

*A Conversation with Štefan Füle*

Transcript

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*J. Vaisse:* Hi, everybody, my name is Justin Vaisse, I am the Director of Research for the Center on the United States and Europe and a Senior Fellow at Brookings. I am very happy you could be with us this afternoon for a conversation with Štefan Füle, the EU Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighborhood Policy. This event is held in the context of our Brookings-Heinrich Böll Foundation Series on the Future of the EU. I would add that we also had quite a lengthy discussion about the Eastern Partnership a year ago with, among others, Carl Bildt, Radoslaw Sirkoski and Benita Ferrero-Waldner, so this is definitely something we follow closely. We have only an hour, so my introduction will be very, very brief. The Eastern Partnership, as all of you know, was launched in 2009, as an initiative by Poland and Sweden to create an enhanced cooperation framework between the EU and what we call here at Brookings “unincorporated Europe,” the six countries in Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus which are not candidates for EU membership and find themselves in somewhat uncomfortable limbo between the EU and Russia, namely Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia. Obviously, the Eastern Partnership has just started, but it has already encountered challenges and headwinds and not only with Ukraine in the recent summit. Among these challenges, we could mention the rise of soft authoritarianism in some of the countries concerned; the implicit or explicit pressure from Moscow in what President Medvedev calls “Russia’s sphere of privileged interests” leading these countries to sometimes be more “balancers” than “joiners,” if you will; and the weaknesses of political systems and economies of these countries with the sort of political or economic emulation efforts that spurred Central European reform in the 1990s not seeming to work as well further East. Obviously the situation is difficult for the EU, as this policy of “enlargement-light,” so to speak, doesn’t seem to offer sufficient leverage however, on the other hand, many member states are reluctant to expend additional resources, whether political or otherwise, on the Eastern Partnership.

With dilemmas and questions like these, we are very fortunate to welcome Commissioner Štefan Füle to talk about the Eastern Partnership and where things stand now. Mr. Füle started his term as Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighborhood Policy in February of this year. Prior to that, he served as Czech European Affairs Minister and First Deputy Defense Minister. In his accomplished diplomatic career he has served in numerous positions within the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs, including as Ambassador to Lithuania, to the UK and most recently to NATO.

Commissioner Füle, we'd love to hear from you, following your remarks we will very rapidly open up the discussion to the room. Once again, thanks for coming to Brookings to discuss these issues with us.

*S. Füle:* Thanks very much for this opportunity to discuss these issues, ladies and gentlemen. And let me, at the beginning, share a couple of thoughts I put on paper - at least at the beginning of our discussions to be politically correct - but I promise to be as open and as frank as possible when more concrete questions based on this channel or review will come later on. And this is what I see as the biggest value added of our interaction. By the way, I mean, knowing the intellectual potential of this institution what I am looking forward to is not only a set of interesting questions, but also comments and I assure you that I will take them into account.

So, again, it is a great pleasure to be at the Brookings Institution today, just nine days after the European Union – U.S. Summit in Lisbon, where leaders re-affirmed the close relationship between the European Union and the United States. In February 2010 I was taking on my office as Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighborhood Policy – by the way, this is the first time the European Union is having a Commissioner for neighborhood policy – I could only expect that both these [inaudible] will keep me very busy. The topic of our discussion today, the Eastern Partnership, is definitely one of the areas that are constantly high on my agenda. This initiative addressed to our six nearest neighbors in the East got off to a flying start over the past one and a half years. Many have been surprised at what has been achieved in such a short time. However, those who wholeheartedly support the process will be disappointed too, as they would wish an even quicker pace.

