

# EASTERN PARTNERSHIP

The Role and Significance  
in the Process  
of Transformation  
of the Countries  
of Eastern Europe  
and the South Caucasus

EDITED BY  
PIOTR BAJOR





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of Transformation of the Countries  
of Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus**

**edited by  
PIOTR BAJOR**




**Kraków**

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Piotr Bajor

Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2569-2552>

 [piotr.bajor@uj.edu.pl](mailto:piotr.bajor@uj.edu.pl)

Review: Marek Delong

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# Introduction

The study is devoted to the issue of the implementation of the Eastern Partnership programme and is the result of an international project, “The role and significance of the Eastern Partnership in the transformation process of Eastern European and South Caucasus countries”. The project was implemented in 2021 as part of the public task funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland in the “Public Diplomacy 2021” competition. While the research results and views presented in the publication do not reflect the position of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, they contain only the opinions of their authors.

The project was implemented by an international consortium of universities, including the Jagiellonian University in Krakow, Yerevan State University, Chisinau Moldova State University, Tbilisi State University, Lviv State University and the International Security and Partnership Centre in Lviv.

The project’s purpose was to conduct research on the role and significance of the Eastern Partnership in the transformation process of the countries covered by the programme and analyse the impact of individual tools on systemic changes in Armenia, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. An important element of the activities carried out was the preparation of recommendations for particular aspects of political processes. They are also part of the individual articles prepared by an international team of scientists from Poland, Ukraine, Moldova, Armenia and Georgia.

The implementation of the Eastern Partnership programme is an extremely important process from the point of view of international conditions, geopolitical order and security in the region of Central and Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus. The articles contained in the publication – concerning particular aspects of political, social and economic processes, together with recommendations – are intended to make an important contribution to the development of scientific research devoted to this matter and contribute to the international discussion on the future of the Eastern Partnership and the socio-political transformation processes in the countries covered by this programme.

Piotr Bajor



ADRIAN TYSZKIEWICZ 

*Jagiellonian University in Kraków*

## The Eastern Partnership as a Structural Actor A Geopolitical Perspective

**ABSTRACT:** The subject of the analysis is to show the institutional meaning of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) presented as a sub-system of the European Union, being one of the two regional pillars of the European Neighbourhood Policy. Reference to general systems theory, in particular to the political metaphor of organisation, which in this case treats the subject of analysis as a (geo)political system, allows the identification of the basic civilisational (Europeanisation, Euro-unionisation), socio-political (standardisation of values and institutional solutions) and economic (liberalisation of flows and generation of modernisation) processes that make EaP a relatively coherent and contained whole. Recalling the theoretical conceptual categories of S.B. Cohen's theoretical categories highlight the centrifugal nature – from the point of view of the geopolitical interests of the Russian Federation – of the impulses unleashed by the EaP, which run counter to the objective tendency for contemporary Russia to restore and maintain its influence in the countries – former republics of the USSR and parallel participants in the EaP (Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan).

**KEYWORDS:** The European Union, the Eastern Partnership, Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, geopolitics, the Russian Federation

## 1. Introduction – The Eastern Partnership as an organisation

The geopolitical approach to the division of space-time understood as the natural environment of social activity gives rise to a number of consequences. One is the obvious necessity to adopt a scientific analytical convention that would introduce both an ontological and epistemological perspective. For the purpose of this analysis, which is focused on the reflection on the spatial significance of the European Union's Eastern Partnership (EaP) programme, it was assumed that the aforementioned programme is an organisation manifested institutionally and process-wise (i.e., by means of institutions and interactions of international character which together form a coherent, compact system of political character). Therefore, this reasoning is based on the approach that uses the system metaphor, particularly the geopolitical system as an adequate matrix in explaining the spatio-temporal context of<sup>1</sup> the functioning of the Eastern Partnership.

The use of the systemic model, which is particularly widespread in the organisation and management sciences, stems from the convention present in the discourse since the second half of the 1990s of treating geopolitics as a structure. The approach, proposed by John Agnew and Stuart Corbridge, assumes a holistic study of structured reality through the following categories: geopolitical order, geopolitical economic governance, geopolitical hegemony and primacy, territorial and technological complexes and geopolitical conditions.<sup>2</sup> This means, as Jakub Potulski stated, that geopolitical research supported by the structural category allows for “a comprehensive analysis of international reality, taking into account such elements as culture, technology, ideology, economy, structure in connection with spatial processes and phenomena that determine the geopolitical structure of the modern world.”<sup>3</sup>

It follows from the above that striving to treat objective reality as a whole allows for distinguishing its essential elements, important from the point of view of the logic of the existence and functioning of a given organisation. According to Anatol Rapoport, in order to justify the existence of the system, it is necessary to meet the following criteria: the presence of identifiable elements that make up the system, the presence of at least one relationship between the components of the system, the possibility

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<sup>1</sup> By introducing the category of “(political) space-time,” I refer directly to the achievements of political geography, where all activities of a political nature can be considered in the context of space as a specific point of reference (social activity space – geographical area – political territory) for the political process expressed in a unit of time.

<sup>2</sup> J. Potulski, *Wprowadzenie do geopolityki (Introduction to Geopolitics)*, Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego 2010, pp. 58–61.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

of multiplying subsequent, individual system dependencies and their relationships (complexes).<sup>4</sup> These general characteristics of the system can be detailed through the political perspective, where the key role is played by six categories – among which one in particular corresponds with the main component of the structural understanding of geopolitics (i.e., the issue of geopolitical order understood as an organised system of international management) in which there are equal forces that integrate and disintegrate the system.<sup>5</sup> It is about analysing and understanding the operation of an organisation (system) as its policy (as highlighted by G. Morgan). Therefore, as the Eastern Partnership is a system composed of certain elements and triggers certain dependencies, it behaves as a political actor aiming to achieve goals under certain conditions of cooperation or competition for specific resources, creates alliances and agreements, and uses various means of expansion to obtain a specific place in the market.<sup>6</sup> Ultimately, in its operation, the Eastern Partnership releases both strengthening forces, integrating its own system (EU sub-system), but also disintegrating the competitive system animated by the Russian Federation.

## 2. The Eastern Partnership – a strategic extension of the EU's civilisational offer

The idea of the Eastern Partnership, initiated by the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs Radosław Sikorski leading a group of officials of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs,<sup>7</sup> became the second component of the so-called “European Neighbourhood Policy” (ENP) alongside the Mediterranean one, formulated and formally implemented by the European Union since 2004. As noted by Olga Barburska, an initiative involving 400 million people living in a total of 17 countries (stretching from Gibraltar to the Caucasus) was characterised by a combination of essentially different civilisation circles and levels of economic development or political systems.<sup>8</sup> Since the concept of conducting an integrated foreign policy towards the southern Mediterranean, Central

<sup>4</sup> Cf.: B. Kaczmarek, *Organizacje. Polityka, władza, struktury* (Organisations. Politics, Power, Structures), Warszawa: Międzynarodowa Szkoła Menedżerów 2001, p. 51.

<sup>5</sup> J. Potulski, *Wprowadzenie do...*, p. 58.

<sup>6</sup> Cf.: B. Kaczmarek, *Organizacje...*, pp. 88–89.

<sup>7</sup> R. Sikorski, *Polska może być lepsza. Kulisy polskiej dyplomacji* (Poland Could Be Better. Behind the Scenes of Polish Diplomacy), Kraków: Społeczny Instytut Wydawniczy Znak 2018, p. 22.

<sup>8</sup> O. Barburska, *Polityka wschodnia Unii Europejskiej jako część składowa polityki zagranicznej UE* (Eastern Policy of the European Union as a Component of the EU Foreign Policy), Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza Aspra 2018, p. 174.

and Eastern Europe and the Caucasus presupposed the establishment and deepening of sectoral cooperation within the framework of EU public policy, it was necessary to find tangible and effective means of maintaining and deepening this cooperation in the face of civilisational differences and differing visions of the intended effects of the relationship. Such an element became a specific policy of systemic solutions and values that would create, in the areas mentioned above, a civilisational community reflecting the universal value of the cultural heritage of Western civilisation and standardised solutions related to economic policy, the place of the individual and their rights in society or the issue of pluralistic democratic representation.

The above diagnosis is confirmed by the clear position of Radosław Sikorski, the Head of Polish Diplomacy from 2007–2014 (i.e., in the period when the EaP program was initiated and systematically implemented). Sikorski assumed that the European Neighbourhood Policy in the eastern direction is civilisationally justified and logical as it concerns “European neighbours” and not “Europe’s neighbours,” unlike the countries bordering the EU in the south and south-east. Therefore, for this reason, it was declared and desirable to support transformation processes towards achieving a level equal to the EU *acquis communautaire*.<sup>9</sup>

The aforementioned thesis on the civilisational compatibility of the EaP countries is perfectly consistent with Mike Mannin’s fundamental remarks concerning the essence of the European civilisational offer, which in the twentieth century took the form of Europeanisation (only to transform after the fall of communism into broad ‘EU-isation’). According to the aforementioned interpretation, it is an objective phenomenon that the EU uses instruments that trigger civilisational and political influence which, in a broader sense (Europeanisation), implies the existence of a process of ideological, institutional and political transformation generated by the EU understood as a centre of power which is to lead in the member states and others (e.g., associated or cooperating countries, to the achievement of fundamental EU objectives and values). In a narrower, more technical sense, Europeanisation means the pragmatic

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<sup>9</sup> *Informacja ministra spraw zagranicznych Radosława Sikorskiego na temat polityki zagranicznej RP w 2008 r. (Information by Minister of Foreign Affairs Radosław Sikorski on the Foreign Policy of the Republic of Poland in 2008)*. In: A. Orzelska-Stączek et al., *Ministrowie spraw zagranicznych Polski w latach 2005–2015. (Polish Foreign Ministers in 2005–2015)*, Warszawa: Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN 2016, p. 182; *Informacja ministra spraw zagranicznych Radosława Sikorskiego na temat polityki zagranicznej RP w 2010 r. (Information by Minister of Foreign Affairs Radosław Sikorski on the Foreign Policy of the Republic of Poland in 2010)*. In: A. Orzelska-Stączek et al., *Ministrowie spraw zagranicznych...*, pp. 219–220.

acceptance of the founding principles of the EU and the application of basic norms (individual dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and human rights).<sup>10</sup>

At the heart of this phenomenon is the evolving European identity, which is both an element of discourse and reception within the EU and within the framework of neighbourhood cooperation. It can be considered with the help of indicators that create a conceptual matrix, where we find such elements as a sense of cultural belonging to Europe and the nation-state and political to the EU, a European sense of community expressed symbolically through “we” and the ability to distinguish other non-European cultures, values, practices, etc.<sup>11</sup>

The process of extending the civilisational influence of Europe/the European Union is thus based on civilisational, socio-cultural and political foundations – which, in institutional projects, take on specific content consisting of assumptions, goals and a range of activities aimed at effective implementation. In this context, the Eastern Partnership programme – understood as a sub-system of the EU – can be compared to an organisation’s development strategy, where one can distinguish its main stages, i.e., mission (here civilisational), vision (defined by the goals formulated and possibly modified by the initiators – the definition of the future desired state) and strategy and implementation activities (a comprehensive plan for achieving the goals using activities at different levels – strategic, operational and tactical).<sup>12</sup>

While the mission of the EaP was outlined above in the context of civilisational, cultural and institutional processes, the vision itself (strategic planning and implementation) requires a broader reference. The vision for the development of the EaP organisation stems directly from the initiators’ ideas and the policies of the management bodies. In the case under consideration, it refers to the formal initiative of Poland and Sweden of May 23, 2008, and the series of positions and decisions of the European Commission between June and December, 2008. This decision package, following the formal announcement of the programme by the Commission on May 7, 2009, at the first Prague Partnership Summit, also included a complimentary strategic plan for the organisation and implementation of the EaP processes and the resulting multi-annual implementation activities.

<sup>10</sup> Cf.: M. Mannin, *Europeanisation as a Past and Present Narrative*. In: M. Mannin, P. Flenley (eds.), *The European Union and Its Eastern Neighbourhood: Europeanisation and Its Twenty-First-Century Contradictions*, Manchester: Manchester University Press 2018, pp. 10–11.

<sup>11</sup> N. Siklodi, *Defining Contemporary European Identity/ies*. In: M. Mannin, P. Flenley (eds.), *The European Union...*, p. 37.

<sup>12</sup> Cf.: R.W. Griffin, *Podstawy zarządzania organizacjami (Fundamentals of Organisation Management)*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN 2004, pp. 211–219.

In the context of outlining the expected state of affairs (vision), it should be stated that assuming deepened bilateral cooperation with the participant states (where Ukraine was of particular importance), it was declared that integration instruments would be created in the form of a permanent formula for multilateral cooperation convergent with existing regional solutions (here the examples of the Visegrad Group or the Union for the Mediterranean, promoted simultaneously by France as part of the European Neighbourhood Policy, constituted a reference group).<sup>13</sup> Agnieszka Cianciara is right when she mentions the EaP as a programme motivated above all by a Polish, national perspective resulting from specific assumptions and preferences as well as historical and economic ties to the region – here Eastern Europe.<sup>14</sup> In this context, an obvious reference related to the tradition of political thought would be the idea of the Piłsudski-ites' [supporters of Poland's Marshal Józef Piłsudski's translator's note] concept of the "Międzymorze" (the Intra-Mediterranean Sea), which united the cooperation of the states lying on the Gdańsk-Odessa axis or the "ULB" project [Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus] proposed by representatives of the post-war political emigration – Juliusz Mieroszewski and Jerzy Giedroyc.<sup>15</sup>

It was, therefore, desirable to create a system which would allow countries with EU accession aspirations (Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia) and those wishing to establish

<sup>13</sup> B. Wojna, M. Gniazdowski (eds.), *Eastern Partnership: The Opening Report*, Warszawa: PISM 2009, pp. 5, 73.

<sup>14</sup> A. Cianciara, *Partnerstwo Wschodnie 2009–2014 (Eastern Partnership 2009–2014)*, Warszawa: ISP PAN 2014, p. 36. The author, cited in the source footnote, also points to the operational 'endogenous' reason for the enlargement of the EaP to the South Caucasus as the prospects for pro-democratic changes triggered by Georgia's so-called Rose Revolution – *ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> See e.g.: W. Paruch, *Konsolidacja Państw Europy Środkowej – od Międzymorza do Trzeciej Europy (Consolidation of Central European Countries – from the Intermarium to the Third Europe)*. In: W. Paruch, *Myśl polityczna obozu piłsudczykowskiego 1926–1939 (Political Thought of the Piłsudski Camp 1926–1939)*, Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS 2005, pp. 689–703; A. Friszke, *Między Niemcami, Rosją a 'ULB'. Program geopolityczny paryskiej 'Kultury' (Between Germany, Russia and 'ULB'. The Geopolitical Program of the Paris 'Kultura')*. In: A. Friszke, *Przystosowanie i opór. Studia z dziejów PRL (Adaptation and Resistance. Studies in the History of the Polish People's Republic)*, Warszawa: Więź 2007, pp. 346–358; M. Kornat, *Realizm środków, idealizm wizji. O geopolitycznej wizji Jerzego Giedroycia i Juliusza Mieroszewskiego. (Realism of Means, Idealism of Vision. About the Geopolitical Vision of Jerzy Giedroyc and Juliusz Mieroszewski)*. In: J. Kłoczkowski (ed.), *Przekłete miejsce Europy? Dylematy polskiej geopolityki*, Kraków: Ośrodek Myśli Politycznej 2009. At: <http://www.polskietradycje.pl/artykuly/widok/310>, last accessed November 11, 2021; M. Urbańczyk, *Idea ULB (Ukraina-Litwa-Białoruś) w myśli Jerzego Giedroycia i Juliusza Mieroszewskiego (The Idea of ULB (Ukraine-Lithuania-Belarus) in the Thought of Jerzy Giedroyc and Juliusz Mieroszewski)*. In: P. Fiktus, H. Małewski, M. Marszał (eds.), *Rodzinna Europa. Europejska myśl polityczno-prawna u progu XXI wieku (Home Europe. European Political and Legal Thought at the Threshold of the 21st Century)*, Wrocław: E-Wydawnictwo. Prawnicza i Ekonomiczna Biblioteka Cyfrowa 2015, pp. 309–322.



and maintain broad, strategic cooperation on a range of issues (Belarus,<sup>16</sup> Armenia, Azerbaijan) – following the example of the Visegrad Group – not only to negotiate with the EU from the position of a collective and therefore stronger partner, but also to strengthen their mutual relations. An additional assumption was to exchange experiences through intensive contact between the EU and the programme countries – and to play a game aimed at shaping the leader of the new region (EaP), who will set the pace of pro-European changes. Ultimately, the accession and sectoral deepened cooperation as a result of EU-EaP relations would become a new element of the geopolitical landscape<sup>17</sup> on the eastern and south-eastern border of a united Europe.

The implementation strategy of the EaP programme presupposed certain standardised steps which would not ultimately result in the signing of an accession agreement as part of the EaP programme package – but through the strengthening of European (EU) economic, legal and political standards – would either enable the eventual pursuit of accession to EU structures or consolidate bilateral, in-depth relations excluding the prospect of membership.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, the initial outlining and then the establishment and long-term implementation of key processes strengthening partnership relations between the EU and the partnership countries – particularly in the areas of trade, energy security, internal affairs, migration policy and environmental issues beyond the sphere of individual participant policies: trade, energy security, internal affairs, migration policy and environmental protection issues that go beyond the sphere of individual participant policies.<sup>19</sup>

The assumed bilateral solutions included replacing the existing partnership and cooperation agreements with association agreements, which was made conditional on achieving goals related to the standards of the rule of law, democratic solutions and civil rights, signing in-depth free trade agreements, which were conditional on the earlier accession of countries partnerships with the World Trade Organisation (WTO)

<sup>16</sup> The case of Belarus was subject to doubts from the very beginning, which resulted in the assumption of cooperation at the expert and technical level, which could be deepened under favourable conditions. The Polish-Swedish original proposal also included the Russian Federation as a potential partner within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy; European Neighbourhood Policy, *Polish-Swedish Proposal: Eastern Partnership 2008*. In: B. Wojna, M. Gniazdowski (eds.), *Eastern Partnership: The Opening...*, p. 74.

<sup>17</sup> Cf.: R. Sikorski, *Polska może być lepsza...*, pp. 22–24.

<sup>18</sup> Cf.: M. Muftuler-Bac, A. Gorgulu, *Turkey and the European Union: Partners in Foreign Policy Cooperation in the South Caucasus*. In: M. Wilga, I.P. Karolewski (eds.), *New Approaches to UE Foreign Policy*, Abingdon–New York: Routledge 2014, p. 225.

<sup>19</sup> M. Sus, *The High Representative and the European External Action Service. Towards Institutional Coherence in the Eastern Partnership*. In: M. Wilga, I.P. Karolewski (eds.), *New Approaches...*, p. 61.

would additionally be a prelude to the creation of a regional economic community within the EaP; liberalisation of mobility processes related to visa and asylum policy, taking into account the condition of counteracting illegal immigration; strengthening security and energy cooperation through integration within the Energy Community except Azerbaijan, for which integration with the EU market and energy infrastructure are provided. The concept of multilateral cooperation, extended from the original Polish-Swedish proposal, was based on the organisation of multi-level multilateral cooperation (summits of the EU and the EaP states; summits of heads of diplomacy; the organisation of and meetings within the so-called “thematic platforms” with the participation of representatives of the European Commission (EC) and the given EU presidency; working platforms supporting thematic platforms); the organisation of flagship initiatives in the area of border management policy; facilitation for medium and small companies, energy policy – here cooperation in the area of the so-called “southern energy corridor,” renewable sources and the prevention of natural and technological disasters. In addition, the development of interparliamentary cooperation and the creation of a so-called “Civil Society Forum” were foreseen. Sources of funding were to be based on amounts allocated explicitly to the partnership programme and transferred from the so-called “Regional East Partnership.”<sup>20</sup>

The more than ten-year period of operation of the EaP Program resulted in effects that were separate in terms of meaning. On the one hand, EaP as a sub-system of the EU has initiated and strengthened, especially in the group of so-called “primates” (Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia), standardisation and modernisation processes, consisting in: signing and implementing association agreements and the deep free trade area, as well as easing the visa regime. Effective factors of the established cooperation also include the functioning of forums for intergovernmental cooperation at each level, the existence of five flagship initiatives, facilitating interpersonal relations, especially in the field of youth exchange, and the policy of strengthening access to the cultural, educational and scientific offer (programmes: Eastern Partnership Culture and Common Knowledge and Innovation Space).<sup>21</sup>

The tendency, which is opposed to deepening cooperation and strengthening ties in EU-EaP relations, emerged in the context of the position of Belarus, Armenia and, to some extent, Azerbaijan. The first of these countries, from the very beginning of the partnership initiative, was rightly considered a potential program participant rather

<sup>20</sup> A. Cianciara, *Partnerstwo Wschodnie...*, pp. 45–47.

<sup>21</sup> O. Barbarska, *Polityka wschodnia...*, pp. 206–211; G. Gromadzki, B. Sendhardt (eds.), *Eastern Partnership Revisited. Associated Countries in Focus*, Warsaw: The Stefan Batory Foundation and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung 2015, pp. 11–13.

than a real partner. The reason for this state of affairs was the authoritarian practices of President Alexander Lukashenko, which resulted not only in the limitation of civil rights and economic stagnation, but also in the fight against the official political opposition by force or any autonomous civic activity (e.g., related to journalistic activity or social self-organisation). Despite the fact that in 1995 a partnership and cooperation agreement was signed with the EU, the agreement has never been ratified. The attitude of the Belarusian authorities also continues to deny the need for reforms in the spirit of democratic rules, human rights, the existence of independent non-governmental organisations and good governance practices. As a result, contemporary Belarus is shifting towards bilateral rather than multilateral solutions, especially in the context of economic cooperation devoid of any element of socio-political changes according to democratic values.<sup>22</sup>

Armenia, despite some clear modernisation trends resulting from the effects of the EU easing customs tariffs, visa restrictions on passenger traffic or having an air traffic agreement or – in particular – the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (2017), is unable to take serious steps due to the seeking a balance in relations both with the EU and Russia, which is a guarantee of security. In particular, it concerns the permanent Armenian-Azerbaijan conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh – the next edition of which took place in 2020, ending with Armenia's clear defeat and strengthening (not only Azerbaijan's position territorially, but also Russia's actual omnipotence in the context of its military presence and the principles of the functioning of the new *status quo*).<sup>23</sup>

Azerbaijan can be assessed as the country least interested in broad participation in the regulations resulting from the EaP. The authorities in Baku show interest in strengthening energy relations with the EU thanks to gas supplies directly from Azerbaijan via the Southern Gas Pipeline. The issue of trade with the EU is no less important, especially in the context of energy resources. Despite some progress regarding, for example, judicial reforms and the fight against corruption, resulting from the signing of the so-called "Partnership Priorities" in 2018, Azerbaijanis are not interested in evolving the political system in a European spirit, which is reinforced not only by Russia's influence, but also by strong ties with Ankara – which is forming a new formula of Pan-Turkism.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> E. Kaca (ed.), *The Eastern Partnership Vision after 2020*, Warsaw: PISM 2019, pp. 24–25.

<sup>23</sup> Cf.: W. Górecki, *Górski Karabach: kapitulacja Armenii, sukces Rosji* (Nagorno-Karabakh: Armenia's Capitulation, Russia's Success), October 11, 2020. At: <https://www.osw.waw.pl/pl/publikacje/analizy/2020-11-10/gorski-karabach-kapitulacja-armenii-sukces-rosji>, last accessed November 12, 2021.

<sup>24</sup> Cf.: E. Kaca (ed.), *The Eastern Partnership Vision...*, pp. 27–28.

### 3. Geopolitical contraction – the Russian Federation in pursuit of the restoration of the western and southern frontiers of the former empire

In the introduction to the brilliant and extremely valuable sketch in the field of popular geopolitics, Tim Marshall noted that taking into account geographic (physiographic) conditions, especially related to the topography, is one of the geopolitical axioms of contemporary Russia. He expressed it in a specific way, stating that: "If God created mountains in Ukraine, the vast plains of the Central European Plain would not be such an ideal place for the frequent attacks carried out against Russia. But in the present situation, Putin has little choice but to take control of the plains to the West. This is true of all nations, big and small. Leaders are trapped by the territory they control. Its shape limits choices and space to make decisions more than you might think."<sup>25</sup>

The above intriguing statement corresponds to the geographical and systemic (i.e., geopolitical) view of international relations presented by Saul Bernard Cohen, the founder and promoter of the holistic theory of multipolar regionalism. In one of his last texts, this recently deceased eminent representative of humanistic geography stressed that international reality is reduced to a system that renews itself as a matter of principle and according to the rules, where interconnected entities and phenomena function in parallel with the entry of new elements and the exit of old ones. The system is, therefore, in principle, open, receptive to change, which determines its survival and development, as opposed to a geopolitically closed system, which inevitably faces regression.<sup>26</sup> Thus, referring to the case of the Eastern Partnership, it can be concluded that for the European Union (existing institutionally and in terms of process [system]), the formula of developing cooperation in Eastern Europe and parts of Caucasus brings new development impulses (input elements), which processed in the form of systemic strategic and operational initiatives produce final effects (output elements), enriched conditioning reproduction of the cycle. The problem is that the gain of a powerful geopolitical player (the EU) is transformed, on the basis of a zero-sum game, into the loss of an equally significant world power (i.e., the Russian Federation).

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<sup>25</sup> T. Marshall, *Więźniowie geografii, czyli wszystko, co chciałbyś wiedzieć o globalnej polityce (Prisoners of Geography: Ten Maps That Tell You Everything You Need to Know About Global Politics)*, Poznań: Zysk i S-ka 2017, p. 11.

<sup>26</sup> S.B. Cohen, "Evaluating Systemic Geopolitics – A Twenty-First Century View", *Geopolitics*, vol. 15, no. 1 (2009), pp. 162.

Contemporary Russia explicitly recognises deepening EU cooperation and integration initiatives as a threat not only to its historical centre (the cradle of civilisation) but also to its ecumene (i.e., the most inhabited and developed area) lying largely in the European part of Eurasia. It is about the territorial, sub-systemic through the EaP initiative, rapprochement of both the EU and NATO to the centre of the state, taking place through a new, separate organisation of parts of the so-called “near abroad” (i.e., the non-Russian Republics of the former USSR). Nine out of the 15 former federal republics are formally covered by forms of cooperation with the EU and NATO, including six within the EaP itself. Thus, the Russian Heartland is exposed to the potential loss of the space-time closest to the formal boundaries, which is, in fact, a resource correlated with quantitative and qualitative material and human factors. This is all the more important as all these factors constitute the power of a given entity combined with a specific strategy.<sup>27</sup> Following the logic of the sphere of influence, the possibility of losing even part of the influence in the immediate surroundings unequivocally affects the adverse change in power and, therefore, the ability to project power.

The Russian Federation, defined as a reborn superpower, is partially in the Thucydides trap because in order to regain its position in the international system, it undertakes reintegration initiatives of a political, military and economic nature (CIS, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the Eurasian Economic Union, the Collective Security Treaty Organisation) in line with the models of state integration western. As a result, the areas of systemic contact between Russia and the West, such as part of Eastern Europe or the Caucasus region – which since the fall of communism have created an area open to the influence of various systems – may turn into a Cohen’s Compression Zone (i.e., an area of partial breakdown and strong competition and clash between regional powers) which, in this case, also have the status of world powers (Major Powers). So far, both Eastern Europe and the Caucasus constitute the western branch of the so-called “Eurasian Convergence Zone,” the position of which is determined by the temporary status resulting from the actual role of the buffer between geostrategic realms,<sup>28</sup> subject to the dominant influence of the major world powers. Therefore, to achieve a revival of influence reaching as far as the Bug River line in the West and the strategically important Bessarabia (Moldova), which secures access to the Black Sea and enables control over the eastern part of the Balkan Peninsula, the

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 158.

<sup>28</sup> Eurasian Continental Realm, Maritime Realm, South Asia, East Asia – S.B. Cohen, *Geopolitics. The Geography of International Relations*, Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield 2009, p. 230.

Russian Federation has three instruments at its disposal: ideology, ethnic-demographic context and strategic presence.

The first of the elements mentioned above refers to the idea of neo-Eurasianism, developed on the basis of the development of Russian political thought, understood as a counterbalance to the liberal world of the West, where the alternative to the individualism of the individual are the values of the social community, and the ideal of a strong and efficient power and counteracting the tendency to dominate any power are to be long-term stabilisation. In this context, Russia uses the idea of the so-called “Third Rome,” known from the times of the Romanov empire, constituting an independent, alternative civilisation, defining and controlling social and political relations in a large part of Eurasia.

The ethnic pressure factor is essentially based on the presence in the former republics of the USSR of a huge Russian-speaking<sup>29</sup> population of around 18 million people, who openly declare Russian nationality or consider Russian culture to be close to or identical with their own. Thus, the justification for actions aimed at the absorption of a given territory, such as the eastern regions of Ukraine or Transnistria, is based on pointing to the traditionally strengthened presence of the Russian population in such a territory, which justifies the further assumption that the Russian *ecumene* extends beyond the part of the borders of the Russian Federation in a given direction. The case of the annexation of Crimea, fully in line with the above assumption, is furthermore an example of resorting to the matrix of formal and legal legitimisation of aggression used in the 20th century by referring to the institution of a local vote/referendum as a basis for the decision of the central Russian authorities. The occupation and incorporation into the USSR of the Eastern Borderlands of the Second Polish Republic, named for the purposes of the formal legalisation of aggression in 1939, “Western Belarus” and “Western Ukraine” is a largely legitimate analogy, taking into account the Great Russian interpretation of the national idea, in which Ukrainians and Belarusians were ethnic groups within the native Russian community.

Strategic presence beyond the formal borders of the Russian Federation is the basis of the force – classic and hybrid in the formula and used means of reacting to the actions of other countries or organisations, perceived in terms of threats. This is why the military presence in Belarus (manoeuvres of joint forces, leasing military infrastructure) or in intentionally destabilised regions, to which a quasi-state formula is imposed (e.g.,

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<sup>29</sup> At the end of the existence of the USSR, according to publicly available statistical data, 21.8 million Russians were to live in the non-Russian republics of the federal state, of which nearly 30% in Ukraine – T.A. Kisielewski, *Schylek Rosji (The Decline of Russia)*, Poznań: Rebis 2007, p. 21.

the Moldovan Republic of Transnistria or the Luhansk People's Republic), as well as a typical strategic game aimed at neutralising the power of the opponent (military presence in Abkhazia and North Ossetia). The military presence in Abkhazia and North Ossetia, in the context of its influence on Georgia, form a canon of Russia's contemporary use of military force as an important part of the general 'hard-power' to counter foreign influences and concentrate its own political and civilisational offer. As S. Cohen aptly observed, it was hard to expect Russia, which was rebuilding its power on the basis of its raw materials policy, agricultural and export potential, its key location in Eurasia and the authorities' determination to regain world rank, to ignore NATO's penetration of areas close to the Russian core.<sup>30</sup>

#### 4. Summary and recommendations

The Eastern Partnership programme, defined as a sub-system of the European Union and shaped within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy in the eastern direction, is to a large extent a civilisation offer resulting from the processes of Europeanisation and Euro-unionisation, which, apart from the internal context, were directed at a part of former Soviet states. The offer, which includes elements related to the political system (transparency, the rule of law, support for grass-roots civic initiatives), the social and economic system (removal of customs barriers, restrictions on the movement of persons, promotion and assistance for entrepreneurship), as well as culture and science (youth exchanges, cultural forums), aims to extend not only the values, but also the civilisational influence of the West to countries with a partly different, often imposed political culture. Apart from the obstacles resulting from the individual interests of a given country (e.g., Azerbaijan) and the sphere of implementation difficulties depending on the condition of civic culture (general consent to corruption or poorly developed ethos of self-organisation of society), the Eastern Partnership encounters resistance seeking to rebuild its own influence in the area of the so-called "near abroad" of the Russian Federation, which promotes a qualitatively different political and civilisation offer, supported by economic and military activities causing increased tension in parts of Eastern Europe and the Caucasus. Thus, the sub-system of the European Union's Eastern Partnership clashes with the influence of Russia, based on the formulas of the institutional reorganisation of a large part of the former

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<sup>30</sup> S.B. Cohen, "Evaluating...", pp. 158–159.



USSR (e.g., the Collective Security Treaty Organisation) and military interventions resulting from presence in strategically important areas (e.g., Moldova or Belarus). Given the geopolitical circumstances, it would – therefore – be reasonable to consider the following actions:

- a. in the sphere of creating security conditions conducive to integration processes within the Eastern Partnership – strengthening the relations between the European Union and the North Atlantic Alliance in the field of intelligence, counter-intelligence and material cooperation – especially in the context of combating Russian disinformation and propaganda.
- b. in the economic sphere – deepening [under the programme] relations that fundamentally evaluate the economic system and, as a result, the political system of partner countries (intensification of trade, supporting modern industries, such as IT, consultancy on modernisation and stabilisation in the financial sector, targeted (project) grants to support the modernisation of infrastructure, including critical infrastructure components (e.g., energy), including clear requirements and support for regulations emphasising the role of private initiative in entrepreneurship).
- c. in the social and educational sphere – strengthening activities for personal exchange – especially in the field of youth contacts and dialogue of economic spheres and NGO activists, which significantly affects the exchange of experiences, development of civic attitudes and joint ventures in the area of education, business and social campaigns.
- d. in the sphere of information policy, the creation [by the EU] of a coherent and intensive information policy concerning the promotion of European values of civilisation and a policy of strengthening bilateral and multilateral cooperation, pointing to mutual benefits in accordance with the “win-win” principle.

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## The Evolution and Functioning Conditions of the Eastern Partnership Programme

**ABSTRACT:** The key objective of the article is to discuss the evolution of the Eastern Partnership programme from the point of view of its assumptions and key aspects of operation, including formal aspects of cooperation. The article presents the most critical aspects related to the evolution of the programme, as well as key challenges and plans for priority directions of its development. The article also discusses the approach of the Visegrad Group to the Eastern Partnership and analyses the assumptions of the new Associate Trio initiative aimed at deepening the European integration of some of the countries covered by the programme. The article also presents conclusions regarding the functioning of the programme and outlines the assumptions of its further development.

**KEYWORDS:** Eastern Partnership programme, Visegrad Group, European integration

The establishment of the Eastern Partnership programme was an important element in shaping the eastern dimension of the European Union and was addressed to Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus. The programme contained a wide range of political and economic goals aimed at supporting the processes of reform, social and political transformation in individual countries and strengthening the European integration process. The purpose of the presented article is to analyse the functioning of the Eastern Partnership programme from the current perspective of its existence, taking the pandemic into account.

## Conditions and premises of the programme

The enlargement of the European Union to include the new eastern European countries in 2004 changed the geopolitical conditions and structure of the international system in the Central and Eastern European region. One of the effects of enlargement was the initiation of an internal discussion in the European Union on shaping relations with the countries bordering the European Union as part of activities going beyond the implemented European Neighbourhood Policy. From the Polish point of view, an important direction and factor was developing a unique programme of cooperation and support for the interested states located beyond the eastern border of the European Union. Another area discussed, about which the creation of new cooperation mechanisms was debated, was the countries bordering the European Union to the south. The adoption of the special 'Union for the Mediterranean' programme during the French presidency was also an important aspect of achieving a consensus among EU countries related to the establishment of a special programme aimed at cooperation with countries in Eastern Europe and the Southern Caucasus. Two important events also influenced the internal discussion in this respect in 2008, the NATO summit in Bucharest and the Georgian-Russian war.

The North Atlantic Alliance summit decided to grant a membership perspective to Ukraine and Georgia and include these countries in the Membership Action Plan. The authorities of these countries made efforts to confirm the declared aspirations and priority directions of foreign and security policy, which were Euro-Atlantic integration and joining the North Atlantic Alliance. However, there was no consensus among the member states on this matter. Granting the membership perspective to Ukraine and Georgia was supported by the United States, and such support was publicly declared by President George W. Bush, who was ending his second term. However, some European countries – including France and Germany – were cautious in this respect. In the end, during the summit, the Membership Action Plan was not granted to Ukraine and Georgia, but the declaration adopted at that time confirmed the Euro-Atlantic aspirations of both countries and stressed that Ukraine and Georgia would be admitted to NATO in the future.<sup>1</sup> It should be emphasised that an essential factor influencing such a solution and the decision of the North Atlantic Alliance was the position of Russia, which categorically protested against granting MAP to Ukraine and Georgia

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<sup>1</sup> NATO, *Bucharest Summit Declaration Issued by the Heads of State and Government Participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Bucharest on 3 April 2008*, April 3, 2008. At: [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official\\_texts\\_8443.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_8443.htm), last accessed November 30, 2021.

and accused NATO of consistent anti-Russian actions and military expansion in the eastern direction.<sup>2</sup>

The second major international event, which influenced geopolitical conditions and the perception of the region's key processes, was the Georgian-Russian war in August 2008. As a result, a direct armed conflict broke out between Georgia and the Russian Federation, in the resolution of which the European Union and France, the then-president(s) of the community, were involved. This conflict resulted in the violation of Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty and the creation of the separatist states of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, operating under the aegis and with the support of the Russian Federation.<sup>3</sup>

The above events were significant from the point of view of international security and the geopolitical situation in Central and Eastern Europe, but they also resulted in the intensification of internal discussions within the European Union on the preparation of a special programme aimed at eastern partners. Poland played a key role in this aspect, for which the launch of an additional support mechanism for the countries of Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus was one of the priorities of foreign policy. Cooperation with Sweden and joint promotion of this initiative in individual countries and at the EU level was important in this respect.

Ultimately, after many months of talks and negotiations, it was possible to achieve a consensus in the European Union regarding the launch of the Eastern Partnership programme, and during the first summit held in Prague in 2009, to outline the most important directions and principles of cooperation with the countries covered by this programme.<sup>4</sup>

The document indicates that the Eastern Partnership is a European Union programme and the EU partner countries based on joint projects, commitment, actions and shared responsibility. The goal of the programme was to deepen European integration and cooperation between the interested states. An important element of the programme was also economic aspects and deepening cooperation between the countries of Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus in this aspect. Taking into account

<sup>2</sup> Cf.: President of Russia, *Press Statement and Answers to Journalists' Questions Following a Meeting of the Russia-NATO Council*, April 4, 2008. At: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24903>, last accessed November 30, 2021.

<sup>3</sup> European Council, *Press Release. Extraordinary Meeting General Affairs and External Relations*, no. 12453/08 (Presse 236), August 13, 2008. At: [http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/delegations/georgia/documents/eu\\_georgia/13august2008\\_en.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/delegations/georgia/documents/eu_georgia/13august2008_en.pdf), last accessed November 30, 2021.

<sup>4</sup> Europe Council, *Wspólna deklaracja przyjęta podczas szczytu partnerstwa wschodniego w Pradze*, no. 8435/09 (Presse 78), Prague, May 7, 2009. At: [https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/PL/er/107647.pdf](https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/PL/er/107647.pdf), last accessed November 30, 2021.

the different approach to the matters of European integration and rapprochement with the European Union as well as the different level of advancement in the projects implemented so far, it was emphasised that the tools and mechanisms of cooperation proposed under the Eastern Partnership would be flexible concerning the level of interest and will to deepen cooperation between individual countries.<sup>5</sup>

## 20 Deliverables for 2020

The flexibility indicated as a feature of the programme reflected the different levels of cooperation and interest in deepening European integration. One of the key elements in this respect in the following years was the negotiation and signing of association agreements and the establishment of deep free trade zones. In the case of Ukraine, these actions, related to President Yanukovich's refusal to sign the association agreement before the Eastern Partnership summit in Vilnius, led to protests in Kiev and the outbreak of the Orange Revolution. As a result, the government in Ukraine changed and the Kiev authorities returned to talks on the signing of this document. Georgia and Moldova also expressed their will to deepen European integration and to sign these documents. Their finalisation in the following years, supplemented with the introduction of visa liberalisation for citizens of these countries, was an important moment in the functioning of the Eastern Partnership and the achievement of important programme goals.

Therefore, in the following years, a discussion on the development of new forms and directions of cooperation with Eastern partners continued on the forum of the European Union. In this respect, the Eastern Partnership summit, held on November the 24th, 2017 in Brussels, was an important event. During the summit, the results of this programme until then were summarised, and priority directions for cooperation were set, assuming the implementation of the "20 goals for 2020." The plan adopted at that time contained several priority areas of cooperation, which were cross-cutting goals, a strong economy, better governance, greater connectivity and a stronger society.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Europe Council, *20 Deliverables for 2020*. At: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eastern-partnership/20-deliverables-for-2020/>, last accessed November 30, 2021. See also: Eastern Partnership, *Eastern Partnership. 20 Deliverables for 2020: State of Play in 2018*. At: [https://www.euneighbours.eu/sites/default/files/publications/2018-10/EAP%20GENERIC%20FACTSHEET%20ENG\\_WEB\\_0.pdf](https://www.euneighbours.eu/sites/default/files/publications/2018-10/EAP%20GENERIC%20FACTSHEET%20ENG_WEB_0.pdf), last accessed November 30, 2021.

