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**Eastern Partnership:
*an effective political tool or refreshed vain promises?***

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Introduction

Brought by Poland and Sweden, the EU Eastern Partnership (EaP) initiative was launched during the Czech EU Presidency. The official inauguration of the EaP was made during the Eastern Partnership Summit in Prague where on May 7, 2008 a special declaration in the name of the involved parties was adopted. The essence of the EaP is to bring six countries of strategic importance covered by this initiative – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine – closer to the EU. Aimed at improving of political and economic relations the EaP initiative may potentially contribute to the democratisation and economic liberalisation in the partner countries, particularly by means of promotion of good governance and rule of law as well as combating corruption. Moreover, the idea of the EaP in the view of non-inclusion of Russia as a partner in this initiative may be regarded as nearly the first real attempt of the EU to view these countries out of the context of the Russian sphere of interests. Even though these six participating countries are treated by the EU on a case-by-case basis the formalisation of their relations with the EU embodied in the EaP may be regarded as the real understanding of the importance of the six countries for the EU that came only in some 18 years after all six countries appeared in the political map.

There are many approaches how to measure the effectiveness of the EaP. It is necessary to remind here that the initiative has been launched some two years ago and the Czech EU Presidency was followed by Sweden, Spain and Belgium. Thus, what I intend to do in this paper is to contextually analyse two types of documents coming from the EU:

- context of the Work Programmes of these four EU Presidencies related to the EaP in general or its member-states in particular,
- context of the 18-month programmes of the Council of the European Union.

It should be mentioned that the programmes for French presidency will not be considered as the French EU Presidency preceded the introduction of the EaP. Furthermore, the Polish presidency is also omitted whilst the Polish EU Presidency goes beyond the timing of this research. Hence, the Polish EU Presidency work programme as well as the 18-month

Programme of Polish, Danish and Cypriot Presidencies will remain out of the context of this research.

Thus, such an analysis enables to test whether there is any continuity in the EU policies toward six members of the EaP and whether there is coherence between the EU and the EaP countries' approaches toward the EaP initiative to eliminate here-and-now events from the discourse.

18-month Programme of French, Czech and Swedish Presidencies

This document embraced the guidelines for three consequent EU presidencies – French, Czech and Swedish lasting from July 1, 2008 to December 31, 2009 – so that their activities could be more coordinated with each other. In fact, each EU country might have its own priorities derived just from its geographic location, hence the coordinated 18-month programme enables them to bring their interests closer to each other and make the EU policy more consistent and achieve the best possible results.

The document consisted of two parts –

- the strategic framework part focusing on wider and long-term perspective and
- the operational programme, i.e. the aspects that should be covered within 18-month period.

The 18-month programme might be viewed as the first document of its kind where the term “Eastern Partnership” was mentioned and explained. The strategic framework programme referred to the “Eastern Partnership” within the context of the promotion of security, stability and prosperity of Europe. To achieve this end the strengthening of the EU relations with neighbouring countries within the EU Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) was foreseen. Within the EU Neighbourhood Policy two geographic dimensions were clearly divided:

- Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean, and
- Eastern Partnership.

Hence, there are three conclusions which can be made on the basis of this provision:

- The main area for the EU-EaP cooperation is viewed within the promotion of security, stability and prosperity in Europe,
- EaP is viewed a part of the ENP
- Accordingly it presumes equal treatment of the EaP and Mediterranean countries by the EU.

The second operational part of the Programme contains a chapter entitled “Neighbourhood Policy and “Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean.” Even though the chapter

mentions “the Eastern Partnership” initiative within the text of the chapter, the relations with the EaP countries are considered entirely within the ENP. The latter is regarded by the EU to be “an efficient tool to sustain the political and socio-economic reforms undertaken by the countries neighbouring the European Union in order to promote security, stability and prosperity” and the division into the eastern and the southern dimensions is made. The Programme underlines the need to strengthen the EU policies toward its eastern neighbours on both bilateral and multilateral level. In this connection the implementation of the EaP was foreseen for Spring 2009, however the modalities for it had not been set up in it.