The Eastern Partnership is the Eastern dimension of the European Neighborhood Policy, a framework that encompasses in addition to the members I have just mentioned, our Mediterranean neighbors, and there we have in particular the Union for the Mediterranean, with tremendous challenges as the linkage with the Middle East peace process is bigger and bigger there. It is a policy framework – I am talking about Neighborhood Policy again – that we are currently reviewing to see how we can best make use of the possibilities opened by the Lisbon Treaty. I am referring to absolutely new things in the EU approach to foreign policy, for the first time we actually have a platform to combine and coordinate the instrument of a common and security policy with the instrument of a communitarian approach – and I will be ready to entertain this issue in the question and answer session. Our vision is to develop a neighborhood that shares common values or views of human rights, democracy and the rule of law embedded in an increasingly closer relationship of political association and economic integration. And during the last eighteen months we have pursued this process of deepened mutual involvement with our Eastern partners. We have initiated important negotiations with five of the six partners and these, so far, have progressed at an impressive pace. The one partner which is outside of that effort is Belarus. Belarus is only a part of a multilateral dimension of the Eastern Partnership. We don't have any bilateral contractual relations with Belarus for reasons well known. Negotiations on an Association Agreement, including a deep and comprehensive trade area – it's a complicated name for an agreement which I would otherwise call economic integration agreement. What is important about this Agreement, by the way, is not this "FTA" part of the abbreviation, the free trade agreement, but what is really important is "DC," "deep and comprehensive." Because this is an agreement which provides our Eastern partners access to most of European Union *acquis*. It provides them access to the internal market of the European Union and this is indeed a significant step forward. So, as I said, the negotiation on this deep and comprehensive free trade area, together with the Association Agreement are already very well advanced with Ukraine, Association Agreement negotiations with the Republic of Moldova are well on track and have started with the three South Caucasus states in July. Good progress has been made on mobility and visa freedom remains a long term objective for our Eastern partners. Ukraine is the first

partner to gain a clear perspective in the form of an Action Plan that was recently endorsed by a EU-Ukraine summit that happened only a week ago. And I hope that Moldova will follow suit very soon.

Ukraine is on the path to becoming a full member of European Energy Community Treaty and Moldova has already acceded to it. This means that these countries are taking over the body of EU legislation in the energy sector, including provisions for third party access to networks, environmental standards and emergency energy stocks. This will considerably improve energy security for all. A key innovation of the Eastern Partnership is the combination of bilateral and multilateral strategies into a single policy framework. By the way, as part of the multilateral dimension, we have four platforms there, a number of them with specific panels. Last, we have our flagship initiatives. Within the multilateral track we have increased the involvement of civil society as an integral and active component of the Eastern Partnership. And I recently attended the second meeting of the civil society forum in Berlin. Within a year, the forum has developed into one of the most lively aspects of the Eastern Partnership and contributes to policy with its clear recommendations. Last but not least, we hope to have attracted the interest of the neighbors, of our neighbors, and other key players in the region, including the United States, and we look forward to seeing how we can cooperate with them to support the objectives of the Partnership.

It is however, much too early to congratulate ourselves on the basis of these encouraging early developments. To enjoy real success we need to see increased trade and investment, intensified contacts between people, progress in human rights and democratic standards. By the way, you probably have heard already from my colleagues a year ago, that there is an additional 350 million Euros for these six countries, half of it aimed at comprehensive institutional building, a very important program to help with the administrative capacities of these countries to handle these difficult negotiations and implementation of these treaties. There is also an additional 250 million Euros re-directed from the European Neighborhood Policy to the Eastern Partnership specifically to support this program. But the point is that this additional money is actually only now arriving to the six countries, and particularly at the beginning of the next year we will finally see the effects of these extra resources. I know it takes a lot of time, but this is one

of the things which is apparently not easy to change in the European Union. Our partner countries are being pulled in different directions, tempted by the siren voices of other social models, models based on values that are different from, and not always compatible with, the values that form the basis of the Euro-Atlantic community. Let's debate on how to make sure we keep our partners on the side of democracy, human rights, civil liberties and cooperation. So with that introduction, I am very much looking forward to the discussion.

*J. Vaïsse:* Thanks very much. I am sure there will be questions on the "siren voices" of other models, among other things. I suggest that I not take advantage of being chair to impose my questions, and rather give the floor to you directly. And so, please identify yourself briefly before asking a question. We will take questions one after another, not in batches.

