This summary has been produced on the occasion of the concluding event of the project – an international conference “Eastern Partnership – The European Opportunity for Eastern Partners” to be held in Brussels on 8th December 2008 – organized by the Polish government and the European Council on Foreign Relations on the eve of the Czech Presidency of the EU Council.
The 3-year (2006–2008) project “Strengthening Central European Contribution to the Eastern dimension of EU’s CFSP” is aimed at creating a platform for think-tanks, NGOs and policymakers of Visegrad countries (V4) in order to bring new impulses to public and expert debates concerning the Eastern dimension of the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the Eastern dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy, and to increase and sustain their role in shaping the political agenda of the European Council, European Commission, European Parliament and a political dialogue between the EU and the US policies towards Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia and Moldova have been a matter of intensive consultations between Europeans and Americans.

The basic framework of the project consisted of a series of high-level annual policy conferences (Bratislava–2006, Warsaw–2007 and Budapest–2008) and bi-annual policy seminars in Brussels. Additional events were organized in Berlin and Paris.

Partners of the project jointly worked out common positions, disseminated policy papers and policy briefs, and communicated policy recommendations to both European and national decision-makers on following issues:

- Eastern Dimension of the EU Neighbourhood Policy
- EU – Russia relations
- Further enlargement perspectives and institutional reform of the EU
- EU Common Energy Policy
- Migration, visa regimes and the enlarged Schengen system

PROJECT ACTIVITIES

Annual Visegrad Conferences

The project was launched at the conference held in Bratislava, 9th-11th November 2006, which focused on “Strategic Framework of the EU’s Relations with Eastern Neighbours”, and examined the existing strategic framework for the EU’s policy on East European countries (Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova) and identified deficits of current EU policy to these East European countries. The conference came up with policy recommendations to enhance the EU’s capabilities in pursuing its foreign policy goals in the region of Eastern Europe and brought new ideas and impulses to be upheld by V4 countries.

The second annual conference entitled “EU’s Eastern Policy - Challenges and Opportunities”, was held on 24th–25th September 2007, in Warsaw. The conference presentations and discussions focused on the following topics: strengthening the Eastern Dimension of the EU Neighbourhood Policy, EU – Russia Relations and the contractual framework of these relations and strategies of the EU and USA towards ENP, Black Sea and Central Asia countries.

The third annual conference “EU Energy Policy and Infrastructure Development – The Role of the Visegrad Countries” was held in Budapest on 4th November 2008. The conference agenda focused on the issue of infrastructure development within the framework of the European Neighborhood Policy, and sought to identify areas of feasible sectoral cooperation between the EU and its neighbors in enhancing transport, energy and electricity grid infrastructures.

Brussels Seminars

A series of seminars were held in Brussels that aimed to communicate impulses from foreign policy community in Visegrad countries to representatives of the EU institutions as well as broader policy community, think-tanks and media that took part in each seminar.

The first Brussels Seminar “EU’s Eastern Policy: What Role for Central Europe?”, held on 23rd January 2007, featured Czech Foreign Minister Karel Schwarzenberg, who
addressed the challenges and opportunities for Central European countries in shaping EU policy toward the East.

The Policy Brief #1 entitled “Strategic Framework for the EU’s Eastern Policy” was presented at the seminar. It recommended to further develop sectoral regional elements of the ENP, to facilitate visa regimes towards EU neighbors, to bridge the ENP with the EU-Russia agenda and to overcome structural inconsistencies in planning and implementation of CFSP with ENP more broadly, to match the ENP ambitions with resource allocation in the 2007-13 financial perspective, to redefine assistance priorities to neighboring countries in favor of the political modernization, rule of law and accountable governance.

The second Brussels Seminar “EU’s Eastern Policy during German Presidency?” was held on 20th June 2007 with former Prime Minister of Slovakia Mikuláš Dzurinda as a keynote speaker.

