

EaP Think Bridge

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Eastern Partnership monthly analytical digest

The Assembly of Changes of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum

This time the Annual Assembly was different in terms of both its format and content, defining and shaping this event for the future.



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EaP Think Bridge is a platform uniting expert communities in the countries of Eastern Partnership region to fill the gap in distributing analytical products for stakeholders

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Year of change in the Eastern Partnership

The new 2019 should be a year of change, both in the partner states and in the region as a whole. A series of elections can completely change the political reality. And the 10th anniversary of the Eastern Partnership is an occasion not only for celebrating, but also for defining new goals.

Civil society should actively join the search for these new horizons for the Eastern Partnership beyond 2020. What new tools for participation in decision-making within? the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum received, what changed in the Forum itself and what other accents were put during the unusual it its form and content annual Assembly, analyzed Gennady Maksak.

What shifts should be expected in the region after the change of power in Georgia and Armenia? What will the elections bring in Moldova, Ukraine and Belarus, where the campaigns are in full swing? The results of year 2018 are summarized in our traditional reviews of events in each of the six partner countries.

In the meantime, the joint staff working document “20 EaP deliverables until 2020” remains the main roadmap in relations with European partners. And further ambitions will largely depend on the implementation of this “homework assignment”. How Ukraine fulfills the provisions of the document regarding gender equality is studied by Natalia Chermoshentseva.

Olga Chizhova

Editor-in-Chief of the EaP Think Bridge Digest



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Armenia's new political reality

Richard Giragosian, Regional Studies Center (Yerevan, Armenia)

After the successful ouster of Armenia's former president turned prime minister and the subsequent coming to power of acting Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan in April-May, the election of a new parliament in early December affirmed the country's new political reality. With a sweeping political landslide, Pashinyan's My Step party garnered an overwhelming 88 seats in the new 132-seat parliament, while in contrast, the former ruling Republican party was unable to even meet the five percent threshold for representation. Pashinyan, who resigned in October in order to trigger the new election, benefited from a still high wave of popularity, coupled with the absence of any real challenge from other parties.



Voter turnout was only 48.6%, a serious 12% decline from the last parliamentary election held in April 2017.

Photo by Photolure

DOMESTIC POLICY

Armenian parliamentary election

The results from the 9 December extraordinary parliamentary elections dramatically altered the Armenian political landscape and cemented gains of acting Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's My Step alliance, which got an impressive 70.4% of the vote. For the former ruling Republican Party, the vote was a sound reminder of their sudden loss of credibility and popularity, as the once-dominant party ended a decade in power with a mere 4.7% of the vote, just short of meeting the five-percent minimum threshold to retain the presence in the new parliament.

Placing a distant second, the one-time second largest force, the Prosperous Armenia Party, was able to return to parliament with securing 8.3% of the vote, just ahead of the Bright Armenia Party, with 6.4% of the vote. Based on the outcome for the newly enlarged 132-seat parliament, only three parties will be represented in the new parliament, with the Pashinyan bloc holding 88 seats, another 26 seats for Prosperous Armenia and

Only three parties will be represented in the new parliament, with the Pashinyan bloc holding 88 seats, another 26 seats for Prosperous Armenia and Bright Armenia with 18 seats

Bright Armenia with 18 seats.

While the Prosperous Armenia party formally remains allied with Pashinyan's bloc, the Bright Armenia party, which was once an integral partner of Pashinyan's former three-party opposition "Exit" coalition, announced plans to be the only opposition party in the new parliament, which is due to be convened in early January.

Although the election was in stark contrast to earlier contests that were consistently denounced as neither free nor fair and marred by widespread voting irregularities, this election stood out as demonstrably improved, according to both domestic and international observers. Nevertheless, voter turnout was only 48.6%, a serious 12% decline from the last parliamentary election held in April 2017 and suggesting that voter interest

in the race declined, despite the pronounced popularity of acting Prime Minister Pashinyan and his political bloc.

ECONOMY

Conflicting details over reported new Armenia-Russian gas deal

After a bilateral meeting with Russian President Putin on 31 December in Moscow, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan announced a new agreement on the prices of Armenian imports of Russian natural gas. According to Pashinyan, the Armenian national gas distribution network, which is owned by Gazprom, will pay a higher price for Russian gas imports, although he stressed that the end price for gas will remain unchanged for consumers as a result of "our certain internal adjustments."

