

## **"Towards a new EU Ostpolitik? – Russia, Eastern Europe and Central Asia"**

In the year 2000 German Federal Chancellor Gerhard Schröder and Russian President Putin initiated the so called "Petersburg Dialogue" between Germany and Russia. The idea was to intensify the dialogue and cooperation between the civil societies of both countries, including critical and oppositional NGOs, as well as human rights organisations. Since the beginning, I have been participating on the German side in the executive board for the Petersburg Dialogue. We always worked for a real participation of representatives of the Russian civil society and of human right activists in the annual meetings. But for a long time without any success: The Russian board always invited the old specialists on Germany. Only at the meeting in October last year Russia for the first time invited two representatives of the international civil rights society MEMORIAL to the conference. I then had very controversial feelings about that: On the one hand I was happy that we had finally reached this symbolic success, but on the other hand I was sad that we had had to wait for this modest success for six years. I think this is a very typical inner conflict presenting itself again and again in all Russian, Eastern European and Central Asian affairs.

The regional priority of the German EU Presidency is to expand the European area of security and stability. To this end we intend to devote particular attention to the EU's relations with its neighbours to the east. Like the United States, the EU has a keen interest in the long-term stabilization, democratization and modernization of its eastern neighbours. For if we do not export stability, we will end up importing instability.

Nonetheless, it would be going too far to describe this Presidency priority as a "new Ostpolitik". The goal is rather to strengthen tried and tested EU policy approaches and inject them with new momentum. If we succeed in this, we will

have achieved a great deal. Coherence with the EU's previous policy towards Eastern Europe is vital, precisely because trust is crucial to the success of our approach. In the past years the EU has achieved a considerable amount in Eastern Europe. Now it has to build on this.

Our Presidency focus on the east consists of three components: first, intensifying the European Neighbourhood Policy with the countries of Eastern Europe and the Southern Caucasus, second, deepening the EU's strategic partnership with Russia, and third, elaborating a strategy for Central Asia. These three priorities of Europe's policy towards the East complement each other and together form a coherent approach to intensifying the EU's overall relations with its eastern neighbours. Basically, the aim is to transform and modernize the post-Soviet region – an enormous challenge, the mastering of which is in both American and European interests.

About the first part of the program: The European Neighbourhood Policy already plays an important role in promoting stability, democracy and reform. However, the EU could demonstrate even greater political will to shape the region and could use the power it has to bring about change even more effectively than it has done to date. Strengthening the European Neighbourhood Policy is therefore a central priority of our Presidency.

Now we want to intensify the ENP beginning in our Presidency with our eastern neighbours. Our basic goal is to gradually make our southern and eastern neighbours politically and economically compatible with the EU. For this reason we want to help our neighbours embrace the "acquis communautaire" in as many areas as possible. We also want to extend political dialogue with these partners.

One beacon project in this area is the new so called enhanced agreement with Ukraine, designed to replace the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement. We have started talks about this just yesterday.

As well as improving access to the EU Internal Market for all our partners, we want to develop innovative financing mechanisms and, last but not least, boost the people-oriented, civil society dimension of the ENP. Internal security is another key priority of the expanded ENP. Crucial aspects include increased

assistance in developing capabilities, securing borders and fighting organized crime, as well as visa facilitation plans for Ukraine and Moldova in return for readmission agreements. In addition, we want to intensify cooperation with our ENP partners in the area of migration. Migration is becoming an ever-increasing challenge for the European Union and its neighbours. The EU's goal is therefore to control migration as effectively as possible to prevent it from becoming a destabilizing factor.

Finally, we intend to improve regional cooperation in our neighbourhood. This applies particularly to the Black Sea region. The Black Sea region is not only an energy and transport corridor, it is also a transit region for illegal migration and organized crime. Frozen conflicts in the region also hold considerable potential for political crisis.

At the same time, however, the Black Sea region offers great potential for economic cooperation and growth. Since the accession of Romania and Bulgaria at the beginning of this year, the EU has had direct borders with the Black Sea region. There are thus many arguments for strengthening the EU's Black Sea region policy with a view to boosting regional cooperation and extending the region's relations with the EU at all levels.

Concerning the second part of the program, we intend to use the German EU Presidency to consolidate and extend the strategic partnership with Russia, building on what we have already achieved and maintaining a realistic view of what is feasible.

For the EU, Russia is a vital, yet not always straightforward partner. The EU has a large stake in Russia's progress along the path of reform. A socially developed, economically sound and politically stable Russia is a good guarantee of a reliable and calculable partnership. Only through intensive cooperation with Russia will we be able to support and influence the difficult process of transformation. That should not prevent us from engaging in critical dialogue on problematic issues. The EU regularly addresses the topic of internal political development in talks with Russia, including the recent murders of journalist Anna Politkovskaya and former FSB member Alexander Litvinenko. The Russian Government itself should have a keen interest in solving these cases

quickly and thoroughly. Democracy and the rule of law are fundamental prerequisites for the stability and prosperity of the country. They form the basis of the community of shared values between the EU and Russia and are thus a crucial element of their strategic partnership.

Russia and the EU are both interested in a long-term, reliable energy partnership based on reciprocity and the principles of the Energy Charter. The gas and oil crisis between Russia and Belarus in January this year has shown once again how important it is that energy relations between the European Union Member States and their neighbours remain calculable and reliable and that supply obligations be honoured. Building on a basis of reliability and partnership, the EU will intensify its bilateral dialogue with Russia on energy. The upcoming re-negotiation of a partnership and cooperation agreement will provide the necessary framework for this. The idea is to make the principles and rules of the EEC a binding part of the PCA. The EU – Troika visit to Moscow yesterday gave constructive answers to that plan.