The Policy Brief #2 entitled “Towards a New Eastern Policy of the European Union: Eastern ENP and Relations with Russia after the German Presidency” was presented at the seminar. It accentuated the need of the EU to effectively pursue its regional interests in Eastern Europe through a comprehensive, consistent regional strategy. Overcoming the lack of consensus over “Eastern policy” represents a strategic challenge for the EU. The paper suggested a combination of bilateral and regional approach – bilateral Action Plans should be viewed primarily as instruments of political modernization and democratic institution building, while Community Programs should serve sectoral modernization of ENP countries.

The third Brussels Seminar “The Impact of the Enlarged Schengen Zone on the Eastern Neighbourhood Policy”, held on 7th February 2008, focused on the nexus between Schengen zone enlargement and the ENP.

In the Policy Brief #3 we made a case for a proper assessment and pragmatic adjustments of the EU policies. We pointed out that barriers and bottlenecks created by the new Eastern border of Schengen Zone substantially inhibit positive effects of the ENP. The paper called for harmonization of the external aspects of the JHA and the ENP policy instruments so that the external border of the EU would be as open as possible for legal migrants (“friendly border”), and as closed as possible for illegal ones (“safe border”) because “illegal migrants never apply for a Schengen visa.” The paper encouraged the Commission to collect data and surveys and to conduct consultations with the representatives of local governments and the civil society (NGOs) in the border regions. Finally it has called the EU to develop an “active labour migration policy” to sustain its economic growth and social welfare.

In June 2008 – on the eve of the French Presidency and before a ceremonial launch of the Union for the Mediterranean – the topic of “The Eastern and Southern Dimensions of the European Neighborhood Policy” was addressed at the fourth seminar held on 3rd June 2008 in Brussels and the seminar “Central European Perspectives on the European Neighbourhood Policy” was held on 4th June 2008 in Paris (in cooperation with CERI/Science-Po). The supposed cleavage between Eastern and Southern vectors of the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) was discussed broadly in terms of existing policy instruments, financial resources and institutional capacities of both the EU and member states.
PROJECT PUBLICATIONS

Policy papers

Policy papers and joint policy briefs for annual conferences and seminars are published in English. Partners of the project make them available in print and electronically on their respective websites. These publications are aiming at the European Commission, the European Parliament, all national governments and parliaments, policymakers, think-tanks and European NGOs as well as to European media. Organizers of the project seek media partnerships in order to attract public attention to conferences and publications.

The project publications so far focused on “Strategic Framework for the EU’s Eastern Policy” (policy paper and joint policy brief), “Towards a New Eastern Policy of the European Union: Eastern ENP and Relations with Russia after the German Presidency” (joint policy brief) and “The European Union and Russia 2004-2007” (policy paper) and “The Impact of the Enlarged Schengen Zone on the Eastern Neighbourhood Policy” (joint policy brief).

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE POLICY PAPERS

Policy Brief #1, January 2007

Policy recommendations for the EU’s Eastern Policy:

- The EU cannot effectively pursue its regional interests without applying regional policies brought under the umbrella of one comprehensive, consistent regional strategy. Therefore the EU needs to develop a coherent two-tier strategy: The existing bilateral frameworks should be complemented by a new regional framework(s). The Action Plans should facilitate political modernization and democracy building, while sectoral agreements (as designed in the Commission’s Communication) should serve sectoral modernization of new neighbours (Free Trade Agreements/FTA, Trans-European Networks/TEN)

- In order to develop a coherent regional strategy towards new neighbours, the EU should aim at bridging ENP policy with the EU-Russia common spaces agenda. By the same token regional sectoral agreements within ENP could lay down foundations for institutionalized regional sectoral dialogues with ENP countries plus Russia especially in sectors of vital importance (e.g. energy security, combating illegal migration, etc.) The EU should insist that EU-Russia energy dialogue should also include Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova

- The ENPI (European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument) for the EU’s new financial perspective 2007-2013 should be brought in line with the ENP goals, challenges identified in the EU’s basic treaty in general, and the European Security Strategy in particular