Indeed, the EU intentions to enhance cooperation with the EaP countries may be revealed in order to help these countries to transform themselves into more secure, stable and prosperous so that they comply with the EU standards for the terms “security”, “stability”, and “prosperity.” The Programme treats all the EaP countries within the ENP framework and emphasises the case-by-case approach towards them. This is clearly seen from the text of the programme – while a new enhanced agreement with Ukraine which also includes free trade agreement was foreseen to be concluded within 18 months of the validity of the programme whilst the full-fledged cooperation of the EU with Belarus under the ENP framework was conditioned by the significant improvement of the political situation in this country. Four other countries of the EaP – Moldova, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia – are mentioned within the perspective of fostering their relations with the EU.

To sum up, it should also be mentioned that the EU’s eastern neighbourhood was drawn as a part of the Union’s transatlantic agenda whilst it was not mentioned on the Programme’s chapter devoted to Russia.

Hence, despite introduction of the term “Eastern Partnership” and differentiation of the eastern and southern dimensions in the EU relations with the neighbouring countries the 18-month Programme of French, Czech and Swedish Presidencies does not go beyond the option of the ENP in this issue. Nevertheless, the need for the enhancement of the cooperation in the eastern dimension may be seen a positive aspect even though limited within the ENP and thus insufficient.

Czech EU Presidency

The Czech EU Presidency lasted from January 1 to June 30, 2009 and its Working Programme was entitled “Europe without Barriers.” It is necessary to point out that the first part of the Working Programme’s chapter devoted to the Union’s external relations is entitled “The Eastern Partnership”. Hence, the relations between the EU and the six countries

involved into the EaP initiative are regarded as priority. This understanding is backed both by “historical ties and current challenges.” Working programme defined several key aspects of the Eastern Partnership to be implemented on various levels. It started with the economic dimension which implies energy, trade, environment and general economic cooperation. No less importance was paid to societal issues – democratisation and transformation processes, fundamental rights and freedoms protection as well as migration and mobility issues. Finally, multi-layer political and security cooperation was foreseen.

The Working Programme emphasised that the EaP was not a replacement but rather a supplement towards the geographically balanced development of the existing European Neighbourhood Policy. Therefore, here differentiated and individualised approach toward each of the EU partners applies similarly as it occurs under the ENP rules. However, the Working Programme emphasised the shortcomings of the ENP and claimed for enhanced and comprehensive EU policies toward the Eastern neighbours which deemed to be of the convenience of the entire Union. It is emphasised in the Programme that the inefficiency of the EU policies toward these six countries was screened during the conflict in Georgia and the events accompanied it. Therefore, the Programme foresaw the implementation of the Eastern Partnership initiative at the highest level of the EU member-states and six partner countries.

The peculiarity of the Working Programme was the description of the at least short-term perspective of the EU relations with each of its neighbours involved into the EaP. In case of Ukraine continuation of the negotiations on a new enhanced bilateral agreement was prescribed. The start of the similar negotiations with Moldova was foreseen. In case of the South Caucasian Countries – Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia – further facilitation of their relations with the EU within the ENP and EaP frameworks was expected. Among other issues in this direction the working process on the more comprehensive agreements between each of them and the EU was mentioned. Particular attention of the Czech Presidency was paid on the observing of the developments in the region to contribute into the security and stability of the entire region. The reconciliation of the ethnic conflicts in Georgia was pronounced a special concern and its settlement implied maintenance of the principles of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of this country. Belarus was considered another special case. Even though the inclusion of Belarus into the EaP initiative and participation of the Belarusian officials in the initiative opening summit was only conditionally conceded, the improvement of the Belarus-EU relations was expected. This improvement was sought to be embodied in a step-by-step facilitation of the constructive relations between the parties in two dimensions. The first one – political dimension – was aimed to establishing the momentum for the asserted dialogue

between the parties. The second one – societal – had the intention to support the country's civic society.

Therefore, I can assume that the Working Programme for the Czech EU Presidency puts the EU relations with the six countries currently involved into the EaP as a priority for the Union. It derives not only by the fact that the EaP initiative is put first in the list of the EU external relations and defined a priority. The ENP insufficiency for the EU relations with its Eastern neighbours and the need for a “regionalised” approach toward them were reasonably concluded and the expected short-term perspectives of the Union relations with each of its six Eastern partners were sketched. Therefore, one can regard the Czech EU Presidency Working Programme a solid justification in regard of the EaP implementation and also a practicable scheme for the future relations with each of the six partner countries. The Czech EU Presidency Working Programme also goes in line with the 18-month Programme of French, Czech and Swedish Presidencies clarifying and expanding its provisions.

