

The European Union's Eastern Partnership, Energy Security and U.S.-EU Cooperation

Event Summary

As the nations of Eastern Europe, the Balkans and the South Caucasus seek to strengthen their relationships with the European Union, the EU shares an interest in enhancing security, good governance and free markets on its eastern frontiers. As part of that effort, the EU established the Eastern Partnership with Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

On November 2, the Center on United States and Europe and the Energy Security Initiative at Brookings co-hosted a conference on the European Union's Eastern Partnership with the Embassy of Poland, the Delegation of the European Commission, the Embassy of Sweden and the Heinrich Böll Foundation. The Frontiers of Europe conference discussed the Eastern Partnership's potential—and the challenges it will face—in achieving its stated goals of promoting democratic values and good governance; strengthening energy security; and fostering stability and economic development.

The first panel of the conference addressed regional perspectives on the Eastern Partnership. **Fiona Hill**, Director of the Center on the United States and Europe, served as moderator and panelists included: **Peter Semneby**, Special Representative for the South Caucasus; **Andrzej Ciesckowski**, Plenipotentiary of the Minister of Foreign Affairs for the Eastern Partnership for the Republic of Poland; **Mikhail Troitskiy**, Deputy Director of the Academic Educational Forum on International Relations in Moscow; **Batu Kutelia**, Ambassador of Georgia to the U.S.; and **Vadym Prystaiko**, Deputy Chief of Mission at the Embassy of Ukraine in Washington.

Mr. Ciesckowski began the discussion, calling the Eastern Partnership “one of the most promising initiatives of the European Union.” The primary aim of the Partnership, he argued, is to reduce the gaps in economic, structural and social development between the EU and its six Eastern neighbors as well as build a genuine partnership that can help these countries strengthen civil society and their democratic institutions. He acknowledged that the implementation of the Eastern Partnership would be a complex process – one that will necessarily develop gradually and build upon existing EU structures and institutions. He welcomed U.S. support of the EU and Eastern partners in this initiative – both in terms of assistance with concrete projects and in lending their expertise on the principles of free market economy, the transferring of democratic values, and rules of good governance.

Mr. Prystaiko explained Ukraine's involvement with the Eastern Partnership and why it receives such strong support amongst Ukrainians. Unlike the European Neighborhood Policy which faced a great deal of criticism in Ukraine, the Eastern Partnership is viewed as mechanism that can “bring Ukraine closer to its goal of full-fledged membership,” as opposed to a stand-in for membership. He cited a number of specific programs within the Partnership that enjoy significant support in Ukraine: the development bilateral institutions, the establishment of integrated border mechanism program in Ukraine, and increased cooperation and integration with the energy sector.

Peter Semneby followed with a discussion of why the EU is engaging with its Eastern neighbors through this platform, and why now. The obvious reason, he argued, is that “this is the last part of the map of Europe where the alignments have still not been finally settled.” As the EU has

engaged with other parts of Europe quite intensively, such as the Balkans, and expanded its borders to the East through enlargement, this makes the strengthening of relations with the Eastern Partnership countries all the more timely and necessary. Mr. Semneby cited the 2008 war in Georgia as another critical factor in the EU's decision to launch the Eastern Partnership. The conflict made clear to the EU, he argued, "that the security and well-being of our Eastern neighbors cannot simply be ignored." Mr. Semneby also acknowledged concerns of countries such as Russia but stated clearly that "spheres of influence thinking" does not in any way shape EU operations or how the Eastern Partnership policy was conceived.

Next, Ambassador Katulia spoke to Georgia's commitment to strengthening its democracy as well its ongoing efforts to adopt reforms, which bring Georgia more in line with European norms, values, and institutions. With respect to Georgian foreign policy, Mr. Katulia stated that Georgia has two main directions: strategic partnership with the United States and strategic partnership with the European Union through the framework of the Eastern Partnership. He emphasized Georgia's view that these partnerships must be "a two-way street" based "on pragmatism and also idealism." He also mentioned Europe's engagement with Georgia following the events of August 2008, stating that Georgia is encouraged by a more proactive policy in the region. For the first time, he argued, Europe has become politically involved with Georgian security issues and continues to play an important role in this regard through efforts like the EU monitoring mission (EUMM).

Mr. Troitskiy concluded the panel with an analysis of Russia's attitude towards the Eastern Partnership program, which he described as "cautious at best, and critical at worst." Their primary complaint, he argued, is that a country cannot simultaneously pursue two integration projects and that integration with the European Union – in particular through the adaptation of EU laws and standards, the *acquis communautaire* – is mutually exclusive with greater cooperation with Russia, especially in areas of trade and energy security. He suggested, however, that Russia is still waiting to see how the initiative plays out and thus has been somewhat restrained with its criticism. There is an even chance, he argued, that the Partnership could have positive consequences for both the EU and Russia, if, for example, the EU decides to actively engage Russia as it moves forward with the implementation of the Eastern Partnership and in a sense "upgrade relations with Russia" so as to balance out its increased involvement in the region.