The summit also adopted a declaration confirming the great importance of the Eastern Partnership programme for the countries involved. In turn, the countries participating in this summit emphasised the importance of the Eastern Partnership as an ambitious and strategic programme and expressed the will to jointly commit to its further development, taking into account support in the scope of implemented reforms, which are a key factor influencing the “long-term success” of the Eastern Partnership.<sup>7</sup>

## A decade of partnership

Another important event related to the analysis of the achievements of the Eastern Partnership, as well as further directions of activities, was the 10th anniversary of this programme. On this occasion, a meeting between the European Union authorities with the Foreign Ministers of the Eastern Partnership countries was held on May the 13th, 2019, discussing the implementation of the “20 goals for 2020,” as well as debating the priorities in cooperation in the coming years.<sup>8</sup> The High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, also presented a special document in connection with this meeting, containing conclusions and assessments on the functioning of the Eastern Partnership programme from a 10-year perspective.<sup>9</sup>

The above-mentioned issues were also discussed at the European Council meeting on June the 20th, 2019. The leaders then assembled underlined the role of the Eastern Partnership and its strategic importance in relations with Eastern partners and obliged the European Union Commission and the High Representative for For-

<sup>7</sup> European Council, *Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit*, Brussels, November 24, 2017. At: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2017/11/24/eastern-partnership-summit-joint-declaration/>, last accessed November 30, 2021.

<sup>8</sup> European Council, *Eastern Partnership Foreign Ministers Meeting*, May 13, 2019. At: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/international-ministerial-meetings/2019/05/13/>, last accessed November 30, 2021. See also: M. Kubiak, “Jaka będzie przyszłość Partnerstwa Wschodniego?” (“What will be the future of the Eastern Partnership?”), *The Warsaw Institute Review*, October 26, 2019. At: <https://warsawinstitute.org/pl/jaka-bedzie-przyszlosc-partnerstwa-wschodniego/>, last accessed November 30, 2021.

<sup>9</sup> European Council, *Eastern Partnership Foreign Ministers’ Meeting: Chair’s Conclusions on the Occasion of the Eastern Partnership 10th Anniversary*, May 13, 2019. At: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2019/05/13/eastern-partnership-foreign-ministers-meeting-chair-s-conclusions-on-the-occasion-of-the-eastern-partnership-10th-anniversary/>, last accessed November 30, 2021.



eign Affairs and Policy Security to propose long-term and strategic priorities for the further development of the Eastern Partnership.<sup>10</sup>

Therefore, further discussions on this issue continued within the European Union, after which the Commission presented its proposals on March the 18th, 2020. At that time, a special communication was issued on this matter, entitled “The Eastern Partnership beyond 2020: Reinforcing Resilience – an Eastern Partnership that delivers for all.”<sup>11</sup>

This document indicates the priority political directions and goals developed as part of broad consultations, which include: functional, sustainable and integrated economies, transparent public institutions, security and the rule of law, activities in the field of counteracting climate change, digital transformation, as well as support for an egalitarian and inclusive society of individual countries.<sup>12</sup>

The above assumptions were adopted in the initial period of the coronavirus pandemic, which had a significant impact on their implementation as well as limiting cooperation with the Eastern Partnership countries. During this period, cooperation in combating the pandemic and its consequences was a key aspect. It was mainly related to the supply of equipment, covid tests and financial support for the implementation of various forms of social programmes. According to data from May 2021, the total value of aid (including the EIB) amounted to over 2.5 billion EUR.<sup>13</sup>

It should be emphasised that due to pandemic conditions, this factor is currently one of the most important aspects influencing cooperation within the Eastern Partnership and the plans to be implemented. In this aspect, it is worth mentioning the

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<sup>10</sup> European Council, *European Council Conclusions on the MFF, Climate Change, Disinformation and Hybrid Threats, External Relations, Enlargement and the European Semester*, June 20, 2019. At: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2019/06/20/european-council-conclusions-20-june-2019/>, last accessed November 30, 2021.

<sup>11</sup> Eastern Partnership, *The Eastern Partnership Beyond 2020: Reinforcing Resilience – an Eastern Partnership that Delivers for All*, 2018. At: [https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/eap\\_joint\\_communication\\_factsheet\\_18.03.en\\_.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/eap_joint_communication_factsheet_18.03.en_.pdf), last accessed November 30, 2021.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* See also: Eastern Partnership, *Eastern Partnership Policy Beyond 2020: Council Approves Conclusions*, 2020. At: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/05/11/eastern-partnership-policy-beyond-2020-council-approves-conclusions/>, last accessed November 30, 2021; Eastern Partnership, *Council Conclusions on Eastern Partnership Policy Beyond 2020*, 2018. At: [https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/eap\\_joint\\_communication\\_factsheet\\_18.03.en\\_.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/eap_joint_communication_factsheet_18.03.en_.pdf), last accessed November 30, 2021.

<sup>13</sup> European Commission, *EU Support to Eastern Partnership Countries in Tackling COVID-19*, 2021. At: [https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/system/files/2021-09/coronavirus\\_support\\_eap.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/system/files/2021-09/coronavirus_support_eap.pdf), last accessed November 30, 2021.



publication on July the 2nd, 2021 by the European Union of assumptions for developing priorities in a 5-year perspective.<sup>14</sup>

In line with the assumptions adopted at that time, an important element of the planned activities will be the implementation of the Economic and Investment Plan in the amount of 2.3 billion EUR. These funds are to be allocated to support activities by individual countries in the form of various grants and financial guarantees in the scope of the activities carried out. It is also worth emphasising the proposal to allocate up to 17 billion EUR for investments in various forms of activity of the public and private sectors. The aim of the measures proposed by the European Union is to provide comprehensive support in combating the impact of the pandemic, as well as strengthening trade, economic growth, employment and support for the democratic model of socio-political transformation.

In this aspect, it is also worth noting that the European Union emphasises the importance of the Eastern Partnership in its agenda, which – according to the declarations presented – remains one of the most important EU programmes. Therefore, the European Union has declared that it will implement measures that are adequate and respond to the challenges and opportunities of contemporary conditions.<sup>15</sup>

## Eastern Partnership as perceived by the Visegrad Group

When analysing the functioning of the Eastern Partnership, it should be stressed that this programme is one of the crucial aspects of the consultations and activities of the Visegrad Group, within which various proposals and activities in this area are developed. Therefore, it is worth highlighting the official position that was issued on the occasion of the decade of operation Eastern Partnership by the countries of the Visegrad Group. A summary of the programme's functioning was to be the subject of a special meeting of the foreign ministers of the Visegrad Group countries, the Eastern Partnership and Croatia, Germany and Sweden, with the participation of European Union authorities, which was scheduled for April 2020. Due to pandemic conditions and the postponement of this meeting, the heads of diplomacy of the Visegrad Group

<sup>14</sup> European Commission, *Eastern Partnership: A Renewed Agenda for Recovery, Resilience and Reform Underpinned by an Economic and Investment Plan*, Brussels, July 2, 2021. At: [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_21\\_3367](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_21_3367), last accessed November 30, 2021. A vision drawn on the basis of the discussed document from 2020.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

countries decided to issue a special statement on the future of the Eastern Partnership programme on April the 8th, 2020.<sup>16</sup>

In the document, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary underlined their appreciation of the programme's achievements to date over the past ten years and confirmed their willingness to adopt an ambitious plan and implement further actions, prepared in cooperation and on the basis of consultations with their partners. The Visegrad countries have also declared their efforts to ensure that the Eastern Partnership programme retains its "strategic importance and priority significance" within the European Union. In this aspect, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary pointed out that the Eastern Partnership must focus on and preserve its inclusive character and remain a mechanism for supporting the European integration policies of individual countries. In this respect, however, the differences related to the different level and advancement of cooperation with the European Union must be preserved, which should constitute the basis for a flexible formula of cooperation and implemented activities. The Visegrad Group also came up with the idea of analysing the possibility of justified changes and updating of association agreements as well as the agreements on the Deep Free Trade Area.<sup>17</sup>

To implement individual tasks and projects, it was also declared that financial resources would be set aside in the perspective of the next Multiannual Financial Framework. In connection with the outbreak and the ongoing pandemic, the temporary Visegrad Group supported the allocation of additional financial aid by the EU at the level of 140 million EUR, as well as an additional amount of 700 million EUR to fight the social and economic effects of the pandemic. In order to directly support the Eastern Partnership countries in this aspect, the Visegrad Group has also launched a special programme for Eastern Partnership countries called "V4EastSolidarity" aimed at combating the effects of the coronavirus pandemic.<sup>18</sup>

The above activities reflect one of the key aspects of the Eastern Partnership, which is the pursuit of economic development and improvement of the economic situation

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<sup>16</sup> Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych RP, *The Visegrad Group Joint Statement on the Future of the Eastern Partnership*, April 8, 2020. At: <https://www.gov.pl/web/dyplomacja/wideokonferencja-ministrow-spraw-zagranicznych-v4-poswiecona-partnerstwu-wschodniemu>, last accessed November 30, 2021.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* See also: S. Czarnecki, "Grupa Wyszehradzka i jej rozwój – wspólne inicjatywy, podejścia, stanowiska" ("The Visegrad Group and Its Development – Joint Initiatives, Approaches, Positions"). In: A. Tatarenko (ed.). *Grupa Wyszehradzka w 30. rocznicę powstania. Idea, historia, współpraca* (*The Visegrad Group on Its 30th Anniversary: Idea, History, Cooperation*), Lublin: Instytut Europy Środkowej 2020, p. 93.

of citizens. In this aspect, financial investment plays an important role, the level of which is limited due to various conditions. Hence, one of the aspects of stimulating economic activities on the part of the Visegrad Group in this regard was support for the idea of creating a special agency responsible for investment issues under the Eastern Partnership.<sup>19</sup>

It should also be noted that the authorities of the Visegrad Group countries also underlined the aspect mentioned above of the significant change in international conditions and the growing threat to the security of individual countries. In this aspect, the complicated international situation was indicated, which determines the necessity of special action and individual countries' resilience. Therefore, it was emphasised that under the Eastern Partnership, there should be a formula and dedicated tools to help and support in the field of implementation of specific actions aimed at "building resilient societies." This formula includes a broad vision of complementary activities in the field of political, social, economic and security sector processes aimed at strengthening internal regional stability and security. Because of this, the existing threats were also highlighted, including those of a hybrid nature – which should be jointly counteracted thus enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency.<sup>20</sup>

## Association Trio

One of the aspects of the Eastern Partnership programme was the different level of European integration and interest in its further development. Recently, these processes have been deepened and have been reflected in formal institutional decisions. At the beginning of February 2021, the foreign ministers of Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova sent a joint letter to the authorities in Brussels and the European Union Member States, in which they reaffirmed their will to join the community and the vision of the future operation of the Eastern Partnership programme. The ministers of diplomacy emphasised that the Eastern Partnership programme should adequately take into account the will of the European direction of the foreign policy of these countries and propose an "ambitious approach" in the framework of bilateral and multilateral cooperation of those most interested in deepening European integration of states.

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<sup>19</sup> Ministerstwo Spraw Zagranicznych RP, *The Visegrad Group Joint Statement...*

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova also announced the coordination of activities in the development of a joint package of activities and goals of the Eastern Partnership.<sup>21</sup>

The consequence of the declarations mentioned above were further actions taken by the authorities of Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova related to the establishment of the Association Trio. This initiative was launched during a meeting between the Ukrainian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dmytro Kuleba, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, David Zalkaliani, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Moldova, Aureliu Ciocoi, which took place in Kiev on May the 17th, 2021.<sup>22</sup>

During this meeting, a special memorandum was signed in which Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova underlined the strategic importance of the Eastern Partnership programme and expressed their will to continue to engage in its development. These countries also confirmed their European identity and European choice and their will to obtain membership in the European Union in the future.<sup>23</sup>

The document adopted at that time in Kiev can be called both a political declaration of the three countries and a road map for actions and coordination of cooperation in the field of European integration. As for the declarations and goals, the intention of establishing the Association Trio was to create a platform for deepened cooperation and dialogue in the field of European integration between Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, on the one hand, and the European Union on the other. One of the critical aspects of this cooperation is the Eastern Partnership programme and its activities aimed at further rapprochement of these countries with the European Union. In this

<sup>21</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, *Україна, Грузія та Молдова висловили спільне бачення подальшого розвитку Східного партнерства у листі до ЄС (Ukraina, Gruzia ta Moldova vislovili spil'ne bachennâ podal'shogo rozvitku Shidnogo partnerstva u listi do ÊS)*, February 2, 2021. At: <https://mfa.gov.ua/news/ukrayina-gruziya-ta-moldova-vislovili-spilne-bachennya-podalshogo-rozvitku-shidnogo-partnerstva-u-listi-do-yes>, last accessed November 30, 2021. See also: "Україна, Молдова і Грузія заявили ЄС про бажання глибокої інтеграції в рамках Східного партнерства" ("Ukraina, Moldova i Gruzia zaâvili ÊS pro bažannâ gliboi integracii v ramkah Shidnogo partnerstva"), *Evropejska Pravda*, February 2, 2021. At: <https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/news/2021/02/2/7119307/>, last accessed November 30, 2021.

<sup>22</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, *Дмитро Кулеба: Україна, Грузія та Молдова започаткували Асоційоване Тріо (Dmitro Kuleba: Ukraina, Gruzia ta Moldova zapochatkuvali Asocijovane Trio)*, May 17, 2021. At: <https://mfa.gov.ua/news/dmitro-kuleba-ukrayina-gruziya-ta-moldova-zapochatkuvali-asocijovane-trio>, last accessed November 30, 2021.

<sup>23</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, *Association Trio: Memorandum of Understanding Between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration of the Republic of Moldova*, May 17, 2021. At: <https://mfa.gov.ua/en/news/association-trio-memorandum-understanding-between-ministry-foreign-affairs-georgia-ministry-foreign-affairs-and-european-integration-republic-moldova-and-ministry-foreign-affairs-ukraine>, last accessed November 30, 2021.

aspect, it was highlighted that the contribution of these countries to cooperation under the programme would take place in parallel with the bilateral form of cooperation with the European Union.<sup>24</sup>

In terms of the declared will to join the European Union, the Associate Trio countries reaffirmed their engagement and commitments in the scope of further activities aimed at implementing the currently binding association agreements. It should be underlined that, in the opinion of Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova, an important aspect of deepening the European integration process of these countries would be the optimisation of instruments and available tools to the needs and capabilities of these countries. In this aspect, the Associate Trio countries consider it justified to introduce the “more for more” mechanism, which would reflect the progress in the next stages of European integration and objectives measurable for the societies of these countries.<sup>25</sup>

With the aim of further strategic development of the Eastern Partnership and deepening European integration, the signatories defined the key spheres of cooperation between themselves and with EU structures and member states. These included the expansion of dialogue and cooperation areas aimed at deepening activities in the areas of energy, digital transformation, transport, justice and home affairs and issues of the health care system, which are important in the pandemic period. Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova also spoke out in favour of developing new tools for entering the European Single Market, going beyond the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area and joining the framework programmes and agencies of the European Union.<sup>26</sup>

Taking into account the security conditions and threats to Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova, as well as the experience of the existence of separatist regions, these countries also indicated this aspect of cooperation with the European Union and the area of activities of the Association Trio. Therefore, these three countries emphasised their will to deepen cooperation with the European Union in the field of defence and security policy. In this regard, the interest in joint action aimed at combating hybrid threats, as well as participation in Common Security and Defence Policy operations and ongoing PESCO projects, was stressed.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> “Україна, Грузія та Молдова створили новий формат співпраці для спільного руху в ЄС” (“Ukraina, Gruzia ta Moldova stvorili novij format spivpraci dla spil'nogo ruhu v ES”), *Evropejska Pravda*, May 17, 2021. At: <https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/news/2021/05/17/7123240/>, last accessed November 30, 2021.

<sup>27</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, *Association Trio: Memorandum of Understanding...*

When analysing the assumptions and goals of the Associate Trio, it is also worth noting that within the created formula, specific mechanisms of multilateral cooperation have been provided aimed at implementing activities related to the political goals and the practical dimension. Cooperation within AT will take place based on regular tripartite consultations on current processes and specific activities related to the implemented policy of European integration and activities under the Eastern Partnership programme. Coordination meetings of the Foreign Ministers of the Associate Trio countries are planned before important meetings related to the implementation of the Eastern Partnership activities. However, the Associate Trio Coordinators, who are based in the foreign ministries of the respective countries, are responsible for day-to-day activities in this area.<sup>28</sup>

It is worth noting that the activities of the Associate Trio were one of the topics of the talks during the last 23 Ukraine-European Union summit, which took place on October the 12th, 2021. In a statement adopted at that time, politicians supported the creation and functioning of this structure as a new format for Euro-Atlantic integration and coordination of the cooperation by Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova. In this aspect, it was announced that a new platform for talks in the European Union-Associate Trio format would be organised in the near future.<sup>29</sup>

## The future of the Eastern Partnership – summary and recommendations

When analysing the functioning of the Eastern Partnership programme, it is necessary to underline the difficulty of having an unambiguous opinion as to its operation and effects. From today's perspective, we are dealing with completely different geopolitical conditions in the region of Central and Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus than at the time of its creation. A different situation also applies to the internal conditions in individual countries, related to socio-political processes, as well as generational

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, “Дмитро Кулеба: Асоційоване тріо створює нові європейські можливості для України, Грузії та Молдови” (“Dmitro Kuleba: Asocijovane trio stvorue novi yevropejs'ki mozhlivosti dla Ukraïni, Gruziï ta Moldovi”), October 13, 2021. At: <https://mfa.gov.ua/news/dmitro-kuleba-asocijovane-trio-stvoryuye-novi-yevropejski-mozhlivosti-dlya-ukrayini-gruziyi-ta-moldovi>, last accessed November 30, 2021. See also: President of Ukraine, “Спільна заява за підсумками 23-го Саміту Україна – Європейський Союз” (“Spil'na zaâva za pidsumkami 23-go Samitu Ukraïna – Êvropejs'kij Soûz”), October 12, 2021. At: <https://www.president.gov.ua/news/spilna-zayava-za-pidsumkami-23-go-samitu-ukrayina-yevropejsk-71037>, last accessed November 30, 2021.

change and the emerging transformational pressure on the part of societies. These processes determine the necessity to change the tools and objectives of the Eastern Partnership as well. As mentioned, the signing of association agreements with three countries and the liberalisation of the visa regime was an important element related to the implementation of the programme's assumptions. The adoption and implementation of these documents, however, did not bring closer the membership prospects of the countries most interested in joining the European Union, which is often mentioned by the authorities of Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova as a significant limitation of the programme.

From today's perspective, one can clearly indicate the existence of two speeds of the programme, related to the intensity and interest in deepening cooperation and joining the European Union in the future. Such a strategic goal in their foreign and security policy is declared by the present authorities of Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova. The appointment of the Associate Trio was certainly an important impetus in this process and the confirmation of the strategic direction of the European policy of these countries. The second group includes the remaining countries whose cooperation within the Eastern Partnership is limited or suspended. Repeated attempts to include Belarus in implemented projects have failed, and the political crisis in that country and the repression of the opposition following the rigged elections in 2020 led to the freezing of cooperation. The current crisis on the border with Belarus has exacerbated the current tense situation and difficult relations due to the confrontational policy of the authorities in Minsk towards Poland and the European Union.

Armenia and Azerbaijan have quite limited forms of cooperation under the programme. The complex relations between these states, resulting from the territorial conflict and the war over Nagorno-Karabakh, have – from the very beginning – affected the usefulness of various multilateral activities. The new outbreak of fighting in 2020 has deepened this process and increased the risk of further phases of conflict in the future, affecting the security situation in the region and cooperation with the European Union. It is also worth noting that in terms of security, other countries are struggling with the existence of separatist regions, and in the case of Ukraine, an ongoing low-intensity conflict, which also affect individual projects under the Eastern Partnership.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> “Безпека Східного партнерства: які перспективи відкриті для України” (“Bezpeka Shidnogo partnerstva: âki perspektivi vidkriti dlâ Ukraïni”), *Evropejska Pravda*, March 5, 2021. At: <https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/articles/2021/03/5/7120304/>, last accessed November 30, 2021.



As previously mentioned, the coronavirus pandemic is a vital factor influencing the present shape of the Eastern Partnership and the activities implemented. Therefore, these conditions will be one of the most important in determining the priority directions of the programme development in the coming years.

From today's perspective, it can be concluded that the Eastern Partnership has confirmed its role as a tool for influencing and implementing various forms of cooperation, conducive to the transformation of interested states and building a stable and pro-European neighbourhood. Therefore, the European Union should confirm its will to develop further the Eastern Partnership programme as well as active involvement and support in activities related to combating the effects of the pandemic. In this aspect, it will be necessary to develop further various forms of cooperation adjusted to the level of interest of individual countries. This practical form of cooperation will be accompanied by increasing political pressure from the Association Trio to grant the membership perspective, but taking into account the current internal conditions in the European Union, making such a decision seems unrealistic in the near future. Thus, it is crucial in this aspect to adapt the instruments and tools of the Eastern Partnership to the needs and effectiveness of these countries, as well as to effectively apply the "more for more" formula, indicating specific progress in the transformation process and stages of European integration. Taking into account the current international situation in the region of Central and Eastern Europe, the threats of hybrid war and various interests on the European Union forum, it will also be of key importance to maintain the Eastern Partnership as one of the priority directions of the European Union. It will also be crucial to develop an ambitious cooperation programme in the coming years, which is a real instrument of change for countries interested in rapprochement and further deepening of the European integration process.

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- “Україна, Грузія та Молдова створили новий формат співпраці для спільного руху в ЄС” (“Ukraïna, Gruziâ ta Moldova stvorili novij format spivpraci dlâ spil’nogo ruhu v ÊS”), *Evropejska Pravda*, May 17, 2021. At: <https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/news/2021/05/17/7123240/>.
- “Україна, Молдова і Грузія заявили ЄС про бажання глибокої інтеграції в рамках Східного партнерства” (“Ukraïna, Moldova i Gruziâ zaâvili ÊS pro bažannâ gliboïï integracii v ramach Shidnogo partnerstva”), *Evropejska Pravda*, February 2, 2021. At: <https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/news/2021/02/2/7119307/>.

## Successes and Failures in the Implementation of the Eastern Partnership Objectives in a Changing Security Environment

**ABSTRACT:** The Eastern Partnership (EaP) is a Polish-Swedish initiative to strengthen cooperation between the European Union (EU) and its eastern neighbours in both bilateral and multilateral dimensions. The programme was inaugurated in May 2009; as the eastern dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), it was intended to help initiate or accelerate the political and economic transformation of the partner countries and bring them closer to the EU, thus stabilising the eastern neighbourhood of the EU and strengthening European security. However, over the past twelve years, the security environment of the EU and the region of Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus have undergone significant transformations, and new challenges and threats have emerged requiring active measures to counteract them effectively. Consequently, the initial goals and objectives of the EaP were updated. The aims of this paper are to analyse the new objectives of the Eastern Partnership proposed by the EU in the context of the changing security environment and closer relations with the eastern neighbours of the EU, and to show the prospects for further development of the eastern dimension of the ENP.

KEYWORDS: European Union, Eastern Partnership, partner countries, objectives, successes and failures

## Introduction

Cooperation between the European Union and the six neighbouring countries participating in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) regional programme (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine) has undergone significant transformations in recent years. First and foremost, this was associated with changes in the realm of European security which occurred as a result of, *inter alia*, the outbreak of the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea by Russia, the civil wars in Libya and Syria, the increase in illegal migration and refugee flows, successive terrorist attacks in EU Member States, and tensions in Asia and the Middle East. Under the influence of these factors, work was undertaken at the EU forum to adjust the aims, objectives and principles of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), as well as the two programmes defining its southern dimension (Union for the Mediterranean) and the eastern one (Eastern Partnership) to the changing reality.<sup>1</sup> The result of this work became a joint Communication from the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy entitled 'Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy,' published on 18th November 2015.<sup>2</sup> It stated that the ENP, launched in 2004 to help the EU support and promote stability, security and prosperity in neighbouring countries, should be the focus of a more coherent effort by the EU and the Member States, as the EU is more influential when united

<sup>1</sup> A. Kalicka-Mikołajczyk, *Europejska Polityka Sąsiedztwa. Konstrukcja i charakter prawny*, Wrocław: E-Wydawnictwo 2021, pp. 52–58.

<sup>2</sup> Apart from the Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2015, the evaluation of its functioning and the updating of the objectives and principles of the policy have been carried out three times since its establishment in 2004: in 2006 – European Commission, *Komunikat Komisji do Rady i Parlamentu Europejskiego w sprawie wzmocnienia Europejskiej Polityki Sąsiedztwa*, COM(2006) 726 wersja ostateczna, Bruksela, December 4, 2006. At: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/PL/LSU/?uri=CELEX:52006DC0726>, last accessed November 20, 2021; in 2007 – European Commission, *Komunikat Komisji do Parlamentu Europejskiego i Rady. Silna Europejska Polityka Sąsiedztwa*, KOM(2007) 774 wersja ostateczna, Bruksela, December 5, 2007. At: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2007:0774:FIN:PL:PDF>, last accessed November 20, 2021; and in 2011 – European Council, *Wspólny Komunikat do Parlamentu Europejskiego, Rady, Europejskiego Komitetu Ekonomiczno-Społecznego i Komitetu Regionów. Nowa koncepcja działań w obliczu zmian zachodzących w sąsiedztwie*, KOM(2011) 303 wersja ostateczna, Bruksela, May 25, 2011. At: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2011:0303:FIN:pl:PDF>, last accessed November 20, 2021.

in a common approach and communicating a single message.<sup>3</sup> It further underlined that stabilisation is one of the major challenges in many neighbouring countries, and the EU will therefore seek to stabilise the neighbourhood by addressing the causes of instability: poverty, inequality, perceived sense of injustice, corruption, and weak economic and social development. The Communication also points to the need to strengthen the resilience of the EU's partners in the face of external pressures and crises, support their economic development for stability, deepen the cooperation on security, mobility, migration and energy, and to make the partnerships between the EU and each neighbouring country more individualised and differentiated to take account of their different ambitions, capacities and interests, and thus the need to create different models of relations, allowing greater self-responsibility on both sides.<sup>4</sup> It is also worth mentioning that the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for 2021–2027 has significantly increased the funding allocated to the Neighbourhood, International and Development Cooperation Instrument to EUR 70.8b in 2018 prices<sup>5</sup> (in the financial perspective of 2014–2020, the budget of the European Neighbourhood Instrument was approx. EUR 15.4b).<sup>6</sup> These changes should make the implementation of the main objectives of the ENP more flexible and effective.

In the case of the Eastern Partnership, the need to update the objectives and principles of the programme – apart from the above considerations – was also dictated by the diversity of the partner countries in terms of their aspirations and progress made. The cooperation of the EU with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine is based on the implementation of the provisions of association agreements, including the agreements establishing the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA). These countries have also shown a willingness to deepen relations with the EU. Cooperation with Azerbaijan, in turn, is based on the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA), which entered into force in 1999. It is to be replaced by a new comprehensive

<sup>3</sup> European Council, *Wspólny Komunikat do Parlamentu Europejskiego, Rady, Europejskiego Komitetu Ekonomiczno-Społecznego i Komitetu Regionów. Przegląd Europejskiej Polityki Sąsiedztwa*, JOIN(2015) 50 final, Bruksela, November 18, 2015, pp. 2–5. At: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=JOIN:2015:0050:FIN:PL:PDF>, last accessed November 20, 2021.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 4–25.

<sup>5</sup> However, it should be borne in mind that the thematic scope of the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument has been considerably extended compared with the European Neighbourhood Instrument, as it combines ten separate instruments and funds existing in the MFF 2014–2020, as well as the European Development Fund, which has so far remained outside the general EU budget.

<sup>6</sup> V. Lilyanova, European Parliament, *Neighbourhood and the World. Heading 6 of the 2021–2027 MFF*, April 2021, pp. 1–12. At: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/690546/EPRS\\_BRI\(2021\)690546\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/690546/EPRS_BRI(2021)690546_EN.pdf), last accessed September 16, 2021.

agreement, under negotiations since 2017. Moreover, this country is only interested in deepening cooperation in selected economic sectors (primarily mobility and energy). In the case of Armenia, bilateral relations with the EU are based on the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement signed in November 2017, and they mainly focus on developing economic and trade cooperation. As for Belarus, relations with this country are developed in a rather limited scope, which is related to the violation of fundamental freedoms, rule of law and human rights by the Belarusian authorities.<sup>7</sup> Taking the above factors into account, the EU has updated the EaP goals twice in the last four years, first by setting '20 Deliverables for 2020' and later by defining new long-term goals for the post-2020 period.

The aim of this paper is to analyse the new objectives of the Eastern Partnership proposed by the European Union in the context of the changing security environment and closer relations with the eastern neighbours of the EU, as well as to show the prospects for further development of the eastern dimension of the ENP. This requires answering the following research questions: what were the original goals and objectives of the Eastern Partnership and to what extent have they been modified in recent years? What successes and failures can be identified in their implementation? What are the prospects for the development of the EaP, taking into account the aspirations of the individual partner countries? The paper poses a research hypothesis that the EU has set ambitious goals for the Eastern Partnership programme, the implementation of which not only positively influences the political, economic and social transformation of the eastern neighbours of the EU, but also contributes to the stabilisation of the EU neighbourhood and increases the chances of the ENP meeting the current security challenges in the region of Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus.

## Eastern Partnership as part of the European Neighbourhood Policy of the EU – essence, objectives and principles

The Polish-Swedish proposal to establish an Eastern Partnership programme was first presented in May 2008 during a meeting of the General Affairs and External Relations Council. Its primary objective was to deepen cooperation between the EU

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<sup>7</sup> A. Kalicka-Mikołajczyk, *Europejska Polityka Sąsiedztwa...*, pp. 53, 76–77; M. Czermińska, "Europejskie Partnerstwo Wschodnie – wymiar polityczny, ekonomiczny i bezpieczeństwa zacieśniania stosunków ze wschodnimi sąsiadami Unii Europejskiej", *Krakowskie Studia Międzynarodowe*, vol. 2 (2020), pp. 200–208.



and the eastern partner countries in both its bilateral and multilateral dimensions. The European Council, which convened in Brussels on 19th–20th June 2008, welcomed the initiative and asked the European Commission to prepare, by spring 2009, detailed rules and mechanisms for implementing the goals of the EaP programme. However, due to events that took place in the post-Soviet space at that time and in particular due to the outbreak of the Russian-Georgian conflict, the European Commission was asked to accelerate the work on the EaP objectives. Eventually, on 3rd December 2008, a communication entitled ‘Eastern Partnership’ was presented.<sup>8</sup>

The December document stated that the EaP initiative ‘should bring a lasting political message of EU solidarity, alongside additional, tangible support’ for partner countries’ ‘democratic and market-oriented reforms and the consolidation of their statehood and territorial integrity.’ It added that the ‘guiding principle should be to offer the maximum possible in forging closer relations, taking into account political and economic realities and the state of reforms of the partner concerned’. The Communication also stressed that cooperation between the EU and its eastern neighbours would be based on ‘mutual commitments to the rule of law, good governance, respect for human rights, respect for and protection of minorities, and the principles of the market economy and sustainable development.’<sup>9</sup> It is worth noting that the text of the document does not address the question of possible accession of the partner countries to the European Union, but it does mention the intensification of cooperation between the EU and the countries of Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus in the bilateral and multilateral dimensions.

With regard to bilateral relations, it is proposed: to replace the existing Partnership and Cooperation Agreements with Association Agreements; to provide the

<sup>8</sup> A.K. Cianciara, *Partnerstwo Wschodnie 2009–2014. Geneza, funkcjonowanie, uwarunkowania*, Warszawa: ISP PAN 2014, pp. 36–45; A. Kalicka-Mikołajczyk, *Europejska Polityka Sąsiedztwa...*, pp. 135–136; C. Hillion, A. Mayhew, “The Eastern Partnership – Something New or Window-Dressing”, *SEI Working Paper*, vol. 109 (2009), pp. 4–5; K. Ежова, А. Ежов, «Восточное партнерство» – механизм сотрудничества ЕС на постсоветском пространстве. In: П. Байор (ed.), *Восточное Партнерство. Цели – опыт – вызовы. Анализ процесса имплементации в государствах охваченных программой*, Краков: Ксиенгарния Академицка 2013, p. 88 (K. Yezhova, A. Yezhov, ‘Eastern Partnership’ – EU Cooperation Mechanism in the Post-Soviet Area. In: P. Bajor (ed.), *Eastern Partnership. Objectives – Experience – Challenges. Analysis of the Implementation Process in the Countries Participating in the Programme*, Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka 2013, p. 88); J. Truszczyński, *Partnerstwo Wschodnie – geneza i wstępny bilans*. In: M. Grela, Z. Rapacki (eds.), *Partnerstwo Wschodnie Unii Europejskiej*, Warszawa: Akademia Finansów i Biznesu Vistula 2016, pp. 16–17.

<sup>9</sup> European Commission, *Komunikat Komisji do Parlamentu Europejskiego i Rady. Partnerstwo wschodnie*, KOM(2008) 823 wersja ostateczna, Bruksela, December 3, 2008, pp. 2–3. At: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2008:0823:FIN:PL:PDF>, last accessed November 20, 2021.

option of integration into the EU economy through the establishment of Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas, ultimately leading to the creation of a network of free trade zones, and in the longer term to the establishment of a Neighbourhood Economic Community; to gradually liberalise the EU visa regime; to deepen cooperation in terms of strengthening energy security; and to provide support in terms of economic and social policies to reduce differences within each partner country and across their borders.<sup>10</sup>

While the above postulates for the development of bilateral relations had been voiced in the EU forum in the context of strengthening the ENP even prior to the Polish-Swedish initiative (e.g. negotiations between the EU and Ukraine on a new Association Agreement began on 5th March 2007), the definition of the multilateral cooperation framework, on the other hand, represented something of a *novum*.<sup>11</sup> The Communication from the European Commission stated that the multilateral dimension of the EaP should consist of the following levels: biennial meetings of the heads of states and governments of the partner countries; annual meetings of the foreign ministers of the EU and the partner countries; four thematic platforms, with senior officials meeting at least biannually, committed to reforms in specific policy areas (it was submitted that these should concern: 1) democracy, good governance and stability; 2) economic integration and convergence with EU policies; 3) energy security; and 4) people-to-people contacts); and panels supporting the work of the thematic platforms. Furthermore, it was added that the goals of the EaP could be pursued through the so-called Flagship Initiatives, which would include integrated border management systems; facilitation for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs); promotion of regional energy markets, energy efficiency and renewable energy sources; development of the Southern Energy Corridor; and cooperation in responding to natural and man-made disasters. Also worth mentioning is the proposal to involve civil society by setting up a Civil Society Forum and to develop interparliamentary cooperation by making the EuroNest Parliamentary Assembly an integral part of the EaP.<sup>12</sup>

According to the above-mentioned proposals of the European Commission, the EaP was to provide 'a forum for the exchange of information and experience concerning efforts made by partner countries for transition, reform and modernisation, as well as

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 3–10.

<sup>11</sup> A.K. Cianciara, *Partnerstwo Wschodnie 2009–2014...*, pp. 33–35, 40–41, 46–47; O. Lugina, „O krok bliżej do Unii – Nowa Umowa Stowarzyszeniowa między Ukrainą a UE”, *Rocznik Integracji Europejskiej*, vol. 3 (2009), pp. 219.

<sup>12</sup> European Commission, *Komunikat Komisji do Parlamentu Europejskiego i Rady. Partnerstwo wschodnie...*, pp. 10–15.



an additional EU instrument to support these processes'. It was also stressed that the multilateral cooperation framework outlined above would ensure the organisation of meetings between the relevant services of the European Commission and experts from the Member States aimed at presenting and explaining EU legislation and standards and comparing them with national policies and legislations. Thus, the EaP will initiate a gradual process of structured approximation of the partner countries to the EU.<sup>13</sup>

The inaugural Eastern Partnership Summit took place on 7th May 2009. The final declaration of the summit stressed that the main goal of the programme was to 'create the necessary conditions to accelerate political association and further economic integration between the European Union and interested partner countries.'<sup>14</sup> In subsequent years, this objective was supplemented and modified, taking into account new challenges and threats to European security and developments in the neighbourhood of the EU. Worthy of note are the measures taken to update the EaP objectives over the past four years, as they reflect the current shape of the programme and outline the immediate perspective on its development. First of all, it is important to mention the results of the latest Eastern Partnership Summit, which took place on 24th November 2017 in Brussels. At that time, 20 key goals were approved, which should be achieved by 2020, in the four priority areas agreed on at the EaP Summit in Riga on 21st–22nd May 2015.<sup>15</sup> These are: 1) a stronger economy (improving the investment and business environment, unlocking the growth potential of SMEs; creating new jobs at local and regional levels; promoting trade between parties; harmonising digital markets, etc.); 2) better governance (strengthening the rule of law and anti-corruption mechanisms; supporting implementation of key reforms in the judiciary and public administration; reinforcing cooperation on security); 3) greater connectivity (expanding the core TEN-T networks and transport; enhancing security of energy supply and the use of renewable energy, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions; ensuring environmental protection and mitigating the effects of climate change); and 4) a stronger society (advancing the dialogue on visa liberalisation, providing support for the implementation of partnerships for mobility; increasing investments in young people's skills as well as their entrepreneurship and employability; establishment of

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 10–11.

<sup>14</sup> Council of the European Union, *Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit Prague, 7 May 2009*, 8435/09 (Presse 78), Brussels, May 7, 2009, p. 6. At: [https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/31797/2009\\_eap\\_declaration.pdf](https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/31797/2009_eap_declaration.pdf), last accessed November 20, 2021.

<sup>15</sup> European Council, *Wspólna deklaracja ze szczytu Partnerstwa Wschodniego, Bruksela, 24 listopada 2017 r.*, 14821/17, Bruksela, November 24, 2019, pp. 1, 11. At: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-14821-2017-INIT/pl/pdf>, last accessed November 20, 2021.

the European School for Eastern Partnership; and integration of the EU and EaP research and innovation systems). These were supplemented with three cross-cutting objectives: greater outreach to civil society organisations; enhancing gender equality and non-discrimination; and strengthening strategic communication while supporting media pluralism and independence.<sup>16</sup>

As for the ongoing armed conflicts in the partner countries, the final declaration of the last EaP summit in Brussels only called for their peaceful resolution in accordance with the principles and norms of international law. With regard to the EU's involvement in resolving these conflicts and building trust between the conflicting parties, the summit welcomed the EU's 'efforts and strengthened role' in this matter.<sup>17</sup>

The implementation of the above objectives and the strengthening of cooperation between the European Union and the Eastern neighbours – conditional on the level of ambition, objectives and needs of the partners and the pace and quality of the reforms, and based on the EU's use of the incentive instrument ('more for more')<sup>18</sup> – was expected to lead to the strengthening of the resilience of states, economies and societies in both the EU and the partner countries. That statement was in line with the appeals contained in the 2015 ENP Review and the 2016 Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy.<sup>19</sup> The emphasis on strengthening resilience also featured in the Communication of 18th March 2020 entitled 'Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020: Reinforcing Resilience – an Eastern Partnership that delivers for all.' It defines five policy objectives for the EaP, stressing that in the long-term perspective, the European Union, its Member States and partner countries will work together towards: 1) resilient, sustainable and integrated economies; 2) accountable institutions, rule of law and security; 3) environmental resilience and resilience to climate change; 4) resilient digital transformation; and 5) resilient, equitable and inclusive societies.<sup>20</sup> With regard to the implementation of the above objectives, the Communication confirmed that this would be facilitated by the existing bilateral

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 11–19; 20 celów na 2020 rok, 2017. At: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/pl/policies/eastern-partnership/20-deliverables-for-2020/>, last update June 16, 2020, last accessed September 23, 2021.

<sup>17</sup> European Council, *Wspólna deklaracja ze szczytu Partnerstwa Wschodniego...*, p. 3.

<sup>18</sup> The 'more for more' principle makes the amount of EU financial support to partner countries conditional on their progress in implementing internal democratic and economic reforms.

<sup>19</sup> European Council, *Wspólna deklaracja ze szczytu Partnerstwa Wschodniego...*, pp. 2–11.

<sup>20</sup> European Council, *Wspólny Komunikat do Parlamentu Europejskiego, Rady Europejskiej, Rady Europejskiego Komitetu Ekonomiczno-Społecznego i Komitetu Regionów. Polityka Partnerstwa Wschodniego po 2020 r. Wzmacnianie odporności – Partnerstwo Wschodnie, które służy wszystkimi*, JOIN(2020) 7 final, Bruksela, March 18, 2020, p. 5. At: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/PL/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020JC0007&from=EN>, last accessed November 20, 2021.

cooperation framework and the new multilateral architecture of the EaP adopted at the 2017 Summit.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, it was acknowledged that the incentive instrument used so far requires 'clearer guidance on specific reform priorities' with objective, precise, detailed and verifiable benchmarks. It was stated that the progress achieved by the partner countries in implementing the reforms should result in an increase in the amount of EU financial support. On the other hand, in the event of any serious or prolonged stagnation or even backsliding in reform implementation, the amount of EU financial support should be decreased 'with the exception of support to civil society.'<sup>22</sup>

## Implementation of Eastern Partnership Objectives – successes and failures

*'In the European Union, we value the Eastern Partnership enormously. Notwithstanding difficulties and problems that we still face in the region, our partnership has managed to take forward our common work on trade, economic development, human rights, the role of civil society, visa liberalisation and in many other fields.'*<sup>23</sup>

– Federica Mogherini,  
High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

In assessing the implementation of the Eastern Partnership Objectives, attention should first be paid to change of the contractual basis for the development of bilateral relations between the EU and the partner countries. Admittedly, this goal has only been achieved in part, as only three out of the six partner countries have signed Association

<sup>21</sup> The revised EaP multilateral cooperation structure includes four platforms transformed into cross-sectoral forums in line with the four priority areas adopted at the Riga Summit in 2015. They act as a link between the panels where in-depth discussions take place (the platforms provide them with political guidelines) and the meetings of high-level officials that provide general guidance, identify synergies and monitor the whole process (the platforms prepare reports for them). During the EaP Riga Summit it was accepted that such a structure 'will be operationalised through an inclusive and results-oriented process' – see further: European Council, *Wspólna deklaracja ze szczytu Partnerstwa Wschodniego...*, pp. 20–21.

