

EU Neighbourhood and Enlargement Policies *revisited* **- Event Report -**

A Youth Conference organized by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Budapest, the Center for EU Enlargement Studies at the Central European University and the Willy Brandt School at the University of Erfurt

February 17-18, 2014, Budapest

The Center for EU Enlargement Studies of the Central European University, in cooperation with the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Budapest, the Willy Brandt School of the University of Erfurt, the University of Warsaw and the Metropolitan University of Prague, organized a two-day youth conference entitled “EU Neighborhood and Enlargement Policies *Revisited*.” The conference accompanies graduate level courses on EU foreign policy taught at the partner institutions and provides an opportunity for the very best students to present and discuss their research with young colleagues and to further develop their academic skills in a conference situation. A year after the first, the conference, which took place on February 17-18, 2014, in Budapest at the Central European University, was the second occasion the partner institutions organized such an event in this framework and on this topic.

The event took place in turbulent times: few days before the start of the conference, demonstrations started in several cities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, while on the second day of the meeting, deadly fights broke out between protesters and government forces in the center of Kyiv, Ukraine, on Maidan Nezalezhnosti (Independence Square) where demonstrations have been on-going since November 21, 2013.

The conference started with the opening speeches of the two hosts, **Prof. Péter Balázs, director of the Center for EU Enlargement Studies**, and **Mr. Jan Niklas Engels, director of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung’s Budapest office**, who welcomed the fourteen student participants representing ten countries: Austria, Belarus, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, France, Georgia, India, Nigeria and Poland.

To introduce the topics of the meeting, **Prof. Gert Weisskirchen, initiator of the student conference series, from the Willy Brandt School** provided a keynote speech entitled “*Eastern Europe, Turkey and the Western Balkans: A joint Policy for different neighbours?*” in which he recapped the main challenges the current EU enlargement and neighborhood policies are facing in the wider neighborhood of the Union. He outlined three scenarios which might describe how the European Union will develop in 2014: a pessimist, a realist and an optimist. In his view, the pessimist scenario entails populism-fueled nationalist temptations which will then lead to incomplete reforms. The Union will need to “calm down an inner-fight between a ‘northern political culture’ and a ‘southern political culture’ and to come back through a more consistent discourse to new convictions.” The optimist scenario

means that the current problems will be overcome and “the European political elite finds a commonly accepted way out of the present crises by reshaping the European institutions, creating new incentives in order to raise the attractiveness of the EU and to open the way to a participative European democracy.” The middle-ground, a so-called realist scenario, envisioned by Prof. Weisskirchen is not so bright in the short run. It would mean that the outcome of the European election and the hitherto decisions on the leading positions linger on in muddling through unconstructive solutions. The regional diversities and the structural diversities would reinforce each other.” These are the potential contexts in which the EU needs to conduct and potentially reform its enlargement and neighborhood policy in order to successfully further relations within Eastern and South-Eastern Europe as well as in Turkey and the South Caucasus.



Prof. Gert Weisskirchen and Prof. Péter Balázs
Photo: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Budapest

Following Prof. Weisskirchen’s keynote speech, the students got the floor and presented their research in four panels. The first two panels discussed the Eastern Partnership initiative of the European Union which is directed toward six countries of Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. The main aim of the initiative is to facilitate the democratization of the partner countries and to help them in their transition to a market economy as well as building an open civil society. The partners of course show varied openness to engage in this program with Belarus, Europe’s last dictatorship on the one end and Moldova, Georgia on the other as more eager reformers. A recent policy turn in Ukraine, the first frontrunner of the initiative, put the country on a new

track when Victor Yanukovich, president of Ukraine¹ suspended talks on signing the Association Agreement with the EU, a main target of the Eastern Partnership initiative.



Panel I – Challenges of the Eastern Partnership

Prof. Péter Balázs, Hanna Vasilevich, Madhumanti Debnath, Milena Chodola, Łukasz Tomaszek

Photo: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Budapest

In the first panel, chaired by Prof. Péter Balázs, the presenters gave an overview about the overall development of the Eastern Partnership in the past nearly five years since its launch, and about the position of Ukraine and Georgia in the initiative. In her presentation “*Eastern Partnership – a two-tier league?*,” **Hanna Vasilevich from the Metropolitan University Prague**, originally from Belarus, assessed each country’s position in the EaP framework in light of the recent Vilnius Summit on November 28-29, 2013, and allotted them in two groups: “In sport terms such a division resembles a two-tier league where the “champions” who were about to initiate or sign the association agreement are delegated to the higher tier, while those lacking it – to the second tier.”

