



"Our meeting today in Warsaw is very timely. While looking back at the last two years, we should not only be proud of our achievements, but also critical."

"A strong partnership with civil society, whose purpose is deep and sustainable democracy, should become an essential part of our Eastern neighbourhood policy."

Warsaw, 29 September 2011

President Buzek remarks at the "Eastern Partnership Conference"

"It is more than two years that the Eastern Partnership has been launched. Our meeting today in Warsaw thus is very timely. It creates an excellent opportunity for us to assess the successes and shortcomings of this ambitious programme. It also gives us the possibility to show that while the EU's attention is focused on the Southern dimension and the unfolding Arab spring, the engagement in the East should be maintained and even strengthened, both politically and financially.

While looking back at the last two years, we should not only be proud of our achievements, but also critical. We should be sincere and frank about the fact that unfortunately there has been a clear backtracking in terms of democracy, human rights and rule of law in some of our Eastern partner countries. And I am talking not only about Belarus.

The bad practices of prosecuting political opponents, intimidating independent media, creating obstacles for the civil society organisations and pressuring the courts have spread beyond Minsk to some other capitals as well. This is a very alarming trend and the best proof that democracy assistance and empowerment of civil society should be at the core of the Eastern Partnership policy.

The Eastern Partnership is a long term pan-European project but it can not go ahead without a parliamentary dimension, and without the full involvement of civil society. As parliamentarians we are those who are in every day contact with our citizens. We provide the political oversight over governments. But increasingly we also provide an element of what I call "parliamentary democracy".

The relationships which exist between parliaments, the exchange of best practises, the peer review and discussions we have, provide an important new dimension to our bilateral and multilateral relations.

This is why I am pleased to announce that two weeks ago the European Parliament held its first session of the EURONEST Parliamentary Assembly. This joins MEP's with Members from the five Parliaments of the Eastern Partnership. Its committees are up and running and its reports are already in the making.

We are tackling crucial issues for all of us - almost 600 million citizens - from economic integration, to energy security to democracy and human rights. This dialogue and day to day cooperation is at the heart of what we call our "community method".

I have one regret though; that we can not yet welcome our colleagues from the Belarusian *Palata*. Belarus should be a full member but it must first return to the democratic community of nations.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A strong partnership with civil society, whose purpose is deep and sustainable democracy, should become an essential part of our Eastern neighbourhood policy. We have the responsibility to strengthen the role of the Civil Society Forum of the Eastern Partnership, both through support for its national platforms, and by setting up a Neighbourhood Civil Society Facility and establishing the European Endowment for Democracy.

The Endowment should enable the EU to react to democracy challenges in a more swift and flexible manner, but this new tool must be employed in a manner complementary to existing European instruments such as the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR).

It should enable us to offer much needed assistance to the civil society, nongovernmental organisations, independent media and reformist movements in the countries in transition. In the long run, democracy, stability and prosperity are all essential elements in rooting democratic values, the respect for human rights and rule of law in our societies.

The European Parliament also attaches a great importance to the improvement of people to people contacts. This is why we will continue to push for greater visa liberalisation which should be an essential element of our neighbourhood policy.

We also believe that we must extend successful EU programmes such as Erasmus, and Media + so that we can give concrete tools to strengthen civil society. My own experience showed that supporting journalists, teachers, students, trade unions, NGOs is crucial in supporting democratic transitions.

My last remark is that in today's integrated world, our policies can not be sectoral. Our neighbourhood policy as a whole can not be just a "foreign policy" it needs to be an extension of our internal market.

This is why the European Parliament has urged the European Commission to open the single market to goods, services and capital from our immediate neighbours. The EU should be at the heart of an ever enlarging circle of cooperation, trade, but also shared laws and democratic norms. Our Eastern Partnership is about creating a zone of peace, prosperity and partnership for all 600 million citizens we politicians represent.

But to achieve this, we need not only cooperation between governments, but also between Parliaments, and of course, civil society."

For further information:

Robert A. Golański

Spokesman

Mobile: +32 475 751 663

Delia Vlase

Press Officer,

Mobile: +32 476 331 038