<sup>22</sup> European Council, *Wspólny Komunikat do Parlamentu Europejskiego, Rady Europejskiej, Rady, Europejskiego Komitetu Ekonomiczno-Społecznego i Komitetu Regionów. Polityka Partnerstwa Wschodniego po 2020...*, pp. 4, 19.

<sup>23</sup> *10 lat Partnerstwa Wschodniego*, 2019. At: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/pl/policies/eastern-partnership/ten-years-of-the-eastern-partnership/>, last update August 11, 2021, last accessed November 20, 2021.

Agreements (including DCFTA): Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. Armenia, however, despite finalising the Association Agreement with the EU, eventually opted out of signing an Association Agreement and later joined the Eurasian Economic Union – a regional economic integration organisation that also includes Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Russia.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, since 2017, the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement has been the basis for relations between the European Union and Armenia. In the case of Azerbaijan, negotiations on a new comprehensive agreement started in 2017. As for Belarus, it is the only EaP country with which relations are still based on the Agreement on Trade and Commercial and Economic Cooperation concluded on 18th December 1989 between the European Communities and the Soviet Union.<sup>25</sup> This is due to the continued violation of democratic principles and human rights by the Belarusian authorities, which has prevented the ratification of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the EU and Belarus signed in 1995 and the adoption of the ENP Action Plan containing plans for political, economic and social reforms in the neighbouring countries.<sup>26</sup>

Significant progress has been made in the bilateral visa dialogue. Visa-free regimes between the EU and these countries have been in place with Moldova since 2014 and with Georgia and Ukraine since 2017. These partner countries have also fully implemented the readmission agreements. There are also visa facilitation and readmission agreements in force between the EU and the three remaining EaP countries (for Armenia and Azerbaijan since 2014, and for Belarus since 2020).<sup>27</sup>

As regards sectoral cooperation between the EU and its eastern neighbours, it is worth noting the intensification of trade between the parties. Taken together, the partner countries rank 10th among the EU's largest trading partners. The EU is the most

<sup>24</sup> *The Eurasian Economic Union*. At: <http://www.eaeunion.org/?lang=en#about>, last accessed November 20, 2021; *Armenia and the EU*, 2016. At: [https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/armenia/896/node/896\\_ky](https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/armenia/896/node/896_ky), last update May 11, 2016, last accessed November 20, 2021.

<sup>25</sup> European Union, *Umowa między Europejską Wspólnotą Gospodarczą i Europejską Wspólnotą Energii Atomowej a Związkiem Socjalistycznych Republik Radzieckich w sprawie wymiany handlowej i współpracy handlowej i gospodarczej*, Dz.U. UE L, nr 68 (1990), pp. 3–20.

<sup>26</sup> O. Tkachuk, *Reakcja Unii Europejskiej na sytuację na Białorusi po wyborach prezydenckich w 2020 r.* In: Я. Турчин, Т. Астратович-Лейк, О. Горбач (eds.), *Східна політика Європейського Союзу: здобутки, виклики та перспективи*, Львів–Оlsztyn: Instytut Nauk Politycznych UWM w Olsztynie 2021, (Ya. Turchyn, T. Astramowicz-Leyk, O. Horbach (eds.), *Eastern Policy of the European Union: Achievements, Challenges and Prospects*, Lviv–Olsztyn: Instytut Nauk Politycznych UWM 2021), pp. 94–95.

<sup>27</sup> European Council, *Wspólny Komunikat do Parlamentu Europejskiego, Rady Europejskiej, Rady Europejskiego Komitetu Ekonomiczno-Społecznego i Komitetu Regionów. Polityka Partnerstwa Wschodniego po 2020...*, p. 3.

important trading bloc for four countries, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, while for Belarus the EU is the second largest trading partner.<sup>28</sup> For Armenia, trade with the EU accounted for approx. 18% of the total trade of this country in 2020.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, the number of companies exporting from Georgia to the EU has increased by 35% since 2015, from Moldova by 40% and from Ukraine by 26%.<sup>30</sup> The progress in implementation of the '20 Deliverables for 2020' adopted in the final declaration of the EaP Summit held on 24th November 2017 in Brussels is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Progress in implementation of the 20 Deliverables for 2020 specified as part of the EaP**

CROSS-CUTTING DELIVERABLES	STATUS	CHANGE
1 – More engagement with civil society organisations	++	↑
2 – Increase gender equality and non-discrimination	+	↑
3 – Strengthen strategic communications and support plurality and independence of media	+	↑
<b>STRONGER ECONOMY</b>		
4 – Improve the investment and business environment and unlock Small and Medium-sized Enterprises' growth potential	+	↑
5 – Create new job opportunities at the local and regional levels	++	↑
6 – Address gaps in access to finance and financial infrastructure	++	~
7 – Harmonise digital markets	++	~
8 – Support trade among partner countries and between them and the EU	++	~
<b>STRONGER GOVERNANCE</b>		
9 – Strengthen the rule of law and anti-corruption	+	~
10 – Support the implementation of key judicial reforms	+	~
11 – Support the implementation of public administration reform	++	↑
12 – Stronger security cooperation	++	~
<b>STRONGER CONNECTIVITY</b>		
13 – Extend TEN-T core networks transport	++	↑

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>29</sup> *Countries and Regions. Armenia*. At: <https://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/countries/armenia/>, last update June 15, 2021, last accessed November 20, 2021.

<sup>30</sup> *Top 10 Achievements of the Eastern Partnership in the Last 10 Years*, p. 2. At: [https://www.eu-neighbours.eu/sites/default/files/publications/2019-05/Factsheet\\_EAP\\_10Years\\_2019\\_EN\\_0.pdf](https://www.eu-neighbours.eu/sites/default/files/publications/2019-05/Factsheet_EAP_10Years_2019_EN_0.pdf), last accessed November 20, 2021.

14 – Mitigate climate change: Enhancing energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy and reducing Greenhouse Gas emissions	++	↑
15 – Increase energy supply security	+	↑
16 – Support the environment and adaptation to climate change	++	↑
<b>STRONGER SOCIETY</b>		
17 – Make progress on Visa Liberalisation Dialogues and Mobility Partnership	++	~
18 – Strengthen investment in young people's skills, entrepreneurship and employability	++	↑
19 – Establish an Eastern Partnership European school	+++	↑
20 – Integrate Eastern Partnership and EU research and innovation systems and programmes	++	~
<b>IMPLEMENTATION SINCE 2016</b>	+++ COMPLETED	++ ON TRACK
<b>CHANGES SINCE FEBRUARY 2020</b>	~ NO CHANGE	↑ PROGRESS
	+ LIMITED PROGRESS	

Source: *Joint Staff Working Document. Recovery, Resilience and Reform: Post-2020 Eastern Partnership Priorities*, SWD(2021) 186 final, p. 51.

As can be seen in Table 1, the most progress has been made on the cross-cutting deliverables and improving connectivity, with partial progress in the areas of stronger economy and stronger society, and the least progress in improving governance. As regards the goals set out in the Communication from March 2020, the European Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy prepared a working document in July 2021 entitled 'Recovery, resilience and reform: post 2020 Eastern Partnership priorities', in which they set out 10 goals for EaP by 2025 on topics such as reducing energy consumption, providing support to health workers, and combating hybrid and cyber threats. In addition, an economic and investment plan was presented, worth EUR 2.3b in the form of grants, blended finance and guarantees, with the possibility of mobilising up to EUR 17b for private and public investments. At the same time, it was added that this plan would support the economic and social recovery of partner countries after the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as investment in competitive and resilient economies and societies.<sup>31</sup> These proposals will be discussed at the next EaP Summit, scheduled for December 2021.

<sup>31</sup> Council of the European Union, *Joint Staff Working Document. Recovery, Resilience and Reform: Post 2020 Eastern Partnership Priorities*, SWD(2021) 186 final, Brussels, July, 2, 2021, pp. 1–51. At:

## Summary and recommendations

In summary so far, it is important to emphasise that the basic purpose of the EaP, which was to deepen and strengthen relations between the EU and the partner countries, thereby bringing the six post-Soviet republics closer to the European Union, has been accomplished. In May 2019, at a gala dinner celebrating the 10th anniversary of the EaP, then-President of the European Council Donald Tusk assessed the implementation of the EaP as follows: *'There is more Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine in the EU and ... there is more EU in all of your countries than ever before. ... We are not only neighbours – we are members of the same European family.'*<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, it is worth noting that important political, economic and social reforms have been initiated or intensified in the respective countries, although there remains the problem of their slow implementation (first and foremost in the area of governance, especially in the context of the rule of law, the fight against corruption and organised crime, as well as the role of independent media and civil society)<sup>33</sup> or selective implementation of the EaP objectives by the authorities of neighbouring countries.<sup>34</sup> The 'more for more' principle has proven to be an insufficient incentive for the partner countries to actively pursue the necessary reforms. In the countries most interested in closer relations with the EU (Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova), such a political incentive could be provided by the prospect of membership,<sup>35</sup> and not merely recognition of the European aspirations and European choice of the individual partners. The authorities of these countries have repeatedly touched upon this issue in their statements. For example, at the beginning of 2021 Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Gacharia said that *'Georgia is preparing to apply for full EU membership in 2024.'*<sup>36</sup> With regard to the other EaP countries (Belarus, Armenia and Azerbaijan),

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[https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/swd\\_2021\\_186\\_f1\\_joint\\_staff\\_working\\_paper\\_en\\_v2\\_p1\\_1356457\\_0.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/swd_2021_186_f1_joint_staff_working_paper_en_v2_p1_1356457_0.pdf), last accessed November 20, 2021.

<sup>32</sup> 10 lat Partnerstwa Wschodniego...

<sup>33</sup> European Council, *Wspólny Komunikat do Parlamentu Europejskiego, Rady Europejskiej, Rady Europejskiego Komitetu Ekonomiczno-Społecznego i Komitetu Regionów. Polityka Partnerstwa Wschodniego po 2020...*, p. 4.

<sup>34</sup> B. Piskorska, "Partnerstwo Wschodnie po 10 latach: sukces czy porażka, realizm czy iluzja?", *Rocznik Instytutu Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej*, vol. 17, no. 2 (2019), pp. 24–25.

<sup>35</sup> A. Harasimowicz, "Europejska polityka sąsiedztwa – pechowa pierwsza dekada", *Studia Europejskie*, vol. 2 (2016), pp. 26–27.

<sup>36</sup> V. Maksimov, "Georgian President Visits Brussels in Push for 2024 EU Membership Application", *EURACTIV*, January 22, 2021. At: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/eastern-europe/news/georgian-president-visits-brussels-in-push-for-2024-eu-membership-application/>, last accessed November 20, 2021.



the drawback of the said principle is that it could be counterproductive, encouraging the authorities of these countries to strengthen their cooperation with Russia, which 'does not require' them to carry out political reforms that would threaten their hold on power. As well, in terms of the multilateral dimension of the EaP, despite a number of changes to the structure of the multilateral cooperation within the EaP, the political factor preventing its effective functioning remains a problem (including the imposition of sanctions on Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko and his regime and the subsequent resumption of armed hostilities between Armenia and Azerbaijan in Nagorno-Karabakh in autumn 2020).<sup>37</sup>

All the above determinants as well as the lack of cohesion among the EU Member States regarding the target for the development of relations with their eastern neighbours, the lack of a strategic approach to relations with Russia (given its ambitions in the region) and inconsistency in actions towards Moscow (on the one hand, due to the annexation of Crimea and the conflict in Donbass, sanctions have been imposed on Russia,<sup>38</sup> while on the other – despite opposition from some states including Ukraine and Poland – construction of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline<sup>39</sup> was completed in September 2021) translate into the weakness of the EaP. The region of Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus continues to be characterised by a high degree of internal instability; the existing security threats have not only not been eliminated, but have intensified (mass protests following the August 2020 presidential elections in Belarus and violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms by the Belarusian authorities; the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, etc.).<sup>40</sup> In conclusion, the hypothesis posed in the introduction of the paper has been confirmed only in part. The implementation of the goals of the EaP programme, which have been updated in recent years, does indeed contribute to the initiation or intensification of reforms in partner countries, and thus it strengthens their resilience, but the process of this implementation has been relatively slow. As a result, the eastern neighbourhood of the European Union remain fragile and poorly developed. In order to meet these challenges and effectively counteract all security threats, the EU should make the offer of cooperation more attractive to partner countries (especially those that are interested in closer cooperation with the EU), as well

<sup>37</sup> B. Deen, W. Zweers, I. van Loon, *The Eastern Partnership. Three Dilemmas in a Time of Troubles*, Clingendael Report, January 2021, p. 4. At: <https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2021-01/the-eastern-partnership.pdf>, last accessed November 20, 2021.

<sup>38</sup> European Council, *Unijne sankcje w odpowiedzi na kryzys na Ukrainie*, 2021. At: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/pl/policies/sanctions/ukraine-crisis/>, last accessed November 20, 2021.

<sup>39</sup> "Nord Stream 2 gotowy. Triumf Putina", *Deutsche Welle*, September 10, 2021. At: <https://www.dw.com/pl/nord-stream-2-gotowy-triumf-putina/a-59147172>, last accessed November 20, 2021.

<sup>40</sup> O. Tkachuk, *Reakcja Unii Europejskiej...*, pp. 91–93.



as redefine the instruments for the implementation of the EaP and ENP by introducing 'hard' security measures because – as experience has shown – the existing mechanisms have not contributed to strengthening the security of the EU and the neighbouring region. In short-term perspective, primary consideration should be given to establish instruments to support implementation of the DCFTAs and proper use of EU funds. On the other hand, in the medium term, the EU should adopt a strategy for development of cooperation with associated and non-associated countries, which would take greater account of the partners' national interests and their integration aspirations. In the case of Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova, a good solution would be a new mechanism for multilateral cooperation. Participation of respective country representatives in that mechanism together with the European Union would improve joint action. On top of that, a proposal should be considered, to further reinforce integration of these neighboring countries into the EU internal market, beyond the framework set out in the current Association Agreements and DCFTAs. Unless these measures are taken, it is highly likely that the interest of the partner countries in continued implementation of the reforms will diminish, while the eastern dimension of the ENP may stagnate. As far as the long-term perspective is concerned, the necessary step seems to be to increase the EU's ability to respond to crises in its vicinity and to strengthen EU's role in resolving armed conflicts in the EaP countries. An important event in the further development of EaP will be the upcoming December summit, which will discuss the objectives of cooperation between the EU and the partner countries for the coming years.

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MARKIYAN MALSKEY 

*Ivan Franko National University of Lviv*

## The Ukrainian Transformation Initiatives of Eastern Partnership

**ABSTRACT:** The new problems and challenges facing the EU's Eastern Partnership Initiative are generated by the dynamism and predictability of political events in Central and Eastern Europe. The European Union is implementing this project by combining two interrelated approaches – intensive bilateral cooperation between partner countries and the EU and the multilateral interaction of participants within the framework of regional programmes.

Both sides (the Council of Europe and the partner countries) – mutually taking into account the positions and proposals of the Eastern Partnership participants – propose some new approaches and mechanisms for the project's functioning. In the list of new initiatives, a special place is occupied by the “revolutionary format” of cooperation with the “European Union – Associated Trio”, proposed by Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova. This initiative is becoming the subject of extensive expert and political discussions in the European Union and raises the question of the future of the Eastern Partnership.

**KEYWORDS:** Eastern partnership, new initiatives, Association Trio security and defence cooperation, European Union, Ukraine

The dynamics of political events on the European continent and changes in regional configurations of interstate interactions constantly give rise to new problems and challenges in the practical implementation of the Eastern Partnership Polish-Swedish Initiative, conceptually formed in the form of communication of the European Commission in 2009 within the framework of the European Neighborhood Policy.

The goal of this initiative was to deepen the systematic cooperation between the European Union and its eastern neighbours – Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine – to implement and support fundamental reforms of the political and economic system of these states. The most attractive and effective mechanism for the practical implementation of cooperation was the association agreements of each state with the European Union, the creation of free trade zones and visa liberalisation. At the same time, taking into account, on the one hand, a certain scepticism of Eastern partners about the European Neighborhood Policy, on the second – competition with the European Union initiative to expand cooperation with leading neighbours, and on the third – different positions of the “old” and “new” member states of the European Union, the initiators of the Eastern Partnership Project proposed several new approaches and practical proposals, taking as much as possible into account in their concept of the initiative and the positions of partner countries.

The so-called “two dimensions” of the Eastern Partnership focus on intensive bilateral cooperation between the partner country and the European Union through association agreements by deepening the Free Trade Area, introducing a visa-free regime and implementing a special technical assistance programme to strengthen the administrative capacity of partner countries.

In multilateral cooperation, the main focus is on mechanisms for strengthening the energy security of the countries of the European Union and its eastern partners, effective equalisation of regional development levels, integrated border management programmes, development of regional electricity markets, assistance to small and medium-sized businesses, operational interaction in the field of emergency situations.

The multilateral format is responsible for creating systemic prerequisites for the harmonisation of European and national legislation, regulatory convergence, organisational and institutional support for the activities of Eastern Partnership institutions, intergovernmental and inter-parliamentary multilateral cooperation.

The creation of the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly, the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, the Conference of Regional and Local Authorities, and the Eastern Partnership Business Forum, although it was an effective incentive to activate cooperation between the project’s countries, failed to provide an adequate and fully-fledged response to the rapid political transformations in the region. On the agenda

was the issue of weakening common positions and overcoming significant political differences in the approaches of the six partners, especially on the prospects for membership to the European Union. The signing of the association agreement with the European Union for Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia has become an additional factor in the informal division of Partner States into two camps – associate members with clear European integration ambitions (up to European Union membership) and other partners with a differentiated level of participation.

As O. Motsyk rightly points out, the lack of a European perspective for partner countries, or at least agreement on the European identity of the EU's eastern partners, can significantly reduce the cost of the Eastern Partnership for countries seeking full membership to the EU. On the other hand, we need to be aware that in the current situation in the EU, launching any initiative that would open the way for the EU's eastern neighbours to gain membership is not an easy issue. The lack of ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, support for the thesis of "fatigue" with expansion, the EU's focus on the Balkans and palpable pro-Russian sympathy among several key EU players are just the tips of the iceberg of fear and unwillingness to raise in any form the question of the possible prospect of membership for its eastern neighbours.<sup>1</sup>

The European Union is trying to respond quickly to the dynamic change in the geopolitical and geo-economic situation and the emergence of new trends, challenges, and threats by reviewing and improving the Eastern Partnership framework, mechanisms and procedures.

In 2016–2017, the European Union presented a new approach to the multilateral architecture of the project in the form of a joint working document "Eastern Partnership – 20 achievements until 2020: focusing on top priorities and real results." This made it possible to expand the range of multilateral cooperation. At the political level of decision-making, sectoral ministerial meetings, informal partnership dialogues and high-level meetings were added to the meetings of the Heads of State and Government of the project's countries, and 20 Eastern Partnership goals were officially proposed as a roadmap for building relations between the EU and Partner States until 2020.

An important stage in the transformation of the Eastern Partnership policy was the celebration of the tenth anniversary of its establishment, during which a number of countries, especially Poland and Lithuania, proposed separate initiatives aimed at strengthening institutional cooperation. Poland, emphasising that the institutionalisation of the Eastern Partnership policy is one of the most important principles of its

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<sup>1</sup> O. Motsyk, *I Believe in the European Future of Our Peoples*, Lutsk: Vezha-Druk 2020, p. 148.



implementation, proposed the idea of creating an Eastern Partnership secretariat and a mechanism for chairing the six Eastern Partnership partners annually on a rotating basis.

Lithuania has prepared an informal position document, “Strategy Trio 2030,” which provides for a more active approximation of Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova to the EU by creating an EU Support Group from among the friendly EU member states and joining the trio to the main EU policies in the field of small and medium-sized businesses, access to the domestic market, digital agenda, investment and infrastructure projects.

On the other hand, the negative political transformations of the second half of 2020 and the beginning of 2021, which manifested itself in the political crises in Belarus, Georgia and Moldova, the Azerbaijani-Armenian war, the freezing of the Normandy format against the background of the aggravation of the Ukrainian-Russian confrontation, as well as the coronavirus pandemic not only made their own adjustments to the functioning of the political-economic and financial mechanisms of the Eastern Partnership, but also sharply put on the agenda the issue of differentiation within the multilateral format of the Eastern Partnership.

Different Eastern Partnership member countries sometimes clearly demonstrate different assessments of political events and processes, contradictory approaches to solving topical issues of domestic development and international cooperation, different rates of democratisation of the political system and different individual priorities and expectations from cooperation with European Unions.

In these circumstances, it is necessary to avoid unification of approaches to the implementation of cooperation policies with a group of states that demonstrate reforms of the political system (Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova) and states that do not seek full membership to the European Union or do not meet the European criteria for stability and democracy.

In this context, the European Parliament has launched the Eastern Partnership initiative as a future model for Associate Partners which provides for close cooperation and accession of partner states to the Customs and Energy Union, a common digital market, association with the Schengen area and deeper integration in other areas. This is a continuation of the policy already agreed on the goals, objectives and principles of cooperation in various fields, as well as compliance with the requirements of the “more for more” and “less for less” approach to the countries that have made the most progress in implementing social and economic reforms.

This position is the basis for joint communication between the European Commission and the European External Action Service to the European Parliament, the European Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the committee



of regions “Eastern Partnership policy after 2020. Strengthening sustainability – the Eastern Partnership that brings results to all.”

This programme document is the result of joint work and lengthy consultations on the future of the EP. It provides for the use of opportunities for the EU Common Market by partner countries, joining the common zone of payments in European currency, participation in projects within the framework of the EU strategy for combining Europe and Asia, increased participation in the Horizon Europe Programme and deepening sectoral cooperation between partners and the European Union. It lays the fundamental foundations for the Eastern Partnership’s post-2020 long-term goals platform, which define the partnership’s main objectives for the future.

The main and determining factor is the concentration of efforts on trade intensification and effective regional and bilateral integration of the economies of partner countries and the European Union. To this end, the gradual liberalisation of access to the EU market will continue, including public procurement, market supervision, technical barriers to trade, sanitary and phytosanitary measures, customs services and tax standards.

The Eastern Partnership’s incentives for key economic reforms include financial support from the EU through an external investment plan, a programme to support countries’ efforts to meet the criteria for joining the single euro payment zone, finance innovative startups and support farmers and rural regions. Attention is focused on the implementation of indicative investment plans to improve the infrastructure of roads, railways, ports and airports, increase the role of cross-border and regional interconnectors, increase investment in renewable energy and increase energy efficiency.

Successful economic development should be based on effective state institutions, whose sustainability is based on justice reform with the participation of international institutions and experts, overcoming corruption and organised crime, and combating human trafficking and illegal goods.

A cross-cutting idea of Joint Communication is the EU Green agreement, which is aimed at ensuring urgent actions of the European Union and partner countries in the field of ensuring the environment and climate.

In order to ensure the health and well-being of the population, the Eastern Partnership will continue to work on promoting environmental innovations and introducing a circular economy, preserving biodiversity, supporting sustainable agriculture and fishing, and strengthening energy and nuclear security.

An important element of the Eastern Partnership’s long-term strategy is the digital transformation of partner countries in accordance with EU legislation and practice. The main thing here will be to and modernise the digital infrastructure, strengthen

regulatory authorities' independence, support e-governance in the EP region, and develop a digital innovation and cyber sustainability programme by the governments of partner countries.

Success in fulfilling the above tasks will largely depend on strategic communication with the population of the Eastern Partnership countries, managing the multilateral structure of the EP and implementing future achievement programmes.

The Eastern Partnership Platform, as the list of primary tasks shows, includes many essential areas for strengthening cooperation between partner countries and the EU, but the emphasis on strengthening regional security for eastern project participants is becoming completely relevant. Five of the six countries participating in the EP programme have acute territorial conflicts with their neighbours and are unable to independently resolve issues of reintegration policy, countering modern hybrid and terrorist threats.

The prospect of combining EP countries into a single security format is actively and critically discussed in the expert community. An expression of the extreme position is the statement that it is inappropriate to talk about a common security space of the Eastern Partnership countries.<sup>2</sup> Turchyn is less categorical about the situation, stating that "the transformation of the Eastern Partnership into a new integration security model can take place only after deepening a differentiated approach to the aggressor countries in the implementation of the programme, as well as the interest of EU member states in such project changes."<sup>3</sup>

The formation of such a model is now directly influenced by Russia's aggressive policy, its destructive position on the main European security trends and influences. The European Union has taken the first steps to review security relations with the partner countries of the Eastern Partnership initiative, introduce anti-terrorist mechanisms and anti-propaganda measures, and consolidate efforts on a Joint Comprehensive counteraction to Russian expansion in the European region. In the EU, there is a growing desire to attract euro-oriented Eastern neighbours to the European defence strategy, among which Ukraine occupies a special place. Experts and politicians discuss expanding cooperation within the framework of the European Neighborhood Policy in the field of security and defence, implementing practical steps to create "European combat groups" to strengthen military-technical cooperation, master advanced operational standards for training troops and achieve operational compatibility. There is

<sup>2</sup> L. Chekalenko, *Is the Eastern Partnership Program a New Security Model?*. At: <http://www.viche.info/purnal/47>, last accessed November 2, 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Y. Turchyn, "Prospects of the Eastern Partnership in the Context of Geopolitical and Security Changes in the Eastern European Region", *Political Sciences*, vol. 2, no. 1 (2016), p. 65.

a growing understanding that the security situation and sustainability in the Eastern Partnership area are important elements of the security architecture of all central and Eastern European countries. Therefore, it is important and productive initiatives of partner countries, particularly Ukraine, to implement a range of political and military measures that are adequate to modern challenges and requirements, to use the security potential of the European Union and the experience of its eastern neighbours. This complex should be based on a well-thought-out reintegration policy as one of the goals of the partnership, which includes the reintegration of annexed and occupied territories and the holistic reintegration of internally displaced persons and the regulation of their status.

The security situation in the region is critically threatened by terrorism and radicalisation of social and political movements. In the case of Ukraine, this is the radicalisation of the local population in war zones, mobilisation into the ranks of illegal quasi-military formations and an aggressive hybrid information policy. In this context, the Eastern Partnership can open access to its member countries to specialised analytical and information centres of the EU and NATO, in particular the European Center for improving Countering Hybrid Threats, the European situation and Intelligence Center, the European Directorate of intelligence of the military staff, and the European Union Agency for network and information security.

In implementing security initiatives, Ukraine emphasises ensuring reliable cyber defence and cybersecurity, analytical capabilities, rapid response and protection of the information processing and transmission system. The involvement of EP countries in the EU's information and cybersecurity policy will allow them to master the experience of analytical work and practical counteraction to information attacks and increase the effectiveness of responding to joint measures for the European Union and EP partner countries.

Constant discussions on various international platforms and platforms give rise to numerous initiatives and projects to modernise the Eastern Partnership Project. Among such initiatives, the "revolutionary" format of cooperation with the "European Union – Associated Trio," which was proposed by Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia as an example of close regional cooperation, is of great interest and controversial assessments. This idea is in line with the EU's historical aspirations to strengthen the multilateral format of regional cooperation between the EP countries themselves as the emergence of the EU itself was based on the European regional communities that later united in the Union. The trio countries identified their main priorities as the desire to become members of the European Union, commitment to further progress in the implementation of the association agreements with the EU and the search for

new dynamics in the strategic development of the Eastern Partnership. The creation of such a new regional alliance that will unite states with similar European integration intentions and problems (territorial conflicts over the Russian Federation, joint threats in the energy sector, militarisation and security challenges in the Black Sea region, information and political expansion of the “Russian World”) is part of a broad strategy of Ukraine’s foreign policy – which has already been called the big strategy of small alliances aimed at solving specific, practical tasks in the interests of the Ukrainian state (Lublin Triangle, Quadriga). The Ukrainian initiative strengthens both the Eastern Partnership and the European Union’s influence in the region on the pace and scale of internal reforms and transformations by improving infrastructure, “deoligarchisation” society and living standards.

The memorandum of understanding between the ministries of foreign affairs of the trio countries defines the coordination of joint actions and the search for new formats of sectoral integration with the EU – especially accelerating integration into the EU internal market, expanding cooperation in transport, energy, digital transformation, strengthening security and defence cooperation.

What is important in the priorities of the trio’s activities is the defence aspect itself, which provides for the development of a platform for cooperation with the EU Coordination Group on Countering Hybrid Threats and the EU Cybersecurity Agency, participation in missions and operations of the SPBO, as well as participation in projects of continuous structural cooperation.

The initiative proposed by the three Eastern Partnership member countries was a serious impetus not only for activating and concretising European integration steps and determining the prospects for membership of Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova in the European Union, but also a challenge for the EU’s neighbourhood policy, its ability to respond quickly and promptly to new geopolitical realities and adhere to declared principles and approaches.

## Summary and recommendations

The future of the European Union’s geopolitical project depends on its focus and ability to respond to the rapidly changing political, economic and security situation on the EU’s eastern borders. Both the member states of the European Union and the Eastern Partnership countries offer various approaches and initiatives to improve the format of the functioning of the institutional mechanisms of the EP, increase the ef-

fectiveness of cooperation in various areas of international relations and the effective use of new resources and funds.

The most European-oriented countries, Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova, successfully took advantage of the EU's proposed policy of deepening a differentiated approach to the Eastern Partnership countries, offering a "revolutionary format of cooperation with the 'European Union – Associated Trio'." This format of cooperation with the EU has become part of a broad foreign policy strategy of Ukraine and its closest partners in the Eastern Partnership – Georgia and Moldova. This initiative puts the issue of membership of these states in the European Union on the agenda and also tests the EU's ability to respond to new geopolitical realities in the eastern region adequately.

Therefore, in terms of recommendations, it is necessary to indicate the need to adapt the mechanisms and tools under the Eastern Partnership programme to the level of involvement of the European integration process and the reforms implemented in a given country. This process should take into account the willingness of individual countries to cooperate further, as well as maintaining cooperation with countries that are interested in the level of cooperation so far.

After years of operation, the Eastern Partnership has confirmed its importance as an essential element of the European Union's eastern policy; therefore, in terms of recommendations regarding the current situation related to international conditions and security threats, it should expand the mechanisms and tools of interaction in mutual cooperation – both at the level of individual and multilateral perspective.

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## The Eastern Flank of Europe Ukraine's Place in the Collective Security System

**ABSTRACT:** The effective protection of European countries and citizens in today's conditions requires joint and coordinated systemic actions that will address existing threats and prevent new challenges in both physical and virtual spaces. The threats from the east, caused by the aggressive policy of the Russian Federation and possible socio-political disturbances in the neighbouring countries, need special attention. The EU has implemented the European Neighbourhood Policy and initiated the Eastern Partnership programme to support stability, security and prosperity in the EU's proximity.

Many important projects were implemented in the partner countries within the cooperation under the adopted programmes; they contributed to the democratisation of the political system, the civil society and economic development – all of which had a positive impact on the security situation in the region.

The article presents the main achievements of Ukraine in the process of economic reform and transformation of the socio-political system as a result of cooperation with the European Union within the Eastern Partnership programme. The positive impact of the adopted Association Agreement on the development of Ukraine-EU cooperation is being noted.

An important step in maintaining regional security is the development of military and technical cooperation between Ukraine and the EU which provides access to financial resources and defence innovative technologies, contributes to the modernisation of Ukraine's security forces and increase their defence capabilities. Ukraine successfully cooperates with European partners in cybersecurity, civil protection and integrated border management.

In general, Ukraine-EU cooperation is of great benefit to both parties and helps to improve the security situation in Europe, and further integration into European structures and programmes such as PESCO will increase this effect.

**KEYWORDS:** Eastern Partnership, European Neighbourhood Policy, Common Security and Defence Policy, European Union, Ukraine

Nowadays, Europe is facing several challenges and threats which none of the countries can prevent and overcome without outside help. In recent years, the issues of collective security and interaction have appeared on the agenda of numerous international summits, and today we cannot say that the security-related situation on the continent of Europe is under complete control and citizens feel entirely safe.

At the Brussels Summit<sup>1</sup> on the 14th of June 2021, NATO member countries noted that the security of the Euro-Atlantic area was significantly affected by international processes related to the systemic competition of the assertive and authoritarian powers, and the security of countries and citizens was threatened from all systemic directions. The most worrying are Russia's aggressive actions, various forms of terrorism, China's growing influence and current international policy. It is also pointed out that more and more state and non-state actors undermine democratic principles and rules of international order. Escalation of conflicts often leads to an increase in irregular migration and human trafficking. Every year, the waves of challenges related to cyberspace have been growing, hybrid and asymmetric threats have been emerging, among which the flows of misinformation and criminal use of information networks have loomed large. A special place is occupied by the problems of combating the spread of COVID-19 and climate change.

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<sup>1</sup> NATO, *Brussels Summit Communiqué. Issued by the Heads of State and Government Participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Brussels 14 June 2021*, June 14, 2021. At: [www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_185000.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_185000.htm), last accessed September 21, 2021.



Under such circumstances, the European community should establish and maintain effective mechanisms to counter threats of all kinds and from all directions as soon as possible. And the most attention should be paid to the eastern flank of Europe where, after the illegal annexation of Crimea and deployment of hostilities in eastern Ukraine in 2014, Russia continues its destructive policy against European countries. This is manifested in the application of political and economic pressure, especially on Central and Eastern Europe countries, criminal activity in European cyberspace aimed at interfering in electoral processes and undermining democratic institutions, as well as attempts to disrupt critical infrastructure. There are many examples of illegal intelligence activities conducted by Russian security and intelligence agencies in a number of European countries, which have resulted in human deaths and significant material losses.

In recent years, Russia has been investing heavily in the modernisation of its strategic nuclear forces and actively developing advanced weapons. Numerous military exercises conducted by Russian armed forces near its western borders and on the territory of Belarus raise concerns in the countries directly bordering the Russian Federation and on the entire European continent.

Russia is actively using the levers of economic influence to pursue its aggressive policy. Suffice it to recall the “gas wars” that have periodically erupted in Russian-Ukrainian relations since 2005 and have had a negative impact on the European energy market. In autumn 2021, European countries also experienced difficulties due to insufficient energy and a significant increase in gas and oil prices, which is the result of unfriendly actions by Russian companies trying to accelerate the implementation of Nord Stream – 2 and gain additional leverage in the energy sector in European countries.

This article aims to consider the security situation in European and the current challenges and threats which the Russian Federation is directly or indirectly involved in. It also looks into the EU's relations with the eastern neighbours, the current state and prospects of cooperation with Ukraine and its impact on European space security.

## Current European Neighbourhood Policy in the context of security and defence

The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) was launched by the European Union in 2003 and developed throughout 2004 to build friendly relations with the countries which became EU's neighbours after its enlargement in 2004. The main ENP objec-

tives have been and continue to be support and promotion of stability, security, and prosperity in the EU's near abroad and prevent the formation of new demarcation lines at the EU's borders.<sup>2</sup>

In general, the Neighbourhood Policy has become one of the key parts of the European Security Strategy adopted by the European Council in December 2003. The EU's main objective during the ENP implementation is "to make a particular contribution to stability and good governance in our immediate neighbourhood [and] to promote a ring of well-governed countries to the East of the European Union and on the borders of the Mediterranean with whom we can enjoy close and cooperative relations."<sup>3</sup>

In 2015, the EU revised its Neighbourhood Policy<sup>4</sup> according to the new conditions that emerged in a number of countries located close to its borders – and the security factor became one of the priorities. This is due to the fact that extremism and terrorism, violations of international law, inciting conflicts, human rights violations and an increase in refugee flows have been increasingly frequent despite the positive transformations in many neighbouring countries. The security situation was significantly affected by Russia's aggressive policy, which led to the illegal annexation of Crimea and the Russian-Ukrainian armed conflict in Donbas. The European Community also had to respond to the escalation of conflicts in North Africa and the Middle East following the Arab uprisings and ISIS' deployment. As a result, this led to uncontrolled flows of migrants causing significant difficulties in many EU countries.

In most cases since the ENP preparation and until today, the European Union has been guided by the principles underlying the Neighbourhood Policy and does not aim to ensure the security of neighbouring countries, but primarily to stabilise the situation around its borders, reduce threats that may arise in the immediate vicinity to the European Community and to establish cooperation with the governments of neighbouring countries in strategic areas. At the same time, the EU actively promotes the development of regional cooperation and integration as one of the mechanisms to

<sup>2</sup> European Commission, *European Neighbourhood Policy*, Strategy Paper, COM(2004) 373 final, May 12, 2004, p. 3. At: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52004DC0373&from=EN>, last accessed September 7, 2021.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> European Commission, *Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy*, JOIN(2015) 50 final, November 18, 2015. At: [https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/enp/documents/2015/151118\\_joint-communication\\_review-of-the-enp\\_en.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/enp/documents/2015/151118_joint-communication_review-of-the-enp_en.pdf), last accessed September 10, 2021.

strengthen security and resolve conflicts by involving local and regional authorities, non-governmental organisations and local communities.

The EU's cooperation with neighbouring countries focuses on protecting borders, preventing conflicts, deterring terrorism, combating organised crime, tackling irregular migration and making significant efforts to reform the security sector to become more efficient and predictable.

The European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) was established in 2005 to ensure reliable protection of the EU's borders and coordinate the activities of the border services of the EU member states. It is worth pointing out that the agency's headquarters is located in Warsaw – the capital of the country of whose eastern border has become the EU's border and, therefore, needs special protection and reliable support of all functions provided for by the Eastern Partnership programme. Today we can say that Frontex is successfully coping with all its tasks: the situation is being monitored along the perimeter of the EU's external borders using the latest information systems, operational support is provided for all measures aimed at maintaining border security, combating border trespassers and monitoring the illegal migration processes and smuggling of goods.

At the same time, it should be noted that Frontex actively cooperates with the border agencies of neighbouring countries, including the State Border Guard Service of Ukraine – as evidenced by numerous joint exercises and communications on an ongoing basis. The main tasks of such cooperation are to coordinate efforts to protect the border, combat cross-border crime, control the flows of irregular migrants entering the EU to timely and effectively respond to violations. Cross-border cooperation aimed at ensuring the reliable operation of the border crossing points and tracking the flow of people and goods is also necessary.

In 2020, the European Commission approved a Common Security Strategy<sup>5</sup> providing an action plan for the period up to 2025 and developed tools and mechanisms that ensure the security environment's effective functioning (which is something that must stand up against the test of time). The primary focus is on building a security system that will timely and fully respond to the emergence of rapidly changing new threats in today's world. The document identifies the strategic priorities, ways to implement them and ensure integrated actions to successfully address digital and

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<sup>5</sup> European Commission, *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the EU Security Union Strategy*, COM(2020) 605 final, Brussels, July 24, 2020. At: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0605&from=EN>, last accessed September 21, 2021.

physical threats throughout the Security Union's ecosystem and in areas where EU actions can achieve positive results. Generally, the main directions of the EU Security Strategy are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. EU Security Union Strategy



Source: [https://euhybnet.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/EU\\_Security\\_Union\\_Strategy\\_\\_connecting\\_the\\_dots\\_in\\_a\\_new\\_security\\_ecosystem.pdf](https://euhybnet.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/EU_Security_Union_Strategy__connecting_the_dots_in_a_new_security_ecosystem.pdf).

Given that the functioning of government institutions, the transport system, the energy system, the financial and economic system, the healthcare system, the information and communication systems, the activities of large and small enterprises and providing a wide range of daily services to citizens; all of which require close interaction of physical and digital infrastructures, the protection of cyberspace of each member state and the whole EU has become of strategic importance. That is why cybersecurity is one of the key areas of today's security strategy. This area of activity should be aimed at protecting the privacy and personal data of citizens, protecting an intellectual property and trade secrets, combating disinformation campaigns, preventing radicalisation of the political processes, etc.

As in previous years, terrorist attacks in 2021 pose a significant threat to citizens and critical infrastructure. The EU Agency for Fundamental Rights notes that one in

five EU citizens is extremely afraid of terrorist attacks that could occur in the coming year.<sup>6</sup> Such attacks by radical extremists remain possible in the near future, so this type of threat will require coordinated actions from EU countries and will be another area of the European security system in the coming years.

Organised crime causes significant damage to the European community. According to the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction,<sup>7</sup> more than 83 million people – or 29% of adults (aged 15 to 64) – in the EU have used illicit drugs. In total, the illicit drug market is worth more than 30 billion EUR per year. International trade in counterfeit medication, the proliferation of firearms and human trafficking have increased significantly. The scale of criminal activity in this area has reached tens and hundreds of billions EUR per year. It is beyond argument that the EU security structures will have to direct significant resources to the fight organised crime and prevent its penetration from the outside.

Since 2014, the EU has been dominated by the need to strengthen security forces, develop cooperation in the defence industry and ensure closer cooperation between defence agencies in the event of conflict escalation near the external borders. The European Defence Industrial Complex Programme<sup>8</sup> has come into effect and European Defence Fund has been established; it began to provide funding for defence research and development of technological projects in 2021. A coordinated review of defence issues according to the new EU Capability Development Plan is carried out on an annual basis, and a plan of funding for the member states' defence sectors in line with EU defence priorities are regularly approved. All these joint defence planning processes are carried out under the auspices of the newly established EU authority called the Military Planning and Conduct Capability.

An important way to increase the level of the EU security and defence continues to be activities aimed at developing the capabilities of the EU partner countries through the organisation of joint exercises and provision of the defence advisory support.

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<sup>6</sup> European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, *Your Rights Matter: Security Concerns and Experiences*, Fundamental Rights Survey, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union 2020. At: [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2020-fundamental-rights-survey-security\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2020-fundamental-rights-survey-security_en.pdf), last accessed September 24, 2021.

