

**Radio Interview with Radio Free Europe/EU Observer, 21<sup>st</sup> December 2010:  
Commissioner Stefan Füle reflects on relations with our Eastern Partners,  
the Western Balkans and the achievements of the Enlargement process  
for the year 2010  
(written transcript of interview)**

**What was the greatest performance of the Filat government in Moldova in respect to the EU during the past year?**

I think the biggest achievement of the Filat government – which, let's be precise, is an alliance of three political parties - is that through the pro-European reform process, it has ensured a support without any reservation from the European Union for further progress in terms of transformation of Moldova and getting the country closer to the European Union. Judging the results of the recent parliamentary elections as well, I would say that the alliance was also successful in fostering support of Moldovan citizens for this policy. There have been many other achievements but what is now at stake for Prime Minister Filat and his two partners and this government and alliance for integration is the capacity to build on the election results and to keep up the momentum. As far as Brussels is concerned, we stand ready to continue to support him fully and his colleagues to bring the citizens of Moldova closer to the EU.

**Is Romania's liberal attitude towards the Moldovan citizens to whom Bucharest is indiscriminately granting citizenship an element in Romania's difficulties in joining Schengen?**

As far as citizenship is concerned, it's up to each member state to formulate the rules and criteria for providing citizenship to people living in third countries. For the Schengen area, it is an intergovernmental framework, so it's up to member states to define the rules of the game and whether a particular country fulfils all the criteria or not. From my perspective, an important and positive step on the Romanian side was the signature of the so-called "border agreement between Romania and Moldova". I think it's not only important in the sense that it codifies the bilateral relationship between those two countries but it also removed – I hope - some of the myths and misinterpretations generated by the absence of such an agreement up to then.

**What about visas? People expect concrete steps – when do you think they will be able to travel to the EU?**

At the beginning, you asked me what the biggest achievement of the current government in Moldova was. I could quote a long list of things, but among them, lies the progress achieved as far as visas is concerned.

In the Prague declaration, which launched the Eastern Partnership, there is good language ensuring that, of course, based on the progress in our partner countries, a process is established which eventually leads to an eventual visa free regime. Ukraine and Moldova are two Eastern countries, which have made the biggest progress so far. As far as Moldova is concerned, we are now working on finalizing the visa Action Plan, which is a list of concrete measures to be implemented by Moldova. If implemented, and then, based on this implementation, if member states agree that a full scale implementation has taken place, this would indeed guarantee the citizens of Moldova a possibility to travel to Schengen countries without a short term visa. The road enabling Moldova to come closer to the EU is both a complex and important one. When I think of it, I think that would be one of the most important measures delivered to the citizens of Moldova.

**In a recent interview with RFE/RL, Poland's deputy Foreign Minister Krzysztof Stanowski said that his country strongly supported Georgia's aspiration to join the EU. There are other EU members who would probably share this stance while others don't. How big are differences on this issue and what is the prospect for a consensus to be reached in the foreseeable future on it?**

As far as the European perspective is concerned, one needs two things. In the treaties, one needs a clear reflexion on who can apply and become an EU member state. In the Lisbon Treaty, we have well defined parameters for that. And second, one needs a consensus among Member States. The truth is, while we have the Lisbon Treaty and clear language there, we don't have a consensus among member states yet. A very important thing is where we already have a consensus, we now have is on building more of the European Union in these countries. And it is through that process of building up more EU in Georgia and other interested partner countries that this issue will make more and more member states look at it with sympathy and support.

**Any names ?**

No, no names. The Commission is both bad at calendars and giving dates and also at dropping names !

**How important is it for Europeans and in the debate between EU member States that Russia is entirely opposed to Georgia joining the EU?**

As far as membership is concerned, it must be made absolutely clear that this is an issue between aspirant countries and member states. I don't think member states would accept that a third country has a veto over the question of who wants to join the EU or not. At the same time, it needs to be stressed that good neighbourly relations is one of the basic criteria and part of the Copenhagen criteria. And here, taking into account the fact that there are Russian military troops located in the two break away regions, it is a long way to go before we reach an appropriate level of relationship between the two neighbour states.

