As an academic observer of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), I remember very well the big 2007 European Neighbourhood Conference in Brussels when Commission President Barroso presented his views on how to take the neighbourhood policy forward.¹ The key message of his speech was that the ENP is a policy based on differentiation, joint ownership and positive conditionality. Depending upon the ambitions and progress of the partner countries, more specific frameworks for cooperation can be developed and a prospect for (more) privileged relations can be delivered. The gradual development of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) as a specific policy framework for relations with the Union’s eastern partners is a clear illustration of this approach. It not only includes a clear political message that the Union is interested in close relations with its Eastern neighbours, it also underlines that this objective has to be reached in an atmosphere of partnership. In other words, it is a common endeavour requiring not only EU assistance but also and foremost a commitment of the partner states to work with the Union on a joint project and on the basis of shared values and interests.

A key characteristic of the Eastern Partnership is the combination of bilateral and multilateral strategies in a single policy framework. The overarching aim is to promote the political association and economic integration of the eastern neighbours through a process of legislative and regulatory approximation. At the bilateral level, this is based upon the negotiation of a new generation of association agreements, the establishment of deep and comprehensive free trade areas, the conclusion of mobility and security pacts and close

¹ “Shared challenges, shared futures: taking the neighbourhood policy forward”, speech by Commission President José Manuel Barroso, European Neighbourhood Policy Conference, Brussels, 3 September 2007.
cooperation in the area of energy security. The *multilateral track*, which is perhaps the most innovative part of the Eastern Partnership, complements this process. The aim is to create a forum for consultation where the partners come together on a regular basis to discuss a number of issues of mutual interest. Such discussions take place on the basis of *four thematic platforms* reflecting areas where there is a common interest to proceed (*democracy, good governance and stability; economic integration and convergence with EU policies; and contacts between people*). The underlying objective is obviously that on the basis of this exchange of ideas and good practices, the eastern partners will learn from each other, see the benefits of closer cooperation with the EU and proceed with the necessary reforms.

The Eastern Partnership is a very young policy, which was only formally launched on the occasion of the 7 May 2009 Prague Eastern Partnership summit. Nevertheless, a lot of work has already been done in setting up an *operational structure* for the implementation of the policy. Each thematic platform adopted a set of core objectives and a work programme for the period 2009-2011. Moreover, in order to give more visibility to the project five so-called flagship initiatives have been launched (on integrated border management, on support for SMEs, on integration of regional energy markets, on the prevention of natural and man-made disasters and on good environmental governance). Apart from the question of visibility, participation and ownership are considered to be crucial determinants for a successful policy. In this respect, the establishment of an EaP Civil Society Forum, an EU Neighbourhood EAST Parliamentary Assembly’ (EURONEST-PA), are of crucial importance.

Hence, it is immediately clear that the Eastern Partnership is a *comprehensive* and a *multi-level* policy. It is comprehensive because it entails cooperation in all areas of common interest ranging from economic integration to combating climate change and organised crime or developing standards for good governance. It is a multi-level policy because it not only includes formal political meetings but also events such as the one we have today, which are of crucial importance to ensure that the Eastern Partnership is indeed a common endeavour, not only of the Union and the partner states but also of the Union citizens and nationals of the neighbouring countries. Obviously, close cooperation in the field of education is therefore of fundamental importance and the Jean Monnet programme is a crucial instrument in this respect.
One important lesson of the European integration process is that political objectives of stability and security can be achieved on the basis of economic integration within a common legal framework. For this reason, the establishment of Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas, leading in the long-run to a pan-European Neighbourhood Economic Community, is of crucial importance. This ambitious process requires not only the abolition of barriers to trade but also a harmonisation of product standards and common rules on issues such as consumer protection and food safety. We can expect, in other words, a spill-over effect in terms of legal approximation.

A central ambition of the Eastern Partnership is exactly to reinforce the process of **legislative approximation** in order to establish a **shared regulatory framework** with efficient institutional structures. The key challenge for policy-makers and academics is to look for appropriate instruments to reach this objective while taking into account the specific legal, political and economic context of the East European neighbours. This is not a very easy exercise. Sometimes reference is made to the agreement on the European Economic Area (EEA), which provides a legal basis for the export of the internal market rules to Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein or to the network of bilateral agreements with Switzerland as an interesting long-term model for the eastern neighbourhood. One should, however, not underestimate the different economic and political situation of the eastern neighbours. Rather than referring to models of the past, it is, I think, important to be creative and to look for alternative models of cooperation and flexible integration, which are more targeted to the needs and expectations of the eastern partners. The Eastern Partnership is an example of such a creative approach, with its flagship initiatives and thematic platforms.

It is important to make progress on concrete issues such as **visa liberalisation** and **energy security**. On those two areas, we can see some important developments where the policy framework established by the Eastern Partnership can provide added value. First, with regard to the movement of persons, the conclusion of **mobility partnerships** to improve the opportunities of legal migration to the Union and support the partner countries in the management of migration flows is an important instrument to achieve a key objective of the Eastern Partnership, i.e. I quote from the Prague declaration, “Supporting mobility of citizens and visa liberalisation in a secure environment”. Progress in this area can rightfully be described as a litmus test for the success of the Eastern Partnership. The experiences with one
country (for instance Moldova, which was the first to be involved in a pilot mobility partnership) provide a useful example for other countries as well (like the one with Georgia with was established more recently). This exchange of information and experiences within the Eastern Partnership context creates a stimulating environment for further cooperation.