<sup>7</sup> European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, *European Drug Report 2021: Trends and Developments*, June 2021. At: [https://www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/edr/trends-developments/2021\\_en](https://www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/edr/trends-developments/2021_en), last accessed September 5, 2021.

<sup>8</sup> European Commission, *European Defense Industrial Development Programme*, 2018. At: [https://ec.europa.eu/growth/content/2019-calls-proposals-european-defence-industrial-development-programme-edidp\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/growth/content/2019-calls-proposals-european-defence-industrial-development-programme-edidp_en), last accessed September 5, 2021.

According to the Implementation Plan on Security and Defence (2017) as part of CSDP, 23 EU member states have agreed to implement a programme of closer cooperation in security and defence called Permanent Structured Cooperation. Currently, 25 of the 27 EU member states have joined the programme, and the programme contains 46 projects in the following categories: training, land, maritime, air, cyber, space and joint enablers,<sup>9</sup> most of which have already been implemented or are in the process of being implemented.

Systematic approach to the organisation of security and defence by EU countries deserves great respect and gives hope to citizens for protection and timely assistance in case of attacks, accidents, natural disasters or other hazards. Institutional mechanisms and the coordinated actions of such respected and powerful organisations as NATO, OSCE, Europol, Eurojust and others, together with the implementation of numerous strategies and programmes, serve to protect the European space in accordance with its area of responsibility.

In general, when assessing the EU Security Union Strategy 2020–25, it is worth pointing out that the main focus here is on the civil security within the EU, and most measures and resources are aimed at improving the protection of citizens, their rights and freedoms, democratic principles and infrastructure.

The adopted strategies, programmes and plans are jointly aimed at forming a comprehensive system of cooperation in planning and implementing the security and defence tasks and protecting themselves as much as possible from new threats, including unforeseen threats. We can estimate the effectiveness of such a system by its response to overcoming new threats in the nearest future.

## European Neighbourhood Policy – East

The European Union's cooperation with partner countries in the context of the European Neighbourhood Policy covers 16 countries in the eastern and southern directions. Eastern European countries such as Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova, and the countries of the South Caucasus such as Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia, all participate in the Eastern Partnership programme launched in 2009 (based on the initiative of Poland and Sweden and aimed at strengthening and deepening the political and economic relations between the European Union, EU member states and partner countries in

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<sup>9</sup> Permanent Structured Cooperation. At: <https://pesco.europa.eu>, last accessed September 15, 2021.

the bilateral and multilateral formats). A website<sup>10</sup> and virtual representations in the most popular social networks have been created to monitor the news and state of the implementation of the cooperation projects between the European Union and partner countries to inform citizens and establish communication with them.

Many important projects have been implemented in each country after the implementation of the Eastern Partnership initiative; they have contributed to the democratisation of the political system, the civil society and economic development. At the same time, it is thought that important changes in EU policy strategies often occur after major regional security crises.<sup>11</sup> Thus, the Eastern Partnership was launched after Russia's aggression against Georgia, and the EU's Association Agreements with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine were signed after Russia's aggression against Ukraine.

The EU has many examples of successful coordinated action to combat past crises. Fiscal and political measures by European governments to overcome the financial and economic crisis that swept the world more than a decade ago have been successful. It is also worth noting the effective financial and organisational support of individual EU countries that have faced domestic economic problems. Positive examples include joint efforts to resolve the migration crisis in recent years, although many countries have had different views on the resolution mechanisms. However, when the Covid-19 pandemic began to spread around the world in 2020, Wolfgang Ischinger, the Chairman of the Munich Security Conference, had justly noted that "in response to the biggest crisis since World War II, national leaders first resorted to the policy of 'my country first' and only later were solidarity mechanisms introduced to combat the spread of coronavirus."<sup>12</sup>

With regard to the implementation of the Eastern Partnership programme, it should be noted that not all plans have been implemented in full and there are a number of objective and subjective reasons for this. One of the most significant reasons is the fact that there are conflicts of various activity in five countries: from the frozen conflict in Moldova, to hot one with active hostilities in Ukraine. All of these conflicts are, more or less, provoked and fueled by the Russian Federation.

At the same time, it should be noted that (in 2020) a large-scale armed conflict broke out between two members of the Eastern Partnership, Armenia and Azerbaijan.

<sup>10</sup> EU Neighbours East Website. At: <https://euneighbourseast.eu>, last accessed September 15, 2021.

<sup>11</sup> Razumkov Centre, *The EU-Ukraine Security Partnership: Status and Prospects*, Kiev 2020. At: <https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/other/БЕЗПЕКОБЕ%20ПАРТНЕРСТВО%20УКРАЇНА-ЄС.pdf>, last accessed September 25, 2021.

<sup>12</sup> T. Bunde, "Beyond Westlessness. A Readout from the Munich Security Conference. Special Edition 2021", *Munich Security Brief*, no. 1 (2021). At: [https://securityconference.org/assets/02\\_Dokumente/01\\_Publikationen/Munich\\_Security\\_Brief\\_Beyond\\_Westlessness\\_MSC\\_Special\\_Edition\\_2021\\_210224.pdf](https://securityconference.org/assets/02_Dokumente/01_Publikationen/Munich_Security_Brief_Beyond_Westlessness_MSC_Special_Edition_2021_210224.pdf), last accessed August 25, 2021.



Now, relations between these countries remain strained and it is no great surprise that the EU has not been very active in resolving this conflict.

As for Belarus, the situation also looks difficult as there is an ongoing political crisis provoked by the current government's actions following the rigging of the 2020 presidential election and the suppression of mass protests due to the dissatisfaction of citizens with the announced results. The Belarusian authorities began harshly persecuting the political opposition and dissatisfied citizens – many of whom were imprisoned for political reasons. In response to this situation, the European Union imposed sanctions against its partner and relations with Belarus deteriorated significantly. As a result, the Belarusian political authorities have intensified the process of rapprochement with the Russian Federation, which has greatly facilitated the implementation of its aggressive foreign policy. In the autumn of 2021, the large-scale military exercises Zapad 2021 (West 2021) were held on the territory of Belarus with the participation of a large number of troops and heavy weapons of the Russian Armed Forces. According to many observers, these troops remained in Belarus after the exercises, reasoning that they had to protect against “threats from the West.” The European Union, mostly the Baltic states and Poland, is also facing difficulties on its borders with Belarus due to border violations by migrants who, under the auspices of local authorities, are trying to enter the EU illegally. As a result, many of the EU's cooperation programmes with Belarus have been frozen or severely restricted.

An action programme called “20 Deliverables for 2020” was adopted in 2017 as part of the Eastern Partnership;<sup>13</sup> the programme was focused on such areas as strengthening the economy, governance, relations and society.

In July, EU countries adopted a joint staff working document “Recovery, Resilience and Reform: post-2020 Eastern Partnership priorities”<sup>14</sup> which identifies the following main areas of joint activity:

- together for resilient, sustainable and integrated economies,
- together for accountable institutions, the rule of law and security,
- together towards environmental and climate resilience,
- together for resilient digital transformation,
- together for resilient, fair and inclusive societies.

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<sup>13</sup> European Council, *20 Deliverables for 2020*, 2020. At: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eastern-partnership/20-deliverables-for-2020>, last accessed September 21, 2021.

<sup>14</sup> European Commission, *Recovery, Resilience and Reform: Post 2020 Eastern Partnership Priorities. Joint Staff Working Document*. At: [https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/swd\\_2021\\_186\\_f1\\_joint\\_staff\\_working\\_paper\\_en\\_v2\\_p1\\_1356457\\_0.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/swd_2021_186_f1_joint_staff_working_paper_en_v2_p1_1356457_0.pdf), last accessed September 21, 2021.



The programme implementation is based on two components: investment and public administration. It is planned to take the Investment and Economic Plan as its basis, which will attract 2.3 billion EUR from the EU budget in the form of grants, mixed financing and guarantees. In total, up to 17 billion EUR of private and public investment can be used to implement the programme. For each of the Eastern Partnership countries, the plan provides a number of flagship initiatives and components for public administration to support investment and promote the consolidation of the sustainable and equitable society that leaves no one behind.<sup>15</sup>

The following Eastern Partnership priorities are on the agenda for 2020–25:

1. Investments in a competitive and innovative economy – support for 500,000 small- and medium-sized businesses;
2. Investments in strengthening the rule of law – all high-ranking officials must declare their assets and their reports will be audited;
3. Investments in sustainable and “smart” transportation service – construction and modernisation of 3,000 km of major roads and railways;
4. Investments in people and the knowledge society – 70,000 opportunities for individual mobility for students and teachers, researchers, youth and young workers;
5. Investments in security and cyber resilience – strengthening the structure to detect and eliminate hybrid threats; strengthening the capacity of partners to increase cyber resilience and fight cybercrime;
6. Investments in sustainable energy – 250,000 households will reduce energy consumption by at least 20%;
7. Investment in environment and climate – another 3,000,000 people will have access to safe water supply; control and improvement of the air quality in 300 cities;
8. Investments in health care – vaccination of 850,000 health care workers, improvement of their working conditions, equipment and means of therapy;
9. Investments in an inclusive, gender-equal and diverse society and strategic communications – support for 2,500 local civil society organisations, 120 independent media organisations and 2,000 journalists;
10. Investment in digital transformation – 80% of households will have access to high-speed internet.

This list looks quite ambitious, and the citizens of each partner country are interested in this plan being implemented as much as possible.

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<sup>15</sup> EU Neighbours East Website. At: <https://euneighbourseast.eu/uk/policy>, last accessed September 21, 2021.

## Ukraine's achievements in the implementation of the Eastern Partnership Security Programme

When assessing Ukraine's achievements in the implementation of plans and programmes adopted under the Eastern Partnership, it should be noted that significant work has been done and considerable achievements have been made in all areas in Ukraine. The results of the activity are periodically presented at high-level meetings between Ukraine and the European Union. In particular, the Ukraine-EU summit is held annually, where problems related to the implementation of the Association Agreement, bilateral and multilateral cooperation are solved, and topical international issues are discussed. An important mission to control and monitor the implementation of the Association Agreement is entrusted to the Association Council, which includes the representatives of the EU Council, the European Commission and the Ukrainian Cabinet of Ministers. In addition to the above, it is worth noting such bodies as the Association Committee, which includes the representatives of the government agencies, and the Parliamentary Association Committee – which consists of deputies of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine (Supreme Council of Ukraine) and the European Parliament. A special place is given to the Civil Society Platform composed of the representatives of the Ukrainian public and members of the European Economic and Social Committee, which performs rather advisory and supervisory functions on the implementation of objectives and compliance with agreements.

Regular military-political dialogues regarding security and defence take place between Ukraine and the European Union at the level of the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and the Chairman of the EU Military Committee, as well as the Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and the EU military headquarters.

According to the results of an analysis of the Ukrainian national platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum,<sup>16</sup> Ukraine's main achievements in the implementation of the Eastern Partnership include the following:

1. Cooperation between Eastern European countries under the auspices of the European Union and without Russia's participation has been strengthened; it allowed intensifying cooperation between the post-Soviet countries on a mutually beneficial basis following European norms and traditions and opened a mechanism

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<sup>16</sup> Ukrainian National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum. At: <http://eap-csf.org.ua>, last accessed September 18, 2021.

for establishing and developing political contacts with EU countries at the bilateral and multilateral level;

2. Signing the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement and growth of trade with the European Union opened new opportunities for the business environment, in terms of exports of goods and services and investment in Ukraine's economy, contributed to the successful implementation of economic and political reforms;

3. The implementation of EU standards has contributed to significant results in public administration reform, small- and medium-sized business development, environmental protection, strengthening security and fighting corruption;

4. A visa-free regime with the European Union has made it easier for Ukrainian citizens to visit EU countries, which has significantly increased awareness of European values, culture and the life of EU citizens;

5. Access to EU programmes has given Ukrainians the opportunity to participate in projects aimed at developing small- and medium-sized businesses, educational initiatives, cultural programmes, research and innovation, expanding academic mobility, developing the infrastructure of Ukrainian cities, etc.;

6. Growing awareness of the EU and its activities in Ukraine has made it possible to increase confidence in EU structures and better understand the principles and mechanisms of political and socio-economic relations between EU countries;

7. Ukrainians' feeling and awareness of belonging to the single European space contributes to the growth of understanding of the need for reforms, socio-economic transformations and the introduction of European values in all spheres of activity;

8. Establishment of the Eastern Partnership institutions for intergovernmental, inter-parliamentary and business cooperation has opened mechanisms for establishing and maintaining contacts between state and non-state structures of Ukraine and EU;

9. Establishment of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum for interaction between citizens of the Eastern Partnership countries and strengthening their influence on national governments and EU institutions;

10. Support by the European Union for greater involvement of non-governmental organisations and citizens of partner countries in implementing the Eastern Partnership policy.

Under current conditions, one of the most essential areas of Ukraine's cooperation with the European Union is joint activities in resolving the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. Of special note is the great political support of Ukraine by EU countries, the provision of significant financial and material assistance, military and technical support and the introduction of sanctions against the Russian Federation.

It is also worth noting the interaction of Ukraine with European structures in the security activity outside its borders. These include Ukraine's active participation in the negotiation process for the settlement of the Transnistrian conflict, repeated accession to the operational duty in the EU combat tactical group "Helbrock", participation of the Armed Forces of Ukraine in military exercises in Ukraine and EU countries, etc. It is important to note the successful cooperation of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine with the European Defence Agency in several multinational projects on material standardisation, logistics, training, the establishment of the single European sky, etc.

Ukraine has made significant progress in its partnership with NATO, where a significant number of "NATO standards" have been introduced. It is worth noting, among others, the achievements in the following areas: democratic and civilian control over the defence forces, ensuring transparency in management decisions at all levels, the introduction of the defence planning process in accordance with Euro-Atlantic principles and approaches, etc. The greatest cooperation was achieved in security activity and strategic planning, operations and hostilities, preparation of the state territory for defence, intelligence (information and psychological operations; military communications), development (testing of armaments and military equipment; strategic communications), gender issues, etc.<sup>17</sup> In general, the implementation of NATO standards will enable the Armed Forces of Ukraine to achieve technical and operational compatibility with European security agencies and to interact effectively during training, peacekeeping or combat missions. A perfect example of Ukraine's cooperation with EU member states is the creation of the Lithuanian-Polish-Ukrainian Brigade named after the Grand Hetman Konstantin Ostrozky, known as LITPOLUKRBRIG, which includes units from the armed forces of Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine.

An important area of Ukraine's relations with the European Union is the development of military and technical cooperation in providing access to financial resources and defence innovative technologies. Such cooperation contributes to the modernisation of the armed forces and law enforcement agencies of Ukraine, the development of the military-industrial complex and security and defence upgrade. At the same time, it is important to note the growth of the share of European countries in the regional structure of exports of arms and military equipment of Ukraine which increased from 3% in 2013 to 16% in 2020.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ministry of Defence of Ukraine, *NATO Standards: Mechanism and Pace of Implementation, Adaptation to Ukrainian Realities*, February 12, 2021. At: <https://www.mil.gov.ua/news/2021/02/12/standarti-nato-mehanizm-i-tempi-vprovadzhennya-adaptacziya-do-ukrainskih-realij>, last accessed September 25, 2021.

<sup>18</sup> Razumkov Centre, *The EU-Ukraine Security...*, p. 27.

An important step towards building a collective security system and defence on the European continent will be Ukraine's accession to cooperation within the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) after adopting the EU Resolution on the participation of third parties countries. Ukraine's representative to the EU announced Ukraine's intention to join more than 20 PESCO projects.<sup>19</sup> Ukraine sees participation in projects for the development of military equipment, military training, interoperability and cybersecurity as one of its priorities. Such cooperation will not only achieve results in strengthening security and increasing Ukraine's defence capabilities, but will also significantly strengthen the EU's security and defence system in the eastern areas.

## Summary and recommendations

Ukraine's cooperation with other countries of Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus within the Eastern Partnership programme is an important and, as practice has shown, an effective mechanism for the implementation of reforms and socio-political transformation of society in partner countries. When implementing the plans under the partnership programme, all countries have achieved significant progress, especially Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, as evidenced by the signed Association Agreements with the European Union.

Ukraine's greatest achievements include the development of civil society which is evidenced by the high activity of citizens in political processes at the local and national levels, the influence of non-governmental organisations on governmental and parliamentary structures and local governments, support for gender equality and combating violence. Strategic communications with European institutions in many areas have reached a new level. It should be noted the progress in the development of small- and medium-sized businesses and their support by the central government and local state administrations. Reforms in the areas of the judiciary and public administration have been launched and still need to be successfully completed.

Significant results have been achieved in the digitalisation of relations between citizens, business and state bodies. The established Ministry of Digital Transformation has implemented a large number of programmes and projects aimed at facilitating the receipt of public and administrative services by citizens, simplifying the mechanisms for starting and running a business, providing access to education and development of

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<sup>19</sup> Y. Šejko, "What Will Give Ukraine Participation in EU Defense Projects", *Deutsche Welle*, November 11, 2021. At: <https://p.dw.com/p/3l6Zm>, last accessed September 25, 2021.

cultural institutions. Ukraine has made significant progress towards integration with the EU Digital Single Market.

It should be noted that the progress in the development of the EU-Ukraine trade which is governed by the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement between Ukraine and the EU entered into force in early 2016. Significant work has been done in the development of renewable energy and energy efficiency and in the implementation of state environmental policy. Ukraine actively cooperates with European partners in cybersecurity, civil protection and integrated border management.

Ukraine is making great efforts to deter Russian aggression and resolve the conflict. Given the desire to restore sovereignty and territorial integrity by peaceful means, an emphasis has been put on measures aimed at involving international partners. The OSCE Special Monitoring Mission has been established under the auspices of EU countries and institutions, quadripartite meetings in the “Normandy format” are being held, a Trilateral Contact Group is working and, in 2021, a new Crimean Platform initiative was launched in 2021 with the support of the European Parliament. In general, such activity in conjunction with international legal institutions should have a systemic influence on Russia to stop the aggression against Ukraine and leave Crimea.

When assessing Ukraine’s contribution to the development and strengthening of the collective security system, it is safe to say that despite the uneven dynamics of implementing the cooperation programmes in some areas, such cooperation generally benefits both Ukraine and the European Union and certainly improves the security situation on Europe’s eastern borders.

Therefore, concerning the recommendations concerning the Eastern Partnership, it is necessary to point out the legitimacy of a more comprehensive inclusion of programmes related to security issues in the scope of implemented activities, as well as the intensification of the above-mentioned effective cooperation in the field of civil society development, relations between citizens, business and government structures – together with reforms in economic policy and an increase in mutual trade turnover.

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NATALIA STERCUL   
*Moldova State University*

# Evolution of Relations Between the Republic of Moldova and the European Union in the Context of Eastern Partnership (2009–2021)

## Main Directions

**ABSTRACT:** The participation of the Republic of Moldova in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) platform has enabled Moldova to make significant progress in country's development over the past decade. The enhancing and deepening relationships with the EaP countries and the European Union (EU), along with the implementation of diverse programs and initiatives drawn up by the EU within the framework of the Eastern Neighborhood Policy has brought tangible results and benefits. The signing of the Association Agreement with the EU has become an important integral part of the constructive political dialogue between the Republic of Moldova and the EU, which covers all cooperation areas in their interest. The creation of the DCFTA had a favorable impact on the increase in Moldovan exports to the EU countries, trade in services, competitiveness of Moldovan products, and it intensified trade and economic relations between the parties. The visa liberalization regime and the technical and financial support from the EU have created a number of advantages for the Republic Moldova and its citizens.

The development of relationships between the Republic of Moldova and the EU has been characterized by ups and downs – from the “success story” of the Eastern Partnership to a period of crisis and stagnation. The difficulties of cooperation were due to internal political crises, inconsistency of the government’s actions and a low level of democratic development coupled with a high level of corruption of Moldovan officials. The new stage of development has emerged with the coming to power in Moldova in 2020–2021 of pro-European forces. This new phase will be based on pragmatic dialogue and the acceleration of integration processes. The EU’s commitment to strengthening the political association and economic integration of the Republic of Moldova with the European Union continues to be a strong foundation for internal fundamental transformations, state development and modernization of the country.

**KEYWORDS:** European foreign policy vector, reforms, modernization, political associations, economic integration, common European aspirations, European future

## Political dialogue

The political dialogue between the Republic of Moldova and the EU is one of the most important conditions for the progressive interaction of the parties, laying the basis for political cooperation, maintaining security, socio-economic development, and promoting European values. The institutional framework of the political dialogue is stipulated in the Association Agreement with the EU,<sup>1</sup> replacing the already existing Agreement on Partnership and Cooperation between the Republic of Moldova and the EU.<sup>2</sup> This has contributed to the expansion of the political dialogue in all spheres of mutual interest, including the strengthening of democracy, political, economic and institutional stability, border security, as well as the promotion of cross-border cooperation and good neighborly relations.

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<sup>1</sup> *Association Agreement between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community and their Member States, of the one part, and the Republic of Moldova, of the other part*, no. L 260/4, August 30, 2014. At: [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:22014A0830\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:22014A0830(01)&from=EN), last accessed November 30, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration of the Republic of Moldova, *Moldova–EU Relations*. At: <https://mfa.gov.md/en/content/moldova-eu-relations>, last accessed November 30, 2021.

## The thorny path of Moldova towards the European model of development and deepening the relations with the EU

The Prague European Summit, held on 7 May, 2009, marked the beginning of the practical implementation of the Polish-Swedish initiative aimed at expanding the area of the eastern policy of the European Union. This was expressed in an ambitious new EU project, namely the Eastern Partnership (EaP),<sup>3</sup> which initially seen as a framework policy, aimed at developing multilateral cooperation between partner countries to better advance them towards deeper relations with the EU, like what happened in the framework of the Visegrad Group. The project supposed the acceleration of the political and economic integration of states through the implementation of radical transformations and reforms, pursuing the goal of improving the well-being of the participant countries.

The Republic of Moldova, being traditionally in the zone of Russian influence, underwent difficult times. Relations with Russia worsened after Moldova's refusal to sign the "Kozak plan" for the settlement of the Transnistrian conflict in 2003.<sup>4</sup> The economic levers of pressure and soft power resources used by Russia, as well as the ban on the import of Moldovan wine in 2006, had an extremely painful impact on the economic situation of the country.<sup>5</sup> The instability of the socio-political development of the Republic of Moldova, poverty, low levels of income, mass unemployment, and the prospects for the development of the state provoked social discontent. It seemed that the acute permanent nature of social problems could be a powerful factor that would highlight the precariousness of the political situation in Moldova and the deepening economic difficulties.

The idea of the Eastern Partnership project was not warmly greeted by the Moldovan authorities, being considered to a greater extent in the geopolitical context.<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, understanding the importance of improving relations with the EU

<sup>3</sup> European Council, *Eastern Partnership*. At: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eastern-partnership/>, last accessed November 30, 2021.

<sup>4</sup> T. de Waal, N. von Twickel, *Beyond Frozen Conflict: Scenarios for Separatist Disputes of Eastern Europe*, London: Rowman & Littlefield International 2020. At: [https://www.ceps.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Frozen-Conflicts-\\_final.pdf](https://www.ceps.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Frozen-Conflicts-_final.pdf), last accessed November 30, 2021.

<sup>5</sup> D. Amonte, "Wine Warfare at the Doorstep – Nothing New, Just Business for Russia", *Moldova's Foreign Policy Statewatch*, no. 8 (2010). At: [https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/121707/IDIS\\_8.pdf](https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/121707/IDIS_8.pdf), last accessed November 30, 2021.

<sup>6</sup> К. Соломон, «Восточное партнерство» и европейская перспектива Республики Молдова. В: П. Байор (ред.) *Восточное партнерство: цели-опыт-вызовы*, Краков: Ксиенгарния Академицка 2013, (K. Solomon, «*Vostočnoe partnerstvo*» i evropejskaâ perspektiva Respubliki Moldova. In: P. Bajor (ed.), *Vostočnoe partnerstvo: celi-opyt-vyzovy*, Krakov: Księgarnia Akademicka 2013), pp. 172–173.

and advancing along the path of European integration in the current situation, they made a rational decision. The initiative was supported, and the Republic of Moldova, together with Ukraine, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Belarus, became a participant in this project.

The regress in the political and economic spheres led to the advent of the “Alliance for European Integration” in Moldova in September 2009, a coalition of national, liberal and liberal-democratic political forces united in opposition to the communists.<sup>7</sup> Although the four-year period of the Alliance was characterized by a high level of conflict within the ruling coalition, profound changes took place in the relations between the Republic of Moldova and the EU. These changes marked the beginning of a real, practical level of interaction between the parties, which was a key difference as compared to the communist times. The cooperation within the framework of the Eastern Partnership built positive dynamics, creating additional incentives for strengthening the political dialogue between the Republic of Moldova and the EU.

## From Moldova’s “success story” in the Eastern Partnership to discrediting and breaking trust

The new stage in the evolution of relations between the Republic of Moldova and the EU seemed to be very promising, yet no one expected Moldova to become the so-called “success story” of the Eastern Partnership countries. Simultaneously, the positive dynamics of cooperation became more and more obvious; meetings of the Moldovan leadership with the ruling elite of Western countries became more frequent, and the country got financial support from not only European partners but also the International Monetary Fund and some Western countries – the USA, Germany, and Romania.

The negotiations on the Association Agreement had a decisive role in the relations between the Republic of Moldova and the EU. The political dialogue included three levels of negotiations: conditions for signing the framework document of the Association Agreement; the creation of a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA); and liberalization of the visa regime. Interested in the execution of this

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<sup>7</sup> I. Groza, M. Jopp et al., *Assessing the State of European Integration and Potential for Transatlantic Cooperation in the Post-Soviet Space: The Case of Moldova*, IEP Research Paper No. 2 (2017), Berlin: Institut für Europäische Politik 2017. At: <http://iep-berlin.de/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Assessing-the-State-of-European-Integration-and-Potential-for-Transatlantic-Cooperation-The-Case-of-Moldova.pdf>, last accessed November 30, 2021.

Agreement with the EU, Moldova made significant progress in developing the capacity to prepare and implement reforms. The country used modern practices proposed by the EU, which gave rise to the application of innovative approaches to solving existing problems. The commitment of both sides to progress contributed to the dynamics of the technical negotiations on the Association Agreement. As a result, the negotiations were completed at all three levels in 2013. At the Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius on 28–29 November, 2013, Moldova signed the text of the Association Agreement with the EU.

The Vilnius Eastern Partnership Summit of 2013 split the life of Moldova into “before” and “after.” Since 28 April, 2014, Moldovan citizens with biometric passports have received the right to visa-free entry to the Schengen zone, and more than 1.4 million citizens used this right only in the period from April 2014 to April 2018. Moldova was the first state in the Eastern Partnership to fulfill all the criteria of the Action Plan for visa liberalization.<sup>8</sup> The Republic of Moldova signed an Association Agreement with the EU in Brussels on 27 June, 2014, together with Ukraine and Georgia. The Parliament of Moldova ratified it on 2 July, 2014.<sup>9</sup> The document officially entered into force on 1 January, 2016 after ratification by all EU member states. From the moment of political negotiations to the execution of the Association Agreement, the Republic of Moldova went through a difficult period of implementation of institutional reforms and legislative changes that brought Moldova closer to the institutional requirements and standards of the EU.

Despite the fact that Moldova managed to become a “success story” of the Eastern Partnership countries, it should be noted that, in many respects, this result was achieved thanks to the involvement of European officials in Moldovan politics. Internal political strife and conflicts undermined the value of the gained achievements. Foreign policy factor – the signing of the Association Agreement with the EU and DCFTA became a stabilizing factor for Moldovan politics. However, for this, the EU had to get involved in Moldova’s politics much more deeply than the European partners had counted on. During this and the following period, more than one example can be

<sup>8</sup> V. Mosneaga, G. Mosneaga, “Visa-Free Regime of the Eastern Partnership Countries with the EU: Effects and Policies”, *Modoscopie*, vol. 2, no. 81 (2018), p. 108.

<sup>9</sup> Parlamentul – Republica Moldova, Закон № 112 от 02.07.2014 о ратификации Соглашения об ассоциации между Республикой Молдова, с одной стороны, и Европейским Союзом и Европейским сообществом по атомной энергии и их государствами-членами, с другой стороны (Zakon № 112 от 02.07.2014 о ratifikacii Soglašeniâ ob asociacii meždû Respublikoj Moldova, s odnoï storony, i Evropejskim Soûzom i Evropejskim soobšestvom po atomnoj ènergii i ih gosudarstvami-členami, s drugoj storony). At: <http://lex.justice.md/index.php?action=view&view=doc&lang=1&id=353829>, last accessed November 30, 2021.

cited that domestic and foreign policy decisions were made in Moldova through the mediation and as a result of consultations with EU representatives, who have even called “mediators” of Moldovan politics.<sup>10</sup> In fact, the permanent nature of internal political instability and the low level of development of democracy make it impossible to get along without the support of other foreign policy forces in critical situations.

Gradually advancing along the path of European integration, trying to turn the European model into a paradigmatic model of the country’s development, the political elite of Moldova promoted reforms. However, at the same time, insufficient attention was paid to social democracy based on the principles of freedom and independence, the rule of law and social cohesion, as well as their overall importance for the promotion of political activity. The European model of development is based on these postulates, and only they can become a solid foundation of functional democracy and effective governance. Fundamental political values and basic legal principles are discussed extremely responsibly, diligently and painstakingly in Europe, while it is common practice in Moldova to give a decorative character to democratic reforms, creating an illusory effect regarding certain achievements in the reform process in Moldova.<sup>11</sup> As a result, the country becomes hostage to the illusions of its own power structures, guided by its own interests and momentary benefits.

The positive dynamics of the evolution of relations between the Republic of Moldova and the EU, as well as the history of Moldova’s success in the Eastern Partnership, were quickly replaced by radically different characteristics. The corruption of the highest echelons of power and the withdrawal of a billion dollars from the banking system of the Republic of Moldova created an unprecedented situation and caused significant damage to the economic and political stability of the state. This led to the undermining of the confidence of the European partners. It had a negative impact on the popularity of the European foreign policy vector of the country’s development and served as an impetus for an even greater delimitation of the Moldovan society along the East-West principle.

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<sup>10</sup> *Восточное партнерство до и после Вильнюса*, Москва 2014 (*Vostočnoe partnerstvo do i posle Viľnůsa*, Moskva 2014). At: <http://www.instituteofeurope.ru/images/uploads/doklad/301.pdf>, last accessed November 30, 2021.

<sup>11</sup> В. Сака, *Тенденции и проблемы консолидации демократии в Республике Молдова в контексте политики европейской интеграции*. В: П. Байор (ред.), *Детерминанты и перспективы политики Европейской интеграции Республики Молдова*, Краков: Ксиенгарния Академицка 2015, (V. Saka, *Tendencii i problemy konsolidacii demokratii v Respublike Moldova v kontekste politiki evropejskoj integracii*. In: P. Bajor (ed.), *Determinanty i perspektyvy politiki Evropejskoj integracii Respubliki Moldova*, Krakov: Księgarnia Akademicka 2015), pp. 80–81.

During 2015–2016 relations between the EU and the Republic of Moldova became significantly complicated. The political crisis generated by corruption scandals and political strife became a key characteristic of this period. He highlighted the fragility of state institutions and the superficiality of the ongoing democratic reforms. Within one year Moldova turned from a “success story” of the Eastern Partnership into a “captive state.” As a result, the EU froze the EU financial assistance. Moldova needed to build a political dialogue in a new format and restore the lost level of confidence in European structures.

The EU insisted on promoting a targeted policy to solve the problems it was facing and focus efforts on the implementation of the Association Agreement and Moldova’s fulfillment of its obligations. In search of a way out of this situation, the Government of Moldova had to develop a so-called roadmap of priority reforms and necessary measures for their implementation. The presidential elections of 2016 were not far away, though the Moldovan roadmap had only been partially implemented, and the EU decided to unfreeze financial aid, allocating € 45.3 million to support four-sector budget programs in December 2016.<sup>12</sup>

The victory of the pro-Russian president in the elections of 2016 could not but cause concern for European partners. After his statements about the need to annul the Association Agreement with the EU<sup>13</sup> and the importance of focusing efforts on building a strategic partnership with the Russian Federation, it was clear that the European vector of Moldovan development would be another decoration. This further redoubled the mistrust of the EU representatives. In fact, throughout the pro-Russian president’s tenure, the EU built political dialogue at the level of the Moldovan government.

In an attempt to prove its commitment to the European Integration Agenda, the government developed and adopted a new National Action Plan for the implementation of the Association Agreement for the period 2017–2019.<sup>14</sup> The document reflects a map of priorities and measures of power structures aimed at fulfilling the

<sup>12</sup> J. Lovitt (ed. in chief), *Eastern Partnership Index 2015–2016. Charting Progress in European Integration, Democratic Reforms, and Sustainable Development*, Bruxelles: Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum 2017. At: <https://eap-csf.eu/wp-content/uploads/index-2015-6-web.pdf>, last accessed November 30, 2021.

<sup>13</sup> “Moldovan President Wants Association Agreement with EU Annulled”, *Agence Europe*, January 17, 2017. At: <https://agenceurope.eu/en/bulletin/article/11705/26>, last accessed November 30, 2021.

<sup>14</sup> Government of Republic of Moldova, *Cabinet Approved National Action Plan to Implement Moldova-EU Association Agreement in 2017–2019*, December 28, 2016. At: <https://gov.md/en/content/cabinet-approved-national-action-plan-implement-moldova-eu-association-agreement-2017-2019>, last accessed November 30, 2021.



obligations to carry out reforms, harmonizing the legal framework in accordance with EU standards and promoting the European foreign policy vector of development.

Also, the EU and Moldova have developed a draft of a new agenda for the implementation of the Association Agreement for 2017–2020. Overall, the dialogue between the EU and the Moldovan government started to stabilize step by step. The critical rhetoric of the EU towards the Moldovan authorities gradually changed to a pragmatic tone. The importance of using the available levers of influence to achieve political and economic stability of the state, to preserve the European vector of development, turned out to be much more significant for the EU than any radical measures to curtail programs and projects. The rationality of the EU approaches is focused on achieving concrete results.

However, the internal crossroads of Moldova's development remained concealed from the European partners. The actual concentration of all power in the hands of V. Plahotniuc, the leader of the Democratic Party of Moldova, who controlled and modeled the entire political space of the country and imitated achievements on the way of implementing reforms, required the immediate possibility of creating conditions for the start of dismantling the oligarchic system.

The ruling structures of Moldova reached a compromise, building a temporary coalition that united the forces of the pro-Russian Socialist Party and the pro-European bloc ACUM. The formed government, headed by M. Sandu, declared its determination to de-oligarchization and reorganization of the state administration system. In response, V. Plahotniuc passed a decision to remove I. Dodon from his post through the Constitutional Court of the Republic and called into question the legitimacy of the Government of M. Sandu. In this situation, external forces intervened again. For the first time in the history of Moldova, three external political actors – the EU, the US and Russia – unanimously expressed support for the legitimate pro-European Government of M. Sandu. In fact, these three forces played a decisive role in overcoming the acute internal political crisis in Moldova and overthrowing the oligarchic regime.

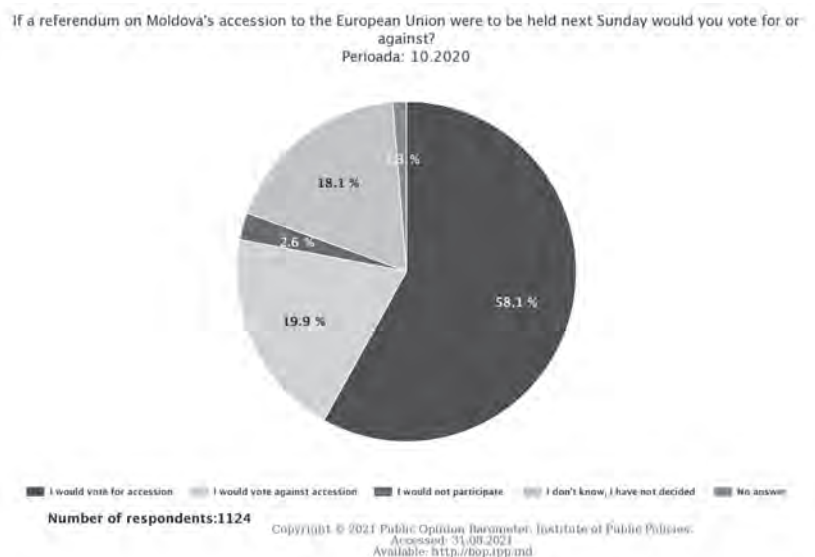
The conflicts between political rivals in the provisional coalition intensified, and the decision of the Parliament of November 12, 2019 on the resignation of the pro-European Government was the climax of the confrontation. Although M. Sandu was criticized for the modest results of her short premiership, it was thanks to her efforts and reputation of a reformer politician with liberal views that relations between Moldova and the EU were somewhat smoothed out.

The positive perception of the European vector of development by the citizens of Moldova significantly increased over the years of the existence of the Eastern Partnership, which is mainly the result of effective public diplomacy and the EU's "soft



power.” And though Moldova still continues to be viewed in the geopolitical context between East and West,<sup>15</sup> most of the country’s population supports the European civilizational choice of the state. According to the Public Opinion Barometer (2020), 58.1% of respondents were in favor of future of Moldova in the EU (See Chart 1).<sup>16</sup>

**Chart 1. Republic of Moldova Public Opinion Barometer**



## Breakthrough towards the European future of Moldova

With the advent of the pro-European President M. Sandu at the end of 2020 and the formation of a pro-European majority in the Parliament, not only a new stage in the political dialogue between Moldova and the EU, but also a new political cycle of the democratic development of Moldova came about. The victory of pro-European

<sup>15</sup> В. Цуркан, В. Мошняга, *Республика Молдова на перепутье Европейский Союз VS Таможенный Союз*. В: П. Байор (ред.), *Восточное партнерство: цели-опыт-вызовы*, Краков: Ксиенгарния Академицка 2013 (V. Curkan, V. Mosneaga, *Respublika Moldova na pereput'e Evropejskij Soúz vs Tamožennyj Soúz*. In: P. Bajor (ed.), *Vostočnoe partnerstvo: celi-opyt-vyzovy*, Krakov: Księgarnia Akademicka 2013), pp. 192–193.

<sup>16</sup> Republic of Moldova Public Opinion Barometer. At: <http://bop.ipp.md/en>, last accessed November 30, 2021.

forces is called an “electoral revolution,” which highlighted the turn of public opinion towards pro-European forces, which became possible mainly due to the established image of M. Sandu as an honest and incorruptible president. In addition, the presented pre-election programs of the pro-European forces were distinguished by a deep social orientation, which was an additional incentive in the conditions of the population’s deep social dissatisfaction with the current political and socio-economic situation.

Rules of procedure of the relations between the EU and Eastern Partnership countries continue to be carried out on the basis of the EU Global Strategy<sup>17</sup> and the updated European Neighborhood Policy.<sup>18</sup> At the same time, the rapidly changing dynamics of regional security in the Eastern Partnership area have highlighted the obvious need to rearrange this format. Taking into account the commitment and interest of the three leading Eastern Partnership countries, Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova, in promoting the European vector of development, the EU developed a very ambitious plan for political and economic integration within the framework of the implementation of the “Trio Strategy 2030 for the future Eastern Partnership.”<sup>19</sup> Not only the expectations of partner countries are important for the UE, but also the initiative and readiness for integration processes, which is not observed in the three states not included in the so-called “success story.” In addition, the situation in these countries has recently been aggravated by internal political difficulties and contradictions. The consequences of the Armenian–Azerbaijani war, the Russian military presence in Armenia, and Moscow’s support for the authoritarian regime of President of Belarus Aleksander Lukashenko and his declarations to withdraw from the Eastern Partnership – all this left its impact on the revision of the EU’s policy towards these countries. The so-called “dividing line” between states interested in political association and integration and those who prefer preserving the current state of affairs within the framework of the Eastern Partnership led to the fact that Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova signed a memorandum on founding the Association Trio.

In this context, it seems important to clarify that European integration is multidimensional in its essential characteristics. It involves the convergence of legal norms, an increase in the volume of trade and economic cooperation, the growth of

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<sup>17</sup> European Union External Action Service, *A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy*, December 15, 2019. At: [https://eeas.europa.eu/topics/eu-global-strategy/17304/global-strategy-european-unions-foreign-and-security-policy\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/topics/eu-global-strategy/17304/global-strategy-european-unions-foreign-and-security-policy_en), last accessed November 30, 2021.

<sup>18</sup> European Commission, *European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations*. At: [https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/index\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/index_en), last accessed November 30, 2021.

<sup>19</sup> TS-LKD, *Trio Strategy 2030*, October 2019. At: <https://tsajunga.lt/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/LT-EPP-Trio-Strategy-2030.pdf>, last accessed November 30, 2021.

transnational networks that unite society, the development of human potential and capital, and as contacts between people. Such a broad concept of integration supposes that EU membership or association with the EU can be not only goals and stages, but also the final state of the integration process. However, integration is not only limited to a normative approach, nor does it serve solely as a measure of harmonization with EU standards, but it also reflects actual social, economic and political transformations. Within the framework of this kind of measurements, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus are at the same stage, while Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova have taken a notable step forward, which allowed them to move to the next stage of integration processes. The new format of cooperation on integration into the EU is capable of accelerating the integration of Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova, provided that the states manage to overcome internal political contradictions and crises, carry out reforms in a decent way, and fulfill the basic requirements and obligations assumed. This will provide a platform for holistic integration into the EU.

