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## White paper "Central-Eastern Europe: 20 years of transition"

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### Background

Central-Eastern Europe (CEE) and Transcaucasia is the region which includes: Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Romania, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia Herzegovina, Albania, Kosovo under UNSC resolution 1244, FYROM, Belarus, and Ukraine. All these states are united by common communist past. 20 years ago with the fall of the Soviet Union (SU) these countries received a chance for democratic development and European integration. Disappearance of the SU, , has opened the way for many countries to their own future. However, the transition period became a challenge with which not every country managed to cope yet. Looking back, 20 years of transition period from Communism to Democracy were marked by progress and regress, which on the one hand encourages, but on the other sets new challenges to unite Europe. In particular, lack of management competence within the new elite, the risks of economic collapse, the danger of communists return, increasing influence of criminal groups in politics, the threat of ethnic conflicts etc are challenges for the next years. In this situation, politicians and society required consolidation idea and foreign support of democratic societies.

### Two waves of success

Beyond doubt, the way of reforms and modernization from the overthrow of Communism to the EU membership can be considered as the greatest success. Some CEE countries have passed this way in two waves: the first one - **Czech Republic, Hungary, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovenia Poland and Slovakia**, the second one - **Bulgaria and Romania**. The fall of communist regimes in these countries in 1989, together with the desire to build democracy and join the EU created significant challenges. For most people such idea was the "return to Europe" as again becoming part of European cultural and political space declared by Vaclav Havel, former President of Czech republic (at that time president of Czechoslovakia). Later on, exactly the desire to join the EU defined the reforms and development of new democracies in many respects.

One of the key actors on the way of successful transformation from communism to democracy was, of course, the EU. Since the first democratic revolutions the European institutions and politicians have extended the hand of partnership and cooperation. Provision of financial assistance under the PHARE program and foundation of the EBRD (European Bank for Reconstruction and Development), became the first instruments called upon to stabilize the economic situation.

However, the biggest impetus for internal transformations was European agreements which consolidated the membership prospect for post-socialist countries. This step of the EU has actually determined the direction of reforms, regardless of changes of Governments in Czech Republic, Hungary, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovenia, Poland and Slovakia. At the same time, agreements stimulated the development of market economy by gradually introducing the four basic economic freedoms: free movement of capital, services, goods and people.

Another key factor in sustainable movement towards the EU membership was the joint coordination of countries efforts. Countries of the first successful wave created the Visegrad group within the framework of which coordinated their efforts, which promoted mutual support, exchange of experience and stabilization of reforms with the region.

In 2004 the Czech Republic, Hungary, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovenia, Poland and Slovakia joined the EU, as a consequence of joint responsibility of European institutions and the desire of the new democracies to return to European values.

The success of the second wave was delayed due to the democratic rollback, which set in **Bulgaria** and **Romania** after the return of populist governments to power. However, again, thanks to a clear perspective of membership and growth of the EU support these countries managed to achieve democracy and thus become members of the EU.

### **Road of chances**

Among CEE and transcaucasian countries which have been falling, but managed to take the way of changes **Georgia** should be marked out. The country, which survived the war, authoritarianism, economic collapse, after the Rose Revolution demonstrates difficult but successful movement towards democracy and prosperity. For several years the Georgian authorities managed to overcome one of the biggest problems of post-Soviet countries - corruption in governmental bodies. It was possible to achieve this, again thanks to external support of the U.S. and the EU, which provided the leadership of the state with necessary knowledge and tools for implementation of reforms.

However, the political situation in Georgia still threatens permanent crises and instability. Georgian people, as previously other successful post-socialist countries need certainty about their future and prospects. Georgians are eager to be the part of the developed democratic world, and therefore membership in NATO and the EU is important for them. The prospect of membership should be incorporated also in Association Agreements, the active negotiations which are carried on with the EU. This is one way to ensure the public consolidation and gradual implementation of initiated reforms.

### **Road of failures**

The transition period has also been marked by failures in such countries as Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine. Threats which most countries faced after the fall of socialist regimes have become the reality for these countries. The growth of crime, corruption, oligarchy and the establishment of authoritarian regimes, all this became the result of inexperience and failure of new elites to ensure stable reforms and the way to democracy.