The following three presentations were dedicated to countries in the “higher tier:” Ukraine and Georgia. **Madhumanti Debnath from the Willy Brandt School**, originally from India, analyzed the provisions of the ENP and the EaP and how far they have been successful in achieving their proposed objectives in the specific case of Ukraine and its relations to the EU. She also assessed the impact of Russia’s increasing influence on the country in her presentation entitled “*An appraisal of the European Neighbourhood Policy in the context of the ongoing political crisis in Ukraine.*”

Łukasz Tomaszek from the University of Warsaw discussed “*The Ukrainian Path to a United Europe after the Summit in Vilnius.*” He argued that the protests in Kyiv

¹ At the time of the conference, Victor Yanukovich was still president of Ukraine. Since then the Verkhovna Rada, the legislative body of Ukraine ousted him. It still remains uncertain whether this move was constitutional.

have shown that Europe must make greater efforts to get closer to Ukraine, while they also confirm the belief that there is a will for changes in Ukraine. Finally, **Milena Chodola from the University of Warsaw** evaluated the “*Consequences of the Vilnius Summit for Georgia*” and while she argued that there is still a long way for the country to go, she emphasized that “Georgia is getting closer to Europe. After Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius it is an unassailable fact.”



Panel II. – The EU, Russia and Belarus
Prof. Gert Weisskirchen, Mariya Lazarova, Maria Hluchava, Liliya Goranova
Photo: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Budapest

After a short break, the conference resumed with discussion on the role of Belarus and Russia in relation to the Eastern Partnership and the EU in general. The panel, chaired by Prof. Weisskirchen, was opened by the presentation of **Mariya Lazarova from the Central European University**, originally from Bulgaria, who evaluated EU-Russia relations. Her presented paper entitled “*The EU’s Approach towards Russia: Time for Reconsideration?*” provided a thorough overview about the changing domestic situation in Russia, the growing EU-Russia competition for the shared neighborhood and the high level of interdependence between the two powers in energy relations.

Maria Hluchava from the University of Warsaw, originally from Belarus, continued with highlighting some specificities of the EU-Belarus relations within the Eastern Partnership, and emphasized that one of the main achievements of the policy in Belarus is its impact on the development of the civil society, “which managed to improve, increased its ability to mobilize, became more active, self-organized and consolidated.”

Continuing the discussion on Belarus, **Liliya Goranova from the Central European University**, originally from Bulgaria, presented her paper entitled “*A dictator as a partner: The Challenges in the EU-Belarus relations,*” which gave extensive recommendations on

how the European Union should reshape its policy towards Belarus to have a real impact. As opposed to the current EU approach, she called for “the Union to engage in real dialogue with the Belarusian authorities” in order to engage them in a reform process rather than further isolating the country.

In the third panel, the speakers turned toward the South-Eastern neighborhood of the European Union, toward the Western Balkans. The countries of the region, which have an accession perspective to the EU, present largely different challenges and are at a different stage of democratization. With Croatia joining the EU recently, Brussels showed credible commitment to accepting the countries to the European structures once they meet the pre-set requirements. Additionally, Serbia has just started accession negotiations with the EU. Nevertheless, there are still unresolved issues just like the status of Kosovo or the division of Bosnia and Herzegovina.



Panel III. – The EU and the Western Balkans
Prof. Jaroslav Sonka, Tomislav Leko, Laetitia Sengseis
Photo: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Budapest

The panel, chaired by **Prof. Jaroslav Sonka from the Charles University**, paid a special attention to Bosnia and Herzegovina where widespread protests have been going on during the conference. **Emmanuelle Siou from the Central European University**, originally from France, discussed her paper entitled “*The EU and Bosnia and Herzegovina issues on political affairs*” in which she emphasized the complexity of the partner country’s internal administration as a factor impeding on relations with the EU. Her paper discussed two main issues: “the lack of implementation of the Sejdic and Finci case issued by the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) and the excessive use of the Entity veto and the Vital National



Interest veto that respectively entailed discrimination towards ethnic minorities and a severe blockade of the legislative decision-making.”

