

VILNIUS CONSULTATIONS

KEY POINTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

ON THE FUTURE OF EU EASTERN PARTNERSHIP

On September 11, the inaugural „Vilnius Consultations“ conference was organized by Vilnius Institute for Policy Analysis and Lithuanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The aim of the high-level expert meeting was to share insights regarding the future of EU Eastern Partnership initiative and to formulate recommendations for decision-makers in three policy areas: security, democracy, and energy. Experts from the UK, US, Germany, Poland, Ukraine and Lithuania took part in the consultations.

SECURITY. In the context of Russia’ increased assertiveness and forceful treatment of Eastern Partnership countries as its “legitimate sphere of influence“, European Union must significantly strengthen its Eastern Partnership policy:

- Security dimension should be included and emphasized in the EaP initiatives and EU policy considerations.
- It is vital to the EU and EaP countries to understand that in Kremlin strategy every public communication or institutional element can be weaponized: information, energy markets and companies, business or organizational practices and discourses, corruption and nepotistic relationships, investments, cultural production, etc.
- Economic reforms in all six EaP countries though extremely important will not be effective without a simultaneous counter-actions against Kremlin efforts to disrupt the strengthening of their democracies and consolidation of their political institutions.
- EU decision-makers should come up with a comprehensive strategy that would address contemporary hybrid threats, including information warfare and cybersecurity.

DEMOCRACY. Despite the significant progress in numerous areas, EaP countries still suffer from the rule of law shortcomings and poor public sector management. Economic difficulties, corruption of political elites and hostile external influences create an atmosphere of insecurity, distrust and polarization of societies.

It must be stressed that:

- Recently, some tendencies to make democracy and human rights in EU and EaP countries secondary issues compared to geopolitical manoeuvring or even bureaucratic technicalities could be observed. Relationship between democracy, economy and security is complex and intertwined. Autocracies cannot be pro-Western as they rely heavily on Eastern methods, resources and power structures.
- In order to keep alive pro-European sentiments and pro-reform aspirations, new EaP policy goals should be defined for the associated partner countries (not so much as a gift, but an agenda and a way to increase the EU leverage) thus motivating and mobilizing the governments and societies to continue the long, complex and costly course of European reforms. “Marshal plan” for Ukraine/associated states could help ensure sustainability of transformation.
- Democratization of EaP countries will depend not only on strong and effective institutions, but on civic resilience as well. The EU should invest more organizational and financial resources to support civil society actors in EaP countries, encouraging their involvement and participation in reform processes.
- The EU should put more effort in directly engaging with EaP citizens, showing the benefits of EaP policy on the ground.

- The EU ought to behave as a stakeholder in EaP countries, especially Ukraine and demonstrate active engagement and strong will to assist in fulfilling their EaP agenda.

ENERGY. Energy security is one of key priorities in the EaP countries and the broader CEE region. Russia has used its leverage in regional energy sector (especially gas and oil industries) to a great effect. Energy dependency on Russian imports is still considerable, though progress has been made in seeking alternative sources in the West. If the EU wants to pursue further integration in the field of energy security in EaP countries:

- Financial support for EaP countries and their energy infrastructure should continue.
- EU support for EaP energy policies should be based on condition of reform continuation.
- Nord Stream 2 project and similar projects should be stopped as they clearly undermine the EaP project and EU cohesion at large.
- As an alternative, the best practices and results of diversification of energy sources and implementation of EU 's Third Energy Package in CEE should be shared with the EaP countries.
- Energy cooperation between the EaP countries, EU and the US should be promoted. Lithuania is a good example which has demonstrated how to successfully escape the precarious status of isolated energy island.

With participation of Chris Donnelly, Alex Dalziel, Stephen Finnen (Institute for Statecraft, UK), Brian Whitmore (RFE/RL), Andreas Umland (Institute for Euro-Atlantic Cooperation, Ukraine), Lukasz Adamski (The Centre for Russian-Polish Dialogue and Understanding, Poland), Taras Kachka, Dmytro Shulga (International Renaissance Foundation, Ukraine), Wojciech Jakobik (Editor-in-chief at *BiznesAlert.pl*, Poland), Marius Laurinavičius (Vilnius Institute for Policy Analysis, Lithuania), Dalia Bankauskaitė (Center for European Policy Analysis, USA), Vytis Jurkonis (Freedom House), Darius Žeruolis (European Social, Legal and Economic Projects, Lithuania), and others.