*F. Hill:* Fiona Hill, the Director of the Center on the US and Europe here at Brookings. I'll start off with a bit of a tough question and hopefully that will compel other people to jump in. As you may recall, at the end of last year, and actually at the beginning of this year as well, there was quite a flurry of media reports on the sort of anniversary of the Eastern partnership program. We had an event here at Brookings almost exactly a year ago to mark the launch and you might recall there was a piece in Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty doing a survey a year on, finding out if anybody had even noticed there was an Eastern Partnership. There was a rather damning claim by the media service that, when they randomly called the EU, those people also didn't seem to know of the European Eastern Partnership Program. Even at the event we had here at Brookings there was quite a bit of skepticism for some people in the audience who was going to take hold. It was quite evident from the some of our participants in our panel from the target countries that there was a little bit of – actually quite a lot of skepticism – I won't name the countries, but you probably have a very good idea of who they were – let's just say that not all the Caucasus states are as enthused as some others being part of this program. And there's been quite a lot of concern that in praising the multilateral format that there won't be sufficient targeted response to the individual countries' desires in their relationship with the EU. You are suggesting that a lot of these bilateral arrangements are really addressing that, but there still seems to be quite a bit of

dissatisfaction on the part of some of the regional states that they have been shunted into basically a siding by the European Union in a not so exciting program and being denied a real perspective - for Ukraine, a week ago - for a real perspective for membership down the line. The fact that you combine both the portfolio of enlargement and the neighborhood suggest that perhaps there may be some hope here. But I think a lot of people are asking "where's the meat of this, what does this really mean for these countries' relations with the EU?" Is it possible that some of the countries may join the Western Balkans, for example, in a real perspective for the EU somewhere down the line? And can you really make the Eastern Partnership program exciting? That's quite a lot of ground, so I hope people jump in, don't be shy. How much time do you have?  
[laughter]

*S. Füle:* Wow, wow, wow! But you are absolutely right that this is a crucial issue. [pause] I think a year ago my predecessor said that this is not about a European prospective. I will not repeat that, ok? And I was [inaudible] from what I said and obviously from how you approached your question. But let me also put it in this perspective. I participated in the Bucharest NATO summit. It was at that summit that NATO promised membership to Ukraine and Georgia, which was quite a political achievement. At the same time, in a quite surprising move, it has not acted in a Membership Action Plan, which was the most needed instrument to prepare these countries for membership. We have created in Bucharest a very strange political animal and, frankly speaking, an animal which has not really created many positive incentives, only problems and difficulties, if I may say so, despite the fact that we're on the record. So, this time the approach is a clear message to these countries: you help to build more of the European Union in your countries, with our assistance - indeed using the instruments and lessons learned from enlargement - and it will be you, quite logically, who will put this issue on the table. The European perspective there is where the consensus of the member states meets with what's in the Lisbon Treaty described as EU being open for these countries not only sharing, but actually also ready to promote the values the European Union is based on. Now, you are absolutely right that we would fail if the Eastern Partnership is just a scheme for each and every partner without any, you know, any tailor-made approach. And there is going to be a tailor-made approach. I mean, I use

and I approach the Eastern Partnership as a set of instruments which enables me to use the best one for a specific country.

It is interesting, by the way, that in one country I am using all the sets of instruments, like Ukraine. I have the Ukrainians complaining about the Neighborhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership because they consider themselves to be special and a strategic partner of the European Union and they are still not getting, you know, the message that not supporting the Eastern Partnership they will actually not be that far. But the Ukrainians also ignore another important thing, which I think is for us very important when we're talking about the Eastern Partnership, and this is a good example. You yourself said that if one or group of the countries will join the Western Balkans, I mean, what impact will that have on the whole region? So I say the same to my Ukrainian friends: "listen, you have to be a locomotive of the Eastern Partnership and not an individualistic country!" You know, trying to make a deal with the European Union without really paying attention to your region and your neighbors. Now, it is all easy to say, but how it works in reality is that: a) we have much more individualized Partnership and Cooperation Councils with these countries; and b), as we have already with Ukraine and Moldova, we also developed it with Azerbaijan. I am talking about metrics. Metrics are very interesting phenomena – by the way, with the permission of the lady, may I? [taking his jacket off]. The first question and the first answer, and I am already feeling the heat [laughter].