Swedish EU Presidency

Sweden took the EU Presidency after the Czech Republic. It lasted from July 1 to December 31, 2009. It is necessary to underline that Sweden was one of the initiators of the EaP. Therefore, the EaP initiative found a comprehensive reflection in the Swedish EU Presidency Working Programme. Its part 1 entitled “Taking on the challenge” in the section “The EU's global role” started with a brief description of the importance of the EU relations with its neighbours. The collaboration under the ENP framework was underlined while the particular focus on the implementation of the Eastern Partnership was stressed.

The part 2 of the Working Programme named “Priorities within each Council configuration” contained more thorough descriptions of the Council of the European Union policies agenda. Its section two called “The EU as a global actor” started with description the relations with neighbouring countries which mentions EaP countries, Cyprus issue, Western Balkans, and Russia. The description of the EU relations with the neighbouring countries began with the mentioning of the ENP while the particular emphasis is made on the EaP implementation. It was underlined that the strengthening and deepening of the Union's relations with the EaP partners – each of them is named separately – should be organised in the three main areas: trade, migration and legislation. Such measures were aimed to ensure integration of these countries with the EU. The orientation of the Swedish Presidency toward implementation of “new multilateral cooperation, negotiations on association agreements and free trade, and steps to facilitate the mobility of people” defined at least mid-term goals of the

EaP. Special emphasis among these six countries was made on Ukraine where perspectives of association agreement and free trade issues were mentioned.

Therefore, all the measures listed in the Swedish EU Presidency programme imply enhanced cooperation on economic, societal, political and security issues which in practice means the coherent continuation of the Czech EU Presidency approach and undertakings and enhanced implementation of the 18-month Programme of French, Czech and Swedish Presidencies.

18-month Programme of Spanish, Belgian and Hungarian Presidencies

This document follows the previous the 18-month Programme of French, Czech and Swedish Presidencies and concerns three subsequent EU presidencies – Spanish, Belgian and Hungarian ones. The document represents a combined programme for the period from January 1, 2010 to June 30, 2011. Similarly to its predecessor, the Programme consists of two parts: strategic framework and operational programme.

The strategic framework part of the Programme refers to the Eastern Partnership initiative entirely within the context of the ENP. In this context a clear division between two foci of the ENP – the EaP and the Union for the Mediterranean is made and their development is to be fostered “in a coordinated and balanced manner.” Similarly to the previous 18-month Programme the document applies to the ENP within the context of the promotion of security, stability and prosperity of Europe. However, there is a clear sign on the desired level of the ENP cooperation announced by the EU. If the previous 18-month Programme claimed just further enhancement of the ENP through “strengthening of the Union’s relations with the countries on its eastern and southern borders”, the current one refers to its “full implementation.” Moreover, the goal aimed “to facilitating sustainable economic development and stability in the area” implies the EU readiness to more actively commit to the transformations in the neighbouring countries. Such an approach may be viewed as an attempt of the EU to become a real regional actor.

The operational programme contains a chapter entitled “Neighbourhood: Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean” which is addressed to the EU policies toward the EaP countries. Its content on the one hand creates an impression on the fact that the EU formally equates the EaP countries with those from the ENP southern dimension. This may be proven by the “equal attention to its [ENP] eastern and southern dimension.”

On the other hand there is a significant difference in the wording of this Programme in regard of the EaP countries. Indeed, similarly to the strategic framework part the more clear

involvement of the EU in the EaP countries is emphasised which goes in line with the EU intentions to promote security, stability and prosperity. The EaP region is proclaimed as the one of strategic importance for the EU and the Union's primary focus in these partner countries is drawn toward "promoting stability, good governance and economic development." As it was mentioned above, the implementation of these policies require more coherent involvement of the EU and may potentially increase its influence in the EaP countries. The possibilities for the expansion of the EU-EaP cooperation both on bilateral and multilateral level are split into three major and closely interconnected segments to be implemented in the EaP countries:

- accelerating reforms,
- legislative approximation and
- further economic integration.

