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## Polish-Swedish initiative Eastern Partnership (EaP) - whether it's „an abend exit” for Ukraine?

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## **Polish-Swedish initiative Eastern Partnership (EaP) – whether it’s „an abend exit” for Ukraine?**

The EU foreign policy in the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) has traditionally two main vectors: the southern and eastern one. The EU leader on the southern direction has traditionally been France and now N.Sarcozy supports the idea of creation and strengthening of Mediterranean Union as a platform of cooperation between the EU and states of the region. Accordingly, advocate of the EU enlargement process on the eastern dimension is Poland which is a strategic partner of Ukraine on many issues within EU.

So, the representatives of Poland and Sweden put on the European agenda the initiate on developing the so-called Eastern Partnership, the main goal of which should become balance of the southern and eastern dimensions. New initiative aims at approximation of all countries concerned including Ukraine to the European Union but in the framework of acting mechanisms not to create new cooperation structures which could become an alternative to the EU membership.

The question whether this initiative opens the doors for Ukraine into the club has become the top one in Ukrainian media. Consequently, the EU formal answer „no” make Ukrainian society skeptically consider the following development of EaP discussion. In particular, during meetings with the Polish experts for Ukrainian side it was difficult to conspire disappointment and regret concerning the absence of the European identity message.

At the same time we should understand our Polish partners who could not ignore the EU key members position on the impossibility and anticipation of the membership issue for Ukraine at least before finding consensus concerning Lisbon Treaty. Anyway, in reality if EaP becomes not just a paper but a document of concrete cooperation it will be one of the approximating steps towards the European Union – as this is the real basis of such a Polish-Swedish project.

Another positive feature of the initiative which has become a Communication on 3 December 2008 is unprecedented considering during its preparation the proposals form the potential partners (one could not observe such phenomena neither in Wider Europe nor in Communication on European Neighbourhood Policy). No doubt, this weighs, especially for Ukraine which wants to seize leading positions in EaP. This special attention to Kiev and eastern partners on

the whole within EU internal discussion is very important as from the last year the French proposals on Mediterranean Union has been taking leading positions. Now, we can assume that the stakes are equal.

EaP initiative has become a unique forum both for the EU members and EU partners on the necessity to pay special attention to the eastern vector of the EU foreign policy as a basis of stability in the region and in Europe, on the whole. Thanks to such active discussion and popularization of Polish-Swedish idea within the EU fundamental alterations has been made to the final variant of EaP, so it possesses a range of proposals from the partners-states.

European Council extraordinary meeting on 1 September 2008 called to accelerate the work under EaP as a reaction after august events on Southern Caucasus and their possible resonance in the region. Before the last conflict in Georgia there were enough reasons for creation by the EU of more ambition programs on integration eastern countries to the European community but Russian expansion policy has created new situation that demands qualitatively new policy of the EU for maintaining peace and security in the region<sup>1</sup>.

Communication EaP was officially presented on 3 December 2008 and concerns six states of the region (Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine). It contains political context of EaP and main principles according to which new dimension of the EU foreign policy should be realized as well as ways of perspective sectoral cooperation.

Explaining the actuality of working out EaP concept European Commission refer to the radical changes that have occurred on the Eastern side of the EU for the last 15 years. The EU geographical proximity due to a range of enlargements 2004-2007, internal reforms in state-partners partially as a result of ENP in political and economic terms have gradually approached such countries as Ukraine to the European Community. It is stated that the EU has become more and more in charge of the its partners on supporting them in overcoming obstacles and making relations more profound.

One of the important components of the EaP is a flexible approach to the development of bilateral cooperation with every partner-state that has all reasons for to consider this document an acting mechanism of the EU foreign policy. It's stated in communication that „partner-states do not have identical political goals concerning their relations with the EU but all of them have common wish to improve their cooperation<sup>2</sup>. In this situation the EU has nothing to do but to propose intensification of relations in key areas.

It's impossible for the European Union to ignore new mechanisms of cooperation with its partners if it wants the Eastern Europe to be a top issue on the for-

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<sup>1</sup> В.Ю. Константинов, Регіоналізація на схід від ЄС: системні чинники та динаміка // Актуальні проблеми міжнародних відносин. – 2005. – Вип. 55, ч. 1, с. 202.