The metrics is something we developed as a reaction to the presidential elections in Ukraine. Originally it was a one page document and it showed, I think, five points at that time, five points we need Ukraine to abide by, and five points, in parallel, on how the European Union could react: how it could help, and how it could, in return, offer to Ukraine. For example, already at that time, right after the elections and the paper we brought with us with Catherine Ashton to Kyiv, there was this issue of – that time we were talking about a road map for the visa free regime. It has turned into an Action Plan, which is more or less the same, although it has two phases and while, as member states made an important point, it does not provide automaticity, well we have a process, ok? That metrics has become an instrument for politically steering the bilateral relationship within the Eastern Partnership. That's an important thing. The metrics has become one of

the instruments that politically steers the relationship in such a way that they indeed, you know, reflect the specific needs of the country.

And you're absolutely right too, I mean, take Azerbaijan, for example. My first reaction when I visited the country was: "Oh, my God, this country does not need an Association Agreement and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement, this country needs: a. to use energy as a locomotive to move us on modernization of all other sectors across the field; and b. it needs to use the Partnership and Cooperation framework to which still has a number of the potential to use for approximation with some key elements of the European Union *acquis*." The point is that this is a very good question of how ready they are for a deep and comprehensive agreement, number one. Number two, as some of you might know, the WTO is a pre-requisite for the DCFTA. The Azeri are telling us that "we are not going to become a WTO member anytime soon, so what is the point in starting this kind of negotiation?" And so on. So you are absolutely right that we need to be much more attentive to the specific needs of the countries. But again, you have to look at the Eastern Partnership not only as a structure which enables you in a programmatic sense much more than the Neighborhood Policy. You need to also look at it as the clear determination of the European Union to have a specific policy towards Eastern Europe, ok? And that's not a small thing, that's an important element in this environment, where I made a point that competition is bigger and bigger.

The last point here: we have started, Cathy and I made this point in the speech, to focus on the Neighborhood Policy review. This Neighborhood Policy was enacted six years ago, so we started to, based on the five years of experience. Now, the point here is not only to look at what kind of impact the Lisbon Treaty has had on the Neighborhood Policy, I already hinted at the first time the possibility of interaction between the CFSP and the community instrument, but it is also about making sure that we have all the instruments and resources, making sure that there is a sense of ownership as far as our neighbors – because I don't get that feeling when travelling around. A number of other issues, but including one which has so far been taboo, in the European Union demand, which is: we are so good about the instruments, we are so good about the programs, what about the endgame? What about the goal? What about defining what we are trying to achieve? Or should we always sort of hide behind this phrase that we are establishing the



“zone of stability and prosperity and peace?” Shouldn’t we be clearer to help the countries define what it means when they say – and actually they are all saying this – that they want to have as close a relationship as possible with the European Union? What does it mean, as close as possible? Are we able to, taking into account the various differences and characterizations of “as close as possible,” define one policy framework, or rather institutional framework? Some are referring to the extension of the European Economic Area, and the participation of these countries not in decision-making, but in decision-shaping. But I would also add that we need something that will be understood by those countries who are eligible to apply for membership. Ok? And, by the way, if anyone asks me whether the Eastern Partnership is indeed a good means to prepare for an eventual European aspiration, my answer would be: “absolutely yes!”

*S. Larrabee:* You mentioned your cooperation with the United States. What do you envisage exactly? Could you spell out how you see this development, particularly in relation to Ukraine and Moldova?

*S. Füle:* It’s very nice to see you again, Mr. Larrabee. I don’t know if you remember me, a junior diplomat in the Czech Republic.

*S. Larrabee:* I was a junior myself.