## Cooperation between the Republic of Moldova and the EU in the field of security

Cooperation in the field of security is an important direction in the evolution of relations between the Republic of Moldova and the EU in the context of the Eastern Partnership. Security has been one of the most significant components in this project from the very beginning of its launch, with a focus on border management and prevention of illegal migration and crime. The context of regional security was rapidly changing, new challenges have emerged and the old ones have intensified with a common denominator for all countries in the region. From a geographical point of view, the Eastern Partnership is a heterogeneous contact zone which largely determines the nature of conflicts rooted in the region. Frozen and armed conflicts the strengthening of militaristic sentiments continue to hinder the development of the region and impair the security of the Eastern Partnership countries. The lack of clarity regarding the plans and the subsequent actions of Russia significantly destabilizes the situation, deepens the turbulent situation and creates unfounded grounds for fears about the growth of hotbeds of conflict. Under these circumstance, there is a need for synergy in the actions of the countries in the region, as well as support from the West in opposing the Russian policies.

The armed confrontation in the Eastern Ukraine has become a background factor hindering any process of world formation and regulation in the region. This is in the interests of Russia, as it does its best to maintain its traditional influence here. The local conflicts in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh, and the Transnistrian region provide Russia with additional advantages of control and influence over the course of events. The escalation of the conflict in Donbass and tensions in the Eastern Ukraine have an impact on the dynamics of these conflicts and postpone the process of settlement, de-occupation of territories and the withdrawal of Russian troops. This is a key obstacle to ensuring security and stability on the eastern borders of the EU.

Mobilization of joint efforts of the states of the region, aimed at maintaining peace, security and stability, is a priority under the current conditions. Deepening cooperation in the field of security and defense should be based on the synchronization of joint actions in matters of operational-strategic interaction and response.

## **Achievements of Moldova in fulfilling the tasks of maintaining security within the framework of the Eastern Partnership**

In recent years, the Republic of Moldova has significantly expanded its participation in various structures and initiatives in the field of national and regional security. In 2014, consultations were launched between Moldova and the EU on its participation in the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP). Promoting regional security and sub-regional security efforts to foster international stability, including cooperation and participation in CSDP missions, is a priority for Moldova. Since 2019, the possibilities and conditions of Moldova's participation in the EC PESCO defense union, which is considered one of the new instruments of European integration, have been under consideration.

The aspiration of integration into the European security space required revision of the national legislative framework and the provision of synergy with neighboring states and participant countries of the Eastern Partnership in this matter. In particular, this concerns the National Security Strategy of the Republic of Moldova, the National Defense Strategy and the Action Plan for the implementation of the National Defense Strategy for the period 2018–2020, the Military Strategy and Action Plan for its implementation until 2022. Particular attention in the framework of the Eastern Partnership is paid to combating hybrid threats, disinformation, fake news and propaganda. The newly created East StratCom Task Force was a conduit for EU strategic communica-

tions in the Eastern Neighborhood, the efforts of which were aimed at countering the ongoing disinformation campaign on the part of Russia.<sup>20</sup> Priority measures in the field of strategic communications are focused on strengthening the media and space of the countries of the region, supporting freedom of the media and independent media, and improving mechanisms for responding to disinformation from external actors. New security threats, in particular the growth of cybercrime, cyberattacks, and an increase in technological risks, pushed the Moldovan authorities to develop and implement the National Cybersecurity Program for the period 2016–2020.<sup>21</sup>

The complexities of the reform in the security sector in the Republic of Moldova were accompanied by a lack of a holistic vision for the implementation of integrative approaches, an insufficient level of development of technical capabilities, a weak resource potential and the vulnerability of critical infrastructure to security challenges and threats. The rapidly developing digitalization and the emergence of new information and technical capabilities have caused additional inconvenience to Moldova to adapt to new realities and protect the national security of the state. The current pro-European authorities within the framework of the Government's Action Plan for 2021–2022 will continue the initiated reforms and modernization of the security sector. Within the framework of the new agenda, it is important to move away from the failures of previous years and focus on the progressive modernization of security structures and increasing the level of resilience to modern challenges and threats. The need to maintain the stability and security of the EU's eastern neighbors is still a priority direction of interaction between the EU and the Eastern Partnership countries.

## Trade and economic relations between the Republic of Moldova and the EU

Trade and economic relations between the Republic of Moldova and the EU has come to be one of the key positions in the entire system of foreign economic relations of the country. In recent years, the total foreign trade turnover has significantly increased between the parties. The role of cooperation in the fields of economy, energy and

<sup>20</sup> Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, *Recommendations by the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF) on Combating Disinformation and Propaganda*, 2017. At: [https://eap-csf.eu/wp-content/uploads/EaP-CSF-Recommendations\\_February-2017.pdf](https://eap-csf.eu/wp-content/uploads/EaP-CSF-Recommendations_February-2017.pdf), last accessed November 30, 2021.

<sup>21</sup> National Cyber Security Program of the Republic of Moldova for the Years 2016–2020. At: [https://mei.gov.md/sites/default/files/raport\\_evaluare\\_hg\\_811\\_2015\\_-\\_07.06.2021.pdf](https://mei.gov.md/sites/default/files/raport_evaluare_hg_811_2015_-_07.06.2021.pdf), last accessed November 30, 2021.

investment cooperation has grown significantly. The EU is Moldova's main trading partner, with 70% of exports and almost 50% of imports. Romania, Italy, Germany and Poland are among the leading EU member states to which Moldovan goods are exported. Over the past 10 years, the volume of Moldovan exports to the EU countries has grown remarkably (Table 1).

**Table 1. The dynamics of trade turnover between the Republic of Moldova and the EU (2009–2021)**

Year	Export Mln US dollars	Import Mln US dollars
2009	678.5	1422.5
2010	746.5	1704.2
2011	1087.0	2256.6
2012	1013.4	2318.7
2013	1140.9	2472.8
2014	1246.0	2567.7
2015	1217.6	1954.1
2016	1332.4	1973.7
2017	1596.9	2389.1
2018	1862.1	2851.7
2019	1830.5	2889.9
2020	1640.3	2470.7

Source: National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova. At: <https://statistica.gov.md/category.php?l=en&cidc=336&>.

The DCFTA, being a tool that stimulates and creates the necessary conditions for the growth of Moldovan exports to EU countries, has had, among other things, a positive impact on improving the quality of Moldovan products. The application of standards helps increase the competitiveness and diversification of the products and goods supplied to the EU markets. According to the Eastern Partnership Index, which reflects the progress achieved by six countries in the integration with the EU, the increase in the share of EU countries in Moldovan exports to 70% has been one of the main practical successes of Moldova over the years of the Eastern Partnership.<sup>22</sup>

The main problems in the trade and economic cooperation of the parties continue to be the presence of certain barriers that do not allow increasing the volume of exports,

<sup>22</sup> European Council, *Индекс Восточного Партнерства 2015–2016*, April 17, 2020. At: <https://eap-csf.eu/23573-2-rus/>, last accessed November 30, 2021.

the small variety of Moldovan goods exported to the EU, slow introduction of tariff quotas for some types of products and the low technological level of development of the agricultural and textile sectors.

The economic development of the Eastern Partnership countries was also assisted by the programs of cross-border cooperation, which acted as tools for the development of border territories and strengthening the economic interaction of the states of the region. The main attention was focused on the life activities of the population and overcoming barriers that hinder the development of cross-border interaction. It helped the implementation of infrastructure and logistics projects and direction of the participation of a larger number of entrepreneurs and public organizations towards the problems of border areas, and it opened up new opportunities for developing skills in joint planning of cross-border cooperation.

In July 2021, the EU announced a new economic and investment plan for the Eastern Partnership, developed in line with the five long-term policy goals of the Eastern Partnership until 2025.<sup>23</sup> The plan aims at stimulating economic growth, increasing the number of jobs and expanding trade. To provide economic support and the implementation of the tasks set, blended financing, grants and public-private investments are envisaged. Particular attention will be paid to the socio-economic recovery of the participating countries after the Covid-19 pandemic.

In this context, it is worth mentioning that the EU is the largest donor of financial resources and technical assistance for sustainable development, modernization, as well as improvements in the welfare of the state and the population of the Republic of Moldova.<sup>24</sup> Most of the financial and technical assistance programs are managed by the European Commission Directorate General for European Neighborhood Policy and are aimed at supporting reforms, socio-economic education and democratic consolidation.

The EU has significantly increased the resource provision of the Eastern Partnership countries in recent years. The instruments and indicators for the distribution of this resource provision, in particular, credit, grant support and humanitarian work, have largely depended on the nature of the EU's relations with the target country.

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<sup>23</sup> EU Neighbours, *Eastern Partnership: A Renewed Agenda for Recovery, Resilience and Reform Underpinned by an Economic and Investment Plan*, July 2, 2021. At: <https://www.euneighbours.eu/en/east/stay-informed/news/eastern-partnership-renewed-agenda-recovery-resilience-and-reform>, last accessed November 30, 2021.

<sup>24</sup> I. Tabirta, *The Western Development Vector of the Republic of Moldova (Between 2009–2019). The Relationship with the EU and Romania*. In: *Policy Brief About the Foreign Policy Evolution of the Republic of Moldova During the Period of 2009–2019*, Chisinau: APE 2019, p. 13.



The overall contribution of the EU to the development of the resource potential of the countries of the region, and their economic stability and attractiveness has made it possible to accelerate the transformation processes in the region and strengthened the interaction among the member states of the Eastern Partnership.

## EU assistance to energy sector reforms

Energy security is a determining factor in ensuring the stability of the region, political and economic stability, as well as independence. Energy issues are, first of all, issues of global politics, where the interests of the Russian Federation and the EU intersect. Given the intention of Moldova to reduce its level of energy dependence on Russia, as well as the desire to take in and fully understand European markets, the cooperation between Moldova and the EU in the energy sector becomes especially relevant and requires a set of measures aimed at ensuring the energy security of Moldova and the Eastern Partnership states.

Today, the dominant trend in European energy cooperation is the implementation of the Third Energy Package, which presupposes specific principles for the functioning of the internal gas and electricity market in the EU. Currently, measures are being taken to split the vertically-integrated enterprise Moldovagaz, which does not meet the requirements of the Third Energy Package, as it owns a gas pipeline used for gas transportation and gas distribution networks, and is also engaged in trade. Unbundling is fraught with a number of difficulties because the main shareholder of Moldovagaz, the Russian company Gazprom, is not making the necessary efforts to complete this process. Meanwhile, it is necessary for the formation of the market, since Gazprom is the owner of the gas pipeline and an integrated-vertical enterprise, so it can cause problems for other economic agents wishing to supply gas to the Moldovan market.

The EU helps Moldova carry out reforms in the energy sector. The value of EU investments in the energy sector for the period of 2009–2018 was 78.8 million lei.<sup>25</sup> Currently, the primary tasks in the energy sector are: development of infrastructure and provision of the state with electricity transmission; rules of procedure of market rules, including existing technical and economic problems; the search for opportunities to ensure equal conditions for competition.

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<sup>25</sup> EU for Moldova, *The Platform of EU-Funded Technical Assistance Projects in the Republic of Moldova*. At: [www.eu4moldova.md/ro](http://www.eu4moldova.md/ro), last accessed November 30, 2021.



## Cooperation in the field of culture and education within the framework of European integration, and the promotion of European values

European integration, being a non-hierarchical network process, presupposes the involvement of civil society, non-governmental organizations, public associations, and business structures in the political life of the state. This approach explains the thoroughness of the EU when dealing with the issues of development of the socio-cultural sphere, civil society, youth, and education in the countries of the Eastern Partnership.

Various EU programs were introduced during the realization of this format of cooperation which have contributed to the development of these areas, and are aimed at increasing the attractiveness of the region and the welfare of the citizens of the participant countries. The EU funded a number of socio-economic, cultural and educational projects for the Eastern Partnership countries,<sup>26</sup> such as the Erasmus + program, which brings together seven EU programs in the field of education, training, youth and sports for the period 2014–2020; Horizon 2020; EU4Youth; Regional Mechanism for Supporting Civil Society of the Eastern Partnership Countries; Creative Europe and others. Particular attention was paid to encouraging youth participation in the life of the state and society. All this has allowed an increase in the level of civic activism in the countries of the Eastern Partnership and strengthened the involvement of the population in socio-political processes.

The EU views common European values as a key element in the process of deepening political and economic integration. Building a common European future for the Eastern Partnership countries presupposes the development of the principles of democracy, supremacy, strict observance of human rights, the fight against discrimination and various forms of its manifestation. It is one of the fundamental foundations of the progressive advance towards building a common European future for the countries of the region.

## Summary and recommendations

Thus, the main directions of relations between the Republic of Moldova and the EU in the context of the Eastern Partnership have significantly expanded and deepened.

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<sup>26</sup> EU Neighbours, *East*. At: <https://www.euneighbours.eu/en/region/25/eu-in-action/projects/Ongoing?page=1>, last accessed November 30, 2021.

The rationality and pragmatism characteristic of the EU's approaches to building a political dialogue with the Republic of Moldova were the key to the constructive dynamics of the relations. Though there are some unresolved problems, it was possible to achieve clarity and definiteness of the foreign policy vector of the development of Moldova. Regional solidarity became a determining factor uniting the countries of the "Associated Trio" in maintaining security and combating new challenges and threats. The level of trade and economic cooperation has increased, which has opened up new opportunities for developing European markets, improving the quality of products and the level of competitiveness of the associated countries of the Eastern Partnership. Cooperation among the parties in the energy sector has deepened, and actions have been intensified to ensure energy security by diversifying sources and reducing dependence on one supplier. Cooperation in the fields of culture, science and education has expanded. For the subsequent constructive and pragmatic development of relations between the Republic of Moldova and the European Union in the context of the Eastern Partnership, it is important to highlight the following recommendations:

- The political dialogue between the Republic of Moldova and the EU should be more focused on strengthening the control mechanisms for carrying out domestic reforms, as well as on the effectiveness of the political course and security policy, built on the principle of achieving practical results in ensuring and maintaining security on the European continent.
- On the eve of the Eastern Partnership Summit of 2021, the countries of the "Associated Trio" should decide on a list of joint efforts of states aimed at the practical implementation of ambitious, long-term and motivating goals outlined within the given format of cooperation and those initiatives that were sent by representatives of these states to harmonization in the EU. In particular, this is related to the participation of these states in the framework of EDF and PESCO.
- More attention should be paid to the development of a stable and integrated economy, overcoming existing barriers that prevent more complete integration of Moldovan products into the European market, as well as expanding its diversity and proper distribution of tariff quotas for certain types of products. It is necessary to build an infrastructure with appropriate technological capabilities which will expand the list of food products exported to the EU. The issues of regulation of the financial sector, monetary-credit and exchange rate policies remain sensitive. Special attention should be paid to the development and strengthening of economic interaction among the states of the Eastern Partnership.

- The issue of reducing the level of Moldova's energy dependence on the Russian Federation continues to be acute. Reforming the energy sector in line with EU standards is being carried out extremely slowly. It seems necessary to complete the unbundling process, coordinate positions on the cost and tariffs for gas transportation and complete the construction of new lines in order to provide the country with alternative energy sources.
- The coordination of regional cooperation mechanisms should be worked out in detail, taking into account the different levels of progress in political transformations and the appropriate level of functioning of democratic institutions. It is important to develop new approaches to cross-border cooperation and more intensive development of border areas.
- In the context of the growing digital transformation, which has become one of the trends in the current stage of world development, the experience and practice of the EU in the process of modernizing the digital infrastructure and strengthening its functioning, protection and sustainability is extremely important.
- In the context of promoting European aspirations and values, it is important to expand forums and formats for dialogue with civil society and youth, joint educational projects, scientific and technical cooperation and attracting more young researchers to joint programs and projects within the framework of the Eastern Partnership.

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TATIANA TURCO 

*Moldova State University*

VALERIU MOSNEAGA 

*Moldova State University*

## Geopolitical Choice of the Republic of Moldova on the Example of Snap Parliamentary Elections (2021)

**ABSTRACT:** For many years, the key topic of the parliamentary elections in the Republic of Moldova has been the geopolitical choice between East and West, integration with either the European Union or the Russian Federation. This is reflected in the confrontation between political parties, and the split of political elites and Moldovan society according to the geopolitical feature.

This study aims at analyzing the geopolitical choice of the Republic of Moldova on the example of snap parliamentary elections on 11 July, 2021. Considering the specifics of the elections, the study is focused on the problem of geopolitical choice on the pre-election platforms of Moldovan electoral competitors. Based on the results of parliamentary elections and sociological inquiries, i.e. polls, the author analyzes the attitude of the Moldovan population towards various geopolitical projects – integration with the EU or the Eurasian Economic Union.



The study showed that the problem of geopolitical choice was not dominant in the parliamentary elections in Moldova (2021). The idea of fighting corruption and reforming justice, which was promoted by the victorious Party of Action and Solidarity and M. Sandu, the country's President, was a priority, determining victory in the elections and uniting different ethnic groups. Moldovan public opinion is evidence of an increase in the number of supporters of integration into the European Union.

**KEYWORDS:** snap parliamentary elections, overcoming the crisis between the president and the parliament, pre-election platforms of electoral competitors, the problem of geopolitical choice, public opinion

## Introduction

For many years, the key topic in the elections in the Republic of Moldova has been the geopolitical choice between East and West, between the EU and Russia. It has a strong and lasting effect on the political processes taking place inside the country and is expressed in the political confrontation and electoral behavior of political parties, as well as in the split of political elites and Moldovan society according to the geopolitical feature.

The aim of this study is to analyze the geopolitical choice of Moldova using the example of snap parliamentary elections held on 11 July, 2021. Before proceeding to the realization of the aim set, one should pay attention to two important points. First and foremost, according to its Constitution, Moldova is a parliamentary republic. Although the country returned to general presidential elections in 2016, the powers of the head of the state are limited, and the president can fully influence a situation only with the support of the parliament and the government. Therefore, parliamentary elections are a significant event that determines who will have real power in the country.

Secondly, in the three decades of independence a multi-party system has developed in the Republic of Moldova. There are 53 registered political parties in Moldova,<sup>1</sup> which carry out their activities in accordance with the Law on Political Parties.<sup>2</sup> However, in actual fact, there are not more than 10 active political parties in the political arena.

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<sup>1</sup> *Lista partidelor politice din Republica Moldova*. At: <http://www.asp.gov.md/ro/node/3664>, last accessed November 30, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> "Lege No. 294-XVI din 21-12-2007 privind partidele politice", *Monitorul Oficial*, no. 42-44, February 29, 2008.

Despite the names and the promoted ideologies of the political parties, the struggle between them is reduced to the struggle of two opposing collective types of memory associated with communist (Soviet) and Romanian identity. The representatives of the parties on the left believe that their opponents in the parties on the right are under the influence of Western values and the process of Europeanization, while, according to the representatives of the right-wing parties, the left is subject to the influence of the East and Eurasian integration processes. Therefore, the main confrontation in the parliamentary and presidential elections has given birth to pro-European and pro-Russian forces.

## Specification and results of elections

1. The parliamentary elections on 11 July, 2021 were snap. The parliament of the convocation of 2019 had been functioning for slightly more than two years when it was dissolved by M. Sandu, the president of the country, on 28 April, 2021. The Constitutional Court recognized the constitutional grounds for the dissolution of parliament, and it canceled the state of emergency declared by the parliament, paving the way for snap elections. The key question of the elections was whether the head of the state would be able to strengthen his or her position in the new parliament, overcoming the crisis between the president and the parliament.

2. The Parliament of the Republic of Moldova is made up of 101 deputies. Following the parliamentary elections of 2019, which were held by means of a mixed electoral system, there was a return to a proportional electoral system, electoral thresholds for parties and blocs were lowered, and the 40 percent gender quota, first introduced in the parliamentary elections (2019), was strengthened by the requirement to be included on the list of candidates. 46% of registered candidates were women, with only three parties headed by them.<sup>3</sup> Also, amendments were made related to the financing of the election campaign, and the condition of the pre-election silence returned.

3. The parliament, elected in 2019, was made up of three political parties and a bloc: the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova, the ACUM bloc (including the Party of Action and Solidarity and the Dignity and Truth Platform Party), the Democratic Party of Moldova and the Șor Party. The composition of the parliament

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<sup>3</sup> OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, *Moldova, Early Parliamentary Elections, 11 July 2021: Interim Report. 03 June – 17 June, 2021*. At: <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/c/e/490586.pdf>, last accessed November 30, 2021.

was constantly criticized, as a number of deputies were involved in corruption scandals. In addition, its configuration was continuously changing: ‘the term “political tourism”, widespread in Moldova, is associated with the transfer of deputies from one faction to another, not out of conviction but for the gain of material rewards.’<sup>4</sup> One of M. Sandu’s pre-election promises in the presidential elections (2020) was the organization of snap parliamentary elections and a purge of the parliament.

4. The realization of parliamentary elections is regulated by the Constitution of the Republic of Moldova (1994), the Electoral Code (1997), the Law on Political Parties (2007), the Code of the Republic of Moldova about Audiovisual Media Services (2018) and other relevant legal acts, as well as the provisions and decisions of the Central Electoral Commission (CEC). Under the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic, the “Instruction on the organization and conduct of elections by the Central Electoral Commission in the context of a pandemic with regard to COVID-19” was approved, aimed at ensuring all regulatory requirements during the election period in order to prevent the spread of coronavirus disease.

In the elections, the CEC faced problems related to an insufficient budget to fully finance the electoral process. The government was barely able to find the money required for the election campaign, since the budget of the country did not include additional funds for organizing snap elections.

5. The media landscape in Moldova can be assessed as pluralistic, but polarized, which is associated with the dependence of the mass media on political and party interests. Television is the main source of information; online sources and social media are also popular.

Considering the influence of the media on the formation of geopolitical preferences of the electorate, it should be noted that in the time when I. Dodon was in power, being perceived as a pro-Russian president in the mass consciousness, Russian news programs and political discussion programs were not broadcast in Moldova. With the arrival of the pro-European President M. Sandu, the broadcast of Russian news programs was resumed. This step of the new president was a great help in overcoming the geopolitical split in the Moldovan society.

6. To take part in the snap parliamentary elections, 23 electoral competitors were registered: 20 political parties; the two electoral blocs of PSRM-PCRM, which

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<sup>4</sup> Ю. Семенова, “«Очистить от коррупции». Дан старт кампании к досрочным выборам в парламент Молдовы” (Ū. Semenova, “«Ochistiti ot korruptsii» Dan start kampanii k dosrochnym vyboram v parlament Moldovy”), *DW. Made for Minds*, May 11, 2021. At: <https://www.dw.com/ru/v-moldove-dan-start-kampanii-k-dosrochnym-vyboram-v-parlament/a-57485469>, last accessed November 30, 2021.

united the Party of Socialists and the Party of Communists, and the Renato Usatii bloc, consisting of two left-wing parties – Nashi, led by businessman R. Usatii, and Rodina, led by E. Chobu, the former Ambassador of Moldova to Romania; and one independent candidate.

7. The main opponents were the center-right parties, the Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS), which are associated with the current president of the country, M. Sandu, and the PSRM-PCRM bloc headed by former presidents of the country V. Voronin (2001–2009) and I. Dodon (2016–2020) on the left wing. According to the results of public opinion polls, the Șor Party and the Renato Usatii bloc were admissible to the parliament, as well.<sup>5</sup>

Sandu's victory in the presidential elections worked in favor of the PAS. The strong points of the party are its well-recognized pre-electoral agenda, which became the continuation of the ideas put forward in the presidential elections ("fighting corruption," "final cleanup of the political system," etc.), support from external forces, namely the EU, the United States and Romania, as well as the vigorous support of the Moldovan diaspora in Europe and North America.

The weak points of the PAS are a rather weak team made up mainly of employees of different NGOs who are very far from the needs of ordinary citizens and have no experience in public administration, and the right-wing radical sentiments of some of its leaders and activists,<sup>6</sup> who are capable of alienating part of the electorate and pushing them slowly towards the political center. M. Sandu managed to smooth out the right-wing radical background in the presidential and parliamentary elections.

On the left wing, the Party of Socialists and the Party of Communists, under the pretext of uniting leftist forces under the threat of the West, established an electoral bloc. The bloc's representatives emphasized the influence of the West on the elections in Moldova. The main ideas of the electoral program were the strengthening of the statehood and the independence of Moldova, the economic development of the country and the improvement of the well-being of citizens, traditional values, and the Orthodoxy.

The Șor Party is headed by the mayor of Orhei, Ilan Shor, who was involved in the theft of one billion and is a fugitive of Moldovan justice taking asylum in Israel. The party opened specialized social shops in the cities of the country for vulnerable sections of the population and implements other social projects.

<sup>5</sup> *Alegerile parlamentare 2021*, July 12, 2021. At: <http://alegeri.md/>, last accessed November 30, 2021.

<sup>6</sup> 3. Тодуа, "Молдавия: 10 лет имитации реформ", *Независимая газета*, June 6, 2021 (Z. Todua, "Moldaviya: 10 let imitatsii reform", *Nezavisimaya gazeta*). At: [https://www.ng.ru/dipkurser/2021-06-06/11\\_8166\\_moldova.html](https://www.ng.ru/dipkurser/2021-06-06/11_8166_moldova.html), last accessed November 30, 2021.

R. Usatii is the leader of Our Party and the mayor of the city of Balti, the second economic center of the country at the time of the elections. In 2014, on suspicion of external funding (from Russia), his party was removed from the election campaign three days before the elections (in April 2021, the Supreme Court of Justice declared this decision illegal). Later, several criminal cases were brought against him; he left Moldova and came back in 2019 after the collapse of the oligarchic regime.

His populism effectively attracts Moldovan voters. In the presidential elections of 2020, he was third in terms of the number of votes. The party hoped that Usatii would repeat the success of the presidential elections, and also counted on the votes of the residents of Balti and the diaspora in Russia.<sup>7</sup>

8. As of June 1, the Central Electoral Commission had registered 3,282,837 voters, including 258,691 voters living in settlements on the left bank of the Dniester (Transnistria) that are not controlled by the constitutional authorities of the Republic of Moldova.<sup>8</sup>

Taking into account the growing electoral activity of the Moldovan diaspora, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration proposed opening 191 polling stations abroad in 38 countries. The CEC pushed for fewer polling stations, but after a decision of the Supreme Court, 150 polling stations were opened in 36 countries, 11 more than in the presidential election of 2020. As an exception, Moldovan voters abroad could vote with expired Moldovan passports.<sup>9</sup>

9. Only 52.3% of voters took part in the parliamentary elections.<sup>10</sup> This is lower than in the second round of the 2020 presidential elections (58.22%).

To enter parliament a party must gain 5% of the vote, an electoral bloc requires 7%, and an independent candidate must win 2%. According to the results of the elec-

<sup>7</sup> “Ренато Усатый ушел не по-молдавски. Что это значит для «Нашей партии» и политики в Молдове” (“Renato Usatyi ushel ne po-moldavski. Chto eto znachit dlya «Nashei partii» i politiki v Moldove”), *NewsMaker*. At: <https://newsmaker.md/rus/novosti/renato-usatyy-ushel-ne-po-moldavski-chto-eto-znachit-dlya-nashey-partii-i-politiki-v-moldove/>, last accessed November 30, 2021.

<sup>8</sup> *Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Moldova*. At: [https://a.cec.md/ru/obshchee-chislo-izbirateley-vklyuchennykh-v-gosudarstvennyy-registr-izbirateley--2781\\_99716.html](https://a.cec.md/ru/obshchee-chislo-izbirateley-vklyuchennykh-v-gosudarstvennyy-registr-izbirateley--2781_99716.html), last accessed November 30, 2021.

<sup>9</sup> ENEMO International Election Observation Mission Early Parliamentary Elections, *Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions*, Moldova, July 12, 2021. At: <http://enemo.eu/uploads/file-manager/ENEMOStatementofPreliminaryFindingsandConclusionsMoldovaEarlyParliamentaryElectionsJuly2021.pdf>, last accessed November 30, 2021.

<sup>10</sup> Comisia Electorală Centrală, Curtea Constituțională, *Hotărârea nr. 20 din 23 iulie 2021 cu privire la confirmarea rezultatelor alegerilor parlamentare anticipate din 11 iulie 2021 și validarea mandatelor deputaților aleși*, August 5, 2021. At: <https://www.constcourt.md/ccdocview.php?tip=hotariri&docid=776&l=ro>, last accessed November 30, 2021.

tions, the PAS received 52.8% of the votes (63 seats in parliament). For the first time in modern Moldovan political history, a center-right party won more than 50% of the votes, which allowed it to form the governing bodies of parliament and appoint a one-party government (51 mandates). The Bloc of Communists and Socialists entered parliament with 27.17% (32 seats: 22 – PSRM, 10 – PCRM) and the Șor Party with 5.74% (6 seats). The remaining 20 competitors did not pass the required threshold for being elected to parliament.

The victory of the PAS is compared to the victory of the Party of Communists in the parliamentary elections of 2001, when the party won 71 parliamentary seats. The communists had the opportunity to implement constitutional amendments and amend the country's Constitution with so many mandates (67).

10. The Diaspora unambiguously voted for the PAS, which gained 86.23% of the votes abroad. However, it would be a mistake to think that the Party of Action and Solidarity won thanks to the diaspora. The party won in the motherland, and the diaspora only strengthened the final election result in favor of the party.

## The geopolitical vector of the pre-election platforms of electoral competitors

An analysis of the pre-electoral platforms of the political parties participating in the snap parliamentary elections of 2021 shows that, in contrast to the parliamentary and presidential elections of the previous decade, electoral competitors focused more on the internal problems the country faced. The platforms of the participants were primarily devoted to socio-economic issues, the fight against corruption, judicial reform and, to a lesser extent, the geopolitical orientation of the country. On the one hand, this indicates that the choice of the geopolitical vector is no longer as relevant as it used to be. On the other hand, it speaks about the level of “maturation” of electors and a more pragmatic approach to elections of the legislative body.

9 out of 23 electoral competitors on the pre-election platforms, including the Șor Party, which entered parliament, did not touch upon the issues of Moldova's foreign policy at all. Nevertheless, the majority of political parties on their pre-electoral platforms paid attention to the development of the foreign policy of the Republic of Moldova.

1. In its pre-electoral program “Moldova of Good Times,” the center-right PAS reproduced the reform program proposed by M. Sandu during the presidential elections

in 2020.<sup>11</sup> In the field of foreign policy, the PAS states that the strategic orientation of the country is European integration, making it necessary to deepen the political dialogue with the EU to strengthen the sustainability of the Republic of Moldova in the fields of democracy, economy, climate, energy, and security, including in the context of the new results of the Eastern Partnership.

The party proposed intensifying the implementation of the Association Agreement and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area with the EU; approving and implementing the new Association Agenda with the EU for 2021–2027; accelerating the implementation of EU standards; providing native producers with the necessary support, and promoting the structural changes necessary to increase the competitiveness of the national economy.

The PAS is committed to strengthening strategic partnerships with Romania and Ukraine. But if relations with Romania are based on common values, in the relations between Chisinau and Kiev, in addition to the general movement along the path of European integration, there are toxic issues related to the Dniester River, joint control of the Moldovan-Ukrainian border on the Transnistrian perimeter, etc.<sup>12</sup> The development of regional partnership for European integration with Ukraine and Georgia is considered an important direction for the party. The party also intends to resume a strategic dialogue with the USA.

Regarding the cooperation with the Russian Federation as one of the foreign policy directions, the PAS stands for a positive, respectful and pragmatic political dialogue with Russia. The restoration of trade and economic relations and the protection of the rights of citizens of the Republic of Moldova are proclaimed as a significant objective.

Other right-wing and center-right parties (Platform “Yes,” PDM, “Democracy at Home,” Party for Development and Unification of Moldova, “New Historical Choice,” Ecological Party of the Greens) adhere to similar views. The National Unification Party (PUN), New Historical Choice Party, and Alliance for the Unification of Romanians (AUR) promote the idea of uniting Moldova and Romania. It is worth mentioning that the right-wing electors mostly voted for the PAS, the winning party, so the unionist parties together gained less than 1% of the vote.

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<sup>11</sup> Partidul Acțiune și Solidaritate, *Moldova vremurilor bune. Program Electoral. Alegerile parlamentare din 11 iulie 2021*, June 9, 2021. At: <http://alegeri.md/images/a/ad/Program-electoral-pas-2021.pdf>, last accessed November 30, 2021.

<sup>12</sup> В. Портников, “Молдова после выборов,” *Радио Свобода*, July 20, 2021 (V. Protnikov, “Moldova posle vyborov,” *Radio Svoboda*). At: <https://www.svoboda.org/a/moldova-posle-vyborov-efir-v-20-32/31367220.html>, last accessed November 30, 2021.



2. The pre-electoral platform of the PSRM-PCRM bloc was based on the solution of socio-economic problems. With regard to the geopolitical vector, the bloc carried out a very controversial campaign. The socialists claim to be the last stronghold preventing Moldova from leaving Russia and swinging towards NATO and Europe, whereas the communists, on behalf of former president Voronin, state that European integration is the main idea of Moldovan statehood, and it shall be included in the Moldovan constitution.<sup>13</sup>

In the pre-election program of 2021, the situation found its expression in the preferences of the bloc – to build a strategic dialogue with Russia, but at the same time maintain the relations with the EU in their current form. The bloc is ready to cooperate with external partners to solve hot social and economic issues while steadily respecting the national and state interests of a sovereign and independent Moldova and its citizens. “The one and only geopolitical vector that the country should be guided by in the foreign arena is the national interests of the Republic of Moldova.”<sup>14</sup>

Despite the fact that the PSRM opposed the signing of the Association Agreement with the EU in 2014, the party acknowledges that the Agreement would play a favorable role in deepening Moldova’s relations with the European Union and granting our country a visa-free regime with the EU countries. PSRM stands for the preservation of this Agreement, subject to changes in a number of articles which currently harm Moldovan producers and are incompatible with our traditional values.

PSRM considers the eastern vector as a significant condition for sustainable development of the country. Moldova can become a full-fledged participant in the Eurasian integration processes. PSRM stands for the development of good neighborly and strategic relations with Ukraine and Romania, the expansion of bilateral partnership with the United States and the comprehensive development of relations with Turkey and China.

The bloc of communists and socialists had to reckon with the changes that took place in the mass consciousness of the Moldovan population. It had to modify its message, stating that Moldova was not choosing between the EU and Russia, but “between external governance and statehood” in these parliamentary elections.<sup>15</sup> At

<sup>13</sup> “Алексей Мартынов: Вместо сближения с РФ Додон решал личные вопросы” (“Alexei Martynov: Vmesto sblizheniya s Rf Dodon reshal lichnye voprosy”), *Alfa News*, July 6, 2021. At: <http://alfanews.md/index.php?newsid=24927>, last accessed November 30, 2021.

<sup>14</sup> Partidul Socialiștilor din Republica Moldova, *Programul Partidului socialiștilor din Republica Moldova*. At: <https://socialistii.md/program-psrm>, last accessed November 30, 2021.

<sup>15</sup> Р. Владимиров, “Итоги парламентских выборов в Молдове 11 июля 2021: Всё решила диаспора – PAS получает большинство, а Блок коммунистов и социалисты вместе с партией ШОР будут в оппозиции” (R. Vladimirov, “Itogi parlamentskih vyborov v Moldove 11 iulya 2021:

the same time, they positioned themselves as supporters of sovereignty and statehood, and M. Sandu and PAS as advocates of external control.

The Renato Usatii Bloc, the Party of Collective Action – Civil Congress, and the Party of Regions, advocating the strengthening of Moldovan statehood, independent development of Moldova and mutually beneficial cooperation with both East and West, and the Patriots of Moldova, supporting unification with Russia, stood on the left wing.

## The issue of geopolitical choice through the prism of public opinion

Public opinion is an essential component of the political life of a country. In the mass consciousness of Moldova, the issue of geopolitical choice was expressed in the form of a split between the European Union and the Eurasian Customs Union.

1. Public opinion polls conducted in 2003–2021 show that the idea of European integration in the Republic of Moldova has many supporters.

The largest number of supporters of European integration was noted in November 2007 (76.2%). This is two times higher than the lowest indicator, in October 2016 (38%). The highest indicator (over 70%) of supporters of European integration was achieved in 2006–2008. This is because Romania joined the European Union in 2007, and the Republic of Moldova became an immediate neighbor of the EU. The revitalization of the activities of international actors (EU and USA) in relation to Moldova stimulated the European expectations of the Moldovan population.<sup>16</sup>

The coming to power of the Alliance for European Integration (AEI) in 2009 gave a new impetus to the European integration expectations of the Moldovan population. However, the lack of success in the socio-economic development of the country, lack of professionalism in management, high level of corruption, and the theft of a billion led to people associating the idea of European integration with the negative activities of the AEI. This led to a decrease in support for European integration and an increase in

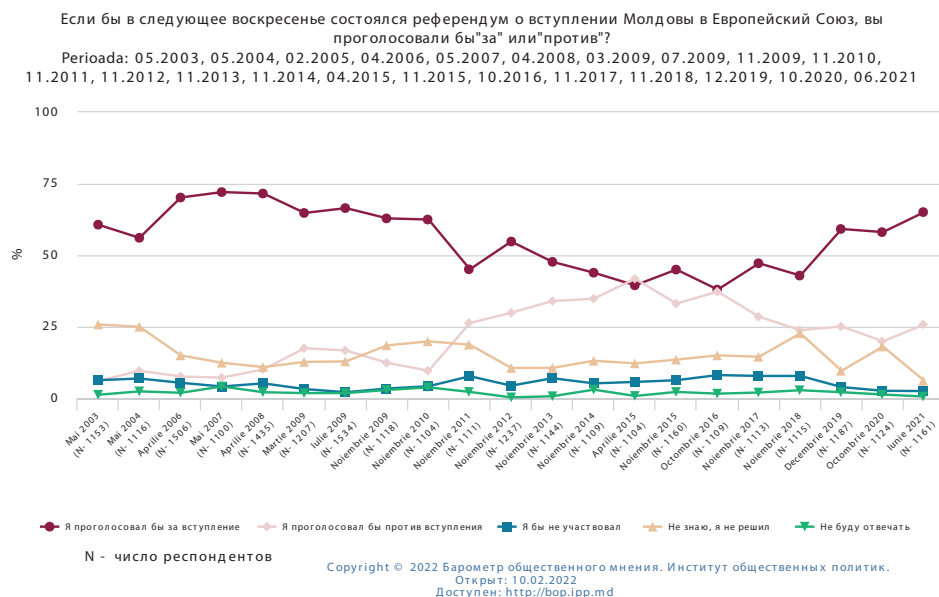
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Vse reshila diaspora – PAS poluchaet bolishinstvo, a Blok kommunistov i socialisty vmeste s partiei SHOR budut v oppozitsii”), *KP*, July 12, 2021. At: <https://www.kp.md/daily/28302.5/4442844/>, last accessed November 30, 2021.

<sup>16</sup> В. Мошняга, В. Цуркан, П. Байор, “Общественное мнение Республики Молдова о внешней политике страны”. В: *Детерминанты и перспективы политики европейской интеграции Республики Молдова*, Краков: Ксиенгарния Академицка 2015 (V. Mosneaga, V. Curkan and P. Bajor, “Obschestvennoe mnenie Respubliki Moldova o vneshnej politike strany”. In: *Determinanty i perspektivy politiki evropejskoj integracii Respubliki Moldova*, Krakov: Księgarnia Akademicka 2015), p. 138.

Euro-scepticism in the Moldovan society. Opposition to European integration peaked in April 2015, at 41.8%.

**Diagram 1. The dynamics of answers to the question “If a referendum on Moldova’s accession to the EU is held next Sunday, you will vote...” (%)**



Source: Public Opinion Barometer, 2003–2021. At: <http://bop.ipp.md/ru>.

In the Moldovan mass consciousness, the EU gained a competitor widely promoted by the Russian mass media, the Customs Union (CU). Playing on the nostalgic post-Soviet consciousness of a significant part of the Moldovan population, the media does not focus on the benefits and losses if it joins the CU, the real state of affairs in this regional entity.<sup>17</sup>

In April 2014, the Republic of Moldova entered a visa-free regime with the EU, a real achievement along the path of European integration. During tourist trips and short-term migration, Moldovan citizens were able to get acquainted with the life of the EU population. The demonstration effect of the EU contributed to an increase in the number of supporters of the European vector of development of the Republic of Moldova. Since 2016, about half of the respondents support the European integration of the Republic of Moldova. A month before the parliamentary elections of June

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 140–141.

2021, a public opinion poll showed that almost two-thirds of the participants would vote for the accession of Moldova to the EU.

The number of Moldovan citizens who do not have a definite position on this issue reached the lowest indicator in June 2021 (6.1%). The highest indicator of uncertain citizens was recorded in May 2004 (25.8%), when the idea of integration into the EU was new to Moldovan citizens, and they had not yet formed their attitudes towards it.

1. Support for joining the Customs Union peaked in April 2015 (57.8%), while it reached a low in June 2020 (30.1%), and it is associated with the disappointment of the Moldovan population with the activities of president Dodon and his endless expectations with regard to Russia.<sup>18</sup>

Although Moldova received a status of an observer in the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) in May 2018, the number of opponents of the country's integration into the CU is quite high. The highest indicator was recorded in June 2021 (47.5%), which is almost 2.5 times higher than the lowest indicator in May 2012 (19.5%). The number of unsure voters on this issue has decreased three times.

This is the nature of public opinion in Moldova in the context of separate consideration of the possibility of joining one or another regional interstate formation.

3. The positions of various ethnic groups regarding Moldova's accession to the EU or the Customs Union are of interest. The difference between positions is based on the criterion of the representative of the titular nation or ethnic minority of the Republic of Moldova. In the last poll of the Public Opinion Barometer (June 2021), the category "ethnicity" was represented by only two options – "Moldovans/Romanians" and "others," without specifying ethnic minorities.