With regard to my other example, that of energy security, a key role is played by the Treaty establishing the Energy Community, which aims to export the EU’s acquis in the field of energy to non-EU Member States in order to create a pan-European energy market. Whereas the Energy Community Treaty was initially concluded between the European Community and the Western Balkan countries it has recently been expanded to Moldova and Ukraine (even though the Ukrainian parliament still has to ratify the treaty within the common months) whereas Georgia has the status of observer. The enlargement of the Energy Community to some East European neighbours as well as their participation in certain EU programmes and agencies reinforces the interdependence between the Union and its East European neighbourhood. The Eastern Partnership aims to facilitate this process and provides a forum for addressing common and, in fact, global challenges (such as energy security, climate change and migration) in dialogue with the Eastern partners.

Despite all good intentions and the undeniable progress since the adoption of the Prague Declaration on the Eastern Partnership in May 2009, the consolidation and successful implementation of this policy faces a number of important challenges.

First, regarding the implications for the ENP. Whereas the Eastern Partnership together with other regional initiatives (Union for the Mediterranean and Black Sea Synergy), provides new impetus to the EU’s neighbourhood relations, it is important to ensure the coherence of this policy and to avoid that the ENP disintegrates into a bundle of competing policies, each supported by a small group of Member States. France and the Southern EU Member States focus on the Union for the Mediterranean; for Romania and Bulgaria the Black Sea Synergy is of particular importance; Sweden, Poland and the other Viségrad countries have a specific interest in the Eastern Partnership whereas Finland is the main the promoter of the EU’s Northern Dimension. The challenge is to establish a coherent European Neighbourhood Policy given the constant fight for funding and influence among the Member States and neighbouring countries. Here a crucial role is to be played by the European Commission
taking fully account of the new instruments provided under the Treaty of Lisbon to ensure the coherence and consistency of the EU’s external action.

My second and related remark concerns the relationship between the Eastern Partnership and other regional policies in the European neighbourhood, in particular the Black Sea Synergy initiative. The latter, which was launched in 2007, essentially aims to create a framework for sub-regional cooperation within the Black Sea basin, covering five Eastern Partnership countries as well as Russia and Turkey. Both processes are considered to be complementary to each other. Whereas the Black Sea Synergy essentially focuses on the regional problems of the Black Sea area, the EaP is more oriented towards the partner countries’ “alignment with the EU and/or their aspiration for European integration”. In the words of the European Commission, the centre of gravity of the Black Sea Synergy is the Black Sea whereas for the EaP it will be Brussels. A crucial difference, of course between the EaP and the Black Sea Synergy and also other regional initiatives such as the Northern Dimension concerns the position of regional organisations. The multilateral track of the EaP does not provide a role for regional partners such as the Organisation for Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) in the Black Sea Synergy or the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS) in the Northern Dimension. The absence of a role for regional institutions further underlines that the objective of the EaP’s multilateral track is in the first place promoting closer links with the EU, more than promoting closer cooperation among the countries themselves. The differences in focus and methodology between the Eastern Partnership and the Black Sea Synergy cannot conceal that both policy initiatives to a large extent deal with similar problems and challenges. For instance, the integration of the energy markets is a key objective of both the Black Sea Synergy and the EaP thematic platform on energy security. There is, in other words, an obvious overlap regarding the issues and sectors for regional cooperation and legal approximation. An efficient coordination between both policies is, therefore, necessary.

This immediately brings me to my third remark, which concerns the position of third countries, in particular Russia, within the EaP. Officially, Russia is not involved in the EaP but as a third country it can participate in EaP actions “on a case-by-case basis” and “in concrete projects, activities and meetings of thematic platforms”. So far, Russia’s reaction to

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the EaP has been rather negative with President Medvedev expressing his concern that the Eastern Partnership could evolve into a Partnership against Russia. In order to overcome this discourse based on competing spheres of influence, the Union faces a challenge to clearly communicate the objectives and principles of the Eastern Partnership as a positive project promoting prosperity, security and stability in Europe which is, as such, also in the interest of Russia. Again, the issue of coordination with other initiatives, such as the newly launched Partnership for Modernisation and the implementation of road maps for the establishment of four common spaces with Russia, which is also very much about regulatory convergence and economic integration, is important here.

Fourth, a crucial element of the ENP in general and thus also for the EaP is the question of money. In times of economic crisis it is difficult to attract funding from Member States and third partners. In other words, the current socio-economic climate significantly complicates the implementation of the ambitious EaP agenda. It will, therefore, be necessary to make choices. A good criterion might be the direct implications for the promotion of people to people contacts, which is perhaps the most powerful tool for stimulating reform.

My fifth and final remark concerns the evolution in the Eastern neighbourhood and the expectations of the Eastern partners themselves. As was already mentioned at the outset a key characteristic of the Eastern Partnership is the principle of joint ownership, i.e. the idea that both the EU and the partner states contribute to shaping and implementing a policy. Only when there is a full commitment of the partner countries, the Eastern Partnership can be successful. A prerequisite for a fruitful cooperation is, of course, sufficient knowledge about the intentions, expectations and sensitivities of all parties. In this respect, the exchange of information on the basis of mechanisms such as TAIEX and twinning but also the Jean Monnet programme is crucial in order to guarantee that the Eastern Partnership is indeed a common endeavour. With this point I want to conclude my presentation and I am open for the exchange of information during the debate. Thank you.