

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
REGIONAL STABILITY AND MODERNIZATION: CHALLENGES AND
OPPORTUNITIES FOR EU-BELARUS RELATIONS
01.12.2014 in Vilnius (LT) / 02.12.2014 in Minsk (BY)

Part 1: Conclusions

- 1) EU's Eastern Partnership approach has to be reconceptualized as a bilateralized approach; Belarus is obviously the last remaining country in the group of six that can really profit from the EP-format.
- 2) Lessons learned from the Ukraine/Russia-conflict will lead to a review of the Belarus-Russia relations; for a further balanced (peaceful) neighborhood it is important to create trilateral formats for the neighborhood issues (f.i. energy, trade, logistics, etc.).
- 3) Regional cooperation is a key instrument for Belarus and neighboring EU-countries to improve the cooperation; here Baltic countries play a crucial role, especially during Latvian EU presidency in 2015; EUs program "Euroregions" should also be developed.
- 4) Sanctions against Belarus should be reviewed more frequently by the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of EU-countries, whereas Belarus should make more constructive steps to manage EU expectations in this regard.
- 5) Minsk as a kind of "new Geneva" played an important role as a platform for negotiations during the Ukraine/Russia-conflict; that role should be prolonged and strengthened.
- 6) Belarus can profit from the adaptation to European/international formats as Bologna-Process or WTO.
- 7) Economic reforms in Belarus are crucial for modernisation; it was good news that the share of SME in Belarusian economy in the last decade.
- 8) New perspectives for EU-Belarus business relations are to be expected in the format of Eurobonds, credit lines by EBRD and European Investment Bank (EIB).
- 9) Visa Liberalisation is a key element for the Future of EU-Belarus relations. Both sides should speed up the process and to finalize the Visa facilitation negotiations with Belarus until the Riga EU-Summit in May 2015.
- 10) Events in Ukraine changed the regional security in Eastern Europe. The post Cold War Order was significantly affected by the annexion of Crimea and the war in Eastern Ukraine. In Belarus statehood and national identity have been strengthened during the conflict on the background of Russias new foreign policy in the Post Soviet Space.
- 11) As it was proposed initially in 2013 the cooperation between EU and Eurasian Union is of paramount importance also as an instrument to strengthen peace and economic and political security in the region. The idea aims at the creation of a Common Economic space between Lisbon and Vladivostok.

On behalf of the participants:

Rainer Lindner - Chairman, The Minsk Forum/German-Belarusian Society, Berlin

Kristina Vaiciunaite - Director, Eastern European Studies Center, Vilnius

Leanid Zaika - Director, Analytical Center "Strategy", Minsk

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Part 2: Summary

On December 1st, the International conference “Regional Stability and Modernization Challenges and Opportunities for EU-Belarus Relations” was held in Vilnius, at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania. The event was organized by the German-Belarusian Society (dgb) in cooperation with the Eastern Europe Studies Centre, with the support of the German Federal Foreign Office, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania and the Friedrich-Naumann-Foundation for Freedom. The conference, part of the Minsk Forum Process, active since 1997, was attended by EU and Belarusian experts, politicians, diplomats and representatives of civil society, who, through round table discussions, have intensively debated the new and relevant role that Belarus is playing in the European arena, with reference to the recent Ukrainian crisis and the resulting tensions between EU and Russia. The Foreign Minister of Lithuania, Linas Linkevičius welcomed the guests, pointing out the importance of such meeting, to enable confrontation and cooperation among countries, especially neighboring ones.

The first round table, moderated by Rainer Lindner, Chairman of The Minsk Forum and German-Belarusian society (dgb), was focused on the possibility of a stronger cooperation in Eastern Europe, through the careful analysis of challenges and opportunities that this process implies. In this regard, the participants have not overlooked obstacles that still stand on the path towards democracy in Belarus, such as political prisoners problem and death penalty, in contrast with the European shared values. The Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany in Minsk, Wolfram Maas, underlined the need for a double level of cooperation, both economic and academic, in order to connect young generations from different countries, and let them learn from the past. Valery Karbalevich, expert of the Analytical Center Strategy in Minsk, drew attention on opportunities that Ukrainian crisis has offered to Belarus, who has now the chance to prove itself as a neutral peacemaker, improving its position in Europe. Balazs Jarabik, project director for Pact and visiting scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, pointed out that the Ukrainian crisis proved how dangerous can be divisions in civil societies. Pushing Belarus to choose between EU or Russia could deep contrasts, leading to new tensions in the area. Belarusian politics should be focused on reforms, better if pursued on a local level. On the contrary, Tomas Janeliūnas, associate professor at Vilnius University, said that, even though political agreements are just formal tools, and often lack in content, Eastern partnership still has a chance. Indeed, conflicts in Ukraine have shown an increasing need for cooperation and attentions towards East. The discussion involved many other participants, who discussed the proposed topics, formulating many interesting proposals for promoting cooperation between the EU and Belarus, in order to promote stability in the region. Among these it is worth mentioning the need for regional cooperation, and for local solutions, without giving up to a reinforced engagement of EU.

The second round table, based on Belarus and Eastern Partnership, was mediated by Kristina Vaičiūnaitė, Director of The Eastern European Studies Center. Many renowned experts expressed their views, concerns and perspectives on EU- Belarusian relations, with reference to Eastern partnership program. Among them, the Ambassador Dirk Schuebel, who reminded the need for a more targeted European politics, in order to determine priorities and achieve results. Dzianis Melyantsou, senior Analyst at the Belarusian Institute for strategic studies (BISS) expressed his concerns about the failure of Eastern partnership. Andrey Kazakevich,



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Director of the Institute of Political Studies “Political Sphere”, placed particular emphasis on the elements that make Eastern partnership different from other forms of cooperation, and perhaps more efficient. Finally, Marius Laurinavičius, senior policy analyst at the EESC, expressed concerns about the real independence of Belarus, as political player in Eastern partnership. The most relevant debates addressed during the second round table referred to the need for maintaining the EU-Belarus partnership alive, and enhancing activities and people contacts for this purpose. Different opinion were given on the inclusion or exclusion of Russia in such partnership.