*S. Füle:* I don’t remember that. The Lisbon Treaty, the institutional changes in the European Union, and the establishment of the External Action Service offers – and also a more institutional basis for our policy for the neighborhood because for the first time there is a paragraph in the Lisbon Treaty which specifically addresses the needs of our neighborhood - all of this creates institutional possibility for close interaction with the United States. Number one. Number two: if I look around the European Union, I see the world is changing, and if the European Union wants to play a global role and interact with the rest of the globe in this more and more interdependent world, and in a world where the size of the population matters, then I don’t see any other strategic partnership other than the one with the United States. And actually if you ask Daniel Kostoval, the Czech *chargé d’affaires*, and he was one of those behind the Eastern Partnership concept with our Polish and Swedish friends, he will confirm that the whole concept was put forward not as a European Union policy of Eastern Partnership, but as a Euro-Atlantic policy towards that part of Europe. So, if I take all of that together, then we came to the

conclusion that the time has come for us to come to Washington, after many signals. We shared with our U.S. friends and to ask the colleagues here: “listen, we’re ready. Are you?” and I was very happy to so far have a very positive reaction. We had a very good discussion with Jim Steinberg this morning, agreed on the consultations very early next year, specifically on the Eastern Partnership, but also on a number of additional issues, aimed at concrete proposals how we should interact, how to structure our dialogue, and how we see the place jointly, for the United States to be more actively involved in the Eastern Partnership, and not only as a political observer – and, by the way, I know that the United States is involved in a number of countries like Belarus. We have a coordination meeting twice a year with United States diplomats, coordinating our programs towards Belarus. But if you ask me whether more could be done, my answer would be: not only it could be done, it should be done. I’ll see more and more money coming from the European Union, addressing the needs of the Eastern Partnership. What I would like to see from United States is to address not only conceptual issues related to that part of Europe, but also helping us in a specifically defined area where the Americans would feel they could have ownership, to be a part of the process. So that’s a shorter version of the answer, but I could also provide you with a longer one.

*S. Larrabee:* Could I just follow quickly with a related question? You mentioned the coordination over Belarus. If there is one area where there is a EU-U.S. policy in divergence is the condition of engagement: the EU has adopted a policy of engagement, while the United States favors more hard conditionality rather than soft conditionality. How do you see that shaping, because they are moving in two different directions?

*S. Füle:* We need to discuss it, and I hope very much that in the end the discussions will not moving in the two directions. The Europeans are not just trying to be engaged with Belarus. We call it a critical engagement, what I mean is that you we are trying to avoid both extremes because we have already tried to avoid both of sides of the spectrum and we failed to deliver. We have tried already to put the first conditionality there, we tried to boycott them, we tried not to talk to them, we told them simply “unless you deliver on the five or six demands there is going to be no dialogue at all.” We have also tried, after they have signaled two years ago the shift in their policy, an engagement that also did not work. What we are trying to do at this point in time is to have a policy

basis which will be translated into a document we call the Joint Interim Plan. The Joint Interim Plan is a political document, it should be the basis for interaction with Belarus on a number of fronts at the same time. And that's exactly the point. Because how we see the critical engagement with Belarus is as an offer from our side to walk that road together with them. As much as they progress on human rights, democracy and rule of law, we will be able to also help them with the progress on development in other issues across the horizontal level. The Joint Interim Plan is now being debated by member states and we have agreed with Jim and other members in the State Department that we will find a way at this stage to also consult with the United States Administration on this plan. There is, of course, a political conditionality, and it is the conduct of the presidential election in Belarus. I will be ready to present this document to Belarus only after the elections. By the way, this document has been a subject of my discussions with civil society organizations and also opposition leaders in Belarus already in July and also at the beginning of November when I visited Minsk. So I hope very much that we'll be able to persuade the U.S. partners that critical engagement, which means an engagement not at the expense of our values, is the right tool here to deal with Belarus.

*J. Vaïsse:* Thanks. Bruce?

*B. Jackson:* I just wanted to come back...

*S. Füle:* Be nice, be nice! [laughter]

*B. Jackson:* I just wanted to follow Fiona's questioning a little further. You described in the beginning the Eastern Partnership as being a great success for the last year and a half. Clearly, I think it is, from the perspective of Western Europe. Some people here think it's a success. But as people observed earlier, Ukraine and others don't think it's a success. [These policies] are full of contradictions: NATO gives Ukraine and Georgia a destination but won't give them the instruments, you turn around, give them the instruments, but won't give them the destination. [laughter] That is the classic problem in relationships: you guys want to just be good friends, and the people in Kyiv have something more intimate in mind.[laughter] So it's possible you may think it's a success, but they may not. [inaudible] So in a partnership both sides have to feel it's successful, and I am thinking of how the other side will try and make it successful. And I think, listening to your characterization of association, you're asking for them to

overthrow the policy of association, to break through it, to dispute it is no longer appropriate because they're so successful in becoming European. So, for the Eastern Partnership to be a success, the objects of that policy have to overthrow the policy of Europe and become candidates and break through. Is that what sort of making it a success means for Ukraine and Moldova?