On the sidelines of the presidential meeting, Gazprom Chairman Alexei Miller and Armenian Deputy Prime Min-

ister Mher Grigorian signed a deal raising the wholesale gas price from \$150 to \$165 per thousand cubic meters, but noted that Gazprom will continue negotiations with the Armenian government on "the structure of internal gas tariffs."

The Gazprom-Armenia network paid its parent company \$150 per thousand cubic meters under a previous, now expired Russian-Armenian deal. Gazprom cut the wholesale price for Armenia from about \$190 to \$165 per thousand cubic meters in 2015 and again to \$150 in 2016. But in a confusing and seemingly contradictory report by Russian energy officials, the new agreement will impose a \$15 increase, suggesting that the Armenian government may be forced to subsidize the difference.

FOREIGN POLICY

Foreign Ministry appointments

In one of the slowest government ministries to institute personnel changes after the change of government, two key deputy foreign ministers were appointed on December 28. Two Armenian ambassadors, to Sweden and the United States, Artak Apitonyan and Grigor Hovhannissian respectively, were promoted to the posts of deputy foreign ministers, with several lesser diplomatic appointments for several new ambassadors also announced. Two

former deputy foreign ministers, Ashot Hovakimyan and Karen Nazaryan, were also named as Armenia's ambassadors to the Czech Republic and the Holy See (the seat of Vatican).

Cautious over U.S. sanctions, Armenia seeks to deepen ties to Iran

According to a statement released by the Armenian Foreign Ministry, on December 27 Armenia's Ambassador Artashes Tumanian met with Iranian Deputy Foreign Min-

ister Abbas Araghchi to discuss plans to deepen bilateral ties and develop trade and economic cooperation. Prior to the meeting, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinian stated on December 22 that Armenia plans to “deepen not only economic but also political relations with Iran” despite the challenge of U.S. sanctions that have been re-imposed by the Trump Administration.

That concern comes in the wake of the October visit to the region by U.S. National Security Adviser John Bolton, who pressed the Armenian government in its relationship with Iran. More specifically, the U.S. official put Armenian officials on notice that unlike the past, Washington would now place greater scrutiny on Armenian-Iranian ties. He further asked for Armenian support to apply “maximum pressure” in order to “squeeze Iran” by enforcing tightened sanctions “vigorously”. But with two of its four borders closed, Armenia’s relationship with Iran is an essential consideration, only bolstered by the fact that

Armenian trade with Iran soared by some 40%, reaching \$297 million for the first ten months of 2018.

Russia warns Armenia to resist “U.S. interference”

On December 19 Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Grigory Karasin warned that the United States was actively interfering in Armenia’s internal affairs and stressed that Moscow expects “that the current leadership of Armenia, which received a necessary mandate in the parliamentary elections, will have the courage to resist the unhidden external blackmail and pressure and will defend its sovereign right to independently make decisions based on national interests”. Karasin further added that the “tragic fate” of Ukraine and Georgia, which he said were “let down” by the West, “must serve as a warning” to Armenia.

Investors leave Azerbaijan?

Sevinc Aliyeva, Center for Legal Studies (Baku, Azerbaijan)

In December, President Ilham Aliyev approved the state budget for 2019. Although revenues increased by 3.5% compared to 2018, the state budget deficit is expected to widen. In accordance with the new state budget, the country's tax code experienced changes in order to stimulate economic activity, reduce "shadow economy", and increase transparency. Foreign policy agenda of the country was dominated by the meeting between Azerbaijan and Armenia during the OSCE Ministerial Council Meeting in Milan. The joint and unilateral statements gave a positive signal about the future talks.



Top diplomats of Azerbaijan and Armenia held negotiations at the OSCE Ministerial Council Meeting in Milan.

DOMESTIC POLICY

What has changed in taxes?

Following the country's state budget for 2019, Azerbaijan's tax code has been changed. The new tax code

changes the payments for state social insurance between [an employer and an employee](#). Employers are not obliged to pay tax on salaries for seven years, which may moti-

vate them to sign contracts with employees. On the other hand, private sector employees, who are not working in the oil and gas industry and earn less than 8000 manats (about \$4700) will be exempt from paying taxes.