The biggest defeat and challenge for Europe is **Belarus**, the last dictatorship in Europe. The defeat of democratic forces in 1994 free elections and Alexander Lukashenko rise to power stopped democratic development. During the first term he managed to concentrate most of the power under his control, to eliminate freedom of speech, virtually eliminate the opposition, and eliminate free elections in the future. Lukashenko regime is acting in the best tradition of the Soviet Union without

leaving any chance to dissidents. The attempt of peaceful revolution during the Presidential elections of 2006 ended with mass arrests of opposition leaders. These events repeated in 2010 when falsified elections have once again ended with members and leaders of the opposition arrested. The EU and the US sanctions against Belarus and Lukashenko do not promote changes. Today Lukashenko dictatorship is a challenge for democratic countries and a threat to a European area of peace and prosperity. Europe can not tolerate the humiliation of human dignity at its borders. Belarusian people require active and consolidated support from the EU side in their struggle against the dictator.

For a long period of time **Moldova** was in a difficult political situation. War, internal strife, the rise to power of Communists permanently stopped development of this country. The confrontation between political forces in 2009 destabilized the political situation in the country even more. Removing communists from power created a window of opportunities for reforms in Moldova, and the first thing declared by the new Government was - joining the EU. Negotiations on associated partnership are underway now, and the success of these negotiations considerably determines further processes of transformation in the country.

**Ukraine** became the example of progress and failures during 20 years of transition. The economic crisis of the early '90s and the failure of the first reforms led to rapid growth of corruption and the emergence of oligarchs. The coming to power of Leonid Kuchma signaled the return of Soviet nomenclature and gradual democratic rollback. Attempts to establish an authoritarian regime and to falsify Presidential elections of 2004 aroused the Orange Revolution which brought Democrats, led by Viktor Yushchenko, to power. However, the new Government faced the old challenges: lack of competence and capacity to implement reform, lack of external support, unstable internal situation etc. Despite significant obstacles and constant internal conflicts Ukraine managed to achieve significant progress of democracy, including freedom of speech and freedom of elections. While the failure of economic and political reforms, political disputes between "orange" leaders has led to the results of the Presidential elections in 2010 in which the representatives of big business and nomenclature, led by Viktor Yanukovich, returned to power. A year in office the new President has destroyed the main achievements of democracy and started attacking the freedom of speech and the rights of civil society. Censorship and pressure of secret service on public figures became increasingly frequent, and the local elections in 2010 were marked by a lack of openness and fairness which led to condemnation by the Council of Europe and the European Parliament. A significant loss of democracy should include restoring of the 1996 Constitution, which was done by the decision of the Constitutional Court, not by referendum or Parliamentary vote. The "old" Constitution gave the President excessive powers, which Leonid Kuchma possessed. These include pressure on opposition, selective justice, reflecting attempts to establish an authoritarian regime of power. The events in Ukraine require increased attention from the EU and international pressure to respect fundamental freedoms and human rights. As other countries, Ukraine is negotiating with the EU to conclude the Association Agreement, which can be an instrument of influence on the authorities in respect of democratic standards. At present Ukraine is in a difficult situation that can lead to one more dictatorship in Europe!

#### **Acknowledging:**

- that peace and stability in Europe is not possible without removal of threats of dictatorship and authoritarian regimes establishment;
- that the EU plays crucial role in achieving democratic standards by the states;
- the successful experience of the EU accessions of Czech Republic, Hungary, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovenia, Poland, Slovakia, Bulgaria and Romania;

**YEPP:**

- calls on the EU and Member States to take an active consolidated stand in opposition to the dictatorship and authoritarian tendencies;
- calls on the EU and Member States to simplify visa regime with the CEE non-EU countries with the purpose to encourage the exchange of experience and knowledge;
- calls on the EU and Member States to increase technical assistance to CEE countries, paying considerable attention to the development of civil society and freedom of speech as fundamental pillars of democracy;
- calls on the EU and Member States to conclude the Association Agreements with the CEE countries pending on their fulfilment of the conditions set.
- calls upon the non EU members which want to have an Association Agreement with the EU to accelerate the necessary political, judicial, and economical reforms needed in order to conclude the Association Agreement.
- considers it necessary to provide for membership of European countries that meet the Copenhagen criteria in full and which fulfil Article 49 TEU;