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## POTENTIAL IMPACT OF EURONEST ON THE EU-UKRAINIAN RELATIONS – expert poll

### Ukraine deserves a special partnership with the EU – experts

Anticipating the first meeting of the Eastern Partnership's Parliamentary Assembly (Euronest), Gorshenin Institute asked experts about its potential impact on the development of the EU-Ukrainian relations, its possible outcome without the participation of Belarus, and Ukraine's chances for the EU integration when compared with neighboring states.

**According to a Ukrainian MP, the head of the parliamentary committee on the European integration and former Ukrainian Foreign Minister, Borys Tarasyuk**, it is still too early to discuss the impact that the establishment of the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly might have since it has not convened yet. However, the diplomat did point out to several positive factors. "The Euronest's parliamentary mode of operation will unambiguously define the status of its participants as 'Eastern partners of Europe,' to which Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union (according to which any state can submit a request to become a member of the EU - editor) can be applied," he said. Tarasyuk emphasized that over the past year, the issue with the Belarusian participation in the assembly has been the most important and the only impediment to the start of the Euronest work. According to him, the Ukrainian delegation drew up an alternative plan although the Belarusian party turned it down. "However, all the participants of the convention realize that the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly cannot be made hostage to the Belarusian issue. In this respect, considering the circumstances which developed after the events in Minsk on 19 December 2010, a decision was taken to convene the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly without inviting Belarus at this stage, yet with reserving for it the ten seats to which it is entitled," the parliamentarian explained. Commenting on a possibility that Moldova's achievements on the path towards the integration into the EU diminish Ukraine's chances for the EU membership, the diplomat believes that it is impossible to compare Ukraine, which has 46m people, with Moldova, whose population is only 4.3m people. "Given its economic potential and interests, Ukraine should follow a negotiation procedure that is substantially harder than the one for Moldova. However, Ukraine still remains the leader among the Eastern Partnership countries. If we show progress in doing our 'homework' and prevent the curtailment of democracy, Ukraine should not be worried about the pace of its integration into the EU," the expert concluded.

**The head of the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry's information policy department, Oleh Voloshyn**, is certain that Ukraine deserves a distinct and special partnership with the EU. "Against this background, we are quite cautious when it comes to any form of cooperation that places us in the same position as Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan, which have less viable prospects for joining the EU. Actually, direct cooperation with the European Parliament and interaction with its factions are way more important for us. That is why Euronest is an institution that plays only a secondary role for us," he noted. As regards Belarus, the diplomat once again mentioned that Ukraine's stance was unambiguous and emphasized that it did not have to support the EU's position on everything. "We understand the concern that the EU expresses about the state of democracy in Belarus. We did convey it to our Belarusian partners. However, Ukraine is not obliged to agree with the EU about all the matters since it is certainly not a candidate for the EU membership. Our cooperation with Belarus has distinct characteristics; we have a great deal of trade and economic interactions. We share an ancient history, it is our neighbor and a people close to us. This all makes Ukraine naturally interested in serving as an intermediary between the EU and Belarus. We believe that any isolation of Belarus would be counterproductive. We hope that the Belarusian leadership will show good will and make up with the EU. Ukraine is willing to help with this. Belarus and the EU are neighbors and they cannot avoid talking to each other," the diplomat said. At the same time, Voloshyn is less optimistic about Moldova's bid for the EU integration. "We do not compete with Moldova. Since there is really no point in comparing the prospects of both countries, it is ridiculous to talk about the competition," the diplomat opined.

**The head of the Public Expert Council Ukraine-EU, Oleh Rybachuk,** considers the project very abstract. “The major problem with the Eastern Partnership is lack of preciseness about it. Is it a tool for solidifying the good-neighbor relations with the EU or is it a tool that makes every state participant one step closer to the membership? Brussels cannot answer these questions,” the expert stated. Rybachuk believes that the EU does not have a unified approach towards Belarus either. According to him, Ukraine neither fully agrees with the EU about foreign policy nor has a clearly outlined position of its own on these matters. “Prime Minister Azarov’s clumsy attempts to make excuses that there was not enough time to support the Visegrad Four in their unified position on Belarus makes me laugh,” the expert said. According to him, Ukraine is missing its chance to join the EU not because Moldova tries better but because Ukraine does nothing to promote its position. “The Moldovan team in Brussels is small but influential. It works to stay ahead of the curve. They move petitions forward very fast and work for the long-term outcome, instead of merely waiting for an invitation. It is absolutely the opposite in Ukraine. Ukraine does not have mechanisms, people, centers – everything is out of balance. However, any state that does not proclaim its intention to join the EU but really strives to make its membership goals more attainable, stands a great chance,” Rybachuk concluded.