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EASTERN PARTNERSHIP

At its spring 2009 meeting, the European Council is due to adopt the Eastern Partnership, a new initiative for closer links with the eastern neighbour countries of the European Union. The Eastern Partnership is aimed at the Union's partners in Eastern Europe and the Southern Caucasus and concerns six countries: **Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine.**

The proposals for the Eastern Partnership were put forward in a Commission communication in December 2008 following a request made by the European Council in June 2008 and reaffirmed at its extraordinary meeting in September 2008 when, discussing the crisis in Georgia, it underlined the need to step up relations with the eastern countries. The December 2008 European Council welcomed the Commission proposals, instructed the Council to study them and set the timetable for adopting and launching the Partnership.

After its adoption, the Eastern Partnership will be officially launched at a summit meeting with the partner countries, hosted by the Czech presidency of the EU Council on 7 May 2009 in Prague. The details of the Partnership are to be further developed with the partner countries subsequently.

All the countries concerned are engaged in political, social and economic reforms and are seeking closer relations with the EU. The objective of the new Eastern Partnership is to support them in their reform efforts for consolidation of democracy and towards a market-orientated economy, to contribute to their stability and to promote convergence with EU standards. Although the aim of the Partnership is to gradually integrate the partner countries into the EU economy, the Partnership itself is not directly linked to the question of EU membership of the countries concerned and does not prejudge future developments in this respect.

P R E S S

The Eastern Partnership is part of the broader **European Neighbourhood Policy** (ENP), developed in 2004 in the context of EU enlargement to deepen political and economic relations with the Union's immediate neighbours to the East and the South¹. The southern dimension of this policy was recently reinforced with the establishment of the Union for the Mediterranean; now the eastern ENP partners are being offered a new forum for raising their relations with the EU to a higher level.

A framework for bilateral and multilateral cooperation

There will be a bilateral component and a multilateral component to implementation of the Eastern Partnership.

The **bilateral** component is expected to build upon the operational structures already in place under the European Neighbourhood Policy. Its pace and specific content will depend on the merits of each of the partner countries concerned. Bilateral co-operation efforts will focus mainly on:

- new contractual relations, in particular through the negotiation of **association agreements**, conditional on such criteria as progress in terms of democracy, rule of law, respect for human rights, good governance, market economy and sustainable development. In order to help partners meet the commitments linked to such agreements, programmes will be developed to improve each partner's administrative capabilities in all the relevant sectors of co-operation;
- gradual **economic integration**, by seeking to establish deep and comprehensive free trade areas with each of the partner countries once they have joined the WTO;
- **mobility and security** issues, which may include the negotiation of "mobility and security pacts" covering areas such as migration and asylum, border management and the fight against corruption and organised crime, as well as steps towards visa liberalisation;
- **energy** security with regard to long-term energy supply and transit;
- support for **economic and social development** to help partner countries to reduce the sharp economic and social disparities between their regions and population groups.

¹ The European Neighbourhood Policy applies to Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Egypt, Georgia, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Republic of Moldova, Morocco, Occupied Palestinian Territory, Syria, Tunisia and Ukraine.

The **multilateral** component will complement the bilateral cooperation between the EU and the individual partner countries by addressing common challenges and fostering links among the partners themselves. Work will be organised around four **thematic platforms**:

- democracy, good governance and stability;
- economic integration and convergence with EU policies;
- energy security; and
- contacts between people.

On a case-by-case basis, other countries, as well as other institutions and international organisations, could be invited to participate in specific activities linked to these themes.

Furthermore, **flagship initiatives** may be undertaken to give multilateral cooperation increased visibility and focus. Such initiatives could include, for example, development of the southern energy corridor, an integrated border management programme, a facility for small and medium-sized enterprises or prevention of and response to natural and man-made disasters.

The operational structure for the multilateral component is expected to be provided by meetings at four levels: heads of state or government; ministers of foreign affairs; senior officials involved in the policy areas of the thematic platforms; and finally panels to support the work of the platforms in specific fields.

Multilateral cooperation within the framework of the Eastern Partnership is in addition to the other multilateral initiatives in the region, such as the Black Sea Synergy² with its focus on cooperation between the countries around the Black Sea (whereas the aim of the Eastern Partnership is to promote approximation of the partner countries towards the European Union).

For more detailed information see also

- communication from the European Commission: "Eastern Partnership", Council document no 16940/08
- Commission website on the European Partnership:
http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/eastern/index_en.htm
- Commission website on the European Neighbourhood Policy:
<http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/>.

² The Black Sea Synergy also includes Turkey and Russia, in addition to the EU and the five ENP Black Sea coastal states (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine).