

Discussion club

# Eastern Partnership: results and new

If we analyse Belarus' foreign policy from the point of view of how often certain phrases appear (a rather accurate method) the words 'European interests', 'rapprochement with the European Union' and 'Eastern Partnership' were among the most often heard in Minsk.

These are not mere phrases, but a clear political trend, as testified by a range of visits by top European politicians to Minsk. The President of Lithuania, Dalia Grybauskaitė, alongside the Foreign Ministers of Germany and Poland, Guido Westerwelle and Radosław Sikorski, and European Commissioner Štefan Füle have given a clear signal of rapprochement and co-operation. Remarkably, this signal was given before the presidential elections, testifying to European confidence in the succession of the current political trend. The *Eastern Partnership* programme is one of the most vital instruments of the EU regarding its Eastern neighbours, including Belarus. According to experts' unanimous opinion, Belarus is the most active player in this initiative.

The participants of an international round table discussion, organised by our editorial office, tackled what has been achieved already and which projects remain in the partnership's 'portfolio'. Anna Dwyer, an expert with the Polish Institute of International Affairs, was joined by Jarosław Dziędzic — the Head of Division for the *Eastern Partnership* Programme and EU Policy in Eastern Europe at the Polish Foreign Ministry's Eastern Department, Rafał Sadowski — the *Eastern Partnership* Department Head at the Polish Centre for Eastern Studies, Adam Balcer — an expert with the Demos Europa organisation, Dmitry Yarmolyuk — who heads the European Integration Department at the Belarusian Foreign Ministry's Main European Directorate, Vladimir Ulakhovich — the Director of the Belarusian State University's Centre for International Studies, Yuri Shevtsov — a political analyst (Minsk), and Sergey Chaly — an economic analyst (Minsk).

**Editorial office: What has been done over the past 18 months, since the programme was launched? Can we sum up the preliminary results and assess further opportunities?**

**Mr. Dziędzic:** Before we begin our conversation, I'd like to note that the 'Eastern Partnership' programme unites 33 states: 27 EU members and 6 partner-countries. According to my estimates, we've achieved a great deal over the past 18 months, since the initiative was launched. If we speak about multilateral collaboration, we've managed to set up and expand the structure of relations with partner-countries. I'll briefly remind you of our thematic platforms, panel meetings of experts and flagman initiatives. In my opinion, it's now vital for Poland and Belarus to fill concrete proposals with definite actions. At today's meeting, we must learn Minsk's views on these issues and its assessment of our mutual relations within the partnership programme.

**Mr. Ulakhovich:** As far as our country is concerned, I'd like to draw your attention to two aspects, which I believe are essential. Firstly, we have achieved noticeable political results from participating in this programme. A range of top level visits have recently taken place, testifying to this. This is a political path down which we should continue to progress.

Secondly, we've recently seen a nationwide consensus towards this programme. At a political level, and in civil society, we are convinced that it is vital for Belarus. We have clear ideas regarding which areas are suitable for collaboration and know which interests we can primarily promote and what the results should be.

**Editorial office: Mr. Chaly, is the Eastern Partnership programme already filled with economic content? Or is it too early to see results?**

**Mr. Chaly:** Yes, there are

economic projects, which deserve the most serious attention. These primarily cover energy security and the development of corresponding infrastructure.

As far as I know, no answers from the EU have arrived regarding our proposals. The fact that we still lack legislation governing bilateral co-operation with the EU is hampering our fully-fledged interaction. The agreement on partnership and collaboration with Belarus hasn't been ratified by the EU yet, which causes bewilderment.

**Mr. Dziędzic:** I'd like to allay your concerns and the scepticism inspired, in my view, by your excessive expectations. The 'Eastern Partnership' programme isn't only about creating infrastructure, power engineering and supplies of resources. It pursues other goals. In particular, it aims to help strengthen the administrative structure of participating countries while creating conditions for the better functioning of their economies. Economic collaboration and energy security are as important in determining progress within the 'Eastern Partnership' as democracy, the supremacy of law and respect for human rights and major freedoms.

**Mr. Balcer:** I'd like to say a few words about power engineering: not only about resources, gas, oil and pipelines. The creation of corresponding institutes in this area is an important part of partnership; I'm thinking of Belarus' membership of the European Energy Union.

The creation of national legislation to achieve transparency on the energy market is also a vital part of our interaction in the energy sphere, as part of the 'Eastern Partnership'. The use of renewable energy sources, such as water, solar energy, wind and biomass are another promising area for liaisons. This type of energy is well-developed in Western countries, with Sweden being one of the leaders.

If Belarus had taken a more

intensive role in the 'Eastern Partnership' and more actively developed these relations, its membership of the European Energy Union would appear on the EU agenda.

