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## **Eastern partnership: Win-win situation not only for businesses**

The Eastern Partnership project aiming to improve the political and economic relations of the countries of "strategic importance" - Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia with the EU was inaugurated on 7<sup>th</sup> May 2009. Ten months later, business organisations, Members of European Parliament and representatives of Member States discussed with Štefan FÜLE, European Commissioner responsible for Enlargement and European neighbourhood policy, challenges of Eastern Partnership (EaP) for EU as well as Eastern partners businesses. This ambitious project aims to develop good governance in these countries, promote human rights, enforce rule of law and strengthen their cooperation. Businesses and business organisations play a vital role in achieving the aims of EaP and should be more present in the whole project through participation in thematic platforms as well as implementation of concrete projects.



Last May, Eastern partnership was inaugurated in Prague. It has four thematic platforms that should enhance the dialogue between EU and Eastern partners in specific areas, one of them economic cooperation. "Companies on both sides should perceive the EaP as an opportunity for potential markets. It's a win-win situation," said **Štefan FÜLE**, Commissioner responsible for Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy. To achieve a win-win situation, we have to understand each other. We have to learn about the expectations and requirements of both sides. "Best practice sharing with EU partners and absorption capacity is an important element for Eastern partner countries in their preparatory process," pointed out **Milena VICENOVÁ**, Czech Permanent Representative to the EU.

Launch of the EaP and its evolution was followed with interest by the European Economic and Social Committee. Its members were involved in its "institutionalizing" and are participating in its thematic platforms. EESC members are also involved in the Civil Society Dialogue and interested in the possibility to set up an Eastern Partnership Business Forum. "Though, important components of the society dialogue are missing such as employers, employees and consumers' representatives. Whole civil society should be represented," stressed **Ivan VOLEŠ**, Member of EESC and Head of Eastern Neighbourhood Contact Group. "It is also necessary to keep the momentum of the EaP process during Spanish presidency," he added.

Businesses from Eastern partner countries expect improvement of regulatory environment and investment climate for SMEs. "We want the EaP to become a strong equal partnership beneficiary for both parts," said **Anna ZVOLIKEYCH**, Director of EU Ukrainian Business Council. Businesses ask for being informed, involved in business capacity building, listened to and understood. "We see the EaP Business Forum as an opportunity and efficient tool."

Eastern partnership cannot efficiently function without a political dialogue. "Parliamentary cooperation between European and EaP countries is vital. This is the reason why the European Parliament is setting up by the end of March the joint Parliamentary Assembly, where 60 members of European Parliament and 60 parliamentarians from EaP countries will gather to improve their dialogue and cooperation," said **Kristian VIGENIN MEP**, chairman of Euronest Parliamentary Assembly and AFET Committee.

The event was organized on 4<sup>th</sup> March, 2010, by CEBRE – Czech Business Representation to the EU in cooperation with the Czech Permanent Representation to the EU. For further details contact Michal Kadera, Director of CEBRE at [Michal.Kadera@cebre.cz](mailto:Michal.Kadera@cebre.cz) or visit: <http://www.cebre.cz/cz/docs/EaP>.