Good news for the individual entrepreneurs who have small businesses operating in the non-oil sector is that the tax rate for them has decreased from 4 to 2%.

In order to encourage non-cash payments and increase the rate of credit/ debit card usage, discounts have been

introduced to merchants who use point-of-sale (POS) terminal. Moreover, when making non-cash payments, some part of the value-added tax will be returned to the customers.

Previously agricultural producers operating in Baku paid 4% tax, while the ones in the regions paid 2%. According to the new tax code, this taxation system will be unified to single 2% tax payment regardless of the geographical region.

ECONOMY

Why do Exxon and Chevron seek to leave Azerbaijan?

The US giants Exxon Mobil and Chevron seek to sell their shares in the Azeri-Chirag-Gunashli field in the Caspian Sea. They have 6.8% and 9.57% stakes in the field, respectively. Exxon expects to secure \$2 billion from the sale of its shares. Chevron has also [decided to launch the sale of its 8.9% interest in the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan \(BTC\) pipeline](#).

The question is why these companies, who have been in Azerbaijan over a quarter of a century since “the Contract of the Century”, want to stop their support to Azerbaijan.

These companies were among five US companies that supported Azerbaijan to launch its oil and gas industry after the collapse of the Soviet Union. While Exxon Mobil has not commented on the sale, Chevron officials relate this decision to the company’s regular review to make sure that its portfolio is in alignment with the company’s long-term goals. [“As part of this review, we have decided to initiate the process of marketing, with a view to a potential sale, of our Chevron affiliate interests in the Azeri Chirag and deep-water Gunashli project and the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline,” officials said.](#) The reason behind Exxon’s exit may be the fact that in recent years company has increasingly

The US giants Exxon Mobil and Chevron seek to sell their shares in the Azeri-Chirag-Gunashli field in the Caspian Sea

focused on working within the US to develop shale fields and it also plans to invest in newly discovered oil fields in Guyana.

The budget deficit is projected to widen

Azerbaijani parliament passed the state budget for 2019 and on December 22 President Ilham Aliyev approved the budget. Next year’s budget is based on the oil price estimate of \$60/barrel. Gross domestic product (GDP) is expected to grow by 3.6%, 45% of which comes from the oil and gas sector. This sector accounts for the 75% of the state revenue which is forecasted to total 23.168 billion Azerbaijani manats (\$13.61 billion). Expenditures, on the other hand, are expected to [amount to 25.190 billion manats \(\\$14.80 billion\)](#). Revenues have an increase of 3.5% compared to 2018, while expenditures [experience 7.3% increase](#). The economy of the country is expected to grow by 2% in comparison with 2018. Annual inflation is projected to decrease to 3-4% from 6.1% in 2018.

According to the state budget for 2019, the budget deficit will widen to 2.022 billion manats, which is approximately equal to \$1.2 billion and comprises 2.5% of GDP from 951 million manats or 1.3% of GDP in 2018. If the oil export prices are higher than expected, this deficit can be covered.

FOREIGN POLICY

What was agreed upon in Milan between Armenia and Azerbaijan?

On December 5 during the OSCE Ministerial Council Meeting in Milan, top diplomats of Azerbaijan and Armenia, the Foreign Minister of Azerbaijan Elmar Mammadyarov and Acting Foreign Minister of Armenia Zohrab Mnatsakanyan [held a meeting together with Minsk Group co-chair countries](#). The Russian Federation, the US, and France praised the significant reduction in ceasefire vio-

lations and ministers of the two countries agreed upon working intensively to find a long-term and peaceful solution.

After the meeting, the statement of Mammadyarov has been a wide-discussion topic. [“I think that at the last meeting with my Armenian counterpart in Milan, we reached an understanding for the first time in a long while,” he said.](#) The minister mentioned the importance of achieving tangible results. On the other hand, Armenian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Anna Naghdalyan not-

ed that “[*It has been a long time since such an agreement was reached*](#)”. These statements gave a positive signal about the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

A joint statement was made by the ministers of the two countries and the heads of the delegations of the OSCE Minsk Group co-chair countries. According to the joint statement, all parties agreed to continue working towards long-term peace, the co-chairs called on parties

to take concrete steps to prepare the nations for peace and the next meeting is scheduled to January 2019.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova expressed Russia’s willingness for the next round of talks. When commenting on the joint statement, she added that “[*for it to turn into agreements it needs to be worked out*](#)”.