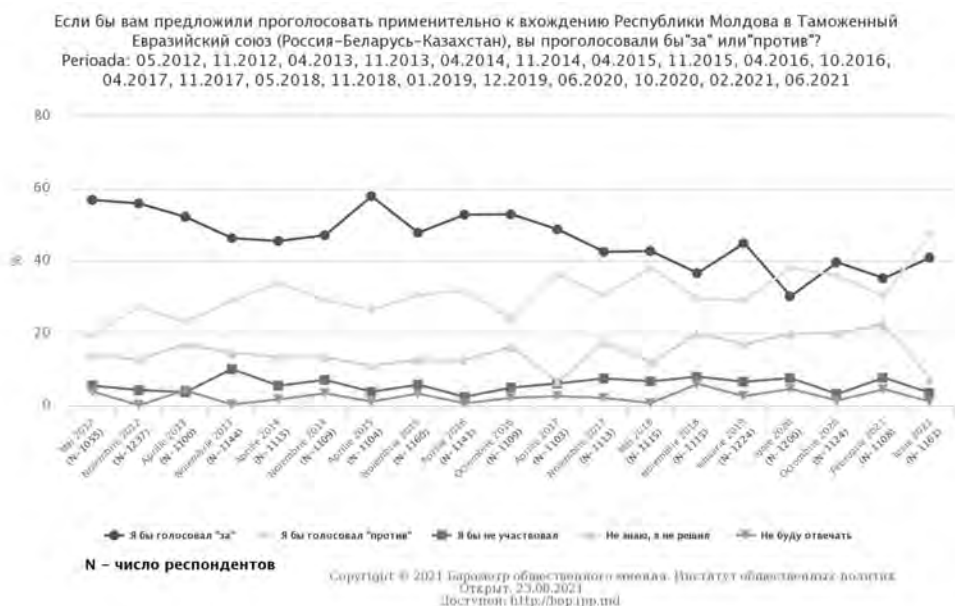
Polls show that representatives of the titular nation in the majority (3:1) would vote "for" the EU, while representatives of ethnic minorities would vote against joining the EU in a ratio of 1:3,5. At the same time, the results would differ materially if voting for the Eurasian Economic Union. One-third of Moldovans/Romanians and three-quarters of representatives of ethnic minorities would vote for joining the EEU. Among those who voted "against," the ratio between representatives of the titular nation and ethnic minorities would be 4:1.<sup>19</sup> As for making a choice between the accession of the Republic of Moldova to the EU or the Eurasian Economic Union, the results would be as follows: the Moldovans/Romanians would vote against the EU at a ratio

<sup>18</sup> Р. Шевченко, "Итоги парламентских выборов в Молдове" (R. Shevchenko, "Itogi parlamentskih vyborov v Moldove"), July 13, 2021. At: <https://ava.md/2021/07/13/itogi-parlamentskih-vyborov-v-moldove/>, last accessed November 30, 2021.

<sup>19</sup> Institutul de Politici Publice, *Raport Barometrul Opiniei publice 2021*, July 2021. At: <https://ipp.md/2021-07/barometrul-opinie-publique-iunie-2021/>, last accessed November 30, 2021.

of 3.5:1, and the representatives of ethnic minorities would be against at a ratio of 1:5. There are more representatives of ethnic minorities than Moldovans/Romanians (11.8% and 9.1%, respectively) who found it difficult to answer the question or did not answer it at all. These results are evidence of ethnic tension in the Moldovan society, which is a consequence of the events of the early 1990s.

**Diagram 2. The dynamics of answers to the question “If you were asked to vote in relation to the integration of the Republic of Moldova into the Eurasian Customs Union (Russia-Belarus-Kazakhstan), you would vote...” (i%)**



Source: Public Opinion Barometer, 2012–2021. At: <http://bop.ipp.md/ru>.

Thus, standing between the two regional geopolitical systems – the EU and the EEU – the public opinion of the Republic of Moldova is influenced by many internal and external factors, resulting in a contradictory and not always logical picture.

## Summary and recommendations

Analyzing the topic, we came to the following conclusions:

1. Despite the complexity and uncertainty of the actions taken, Moldova is moving along the path of European integration. This is due to the international position

of the country, the influence of external actors, the difficult socio-economic situation inside the country and the course of socio-political transformations, the electoral behavior of political parties, etc.

2. As a result of the snap parliamentary elections of 2021, three political parties entered the country's parliament. For the first time in modern Moldovan political history, a center-right party was able to gain more than half of voters. The stable parliament of the Republic of Moldova was now ruled by pro-European forces. A pro-presidential parliamentary majority was formed; a one-party government was created with full power and the ability to really become a capable and working government, supported by international structures and the international community.

3. An analysis of the pre-election platforms of electoral competitors shows that the problem of geopolitical choice in its classical version (EU or Russia), which traditionally dominated in the elections of post-Soviet Moldova, was not the main one, or it was modified among the main participants in the parliamentary race. However, it cannot be claimed that this problem has been resolved. The idea of a geopolitical choice was transformed into the formula "sovereignty or external control." In these elections, the main issues of the PAS were victory in the fight against corruption and the venality and inefficiency of the legal system.

4. Public opinion polls record the attitude of the Moldovan population towards various geopolitical projects – integration with the EU or integration with Russia and the Eurasian Economic Union. The results show an increase in the number of supporters of integration into the EU and, accordingly, a decrease in interest in the EEU. Most ethnic Moldovans support European integration, while representatives of national minorities more often identify themselves with an orientation towards Russia.

Based on the conclusions reached, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. To systematically and comprehensively inform the population of the Republic of Moldova about the results of the elections, the situation in the country, and the achievements of the authorities on the way to European integration.

2. Taking into account the geopolitical position of Moldova, the state authorities should develop relations with both the EU countries and Russia, emphasizing that the strategic goal of the country is European integration.

3. It is necessary to conduct intercultural dialogue among different ethnic groups, taking into account the specific interests of representatives of non-titular nation in terms of the geopolitical vector of the country's development. This will contribute to the establishment of interethnic harmony and political stability in Moldovan society.

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MARIAM LASHKHI 

*Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University*

VAKHTANG CHARAIA 

*Business and Technology University*

# The Role of the Eastern Partnership in Georgian Economic Development

**ABSTRACT:** This paper analyzes EU-Georgia cooperation, with specific attention paid to the role of the initiatives of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) in the process of the economic development and modernization of Georgia. The paper discusses the EaP's role from the first day of its existence, which continues fully fledged and comprehensive support for Georgia through bilateral and multilateral cooperation, providing technical, intellectual, financial, political, business, and social assistance. The paper specifically focuses on bilateral trade, investments, remittances, tourism and other fields of economic cooperation, all of which have a significant impact on the Georgian economy. The paper shows the EU's contribution to the Georgian economy field-by-field and also shows its aggregated size relative to the Georgian GDP while comparing the results to those of other countries. The paper provides specific conclusions and recommendations for deepening Georgia-EU cooperation through the EaP and other means.

**KEYWORDS:** Eastern Partnership, EU-Georgia cooperation, economic growth, Sustainable development, Coronomics

## Introduction

The Eastern Partnership (EaP) initiative launched by the European Union (EU) and its member states in May 2009 delivered a huge stimulus for Georgia not only from the economic point of view, but more significantly from the moral point of view, to overcome the enormous economic, political, military and social stress caused by Russian military aggression just nine months earlier.<sup>1</sup> Even after twelve years since its introduction, the EaP continues to play a significant role in Georgia's sustainable economic development through its direct priorities and indirect influences and impacts.

Moreover, backed by the success of different projects, initiatives and reforms supported by the EU, the government of Georgia has already declared its willingness to officially apply for EU membership in 2024.<sup>2</sup> Knowing that application does not mean immediate membership, Georgia has presented its ultimate wish, one it has been fighting for over at least the last two decades. It has even declared its Western orientation in its constitution.

The EU, as one of the most influential players in Georgia, has had significant input in Georgia's comprehensive development, and this continues. However, the direct and hybrid wars in the South Caucasus region have been incessant since the breakup of the Soviet Union,<sup>3</sup> thus requests for the West's active participation in all aspects, while considering local specifics.

## The EU's role in the Georgian Economy

From the first days of Georgian independence to the present day, the EU has been one of the top economic partners of Georgia, as is evident in all aspects. According to the official statistics of 2020, the Georgian economy gained \$1.77 billion USD from cooperation with the EU, and this is not even counting different grant projects:

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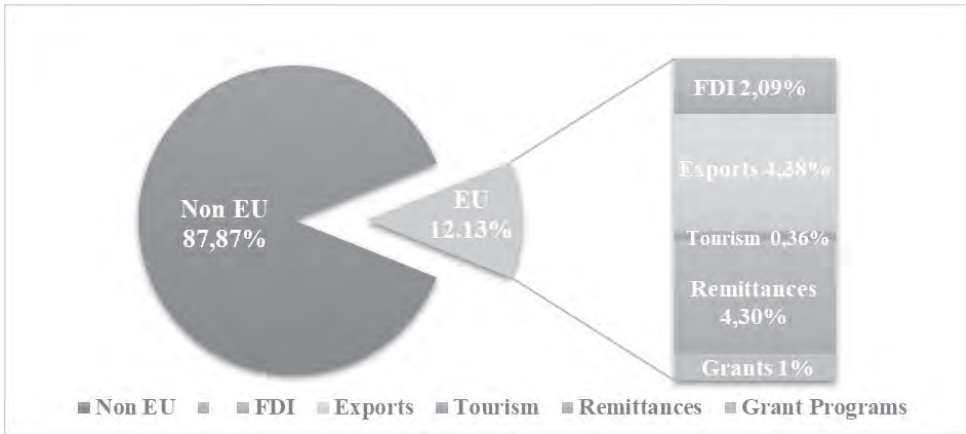
<sup>1</sup> P. Dickinson, "The 2008 Russo-Georgian War: Putin's Green Light", *Atlantic Council*, August 7, 2021. At: <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/the-2008-russo-georgian-war-putins-green-light/>, last accessed November 20, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> V. Maksimov, "Georgian President Visits Brussels in Push for 2024 EU Membership Application", *Euractiv*, January 22, 2021. At: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/eastern-europe/news/georgian-president-visits-brussels-in-push-for-2024-eu-membership-application/>, last accessed November 20, 2021.

<sup>3</sup> K. Gogolashvili, *Ten Years After the Initiation of the Eastern Partnership: What Associated Countries Should Do Next?*, GFSIS Expert Opinion, no. 129, 2009. At: <https://www.gfsis.org/files/library/opinion-papers/129-expert-opinion-eng.pdf>, last accessed November 20, 2021.

from tourism – \$57 million (average spending per visitor – \$800);<sup>4</sup> investments – \$333 million;<sup>5</sup> remittances – \$683 million;<sup>6</sup> and exports – almost \$700 million.<sup>7</sup> In total, this equals 11.13 percent of Georgian GDP (or \$1.91 billion), or even 12.13 percent in case of also adding grant programs (around €100–120 million annually<sup>8</sup>). (Figure 1).

**Figure 1. The EU's role in the Georgian economy as percentage of GDP in 2020**



Source: Authors calculation based on GEOSTAT, GNTA and NBG data

The tremendous economic role of the EU in Georgia is clearly visible when compared to the results of other dominant economic partners, where:

- The most traditional market for trade, tourism and remittances for Georgia – Russia – shows 5.6 percent importance/share for the Georgian economy, which is only half of that of the EU (no grants from Russia have been detected);
- The most stable and reliable partner (along with the EU) for Georgia not only in economic terms, but almost in all areas, the USA, has reached the level of 3.5 percent, including plentiful grant programs;

<sup>4</sup> Georgian National Tourism Administration, *Statistics – 2020*. At: <https://gnta.ge/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/2020-eng.xlsx>, last accessed November 20, 2021.

<sup>5</sup> National Statistics Office of Georgia, *FDI*. At: [https://geostat.ge/media/40349/FDI\\_Eng-countries.xlsx](https://geostat.ge/media/40349/FDI_Eng-countries.xlsx), last accessed November 20, 2021.

<sup>6</sup> National Bank of Georgia, *Money Transfer Map*. At: [https://analytics.nbg.gov.ge/views/MoneyTransfers/MoneyTransfersMap?iframeSizedToWindow=true&embed=y&showAppBanner=false&display\\_count=no&showVizHome=no](https://analytics.nbg.gov.ge/views/MoneyTransfers/MoneyTransfersMap?iframeSizedToWindow=true&embed=y&showAppBanner=false&display_count=no&showVizHome=no), last accessed November 20, 2021.

<sup>7</sup> National Statistics Office of Georgia, *Export*. At: <https://www.geostat.ge/en/modules/categories/637/export>, last accessed November 20, 2021.

<sup>8</sup> Delegation of the European Union to Georgia, *Projects in Georgia*, September 3, 2018. At: [https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/georgia/50014/node/50014\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/georgia/50014/node/50014_en), last accessed November 20, 2021.

- The top trading partner and one of the most distinguished investors in the Georgian economy, as well as a good source for remittances, Turkey, shows only 3.1 percent, including grants;
- The most rapidly growing economic partner of Georgia for the last decade, China, has reached only 2.9 percent of the Georgian GDP, including small grant programs.

However, at the same time it should not be forgotten that individually these countries are ahead of most EU member states, since the EU is counted as a combination of 28 different countries, considering Brexit after January 31, 2020.<sup>9</sup> Showing the power of unity, the EU is the most stable, reliable and – even more importantly – promising group of states with whom Georgia had cooperated so far, even though different countries, especially neighboring ones, have tried to implement their own soft and/or hard power over different aspects of the Georgian economy, politics, social life and more. Let us look deeper into the EU-Georgia economics:

**Trade.** During the past decade, thanks to EaP and other corresponding cooperation mechanisms, the total trade between Georgia and the EU has, according to the GEOSTAT, increased by 50%, reaching \$2.55 billion, making the EU the number one trading partner with Georgia, both in imports and exports. Even more interesting, Georgian exports to the EU market have increased by a significant 140%, which is also the result of (on some level) the diversification of export potential and entrance into new EU markets, leading to Georgia's more complex integration into global value chains. Furthermore, during the same time period the number of companies exporting to the EU from Georgia has increased by 46%,<sup>10</sup> clearly reflecting the mutual benefits of Georgia-EU cooperation.

At the same time it should be noted that for the last ten years, lately for reasons of coronomics, and before that for various reasons including the uptick in the Chinese market, trade between EU and Georgia, initially growing from 2010 to 2016, gradually decreased in the following years and from 2016th 27.9 percent went down to 23.2 percent by 2020, which meant decreases in both exports and imports simultaneously, from 2016 26.0 and 28.4 to 20.8 and 23.0 percent, respectively. By 2020,

<sup>9</sup> H. Davies, "A Brexit Post-Mortem for the City", *Project Syndicate*, May 18, 2021. At: <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/brexit-impact-on-london-financial-center-by-howard-davies-2021-05?barrier=accesspaylog>, last accessed November 20, 2021.

<sup>10</sup> European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, *Joint Communication to The European Parliament, The European Council, The Council, The European Economic and Social Committee and The Committee of The Regions. Eastern Partnership Policy Beyond 2020. Reinforcing Resilience – an Eastern Partnership that Delivers for All*, Brussels, March 18, 2020. At: [https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/system/files/2020-03/joint\\_communication\\_on\\_the\\_eap\\_policy\\_beyond\\_2020.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/system/files/2020-03/joint_communication_on_the_eap_policy_beyond_2020.pdf), last accessed November 20, 2021.

the EU had become the number two trading bloc for Georgia, with a 23.2 percent share, lagging behind CIS countries, with a 34.4 percent share in the total trade.<sup>11</sup>

The structure of Georgia's exports and imports to and from EU markets has not changed significantly over the past decade, especially in top positions, but trade continues to increase gradually year after year, thanks to adaptation of Georgian standards to EU requirements, support programs financed by both local and EU budgets, contacts gained over the decade, Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) advantages, and other factors. The main products so far exported from Georgia to EU markets are copper ore, nuts, ferroalloys, and wine. The dominant import products are petroleum and petroleum products; drugs and medical equipment; cars, trucks and tractors; phones; and cosmetics. It should be noted that unlike Georgian exports to the EU, in which a few products dominate, EU exports to Georgia are significantly diversified.

While Turkey, Russia, China and Azerbaijan are the top four trading partners for Georgia, making up 44.5 percent of total trade, EU members individually take positions among the top 10. Germany, Bulgaria and Italy are in 8th, 9th and 10th positions, respectively, with a total share of only 9.7 percent. These numbers show that there is still much work to do between the EU and Georgia to meet each other's requirements, expectations and needs regarding quality, price, legislation and more. The process is continuing without a halt, although it is progressing slowly.

**Tourism.** Unlike trade, the trend in tourism for the last decade, including 2019, was on an uptick, starting from around 100 thousand visitors and finishing with almost half a million in 2019, before the pandemic restrictions all over the world rose to very strict levels. However, it never exceeded 5.2 percent of the total number of visitors to Georgia, with only two countries, Poland and Germany, at the bottom of the top 15 visitors. Because of strict regulations in 2020, the number of tourists from the EU in Georgia decreased by a significant 85.4 percent, in absolute numbers, meaning 77 thousand visitors, or 4 percent of the total number of visitors.<sup>12</sup>

Even though the real driver of Georgia's tourism industry has never been the EU, the Georgian National Tourism Administration claims that they still are among the top in terms of money spent per visitor, averaging approximately \$600, but still lagging behind Saudi Arabia, the USA, Qatar and the UAE, which average between \$750 and

<sup>11</sup> National Statistics Office of Georgia, *External Trade*. At: <https://www.geostat.ge/en/modules/categories/35/external-trade>, last accessed November 20, 2021.

<sup>12</sup> Georgian National Tourism Administration, *Statistics – 2020...*

\$1000. Neighbouring Azerbaijan, Russia, Turkey and Armenia are ahead of those in numbers, making up to 70% of all visits, but tourists from those countries spend less.

Considering the facts of the visa-free regime; the availability of direct flights, including on budget airlines; security; and prices, tourism has the chance to be a significant economic linkage for EU-Georgia cooperation in both directions. However, this has outstanding importance for the diversification and development of the Georgian tourism industry and achieving less dependence on other tourists, especially those from Russia, which could be used by the Russian government for their political aims. Dependence could be punished with partial or total blockade of tourism when you less expect it and the reason might not exist at all or could be politically motivated, as it has already happened and not only with Georgia.

**Foreign Direct Investment (FDI).** Similar to tourism, FDI from EU countries over the last decade been on a positive trend, starting from a 21.9-percent share in 2010 and finishing with 48 percent in 2020, which can be seen as extraordinary considering the challenges of coronomics sweeping through the country over recent years, but is logical in light of the EU's interests and expectations towards the Georgian market. During those years, FDI from the EU in absolute numbers grew from \$190 million to \$293 million, reaching a peak of \$727 million in 2014 and also the significant amount of \$559 million in 2017,<sup>13</sup> largely in maintaining and creating workplaces, bringing innovation and technologies, providing new export markets and more for Georgia.<sup>14</sup>

Summing up FDI of more than \$4.5 billion from 2010 to 2020, the EU became the number one investor in Georgia, with a 31.2% share. Dutch, Luxembourgian and Czech investors (quite often Georgian investors hiding behind representatives of those countries) invested 72% of all the EU investments in Georgia, predominantly in the areas of banking, energy, and trade.<sup>15</sup> During this period the UK alone invested over 1.8 billion in Georgia, mostly in the banking sector (both major Georgian banks are listed on the London Stock Exchange<sup>16</sup>).

It is interesting to underline that almost the same amount of FDI as from the EU, during the same period of time, was made by Georgia's neighbouring countries of Azerbaijan (approx. \$2.5 billion), Turkey (approx. \$1.25 billion), Russia (\$528

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<sup>13</sup> National Statistics Office of Georgia, *FDI...*

<sup>14</sup> V. Charaia, A. Chochia, M. Lashkhi, "The Impact of FDI on Economic Development: The Case of Georgia", *TalTech Journal of European Studies*, vol. 10, no. 2 (2020), pp. 96–116.

<sup>15</sup> V. Charaia, M. Lashkhi, "An Analysis of the Motives Underlying Foreign Direct Investments (The Case of Georgia)", *Central Asia & the Caucasus*, vol. 19, no. 4 (2018).

<sup>16</sup> R. Fischer, *Top Georgian Companies Listed on the London Stock Exchange*, July 23, 2020. At: <https://www.reinischfischer.com/top-georgian-companies-listed-london-stock-exchange>, last accessed November 20, 2021.



million) and Armenia (\$105 million), with total investments of \$4.372 billion, or a 30.1 percent share.

**Remittances.** Remittances for the decade from 2010 to 2020 surpass the amount of FDI from EU member states by almost 1/5th, making up \$5.423 and \$4.522 billion, respectively. Statistics reveal that the value of remittances from 2010 to 2020 has increased 2.8 times, from \$275 million to \$763 million,<sup>17</sup> pointing towards several assumptions:

1. The number of Georgians in EU 28 has increased, including diversification among those countries;
2. The average income of those migrants has increased and was more or less stable even during the first year of the pandemic chaos, stabilizing considerably later on;
3. Various programs offering official employment, along with the visa-free regime, has boosted both employment and the value of remittances from EU to Georgia.

Improvement has happened in the prism of EU's share in total remittances, starting at 26% in 2010 and finishing with 40.5% in 2020. It should be mentioned that the dominant majority of those remittances are below \$1000, typically at around \$500, which means that those funds are not for business operations, but are person-to-person transactions, normally used by receivers to cover their everyday needs, including costs of food, medicine, utilities, bank services, etc., significantly easing their financial challenges with the help of EU-generated income.

**Grants.** Being one of the top donors to Georgia, since 1992 the EU has spent more than €2 billion in Georgia in the form of grant projects, covering all possible areas and sectors of the country's life, including democratic development, agriculture, and strengthening of governmental institutions. Along with political support, EU granted Georgia €500 million after Russia's military aggression in Georgia,<sup>18</sup> which played a significant role in the stability of the country during the most unstable period. Being one of the front runners under the EaP provided Georgia with a more-for-more deal, which meant more financial support for deeper cooperation and reforms. Under this particular initiative the country has received an additional €121 million since 2014.

The EU, aiming at improving democratic, business, and social aspects in a tangible and visible manner, provides around €100–120 million to Georgia annually, in

<sup>17</sup> National Bank of Georgia, *Money Transfer Map*. At: [https://analytics.nbg.gov.ge/views/MoneyTransfers/MoneyTransfersMap?iframeSizedToWindow=true&embed=y&showAppBanner=false&display\\_count=no&showVizHome=no](https://analytics.nbg.gov.ge/views/MoneyTransfers/MoneyTransfersMap?iframeSizedToWindow=true&embed=y&showAppBanner=false&display_count=no&showVizHome=no), last accessed November 20, 2021.

<sup>18</sup> D. Brunnstrom, "Donors Pledge \$4.5 Billion for Georgia Recovery", *Routers*, October 22, 2008. At: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-georgia-donors-idUSTRE49L2IB20081022>, last accessed November 20, 2021.

a form of grant assistance in line with the Association Agreement.<sup>19</sup> In general, grants are provided under the Single Support Framework, which is usually designed for 3–4-year period and is based on a bilateral agreement between the EU and Georgia. According to the MFA, the 2014–2016 program budget was set up for €350 million, while the 2017–2020 program budget varied from €370 to €450 million, depending on different circumstances.

Those grants are usually spread between budgetary needs (usually around 60 percent) and specific supportive programs (usually around 40 percent) such as TWINNING, SIGMA, Horizon 2020, ENPARD, and support to the NGO sector. Georgia is also a part of various regional and thematic aid programs, which usually cover relatively small-budget projects but still play an important role in different aspects. However, despite everything, from time to time these grants become the subject of speculation in the local political arena, since those transfers significantly depend on the political stability in Georgia, the reforms it has undertaken, and the sustainability achieved.

**Free Trade Agreement.** On top of financial support mentioned above, cooperation between the EU and Georgia in light of the free trade agreement has made Georgia one of the most interesting countries in the international arena for attracting foreign direct investments, at least for the post-covid period. However, Georgia's Western orientation and close cooperation with the EU and the US have caused some challenges, for instance in terms of cooperation with China,<sup>20</sup> with its veiled threats of political and economic pressure.

It is not likely not a coincidence that Beijing approached Tbilisi with an FTA proposal shortly after Georgia reached an Association Agreement (AA) with the EU, joining the DCFTA. From the perspective of international competition, there are only four countries (Israel, Iceland, Switzerland and now Georgia) which have a free trade regime simultaneously with the EU and China,<sup>21</sup> while none of the other three are direct competitors to Georgia.<sup>22</sup> This fact could turn Georgia into a hub for at

<sup>19</sup> European Commission, *European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations. Georgia*. At: [https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/european-neighbourhood-policy/countries-region/georgia\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/european-neighbourhood-policy/countries-region/georgia_en), last accessed November 20, 2021.

<sup>20</sup> D. Shatakishvili, *Who Benefits from the Challenges of the Chinese Economy and the Role of Georgia?*, *China-USA Business Review*, vol. 20, no. 3 (2021), pp. 126–137. At: [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=3880940](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3880940), last accessed November 20, 2021.

<sup>21</sup> V. Charaia, M. Lashkhi, *Strategic Cooperation Between China and the South Caucasus Countries*. In: M.D. Sahakyan, H. Gärtner (eds.), *China and Eurasia*, London: Routledge 2021, pp. 145–162.

<sup>22</sup> V. Charaia, M. Lashkhi, *China and Georgia: The Economic Ties that Could One Day Bind. In: A Sea Change? China's Role in the Black Sea*, Washington, DC: Middle East Institute 2020, pp. 28–42. At: <https://mei.edu/sites/default/files/2020-11/A%20Sea%20Change%3F-China%27s%20Role%20in%20the%20Black%20Sea.pdf>, last accessed November 20, 2021.

least China-EU trade and investments, since hidden trade and investment wars are challenging their direct cooperation opportunities. However, the number one threat to such a prospect, as well as the number one guarantor of its realization, turns out to be the West.

**Transport.** As in the other directions, Georgia's cooperation both bilaterally and under the EaP is fruitful in the transport sector. The top priority for Georgia here is legislative approximation with the EU and integration into the European transport system.

Under the AA, Georgia is obligated to implement 12 directives/regulations in the transport sector, eight in the railway sector, and 22 in marine transport. Fortunately, in the aviation industry the main document on a "common aviation area agreement" was signed back in 2010 and entered into force in August 2020.

Under its Technical Assistance program, the EU is significantly supporting Georgia's upgrade to EU levels in the marine, auto, railway and aviation spheres. The most important projects for recent years are:

- Twinning project on "Georgia Aviation Legislation Approximation with EU Standards" during 2015–2017;
- Formation of high-level dialogue on transport issues, with a first session held in January 2019, and a second scheduled for 2020 postponed due to the coronavirus pandemic;
- EU expert's online mission in Georgia for Maritime Single Window principle implementation under the EU's Technical Assistance and Information Exchange program in July 2020;
- An ongoing Railway Twinning project, which started on March 2021 and aims at Polish experience-sharing with Georgia;

Under the EaP initiative:

- The Trans European Transport Network (TEN-T) has been expanded over the Eastern Partnership area, providing additional opportunities for Georgia since January 2019;
- A European Transport Networks investment plan has been developed, which implies support in the creation of new – and the upgrading of existing – roads, railway, seaports, airports, logistical centres and border crossing checkpoints by 2030 in all EaP countries, including Georgia;
- The planned foundation of an EaP Road Safety Observatory, to improve the safety on the roads through best-experience sharing, importantly with the office secretariat in Georgia.

EU framework programs. On top of the EaP programs, Georgia benefits from the EU's 18 different Framework Programs, such as: Asylum and Migration Fund (AMIF); Civil Protection Mechanism; COPERNICUS; COSME; Customs 2020; Creative Europe; Erasmus +; EU Aid Volunteers; European Maritime and Fisheries Fund; Fiscalis 2020; Galileo and EGNOS Programmes; Health III; Hercule III; Horizon 2020 including COST; Internal Security Fund; LIFE Programme; Pericles 2020; and EU Aid Volunteers. Each of these covers different areas oriented towards Georgia's development. Currently Georgia is part of three framework programs:

- ERASMUS +

Georgia takes eighth position among the 141 countries involved in the Erasmus + program, meaning that more over one thousand students and university staff have visited EU universities, and around the same number of EU representatives have visited Georgia for educational purposes. Based on those results, the EU offered a Special Funding Window to Georgia, which means more grants and more Georgian students and staff visiting EU universities in upcoming years.

- Horizon 2020

Under its associated member status, Georgia was part of 21 different projects financed under the EU's most significant scientific program. In total, 26 different Georgian organizations received more then €2.22 million.

- Creative Europe

Georgia was the first country from the Eastern Partnership to sign an agreement on Creative Europe membership. Since becoming an official member, 22 different projects have been financed with Georgian participation, and the number of projects is rising.

**Business Support through SME empowerment.** Separate attention in EU–Georgian relations should be devoted to support programs for small and medium enterprises (SMEs), which form the backbone of the Georgian economy, representing: a) 99.8 percent of all active companies in the country, b) 41 percent of total turnover, c) 58 percent of employment, d) 59 percent of value added, and e) 58 percent of total output.<sup>23</sup> The EU provides funding, training, and export support through its EU4Business initiative. Starting from 2009, more than 63,000 SMEs, microenterprises and farmers received various grants and loans. On top of that, innovative SMEs and small mid-cap companies received an extra €130 million. In 2019 alone, more than 36 thousand SMEs were supported through the EU4Business Initiative in Georgia,

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<sup>23</sup> V. Charaia, A. Chochia, M. Lashkhi, "Promoting Fintech Financing for SME in S. Caucasian and Baltic States During the Covid-19 Global Pandemic", *Journal of Business Management and Economics Engineering*, vol. 19, no. 2 (Forthcoming); V. Charaia, M. Lashkhi, SME Sector Development through Fintech in Georgia, *Globalization and Business*. 12, (2021), pp. 179–185.

generating €414.8 million in income and 31,443 new jobs, growing their turnover by 14.4 percent, and increasing their exports by 3 percent.<sup>24</sup> At the same time they have supported Georgia's national currency stability<sup>25</sup> through macroeconomic activity.

For the import-dependent Georgian economy, it is important to promote its own agricultural production, which has all the necessary bases, but a lack of capital and interest. Through the European Neighbourhood Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development program, the EU is supporting modernization of Georgian agriculture by supporting a cooperative model of business, and providing 1,600 co-operatives with financial and technical support and establishing 59 information and consultation centres throughout the country, which have trained over 25 thousand farmers so far. It should also be mentioned that agricultural support does not mean only import substitution for Georgia, but it importantly guarantees a reduction in rural poverty, and it prevents migration.

Coronomics. Georgia-EU cooperation has been tested once again during the coronomic crisis, which started at the beginning of 2019. As a reliable partner, Georgia has of course done much in the joint fight against Covid-19, although in this paper we analyse EU tolerance to Georgia, which besides significant moral support has also provided €282 million in grants and a €150-million preferential loan, targeted at meeting coronomic challenges. EU grants consisted of 1) €183 million in budgetary and grant aids for mitigation of socio-economic challenges; 2) €70 for support to SMEs; 3) €25 million for the healthcare system; and 4) €4 million for NGOs and social entrepreneurship support. On top of that, a €150 million preferential loan was provided for macro-economic stability in the post-crisis period.<sup>26</sup>

Being the most significant challenge not only for Georgia, but the whole world, the coronomic crisis has resulted in increased unemployment, decreased investments and tourism, increased budget deficits and public debt, increased unforeseen costs for healthcare, and more.<sup>27</sup> All of this has caused significant stress to the Georgian

<sup>24</sup> European Union Eastern Partnership, *Facts and Figures About EU–Georgia Relations*, 2021. At: [https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/system/files/2021-03/eap\\_factsheet\\_georgia.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/system/files/2021-03/eap_factsheet_georgia.pdf), last accessed November 20, 2021.

<sup>25</sup> O. Anguridze, V. Charaia, I. Doghonadze, *Security Problems and Modern Challenges of the Georgian National Currency*, Tbilisi: State University 2015. At: <http://eprints.tsu.ge/1201/1/Security%20Problems%20and%20Modern%20Challenges%20of%20the%20Georgian%20National%20Currency.pdf>, last accessed November 20, 2021.

<sup>26</sup> Embassy of Georgia in France, June 9, 2020. At: <https://www.facebook.com/ambassadegeorgieenfrance/photos/3027861087260265>, last accessed November 20, 2021.

<sup>27</sup> V. Papava, V. Charaia, *The Coronomic Crisis and Some Challenges for the Georgian Economy*, GF-SIS, Expert Opinion, 136, 2020. At: <https://www.gfsis.org/files/library/opinion-papers/136-expert-opinion-eng.pdf>, last accessed November 20, 2021.

economy, and if not for the moral, political, medical and financial support of strategic partners, it could result in significant problems for Georgia. Fortunately, however, the Georgian economy has proved to be one of the fastest recovering economies in both the region and the world.

## Summary and recommendations

The financial and political incentives of the EU have spurred Georgia to reform and upgrade over recent decades, bringing both challenges (mostly related toward EU standards adoption, painful sometimes) and enormous benefits to the country and its citizens.

It is vitally important for Georgia to have a stable and reliable partner in the EU, not only for its sustainable economic development and diversification of economic activities, but most importantly to balance the various kinds of threats stemming from the Global or regional perspectives, such as Covid-19 or the Russian factor in particular. Or even to facilitate the local challenges, derived from the social, economic, political or other types of challenges.

COVID-19 pandemic has proven to be a good example of a global threat, and a reason why Georgia must maintain its bonds with its trustworthy Western partners. If not Western partners and EU in particular, Georgia could get into a collapse, would it be because of scarcity of adequate medical equipment, panic caused by the vaccines shortage/unavailability or inability to meet budgetary obligations for the reason of being lack in financial resources.

Different bilateral and multilateral projects between EU and Georgia, including the EaP, have had a dramatic role in the development of Georgia in many aspects, but most importantly in terms of strengthening democratic institutions, supporting sustainable economic development, upgrading social life standards, and securing overall stability. This should be continued further, requesting more bold actions from the Georgian side to reach the ultimate goal of EU membership or alternatively reaching EU levels even without membership, while guaranteeing top standards for its citizens and international partners.

At the same time, it should be considered that neither the EU nor its promising projects can guarantee any success without real political and public will and aspirations on the Georgian side, which also has to be fed tangible fruit from time to time. Such as it was a visa free regime and free trade agreement. to prevent stagnation and the rise in Euroscepticism stemming from the hybrid war and the fact that step-by-step



adaptation to EU standards usually takes a significant amount of time and sacrifice, although it will be beneficial in the end.

As a recommendation for the future cooperation, EU-Georgia have a great chance of win-win cooperation through FTA. This could convert Georgia to a real economic, transit, trade and investments hub in the region. While EU and the west at large could benefit from the indirect access to the markets problematic nowadays, because of open or hidden trade and investments wars, such as Chinese market. On the top of those interests, overall strengthening of Georgia could support the diversification plan of the EU to decrease the dependence on particular countries, which can use their dominance/superiority for the political reasons.

Georgia willing to apply for the EU membership in 2024, should remember that it is not an easy process, but more importantly the membership itself should not be the goal, but reaching the same (economic, life, educational, healthcare, scientific and etc.) standards which EU average citizen has. While those two goals are not contradictory, Georgian government has to remember that the opportunities provided by the EU, such as it was EaP, FTA, visa free regime, DCFTA or others, should be squeezed out first. On the other hand, EU also has tested Georgia as a reliable partner for many decades already, which makes partnership mutually beneficial.

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NINO LAPIASHVILI

*Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University*

# Application of the EU-Georgia Association Agreement by the Georgian Judiciary

## A Role Unplayed by the Inert and Under-Reformed Courts

**ABSTRACT:** This paper analyses the association implementation reports for the purposes of tracking Brussels' perception of judicial reform in Georgia. It argues that since the signing of the Association Agreement (AA), as the initial excitement dissipated the European Union gradually became more critical and open-eyed to the long-standing problem of the under-reformed judiciary, which is among the main obstacles to consolidating democratic institutions in the country.

In addition, the case law of the common courts (Supreme Court of Georgia and Appellate Court of Georgia) as well as of the Constitutional Court of Georgia is being reviewed in order to demonstrate that most of the attempts of either litigants, or the authors of *amicus curie* or the lower courts aimed at facilitation of the effective implementation of Association Agreement via the 'pro-European' judicial activism had been neglected and ignored by the Georgian judiciary ranking superior in the hierarchy. In conclusion, the article does not maintain that there is a direct link between the apparently blind eye turned by Brussels towards the Georgian Judiciary and the total inertness of the judicial branch, discussed in the second chapter, in promoting the implementation of the AA via its application during the decision-making process. However, it

provides a context for the stakeholders that is necessary enough to remain focused on reasons that might cause dramatic democratic backsliding in the future.

**KEYWORDS:** EU-Georgia Association Implementation Reports, Reform of Judiciary, Application of AA by the courts, Case Law, Judicial Activism, Judicial Inertia

## Introduction

Georgia has been praised for quite a long time by the European Union and other Western partners for being a ‘torch-bearer’ in successfully promoting a democratization agenda among the members of the Eastern Partnership initiative. The turning point for Georgia, since the break-up of the Soviet Union, was the ‘color revolution’ of 2003, when the first substantial input had been made in building a solid liberal democratic institutions across the country. Another ‘game-changing’ development took place in 2012, when the region witnessed the first ever power change through peaceful, free and fair democratic elections. Conclusion of the Association Agreement (AA) with the European Union in 2014 as well as extension of the Visa-Free regime by the EU in 2017 was comprehended by the Georgian society at large as a gesture of appraisal by the Western partner for the progress made on its path towards democratization.

Looking through the joint progress reports of the EU Commission and the High Representative on the implementation of the AA, the overall satisfaction of Brussels with the process becomes evident. This held true up to recently, when the seemingly ‘smooth path’ of democratization took a turn and Georgia ended up in an unprecedented political crisis after the 2020 elections, with a single political party in the Parliament, which was followed up with a brokered ‘truce’ by Charles Michel, the President of the European Council, whose efforts went in vain, as the content had been hollowed out by the key political actors who did not show any enthusiasm or interest for reforms of, *inter alia*, the Judicial System, which turned into an Achilles’ heel for the country.

In a close review of the content of the implementation reports of Brussels and an analysis of failed ‘judicial activism’ unwilling to apply and to ensure a compliance with the obligations arising out of the AA, the paper claims that the EU apparently turned a blind eye towards the long-standing problem of underperformance in the Georgian judicial branch, which could have played a very important role in the ‘Euro-friendly interpretation’ of national legislation, but instead might become a main cause of a democratic backsliding of the country in the near future.

## The Progress of the Reform of the judiciary as seen under the Association Implementation Reports on Georgia

Georgia signed the AA with the EU on 27 June 2014, and it fully entered into force on 1 July 2016. It had been provisionally applied since September 2014. In its first joint report on implementation, issued on 25 November 2016, the European Commission together with the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy had been appraising Georgia for the consolidation of the democratic institutions, democracy and rule of law.<sup>1</sup> There was a clear assumption made with regard to the ‘independence of judiciary,’ which was suggested to have been strengthened through “implementation and consolidation of existing legislation.”<sup>2</sup> The report emphasized the success of the reforms that prompted the ‘independence, professionalism, accountability and effectiveness’ of the judiciary, while, as stated, the so-called ‘third package’ legislative amendments tackled and advanced ‘the protracted lack of transparency in judicial management, including the functioning of and accountability of the High Council of Justice and random allocation of cases.’<sup>3</sup> Among the shortcomings, the report enumerated unclear rationales behind the decision-making processes on the following: 1) holding hearings either publicly or closed, 2) not fully ensured transparency in allocation of cases and the selection of judicial candidates and courts administrators, 3) management of disciplinary procedures, 4) understaffed judiciary, and 5) temporary tenure for judges. Overall, the EU report expresses its satisfaction that “all the fundamental institutions of Georgian democracy are in place,”<sup>4</sup> which is in line with its enthusiastic approach regarding the democratic development of the country.

In its second report on AA implementation, as issued on 10 November 2017, the Commission and the High Representative dropped the term ‘consolidated’ for the purposes of characterizing the Georgian democracy and instead turned to using it to describe its outstanding position in the region, saying that it stands as ‘a key and strategic partner’ which is the result of the ‘its sustained reform efforts and ambition to develop further its relations with the EU.’<sup>5</sup> The review of the state of play reveals

<sup>1</sup> European Commission, *Association Implementation Report on Georgia*, European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Joint Staff Working Document, SWD (2016) 423 final, November 25, 2016, pp. 2–3. At: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-15362-2016-INIT/en/pdf>, last accessed November 19, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>5</sup> European Commission, *Association Implementation Report on Georgia*, European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Joint Staff Working

that there is an overall satisfaction of Brussels with the timely implementation of the AA, including its Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement commitments.<sup>6</sup> The authors of the joint report's reference to 'meeting the deadlines' should usually be understood in terms of progressing successfully with the legal approximation process prescribed under the AA. However, when it comes to the Judiciary, the first signs of concern already appear: in particular there is a brief reference in the text to a controversy surrounding 'potential political interference' related to 'legal battles over the ownership of TV channels.'<sup>7</sup> One can also notice a somewhat more lengthy review of the shortcomings of the third wave of judiciary reform, along with, of course, the oversight of the positive developments.<sup>8</sup> In particular, the EU eventually comes to underline that even if the level of judicial independence is above average, it is actually decreasing,<sup>9</sup> it also makes the highlights regarding the actual lack of the transparency and accountability in the procedures set out by the High Council of Justice for the appointment of judges and presidents of courts. Apart from this, it points to the issue of 'disciplinary procedures,' which also begins to seem somehow problematic for Brussels.<sup>10</sup> It is noteworthy to underline that at the time Georgia was celebrating visa-free travel to the Schengen area, granted from 28 March 2017. Even if there is no direct link between the visa-free regime and the consolidation of democratic reforms, in the official speeches of the decision makers of Brussels and the EU Member States capitals one could still easily link this positive development to the concept of the EU-conditionality. This is because in the speeches of the high officials of the EU, the emphasis placed on the successful efforts at democratization and the adherence to the European system of values traditionally went along with statements regarding the EU's decision to grant Georgian citizens visa-free travel.

