

## **Jean Monnet Wider Europe Network Report for CEELBAS**

### **Summary**

Over the course of 2009 the Jean Monnet Wider Europe Network (JMWEN) continued its work of organizing conferences and seminars across the UK and the rest of Europe that brought together academics and practitioners with an interest in the relations between the European Union and its eastern neighbours. The network has also continued to make policy recommendations to the Ukrainian and Swedish governments through the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida) on how best Ukraine can further its European integration strategy over the next few years. This is an important indicator of how CEELBAS support has contributed towards the production of outputs that (when adapted) are of benefit to the European policy community.

We are hugely grateful to CEELBAS for its continued support of our core academic activities that have helped us to organize three academic seminars in Bratislava (July 2009), Helsinki (September 2009) and Birmingham (December 2009) over the course of the year (CEELBAS support was used to fund the participation of UK scholars at our events in Helsinki and Bratislava). Reports on these events are available below. In addition to this, but without financial support from CEELBAS, the network also ran two practitioner-focused events for the development assistance sector and diplomats in Kyiv under the Sida umbrella. What is invaluable about the CEELBAS support is that it funds the more academic of our activities which would be harder to fund privately.

The focus of this report is on the CEELBAS funded activities, however, our policy outputs for Sida and other information may be found at <http://wider-europe.org>.

### **Seminar in Bratislava – 12 and 13 June 2009**

On 12 and 13 June 2009, the Wider Europe network held a seminar in Bratislava in collaboration with Comenius University, CEELBAS, the Economic and Social Research Council and the Slovak Foreign Policy Association. The principal focus of the conference was the impact of the new Member States on the making of the European Union's policy towards its eastern neighbours and, in particular, their preferences for the Eastern Partnership.

Before tackling this issue, however, the conference opened with a panel on the impact of the global economic crisis on the region. Three presentations were made during the panel, which began with an overview of the global economic crisis, which was provided by Professor Jim Rollo from Sussex European Institute. He argued that origins of the crisis lay in the loose monetary policy that had been operated by the United States (and the United Kingdom) since around 1995 that had allowed large imbalances between surplus and deficit countries to build up. Richard Connolly, CEELBAS research fellow at the University of Birmingham, followed this

presentation with an overview of the crisis' impact on Russia, Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus, and highlighted that the depth of the economic recession in those states can best be attributed to a failure to undertake structural reforms in the period of the economic boom, which meant that – despite lower levels of debt – these economies were very exposed. Zsolt Gal concluded the panel with a discussion of the impact of the crisis on central Europe, looking especially at the trade dependency of the central European states.

The second panel looked at the Eastern Partnership, with presentations from Derek Averre of the University of Birmingham, who analysed Russia's reaction to the Eastern Partnership arguing that the Russian foreign policy elite lacks a coherent vision of what it seeks to achieve in the region. Peter Mišík from the Slovak foreign ministry gave a practitioner perspective on Slovak policy towards its eastern neighbours. Alan Mayhew, Sussex European Institute, and Alexander Duleba, Slovak Foreign Policy Association, commented on these two presentations reflecting on both energy policy concerns and the profusion of regional cooperation initiatives that the EU has produced in recent years – from the Black Sea Synergy project to the Northern Dimension to the Danube regional cooperation initiative – making the point that whilst some of these projects do add value, the Eastern Partnership is of an altogether different nature, aiming at integration of the Eastern European states with the EU. The third, fourth and fifth conference panels looked at the new Member States' impact on the making of policy towards the eastern neighbours and was opened with an insightful analysis from Jarosław Pietras, Director General in the Secretariat of the EU Council of Ministers, on the impact of the new Member States on the European Union since 2004, that was complemented by a paper from Erik Lastic, Comenius University. His analysis was upbeat although he did indicate that it would be another five years until the 2004/07 Member States began to play as significant a role as the old EU-15. He also made the point that the term EU-15 continues to be used for academic analyses five years after the Big Bang enlargement of 2004, an indicator of the way in which the Union is still perceived by some analysts.