Belarus: The Kremlin's ultimatum

Arseny Sivitsky, Center for Strategic and Foreign Policy Studies (Minsk, Belarus)

In December, the tensions of the past years in relations between Russia and Belarus entered a new stage growing into an open conflict. The Kremlin openly declared its ambitions of integrating Belarus. It conditioned discounts for oil and gas on deeper integration between Russia and Belarus within the Union State.



The talks between Presidents Putin and Lukashenko held on December 29.
Photo by president.by

FOREIGN POLICY

Independence for cheap fuels

On December 6, Belarus President Aleksandr Lukashenko and Russian President Vladimir Putin had a loud dispute over the unfair price for Russian gas and transit rates through Belarus at the meeting of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council in Saint Petersburg. President Lukashen-

ko claimed that the Union State could not function in the context of inequality between partners and economic players in it. "No equal conditions, no union", he said. [Vladimir Putin responded that](#) "this takes time and a different level of integration between our countries".

Russia's Vice Premier Dmitri Kozak took President

Putin's line when he voiced [the Kremlin's ultimatum in a harsher form](#) on December 11. He refused to discuss discounts for gas and compensation of Minsk's losses caused by the oil tax change with Belarus Vice Premier Igor Liashenko "until principled decisions on further integration of Russia and Belarus within the Union State" are reached. When the Union State Council of Ministers met in Brest on December 13, Russia's Prime Minister Dmitri Medvedev stated that [Russia was ready for further integration with Belarus](#) within the boundaries established in the Union State Treaty of December 8, 1999.

Belarus President Lukashenko responded to this ultimatum by saying that [sovereignty was sacred for Belarus](#) and he would not [surrender it for a barrel of oil](#). Moscow's response to this statement was swift as Anton Siluanov, Russia's First Vice Premier and Minister of Finance, said several hours later that [Minsk should not count on compensation of its losses](#)

2019 will see stronger comprehensive pressure from the Kremlin to force Belarus into a deep integration

[from the oil tax change](#) (the assessment of Belarus's direct loss caused by the change in the Russia's tax code in 2019 stands at US \$300mn).

The talks between Presidents Putin and Lukashenko on December 25 and 29 failed to resolve the disputes between the two countries. It looks like the Russian side just used them to voice its ultimatum yet again, and that ultimatum seems unacceptable to President Lukashenko. The only visible consequence of the talks is the decision

[to establish a working group with government representatives](#) tasked with developing proposals on deeper integration and solving disputes. This is not the first time a group like this is set up. This time, however, Minsk's strategy to talk itself out of it will hardly prove successful.

President Lukashenko called on the Belarusians to [strengthen statehood](#) in his New Year speech.

DOMESTIC POLICY

Independence and sovereignty above all

Minsk could not leave Russia's harsh statements questioning Belarus' sovereignty unanswered. President Lukashenko's main message implied that [the situation in Belarus economy would not be catastrophic](#) even if no agreement was reached with Russia on the compensation of losses caused by the tax change. Belarus would be forced to change its domestic and foreign policy but would still develop as an independent state that makes its own choices on the vectors and priorities of development. At the same time, President Lukashenko demanded a switch to austerity in government spending and cut of any "non-productive" expenditures by government bodies, such as trips abroad to take part in conferences and similar costs.

This message served as a signal for other government players to speak on further relations with Russia. Aleksei Sytenkov, Deputy Head of the Pre-Trial Investigations Department at the Belarus State Border Committee, [marked a 20% increase in the number of illegal migration crimes in one year](#). Russian citizens from the North Caucasus regions are most often perpetrators or accomplices in these crimes. Belarus law enforcement entities have long

known about this. But they previously refrained from describing Russia as a source of criminality in Belarus, rather blaming it on western states.