<sup>2</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council Eastern Partnership SEC, Brussels, 3 December 2008 COM(2008) 823/4.

aign policy agenda. One of the ways – strengthening of political dialog as well as through coordinating more profound economic and legal integration<sup>3</sup>, 178, 203). We consider the EU decision to refresh legal base of its relations with partner-states to be one of the most progressive and important. For Ukraine it concerns the replacement of the Agreement on partnership and cooperation for a new enhanced agreement. Ukraine has become the first partner-state with which the European Commission has started negotiations on working out such an agreement of a new type. During the Ukraine – EU Paris Summit (9 Sept. 2008) the parties have agreed that it will be the Association Agreement which could bring new quality and sense to our relations<sup>4</sup>.

Another positive element is that the Communication foresees launch of a new type of mechanisms (with appropriate benchmarks and milestones) instead of the acting action plans as it should fix the progress made by Ukraine in this or that sphere of cooperation.

It's very important that EaP opens dialogue on a new basis between Kiev and Brussels on intensifying free trade. Such a dialogue has unprecedented character as it means not only abolishment of the customs tariffs and rates but de-facto entering by Ukraine the EU common market. It does not import participation in legal process but will foresee all advantages of the EU common market with its preferences. We are looking forward with optimism to realization of the declarations of the Ukrainian politicians on readiness of our state to fulfill ambition commitments in this area. Following Ukraine, there is a proposal stated in EaP Communication on profound free trade areas with every partner-state which should result in formation of the common regional FTA between the EU and EaP partners.

From the EU new member-states it's known that for ordinary people trips facilitation to the EU and possibilities to find work are one of the most important issues considering integration of their country into the European Community. That's why it was essential requirement of the Ukrainian side to put innovation elements into the part of Communication „Movement of persons and security”. In particular, it contains a Ukrainian message „ambition character of the EaP statement on movement of persons will be a key indicator of the success of the initiative”<sup>5</sup>.

For the Agreement on facilitation visa regime between Ukraine and the EU signed in 2007 to become acting in real life it's necessary to work out a list of conditions which Ukraine should meet at the appropriate level. So we can consider the proposal to launch dialog on liberalization of visa regime with the partner-states in the format of „road map”. It's a pity that there are no concrete terms of

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<sup>3</sup> В.Ю. Константинов, *op.cit.*, с. 178, 203.

<sup>4</sup> A. Mayhew, *Ukraine and the European Union: financing acceleration*, „University Sussex”, November 2008, с. 215.

<sup>5</sup> В.Ю. Константинов, *op.cit.*

implementation of such a regime on the other hand, it's proposed in EaP to consider the possibility to abolish a visa-fee for some partners.

In the EU a wide range of issues connected with the reduce of differences between states and regions are covered by the so called Cohesion policy 2007-2013. The principles of such a policy are formed in Brussels though the priorities of money distribution are set by the local authorities through appropriate projects. The EaP gives the opportunity for partner-states to improve cooperation on regional level taking as a basis the mechanisms of cohesion policy. For Ukraine which is in the process of implementation of State regional policy Concept it could be very useful to use such a tool within EaP.

One of the mechanisms can be Memorandum on understanding and cooperation in the sphere of regional policy which should clear out the concrete directions of cooperation with the European Commission. Another is working out of pilot projects in the sphere of regional development and maintaining ties with the regions of the partner-states (with the involvement into the appropriate programs for Eastern Europe in the framework of the Committee of Regions and the Assembly of European Regions).

The innovation element of the EaP is the multilateral format as a basis of cooperation with the partner-states in a sense of a group which is no doubt a very beneficial for the European Union and will facilitate the process of influence on the region. On the other hand, such level of cooperation will assist to formation of common position in the spheres of common interest through exchanging information and experience. In practice, it's planned to hold every two years EU – partners summits, annual meetings on the ministerial level as well as organizing theme platforms according to the sphere of cooperation. For Ukraine the fact of fixing in EaP the multilevel format would not influence the bilateral one was of utmost importance. We hope that the leading role for our state will play intensification of bilateral cooperation with the EU considering all possibilities that are stated in the EaP.

Summing up, we can give different prognosis and opinions whether it was necessary or not to launch such an initiative and if it turns out to be efficient for Ukraine. But the above-mentioned mostly innovation elements of Eastern Partnership are the best prove of the fact that this initiative is not „an ordinary EU paper towards its neighbours”. Thanks to common and strenuous work this document possesses „additional value” the prove of which is unprecedented fact of including the proposals from partner-states into the EU foreign policy concept.

On the whole whether the EaP becomes an „abend exit” for Ukraine or be an organic part of the long-term strategy on the way to joining the European Community depends only on Ukrainians. What is left – a huge routine on filling with the concrete proposals the numerous directions of sector and theme cooperation as well as their gradual implementation – but it's a part of work that only Ukrainians are able to do.

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