Contrary to the previous 18-month Programme, this Programme neither distinguishes the EaP countries according to their progress (case of Ukraine) nor puts any conditions because of the political situation there (case of Belarus).

The programme foresees negotiations "for deep and comprehensive free trade agreements with partners that are members of the WTO." These undertakings however do not embrace all the EaP countries as well as require commitments of those interested (Azerbaijan and Belarus do not have WTO membership).

Another important step covered by the Programme is visa liberalisation. This matter however brings many controversies since the EU applies:

- case-by-case basis,
- considers this measure in a long-term goal and
- requires "conditions for well managed and secure mobility."

Therefore, one can hardly say about the reasonable solution of the visa issue which have become one of the most crucial aspects for the political discourses in most of the EaP countries.

It necessary to admit that the Programme sets timing for the second Eastern Partnership Summit to be held in the first half of 2011. Another important issue is the EU commitment for the implementation of the European regional strategies that also embrace some EaP countries on the principle of their consistence with the ENP. The Programme names two of them – the Northern Dimension and the Black Sea Synergy.

Summing up the contents of the Programme of Spanish, Belgian and Hungarian Presidencies I can conclude that the EaP is regarded strictly as a part of the ENP with all

relevant consequences. Despite more solid and precise contents of the Programme which require more involvement of the EU in the EaP countries the wording of the Programme is accurate enough to make a conclusion that all the goals set up by the EU have long-term perspective.

Spanish EU Presidency

Spanish EU Presidency was the inaugural one in its cycle of three EU Presidencies and lasted from January 1 to June 30, 2010. Its Working Programme was entitled “Innovating Europe.” It may be assumed that the Working Programme of the Spanish EU Presidency formally complies with the provisions of the 18-month Programme of Spanish, Belgian and Hungarian Presidencies which in its turn can be seen a solid continuation of its predecessor in regard of the EaP dimension of the EU policies. However, its contents can be seen neither progressive nor favourable toward the EaP countries.

Chapter III of the Programme entitled “Europe: a global, responsible and supportive player” in its part 4 “Close and balanced neighbourhood relations” draws Spanish vision toward the EaP countries. Underlining the importance of prosperity and stability of Europe, Spain eloquently stresses its “defence of the unitary nature of the European neighbourhood policy” so that the balanced progress of its Mediterranean and Eastern dimensions could be achieved. The role of the EaP initiative is seen mostly as that necessary “to facilitate the progressive approach of these six countries to the European Union.” Such formulations imply that for Spain the EaP does not belong to the priorities and it considerably halts if not puts back the initiatives and undertakings evoked during Czech and Swedish EU Presidencies.

This approach is also embodied in the Chapter “Operational Programme of Council Configurations”, notably in its part 2 “Foreign Affairs.” First, the section on the EaP is much more general than the similar one on the Mediterranean countries. Second, the location of the EaP/ENP section is behind Transatlantic (incl. Central and Southern America) relations and EU-Russia relations. Third, such formulations as “on the Eastern track of the ENP, focus will be placed on the processes opened in the Eastern Partnership to reinforce the EU relations with the six Eastern neighbours both bilaterally and multilaterally” do not contain many specifics. Hence, Spanish approach toward the EaP countries may be viewed as that aimed on the renewal of the expired Action Plans and preparation of the third round of the thematic platforms in the EU-EaP bilateral and multilateral relations. In this context the Working Programme makes special emphasis to Ukraine which is the only EaP country separately mentioned there.

Spanish peculiarity is the attitude toward the EU relations with the EaP countries embodied in the Working Programme which may be formulated as “consider Russia”. Russia-EU relations are defined as strategic that should be “based on an earnest and constructive approach of common interdependency” (Chapter III). In this connection implementation of the roadmaps with Russia is foreseen in the following areas: “energy cooperation, the negotiations of the new post PCA Agreement, mobility simplification and global matters” (Operational Programme). These measures clearly emphasise bigger importance of Russia over the EaP countries for the Spanish vision of the EU development. However, the most notable part of the Working Programme within this paper is the Spain’s willingness to encourage Russia’s participation in Eastern Partnership programmes within the European neighbourhood Policy framework.” I can assume that such an approach devaluates the very idea of the EaP initiative since the EaP could potentially become dominated by Russia’s interests in this case. Accordingly, should Russia be included in it the EaP might become a tool to spread Russia’s influence in all six current EaP members.