In the concluding remarks of the report, there are passages that imply that a share import of the EU *aquis* is not enough: The sincere attitudes, dedication and ambitions of those in power as well as the effective institutions with the ability to perform are equally important to making this legislation work. In particular, while the report

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Document, SWD (2017) 371 final, November 9, 2017, p. 1. At: [https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/1419205/1226\\_1512477382\\_171109-association-implementation-report-on-georgia.pdf](https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/1419205/1226_1512477382_171109-association-implementation-report-on-georgia.pdf), last accessed November 19, 2021.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>9</sup> This statement is based on the rankings of the World Economic Forum of 2016–2017. World Economic Forum, *Annual Report 2016–2017*, 2017. At: [https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_Annual\\_Report\\_2016\\_17.pdf](https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Annual_Report_2016_17.pdf), last accessed November 19, 2021.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.



praises Georgia for the continued efforts “to implement its commitments under the AA,” it also makes particular emphasis on the standing difference between adoption of the legislation on the one hand and on its proper implementation on the other: “As new legislation is adopted and with institutions in place, renewed political will and strengthened administrative capacity will be needed to continue ensuring successful implementation,” therefore, it says: “An effective state and justice apparatus is crucial not only to fulfill Georgia’s reform aspirations, but also to further gain the confidence of citizens and investors.”<sup>11</sup>

Quite a similar approach related to the state of art of the judicial branch in Georgia can be noticed in the third implementation report of 30 January 2019, which emphasizes that the level of judicial independence was ‘on a downward trend’ and that the appointments of justices to lifetime tenure had become the subject of vast public criticism,<sup>12</sup> and refers as well to potential political interference in the judiciary.<sup>13</sup> Summarizing that important challenges remained, it called for continued efforts to reform the judiciary “with special attention to transparency and accountability in the process of appointing justices.”<sup>14</sup> Still, the EU seemed to be satisfied with the level of “consolidation of democracy and quality of governance,” which was claimed to be progressing as Georgia continued “the process of approximating its legislation and institutional structures closer to EU standards and requirements.”<sup>15</sup>

In the next two reports, issued on 6 February 2020 and 5 February 2021, the wording already signaled worrisome alarm with regard to the Georgian judicial branch. The documents underlined not only the standing problem of accountability and independence of the judiciary as well as the issue of the legal certainty related to

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16. The resolution of the European Parliament of 14 November 2018 on the implementation of the EU AA with Georgia (2017/2282(INI)) underlines the need for an independent judiciary to fight corruption effectively (para. 22), calls for judicial procedures that are in line with the European standards while adjudicating some particular cases of Turkish residents (para. 25), and states that in the context of ongoing judicial reform there are “signs of greater impartiality and transparency of judiciary.” It assumes that the judiciary is at least partially free even if there is a ground of concern that, as per the Venice Commission, the legislative amendments do not ensure the political neutrality of the Prosecuting Attorney’s Council (para. 25).

<sup>12</sup> European Commission, *Association Implementation Report on Georgia*, European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Joint Staff Working Document, SWD (2019) 16 final, January 30, 2019, p. 6. At: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-5888-2019-INIT/en/pdf>, last accessed November 19, 2021.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

some high-profile cases, including major businesses,<sup>16</sup> but also hinted to the serious problems of the fourth wave of reform by making a clear statement that the selection criteria for the Supreme Court Justices reflected only partially the recommendation of the Venice Commission. It was the first time the term ‘failed’ is used in relation to the non-transparent process of the appointments of the 14 candidates for lifetime tenure to the Supreme Court.<sup>17</sup> The conclusion states that adherence to the Venice Commission recommendations will be crucial in the future and that “Georgia’s commitment to uphold the highest standards of ethics and integrity in its judiciary remains critical.”<sup>18</sup>

Under the 2021 report, we can see that it is already becoming too obvious for Brussels that the problem of the judiciary was deeper than previously perceived. It says that by adopting the new legislative amendments on 30 September 2020 and by its immediate application, Georgia neither waited for the requested opinion of the Venice Commission, nor addressed the long-standing shortcomings surrounding the independence and accountability of the judiciary. Brussels seems to be concerned with the fact that the urgent opinion by Venice Commission adopted on 8th of October of 2020 – which suggested increased public scrutiny and for that purposes was recommending making the vote open and providing written justification by the members of the High Council of Justice for each vote during the new appointments in the Supreme Court – had been neglected and ignored. In fact, the High Council of Justice started interviewing candidates for the vacancies in the Supreme Court using the regulations of the amendments of 30 September.<sup>19</sup>

These sad developments in the system of the Georgian judiciary prompted the EU to make judicial reform the top priority on the agenda for the negotiations between the ruling party and the opposition. This was undertaken within the frames of the recent unprecedented mediation brokered by the European Council President Charles Michel during March–April 2021. The mediation was aimed at ending the political crises caused by rejection of the official results of October 2020 parliamentary elections results and boycotting the legislative body, a process which eventually wrapped

<sup>16</sup> European Commission, *Association Implementation Report on Georgia*, European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Joint Staff Working Document, SWD (2020) 30 final, February 6, 2020, p. 2. At: [https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/1\\_en\\_document\\_travail\\_service\\_conjoint\\_part1\\_v4.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/1_en_document_travail_service_conjoint_part1_v4.pdf), last accessed November 19, 2021.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>19</sup> European Commission, *Association Implementation Report on Georgia*, European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Joint Staff Working Document, SWD (2021) 18 final, February 5, 2020, pp. 1, 7, 18–19. At: [https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2021\\_association\\_implementation\\_report\\_in\\_georgia.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2021_association_implementation_report_in_georgia.pdf), last accessed November 19, 2021.

up as a single-party parliament for the first time ever in the history of independent Georgia. On 19 April 2021 the document proposed by President Michel was signed by the ruling party and by representatives of the majority of the Georgian opposition political parties, with the exception of the largest, the UNM. Among the undertaken obligations are proposals on the rules on snap elections, a commitment to resolving cases of politicized justice, guidelines for ambitious electoral reform, and a promise of power-sharing with the opposition in parliament, as well as lengthy passages with very concrete guidelines for reforming the Georgian judiciary. Among the agreed terms there was a the requirement to “refrain from making appointments to the Supreme Courts under existing rules”<sup>20</sup> as well as a point regarding a constitutional amendment aimed at stipulating the election of the Prosecutor General with a vote of a qualified majority of the Members of Parliament for the purposes of ensuring ‘broadest, cross-party political support.’<sup>21</sup> The appointments of justices very soon continued under the old rules, and it became obvious that the ruling party was not intending to fulfill any of the undertaken obligations, as it was agreed upon as a result of long mediation. On 28 June 2021 the ruling party declared the Charles Michel document null and void by abandoning it,<sup>22</sup> while in September the suggestion on changing the rules of election of the General Prosecutor was rejected. It became a breaking point for all stakeholders to understand that judicial reform had failed. This outcome triggered the EU to halt the transfer of the scheduled Macro Financial Assistance to Georgia, the allocation of which was subject to conditionality: In particular, Georgia was supposed to demonstrate a progress in advancing the rule of law including reforming judiciary.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Bullet point 1.c of section 3 “Rule of Law/Judicial Reform.”

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, Bullet point 4 of section 3 “Rule of Law/Judicial Reform.”

<sup>22</sup> *Note:* The largest opposition political party UNM signed the document only after the ruling party left it.

<sup>23</sup> See the statement by Giorgi Kakauridze, the First Deputy Minister of Finances of Georgia made on the 13th of October of 2021, who confirmed (rather confessed) that MFA from the EU was conditional to successful Judiciary Reform. Before, on the 31st of August 2021 the Prime Minister of Georgia stated that it was not supposed to be understood as a ‘sanctions language’ from the EU, but rather as an autonomous decision of the Government of Georgia not to accept the offered loan, which was substantiated with the high economic growth as well as the willingness of Georgia to reduce the foreign debts. Available at: <https://tabula.ge/ge/news/674494-kakauridze-eu-s-dakhmarebaze-iqo-riski-rom-tankha>, last accessed October 13, 2021, კაკაურიძე EU-ს დახმარებაზე: იყო რისკი, რომ თანხა ისედაც არ ჩამოირიცხებოდა.

## The sluggish impact of the Association Agreement on Judicial Activism in Georgia: Judicial inertia instead of a proactive court

The Association Agreement obligates Georgia to import a large share of EU law, which is a very challenging undertaking. This is foremost because of the approximation with the EU *aquis* goes beyond the formal adaptation of national legislation via amendments or the adoption of new packages of law, but definitely also envisages a compliance as well as its proper implementation and enforcement. This means that the reinforced institutional framework and the effective coordination of all branches of government are crucial. Still, the role of judiciary in the process of the correct application of the shared legal framework and the need of uniformity in its interpretation<sup>24</sup> is indeed outstanding. Talking about international treaty law, Mendez mentions that

it is primarily the executive and legislative branches that are best placed to ensure that the treaty commitments to which the State voluntarily commits are respected domestically... Courts, however, have an increasingly important role to play in giving effect to this form of 'universal legislation.' First and foremost because a substantial portion of this international law-making is likely to find itself transposed into domestic legal norms on which national courts are then called upon to adjudicate. But even where this is not so, courts in most legal systems will find themselves faced with litigants invoking treaty law in support of their claims.<sup>25</sup>

The status of international treaties in the national legal system of Georgia is defined under the 1995 Constitution, the Organic Law of Georgia on Normative Acts adopted on 29 October 1999, and the Law on International Treaties of Georgia adopted on 16 October 1997. The recent constitutional amendments of 13 October 2017 and 23 March 2018 did not change the old concept on the status of the international treaties in the domestic legal hierarchy of the country: Article 4(5) of the Constitution stipulates that "the legislation of Georgia shall comply with the universally recognized principles and norms of international law. An international treaty of Georgia shall take precedence over domestic normative acts unless it comes into conflict with the Constitution or the Constitutional Agreement of Georgia." Therefore, an international treaty remains to be accepted as an inalienable composite part of the national legal

<sup>24</sup> A. Lazowski, "Enhanced Multilateralism and Enhanced Bilateralism: Integration without Membership in the European Union", *Common Market Law Review*, vol. 45, no. 5 (2008), pp. 1433–1458.

<sup>25</sup> M. Mendez, *European Journal of International Law*, Oxford: University Press 2010, p. xvi. See also: კ. კორკელია, ადამიანის უფლებათა ევროპული კონვენციის გამოყენება საქართველოში, ევროპის საბჭოს საინფორმაციო ბიურო საქართველოში 2004, (K. Korkelia, *Application of the European Convention on Human Rights in Georgia*, Information Bureau of the CoE in Georgia 2004), pp. 93–94.

system. Besides, as per sections 1 and 5 of Article 7 of the Organic Law of Georgia on Normative Acts, an international treaty of Georgia is a national normative act and has a superior legal force over all other normative acts aside from the Constitution and the Constitutional Agreement.

Georgia has not adopted any special law on application of the EU-Georgia Association Agreement that could clarify the criteria and standards of its direct effect, the forms of its implementation, the tools of its application or the methods of its 'Euro-friendly interpretation' in the national courts. Besides, the status of the mandatory decisions of the treaty body – the Association Council – in the hierarchy of national normative acts remains unclear.

Irrespective of the fact that the special law on application of the AA was not adopted, the national courts of Georgia can ground their decisions on the international treaties as per Article 6(3) of the Law on the International Treaties of Georgia, which envisages the provision enabling the direct use of international treaty on conditions that the following three-tier test is met: 1) the treaty is to be officially published, 2) the provisions of the treaty should establish the rights and obligations of a concrete nature, and 3) It is not supposed to be the subject of clarification via an additional domestic normative act.

Before conclusion of the AA, the Georgian courts showed no enthusiasm to apply the provisions of its predecessor, the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement,<sup>26</sup> as the legal grounds for adjudication and making decisions. There is a record of the sporadic, inaccurate, inconsistent and unsystematic reference to the EU *aqius* by the judiciary itself, the Constitutional Court of Georgia and the common courts, especially the Supreme Court of Georgia, and by the parties in case.<sup>27</sup> Still, decisions had never been based on the EU Law because the only rationale to refer to it was to strengthen legal arguments grounded on the national law, while occasionally it was the result of mistaken assumption on its obligatory nature.<sup>28</sup>

Unfortunately, there has been no dramatic change in judicial activism since the signature of the AA in 2014, even though it triggered a very intensive legislative

<sup>26</sup> The Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) between the European Communities and their Member States, on the one part, and Georgia, on the other part was signed on the 22nd of April of 1996. It entered into force on the 1st of July of 1999.

<sup>27</sup> G. Gabrichidze, "Legislative Approximation and Application of EU law in Georgia". In: P. Van Elsuwege, R. Petrov (eds.), *Legislative Approximation and Application of EU Law in the Eastern Neighbourhood of the European Union. Towards a Common Regulatory Space?*, London–New York: Routledge 2014, pp. 189–190.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

approximation process, as a result of which a substantial amount of EU law was successfully imported.

To start from the experience of the common courts, there are only two cases, both adjudicated in 2019.<sup>29</sup> These are cases brought on the cassation at the Chamber of the Civil Law of the Supreme Court of Georgia, where references to the obligations stemming from the AA made by the lower court can be observed.

The first, *case no 5237–2019* of 17 May 2019, is about a request made to the court by a bank operating in Georgia, the applicant in this case, to rule an order about the repayment of the remainder of a mortgage by the respondent, a physical person, who did not pay the due interest after s/he was dismissed from their place of employment. However, the respondent was rejecting the claim because of a provision written in the contract regarding their unemployment insurance, which was claimed to be provided as a bonus by the bank at the time of conclusion of the contract.

The applicant claimed that the operationalization of the insurance provision in the contract was conditional because there was a reservation that made it a subject to signature of Annex ix, which had never been signed by the client. The Appellate Court of Georgia used a teleological method of interpretation in order to clarify whether the provision about the insurance in the case of unemployment was an ‘essential element’ of the contract – i.e. a subject of the normal and standard proposal by the bank in general circumstances. The appellate court investigated the object and purpose of the provision of the contract and decided that it was intended to be interpreted in the best interests of the client, who was acting in a good faith and could not make assumptions independently regarding the additional requirements to sign the annex to the contract unless the bank were to make clarifications.<sup>30</sup> This is the point after which the Appellate Court says that this interpretation is in line with the international instruments and that even if the EU *aquis* (Directives and Regulations) is not mandatory for Georgia, the importance of the AA and obligations undertaken within its framework leads

<sup>29</sup> Generally, it is very complicated to retrieve the decisions and other documents of the Common Courts of Georgia, including in the cases where the public interest is substantially high. The rational behind the rejection to grant access is the claimed objective of protecting the personal information. There is an ongoing discourse in Georgia whether this approach is in compliance with the provision of Article 62.3 of the Constitution of Georgia, which stipulates that the Decision of the Court should be public. Those who support more open access actively refer to the Decision of the Constitutional Court of Georgia made on June 7 of 2019 (N1/4/693,857), which ruled that those provisions of the Georgian Law on Protection of Personal Information as well as of the General Administrative Code that stand as a hindrance to provide an access to the court documents issued on the open hearings – are unconstitutional.

<sup>30</sup> See paras. 26–27.



the court to consider the reference to the EU Directives as well as the case law of the ECJ regarding consumer protection to be important.<sup>31</sup> Afterwards, it goes through the content of the specific EU Directive on consumer protection without indicating any particular provision of the AA; as well, it cites and reviews the paragraphs out of three cases adjudicated by the ECJ. It seems that the long passages on the EU law serve the sole purpose of supporting and fortifying the main argument of the court, which leads to the conclusion that the claim of the bank was to be rejected.<sup>32</sup> If one looks closely at how the court formulates its wording regarding the AA, it becomes clear that the court does not accept it as a part of national legislation but treats it as an example to be drawn from international practice.

The Supreme Court did not accept the case on merits due to a lack of legal grounds necessary for the review on cassation. However, it made clear that it was aligning itself with those arguments of the Appellate Court which were supporting the logic about the respondent's actual inability to assume the need to sign an additional annex without necessary clarifications, unmade by the bank. Hence, the Supreme Court supported upholding the decision without reservations.<sup>33</sup> However, in this case it did not make any reference to those arguments of the Appellate Court which discussed the importance of the AA, nor to the relevance of reviewing the EU *aquis* and the case law of the ECJ.

The same court, one month later, on 28 June 2019, while making a decision on accepting *case no. 586-2019* for the review on cassation, made a very clear statement that it did not agree with the justices of Appellate Court who elaborated their legal arguments based on the AA, EU *aquis* and ECJ case law. The applicant, an energy company, was requesting from the respondent, a physical person, to pay both – the bill for consumed electricity as well as the interest envisaged under a renewed contract. The respondent was refusing to accept interest payment obligation. Both the first instance court as well as the appellate court rejected the claim of the energy company and declared the renewed contract null and void. The court based its arguments on the provisions of article 54 of the Civil Code of Georgia and said that even if formally the renewed contract was not breaching any law, it was nonetheless inconsistent with morals and was violating the principle of social justice and was therefore in breach of the public order.<sup>34</sup> The rationale was that during the conclusion of the renewed

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 28.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 29–32. The Court refers to paragraphs 5.1, 6 and 49 of the EU Directive 93/13/EEC as well as cases of ECJ no C-137-08, C-40/08, C-240/98.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 66.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, paras. 20–22.



contract, the respondent, residing with their sick and poor elderly parents, was helpless while electricity at the residence was cut off. Hence, the court expressed its belief that a level playing field had not been provided, as the applicant had the excessive power to impose influence and to force the respondent to sign a new contract against their will.<sup>35</sup> The Appellate Court said that apart from this argument, it additionally considered it necessary to make a reference to the EU *aquis* on consumer protection as well as to review the ECJ case law.<sup>36</sup> It underlined the importance of the AA, evaluating it as an 'action plan' to approximate with the EU,<sup>37</sup> and said that the envisaged sector cooperation undertakes intensive approximation with EU standards and experience-sharing, and supports intensive reforms, including in the sphere of consumer protection.<sup>38</sup> Hence, it went into a detailed explanation of the purposes of the Directive 93/13/EEC, indicating that its key principles were subject to mandatory implementation under the AA.<sup>39</sup> What follows are long paragraphs with profound clarifications of the content of the directive, with a focus on the concept of fair contracts as well as a review of the relevant case law of the ECJ.<sup>40</sup>

The Supreme Court did not admit the case on merit, but it assured that it supported the decision of the Appellate Court in declaring the new contract null and void. However, under the separate paragraph 54, the Supreme Court made the unambiguous statement that it did not agree with the reasoning of the appellate court, which was based on the review of the EU *aquis* and the case law of the ECJ in paragraphs 27-29. However, it did not provide any rationale for that disagreement. It merely said that disagreement in that regard would have no influence over the final outcome. Therefore, a good attempt of the Appellate Court to act as a pioneer in promoting the direct enforceability of the AA and engaging in 'Euro-friendly interpretation' of national legislation via the judicial activism was rejected without explanation, which apparently was understood as an instruction from the higher court not to further pursue any similar practices.

As for the Constitutional Court of Georgia, it is to be admitted that since its establishment in 1996 it had been actively engaged in discussing the obligations arising from the international treaties during adjudication of cases. However, when it comes

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 23.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 24.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 25.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 26.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 27-31. The Appellate Court is referring to the following case law of ECJ-C-415/11, C-472-10, C-168/05, C-397-11, C-137-08, C-40/08, C-240/98, C-243/08.

to the AA, it seems that the court is reluctant to express its attitude with regard to its status in the domestic legal system or the methods of its application.

In particular, since the signing of the AA, there have been only several occasions when the agreement itself or the obligations undertaken within its frames were highlighted. The initiative to make reference to the AA were mostly made by the authors of *amicus curie*<sup>41</sup> or the witnesses of the litigants representing the respondents<sup>42</sup> in the majority of cases, and only once did an initiatory step come from the applicant's side.<sup>43</sup> In most of these cases the court kept silent and ignored the arguments which had been based on the provisions of AA. Even in the single case in which the court aligned itself with the position elaborated under the *amicus curie* by Vakhtang Lejava – which was extensively grounded on a review of the AA and the respective EU *aquis* – the court merely made a decision which was generally supportive of the author of the *amicus curie*, however, in its reasoning it did not make any reference to the EU Law-based arguments elaborated in the document.

There were only two occasions where the court showed some signs that AA could have been a relevant legal source for consideration during adjudication of a case. The first one is a concurring opinion of a justice who reviewed international practice quite intensively, including the annexes of the AA and the articles of the EU Directive, which he considered to be appropriate for the consideration during the decision-making process. This concurring opinion is also interesting for the fact that its author elaborated the arguments on the issue of compliance of the national legislation of Georgia *vis-a-vis* the provisions of the relevant EU Directive.

Another, and thus far the latest, case in which the AA was referred to by the court is a dissenting opinion by four justices of the Plenum of the Constitutional Court. The case was brought by the Public Defender of Georgia, who was requesting the Constitutional Court to declare unconstitutional those regulations which had not ensured a transparent and merit-based system of appointments of the justices in the Supreme Court of Georgia. The request was rejected on merit. In their dissenting

<sup>41</sup> Constitutional Court of Georgia, April 19, 2016, Case no. 2/2/565, Ilia Lejava and Levan Rostomashvili vs Parliament of Georgia; Constitutional Court of Georgia, April 18, 2019, Case no. 1/13/655, LTD “SKS” vs Parliament of Georgia; Constitutional claim of ‘New Politician Centre’ no. 1525, 13th of July of 2020 and the *amicus curie* submitted against this claim on 31st of August of 2020.

<sup>42</sup> Constitutional Court of Georgia, December 28, 2017, Supra Case no. 2/2/565; Case no. 2/9/745, Ltd “Georgian Manganese” vs Parliament of Georgia; Constitutional Court of Georgia, July 3, 2018, Case no. 1/2/671, LEPL “Evangelical-Baptist Church” and others vs Parliament of Georgia; Supra case no. 1/13/655.

<sup>43</sup> Constitutional Court of Georgia, February 22, 2018, Case no. 2/2/863, Gucha Kvaratskhelia and others vs Parliament of Georgia.

opinion, the four justices made a statement that the respective Plenum of the Constitutional Court should have had taken into consideration, *inter alia*, the latest AA implementation report of Brussels where, as they claimed, the lack of transparency during appointments of Supreme Court justices was clearly indicated.<sup>44</sup> Sadly, there are no other traces that could provide evidence of any willingness of the Constitutional Court to contribute to the pro-active implementation of the AA.

## Summary and recommendations

The first chapter summarized the state of the art of the judicial branch in Georgia as exposed in the association implementation reports of the European Commission and the High Representative, from the signing of the AA up to recently. It took more than five years for the European Union to realize that the problem of the judiciary in Georgia was a 'black hole' which denies a level playing field for all stakeholders and restricts an enabling environment for quite a weak democracy to consolidate. Approximation with the EU *aquis* undertaken as an obligation within the frames of the AA was spread out over the agreed timeline, sometimes even to eight years, a period during which the Georgian judiciary could never stand out as a guarantor of its 'Euro-friendly' definition, correct application and proactive implementation. It is hard to find a direct link between the apparently blind eye turned by Brussels to the Georgian Judiciary and the total inertness of the courts, as discussed in the second chapter, to promote a successful compliance with and the implementation of the Association Agreement. However, this provides a context, and perhaps a mental workout, for all the stakeholders to keep a close eye on the reasons that might cause dramatic democratic backsliding in the future.

Whether we shall be able to witness a continuous and an effective reform for the purposes of making the Georgian judiciary strong, independent and impartial – largely depends on the political will of the incumbent power. However, the influencers might be different when one thinks of the options for providing the solutions to judicial inertia in their application of AA during the adjudicatory process: a reasonable assumption can be made that Georgian courts do not apply AA and hence, neither support its implementation process nor rectify its violations by the other branches of the government just because of the inadequate education system. While the targeted education aimed at the development of the theoretical and practical skills should be a part of

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 119, footnote 17.

the reforms package of the government, the key recommendation for other influential actors would be to support intensively the training measures in the EU Law and AA for all Georgian lawyers including the members of the courts. The development of the programmes in EU Law, availability of EU law textbooks in Georgian language, discussion of the CJEU case law on the special workshops, seminars and conferences as well as provision of the guidelines on the methods of application of AA including via highlighting the best practices of other associated countries – could be the options to think about. Whether in the coming years Georgia turns the ‘Judiciary challenge’ into the window of opportunity is impossible to predict; however, this is for sure a crossroad where the choice of the path will have a profound historical significance.

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NAREK S. GALSTYAN   
*Yerevan State University*

## Within the EAEU and with the EU

### The Evolution of the Attitude of Armenian Ruling Elites Towards the Eastern Partnership

**ABSTRACT:** The article analyzes the evolution of the approaches of Armenian ruling elites towards the Eastern Partnership during 2009-2021. In particular, the fundamental principles of the positions of the Armenian ruling elites are identified, as well as the desired international statuses and national roles that the Armenian elites sought to fulfill within or through the Eastern Partnership. It also identifies the main external and internal factors that have changed the approaches of the Armenian authorities and transformed the designated international statuses and national roles. In conclusion, the author highlights the commonalities and differences in the positions of the administrations of Serzh Sargsyan and Nikol Pashinyan, as well as stable, transformed and new international statuses and national roles in relation to the Eastern Partnership. The article also provides a list of recommendations for decision-makers to improve the effectiveness of Armenia's European agenda and the EU's Armenian agenda.

**KEYWORDS:** Armenia, the Eastern Partnership, Value-Based Community, differentiated partnership, bridging, Eurasian integration, European integration

## Introduction

As a small state with a fragile economy and political system in a complex geopolitical region, the authorities of the Republic of Armenia (RA) have always stated the need for a multivector foreign policy to diversify foreign partners and develop balanced relations with them. Despite that generality, the ruling class of Armenia has differently perceived the implementation of such a policy, and that policy with its results differed from the official concept of the authorities in practice.

As an organic component of multi-vector policy, the Armenian authorities have always considered the European direction and, particularly, the relations with the European Union (EU) as a priority. Nevertheless, these relations have not developed in a straightforward manner, as they have been conditioned first of all by external/structural factors, and partly by internal factors.

The volume of Armenia's relations with the EU and deep sectoral involvement has increased since 2006, after the accession of the EU to the European Neighborhood Policy, and this has gained momentum since 2009, when Armenia was included in the Eastern Partnership program.

The analysis aims at revealing the evolution of the attitude of the ruling elites of the Republic of Armenia towards the EU, in particular the Eastern Partnership, in 2009–2021. To reach the goal, some issue-questions of analysis were defined:

Based on the analysis of official documents and statements:

1. to find out what kind of principles the approaches of the ruling elites of the Republic of Armenia to the EU, in particular, to the Eastern Partnership were built on in 2009–2021.

2. to highlight the similarities and differences between the approaches of the elites during the periods of Serzh Sargsyan's presidency (2009–2018) and Nikol Pashinyan's prime ministership (2018–2021).

3. to find out what impact Armenia's membership in the Customs Union / EEU and the coup d'état of the government had in 2018, mainly how the approaches of the ruling elites of the Republic of Armenia towards the EU, in particular the Eastern Partnership were effected.

4. to point out policy directions that are more appropriate to the current structural conditions, aimed at the improvement of EU-Armenia relations.



## Basic principles

In the very first years of the launch of Eastern Partnership, the basic principles of the approach of the ruling elites led by Serzh Sargsyan to the significance of the program were clearly outlined. These principles are reflected, in particular, in Sargsyan's speech at the second summit of the Eastern Partnership in 2011,<sup>1</sup> and they are as follows:

- Eastern Partnership is a means of wider cooperation with the EU and between the participating countries in the EU, as a result of which “the interconnectedness between the parties becomes more and more tangible.” Mr. Sargsyan reaffirmed his approach in 2015, stating that since the launch of the Eastern Partnership, official Yerevan had viewed it as a format of cooperation with the EU, the promotion of societal relations, and targeted cooperation with directions.<sup>2</sup>
- The EU shall adopt a differentiated approach to participant countries in the frames of the project in accordance with their needs.
- The EU shall adopt another differentiated approach, based on the principle of “more support for more reforms” to stimulate partner countries according to the progress made by each.
- The Eastern Partnership is “an additional impetus for Armenia to advance fundamental institutional and structural reforms.”
- By implementing the changes envisaged by the program, the RA reaffirms its commitment to common European values.
- The EU can greatly contribute to cooperation, continual peace and prosperity in the South Caucasus. To reach this goal, through the Eastern Partnership the EU can support the peaceful settlement of the Artsakh conflict, providing, in particular, favorable conditions and strengthening confidence-building measures. And “if we use this opportunity wisely, everyone will benefit, both partner and EU member states.” Furthermore, Mr. Sargsyan considers the EU's role a key factor in promoting such cooperation, expecting it to be consistent with its own principles and values.
- The involvement of the South Caucasus in significant pan-European programs is a laudable action. However, as a result of these projects, no country should be in a more favorable position, “especially if that capital is used to the detriment of

<sup>1</sup> The Office of the President of the Republic of Armenia, “Statement by President Serzh Sargsyan at the EU Eastern Partnership Second Summit”, September 30, 2011. At: <https://www.president.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2011/09/30/news-111/>, last accessed September 16, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> The Office of the President of the Republic of Armenia, “Statement by the President of the Republic of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan at the Fourth Eastern Partnership Summit”, May 22, 2015. At: <https://www.president.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2015/05/22/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-Eastern-Partnership-Latvia-speech/>, last accessed September 20, 2021.

regional security.” In particular, “the Southern (gas) corridor should never become a reason for a new war.”

It is noteworthy that Avet Adonts, the former Armenian Ambassador to the EU and Belgium, is convinced that the EU, which made a lot of efforts before the signing of the Armenian-Turkish protocols, “can still use its leverages more effectively to have the procedure on the right way in the current situation.”<sup>3</sup> This should also be considered one of the basic principles of the ruling elite’s approach to the issue of the final result of the program as an expectation in the context of the Eastern Partnership.

## Eastern Partnership as a valuable association

The rhetoric of the political elites led by Serzh Sargsyan on relations with the EU was rich in valuable emphases. Back in 2007, “the adoption of the European path of development” in the National Security Strategy of the Republic of Armenia during the presidency of Robert Kocharyan was considered as one of the components of Armenia’s complementary foreign policy.<sup>4</sup> In 2012, Tigran Sargsyan, the Prime Minister of the RA, stated in one of his speeches that “Armenia has consciously chosen the European path of development” due to the Christian heritage of the Armenian people and “the decision to get rid of the tracks of the previous dictatorial regimes (Ottoman Empire and Soviet Union).”<sup>5</sup> It is noteworthy that Prime Minister Sargsyan placed importance on the choice of European values not only in the context of Armenia’s internal life, but also in the context of regional developments. In particular, according to him, the reforms of the European development path of Turkey, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia would contribute to regional security and cooperation. “The only right option for the countries of our region is to rely upon values such as mutual respect, tolerance and solidarity, which are the cornerstones of modern Europe.”<sup>6</sup>

The valuable emphases in the rhetoric of the elites led by Serzh Sargsyan were numerous, especially in 2013–2017, from the period of the accession of the RA to

<sup>3</sup> “Avet Adonts: ‘We Need to Realize Substantial Reforms to Start Negotiations on Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area with the EU’”, *Mediamax*, August 29, 2011. At: <https://mediamax.am/en/news/interviews/2177/>, last accessed September 16, 2021.

<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “National Security Strategy of the Republic of Armenia”, January 26, 2007. At: <https://www.mfa.am/filemanager/Statics/Doctrineeng.pdf>, last accessed September 18, 2021.

<sup>5</sup> The Government of the Republic of Armenia, “Tigran Sargsyan: Armenia Has Consciously Chosen the European Path of Development”, June 4, 2012. At: <https://www.gov.am/en/news/item/6248/>, last accessed September 16, 2021.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

the Russian-led Customs Union (CU) to the signing of the CEPA with the EU. According to RA President Serzh Sargsyan, the membership in the CU did not cancel the agenda of Armenia-EU relations, as their cooperative relations were based on common values – legal state, rule of law, and respect for human rights.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, in his view, the core uniting the partner states that have adopted different directions in the development of relations with the EU within the framework of the Eastern Partnership is their commitment to common values, democracy, human rights, rule of law, regional stability and peace.<sup>8</sup> Relying upon these common values, Armenia is developing its relations with the EU in the areas of democratic institutions, such as improving the judiciary, effective governance, human rights, promoting the rule of law, strengthening civil society, improving the business environment, combating corruption, etc.<sup>9</sup>

The above-mentioned valuable emphases are visible in the rhetoric of the ruling elite led by Nikol Pashinyan, as well. Thus, according to Zohrab Mnatsakanyan, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Armenia, Armenia is an inseparable part of European civilization and its value system. And the latter are the basis of democratic public administration reforms and sectoral cooperation with the EU in Armenia.<sup>10</sup> According to Pashinyan, the RA-EU CEPA is equal to a truly independent judiciary, an institutional mechanism for preventing and combating corruption.<sup>11</sup> According to

<sup>7</sup> The Office of the President of the Republic of Armenia, “Interview of President Serzh Sargsyan to the Czech *Lidové Noviny*” (National News), January 30, 2014. At: <https://www.president.am/en/interviews-and-press-conferences/item/2014/01/30/Interview-of-President-Serzh-Sargsyan-durin-state-visit-to-Czech-Republic/>, last accessed September 23, 2021.

<sup>8</sup> The Office of the President of the Republic of Armenia, “Statement by the President of the Republic of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan at the Meeting of the European People’s Party Eastern Partnership Leaders”, May 21, 2015. At: <https://www.president.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2015/05/21/Statement-of-President-Serzh-Sargsyan-EPP-Latvia/>, last accessed September 20, 2021.

<sup>9</sup> The Office of the President of the Republic of Armenia, “Address by the President of the Republic of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan at the Opening Meeting of the Fourth Ordinary Session of the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly”, March 17, 2015. At: <https://www.president.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2015/03/17/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-National-Assembly-Euronest-Parliamentary-Assembly-speech/>, last accessed September 20, 2021.

<sup>10</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Opening Remarks by Foreign Minister Zohrab Mnatsakanyan at the Annual Conference of the MFA Apparatus and Heads of Diplomatic Service Abroad”, August 27, 2019. At: [https://www.mfa.am/en/speeches/2019/08/27/fm\\_opening\\_remarks/9782](https://www.mfa.am/en/speeches/2019/08/27/fm_opening_remarks/9782), last accessed September 21, 2021.

<sup>11</sup> “Nikol Pashinyan: Armenia Will Not Be Authoritarian”, *Euronews*, March 8, 2019. At: <https://www.euronews.com/2019/03/08/nikol-pashinyan-armenia-will-not-be-authoritarian>, last accessed September 21, 2021.

him, the CEPA is a document that gives rise to reforms, the implementation of which presupposes qualitative changes in many spheres of public life.<sup>12</sup>

## Differentiated partnership

During the period under review, all of Armenia's ruling elites highlighted the need for the EU to apply a differentiated approach to partner countries within the framework of the Eastern Partnership. In Serzh Sargsyan's words, it is not known why the EU has included states that are so different in their approaches, aspirations, and capabilities in one program. And this, in his opinion, had a negative impact, for example, on the component of regional cooperation of the Eastern Partnership.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, he praised the introduction of the "more for more" principle of an individualized approach to partners within the revised European Neighborhood Policy.<sup>14</sup> According to Edward Nalbandyan, the former Armenian Foreign Minister, the principles of the differentiation and promoting approach create the possibility of multi-sectoral or multi-level cooperation, thus preserving the integrity of the Eastern Partnership.<sup>15</sup> According to former Minister Zohrab Mnatsakanyan, Pashinyan's government is another way of maintaining the integrity of the Eastern Partnership and responding appropriately to the individual needs of partners, which should not be perceived as a fragmentation within the program.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>12</sup> The Office of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, "It Is Impossible to Settle the Nagorno-Karabakh Issue Without Hard and Consistent Work, without Compromise, Mutual Respect, and Balance" – PM Addresses the Italian Institute for International Political Studies in Milan", November 20, 2019. At: <https://www.primeminister.am/en/press-release/item/2019/11/20/Nikol-Pashinyan-ISPI/>, last accessed September 21, 2021.

<sup>13</sup> The Office of the President of the Republic of Armenia, "Statement by the President of the Republic of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan at the High-level Meeting on the 5th Anniversary of the Eastern Partnership", April 25, 2014. At: <https://www.president.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2014/04/25/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-speech-Eastern-Partnership-Prague/>, last accessed September 20, 2021.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Statement by Edward Nalbandian, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia at the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the European Parliament", February 21, 2018. At: <https://www.mfa.am/en/speeches/2018/02/21/fm-afet-speech/7958>, last accessed September 20, 2021.

<sup>16</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Foreign Minister of Armenia Zohrab Mnatsakanyan Participated in the EaP Ministerial Video-Conference", July 1, 2020. At: [https://www.mfa.am/en/press-releases/2020/07/01/fm\\_eap/10342](https://www.mfa.am/en/press-releases/2020/07/01/fm_eap/10342), last accessed September 22, 2021.

## Combining European and Eurasian

In 2011, Armenia also joined the CIS Free Trade Agreement, which replaced and regulated bilateral free trade with Armenia's main trading partners within the Association, and negotiations regarding the free trade agreement with the EU began in 2012. From that moment on, heated discussions on the compatibility of the "European" and "Eurasian" components of Armenia's foreign policy began in Armenian socio-political and analytical circles. The position of the representatives of the ruling elite of the Republic of Armenia on that issue was clear. As Tigran Sargsyan, the Prime Minister of Armenia (and the future Chairman of the Eurasian Economic Commission) regularly stated,<sup>17</sup>

- As a small state, Armenia can not "play" with diplomacy. The Russian Federation, a strategic partner of Armenia, is well aware of official Yerevan's relations with the EU, the US, NATO, Iran, China, and Georgia. The European partners of Armenia, in their turn, understand the actions of official Yerevan due to the geopolitical situation and problems with its neighbors.
- The cooperation of Armenia with the European Union within the framework of the Eastern Partnership is not directed against the Russian Federation, and the Armenian-Russian strategic partnership is not directed against the European Union. The relations between Armenia and the EU, Russia and the United States are complementary, and not mutually contradictory.
- The cooperation with the European Union within the framework of the Eastern Partnership is not aimed at Armenia's membership in the organization, and the deepening of economic cooperation within the CIS is not aimed at Armenia's membership in the Customs Union.
- Armenia is interested in deepening economic cooperation both within the CIS and with the EU. Official Yerevan wants to parallelly create a free trade regime with both the Customs Union and the European Union, gaining the right of free access to the markets of the two economic unions.

<sup>17</sup> "Таможенный союз не имеет для нас смысла" ("Tamožennyj soúz ne imeet dlâ nas smysla"), *Коммерсантъ (Kommersant)*, April 4, 2012. At: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1908052>, last accessed September 16, 2021; N. Il'ina, "«Для интеграции нужно создать экономические стимулы»" ("Dlâ integracii nužno sozdat' èkonomičeskie stimuly") Prem'èr-ministr Armenii Tigran Sarkisân", *Gazeta.Ru (Gazete.Ru)*, April 7, 2012. At: <https://www.gazeta.ru/business/2012/04/06/4309137.shtml>, last accessed September 16, 2021; The Government of the Republic of Armenia, "Tigran Sargsyan: Armenia Has..."; The Office of the President of the Republic of Armenia, *Statement by the President of The Republic...*

On September 3, 2013, Serzh Sargsyan, the President of the Republic of Armenia, announced the wish of Armenia to join the Belarus-Kazakhstan-Russia Customs Union and the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). He explained that the decision was based on the fact that Armenia initially built its military security system on the basis of partnership with Russia within the CSTO, so “being in the same system of military security, it is impossible and inefficient to keep aloof from the relevant geo-economic space.”<sup>18</sup> Nonetheless, in his opinion, this decision does not mean breaking off the dialogue with European structures; Armenia intends to continue the reforms in the spheres of strengthening democratic institutions and civil society, and in the sphere of protection of human rights with the support of European partners.<sup>19</sup>

According to the ruling elites led by Sargsyan, “the expansion and deepening of relations with one partner shall not create new divisions, and Armenia shall continue its policy of combining and harmonizing the interests.”<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, no partner state shall pay for its decision to join one integration process or another. “We do not want to choose between our friends, but we want to have as many friends as it is possible... When we announced the «both...and» approach, we meant to have an alternative, and not to choose this or that instrument of cooperation.”<sup>21</sup> According to Sargsyan, by joining the EEU, Armenia continues to maintain its readiness to deepen and expand relations with the EU. Moreover, having a balanced policy, Armenia did not create additional hotbeds of tension in Europe and, on the contrary, was able to build its policy on the principles of compatible, balancing and multi-vector cooperation of different integration systems.<sup>22</sup> Together with the EU partners, Armenia will develop such new legal regulations of relations, which, on the one hand, will reflect the content of the previous negotiations with the EU and, on the other hand, will be compatible with the undertaken commitments of Armenia within the EEU.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>18</sup> The Office of the President of the Republic of Armenia, “The RA President Serzh Sargsyan’s Remarks at the Press Conference on the Results of the Negotiations with the RF President Vladimir Putin”, September 3, 2013. At: <https://www.president.am/en/interviews-and-press-conferences/item/2013/09/03/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-press-conference-working-visit-to-Russian-Federation/>, last accessed September 20, 2021.

