

The Eastern Partnership

Under the European Neighbourhood Policy the European Union has created a specific partnership for its eastern neighbours. The development of the Eastern Partnership is in response to the strengthening of the European Neighbourhood Policy to the south of the EU. The EU tightened its links with its southern neighbours through the Barcelona Process, which has since led to the creation of the Union for the Mediterranean. Following the expansion of the EU into Central and Eastern Europe in 2004 and 2007, a need arose to do the same in the east. This led in May 2009 to the creation of the Eastern Partnership.

Mutual interest

The Eastern Partnership has six partner countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine and Belarus (in the case of the latter, the extent of participation will depend on the general development of relations with the EU). Each of the six partner countries is undergoing radical political and socio-economic reform and is keen to forge closer ties with the EU. By means of the Eastern Partnership the EU is conveying a lasting political message of solidarity, combined with tangible support for democratic and market-oriented reforms. This is a question of mutual interest, as it benefits the stability, security and welfare of both the EU and its eastern partners.

The partnership is based on shared values, specifically democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights and fundamental liberties, and the principles of the market economy, sustainable development and good management. This common initiative by the Member States of the European Union and their East European partners is also based on joint ownership, differentiation and conditionality. Mutual and active commitment to realising the shared values is essential. The EU is committed to offering maximum support, in line with the political and economic reality and ambitions of the various partner countries. This demands individual efforts for reform.

Bilateral cooperation

The bilateral cooperation established under the Eastern Partnership will amongst other things lay the basis for new association agreements. These agreements differ in content and are adapted to the objectives and capacities of the partner countries. They create a stronger political bond and promote convergence with European rules. In time, the association agreements will lead to the establishment of free-trade zones, thereby ensuring a gradual integration of the partner country into the European economy. Furthermore, the Eastern Partnership will improve the mobility of the citizens of partner countries with the opportunity to conclude visa facilitation and readmission agreements. Abolition of the requirement for a visa is a long-term objective for indi-

vidual partner countries provided the conditions for correctly-managed and secure mobility are met. Finally, the Eastern Partnership will in the long term contribute to the increased energy security of both the EU and its partners.

The multilateral forum

The Eastern Partnership also provides a multilateral framework for the EU's relationships with its eastern partners. This framework supports multilateral relations and gives the EU an additional tool with which to support modernisation and reform in the partner countries. It is an outstanding forum for discussion and the exchange of information and experiences about the progress of democratic and market-oriented reform. The forum involves a broader range of participants than simply governments. It also involves parliaments, civil society, international organisations, financial institutions and the private sector.

The multilateral forum organises a summit of heads of state and government every other year and an annual gathering at the level of Ministers of Foreign Affairs.

Four thematic platforms have been created, for which a series of realistic, periodically-revised key objectives has been established, with regular re-evaluation of requirements. The first platform, "Democracy, good governance and stability", promotes the development of stable democratic institutions and efficient government structures. The "Economic integration and convergence with EU policies" platform aims to promote the economic integration of the partner countries by means of coordination. Given the mutual dependency with respect to energy, the "Energy security" platform focuses on the development of mechanisms for mutual support and security of energy supply. The fourth and final platform emphasises the importance of inter-personal contacts between citizens of the EU and of partner countries. This focuses specifically on cultural cooperation, education and media.

To increase the transparency and efficiency of the multilateral cooperation, a number of prestigious initiatives have been selected, such as the promotion of regional electricity markets, energy efficiency and renewable energy sources.

Financing

The Commission is allocating €600 million to the Eastern Partnership for the period 2010-2013. In addition, supplementary funds from international financial institutions and the private sector are needed to accelerate the reform and modernisation process in the partner countries.

Calendar of events

5-9 July 2010

Ukraine Association Agreement – 12th FTA Round (Brussels)

Mid-July 2010

Ukraine Association Agreement – 16th Plenary Round (Brussels)

26-27 July 2010

Civil Society Forum Steering Committee (Brussels)

8 September 2010

Cooperation Committee with Armenia (Brussels)

10 September 2010

Cooperation Committee with Azerbaijan (Brussels)

14 September 2010

Cooperation Committee with Georgia (Brussels)

23 September 2010

Civil Society Forum Steering Committee (Tbilisi)

September 2010

Ukraine Association Agreement – 13th FTA Round (Kiev)

September 2010

Ukraine Association Agreement – 17th Plenary Round (Kiev)

September/October 2010

4 Working Groups Civil Society Forum

October/ November

Fourth round of EaP Platforms (Brussels)

October/ November 2010

4 Sub-committees (Ukraine)

18-19 November 2010

Second Civil Society Forum (Berlin)

November 2010

Ukraine Association Agreement – 18th Plenary Round (Brussels)

November 2010

Cooperation Committee

13 December 2010

Second EaP Ministerial Meeting (Brussels)