

***Moving Forward with the Eastern Partnership:
Challenges and Opportunities***
Stockholm, September 4, 2009

I would like to express my gratitude to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute for hosting this seminar on the Eastern Partnership (EaP), one of the most promising initiatives of the European Union.

The complex situation in Eastern Europe poses new challenges for the EU. The financial crisis, problems with energy supplies, including the gas controversies between Russia and Ukraine, and the revival of frozen conflicts, are factors that threaten the stability of the whole continent.

Poland and Sweden proposed this new initiative in 2008 aimed at deepening the co-operation with six East European and South Caucasus states. Following the adoption of the European Council's March 2009 conclusions and of the Prague Declaration in May, we began developing the political framework of the Eastern Partnership. **Now it is high time we launched useful projects.** The implementation of the Eastern Partnership is the way for the EU to reduce the gap in the

economic, structural and social development between the EU and its 6 Eastern neighbours. Such steps are also needed if we wish to see the EU as a global player. We will aim at stimulating the Partner countries' economic development, to strengthen democracy, freedom and civil societies there, and to enhance their legal and administrative capacities. Naturally, both sides have to treat the task seriously. The Partnership tasks both the EU, with its enhanced support to be delivered to the Eastern Partners, and the Partners themselves, with efforts to meet the necessary conditions leading to enhanced forms of co-operation. **The goals of the initiative require not only strong political will from the Eastern Partners to implement the necessary reforms as soon as possible.**

I would like to thank the European Commission for its efforts to implement the Eastern Partnership. The first meetings of the thematic platforms (held in June) to set specific tasks: the first panels of experts were established and the Commission presented the rationales of the flagship initiatives. This autumn we will need to accelerate: the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum will be launched in mid-November, the thematic platforms will continue their work and I hope that next projects will be launched, apart from the already approved East-Invest

and EaP cultural programmes. We commend the Swedish Presidency for organising the first EaP foreign ministers meeting in December.

Indeed, the **Swedish Presidency is of crucial importance**. The Prague decisions were a success, but **the real challenge is the implementation**.

Let me specify some priorities.

- I hope that the **Comprehensive Institution Building Programmes** will be presented soon. The programmes can assist each partner country in achieving goals of the Action Plans, as well as in their preparation to conclude the **Association Agreements and the agreements on the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas**.
- I expect a **substantial progress in the visa facilitation process, eventually leading to a visa-free regime**. Before this objective is realised, the EU should consider lowering visa fees for the citizens of the "6" or reducing them to zero. We need to be **credible** when we talk about closer co-operation with the Eastern neighbours and about our openness to people-to-people contacts. **EU assistance and**

programmes concerning border issues (such as border demarcation, the improvement of infrastructure and border management) should also be developed.

- Next is **energy security and the development of energy infrastructure.** Only by securing the energy supplies can we avoid energy crises in the future, There is a need to elaborate on the development of a mutual energy support system and security mechanisms between the EU and the Partner Countries, which are strategically situated between the EU and the regions rich in natural resources. A gradual harmonisation of Partners' energy policies and regulations with EU practice and *acquis* is here of great importance.
- Today, more than ever, we appreciate the importance of **environmental questions**, which is why the EaP Partners should undertake steps to reach convergence with the EU environmental *acquis* and to ensure the implementation of relevant multilateral agreements as well as to exchange experience and best practice on strategic planning and environmental governance. Regional EU-Eastern Europe environmental projects should be taken into consideration.

- No significant and sustainable changes can be made without healing the administrative systems in the Partner Countries and without action to **fight corruption**.
- I am glad that the Partnership is supported by the EU budget with the **additional 600 million EUR, that supplements more than 3 billion EUR secured for the co-operation with Eastern Partners till 2013**. Nevertheless, it is necessary to support the Partnership with additional funds from international financial institutions, including the European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, as well as investment funds of the NIF (Neighbourhood Investment Facility) and bilateral contributions from the EU member states and third countries. Poland allocated a substantial part of its external assistance (24.5mln PLN \approx 6,1mln EUR) this year on projects implementing the EaP goals. We intend to increase our contribution next year.
- The new EaP challenges should also be reflected in the structure of the new European Commission. Why not provide **one of the Commissioners with direct responsibility for the Eastern Partnership, possibly**

together with the EU Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy (“Commissioner for Enlargement, the ENP and the EaP” or “Commissioner for the ENP and the EaP”). Furthermore, we need a coordinating body for the EaP within the EC services' structure. Such a body should be strong enough to coordinate activities within the Partnership, identify projects, ensure consistency among the EC services, contribute to the coordination of the EU member states' bilateral assistance and liaise with international organizations.

- I do not share opinions that the Eastern Partnership can act to the detriment of the EU's relations with Russia. The Partnership is aimed at building a genuine partnership between the EU and the Eastern partners. **This positive initiative is not driven by any hidden agenda and is not an initiative directed against anybody.** Stabilization and modernization of the region of Eastern Europe brings profits to the EU and its East European partners as well as to all the others who perceive this region as important to their interests.

- Bearing in mind the **interest of third countries in supporting the initiative**, we need to work out a mechanism that will determine legal and financial terms, and conditions of their assistance, including financial contributions to Eastern Partnership's projects

Poland will continue its strong support for the development and the implementation of the Partnership. We will finance projects on: regional development; migrations and border management; fight against trafficking of human beings; strengthening of administrative capacities of the "6", sectoral reforms; and on approximating national legislation to the EU standards; also civil service training; supporting of free market institutions; fighting corruption, and the co-operation of ombudsmen. Naturally, we are ready to co-operate on projects supporting the Partnership's goals with other EU and partner countries.

I hope that both the EU and each of the Eastern Partners demonstrate determination in implementing the Partnership and achieving its goals. There is no time to lose.