**According to one confidential diplomatic dispatch from series of leaked U.S. embassy cables, released by WikiLeaks, an EU diplomat told U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Philip Gordon in July, 2009, that Russia view EU's Eastern Partnership "through a zero-sum lens", perceiving the initiative as anti-Russian. Is the EU doing anything to reassure Moscow?**

The "Eastern Partnership" initiative was never meant as anti-Russian, on the contrary. Russia was invited to be part of the Eastern Partnership. The Prague declaration is very clear: it mentions the participation of third countries in the activities of the Eastern Partnership. I'm glad to say once again that Russia participated earlier this year in a project dealing, I think, with e-twinning. As far as the Commission is concerned, we would like to see more active Russian involvement in these activities - of course with the agreement of all other partners and member states. We also have other more informal frameworks where we exchange views with our Russian partners on all these issues. Cathy Ashton also has a very good and active dialogue with the Russians on a number of issues also related to our neighbourhood but what we are seeking here to build a win-win process and not a zero-sum game as some Westerners may see it.

**Georgian President Saakashvili said he "will never use force to roll back the Russian occupation and to restore its control over the occupied areas". Will this have an impact on the EU's attitude towards Tbilisi?**

I think President Saakashvili's statement in the European Parliament on non-use of military force was very good and constitutes a very important declaration. This is something the EU stressed a number of times when dealing with the Georgian authorities. It's up to the member states to make political sense of it but I'm confident that not only the member states but also the authorities in the two break-away regions and the Russian authorities will take it as a sincere step towards solving the issue we face in Georgia today.

**You characterized the ratification by the European Parliament of EU-Georgia agreements on visa facilitation and readmission of irregular immigrants as “part of our commitment to bring Georgia closer to the EU, not only at an institutional level but also at peoples' level”. What does that mean in concrete terms?**

I think the biggest challenge we face when talking about bringing a country closer to the EU is of course the answer to the questions: "what does it mean? what is there for that country? what is there for its citizens?" That's why, when try to explain about this process, we always that we don't only talk about a political association, which is the first pillar, we don't only talk about economic integration - the second pillar but we are always talking about the third pillar - people-to-people contact, mobility, visa facilitation or eventually visa free regime. We attach great importance to that because there needs to be something very concrete, very tangible for the citizens to involve them in this process, and engage with them. If you look at the European Union, its history is about breaking walls. In this case, it is about breaking walls between EU Schengen countries on one side and Georgian citizens on the other. This is a very important goal and the ratification of both the readmission and visa facilitation agreements is an important step towards that.

**In their statement on the strategic importance of the Eastern Partnership, EU foreign ministers stressed the need “to make further progress in negotiations on Association Agreements, including Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas”. What would the EU and its member states gain from getting closer to their Eastern neighbours?**

In recent years, the European Union has very much looked inwards and into new working arrangements, such as, first to the Constitutional Treaty and then the Lisbon Treaty. The time has come for the European Union to look outwards, because, whether you like it or not, in a number of issues – be it competition, climate change, energy security - the solution can hardly be found within the borders of the European Union. However, it can be found through an active engagement with our neighbours and sometimes neighbours of our neighbours. Of course, quite logically, we are the most interested in projecting our values in the region you mention and turning it into a zone of stability and prosperity. So there is indeed a lot the European Union could achieve through active participation with these countries.

**Can you describe Armenia in comparison with two other regional neighbours - Georgia and Azerbaijan? Some experts believe that there is no unified position between Member States on the future of Eastern Partnership. They accuse for example the EU of turning a blind eye to human rights abuses in Armenia for “geopolitical considerations.”**

I think, it is important to realize that, as far as the "Eastern Partnership" is concerned, we are not trying to differentiate between countries which would constitute some kind of "first priority" for the European Union, or "second" or "third priority".

The "Eastern Partnership" is a fair offer and a chance for all six countries to fulfil their own aspirations and be helped with their own reform process and transformations.

It is also important for us to realize that we cannot put all these countries into one box. Even if I look at the South Caucasus (Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia), it is difficult for me to compare these countries because each of them has certain specificities. This of course relates

to Armenia, which I visited not a long time ago and, by the way, where I promised the foreign Minister to visit again early next year.

What is specific to Armenia is that it was one of the few countries where the work started early with our expert group, and I took this as an expression of serious commitment on behalf of the Armenian authorities regarding the reform process. Nevertheless, there are many challenges. In Armenia right now, we have politicians who "talk the talk" but we need to see them actually "walking the walk".

One issue which is very important is, of course, the one related to human rights. I was very pleased when the Armenian authorities agreed to establish, a sub-committee dealing notably on human rights in the framework of our structural relationship. The sub-committee already held a meeting and a rather good meeting on human rights. This is an important issue, particularly in the context of what happened two years ago. The tragic memories of those should be put behind us but not forgotten. Making peace is important. Freeing those who are still in prison after the tragic events is important.

