

## **Economic and social aspects must inform geopolitical decisions**

Written by Vitālijs Gavrilovs on 19 May 2015 in Special Report  
Special Report

Vitālijs Gavrilovs says public officials should seek the advice and assistance of social and economic partners when tackling geopolitical issues.



One of the most significant milestones of the Latvian presidency is the eastern partnership summit and related forums, demonstrating the interest and contributions of business, civil society and other stakeholders.

Geopolitical developments during the last couple of years have put the eastern partnership and European neighbourhood policy issues very high on the European agenda, especially in countries located on the eastern border of the EU such as Latvia and other Baltic countries.

However, escalation of the relationships between regions will not help any of the parties involved, and the economy is the first victim in this regard. Unfortunately, recent hurried decisions have already greatly affected business.

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In his speech at the European economic and social committee plenary session in December, parliament president Martin Schulz strongly emphasised that worsening economic conditions provide fertile ground for various forms of extremism and radicalism in society.

Unrest causes additional distrust and instability, decreasing investors' interest in a region and lowering overall economic activity as a result. This creates an endless vicious circle. We therefore insist that social partners be involved in solving geopolitical matters, as public officials alone are unable to do so - bad decisions do not affect them as severely or as directly as they do business.

The employers' confederation of Latvia has always worked and is continuing to work towards promoting new opportunities to strengthen business cooperation between the EU and the six eastern partnership countries - Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine - and also to foster cooperation with other countries interested in the region.

We have set up several bilateral business cooperation councils during the last couple of years, strengthening business relationships with all these countries and several others, such as Kazakhstan and Russia.

We are also hoping to build momentum for further pragmatic development of the European neighbourhood policy during the discussions at the eastern partnership business forum to take place on 21 May 2015.

Despite the hopeful investment climate in Europe, economic growth is slowing and whole regions are being depopulated for economic reasons. There is no alternative to working towards long-term, stable, pragmatic and rational business cooperation with non-EU countries at the regional level (such as the eastern partnership countries or central Asia), at the transatlantic level, and at the global level.

At the same time, however, an individual approach must be taken to each of the eastern partnership countries. Although they have a common historical background, they are not homogeneous in their economic, social and political development.

They should be given enough time - as, for instance, Latvia was given - to work closely with their social partners, civil society and other stakeholders in order to implement the necessary reforms and gradually start enjoying the advantages of the EU common market.

However, we expect national social partners in their respective countries to be more proactive than ever before, strengthening social dialogue as the foundation of balanced and peaceful development and facilitating growth and welfare.

We have shared our experiences in this regard with several business organisations in the eastern partnership countries in the past and will continue to do so in the future. I hope that the eastern partnership business forum will drive this process forward.

## About the author

Vitālijs Gavrilovs is a member of the European economic and social committee and president of the employers' confederation of Latvia

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