

The European Union and its Eastern Partners

Current approaches to regional cooperation

Eastern Partnership Reflection Forum in the framework of the Belarusian Presidency of the CEI

10-12 December 2017, Hotel Crowne Plaza, Minsk, Belarus

Programme

- 10 December 2017** 18h00-19h00: Welcoming cocktail offered by Austro-French Centre for Rapprochement in Europe
- 19h00-20h30: Evening talk – Security dialogue & regional co-operation in and with the Eastern Partnership region
- 11 December 2017** 8h45-18h00: Main event
- 18h40-21h30: Closing Reception given by the Embassy of France in Minsk (upon invitation)
- 12 December 2017** 8h35-11h45: Optional guided tour of the MTZ tractor factory & surrounding area (upon registration)

Organised and coordinated by

Austro-French Centre for Rapprochement in Europe (CFA), Vienna
Minsk Dialogue Track II Initiative (MD), Minsk
Centre international de formation européenne (CIFE), Nice/Berlin

French Institute for International Relations (Ifri), Paris/Brussels
German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP), Berlin
Estonian Center of Eastern Partnership (ECEAP), Tallinn
Austrian Institute for International Politics (OiiP), Vienna
Istituto affari internazionali (IAI), Rome
Slovak Foreign Policy Association (SFPA), Bratislava
European Institute for Peace (EIP), Brussels

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Delegation of the European Union to Belarus, Minsk

in cooperation with



with the support of



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Belarus Office of the Konrad-Adenauer Foundation, Vilnius

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Background

The Eastern Partnership Reflection Forum 2017 (EaP-RF) is **an initiative inspired by the on-going “EU-Western Balkans Reflection Forum Initiative”** (WB-RF). The latter was launched in 2015 in support of the so-called “Berlin Process”, an intergovernmental initiative aimed at promoting reforms and regional cooperation in the Western Balkans. The WB-RF, now backed by the CEI, emerged as the expert component within the Berlin Process. It convenes a community of experts in order to encourage a wider strategic reflection on EU relations with Western Balkan states and build bridges with national and international administrations. The value-added of the WB-RF is its capacity to facilitate a pan-European dialogue on the EU’s strategy towards the Western Balkans by mobilising a pool of EU and non-EU experts; capacity to disseminate discussions throughout Europe (EU and non-EU) through outreach and in-reach public seminars; and willingness to create long-stranding synergies by fostering cooperation amongst experts and with foreign policy actors.

Context and objectives

The **Eastern Partnership** (EaP) was founded in 2009 with the aim of supporting political association and further economic integration between the EU and interested partner countries. In the past few years, the EaP had to face serious challenges, which question its actual adequacy in times of geopolitical turmoil. The Ukrainian crisis, rising instability, resurgence of nationalism in the EU, and risks of EU disintegration have all brought the EaP to a watershed, despite progress in concluding Association Agreements with several EaP countries. In order to adapt to new realities and give fresh impetus to the EaP, new approaches have been identified that prescribe more differentiation between EaP countries, less reliance on the enlargement methodology, more pragmatism, and more engagement with the neighbours of the neighbours.

Of particular interest in this framework is the aim of **regional cooperation**, which is promoted both by the EU (through the multilateral dimension of the EaP) and the CEI. Regional cooperation is not only instrumental in addressing common challenges and cross-border issues; it also enhances the exchange of best practices and, therefore, advances good governance, economic integration, transport and people-to-people connectivity, as well as energy and environmental security.

This is especially the case for **Belarus**. Although formally included in the ENP, as of now Belarus has only participated in EaP multilateral initiatives. Recent developments, however, indicate that Belarus is looking for enhanced relations with the EU and is increasingly prioritising regional cooperation. Its constructive role in mediating the cease-fire in the Donbass, Presidency of the CEI, and the improvement of ties with EU member states call for re-thinking EU-Belarusian relations.

How can the EU, constrained both internally and externally, engage more constructively with Belarus and other EaP countries, beyond the “in-between” paradigm? How can it strengthen regional cooperation and reinforce dialogue with this part of Europe in wider, more inclusive and yet more differentiated way? What are the expectations



nurtured in EaP countries towards Brussels? What potential for cooperation can be envisioned, considering the geopolitical context specific? What lessons from the crisis in Ukraine can be drawn by the EU in its redefinition of the ENP/EaP approach?