Thus, Spanish EU Presidency may be characterised by different priorities and seen as a considerable rollback of the EaP initiative which may be regarded as a coherent continuation of Czech and Swedish EU Presidencies.

Belgian EU Presidency

The Belgian EU Presidency was scheduled from July 1 to December 31, 2010. Its Working Programme was entitled “Europe in Action!” Its general provisions laid within the scope of the 18-month Programme of Spanish, Belgian and Hungarian Presidencies.

However, the Belgian EU Presidency Working Programme may be characterised as the one with the least attention to the EaP initiative. There were only a few positions related to the EaP in general and its members in particular. The EaP countries in Belgian view belong neither to the EU priorities nor to its strategic partners. The countries of the EaP were mentioned only within the context of the Justice and Home Affairs domain. The Working Programme provision assured that the cooperation between the EU and its Eastern Partners will be continued.

The Belgian EU Presidency Working Programme did not mention any EaP members except Ukraine. In case of this country, it was emphasised that in 2010 progress was to be made in the EU-Ukraine negotiations. Interestingly, the “Euromed zone” countries were mentioned along with Ukraine whilst other five EaP members were not considered at all.

Hence, it is possible to conclude that the Belgian EU Presidency Programme in regard of the EaP may be evaluated as a rollback comparing even with the Spanish EU Presidency Working Programme. Moreover, formulations of the Belgian EU Presidency Working Programme offer very little comparing to circumspective but still rather ambitious 18-month Programme of Spanish, Belgian and Hungarian Presidencies.

Hungarian EU Presidency

Being the last party to the Spanish-Belgian-Hungarian EU trio, the Hungarian EU Presidency lasted from January 1 to June 30, 2011 and was entitled “Strong Europe with a Human Touch”. Its agenda was predominantly formed by “handling the consequences of the economic crisis and launching new forms of cooperation.” Nevertheless, the Hungarian EU Presidency Programme represents a document that draws considerable more attention to the EaP programme than the presidency programme of its Belgian predecessor. The Hungarian ambitions were on the one hand reasoned by the new structure of the EU external relations emerged as a result of the Lisbon Treaty. In this view the Hungarian EU presidency was seen as those aimed “to work closely with the actors in this new framework in order to provide coherence and efficiency in the international engagements of the EU.” On the other hand, it was expected thus to “maintain the openness of the European Union.” These two provisions are set in the Programme’s strategic framework part devoted to the EU external relations (part 4). The structure of this part itself requires closer attention – it is subdivided into two parts “Enlargement” and “External Relations.” The later in the first instance was focused on the ENP countries and declared the renewing of the ENP as a special priority to strengthen the EU relations with those countries “in economic, political and cultural terms.” Despite the fact the Hungarian EU presidency emphasised the need for a strong Euro-Mediterranean partnership, its major focus was eloquently put to the EaP. Hungarian EU presidency sought to strengthen the EU relations with all six EaP countries so that the political framework provided by the EaP could be filled with “targeted programmes and projects” that on the differentiated basis could meet the needs and demands of the EaP countries. The second EaP summit initially scheduled under the Hungarian EU presidency was thought to become the key event in implementation of these tasks. Thus, on the one hand, the EaP was believed to become the key priority of the EU foreign policies under Hungarian presidency and on the other hand it was expected to renew it so that it could be filled with practical content oriented toward needs of the EaP countries.

The operational part of the Hungarian EU presidency programme touches the EaP issue twice – within the external dimension of the JHA policies (part 3) and as a part of the EU external relations (part 10). The former foresees the EU support of the initiatives aimed at strengthening stability and security of the EaP countries. Within this context the endeavours to reach progress “in the visa dialogues with Russia, Ukraine and Moldova” are also mentioned. Such a formulation on the one hand confirms that the case-by-case approach dominates the EU-EaP relations (hence, the progress of Ukraine and Moldova is distinguished). On the other hand, mentioning of Russia under this context indirectly resembles Spanish EU presidency attitude aimed at considering Russia under the EaP/ENP framework activities.