*S. Füle:* Yes, it is up to them to define their policies, it's up to us to help them to implement those which are compatible with our values, and that was the very politically correct answer, but I will go beyond that. It has been a subject of many meetings between us and Ukrainian their demand to reflect - in the Association Agreements - their European aspirations. I already made the point that the European aspiration needs to be at a point where the agreement on the eligibility as reflected in the Treaty meets the readiness of twenty-seven member states to deliver on it. Are we there yet? No, we are not, quite clearly. And this is probably not a good opportunity to have a discussion on to what extent the European Union is still more inward looking rather than outward looking. The truth is that the Lisbon Treaty, while it has brought a number of important issues, has removed the institutional bottleneck that was there as an obstacle to enlargement, while at the same time it has brought an attempt to find a different balance among the EU institutions, which was an interesting phenomena which only a few people could predict. And if you add to that the fact that the European Union has been busy with its own domestic, financial and economic kitchen, dealing with the Stability Pact improvement, the Euro, economic governance, the European stabilization mechanisms, there's not much time and opportunity for the European Union to see the bigger picture of Europe being a part of the bigger world. Let's put it this way, because I would probably be flying when I see the red lights here in front of me. That's not a good thing. What we are saying to the Ukrainians, and hopefully they are, you know, step by step understanding this, that it is up to them to build the European Union inside of their countries, step-by-step gradually implementing these economic integration agreements which would almost automatically, by definition of this process, bring them closer and closer to the European Union and closer and closer to the internal market. And once they are close to the internal market, if not a part of the internal market, again, the whole issue about the twenty-seven

member states redefining their level of consensus on their policy aspirations, would be an easier thing to achieve.

*J. Vaïsse:* Thanks. Next question. Sir?

*B. Kutelia:* Batu Kutelia, Ambassador of Georgia. Thank you very much.  
[inaudible] I wanted to comment on that last question about the political animal that was created in Bucharest [inaudible] I think this is the right political animal because it provides the elements and NATO was created with this type of political animal doing all the phase of the enlargement.[inaudible] So my question with regards to the Eastern Partnership [inaudible]: what is the perception of, or the common understanding of the benefits that these countries can bring to the European Union? [inaudible]

*S. Füle:* Could you re-phrase that question, that last sentence, please?

*B. Kutelia:* What is the understanding on the European Union side, why this cooperation is important for the European Union? You mentioned that it is important for the countries, with the deep trade agreement, the association agreements, visa free, for the countries that are aspiring, but why is it important for the European Union? What is the expectation for these countries?

*S. Füle:* I already tried in a very general way to describe the elements which would then serve as an answer to your question. The European Union is keen on the stability in its neighborhood. Actually the most effective way to achieve it is enlargement – I mean, you would agree with me that enlargement is the most effective way of projecting your values beyond your border. But there are countries which will never be a member state, or there are those who may be eligible, but there is no consensus at this point of the time. That does not mean that the European Union should not have a specific policy to bring these countries closer. And it is obvious that there are three main pillars of the policy: political association, economic integration and the mobility issue, people-to-people contact. In the southern dimension of our neighborhood, sometime ago we have created this Union for the Mediterranean, which is a specific framework which, by the way has no comparison, is not compatible with the Eastern Partnership. But there was this attempt, in addition to the individual bilateral relationship, to have this multilateral framework. Then, not as a reflection of that, but rather as a reflection of the need to have a specifically defined policy within the Neighborhood Policy framework which would