Following the flag raising ceremony on December 20, Belarus Minister of Foreign Affairs Vladimir Makei spoke about [independence and sovereignty of the Belarus State as an unconditional priority for Belarus and its citizens](#). Even though the price of sovereignty is high, every citizen must contribute to strengthening it. He bluntly referred to the MFA's new raised flag as the "battle flag" signaling the decisive and principled position.

In the context of these developments, Belarus authorities have seriously embarked on restraining the spread of "satellites" from Russian operators, including NTV and Trikolor in Belarus. This is essentially a [restriction of access for the Russian propaganda](#). Those who install the antennas are facing criminal cases. None of the companies has a license for the distribution of mass media products in Belarus, but private individual entrepreneurs and small companies used to provide services installing satellite antennas and subscribing clients. As a result, many people in Belarus have access to "uncensored" versions of Russian TV channels while the officially broadcast Russian TV channels reach the Belarus audience with a significantly curtailed part of their content.

Reforms as a response to Russia's pressure

The escalating tensions in relations between Russia and Belarus have led to internal transformations in quite a few fields in Belarus politics. Apart from the change in the attitude of the Belarus leadership to Russia, these transformations mostly had to do with economic life. The board of the National Bank of Belarus has stated that [the establishment of a unified mint for the union of Belarus and Russia](#) is not currently discussed and can only be considered as the “helm of integration”. Pavel Kallaur, National Bank Board Chair, has spoken of a possible “crossover of inflation and devaluation processes” from Russia to Belarus. The Belarus authorities are thus preventively insuring themselves from economic difficulties in 2019 by preparing ground for blaming them on Russia.

The long-expected [abolition of the decree on the campaign against fake entrepreneurial entities \(No 488\) came into effect on January 1, 2019](#). At the same time, the Chamber of Representatives at the Belarus National Assembly passed a package of amendments in the crim-

inal code to decriminalize many economic violations or to introduce seriously lighter responsibility for them. The article on fake entrepreneurship was removed from the Criminal Code. The amended article on illegal entrepreneurial activity only entails punishment for unlicensed activity. Other important innovations include the narrowing down of the scope where general confiscation of property applies (special confiscation remains in place as a punishment for the property and the revenues received from criminal activity), and lighter criminal liability for the violations committed as part of legal economic activity.

The National Bank's abolition of [the authorization procedure for the opening of bank accounts for individuals abroad](#) is another revolutionary measure. Belarus citizens can now open and use these accounts without the regulator's approval.

2019 will thus see stronger comprehensive pressure from the Kremlin to force Belarus into a deep integration. Resistance against this pressure on the domestic and international arena will become the main element of Belarus' politics. This will inevitably fuel escalation in relations with Russia.

Georgia: Opposition declares a boycott

Lasha Tughushi, Liberal Academy Tbilisi (Tbilisi, Georgia)

The President Salome Zurbashvili has already been inaugurated; however, opposition still rejects the election results.



President-elect Salome Zurbashvili's inauguration took place in the historical city of Telavi.

DOMESTIC POLICY

President “for all”

While a part of the opposition was trying to break through the police cordon, the new president-elect Salome Zurbashvili's inauguration was taking place in the historical city of Telavi. Only small groups were able to get into Telavi in order to protest. In the days to follow two political activists from both sides were detained: a representative of the opposition – for violent resistance to the police and a supporter of the new president – for assaulting a representative of the opposition.

Zurbashvili's emigrant ancestors came from Telavi. And even though the new president-elect did not enjoy the support of the local voters, she made a statement saying that

she is going to the city she lost in order to demonstrate her willingness to be a president for all citizens in the country including those who did not vote for her.

The president-elect has already moved in to a new, more modest and yet to be completely remodeled residence while already being criticized for another reason. As a result of hasty consultations with civil society representatives, Zurbashvili introduced three candidates for the head of the Central Election Commission (CEC) including the acting CEC head Tamar Zhvania. According to the opposition, she was “paid back” for her “objectivity” during presidential elections and deserved her re-election as CEC head for a new term.

Zurbashvili's opponents, the National Movement, do

not recognize the election results and have declared a boycott in the parliament. According to the new rules of the procedure, any party can declare a boycott based on their political beliefs.

