

The European Union and its Eastern Partners

Current approaches to regional cooperation

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

Venue

10-12 December 2017, Crowne Plaza Minsk Hotel, vulica Kirava 13, Minsk, Belarus

Organised 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

In cooperation with

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 (Oiiip), Vienna
Istituto affari internazionali (IAI), Rome
Slovak Foreign Policy Association (SFPA), Bratislava
European Institute for Peace (EIP), Brussels

With the support of

Central European Initiative (CEI), Trieste
Programme MOST of the Delegation of the European Union in Belarus, Minsk
Belarussian Chairmanship of the Central European Initiative, Minsk
Estonian Presidency of the Council of the European Union
Foreign Ministry of Austria, France, Germany
Delegation of the European Union in Belarus, Minsk
Embassy of Austria, Estonia, France, Switzerland & the United Kingdom to Belarus, Minsk
Belarus Office of the Konrad-Adenauer Foundation, Vilnius

Coordination

Florent Marciacq (CFA), florent.marciacq@oefz.at
Tobias Flessenkemper (CIFE), tobias.flessenkemper@cife.eu
Yauheni Preiherman (MD), yauheni.belarus@gmail.com

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 by the organising partners 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 this Berlin Process. It convenes the community of experts dealing with EU external

in cooperation with



with the support of





relations towards the Western Balkans in the run-up of annual Berlin Process Summits in order to encourage a wider, strategic reflection on EU relations with Western Balkan states and EU internal politics, and build bridges with national and international administrations. The specificity of the WB-RF is its capacity to further a pan-European dialogue on the EU's strategy towards the Western Balkans by mobilising a pool of EU and non-EU experts engaging in interactive discussions (instead of conference-like presentations); its capacity to disseminate these discussions throughout Europe (EU and non-EU) through the organisation of outreach and in-reach public seminars; and its willingness to create long-stranding synergies by fostering cooperation amongst experts (including through joint publications) and with foreign policy actors. The last WB-RF, supported by the CEI, took place in Trieste in June 2017.

Context and objectives

The **Eastern Partnership** (EaP), one of the EU's key approach to its Eastern neighbourhood, was founded in 2009 with the aim of supporting political association and further economic integration between the EU and interested partner countries. Conceived to complement the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) as a framework that should convey the EU's transformative power in its "shared neighbourhood", the EaP had to face serious challenges in the past few years, questioning its actual adequacy in times of geopolitical turmoil. The Ukrainian crisis, the return of Russia in international politics, rising instability in the region, the resurgence of nationalism in EU member states 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 suit new realities and give a new impetus to its 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 challenge 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 trans-boundary issues; it also enhances the exchange of best practices on issues of mutual interest and therefore contributes to advance good governance, economic integration transport and people-to-people connectivity as well as energy or environmental security. Regional cooperation therefore ranks high on the foreign policy agenda of most EaP countries.

This is especially the case of **Belarus**. Since 1997, the Partnership and Cooperation process organising the relations between the EU and Belarus has not progressed, due to concerns about fundamental and democratic rights in the country. Likewise, although formally included in its ENP (and EaP), Belarus does not participate in the dynamic, except in EaP multilateral initiatives. Recent developments, however, indicate that Belarus increased its emphasis on regional cooperation: its constructive engagement in mediating a cease-fire in the Donbass, its contribution to regional stability in the Crimean crisis, its Presidency of the CEI, its enhanced relations with other EaP countries and the improvement of its relations with the EU and neighbouring EU Member States call for re-thinking EU-Belarusian relations with a greater emphasis on regional cooperation.

How can the EU, constrained both internally and externally by serious challenges, engage more constructively with Belarus and other EaP countries, beyond the "in-between" paradigm? How can it strengthen regional cooperation and reinforce its dialogue with this



part of Europe in wider, more inclusive and yet more differentiated way? How can it encourage an understanding of good neighbourly relations that is shared by its Eastern partners? What are the expectations nurtured in EaP countries towards Brussels in regional cooperation matters? What potential for cooperation can be envisioned, considering the geopolitical context specific to EaP countries and their differentiated relationship to Russia? How to balance the need for differentiation and the challenge of coherence in the EU's strategy towards EaP countries? What lessons from the Ukrainian crisis can be drawn by the EU in its redefinition of its 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 Belarussian Presidency of the CEI, on the run-up to the CEI Summit of Minsk planned on 12 December 2017, and against the backdrop of the Eastern Partnership Summit of 27 November 2017. The Forum will encourage pan-European, expert-led discussions on EaP questions revolving around regional cooperation and kick off an innovative process of reflection.

Format and outputs

The Minsk EaP Reflection Forum will convene **the pan-European community of experts** working primarily on the EaP to reflect on current approaches towards regional cooperation among EaP countries and between EaP countries and the EU. Around 50 experts and researchers, affiliated to renowned think-tanks and universities from all over the EU, EFTA, the Western Balkans, the Eastern Neighbourhood (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine) and Russia will be personally invited as active participants. The Reflection Forum will provide an interactive platform fostering an exchange of perspectives abiding by the Chatham House Rule.