**What do you think of the recent events in Belarus and how do you see the future of EU-Belarus relations?**

On Belarus, the next weeks or months are going to be very important. There have been a lot of activities recently and in the run-up to the presidential elections. The truth is that we wanted to continue the process of critical engagement. By the way, we always made it clear that this critical engagement was conditioned by Belarus' attitude towards human rights, rule of law and so on.

And before the elections, we had seen some progress. The election campaign had positive elements. If you compare it to the previous one, one can indeed assess the progress but then something went wrong. From the OSCE report, the counting itself raised issues: plus or minus half of the counting was deemed "bad" or "very bad". That does not really create the best conditions for this engagement.

If I now add - and this is probably the most dramatic element - the pictures of demonstrators being beaten in Minsk, if you realize that there are more than 600 people in prison and among them most of the presidential candidates, now that is unacceptable for us.

Cathy Ashton quite rightly called for the immediate release of these people. She was quite clear in denouncing the violence in general, and in particular that of governmental forces.

At the same time, I think we need an engagement with the country for the sake of the Belarusian people, for the sake of Belarusian civil society. We need a framework for our relationship, which would be useful and serve us, not only in good weather, but also in bad. Right now, the way the authorities have treated the demonstrators, the way they have treated the presidential candidates and so on has generated rather bad weather as far as the relationship with Belarus is concerned.

**Did the European Union in any way influence the departure of Milo Djukanovic, the Montenegrin prime minister?**

No, it did not. The European Union is not in the business of telling candidate countries and aspirant countries how to elect their prime ministers, etc. There are certain principles which we are keen on. We monitor their implementation and, off course, have a lot to say if we see that certain principles are being violated.

We respect the decision of the Prime Minister. I understand that he will remain chair of his political party. He is a Prime Minister who enabled his country to achieve candidate status for the European Union. I trust that the new Prime Minister will be able to deliver on the

seven key priorities which the Commission stressed in its opinion on Montenegro, thus allowing the country to start accession talks based on the decision of Member States.

**Is Mr Djukanovic's departure from the position of Prime Minister of Montenegro in any way related to his inability to deal with corruption?**

Again, it's not for me to comment on what Prime Minister Djukanovic's departure is related to or not. The fact that, based on the Commission's opinion, Member States decided to grant candidate status to Montenegro shows that Prime Minister Djukanovic's was not only a committed politician but was also able to deliver on certain issues and particularly fight against corruption and organised crime. Prime Minister Djukanovic took a very personal commitment a couple of months ago in establishing an institutional and legislative framework in these fields. This was an important step. What we need now is a track record: concrete delivering on this legislation. That is now up to the new Prime Minister.

**If Mr Sanader hadn't been indicted, the EU would be dealing with him now. Mr. Djukanovic was accused of being a man running a country with cigarette trafficking. When dealing with other leaders from West Balkans countries, isn't there an awareness or a fear on the EU side that it might be dealing with leaders while not knowing who they really are?**

I think that what is important here is to realize the following principle: what we are after in the Enlargement process is helping countries to fight effectively against corruption, organised crime and to establish rule of law, independence of the judiciary etc. If, through the process, through the track record, through the implementation of anti-corruption laws and so on, this brings about certain changes, then we will never turn around and say "this is someone with whom we won't negotiate". The enlargement process is a process in which we help to move countries to a higher standard in order for them to deal with these issues themselves. That however also means higher standards not only in fighting against corruption but also in justice. If a politician - former or active - is being accused, we consider, for the sake of the judicial process and for all the citizens of the country, that, on the one hand, this shouldn't be put under the carpet and, on the other, this person's rights and first of all their right to a fair trial with an independent judiciary should be secured.

**As Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighbourhood policy, what was or were your greatest achievement(s) and your greatest failure(s) in the year 2010?**

I think the greatest achievements of the Enlargement process behind which there are hundreds of my colleagues both here in Brussels and in the Delegations on the ground is that in this past year, we have been able to both improve the credibility of the process of Enlargement and, at the same time, we have been able to move a number of countries themselves closer to the accession process.

If you look at the opinion on Albania, on Montenegro, if you look at the questionnaire we handed over to Serbia, if you look at certain progress and expectations regarding the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, if you look at the European agenda of some of the political leaders in Bosnia-Herzegovina, I feel rather confident that we are moving in the right direction despite the economic and financial crisis which is badly biting member states.

As far as the failures are considered, there are many of them: I would have wished to open a new chapter with Turkey. I would have wished Albania to overcome the political stalemate it is in. I would have wished the countries in the region not only to realize that the fight against corruption and organized crime is among the priorities of this process but also to start to deliver on concrete steps and through that, strengthen even more the credibility of the Enlargement process.