“There is a special session on Saturday. Moreover, there will be two more sessions next week, which we will miss fully abiding with the rules of the procedure as a sign of political protest, therefore, yet another time stressing the fact that there is terror and political persecution in the country”, - says the United National Movement (UNM) statement.

The opposition did not spare even the General Secretary of the ruling party, mayor of Tbilisi Kakha Kaladze, who was making an annual report in Tbilisi Sakrebulo (the city council). Saakashvili's party, disappointed with the city budget project, obstructed and left as a sign of protest.

Yet it is obvious that the bipolar party system functioning in the country is rather problematic due to its high polarization. Other political powers are

Zurabishvili's opponents, the National Movement, do not recognize the election results and have declared a boycott in the parliament

necessary, a third power is needed. However, given the conditions of the radical political discourse, it is difficult to find a place for a new power in this political landscape.

The parliament majority is likely to make another New Year “gift” to the democratic society supporting judicial reforms. The members of parliament are planning to approve 10 judges for the Supreme Court of Georgia, introduced by the High Council of Justice. The People's Guard of Georgia, civil society, political opposition, and other members of the High Council of Justice (not judges) have declared a strong protest and called for Parliament not to make hasty decisions. The reason for this development is simple: these judges have long been severely criticized for their past. Furthermore, the selection procedure itself is not transparent and the

criteria are not clear. According to some experts, the parliament may postpone this decision until spring.

ECONOMY

Promising rankings

Georgia improved its performance in the Global Competitiveness Index by World Economic Forum 2018, taking the 66th place among 140 countries. The country was able to move a position up against last year. The most concerning findings from the World Economic Forum report included the weakness of the country's financial system and the possibility of implementing innovations in Georgia. Transparency as well as implementing information and communication technologies were named among Georgia's positive developments.

Georgia ranked 6th in Ease of Doing Business World Bank Doing Business-2019 ranking, and without a doubt, that is a serious achievement.

Moreover, in the Forbes Best Countries for Business ranking Georgia moved up to take the 44th place among 161 countries. Georgia improved its performance by 8 positions against last year.

“Georgia's performance in top rankings promotes a higher level of trust to the business climate in the country among those seeking to invest in Georgia”, said the country's business ombudsman.

FOREIGN POLICY

What has Russia got to do with Lugar?

It is yet another time that Georgia's Lugar biological laboratory was the center of attention of Russia's top authorities. The head of the federal service for the oversight of consumer protection and welfare Anna Popova started her briefing with pointing out a serious threat the Lugar laboratory located in the vicinity of Tbilisi poses to Russia. Ms. Popova also mentioned the events last summer, when Russian tourists including children developed acute enteric infections while traveling in Georgia. According to Anna Popova, Russian doctors believe that this incident

may have been related to genetically modified bacteria.

The Russian president Vladimir Putin has also mentioned the subject recently. When speaking during the session of the Valdai Club in Sochi, he said that biological weapons capable of causing genetic mutations are allegedly developed there.

Despite the Georgian side being very open and transparent on the issue and having invited experts to monitor the lab activities on multiple occasions, the frequent questioning of the laboratory activities by the Russian side continues. This spawns another line of questions and warnings regarding Russia's specific goals.

Moldova: Elections are coming

Sorin Sclearuc, Foreign Policy Association of Moldova (Chisinau)

As Moldova was getting ready for the winter holidays, preparations for the parliamentary elections scheduled for February 24 were in full swing too. ACUM (Now), the pro-European and anti-oligarchic bloc was formed, led by Maia Sandu, the head of the Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS), and Andrei Năstase, the head of Dignity and Truth Platform Party “DA”. Moldovan parties published lists of candidates by constituency demonstrating the faults of the mixed electoral system. For the fifth time now, Moldovan President Igor Dodon was suspended from office for yet another refusal to promulgate the laws proposed by the Parliament.



Maia Sandu and Andrei Năstase signed an agreement to form the ACUM bloc (Now) on December 16.
Photo by acum.md

DOMESTIC POLICY

Brace yourself, elections are coming

PAS's Maia Sandu and DA's Andrei Năstase signed an agreement to form the ACUM bloc (Now) on December 16. It positions itself as pro-European and anti-oligarchic.

