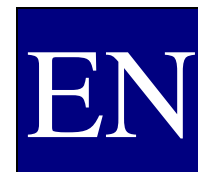




**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



Conclusions on Eastern Partnership

*3041st FOREIGN AFFAIRS
Council meeting
Luxembourg, 25 October 2010*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

1. The Council recalls its Conclusions of 26 July 2010 on the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). It reiterates its commitment to a strong ENP including its regional dimensions. The Council also recalls the Declaration by the European Council on the Eastern Partnership of 19/20 March 2009, as well as the Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit of 7 May 2009 which established the Eastern Partnership as a specific Eastern dimension of the ENP. It confirms the strategic importance for the European Union of promoting stability, good governance and economic development in its Eastern neighbourhood. The EU is committed to deepening relations and strengthening cooperation with its Eastern partners.
2. Since its launch at the Prague Summit, the Eastern Partnership has reinvigorated the EU's policy towards its Eastern partners (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine), with a view to creating the necessary conditions for political association and further economic integration between the European Union and interested partner countries. It has created a meaningful political framework for deepening relations with the partner countries, including cooperating on reform. Through the Eastern Partnership, the EU will continue to support political and socio-economic reforms of the partner countries, facilitating approximation and convergence towards the European Union. The Council recalls that the Eastern Partnership is founded on mutual interests and commitments, as well as on shared ownership and responsibility.

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3. It is now important for the dynamics of the process to be maintained so that further tangible results can be made. The second Eastern Partnership Summit in Budapest in May 2011 will provide an opportunity to take stock of progress made and give guidance for the future.
4. The Council recalls that the active engagement of the partner countries and their commitment to shared values and principles, including democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights and good governance are essential to take the process forward and to make the negotiation and the subsequent implementation of ambitious future Association Agreements a success. The EU is committed to assisting the partner countries in this regard.
5. The Council underlines that progress on the bilateral track of the Eastern Partnership, on the basis of the own merits of each of the partner countries, remains essential. This includes the upgrading of bilateral contractual relations, and, in this context, developing Comprehensive Institution-Building with each of the partners, as well as promoting the mobility of citizens in a well managed and secure environment, and strengthening energy security. In the same context, the EU will continue to pursue the establishment of Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas with Eastern partners once they have met the necessary conditions.
6. The Council notes the progress made so far in negotiations with Ukraine on a future Association Agreement, including the establishment of a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, and encourages further efforts on both sides so that the negotiations can be finalised soon. Negotiations with the Republic of Moldova on a future Association Agreement have made very good progress since they were launched in January this year. Furthermore, the accession of Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova to the Energy Community offers a concrete perspective for the integration of both countries in the EU's internal energy market on the basis of alignment with the relevant *acquis*. As for future Association Agreements with Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, the Council welcomes the launch of negotiations in July and hopes that these will progress swiftly. The extent of Belarus' participation in the bilateral track of the Eastern Partnership continues to depend on internal political developments in Belarus. The EU will therefore continue to follow the situation pertaining to democracy and human rights in Belarus.
7. The Council reiterates the importance it attaches to people-to-people contacts as a means to promote mutual understanding, as well as business, civil society and cultural ties. Recalling the Stockholm Programme and the Joint Declaration of the Prague Summit, the Council reiterates its commitment to promote mobility of citizens of the Eastern partner countries through visa facilitation and readmission agreements, and once these are successfully concluded and implemented, to take gradual steps towards full visa liberalisation as a long term goal for individual partner countries on a case-by-case basis provided that conditions for well-managed and secure mobility are in place.

8. With regard to Ukraine, the EU-Ukraine visa dialogue examining the conditions for visa free travel as a long-term goal should now enter a fully operational phase on the basis of an action plan setting out all technical conditions to be met by Ukraine before the possible establishment of a visa-free travel regime. The action plan will be "two phased" and will be tailored to Ukraine's current progress. It will contain two tiers of benchmarks: preliminary benchmarks concerning the policy framework (legislation and planning), which in turn will pave the way for meeting more specific benchmarks, covering effective and sustainable implementation of relevant measures including concrete results on the ground. Moreover, the effective implementation of visa facilitation and readmission agreements will remain of particular importance.