**Mr. Yarmolyuk:** Belarus joined the 'Eastern Partnership' process at the very stage of its establishment. Today, we have definite ideas on how to optimise



Ms. Dwyer

and improve it. We've taken an active role in events at all levels since the 2009 Prague Summit. Next year, we hope to participate in another 'Eastern Partnership' summit.

It's common knowledge that Belarus' status in this project is rather specific, but it has happened through no fault of our own. If we wish to question it, we should ask representatives of the European Union, Brussels and European institutes. Meanwhile, we're taking great advantage of the opportunities currently available to us as part of this initiative, and plan to continue making our constructive contribution to its development. This project has potential which significantly exceeds the functions it currently fulfils. Accordingly, our task is to avoid restricting its activity.

**Editorial office: What do you mean? Does Belarus consider the EU's offers to be insufficient?**

**Mr. Yarmolyuk:** The novelty of the 'Eastern Partnership' — compared to the 'European Neighbourhood Policy' (ENP) — lies primarily in its multilateral essence. Belarus was pin-



ning great hopes and expectations on this dimension, hoping it would give additional impulse to co-operation between countries within our region and collaboration between this group of countries and the EU. However, our hopes have not been fully realised. The added value of the multilateral path has occurred via renewed dialogue at bilat-



Mr. Dziędzic

eral level. However, it's vital that ideas and initiatives discussed at bilateral level find practical application at a multilateral level. If this concept dominated, the 'Eastern Partnership' would benefit us in many respects and its future would be assured. As it is, its future is under question, raising more concerns than giving solutions.

Probably, such issues would never have arisen if the 'Eastern Partnership' had originated in a 'vacuum' — as the first initiative of its kind. However, it is preceded by long EU experience and the 'Barcelona Process', which existed long before the 'Eastern Partnership'; it recently transformed into the 'Union for the Mediterranean'.

What does the Southern vector of the 'European Neighbourhood Policy' look like? Political dialogue has successfully co-existed with a rather well developed practical vector, aimed at integrating this region while developing strategic interfaces: ties and infrastructural bridges between countries, as well as between this group of states and the EU. The EU has promoted the modernisation of the economies

of these countries by implementing definite projects. Moreover, funds allocated to these projects by the EU can't be compared with those for the 'Eastern Partnership'. A fixed proportion of funding is shared between the ENP's Eastern and Southern components — long approved by the EU and standing at one third to two thirds.



Mr. Sadowski

Looking at the current situation, we should be realistic. Until 2013, we'll be concentrating on organisational reform of the 'Eastern Partnership' while creating an initial reserve for our goals.

**Editorial office: What is the reason for such deliberation, in your opinion?**

**Mr. Yarmolyuk:** Speaking of the EU's deliberation regarding the realisation of this initiative, we can note various elements: the EU's lack of money, the negative influence of the financial crisis and the sluggishness of European bureaucracy which sometimes needs years to launch a project. We should also remember that the Eastern region is diverse; there are six countries, each boasting their own specific priorities and interests regarding the EU. All these reasons are significant.

If we compare the 'Eastern Partnership' and the 'Union for the Mediterranean', then, in my view, the major reason still relates to 'real politik'. No political 'heavyweights' (from the states representing old Europe) stand behind the 'Eastern Partnership' — with all respect to our Polish

colleagues, who initiated the project, and to Sweden, which has been actively assisting in its realisation. These states aren't actively hindering 'Eastern Partnership' work but, in the South, personally interested states — such as France, Italy and Spain — are actively promoting the 'Union for the Mediterranean'.

Accordingly, one of our most important tasks is to ensure that as many of the most influential EU states as possible are aware of the 'Eastern Partnership' programme and actively join in its realisation. As for ourselves, we plan to do everything possible. We'll be very grateful to our Polish partners for their efforts in this direction.

**Mr. Sadowski:** It's necessary to take into consideration the potential of other institutions — such as the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the European Investment Bank. The most important achievement of the 'Eastern Partnership' is changed thinking, to the benefit of support of our Eastern neighbours and Eastern partners. I think there are funds available for the development of co-operation.

**Ms. Dwyer:** Apart from the money (envisaged by the 'East-



Mr. Balcer

ern Partnership' programme and other EU instruments), there are other possibilities regarding the bilateral relations. For example, certain funds are to be allocated as part of Poland-Belarus collaboration. As Mr. Dziędzic has noted, if participation in the 'Eastern Partnership' leads to institutional reform and the creation of legislation governing investors, then the state will be interested in rendering support for these programmes. Obviously, it's not just partner-countries which are interested in co-operation within the 'Eastern Partnership'. The programme is also important for the European Union and, primarily, for those states which share common borders with their Eastern partners. In particular, we refer to the creation of transport corridors and energy transit. It's important for us to know what is most important to you; we need to see your priorities to decide where funds should be allocated.

**Mr. Dziędzic:** I'd like to stress something already mentioned by Mr. Sadowski. In fact, not only 600m euros are in focus, but 1.9bn euros. This means we should study the whole complex