address the needs of the Eastern partners which actually have theoretical eligibility to become a European Union member, was obvious. That's why the policy has been elaborated. I have already mentioned the countries behind the policy, Poland, Sweden and, to a certain extent, also the Czech Republic, we were able to persuade the rest of the European Union that we need this specific framework for Eastern Europe. It is indeed a set of instruments which is not at the disposal to the southern dimension, it is a set of instruments which could indeed bring the Eastern Europe not only closer not European Union, but actually they can make them part of the internal market. At the time when there was an absence of policy, or definition of the goal going beyond that, it seems to me a reasonable policy and a very good idea to do it. The rest is up to us together, the rest is up to you to deliver because if we have the relationship where most of the time we will be spending on trying to define these goals, while not using the instruments to build that small European Union in your country we fail, we will fail.

*J. Vaïsse:* Yeah. Your neighbor. Sir?

*A. Vierita:* Thank you so much. My name is Adrian Vierita, I'm from Romania and I would like to thank the Commissioner for meeting with us here and allow me to assure you that we fully support your activity in the Eastern Partnership. Would you mind if I...you mentioned that the result in Bucharest was a strange political animal. Would you mind if I called it "as good as it gets political animal" because this was, as you know, a result of the compromise? But this is not my question. My question is related to the Black Sea, because there are some members in the Partnership which are European countries and – what do you call that? - there was a communication of the Commission in 2007, the Synergy, the Black Sea Synergy, and I would like to ask you how do you feel about it and if you see a link between this communication. In other words, if this communication and the Strategy would still have a future and if there is place or a slot in the partnership. And my last point I had, thank you again for being here, I regret we only have a one our time to discuss. Thank you very much!

*S. Füle:* Yes, I don't want to compare the Black Sea Synergy with the Danube Region Cooperation – how do we call it exactly? – Danube Region Strategy. But I think the idea there is similar. The idea is not to institutionalize the cooperation too much but help member states or group of member states cooperate with non member states using

the best experiences and policies of the European Union. That's exactly what's going on in the framework of Black Sea Synergy: Romanians are in charge of one important panel, the Bulgarians are also in charge, I think the Greeks are also involved. I think this could be a very useful addition to the Partnership we are talking about. It will never be a substitute, but this is a new phenomena which I think could be used to bring the benefit most of European Union and those countries who are not the members because the Danube Strategy is the first strategy involving non-EU members. Actually, this is also an important phenomena in our foreign policy, particularly after the Lisbon Treaty. Trying to involve, in our own strategic policies, more and more not only candidate countries and not only aspirant countries, but our partners around. And I am specifically talking about Europe 20/20, which is the first strategic document of the European Union with a clear external dimension and that's something we are now working hard on how to use, it first of all in the enlargement area, but the time will come when we will also turn towards the neighborhood area and, in particular, the Eastern Partnership.

*J. Vaïsse:* Thanks. So we are coming to the end of the hour, but we still have a few minutes, and so I will like to gather one or a few questions and will give you the chance to answer. So, Sir?

*O. Kravchenko:* Thank you very much. I'm Oleg Kravchenko, I'm the *chargé* at the Embassy of Belarus. Commissioner Füle, thank you very much for this very interesting, open and frank presentation and the answer to the questions. I would also like to thank the Brookings Institution for inviting me. I was here a year ago and I am happy to be here today. I would like to say that Belarus is indeed interested in participating in the Eastern Partnership. We do consider this to be a very important initiative to re-design the whole pattern of interaction with post-Soviet countries in Europe. At the same time, we believe that in order to be successful, this initiative should not be only mainly about the soft activities, but also about the hard activities, as you said, about trade and investment relations. That is why Belarus relatively recently suggested to established an Eastern Development Forum, a full-scale business pillar of the Eastern Partnership. We also suggest, together with Ukraine and Lithuania, we have prepared a list of strategic infrastructural projects. So what I wanted to say was that, without refusing to participate and cooperate in the field of human rights and democracy, we also suggest to actively

promote the business infrastructural and investment cooperation within the Eastern Partnership and we are not imposing the engagement, we support the engagement, but we are not opposing the principle of conditionality, we do believe that the principle of conditionality should be applied equally and [inaudible] to all countries with which the European Union participates in different formats of participation. Thank you very much!