The EaP countries are seen as strategic partners within the context of the Programme’s operational part on the EU foreign relations. The EU approach toward them is described as “tailor-made strategies on individual partners” which again proves the application of the case-by-case basis and consequently marginalises the added value of the entire EaP initiative. It should also be emphasised that despite this quite high ranking of the EaP initiative within the context of the EU foreign policies, none of the EaP countries have specifically been mentioned in this part of the Programme.

The Hungarian EU presidency Programme expected the second EaP summit to take place in May 2011 as “one of the highlights of the Hungarian Presidency” that marks “the ongoing review of the ENP.” This, however, did not occur as the summit was rescheduled to take place under the auspices of the Polish EU presidency and thus within the next Polish-Danish-Cypriot trio of EU presidencies. It means that despite quite ambitious agenda that seemed to qualitatively improve the rollback of Spanish and Belgian EU presidencies did not meet its declared EaP-related goals. Simultaneously, failure of Hungarian EU presidency to achieve the EaP-related goals also meant the failure of the EU to practically implement the EU-related provisions of the 18-month Programme of Spanish, Belgian and Hungarian Presidencies. Hence, despite the promising start of the EaP initiative under the previous EU trio, the entire 1.5 years of Spanish, Belgian and Hungarian EU presidencies may be seen as a failure of the EU to clearly define its priorities toward the EaP partner countries resulted into time-wasting and the Union’s inability to effectively implement the result-oriented programmes that meet the needs and demands of the EaP countries that could have demonstrated the declared EU openness toward these countries.

Conclusion

Even though it had a promising start, the EaP initiative has serious shortcomings. First, despite the declared approximation between the EaP and EU countries, there is no mentioning on the EU membership perspective for these countries even in a long-term perspective. This largely contradicts with the foreign policy (FP) aims proclaimed by Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine that settled EU integration as one of their FP priorities. Moreover, there is no clear evidence how the programme priorities such as political and economic integration or lifting visas may universally be solved. Instead, there is the approach that still dominates in the EU that countries should be a case-by-case basis. This marginalises the added value of the EaP initiative.

Second, the EaP initiative was brought by Poland and Sweden, countries whose geopolitical interests lay with the EaP area. However, there can be many doubts on the issue whether other EU countries with different strategic priorities may equally contribute to the EaP development. Despite the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty we still hardly say on the common EU FP.

This all can be viewed from the content analysis of the Work Programmes of these four EU Presidencies related to the EaP in general or its member-states in particular, as well as from two 18-month programmes of the Council of the European Union. The differences in the approach toward the EaP countries existing in the EU have been proven by the debate in the Union over the Spanish EU Presidency's initiative on visa liberalisation with Russia. It has been stated by some countries (Sweden, Estonia, etc) that in this case the EaP states should be prioritised. However, other countries – such as Spain, Belgium and also Italy – do not share this view which imposes the question of the lack of interest of these countries in the EaP initiative. Thus, the development of the peoples' mobility issue which has been set as one of the key factors for the EaP proves that there could be serious doubts over the general effectiveness of the EaP initiative until it at least becomes a clearly-settled EU priority.

It might be possible that the forthcoming Polish EU Presidency scheduled from July 1 to December 31, 2011 could change the situation toward the better shape. There are several assumptions to expect this even though they all may be considered hypothetical conclusions. First, it is expected that the second Eastern Partnership Summit, initially foreseen as a part of the Hungarian EU Presidency and potentially can mean qualitative re-activation or reshaping of the EaP, is to take place under the Polish EU Presidency. Second, similarly to the Czech Republic and Hungary, Poland is a country which strategic interests lay clearly within the EaP region and is a post-communist state that has successfully undergone economic and political transitions which implies better understanding of the EaP countries and their needs. Third,

Poland might have a special interest in Ukraine and Belarus due to the existence of common border as well as historical and cultural ties with these two countries. These three factors might potentially change the situation with the EU-EaP relations for the time being of the Polish EU Presidency.

However, all the current trends just prove the fact that either the EaP would clearly set up as one of the EU priorities with clearly-settled agenda or the EaP would be balanced between vain promises and insufficient measures.

Sources

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