- In order to overcome structural and institutional inconsistency between foreign (CFSP) and neighbourhood (ENP) policies, an effective and flexible planning, consultation and implementation mechanism should be developed between the Commission, the Council and member states. The planning mechanism should be changed so that it facilitates a flexible policy response, including a continuous adjustment of assistance programs for the new neighbourhood. The EU cannot plan its policy response towards its new neighbours within the five-or more-years period because the post-Soviet countries are still facing dramatic political and economic challenges of their post-communist transition

- The EU’s visa policy towards new neighbours should reflect strategic EU interests in the region. The policy should also acknowledge the basic fact that a strict visa regime impedes desired legal movement of persons, but does not thwart the illegal migration from third countries

- The EU should redefine its assistance priorities in favor of the political modernization promoted by the Action Plans – i.e. Strengthening democracy in new neighbouring countries through improving the system of representative democracy (including political parties), supporting NGOs and civil society, sustaining free and independent media, building an independent judiciary and promoting the rule of law, protection of private property as well as promoting anti-corruption measures and public accountability. In these areas the transition experience of new member states may be particularly valuable
Policy Brief #2, June 2007

Towards a New Eastern Policy of the European Union: Eastern ENP and Relations with Russia after the German Presidency

- The EU cannot sustain its vital interests in the region of Eastern Europe while relying on a merely bilateral approach to its Eastern neighbours... The EU cannot effectively pursue its regional interests in Eastern Europe without applying regional policies brought under the umbrella of one comprehensive, consistent regional strategy.

- The lack of consensus over “Eastern policy” - as it juxtaposed to the recently raised idea of Mediterranean community - does represent a strategic challenge for the EU.

- Action Plans should be viewed primarily as instruments between the EU and a respective ENP country in the area of political modernization and democratic institution building, while Community Programs should serve both the EU’s interests in the region and sectoral modernization of ENP countries.

Policy Brief #3, February 2008

The Impact of the Enlarged Schengen Zone on the Eastern Neighbourhood Policy: From Proper Assessment to Pragmatic Adjustment

- Schengen is a Janus-face: internally it is smiling and externally it is snarling... by creating new barriers and bottlenecks, we have weakened the incentives for the neighbouring societies to see the EU favourably and to move towards modernization through a faster integration and harmonization with the EU.

- It is necessary to harmonize the external aspects of the JHA and the ENP policy instruments (e.g. visa policy, visa procedure, energy solidarity). Legal and illegal migration are two completely different agendas that should be addressed by different policy instruments. The external border of the EU should be as open as possible for legal migrants (“friendly border”), and as close as possible for illegal ones (“safe border”). A too strict visa regime impedes the desired legal movement of persons, but does not thwart the illegal migration from third countries. It should not be forgotten that illegal migrants from third countries never apply for a Schengen visa.

- The Commission should engage in extensive data and information collection about the impact of the enlarged Schengen area on the EU neighbours by requesting HoMs reports in neighbouring countries, commissioning surveys and conducting a consultation process with the representatives of local governments and the civil society (NGOs) in the border regions.

- Community agencies and programmes for Eastern EU and ENP states at regional level have to focus on developing the cross-border regional communities that may bridge the gaps or diminish the dividing lines made by the Schengen acquis... A coherent legal basis for CBC should be defined, and the cross-border infrastructure projects facilitating the flow of people and goods should be accelerated.

- The EU needs to develop an “active labour migration policy” to sustain its economic growth and social welfare. The special treatment of Eastern Europeans (“blue cards for E-Europeans”) should be seriously considered in future adjustments of the Schengen system.

Recommendations about The Eastern and Southern Dimensions of the ENP, June 2008

- The EU should avoid duality in the institutions and policies; apply similar approach to the south and to the east.

- The EU should engage private sector - the ENP implementation should not rely only on instruments funded by the EU budget.

- The EU should order independent studies about the impact of the ENP by researchers and NGOs from concerned countries. The European Commission needs more information and assessment to make informed policy decisions about the ENP, the studies would be vital for providing them with the information they need.

All publications are available in full text at the websites of project partners (e.g. see http://www.pssi.cz/en/program-of-atlantic-security-studies/visegrad-countries-eueastern-policy/)
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