*J. Vaïsse:* Thanks. Emiliano?

*E. Alessandri:* Emiliano Alessandri from the German Marshall Fund. My question for you, Commissioner, is what the Russian reaction is to this initiative. Is there been any evolution in the Russian position and if you think there is some link in relation to what the EU does with Russia and what the EU does in the Eastern Partnership or if you think that this link should actually be avoided.

*J. Vaïsse:* Thanks. No more questions? OK. So Commissioner you have two large questions on your plate.

*S. Füle:* Yes. The first was rather a comment than question, but still, let me add the following. We're discussing these issues on the second margin again and again, and exchanging letters but only on some...by the way, most recently we had a good dialogue with Belarus on energy security and your government programs there, with us being interested in these issues and ready to engage you on a number of elements. But one thing which is not going to work is lacking the bilateral dimension of the relationship you are trying to maximize the benefits of the multilateral one. Unfortunately, it is not intended to serve as a framework for infrastructure projects and all of that. I mean, the Eastern Partnership is not about infrastructure. The Eastern Partnership, as we discussed at the beginning, is a set of instruments on how to get the countries closer to the European Union. And I am not saying that we could do it without strategic thinking about transport issues. By the way, as my colleague in the European Commission, we have a couple of months ago to come out with a strategy which would take a strategic communication – I think there is a specific name for that in the European Union - to go beyond the EU boundaries and reach to our Eastern partners. But the bulk of the cooperation is in the bilateral dimension. Most of finances actually are in the bilateral dimension. We're talking about the cost of bilateral cooperation with Belarus, last year, 10 million, this year, 15 million Euros, while in other countries it is hundreds of millions of Euros. So



this is where there is the problem. Once we start to walk this road together, across the board, including human rights, rule of law and democracy, you will become a full fledged partner for us also as far as a bilateral dimension is concerned, with all the benefits coming from that. Because so far it is only a shadow of what you actually are enjoying as far as the Eastern Partnership is concerned. And it's a pity. But I have not talked about the readmission agreement and the visa facilitation, something we are now working on very hard for the Belarussian citizens. This story could be longer.

Russian reactions. I think a year ago my colleagues Ferrero-Waldner, Radek Sikorski and also Carl Built - were here I believe - told you that the Russians have chosen to stay outside the Neighborhood Policy and outside the Eastern Partnership. There is nevertheless a development in the following sense: the Prague Declaration clearly stipulates that third countries could participate in the programs of the Eastern Partnership. There is a consensus among the Eastern partners and the EU and for the first time the Russians participated in the summer at a e-twinning project. The meeting took place in Moldova, I think. And if there are those pragmatic projects where Russian participation could be a value added and if there is a consensus among the Eastern partners, and as you can imagine we are very much facilitating this consensus, then we can see more Russian involvement in the Eastern Partnership programs. There is also another dimension to that. A small number of member states have started talking about a "Group of the Friends," an informal framework of the third countries to interact with the Eastern partners and the European Union. We have developed this concept a little bit as we had the first meeting on 29 September. What now seems to be the concept is that this is now an informal framework where the Commission is in the lead, where the third countries like the United States, Russia, Canada, Japan, Switzerland, Norway and Turkey - I am just listing the countries that participated in the meeting on the 29 of September - could participate, together with international financial institutions, in particular the European Investment Bank, the EBRD, and others. There are three goals of this informal group. The first one is to get new contributors to the Eastern Partnership project. The second one is coordination among the existing contributors, and third is to exchange the information in general about the Eastern Partnership policies. The group is now called "Information and Coordination Group." I think after the first meeting we are going to see more meetings, possibly twice

a year. Russia is still participating, although as an observer, which is an interesting phenomena, because this is going to be an informal group, so they are going to be an observer of an informal group [laughter] but whatever we can do to make them more comfortable without compromises in terms of values on our side, we'll do that, obviously.

*J. Vaïsse:* Thanks very much. Please join me in thanking Commissioner Füle for this very interesting discussion and we hope he will be back in a year from now!

[applause]