneer but with Moldova rapidly catching up as the biggest success story within the EaP framework. Georgia is the country with the greatest will and enthusiasm about EU integration. The other three countries lag behind, especially Belarus, whose leader Aleksandr Lukhasenko was not even invited to the summit. The EU thus sent an important message by repeating its differentiating, '*more for more*' approach and adding the "less for less" approach during this summit.

As one concrete result of the summit, Belarus was sent a special political message: she can eat from the EU's carrot only if it gives concrete signs of democratic development.<sup>2</sup> It is definitely a positive evolution in EU behaviour. Since the Belarusian economy is near bankruptcy, it needs external financing. Thus financial incentives may work. However, it seems that Belarusian society is still not ready for the necessary changes. The summit was a failure in light of the EU attempt to formulate a joint statement with the five Eastern partners on antidemocratic processes in

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<sup>2</sup> EU's conditions include the requirement of immediate release and rehabilitation of all political prisoners.

Belarus. The Eastern partners still seem more sympathetic toward each other than toward EU approaches. On the other hand, one can hardly find a well-functioning democracy among the six countries. Not only Belarus has serious political shortcomings. The Azeri regime is close to autarchy, Armenia and Saakashvili's Georgia are also not without question marks on democracy building. Moldova is in a state of permanent domestic political instability, while international observers and the public at large were recently shocked by the Ukrainian "political" trial and strong sentence against former prime minister Yulia Tymoshenko.

Regarding the major expectations of the Eastern partners, the summit offered the following. The number one issue is still the membership perspective. The summit did not move ahead on this point. However, in May 2011 an important EU document on the partnership, the first in EaP history, referred to the famous Art. 49 of the EU Treaty which states that all European states that exhibit European values may aspire to EU membership.<sup>3</sup> But contrary to the Western Balkans, there is still no definitive promise from the EU, nor is there a potential proposed target date, even for the most 'advanced' Eastern partners.

The visa liberalization process is possibly the number two issue. In this respect the summit has strengthened already launched processes, welcomed visa dialogues with Ukraine and Moldova as well as the recent implementation of visa facilitation and re-admission agreements in Georgia and confirmed that similar agreements will be concluded with the other three countries.

One of the principal milestones of the summit is the fact that EU leaders formulated their wish to bring negotiations on a deep and comprehensive free trade agreement (DCFTA) between the EU and Ukraine to a close by the end of this year. But this issue is politically linked to the Tymoshenko case and remains highly problematic in its own right. Serious Ukrainian concerns remain about the agreement and whether it is really beneficial to Ukraine. On the Ukrainian side, trade in agricultural products constitutes a crucial issue in the negotiations. But Ukrainian claims already affect the EU's CAP though its reform cannot be subordinated to bilateral talks with Ukraine. Negotiations on a similar DCFTA agreement may start at the end of this year with Moldova and Georgia.

Although the June EU Foreign Affairs Council offered some additional resources to the Eastern partners for the period of 2012-13 – a quite unexpected development keeping in mind the current financial problems of the EU – Eastern partners complain that the EaP remains an obscure project without tangible results in their countries. And these financial resources, in total 1.9 million euros until 2013, are quite marginal compared to those to the EU's its Eastern

neighbours, the former "new" members like Hungary or Poland for very similar purposes during the transition period.

Drawing the balance of the summit and the Eastern Partnership program, the EU is often criticized for being a very slow-moving, bureaucratic institution with divided members regarding important goals. The Eastern Partnership is a typical example. Apart from the recent internal integration problems, Member states have different views on the importance of the issue and this leads to very slow movements ahead. Poland was not in a position to lend considerable impetus to the matter of the Eastern neighbours. Some Member states link the issue to another one, to relations with Russia. Some try to keep the issue hot and for others it is simply irrelevant.<sup>4</sup> But the decidedly gradual process may turn out to be a bad strategy. The EU has rivals in the region, first of all Russia with her own ideas regarding the common neighbourhood. Partner countries have to answer basic questions in the foreseeable future. Russia is currently pressuring Ukraine, the key country of the EaP, for example, to react to her customs union 'invitation'. The recent EU approach does not help Ukraine arrive at the appropriate response. The EU should make some very basic decisions and offer something attractive to its Eastern partners in order to keep them enthusiastic. According to the last joint declaration dated from 30<sup>th</sup> September in Warsaw, the EU's stated goal, "to be visible", should not remain only on paper!

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<sup>3</sup> COM(2011) 303 final, 25 May 2011.

<sup>4</sup> As evidence of this, the French president and the prime ministers of Great Britain and Italy did not even attend the summit.