

**Introductory remarks by
State Secretary for Foreign Affairs
Mr. Frank Belfrage
at the SIPRI Roundtable on the Eastern Partnership,
4 September 2009**

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen.

Let me start by thanking the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute and the Romanian Embassy for organizing this round table. I would also like to extend a warm welcome to all of you who have taken time out of your busy schedules to come here today and participate in what I am confident will be an interesting and lively discussion.

The theme we will be discussing concerns the challenges and opportunities of the Eastern Partnership. The Eastern Partnership has, since its inception, drawn great interest and been a topic for many discussions and debates. And rightly so I might add.

As you are aware, the Eastern Partnership is a matter close to the Swedish government's heart. It was Sweden together with Poland who last year initiated a discussion on the development of the European Union's relations with our six closest neighbors to the East. Many EU members acknowledged the need to strengthen and deepen the contacts and cooperation with these six countries – countries who have come closer to the Union after the latest enlargement and who want to come even closer. And so in May this year, the Eastern Partnership was formally launched at a summit in Prague under the auspices of the Czech EU Presidency.

So what is the Eastern Partnership, and how does Sweden currently holding the presidency of the EU view its development?

First of all, the Eastern Partnership is a clear expression of solidarity and long-term commitment from the EU's side. With it, we make a joint undertaking to strengthen our cooperation and to enhance our interaction with Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

The Eastern Partnership, being both an EU policy and a framework for cooperation with the six countries, has significantly raised the EU's engagement and offer towards them. It provides for a new level of political association, with the conclusion of Association Agreements as a possibility for those willing and able to take on the resulting

commitments. It clearly sets out the objective of establishing deep and comprehensive free trade areas between the EU and the partners. It confirms full visa liberalization as a goal, albeit long term. It promises enhanced cooperation on energy security, diversification and efficiency, backed up with significant financial resources.

The Eastern Partnership is also a new format for political dialogue and a vehicle for enhanced integration, approximation of legislation and reform. The bilateral relationships between each of the six countries and the EU is at the core of the partnership. The approach with regard to the individual partner countries is tailor made. This is where the bulk of the work will take place, and where most of the progress will be achieved and measured. Respect for fundamental values such as democracy, human rights and the rule of law will be a prerequisite for advancing the relations with our Eastern partners further and deeper. The multilateral dimension of the Partnership creates an additional arena for strengthening the cooperation and interaction between all the participants of the Eastern Partnership, and offers structured discussions and deliberations on various matters of common interest such as good governance, energy efficiency and mobility.

After Prague, we are now in a phase where serious implementation of the various parts and provisions of the Eastern Partnership needs to commence. Taking the Eastern Partnership forward is an important task for the Swedish EU Presidency.

Our ambition is to make progress in the relationship between the EU and each of the six partner countries, and to contribute to the establishment of the multilateral dimension of the Partnership. We would like to, by December 2009, be able to hand over a well-established, consolidated process with set priorities and objectives and clear timeframes for implementation.

We would like to see concrete steps being taken towards the establishment of Comprehensive Institution Building Programs for each of the six partners. These programs will be designed to support reform of key institutions in each country.

Some of the flagship initiatives proposed by the European Commission should be launched, and others developed, during the Fall. Sweden will place particular emphasis on energy efficiency, which can not only contribute to enhancing energy security, decrease dependencies and reduce costs, but also make a valuable contribution to the fight against climate change.

The involvement of civil society in the Eastern Partnership is important. Sweden will therefore, together with the European Commission, organize the first meeting of the

Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum. We hope through this to be able to facilitate discussions among civil society representatives from the six partners and the EU on how they can contribute to the implementation and the future development of the Partnership.

In this vein, we hope also that the parliamentary cooperation under the Eastern Partnership will take form, as well as cooperation among local and regional authorities of the partners and the EU member states.

Towards the end of the Swedish EU Presidency, we intend to organize the first Eastern Partnership Foreign Ministers Meeting. This will provide an opportunity to take stock of progress so far and give guidance for the way ahead.

Taking the Eastern Partnership forward and making sure that it is a success is a shared responsibility. Rest assured, however, that the Swedish EU Presidency will do its part to contribute to a successful first six months of implementation of the Partnership.

Thank you.