The second panel focused on how the Eastern Partnerships relates to energy security questions. **Steven Pifer**, Senior Fellow at Brookings, served as Moderator and panelists included: **Steven Everts**, Special Advisor to Javier Solana, Council of the European Union; **Richard Morningstar**, U.S. Special Envoy for Eurasian Energy; and **Michael Eriksson**, Energy Policy Coordinator for the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

According to Mr. Everts, the U.S., EU, and Eastern Partnership countries have a shared vision with respect to energy security and this vision is based on the belief that that real energy security rests on transparency, stable and predictable business environments, and rule of law. He also highlighted the link between energy issues and foreign policy issues, noting that often energy security can become a highly charged and politically divisive issue. Moving forward, he argued, Europe must work to find common ground amongst all relevant partners and policy solutions that emphasize open markets, a diversity of options, and cooperative politics.

Next, Mr. Eriksson spoke on behalf of the Swedish Presidency, which has found itself focused on two predominant issues over the past year: the economic crisis and climate – both of which relate to the broader question of energy security. Similarly, the Swedish Presidency has also taken a special interest in what can be done on the demand side of energy security. Mr. Eriksson stated that it is simply not enough to focus on the supply side; attention must also be given to creating greater energy efficiency as well as a more efficient liberalized market. He also commented that when it comes to the energy platform, the Eastern Partnership is not meant to be a mechanism for implementing specific energy projects and programs. Rather, its main role is to serve as an "political umbrella," or a forum for debate and discussion.

Ambassador Morningstar began by emphasizing the U.S.'s strong support for the Eastern Partnership and for further U.S. and European engagement with the Partnership countries.

Although the U.S. is increasingly looking to diversify energy supply routes, Ambassador Morningstar rejected claims that the U.S. position was “anti-Russia.” After a long period of failing to engage Russia in a meaningful way, the U.S. is now actively reaching out to Russia on energy security issues. Indeed, Morningstar argued that there are a number of areas where the U.S. and Russia can work together – for example, technology, environment, and energy efficiency.

For the third and final panel, **Strobe Talbott**, President of the Brookings Institution, provided introductory remarks and **Fiona Hill** again served as moderator. Panelists included: **Carl Bildt**, Swedish Minister for Foreign Affairs; **Radoslaw Sikorski**, Polish Minister for Foreign Affairs; and **Benita Ferrero-Waldner**, European commissioner for external relations and European neighborhood policy.

Mr. Sikorski described the Eastern Partnership as offering partner countries “an ambitious project of gradual political and economic integration with the E.U. as well as an advanced mechanism offering support in modernization and transformation.” Poland itself is financing and implementing a number of its own programs in support of the broader initiative. It is key, he argued, that the Eastern Partnership maintain momentum and there are a number of important issues that demand significant attention such as visa liberalization and support for Partnership countries in negotiating association agreements, including free-trade agreements. Poland is also advocating for the establishment of a Group of Friends of the Eastern Partnership, a more formal mechanism for bringing together third-party countries that are interesting in supporting the Eastern Partnership initiative. This would of course, include countries such as the U.S., which Sikorski believes can play an essential role through enhanced U.S.-EU coordination with Eastern Europe.

Although the process of EU enlargement will continue, Mr. Bildt argued that it would likely be sometime before Europe expands its borders again. In the mean time, however, Europe needs a new mechanism and instruments for engaging countries in its near abroad. To this end, the EU launched two strategic initiatives: the Union of the Mediterranean and the Eastern Partnership. Mr. Bildt stated that the Eastern Partnership builds upon the EU’s existing Neighborhood policy but has a “far more political component.” It seeks to coordinate both multilateral and bilateral initiatives in the region and offer concrete and far-reaching support for these countries to pursue democratically-minded reforms and achieve greater political and economic stability.

Ferrero-Waldner concluded the event and described a bit of the history behind the Eastern Partnership. Since 2003, Europe had been engaged in the region primarily through the Special Neighborhood policies, which consisted primarily of bilateral action plans, covering a wide-range of issues, such as rule of law, education, transport, economic liberalization. What was lacking was a multilateral framework, hence the development of the Eastern Partnership. Like many of the previous speakers, Ferrero-Waldner emphasized that the Eastern Partnership does not have an accession perspective, that is to say it is not a guaranteed ticket to EU membership. Nevertheless, she encouraged the six countries involved to use the incentives and programs offered by the Partnership to the fullest degree possible, noting that the “future is not prejudged” and doing so will be the most effective way for these countries to become membership candidates later down the road.