Through the Council, EU Member States will be fully associated in the different steps of the process, including by being consulted on the draft action plan and both sets of benchmarks. The draft action plan will take into account the expert analysis produced during the exploratory phase of the visa dialogue and will be accompanied by an initial assessment of the impact of possible future visa liberalisation. The Council will also be kept informed through Commission reports on the fulfilment of the first set of benchmarks, in view of taking a decision to initiate an assessment of the second set of more specific benchmarks. Furthermore, Member State experts will participate in the monitoring missions conducted by the Commission services and in regular consultations in relevant Council Working Groups.

The Council underlines that there will be no automaticity in this process and progress in the fulfilment of benchmarks will be closely examined and decided upon by the Commission and the Council.

9. The Council notes that this approach could serve as a model for other Eastern Partnership countries bearing in mind the specificity and progress of each country.
10. The Council reiterates the importance of people-to-people contacts and welcomes the opening in June 2010 of the visa dialogue examining the conditions for visa-free travel of citizens of the Republic of Moldova to the EU as a long-term goal. On the basis of the exploratory phase of the dialogue, the Council underlines the achievements made so far, the existing challenges and the importance of further reform efforts by the Republic of Moldova, and invites the Commission to prepare a draft action plan, in line with the approach set out in paragraphs eight and nine of these Conclusions, setting out all the conditions to be met by the Republic of Moldova before the possible establishment of a visa-free travel regime, with a view to the visa dialogue entering a fully operational phase as soon as appropriate. Through the Council, EU Member States will be fully associated in the different steps of the process, including by being consulted on the draft action plan and both sets of benchmarks. The effective implementation of the readmission agreement will remain important in this context

11. In this way, in working towards a possible future visa free travel regime, the EU will seek to provide incentives for reforms in the JLS domain and promote conditions for secure and well-managed mobility using a country-specific approach, while at the same time ensuring regional coherence in the approach adopted towards visa liberalisation with the Eastern Partnership countries and also Russia.
12. In this context, in accordance with the Stockholm Programme and the Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit, the Council has invited the Commission to develop before the end of 2010 a plan on how to take cooperation with the Eastern Partnership countries forward in the area of Justice, Freedom and Security. This plan should also list the gradual steps towards visa liberalisation as a long-term goal for individual Eastern partner countries on a case-by-case basis, as well as describe the conditions for well-managed and secure mobility.
13. The Council reiterates its concern that unresolved conflicts in the Eastern neighbourhood continue to hamper not only the economic and political development of the partner countries, but also regional cooperation and the stability of the European continent. The EU remains committed to support the agreed negotiating formats and processes aimed at a peaceful and lasting settlement of conflicts in the region, and calls on the parties to fully commit themselves to these processes.
14. The Council notes with satisfaction the progress made in implementation of the multilateral track of the Eastern Partnership as a vehicle for promoting cooperation, open dialogue, and the exchange of experience and best practices, thus serving the objectives of the Eastern Partnership. The four thematic platforms have adopted Work Programmes for 2010-11 and have established a number of Panels. Several Flagship initiatives have also been set up. The Council looks forward to the further implementation of concrete regional activities and projects agreed, in particular in the framework of the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI). The Council supports the further involvement of civil society in the work of the multilateral track of the Eastern Partnership through the Civil Society Forum. The Council also underlines the opportunities offered by the multilateral track for building trust and promoting cooperation among the partner countries, and with the EU and its Member States. The Council recalls the importance of the partner countries continuing to make full use of the multilateral track to this end.
15. The Council recalls that third countries are eligible for participation on a case-by-case basis in concrete projects, activities and meetings of thematic platforms, where it contributes to the objectives of particular activities and the general objectives of the Eastern Partnership.
16. The Council looks forward to the Eastern Partnership Ministerial meeting to be held in Brussels in November 2010, which will provide an opportunity to take stock of the implementation of the Eastern Partnership. It will also allow the EU and the partner countries to discuss the further implementation of the Eastern Partnership with a view to supporting further reforms and strengthening and deepening the relations between the EU and the partner countries on the basis of common values.