Rather than delivering formal presentations *ex cathedra* followed by Q&A, the participants, all sitting around a large table, will engage in **interactive discussions** moderated by experienced facilitators. Participation will only be allowed upon invitation to academic experts, think-tankers and national or international representatives.

The Reflection Forum initiative will not only discuss regional cooperation; it will also contribute to **strengthen expert-to-expert contacts**, encourage **joint publications and cooperation projects** among the participating institutions and help bridging the gap between academic research and policy action.

Building on the Minsk Reflection Forum of December 2017 and the expert network established at this occasion, a **series of public expert roundtables** will be organised in EaP countries as well as EU capitals 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 Belarussian experts and think tanks in the project.



Programme

Sunday, 10 December 2017

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

18h00: Evening talk – Security dialogue and regional cooperation in Eastern Europe

Welcoming speech

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, Vilnius

Panel discussion

Christine Muttonen, former President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Vienna / Villach
Valery Varanetsky, Chairman of the Standing Commission of International Affairs, House of Representatives of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus, Minsk
Member of the Parliament of Sweden or Germany (tbc)
Feith Pieter, Senior Diplomatic Advisor, European Institute of Peace (EIP), Brussels

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

19h30: Networking dinner (upon invitation)

Monday, 11 December 2017

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

9h00: Official opening

Representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus, Minsk
Margot Klestil-Löffler, Alternate Secretary General of the Central European Initiative, Trieste

Merike Kokajev, Ambassador of Estonia to Belarus, Minsk

Dominique David, President of the Austro-French Centre for Rapprochement in Europe; Advisor to the President of the French Institute for International Relations (IFRI), 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 Program, 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 crisis 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, e.g. 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 implication will these developments have in the practice of EU-EaP relations and regional cooperation? How common and principled can the EaP prove as an external policy of the EU, considering the substantial differences in EU member states' approaches and the institutional and political context promoting internal and external differentiation? How can connectivity be used, beyond infrastructure development, as an open, pragmatic vehicle of cooperation throughout the region?

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 are often contingent on domestic issues and/or international developments. These are conducive to fluctuations in EaP external relations, regional instability and latent unpredictability. Regional cooperation, against this backdrop, is paramount: by promoting dialogue amongst partners and building bridges between the EU and its six Eastern Neighbours and among EaP countries themselves, regional cooperation 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 the EU use to strengthen the exchange of best practices with EaP countries and among themselves too? What lessons can the EU draw from its (partly disappointing) experience in external democratisation? How can the EaP contribute to strengthening its partners' economic stability, considering the adaptational costs incurred the access to the EU markets? What lessons can EaP countries learn from their respective experiences with the EU in this respect? Finally, what should regional cooperation mean or entail at the level of individuals? How to use existing framework to further improve people-to-people relations with the EU and among EaP countries?

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



Geopolitical tensions in various parts of the EaP “shared neighbourhood” have reached their climax in the past few years with the Ukrainian crisis and the war in Syria. These tensions and their polarising effect have strained those EaP countries seeking to balance their relations between the East and the West and hindered the pursuit of multi-vector foreign policies in the region. This difficulty to establish a balanced relationship has been reinforced through the parallel promotion by Brussels and Moscow of overlapping regional integration projects (with, respectively, the promotion of ENP association agreements and the accession to the Eurasian Economic Union). The case of Armenia or Ukraine, which had to “choose” an integration scheme, are good example of the negative-sum games shaping the context in which EaP countries may be pushed to operate. How can regional and pan-regional cooperation help overcome this thucydidean trap? How should the EU address these challenges reverberating through its relations with particular EaP countries? How to balance the need to dialogue with major powers (Russia, China, Turkey...) about their respective relations with EaP countries, e.g. in working on making regional integration schemes more compatible with each other, while not losing sight of EaP countries’ sovereign independence? How to engage with EaP individual countries in co-shaping an opportunity structure that does not lead EaP to lose-lose situations and increased instability?

16h00: Networking & coffee break

16h30: From the EaP countries to the Western Balkans: Regional cooperation in across EU neighbourhoods (concluding discussion)

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 a 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 2 decades, with mixed results though. Against the backdrop of declining progress in the past few years, enduring crisis 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. While running in support of EU processes, this initiative (so-called Berlin process) prioritised connectivity and regional cooperation as never before. 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 the EU falls short of addressing in the Western Balkans and its Eastern neighbourhood, e.g. regarding territoriality, which require a different approach or new tools? How to build bridges across 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: Concluding remarks by the General Rapporteur

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

17h45: End of the main event



18h45: 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 18h40

Welcoming speech

Didier Canesse, Ambassador of France to Belarus, Minsk

Tuesday, 12 December 2017

9h30: Optional guided visit of the MTZ tractor factory & surrounding area in Minsk
Transfer by bus - Meeting point in front of the hotel at 9h20 (registration needed)
Transfer back to the hotel – arrival time 12h30

12h30: End of the programme