However, future-oriented cooperation with Russia should not be restricted to energy. During the German EU Presidency we intend to consider the entire spectrum of EU-Russian relations. We are particularly eager to drive forward the implementation of the four Common Spaces agreed between the EU and Russia. The four Common Spaces are a political arrangement concerning close cooperation in the fields of the economy, freedom, security and justice, external security as well as research, education and culture.

The common space of external security will be a particularly important aspect, specifically encompassing cooperation between Russia and the EU to stabilize their common neighbourhood. Despite reticence on the Russian side, we must keep this issue on the agenda. We must intensify dialogue particularly on how to move frozen conflicts forward. That will be a litmus test for the possibilities of closer cooperation.

The Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with Russia will expire in November this year. The Agreement is to be adapted to the changed situation and extended to establish a broad legal basis for the future of EU-Russian relations, on which we can develop the strategic partnership between the EU and

Russia as effectively and productively as possible. We are seeking to create a comprehensive, future-oriented agreement covering all areas of cooperation, like the existing PCA. Driving this forward is the second regional priority of the German EU Presidency.

With regard to the third part of the program: the German EU Presidency will also pay special attention to Central Asia.

Europe is increasingly recognizing the strategic importance of Central Asia. However, despite providing considerable financial commitment, the EU is not yet perceived as an influential player in the region.

Foreign policy in both Germany and Europe is now taking account of this development. Our goal is to have adopted political guidelines for closer cooperation between the EU and Central Asia in the form of an EU strategy for Central Asia by the end of our Presidency. The European Council gave us a mandate to do this in December 2006.

Developing an EU strategy for Central Asia must begin with the EU's interests in the region. Let me cite the three most important points:

- The goal of stability is at the top of the list. Stability in Central Asia is vital for peace and prosperity in the whole region around the Caspian Sea. Peace in Afghanistan cannot be achieved without stability in Central Asia.
- We know from experience that this goal can only be attained by gradually establishing democracy and the rule of law as well as guaranteeing the observance of minimum human rights standards in the societies affected. This must therefore be our second political priority.
- The countries of Central Asia are becoming increasingly important for German and EU energy security. Although the region has not been found to harbour more than 4% of global energy reserves, the demand pressure from economies experiencing dramatic growth, such as China and India, gives this 4% strategic significance. It also has an impact on the desired energy supply diversification.

But several things still stand in the way of this development.

Political reluctance to embrace reform, autocratic regimes, human rights abuse, corruption, the influence of organized crime and a lack of social perspective in many areas – all this hampers the emergence of integrally sound state structures, not everywhere, but sadly all too often. The distribution and utilization of water resources is often a matter of dispute. Closed and in some cases even mined borders prevent the movement of people and goods. Cross-border drug trafficking is increasingly becoming one of the main obstacles to modernizing the affected societies. A large proportion of the opiates grown in Afghanistan arrive in Western Europe via Central Asia. Environmental degradation and continuing salination in the Aral Sea basin – a real ecological tragedy – are directly affecting the population's quality of life.

The predominantly secular states of Central Asia are seriously concerned about the threat of militant Islamic fundamentalism. Some activities of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, al-Qaida networks and Hizb ut-Tahrir can be observed, not only in the Ferghana Valley where the borders of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan meet.

The countries of Central Asia need support to overcome these challenges. It is in European and German interests to promote the necessary reform processes as well as cross-border regional cooperation, which so far is still in its infancy.

To this end we will devote special attention to the in some cases vast differences between the countries in the region and take them into consideration. In its strategy the EU will therefore adopt both a country-specific, tailored bilateral approach and a broader, regional policy. The most difficult issue will be to achieve the right balance between the two approaches.

The common challenges for which a regional approach is the only sensible option include the fight against organized crime, drug and arms trafficking and Islamist terrorism. Environmental protection, water and border management are other areas in which the EU and the Central Asian countries must join forces.

Other areas require a tailored bilateral approach with the EU.

They include education and training as well as the creation of rule-of-law structures and the fostering of good governance, including promotion of human rights. The observance of minimum human rights standards is a priority for the EU. The EU should therefore enter into regular structured dialogue on human rights with each one of the five Central Asian countries. We are currently in the process of drafting the fundamentals for this form of institutionalized dialogue with Uzbekistan.

These are the initial components of an EU-Central Asia strategy. It will also be important to maintain dialogue with Central Asia and involve the political level. The meeting of the EU Troika Foreign Ministers with the five Central Asian Foreign Ministers scheduled for 28 March in Astana is to mark the beginning of regular dialogue.

Our attention for Central Asia does not aim at a new Great Game. We are not looking for power, control or more political influence in the region. We want the proceedings to be shaped by transparency and a spirit of partnership, and above all to include our friends and allies. We are therefore particularly keen to coordinate closely with the United States. Stable and prospering Central Asian states which respect human rights and rule-of-law principles are in our common transatlantic interests.

The opportunities presented by an intensified EU policy towards its eastern neighbours are obvious. The EU and the United States have a mutual interest in expanding the area of security, stability and freedom. The EU's policy towards the east can play an important role in achieving this goal through its offer of a reform partnership with its eastern neighbours.