<sup>19</sup> The Office of the President of the Republic of Armenia, *Interview of President...*

<sup>20</sup> The Office of the President of the Republic of Armenia, “President Serzh Sargsyan Took Part in the Plenary Session of the EPP in Dublin”, March 6, 2014. At: <https://www.president.am/en/press-release/item/2014/03/06/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-speech-Dublin-EPP/>, last accessed September 20, 2021.

<sup>21</sup> The Office of the President of the Republic of Armenia, *Statement by the President of the Republic of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan at the High-level Meeting...*

<sup>22</sup> The Office of the President of the Republic of Armenia, *Statement by the President of the Republic of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan at the Meeting...*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

It should be noted that The European Union and Armenia had already started negotiations on Association and Free Trade Agreements in 2011. According to Ambassador Avet Adonts, the end of the negotiations on the Association Agreement was already visible at that time, which was to be followed by further extensive work – the implementation of the agreement. And after the settlement of a number of issues, Armenia would be able to start negotiations on a Free Trade Agreement. At the same time, according to the ambassador, negotiations on visa facilitation were expected to start, as a result of which contact between people would be improved. And “without it, the signing of the Association Agreement and the application of the free trade regime could simply become an end in itself, without the results on which documents are based.”<sup>24</sup> The end point of this process should have been the mutual abolition of the visa regime.

In 2017, President Sargsyan assessed the new agreement with the EU as a political document, which confirms the viability of the “both... and” policy of combining different interests.<sup>25</sup> In his words, “Armenia has shown through its experience that it is possible to combine diverse integration processes, taking from each of them and giving to each the positive and useful thing that unites the states, and not divides them.”<sup>26</sup> According to the representatives of the ruling elite, the EU-Armenia CEPA may be a positive precedent for other programs and even for various integration processes.<sup>27</sup>

In 2017, the ideas of the ruling elites of Armenia about the possible practical manifestations of joining the EEU and cooperating with the EU were made public. For example, according to RA President Sargsyan, the EU and the CU have huge markets, and the goal of Armenia should be the promotion of exports to those markets. “We have to produce much more, and it’s up to us how much our economy will grow, how many goods we will export, and those goods can be adequately exported

<sup>24</sup> “Avet Adonts: ‘We Need to Realize’...”

<sup>25</sup> The Office of the President of the Republic of Armenia, “President Spoke at the Carnegie Center”, February 28, 2017. At: <https://www.president.am/en/press-release/item/2017/02/28/President-Srezh-Sargsyan-visited-Carnegie-Center/>, last accessed September 20, 2021.

<sup>26</sup> The Office of the President of the Republic of Armenia, “President Serzh Sargsyan Participated at the Congress of the European People’s Party”, March 29, 2017. At: <https://www.president.am/en/press-release/item/2017/03/29/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-participated-at-EPP-Congress-in-Malta/>, last accessed September 20, 2021.

<sup>27</sup> The Office of the President of the Republic of Armenia, “Statement by President Serzh Sargsyan at the Eastern Partnership Summit”, November 24, 2017. At: <https://www.president.am/en/press-release/item/2017/11/24/President-Serzh-Sargsyans-speech-at-EaP-Summit/>, last accessed September 20, 2021; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Statement by Edward Nalbandian, Minister of...*



to both the EEU and EU markets.”<sup>28</sup> Armenia can also be a supplier of high quality agricultural products and an attractive platform for the development of information technologies for the EU.<sup>29</sup>

According to Karen Karapetyan, the Prime Minister of the RA, from the point of view of business development a large and perceptible market is attractive for Armenia. The EU is one of the largest donors and investors in Armenia, and, deepening the relations with the EEU, official Yerevan continues to cooperate with the EU. “We see ourselves as bringing these two markets closer together, not separating them.”<sup>30</sup>

In another speech of President Sargsyan another approach of compatibility is visible, that is, the clear realization of the membership in the EEU would best serve the economic development of Armenia, which, however, would not hinder cooperation with the EU, especially in the field of institutional reforms and modernization.<sup>31</sup>

The idea of disproportionate combination was preserved during Nikol Pashinyan’s prime ministership, as well. In particular, in Pashinyan’s words, the official CEPA with the EU intends to use official Yerevan with maximum efficiency in the design and implementation of the reforms planned by the government he headed. And the cooperation with the EU does not contradict Armenia’s membership in the EEU at all, and, what is more, it complements and enriches the country’s capabilities with new relative advantages.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, there is no problem for Armenia of choosing between East and West. “We are a member of the EEU, we have a CEPA with the

<sup>28</sup> The Office of the President of the Republic of Armenia, “President Serzh Sargsyan’s Interview with Armenia TV Channel”, December 14, 2017. At: <https://www.president.am/en/interviews-and-press-conferences/item/2017/12/14/President-Serzh-Sargsyan-gave-an-interview-to-ArmeniaTV-channel/>, last accessed September 20, 2021.

<sup>29</sup> “EU, Armenia Edge towards Cooperation Deal”, *Euronews*, March 2, 2017. At: <https://www.euronews.com/2017/03/02/eu-armenia-edge-towards-cooperation-deal>, last accessed September 20, 2021.

<sup>30</sup> A. Zabrodin, “Армения стремится стать мостом между ЕАЭС и Евросоюзом” (“Armeniâ stremitsâ stat’ mostom mezhdu EAËS i Evrosoûzom”), *Известия (Izvestiâ)*, April 3, 2017. At: <https://iz.ru/news/675354>, last accessed September 20, 2021.

<sup>31</sup> The Office of the President of the Republic of Armenia, “Remarks by the President of the Republic of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan at the Munich Security Conference”, February 17, 2018. At: <https://www.president.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2018/02/17/President-Serzh-Sargsyans-speech-at-Munich-Security-Conference/>, last accessed September 20, 2021.

<sup>32</sup> The Office of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, “Nikol Pashinyan Attends Plenary Session at St. Petersburg International Economic Forum”, June 6–7, 2019. At: <https://www.primeminister.am/en/foreign-visits/item/2019/06/06/visit-to-Saint-Petersburg/>, last accessed September 21, 2021.

EU. Russia is not against our cooperation with the EU, and the EU is not against our membership in the EEU.”<sup>33</sup>

It is very remarkable that initially Pashinyan was dissatisfied with the scale and depth of EU support for institutional reforms. Thus, in July 2018, he stated that Yerevan would not be the questioner in relations with the EU, and European partners should clarify their position and actions, “as the high-profile statements of European capitals have not been fixed in Armenia since the Velvet Revolution.”<sup>34</sup> According to him, since the democratic revolution the EU policy and the volume of support to Armenia have not changed. Therefore, it is necessary to either temper the enthusiastic tone of those announcements or radically reconsider the policy. In his words, “democratic Armenia expects a more serious attitude.”<sup>35</sup> However, in the following period, similar complaints have not been voiced by Pashinyan’s team, and Pashinyan’s government is already fully satisfied with the level and depth of cooperation with the EU, including the framework of the Eastern Partnership in 2021.<sup>36</sup>

## Bridge

Along with the idea of combining cooperation with the EU with EEU membership, the ruling elites led by both Sargsyan and Pashinyan spread the idea of connecting the two, the idea of bridging them. This idea appeared in 2014–2015, immediately after Armenia’s membership in the EEU, and then it was conceptualized in 2017–2018. So, in 2014, RA President Sargsyan stated that Armenia joined the Eastern Partnership, being convinced that it was not directed against any third state. Moreover, that initiative should not be a dividing wall in the South Caucasus, but a connecting bridge. “It

<sup>33</sup> V. Solov’ev, “Россия пришла в наш регион как европейская сила” (“Rossiâ prišla v naš region kak evropejskaâ sila”), *Коммерсантъ* (*Kommersant*), October 29, 2019. At: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4140669>, last accessed September 21, 2021.

<sup>34</sup> “Pashinyan: EU Should Pipe Down Big-Hearted Tone of its Statements in Relations with Armenia, or Change Policy”, *ARKA*, July 13, 2018. At: [http://arka.am/en/news/politics/pashinyan\\_eu\\_should\\_pipe\\_down\\_big\\_hearted\\_tone\\_of\\_its\\_statements\\_in\\_relations\\_with\\_armenia\\_or\\_change/](http://arka.am/en/news/politics/pashinyan_eu_should_pipe_down_big_hearted_tone_of_its_statements_in_relations_with_armenia_or_change/), last accessed September 24, 2021.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> “European Union to Provide Armenia with 1.6 Billion Euros Worth Grants”, *ARKA*, July 9, 2021. At: [http://arka.am/en/news/economy/european\\_union\\_to\\_provide\\_armenia\\_with\\_1\\_6\\_billion\\_euros\\_worth\\_grants/](http://arka.am/en/news/economy/european_union_to_provide_armenia_with_1_6_billion_euros_worth_grants/), last accessed September 23, 2021.

is necessary to find solutions by the help of a dialogue, and the solutions will take into account the interests of all stakeholders in the region.”<sup>37</sup>

Armenia even tried to position itself as a possible bridge for a mutually beneficial approach between the EEU and the EU. The favorable economic, political and cultural relations with Iran were presented as a favorable precondition in that context, which, in Sargsyan’s opinion, could be used by European companies to enter Iran, as well as connect seaports of the Black Sea with the Persian Gulf. In particular, the North-South highway is aimed at the same idea. According to Sargsyan, the mutually beneficial relations between Armenia as an EEU member and Georgia as an EU associate partner can become a model of cooperation. In 2018, Serzh Sargsyan even spoke about the negotiations with the beneficiaries of the EEU-EU member states over the Black Sea-Persian Gulf transit corridor.<sup>38</sup>

The idea of a bridge was circulated with much less caution by the ruling elites led by Pashinyan, considering it realistic and inevitable, but a matter of future perspective.<sup>39</sup> Pashinyan underlined the EU’s participation in the infrastructure projects of Armenia as well, in particular, the construction of the North-South highway.<sup>40</sup>

## Eastern Partnership as a means of regional peace and cooperation

As Serzh Sargsyan once noted, Armenia initially supported the Eastern Partnership in the belief that this format of cooperation was aimed at promoting sustainable regional development, and as a uniting factor, being based on fundamental rights of people, it would erase all dividing lines.<sup>41</sup> And the solution of the last problem was one of the main expectations of the elites led by Serzh Sargsyan. Probably it is with this very logic that Mr. Sargsyan regularly called to the EU to promote the unblocking of the Armenian-Turkish border should be probably observed in the same. In his words, one

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<sup>37</sup> The Office of the President of the Republic of Armenia, *Statement by the President of the Republic of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan at the High-level...*

<sup>38</sup> The Office of the President of the Republic of Armenia, *Remarks by the President of the Republic of Armenia...*

<sup>39</sup> The Office of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, *Nikol Pashinyan...*

<sup>40</sup> “Azerbaijan’s Xenophobic Policy Should be Condemned by Civilized World – PM Receives EU Official”, *Armenpress*, April 15, 2021. At: <https://armenpress.am/eng/news/1049190/>, last accessed September 23, 2021.

<sup>41</sup> The Office of the President of the Republic of Armenia, *Statement by President Serzh Sargsyan at the Eastern...*

of the problems hindering the mutual benefit of cooperation with the EU is the “illegal blockade of Armenia by Turkey, a member of the EU Customs Union”<sup>42</sup> and for the Eastern Partnership to be in the vital interests of all member states, “for Armenia it is, first of all, the unblocking of the closed border with Turkey.”<sup>43</sup>

The same logic probably applies to Sargsyan’s attitude towards peaceful settlement of the Artsakh issue. And it is noteworthy that he positively assessed the RA-EU CEPA from this point of view; more specifically, “the document reaffirms the EU’s commitment to support the activities of the OSCE Minsk Group, it clearly states the three principles proposed by the OSCE Minsk Group.”<sup>44</sup>

It is noteworthy that Pashinyan’s government (despite the autumn war in 2020) does not (for the time being) emphasize the advance of the approaches of the previous elite to the involvement of the EU in the establishment of regional peace and development of cooperation, but it also never opposed it.

## Summary and recommendations

Summing up the results of the analysis, we conclude that:

- Since the accession of Armenia to the Eastern Partnership program in 2009, all Armenia’s ruling elites have been guided by the almost unchanging principles of that program and its position on the EU in general: 1) The Eastern Partnership is the most effective mechanism for multidisciplinary cooperation with the EU; 2) In order to maintain the integrity of the program and to make it more effective, the EU should have a differentiated and individualized approach to its partners, responding to their individual priorities and encouraging their progress; 3) Adherence to common values is essential for both maintaining the integrity of the program and achieving its underlying goals; 4) For Armenia, cooperation with the EU in general and with the Eastern Partnership in particular is an influential stimulus for structural change; 5) The program should necessarily contribute to the elimination of dividing lines in the South Caucasus, the establishment of regional peace and the strengthening of cooperation; 6) The program should not limit the participation of partner countries in other integration formats, but complement it.

<sup>42</sup> The Office of the President of the Republic of Armenia, *President Serzh Sargsyan Took Part...*

<sup>43</sup> The Office of the President of the Republic of Armenia, *Statement by President...*

<sup>44</sup> The Office of the President of the Republic of Armenia, *President Serzh Sargsyan’s Interview with Armenia TV...*

- Accession to the CU in 2013 and then to the EEU in 2015, have radically influenced the content and logic of Armenia's cooperation with the EU within the framework of the Eastern Partnership. If official Yerevan had previously sought to combine free trade zones and free movement mechanisms within the CIS with the EU, then since 2013, the rhetoric of Armenia's ruling elite has discussed the idea of disproportionate compatibility, economic integration, CU / EEU membership and institutional reforms in the framework of cooperation with the EU, free movement of people and manpower, CU / EEU membership and visa regime liberalization and gradual abolition in the framework of cooperation with the EU.
- Later, in the rhetoric of the ruling elites of Armenia, the idea of bridging the EU-EEU appeared, positioning Armenia as a possible transit link for EU countries to the EEU and Middle East markets, in the opposite direction.
- The changes brought about by the coup d'état of 2018 did not lead to a radical change in the "European" agenda of the ruling elite in Armenia, neither in terms of rhetoric nor actions. Pashinyan's government probably did not receive the expected increased support from the EU for "democratic Armenia" and, the accents known from the previous period were shortly after restored to the agenda of official Yerevan's foreign policy under the influence of regional structural factors.
- All in all, during the years of Serzh Sargsyan's presidency, 2009–2018, the "European" rhetoric of the ruling elite and the practical steps in that direction were much more intense, more conceptualized and richer in ideas, than after 2018. The decrease in the intensity of "European" rhetoric and practical steps during Pashinyan's rule were due to internal (interpolitical realignments following the coup d'état, coronavirus disease in 2020, the 44-day war, and their consequences on governance and socio-economic situation) and external factors (the "waiting" position of the EU during the realignment of the political elite in Armenia in 2018–2019, the global pandemic situation in 2020, the structural dependence of Armenia on Russia in the war and post-war situations, and the deepening of integration into the EEU and CSTO).
- The foreign policy agenda of Armenia has always been highly sensitive to changes in the international system (primarily the regional subsystem). Due to their influence, the ruling elites of Armenia had to and in the nearest future will have to make adjustments and changes in their foreign policy agenda, striving, on the one hand, to quickly adapt to the new situation and, on the other hand, to create certain opportunities for independence and maneuvering.

- The situation resulting from the 44-day war in 2020 and the new geopolitical realities arising around Armenia hinder and in the coming years will further hinder the foreign policy actions of the elites led by Nikol Pashinyan (and his successors).
- The sharp increase of Russia's role in the sphere of the external security of Armenia and the deepening of economic integration within the EEU will objectively make the "Russian" and "Eurasian" agendas superior to other directions of foreign policy of official Yerevan. This, in its turn, will significantly reduce official Yerevan's opportunities to combine cooperation with the EEU and the EU.
- The increased role of Turkey and Azerbaijan in matters of strategic importance to Armenia (primarily regional transport infrastructure) will increase both the influence of these countries in working out Armenia's political agendas and the weight of these two countries in the relations with regional actors, including the EU. All this will affect the EU relations with Armenia.

At the moment, the EU is targeting its technical and financial assistance to Armenia in resolving post-war humanitarian issues, mitigating the socio-economic consequences of the epidemic, carrying out institutional and structural reforms in governance, and promoting small and medium-sized businesses.

However, there is a risk that due to the influence of external-structural factors and the weakness of internal stimuli, the "European" agenda of the Armenian authorities may be significantly narrowed. To prevent this, instead of making it viable, developing and expanding, the EU must address the following issues through bilateral and multilateral cooperation:

1. support the strengthening of Armenia's internal economic and institutional capacity in order to make it more resilient to external and internal challenges;
2. in order to promote stability and regional cooperation in the South Caucasus, to link the individual progress of each of the three countries of the South Caucasus in the field of domestic and foreign policy, and to connect the three countries within regional programs.

The measures taken to address these issues may include:

- **The EU should coordinate its work with Armenia on foreign and domestic policy issues.** Cooperation regarding only national institutional and structural reforms is not enough. It is necessary to carefully and gradually but actively penetrate the sphere of drawing up Armenia's foreign policy agenda. In particular, the most accessible areas at the moment are the issues of repatriation of war prisoners held in Baku, regional energy and transport infrastructure, Armenia-Azerbaijan, Armenia-Turkey dialogue, especially Armenia-Georgia dialogue, Armenia's for-

eign trade and, in particular, export promotion and export diversification. Most of these issues have been present in the frames of the Eastern Partnership, but have never received adequate attention from either the EU or partner countries. It is necessary to change the attitudes towards the regional format of the Eastern Partnership and intensify the actions at that level.

- **The EU must be not only a “supporter” but also a “participant.”** In other words, it is necessary to not only provide technical and financial assistance to Armenia, but also directly penetrate into the socio-economic life of Armenia through the volume of investments, European capital and an increase in the number of joint partnerships. To this end, it is expedient to create a “Group of European Friends of Armenia” with the participation of the EU, individual European countries and organizations, which will reveal the target areas by means of scanning, making logistical calculations and mobilizing financial and technical resources, and directing them to the target areas.
- **The EU should increase its engagement and its intensity in the areas of Armenia’s “disproportionate compatibility” with the EEU and the EU,** focusing in particular on current priorities, especially for official Yerevan. Such spheres can include the development of energy capacities (renewable and alternative), internal transport infrastructures (automobile-railway), smart agriculture (introduction of new resource-saving technologies, organic methods), special branches of tourism (first of all, agricultural, healthcare, cultural) and balanced territorial development. Special attention and support should be paid to the development of Armenia’s production capacities in the spheres, the end result of which may be exported to other EU markets, in addition to Armenia’s privileges already within the CIS and GSP + system in the EU. Consistent and coordinated efforts in these areas can significantly contribute to the development of Armenia’s own capabilities, thus to some extent developing its capacity for independence and maneuvering. One of the results may be the creation of the edges of cooperation between the EU and the EEU through Armenia.
- **The EU should increase the financial and technical assistance and its participation in the areas of “soft impact”** such as school and university education, science and research, and facilitate and intensify human-to-human contacts (primarily through abolition of the visa regime). It is desirable for the EU to support and participate in these areas of “disproportionate compatibility” through the “Group of European Friends of Armenia.”



- **The EU should reconsider its policy concept in the South Caucasus**, increasing the significance of normative principles in the logic of its principle-based pragmatism. In particular, to link the EU energy and communication realpolitik with normative-value requirements in relations with the countries of the region, at the level of both high-level statements and practical policies. It will stimulate democratic transformations in those countries, and it will contribute to the strengthening of mutual trust and stability in the region.
- By the same token, **the EU should expand the spheres of application of flexible principles of interconnection and mutual agreement** in relations with the South Caucasus partner countries within the framework of the Eastern Partnership. They have proven their viability and effectiveness over the years. At present, they need to be disseminated both for cooperation in the foreign and national policy of each of the partner states and for the creation of structural interdependencies between those states. In particular, it is necessary to interconnect and mutually agree on (for example, with additional financial support) the support of the internal reforms of Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia with their regional cooperation within the framework of the Eastern Partnership, to establish a similar interconnection within the framework of EU cooperation with Turkey.
- **The EU should promote the deepening of the interconnectedness of Armenia and Georgia**, taking into account the similarities and common interests of foreign policy issues of these two countries, as well as the more positive relations and the existing opportunities for cooperation in economic and humanitarian issues. This support can be directed, for example, to cross-border cooperation between the two countries, joint productions, joint research, and joint educational programs.

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SAMVEL HOVHANNISYAN  
*Brusov State University*

## The Role and Significance of the Eastern Partnership Program in Achieving Armenian Economic Priorities

**ABSTRACT:** In July 2021, the European Commission and the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy outlined a proposal on how to take forward priorities for cooperation with the Eastern Partners in the years to come. The economic and investment plan will support post-COVID-19 pandemic recovery using specific EU tools, including blending and guarantees, to foster sustainable development and leverage public and private investment. The plan contains a set of flagship initiatives for each of the partner countries. These are concrete priority projects with tangible results that have been jointly identified with the partner countries, taking into account their priorities, needs and ambitions. On July 9 in Yerevan, the EU Commissioner for Neighborhood and Enlargement Oliver Varhelyi announced that the new aid package would total 2.6 billion euros over five years, or \$3.1 billion.

This report aims at outlining economic priorities for Armenia and possible investment directions under the EU economic and investment plan for the next five years.

**KEYWORDS:** Eastern Partnership, Armenian economic priorities, Armenia flagship actions, EU role in Armenia, economic development of Armenia

## Introduction

The Eastern Partnership (EaP) was launched in 2009 with the aim of strengthening and deepening the political and economic relations between the EU, its Member States and six Eastern European and South Caucasus partner countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine. The Partnership has developed according to each partner's interests, ambitions, and progress, allowing for differentiation in a flexible and inclusive way, to tackle common and global challenges and foster regional integration jointly.<sup>1</sup>

Through its ambitious '20 deliverables for 2020' agreed on at the 5th Eastern Partnership Summit in 2017, the EaP has delivered tangible results and improved people's lives. Work on a successor agenda began in 2019 with broad and inclusive consultation. The resulting Joint Communication: Eastern Partnership Policy beyond 2020: Reinforcing Resilience – an Eastern Partnership that delivers for all and Council Conclusions on the Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020 set out a new vision for the partnership, with resilience as the overarching policy framework and five long-term policy objectives (economy and connectivity, good governance and the rule of law, environmental and climate resilience, support for digital transformation, and fair and inclusive societies), acknowledged at the EaP Leaders' Videoconference held in June 2020.<sup>2</sup>

## Analysis

In July 2021, the European Commission and the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy outlined a proposal on how to take forward priorities for cooperation with the Eastern Partners in the years to come. This agenda is based on the five long-term objectives, with resilience at its core. The comprehensive agenda aims at increasing trade, growth and jobs, investing in connectivity, strengthening democratic institutions and the rule of law, supporting the green and digital transitions, and promoting fair, gender-equal and inclusive societies. This proposal will contrib-

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<sup>1</sup> European Commission, *Joint Staff Working Paper. Recovery, Resilience and Reform: Post 2020 Eastern Partnership Priorities*, SWD (2021) 186 final, Brussels: European Commission, July 2, 2021. At: [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/101173/joint-staff-working-document\\_en](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/101173/joint-staff-working-document_en), last accessed November 19, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> European Commission, *Eastern Partnership: A Renewed Agenda for Recovery, Resilience and Reform Underpinned by an Economic and Investment Plan [Press release]*, July 2, 2021. At: [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_21\\_3367](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_21_3367), last accessed November 19, 2021.

ute to the discussions on the future EaP policy, including at the Eastern Partnership Summit planned for December 2021.<sup>3</sup>

Proposed post-2020 priorities:<sup>4</sup>

- Investing in competitive and innovative economies: 500 000 small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) supported.
- Investing in sustainable and smart connectivity: 3 000 km of priority roads and railways built or upgraded.
- Investing in people and knowledge societies: 70 000 individual mobility opportunities for students and staff, researchers, youth and youth workers.
- Investing in the rule of law: All high-level officials declare their economic assets and these declarations are verified.
- Investing in security and cyber resilience: A strengthened framework in place for identifying and addressing hybrid threats; strengthened partners' capacities to increase cyber resilience and tackle cybercrime, including through fully implementing the Council of Europe Budapest Convention on Cybercrime.
- Investing in sustainable energy: 250 000 households reduce energy consumption by at least 20%.
- Investing in environment & climate: Another 3 million people gain access to safe water supplies, with quality monitored and improved in 300 cities.
- Investing in digital transformation: 80% of households have affordable access to high-speed internet.
- Investing in inclusive, gender equal and diverse societies, and strategic communication: 2 500 local Civil Society organizations, 120 independent media outlets and 2 000 journalists supported.
- Investing in health resilience: 850 000 health-care workers vaccinated and benefiting from improved therapeutics, equipment and working conditions.

This plan contains a set of flagship initiatives for each of the partner countries.

These are concrete:

- priority projects with tangible results that have been identified jointly with the partner countries,
- taking into account their priorities, needs and ambitions.

<sup>3</sup> European Commission, *Joint Staff Working Paper. Recovery...*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*



## EIP flagship initiatives for Armenia (European Commission, 2021)<sup>5</sup>

### **Flagship 1: Supporting a sustainable and innovative and competitive economy – direct support for 30 000 SMEs**

Economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic is a key priority for Armenia. Promoting and diversifying SMEs' access to finance and boosting their export capacities will be important with a view to supporting jobs, growth and innovation, and, more broadly, for the country's sustainable socioeconomic recovery.

Priority will be given to access to financing schemes for greening of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), particularly those in the regions and those led by women. The large Armenian diaspora offers important economic opportunities for the country, and this will be leveraged for impact investment and trade networks. The EU will aim to leverage IFI and private-sector funding that would allow it to support 30 000 Armenian SMEs and self-employed people.

*The overall support for SMEs is estimated up to €500 million. The EU will use various instruments to support the implementation of this flagship in cooperation with IFIs: grants, loans, guarantees, and blending.*

### **Flagship 2: Boosting connectivity and socio-economic development – the north-south corridor**

Strengthening connectivity and transport corridors is high on the national agenda. Improving the transport infrastructure will improve connections between the different regions of the country, and with neighboring countries and the EU.

Building on the indicative extension of the TEN-T core network agreed on in 2017 and ongoing works across the network, EU investment will focus on remaining segments of the north-south highway (as identified in the Indicative TEN-T Investment Action Plan), including further supportive infrastructure and logistics. Improved links will boost trade and value chain integration and improve access to services and markets, thus enhancing Armenia's resilience and reducing vulnerability. Investments will include planned work on the Sisian/Kajaran section of road, including a tunnel that is expected to cut travel time substantially.

*The overall investment is estimated up to €600 million. The EU will use various instruments to support the implementation of this flagship in cooperation with IFIs: grants, loans, guarantees, and blending.*

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

**Flagship 3: Investing in digital transformation, innovation, science and technology**

Armenia has strong digital potential, with the sector growing by around 20% in recent years, and digitalization has been highlighted as a cross-cutting issue. Additional support is required to fully unleash its potential. Resilient digital transformation of the public sector is also crucial for Armenia's long-term competitiveness. The EU has supported e-governance in the past, but further investments are needed to expand public service delivery to regional and municipal levels.

The EU will provide further support for a nationwide roll-out of e-government, the development of digital skills, and tech start-ups, and improve information and communication technologies (ICT) companies' access to financing, thus boosting competitiveness and employment.

*The overall investment is estimated up to €300 million. The EU will use various instruments to support the implementation of this flagship in cooperation with IFIs: grants, loans, guarantees, and blending.*

**Flagship 4: Building resilience in the southern regions**

The Government of Armenia has pinpointed decentralization and support for the country's southern regions as a priority. The Syunik region, in particular, needs support to tackle chronic underdevelopment, poor links and a deteriorating environment. It was particularly affected by recent hostilities, and it has witnessed an influx of displaced people in need of housing, jobs and access to education.

Building on experiences in the northern regions, and taking account of the local needs, the EU will invest in a holistic approach to strengthen the Syunik region's resilience and help with sustainable socio-economic recovery. Priority sectors could include: housing, infrastructure, tourism, agriculture, education, health, renewable energy and support for local SMEs.

*The overall investment is estimated up to €80 million. The EU will use various instruments to support the implementation of this flagship in cooperation with IFIs: grants, loans, guarantees, and blending.*

**Flagship 5: Investing in a green Yerevan – energy efficiency and green buses**

The Government of Armenia is committed to a green transition. In order to enhance the people's quality of life, Yerevan's air quality, waste management and energy situation need to be addressed. The EU and IFIs are ready to invest in a 'smart-city' package that will bring energy efficient solutions to the city, together with green mobility and investments in waste management.

Energy efficiency investments will cover internal lighting and energy infrastructure, heating, cooling and ventilation systems, and on-site use of renewable energy sources in key public buildings. Investment in smart mobility and urban transport, such as the ‘green buses for Yerevan’ initiative, will improve and modernize public transport in the capital. Significant quality-of-life investments, including in the city’s waste management capacities, are also in the pipeline.

*The overall investment is estimated up to €120 million. The EU will use various instruments to support the implementation of this flagship in cooperation with IFIs: grants, loans, guarantees, and blending.*

On July 9, in Yerevan the EU Commissioner for Neighborhood and Enlargement Oliver Varhelyi announced that the new aid package will total 2.6 billion euros over five years, or \$3.1 billion. This was 62 percent more than previously promised in an earlier draft proposal. This is thought to be in the wake of fair elections and as the country tries to recover from defeat in the war with Azerbaijan of the previous year.<sup>6</sup>

At the time of writing this paper, there is no public information about the flagship initiatives to which the additional funding will be directed. The experts in the field are hinting at the following two possible flagships:

**Flagship 6: Support for accessibility to education in Armenia.<sup>7</sup>**

**Flagship 7: Construction of water dams, irrigation water systems and waste disposal sites.<sup>8</sup>**

The potential and high-priority action directions under each flagship are presented below.

Flagship 1: Supporting a sustainable and innovative and competitive economy – direct support for 30 000 SMEs

1.1 Young people’s involvement in entrepreneurship and social engagement.<sup>9</sup>

Armenian youth and other stakeholders identified a range of unmet needs and gaps in information and services that would enable them to contribute more meaning-

<sup>6</sup> A. Mejlumyan, “Armenia Gets Aid Boost from EU”, *Eurasianet*, July 15, 2021. At: <https://eurasianet.org/armenia-gets-aid-boost-from-eu>, last accessed November 19, 2021.

<sup>7</sup> A. Wiktorin, “Explaining the €2.6 Billion EU Package for Armenia”, *Civilnet*, September 29, 2021. At: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b5mAYM6x3i4>, last accessed November 19, 2021.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *World Youth Report: Youth and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, United Nations Publications 2018. At: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/youth/wp-content/uploads/sites/21/2018/12/WorldYouthReport-2030Agenda.pdf>, last accessed November 19, 2021.

fully to the development of their country. Respondents identified skill-critical needs to support youth livelihoods as well as performance gaps in the education system and the labor market. While some of the momentum from the revolution has ebbed, about half of the youth respondents also demonstrated a willingness to engage in civic and political activities if it would be productive.<sup>10</sup>

## 1.2 Enhancing women's economic empowerment through entrepreneurship and business leadership.<sup>11</sup>

In its cooperation with Armenia, the EU is driving real change by strengthening women in business, providing opportunities for quality education and promoting a fair society.<sup>12</sup>

## 1.3 Promotion of energy efficiency.<sup>13</sup>

The EU4Energy Programme, funded by the European Union, has been working with Armenia since 2016, helping to strengthen legislative and regulatory frameworks, improving the quality of data and statistics, and supporting evidence-based policymaking. The support of the International Energy Agency, Energy Charter and the Energy Community Secretariat will lay the groundwork for the country's energy security, sustainable energy and energy markets in the years to come.<sup>14</sup>

Promoting energy efficiency and renewable energy solutions is a high priority.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Making Cents International, *Armenia Youth Situation Analysis*, The United States Agency for International Development (USAID), October 2019. At: [https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/PA00WBW7.pdf](https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00WBW7.pdf), last accessed November 19, 2021.

<sup>11</sup> W. Adema, N. Ali et al., *Enhancing Women's Economic Empowerment Through Entrepreneurship and Business Leadership in OECD Countries. Background Report to China Development Research Foundation Project Enhancing Women's Economic Empowerment Through Entrepreneurship and Leadership in the Midst of China's Urbanization*, OECD, 2014. At: [https://www.oecd.org/gender/Enhancing%20Women%20Economic%20Empowerment\\_Fin\\_1\\_Oct\\_2014.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/gender/Enhancing%20Women%20Economic%20Empowerment_Fin_1_Oct_2014.pdf), last accessed November 19, 2021.

<sup>12</sup> European Commission, *Stronger Women: Stronger Armenia – Factsheet*, March 7, 2021. At: <https://euneighbourseast.eu/news-and-stories/publications/stronger-women-stronger-armenia-factsheet/>, last accessed November 19, 2021.

<sup>13</sup> International Energy Agency, *Energy Efficient Buildings in Armenia: A Roadmap. Insights and Pathways for Better Buildings in Armenia: 2020–2040*, Paris: IEA 2020. At: <https://www.iea.org/reports/energy-efficient-buildings-in-armenia-a-roadmap>, last accessed November 19, 2021.

<sup>14</sup> EU Neighbours East, *EU4Energy in Armenia*. At: <https://euneighbourseast.eu/news-and-stories/publications/eu4energy-in-armenia/>, last accessed November 19, 2021.

<sup>15</sup> UN–Armenia Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2021–2025. At: <https://unsdg.un.org/resources/un-sustainable-development-cooperation-framework-armenia-2021-2025-final-draft>, last accessed November 19, 2021.

#### 1.4 Improving competitiveness of export-oriented industries in Armenia.<sup>16</sup>

The lessons learned from the implications of the global crisis for the Armenian economy led the Government of Armenia to refine its approach to economic development policy. The business environment, the market structure, and the incentive pattern had not fostered reallocation of resources into more productive areas or the emergence of internationally competitive products and services.<sup>17</sup>

#### 1.5 Promotion of smart and intensive agriculture.<sup>18</sup>

There are a number of interesting opportunities in Armenia's agricultural sector, despite the country's difficult geographical position, distance from other markets, and a relatively small domestic market with limited buying power. The government has placed a great deal of emphasis on developing the sector, to include devising policy reforms and extending benefits such as subsidized lending facilities and tax and customs exemptions. Armenia is eager to introduce more modern technology to move agricultural products up the value chain, increase exports (especially to Europe), and expand economic opportunities for rural populations. Armenia's inability to satisfy local demand for some foodstuffs, notably wheat, through domestic production alone, means securing investment is also important for ensuring food security. Wine stands out as an exciting opportunity, given the combination of Armenia's indigenous varieties, moderate land and labor costs, favorable climatic conditions, and excellent terroir.<sup>19</sup>

#### 1.6 Improvement, modernization and promotion of development programs in the field of agriculture.<sup>20</sup>

#### 1.7 Promotion of organic agriculture produce.<sup>21</sup>

#### 1.8 Promotion of standardization and automation of accounting and internal processes of enterprises.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>16</sup> World Bank Group, *Republic of Armenia: Export-Led Industrial Development Strategy: Implementation Review and Recommendations on New Toolset*, Washington, DC 2015. At: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/22273>, last accessed November 19, 2021.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> A. Melkonyan, "Climate Change Impact on Water Resources and Crop Production in Armenia", *Agricultural Water Management*, vol. 161 (2015), pp. 86–101.

<sup>19</sup> International Trade Administration, *Armenia – Country Commercial Guide*, September 16, 2021. At: <https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/armenia-agriculture>, last accessed November 19, 2021.

<sup>20</sup> A. Melkonyan, "Climate Change Impact...".

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> U.S. Department of State, *2021 Investment Climate Statements: Armenia*, July 21, 2021. At: <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-investment-climate-statements/armenia/>, last accessed November 19, 2021.

### 1.9 Promotion of corporate governance and access to capital markets for enterprises.<sup>23</sup>

Major pillars of corporate governance in Armenia include the Law on Joint Stock Companies, the Law on Banks and Banking Activity, the Law on Securities Market, and a Corporate Governance Code. International observers note inconsistencies in this legislation and generally rate corporate governance practices as weak to fair. Specific areas for potential improvement cited by the local business community include improving internal and external auditing for firms, enhancing the powers of independent directors on company boards, and boosting shareholders' rights. Armenia has outlined commitments to corporate governance reforms, including with regard to mandatory audits, accounting, and financial reporting, within the context of an ongoing Stand-By Arrangement with the International Monetary Fund.<sup>24</sup>

### 1.10 Modernization of quality infrastructure.

### 1.11 Modernization of quality assurance state monitoring mechanisms.

Flagship 2: Boosting connectivity and socio-economic development – the north-south corridor.<sup>25</sup>

2.1 Construction of a 60-km section of the north-south road corridor from Sisian to Kajaran.

2.2 Construction of Kajaran Tunnel for the north-south road corridor.

2.3 Construction of a 175-km section of the north-south road corridor from Artashat to Sisian.

2.4 Construction of a 37-km section of the north-south road corridor from Gyumri to Bavra (border of Georgia).

2.5 Construction of a 23-km section of the north-south road corridor to bypass Gyumri.

The construction of this highly important strategic road will ensure easier traffic from the southern border of Armenia to the Georgian border and up to Black Sea ports and will allow passenger and cargo transportation in accordance with European standards. The highway will also provide serious development opportunities for all communities from the north to the south of Armenia.

Project implementation will result in the following outcomes:

- Improved road corridor in compliance with international standards;
- Four-lane Category 1 road on Yerevan-Gyumri and Yerevan-Ararat sections;

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Government of the Republic of Armenia, *Programme of the Government of the Republic of Armenia 2021–2026*, 2021. At: <https://www.gov.am/am/gov-program/>, last accessed November 19, 2021.

- Other road sections meeting international standards with the possibility to be widened to four-lane roads in the future;
- Efficient and safe road corridor traffic management.

Flagship 3: Investing in digital transformation, innovation, science and technology.

3.1 Improving internet connectivity for Armenia.

3.2 Establishment of a technological university in Armenia.

3.3 Establishment of technological centers (TUMO, Armat Laboratories).

3.4 Establishment of a center for cybersecurity and data science.

Armenia's economy is heavily reliant on domestic demand, which is itself driven by remittances that support local construction and consumption. Armenia will need to shift to an export-led strategy if it is to move from middle-income to high-income status. Because Armenia is a landlocked country with comparatively high trading costs in physical goods, high-tech digital exports will continue to be key to Armenia's growth.<sup>26</sup>

Flagship 4: Building resilience in the southern regions.<sup>27</sup>

4.1 Renovation of the bridge in Kajaran city.

4.2 Implementing solar energy heating for the schools of the region that do not have access to natural gas.

4.3 Capital renovation of intercommunity roads.

4.4 Modernization of the drinking water supply system.

4.5 Construction of roads for access to new pastures for cattle.

4.6 Construction of housing for displaced people.

4.7 Establishment of food-processing businesses.

4.8 Development of the waste management system in the region.

4.9 Promotion of intensive agriculture in the region.

Flagship 5: Investing in a green Yerevan – energy efficiency and green buses.<sup>28</sup>

5.1 Reforms in the public transport system.

5.2 Promotion of energy efficiency.

5.3 Waste management system improvements.

5.4 “Smart city” program.

5.5 Rehabilitation and modernization of the metro system.

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<sup>26</sup> World Bank Group, *Realizing Armenia's High-Tech Potential*, Washington, DC 2020. At: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/33027>, last accessed November 19, 2021.

<sup>27</sup> Government of the Republic of Armenia, *Programme of the Government...*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*



Flagship 6: Support to accessibility to education in Armenia.<sup>29</sup>

6.1 Construction and renovation of 500 kindergartens.

6.2 Construction and renovation of 300 schools.

Flagship 7: Construction of water dams, irrigation water systems and waste disposal sites.

7.1 Construction of water dams.

7.2 Construction of waste disposal sites.

## Summary and recommendations

Transforming the EaP economies to make them more resilient and integrated has become even more urgent in the context of the post-COVID socio-economic recovery. The plan is directly in line with the long-term policy objectives for EaP policy beyond 2020 as outlined in the Joint Communication of 18 March 2020, which specifically identified investments in access to finance and support to SMEs and start-ups, in the Trans-European Transport Network, in renewable energy and enhanced energy efficiency, and in environmental and digital transition.<sup>30</sup>

The 2.6-billion-euro investment plan package will play a significant role in improving and modernizing the Armenian economy, making it more open and accessible, with more opportunities for entrepreneurship, social and economic growth and regional cooperation.

The following recommendations should be considered when working on implementing the above investment plan:

- The success of the investment plan will enhance Armenia-EU relations, and catalyze the efforts towards deepening the friendly relations and expanding partnership with the EU, its member states and other European countries.
- The successful implementation of the investment will establish Armenia's image of a reliable economic partner and player in the region and will boost further investments from other counterparties.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> European Commission, *Stronger Women: Stronger Armenia – Factsheet*, March 7, 2021. At: <https://euneighbourseast.eu/news-and-stories/publications/stronger-women-stronger-armenia-factsheet/>, last accessed January 3, 2022.

- The scale of the investment plan is huge and maximum effort should be made by the Government of Armenia to ensure there is enough capacity to absorb it.
- To ensure efficient implementation of the economic and investment plan, the Government of Armenia should make sure to include the best talent available in the country and the diaspora.
- The effective realization of the investment plan would have positive impacts for the political stability of the country.

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