It is in order to reflect on these questions that a **Reflection Forum on the Eastern Partnership** will be organised in Minsk on 10-12 December 2017. The event will take place within the framework of the Belarusian Presidency of the CEI and on the eve of the CEI Minsk Summit to be held on 12 December 2017. The Forum will analyse the results of the EaP Brussels Summit and encourage pan-European expert-led discussions on the EaP in an innovative reflection format.

Format and outputs

The Minsk EaP Reflection Forum will convene **a pan-European community of experts**. Renowned think-tanks and universities from all over the EU, EFTA, the Western Balkans, the EaP region, and Russia will be represented by more than 50 researchers. The Forum will abide by the Chatham House Rule. Instead of delivering formal presentations *ex cathedra* followed by Q&A sessions, the participants will engage in **interactive roundtable discussions** moderated by experienced facilitators.

Not only will the Reflection Forum discuss regional cooperation, it will also contribute to **strengthening expert-to-expert contacts** and encouraging **joint publications and cooperation projects**. It will also aim at bridging the gap between academic research and policy action. Building on the Minsk Reflection Forum and the expert network it will establish, a **series of public roundtables** will be organised in EaP and EU countries throughout 2018. The initiative will reach a new climax in 2019 with the organisation of a second EaP Reflection Forum in another EaP country, while maintaining the active involvement of Belarusian experts and think tanks in the project.

P R O G R A M M E

Sunday, 10 December 2017

Venue: Hotel Crowne Plaza Minsk, vulica Kirava 13, Minsk, Belarus

18h00: Welcoming cocktail offered by the Austro-French Centre for Rapprochement in Europe

19h00: Evening talk – Security dialogue and regional cooperation in and with the Eastern Partnership region

Welcome

Peter Jankowitsch, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Austria, member of the Board of the Austro-French Centre for Rapprochement in Europe, Vienna

Wolfgang Sender, Head of Belarus Office, Konrad-Adenauer Foundation, Minsk/Vilnius

Panel discussion

Valery Varanetsky, Chairman of the Standing Commission of International Affairs, House of Representatives of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus, Minsk

Christine Muttonen, former President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Vienna/Villach



Pieter Feith, Senior Diplomatic Advisor, European Institute of Peace (EIP), Brussels
Ghia Nodia, Director of the International School of Caucasus Studies, Tbilisi

Moderation Yauheni Preiherman, Head of the Minsk Dialogue Track II Initiative, Minsk

Monday, 11 December 2017

8h45: Registration - Hotel Crowne Plaza Minsk, vulica Kirava 13, Minsk, Belarus

9h00: Official opening

Representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus, Minsk

Merike Kokajev, Ambassador of Estonia to Belarus, Minsk

Margot Klestil-Löffler, Alternate Secretary General of the Central European Initiative, Trieste

Dominique David, President of the Austro-French Centre for Rapprochement in Europe; Advisor to the Chairman of the French Institute for International Relations, Paris

9h30: Differentiation inside, differentiation outside and regional cooperation: The practice of connecting the EU, its Member States and the Eastern Partners

Co-facilitators Nona Mikhelidze, Head of the Eastern Europe and Eurasia Programme, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), Rome
Florent Marciacq, Deputy Secretary General, Austro-French Centre for Rapprochement in Europe, Vienna

In the past few years, in response to the multiple crises it faces, the EU has embarked on introducing more differentiation in its internal functioning. This increased flexibility, aimed at “saving” the EU against the backdrop of Brexit and disintegration tendencies, has also permeated the external policy of the EU (through the reviewed ENP and the new EU Security Strategy). External differentiation, as a result, has become a common thread in the EaP. But it remains to be seen how this growing emphasis on differentiation should be operationalised, and how internal and external differentiation relate with each other, especially *vis-à-vis* regional cooperation. Moreover, the EU’s commitment to pursue more differentiated policies and the gradual renationalisation of the EU polity imply a shift from a technocratic approach, which failed to acknowledge the needs and aspirations of EaP countries, towards a more politicised approach, which may be more amenable to actual progress in regional cooperation. What implications will these developments have for EU-EaP relations and regional cooperation? How common and principled can the EaP prove to be as an external policy of the EU, given substantial differences in EU member states’ approaches? How can connectivity be used, beyond infrastructure development, as a pragmatic vehicle of cooperation?

11h00: Networking & coffee break

11h30: Internal challenges, external challenges and regional cooperation: how to enhance resilience in EaP countries?