Tomislav Leko from the Central European University, originally from Croatia, continued with further elaborating on the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina. His paper, *“Reversing the paradigm of reforms in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the misstep of current EU conditionality,”* he argued that “constitutional reforms are still not feasible [in Bosnia and Herzegovina] and the EU should concentrate on institution-building and ensuring prosperity of the most of the Bosnian population. Financial assistance cuts cause a step back for Bosnia’s association process. Therefore, some other measures should be taken into account to ensure conditionality.” Here he named e.g. differentiated visa liberalization.

Moving on to another challenging country of the region, **Laetitia Sengseis from the Willy Brandt School**, originally from Austria, discussed the European Union’s foreign policy strategies by underlining weaknesses and strengths of both enlargement policies and European Union Neighborhood policies through a specific focus on Serbia and Kosovo. In her presentation entitled *“EU enlargement as an incentive to resolve the Serbia/Kosovo conflict?”*, she argued that “since the European Union was facilitating a dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo to solve the North-Kosovo issue, Serbia was compelled to find a suitable solution in order to fulfill the requirements.”

Concluding the panel, **David Erkomaishvili from the Metropolitan University of Prague**, originally from Georgia, offered a discussion of the the application of alliance theory in the case of EU’s cooperation with the neighbourhood: post-Soviet and Balkan regions. In his presentation entitled *“Multilateral alignments between the EU and its neighbourhood: the cases of the Balkans and the post-Soviet space,”* he argued that “natural factors, which can be found in spatial analysis, tend to influence policymaking in the specified region more than any short-term political strategies.”

The last panel discussion, chaired by **Prof. Kazimierz Wojcicki from the University of Warsaw**, took place already on February 18 (Tuesday) and covered various aspects of EU-Turkey relations. Turkey has been an EU membership candidate for the longest time in the EU’s history. It applied for membership in 1987, was granted candidate status in 1999 and finally started accession negotiations in 2005. While accession is still further down the road and the negotiation are moving at a very slow pace, the previous year brought a big step forward, the opening of negotiations on the chapter on regional policy and coordination of structural instruments. At the same time, the country in itself is undergoing deep societal changes signalled e.g. by the Gezi Park protests in 2013. The presenters discussed some of these changes and how realistic Turkey’s EU accession is in the present context.

The first presenter, **Archana Chaturvedi from the Central European University**, originally from India, discussed the *“Turkish accession prospects to the EU in the Current Scenario.”* Her presentation gave an overview of the Turkish accession process until now and also highlighted some of the main, current debates in the country: the issue of Cyprus, economic incompatibilities with the EU, the debate on identities, human rights and minority protection, institutional reforms and an overall disenchantment with the European Union.

Continuing the discussion on sensitive social issues, **Adenike Titilayo Obaoye from the Willy Brandt School**, originally from Nigeria, gave a thorough account on the issue of gender equality in Turkey. Her presentation entitled *“Turkey’s march towards the accession bridge: A case for gender equality”* highlighted that “there are huge gender gaps as reflected in school enrolment, employment, and number of women at decision making levels which

scores Turkey very low as compared to the rest of the European Union.” Furthermore, she suggested ways to bridge these gaps and called on the European Union to ensure compliance of this aspect of Europeanization.

The closing presentation of the conference was provided by **Karin Sluneckova from the Metropolitan University of Prague**, who assessed the “*Arguments for and against the EU membership of Turkey.*” Among the arguments in favour of the Turkish accession, she mentioned the economic weight of the country, that it is a significant trading partner of the EU and its geopolitical role as a bridge between Europe and Asia, as well as a credible actor in the Middle East. Among the arguments against, she highlighted the cultural difference between the EU and Turkey, the shortcomings in the field of securing human rights and finally the demographic weight of the country. As a factor impeding on the accession prospects, the issue of Northern Cyprus was also discussed.



Panel IV. – The EU and Turkey
Adenike Titilayo Obaoye, Archana Chaturvedi, Karin Sluneckova and Prof. Jaroslav Sonka
Photo: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Budapest

Following the panel discussions, the conference was concluded by a one-hour working group session, where the presenters grouped into their previous panels discussed the strengths and the weaknesses of the European Union’s policy directed towards the region they had been covering in their panels. They developed several policy recommendations targeted both at EU policy-makers and to representatives of the civil society, which were later on discussed in front of the whole group.



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At the end of the conference, all student participants received a certificate of participation from the CEU Center of EU Enlargement Studies, handed over by Prof. Péter Balázs.



**The participants and organizers of the conference
Photo: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Budapest**

*Event report prepared by Zsuzsanna Végh, CEU Center for EU Enlargement Studies.
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