The following presentations from Vladimír Bilčík, Comenius University, Attila Ágh, Corvinus University, Vít Beneš, Institute of International Relations in Prague, Nathaniel Copsy, CEELBAS research fellow at the University of Birmingham, Laurynas Jonavičius, University of Vilnius, and Sorin Denca from the University of Birmingham, looked respectively at the national preferences of a range of central European states: Slovakia, Hungary, Czech Republic, Poland, Lithuania and Romania. The position of Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Hungary could be summarized in Attila Ágh's memorable expression as 'full support but no effort' for the Eastern Dimension. Hungary is preoccupied with the Western Balkans, Slovakia is still coming to terms with the notion of having an independent foreign policy and the Czech Republic, whilst suspicious of Russia, does not know what it seeks to achieve. Lithuania and Poland have a near-identical foreign policy agenda for the region with a focus on Belarus and Ukraine. Romania is most concerned about Moldova and takes an interest in the Black Sea Synergy – although whether that regional initiative

is of any real value remains to be seen.

This regional seminar attracted a wide local audience from academia and policy-making circles. We are particularly grateful to our sponsors: CEELBAS, the ESRC, the SFPA and the Comenius University, without whose support this event would not have been possible.

### **Seminar in Helsinki – 10 September 2009**

The event was organized in collaboration with CEELBAS and the Aleksanteri Institute in Helsinki, Finland.

The seminar was opened by Markku Kivinen, Director of the Aleksanteri Institute and Alan Mayhew. The theme of the seminar was a comparison between the EU's northern dimension and the EU's eastern partnership that was first proposed in May 2008 by Sweden and Poland, and adapted into a practical framework by the European Commission in late 2008. Speakers on the northern dimension were Hanna Smith of the Aleksanteri Institute, Andrey Avetisyan of the Russian MFA, Petteri Vuorimäki from RELEX in the European Commission and Pertti Joenniemi from the Danish Institute of International Studies. On the eastern partnership, speakers included from the Wider Europe network Alan Mayhew, Christophe Hillion, Nat Copsey and Alexander Wochnik. A third panel looked at the perspective of civil society in the region and included Tuula Yrjölä from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland, Hans Gutbrod from the Caucasus Research Resource Center (CRRRC), Daniel Tarschys from the University of Stockholm, Ketevan Vashakidze from the Eurasia Partnership Foundation and Viktor Liakh from the Eurasia Foundation. A final panel examined the issue of Russia-EU cooperation in the north and asked if the EU and Russia shared common interests. The last panel included Markku Kivinen from the Aleksanteri Institute, the Swedish Ambassador to Finland, Johan Molander, Clyde Kull, the Estonian Political Director, and Riku Huttunen from the Finnish Ministry of Employment and the Economy.

Comparisons between the northern dimension and the eastern partnership cannot readily be drawn in a meaningful way for two main reasons. First, the essence of what is being discussed – European integration potentially leading to membership in the east versus peaceful co-existence with some cooperation in limited areas in the north – is rather different. Second, in collaborating with Russia, the discussion is about 'interests', shared or otherwise, rather than common values and integration. Nonetheless, the event was a useful platform for an exchange of views.

### **Seminar in Birmingham at the Aston Centre for Europe – 3 December 2009**

In collaboration and partnership with DG Relex in the European Commission and the Aston Centre for Europe, on the 3 December 2009, the JMWEN organized a one-day seminar in Birmingham.

The conference was opened by Simon Green from the Aston Centre for Europe and John O'Rourke from DG RELEX in the European Commission. The event was centred on two principal themes: first, an evaluation of the eastern partnership; and, second, an assessment of the impact of the economic downturn on eastern Europe. John O'Rourke opened the event with an upbeat presentation of the Eastern Partnership, the discussion that followed centred on the viability of the deep and comprehensive free trade areas that are intended to follow the negotiation of Association Agreements between the European Union and the six eastern partners. Derek Averre from the University of Birmingham's Centre for Russian and East European studies gave the next presentation, which looked at relations between Russia and the EU since the war in South Ossetia. The first of the two principal panels made an assessment of the eastern partnership, with presentations from Nat Copsey (Aston), Viorel Ursu (the Open Society Institute), Vladimer Papava (the Georgian Centre for Strategic Studies) and Piotr Maciej Kaczyński (Centre for European Policy Studies, CEPS in Brussels). Discussion here centred on the added-value or otherwise of the Eastern Partnership. Finally, the last panel with presentations from Julian Cooper and Richard Connolly looked at the impact of the economic crisis on Eastern Europe, with a focus on structural weaknesses and imbalances in the region.