



Eastern Partnership Reflection Forum initiative

The European Union between internal reforms and external challenges: the (un)making of a strategic actor?

7 October 2019, 20h30-22h00

Marriott Hotel, Minsk, Belarus

A session of the organised in the framework of the Minsk Dialogue Forum

Context and objectives

In the past ten years, the European Union (EU) has *peu ou prou* faced a long list of serious challenges, both internal and external: the international and European debt crisis, outbreak of wars across its neighbourhoods, refugee and migration crisis, rise of Euroscepticism, British vote to exit the EU, election of Donald Trump, rise of China's economic diplomacy, assertive return of Russia on the European stage, etc... Understandingly, the need to swiftly react to a changing environment and mitigate internal tensions have dominated the EU's agenda. Notwithstanding these internal and external challenges, the EU remains committed to the advancement a more robust strategic vision, in its Eastern neighbourhood and beyond. Discussions about the Future of Europe, about the most pressing reforms and the Eastern Partnership itself, have flourished since the publication of the EU's White Paper on the Future of Europe in March 2017, and a new Strategic Agenda has recently been issued for 2019-2024.

There could not be better timing for this strategic reflection to be intensified: the future budget of the EU (MFF 2021-2027) is being finalised; European elections have taken place in 2019; top positions have been redistributed in EU institutions and Brexit is about to become reality. How will these internal challenges affect the EU's approach towards its Eastern neighbourhood? What place does the Eastern neighbourhood occupy in the EU's new Strategic Agenda and discussions about the future of Europe? What challenges does the EU face in its pursuit of a more strategic engagement?

Organised in the framework of the Minsk Dialogue Forum, this session will build on the Eastern Partnership Reflection Forum initiative, an on-going initiative launched in 2017 by the Austro-French Centre for Rapprochement in Europe, the Centre international de formation européenne and Minsk Dialogue Track-2 Initiative, in cooperation with a pan-European network of think-tanks and research institutions and with the support of key European governmental and inter-governmental institutions.

The format of the discussion, in line with the Eastern Partnership Reflection Forum initiative, will foster an interactive exchange of views among all participants. The panellists will give short inputs and then engage in discussions under the Chatham House Rules.

Discussion

- Vygaudas Ušackas, Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania; former EU Ambassador in Russia
- Judy Dempsey, Non-Resident Senior Fellow, Carnegie Europe
- Lazar Comanescu, Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Romania
- Paul Révay, Member of the Board of Trustees, "Friends of Europe"

Moderation: Florent Marciacq, Deputy Secretary General, Austro-French Centre for Rapprochement in Europe; Senior Fellow, Centre international de formation européenne