Co-facilitators Susan Stewart, Senior Associate, German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP), Berlin



Tobias Flessenkemper, Senior Research Associate, Centre international de formation européenne, Nice/Berlin

Relations between EaP countries and the EU and among EaP countries themselves often depend on domestic issues and/or international developments. This leads to fluctuations in bilateral relations and regional instability and unpredictability. Regional cooperation, against this backdrop, helps to promote dialogue and build bridges among partners, it also contributes to strengthening resilience and advancing good-neighbourly relations. How can the EaP framework further encourage regional cooperation among EaP countries as a means to increase political, socio-economic and societal resilience? What tools can be used to strengthen the exchange of best practices? How can the EaP contribute to strengthening its partners' economic stability, given the adaptational costs incurred by access to the EU markets? What lessons can EaP countries learn from their respective experiences with the EU? Finally, what should regional cooperation entail at the level of individuals and people-to-people contacts?

13h00: Networking & lunch break

14h30: Compatibility across and beyond the Eastern Partnership: advancing pan-European integration through regional cooperation

Co-facilitators Laure Delcour, Research Fellow, Foundation Maison des Sciences de l'Homme (EU-STRAT project) / French Institute for International and Strategic Affairs (IRIS), Paris
Dzianis Melyantsou, Programme Coordinator of the Minsk Dialogue Track-II Initiative, Minsk

Geopolitical tensions in the "shared neighbourhood" have reached their climax in the past few years with the crisis in Ukraine and the war in Syria. The polarising effects have strained those EaP countries seeking to balance their relations with the East and the West and hindered the pursuit of multi-vectored foreign policies. The geopolitical tensions have been reinforced through the parallel promotion by Brussels and Moscow of overlapping regional integration projects (the EaP versus the Eurasian Economic Union). The case of Ukraine, which had to "choose" an integration scheme, is a good example of the negative-sum game shaping the context in which EaP countries may be pushed to operate. How can regional and pan-regional cooperation help overcome this "Thucydides Trap"? How should the EU address these challenges in its bilateral relations with EaP countries? How to make regional integration schemes more compatible with each other, while not losing sight of EaP countries' sovereign choices? How to engage with EaP individual countries in co-shaping opportunity structures that do not lead to lose-lose situations and increased instability?

16h00: Networking & coffee break

16h30: From the EaP countries to the Western Balkans: Regional cooperation across EU neighbourhoods

Co-facilitators Davor Boban, Assistant Professor, University of Zagreb, Zagreb
Panagiota Manoli, Head of the Slavic, East European and Eurasian Studies Programme, Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP), Athens; Assistant Professor, University of the Aegean, Rhodes



The EU has long experience of promoting regional cooperation within and beyond its borders. In the Western Balkans, most notably, it has been promoting political dialogue, good neighbourly relations and regional economic integration for almost two decades, with mixed results though. Against the backdrop of declining progress in the past few years, enduring crises in the EU, and geopolitical challenges in the region, a mini-lateral intergovernmental initiative was launched in 2014 to maintain the impetus of reforms, transformation and European integration in the Western Balkans. The initiative (so-called Berlin process) prioritised connectivity and regional cooperation. What lessons can the EU and EaP countries learn from the EU's long-standing engagement in the Western Balkans and its Berlin Process experience? Would EaP countries benefit from a similar mini-lateral initiative, giving precedence to multilateral meetings over bilateral contacts, and trust-building over conditionality? Are there similarities in the challenges in the Western Balkans and the EaP region? How can we build bridges between Western Balkans and ENP area studies? Likewise, what lessons can be drawn from the engagement of the CEI both in the Western Balkans and Eastern Europe?

17h30: A view from Brussels after the EaP Summit 2017 – a way forwards

Vassilis Maragos, Head of Unit, DG NEAR C.2. in charge of "Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus & the Eastern Partnership", European Commission, Brussels

17h45: Concluding remarks by the General Rapporteur

Prof. Elena Korosteleva, Director, Global Europe Centre, and GCRF COMPASS PI, University of Kent

18h00: End of the main event

18h40: Closing Reception given by the Embassy of France in Minsk (upon invitation)
Transfer by bus to the Residence - Meeting point in front of the hotel at 18h30

Welcome

Didier Canesse, Ambassador of France to Belarus, Minsk

Tuesday, 12 December 2017

8h45: Optional guided visit of the MTZ tractor factory & surrounding area in Minsk
Transfer by bus – Meeting point in front of the hotel at 8h35 (registration needed)
Transfer back to the hotel – arrival time 11h45

11h45: End of the programme