Currently, the bloc is the main opposition force that is ready to compete with Igor Dodon's Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova and Vlad Plahotniuc's Democratic Party of Moldova.

“We are united by the desire to put the Republic of Mol-

dova on the right track, to give citizens a chance to have a decent life at home, and to do everything possible so that those who have left could come back. We are united by the commitment to build a truly democratic society where votes cannot be stolen or bought. We are united by the idea of building a democratic state that is able to protect us from all kinds of thieves, usurpers and corrupt officials”, Maia Sandu said.

Moldova’s President Igor Dodon was suspended from office in what is less than two months after the previous suspension. The head of state refused to promulgate a number of laws including the ones on transferring the territory of the former Republican Stadium to the US Embassy for the construction of its new premises and on the adoption of a new Media Code that monopolizes media space in the country in the President’s opinion. Also, Dodon did not agree with the

Opposition formed the pro-European and anti-oligarchic ACUM bloc

Labor Code amendment to introduce the celebration of the Day of Europe on May 9, the same day as Victory Day is marked.

On December 25, Igor Dodon met with Vadim Krasnoselsky, the leader of Transnistria. The Moldovan president noted the progress in the Transnistria dialogue on his social media account, and the implementation of 6 out of 8 provisions in the respective action plan. Dodon referred to the Russian peacekeepers in Transnistria as a factor of stability.

“There have been some provocations in that regard this year. But we managed to deal with everything in a joint effort without serious consequences, largely because the peacekeepers help maintain the good climate to ensure the right of Moldovan citizens to freely express their will during the parliamentary elections on February 24, 2019”, Igor Dodon said.

Energy expert Sergiu Tofilat said “This seems like a silent agreement between the suppliers. For consumers, competitive environment is ideal”. Tofilat believes that the entry of this law into force was intentionally postponed until March 1, so that gas and petroleum prices remained stable before the parliamentary elections while the suppliers would get a carte blanche to increase rates right after the vote.

Importantly, Chisinau saw protests in June 2018. Protesters then expressed their frustration with ANRE’s decision to raise petroleum price. Moldova’s Prime Minister Pavel Filip abolished this initiative. Meanwhile, the new law will allow the government to stave off the blame for the future fuel prices increase.

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ECONOMICS

New Year handouts

Along with the election race, a quiet “bribing” of citizens in the Republic of Moldova has begun. The Democratic Party uses administrative leverage to send letters ascribing to itself all accomplishments of the Cabinet of Ministers and promising a “New Year gift” of MDL600 (\$36) to all the pensioners whose pensions are under MDL2000 (\$117). According to the source, over 500 000 pensioners are going to receive it.

Beginning March 1, 2019 the National Agency for Energy Regulation (ANRE) will adopt a new methodology for calculating the price for oil products. According to it, companies will now set fuel prices.

FOREIGN POLICY

The dialogue continues

Prime Minister Pavel Filip met with U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs George Kent on December 5. Prime Minister Filip noted that Moldova-US relations are strategic and that US assistance is very important for the Republic of Moldova. He also noted that any problems can be solved with dialogue and compromise, and the Moldovan government is ready for it. “We are a team that wants and can change the situ-

ation in Moldova,” he added.

The US official said that his country supports the development of the Republic of Moldova into a democratic and prosperous country. At the same time, George Kent noted that the US supports Moldova in the process of solving external and internal problems, as well as in preventing risks of external interference during the elections in February. In this regard, Prime Minister Filip guaranteed that the government would do its best to make the elections free and transparent.

Ukraine: In the hope of new victories?

Sergiy Gerasymchuk, Foreign Policy Council “Ukrainian Prism”

December was a success in improving economic performance and cooperating with international financial institutions. It brought Ukraine a long-expected unification of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine, showing that Kyiv can count on the international partners. Meanwhile, there was no progress on the Russian issue. The conflict continues and is highly likely to intensify in 2019.



The historical agreement to establish the Unified Orthodox Church of Ukraine reached on December 15.

DOMESTIC POLICY

Church, land, and “friendship” with Russia

The uncontested top event of December and of 2018 was the Unification *Sobor* or Assembly of the Orthodox Churches of Ukraine. Following the lengthy negotiations at St. Sophia’s Cathedral on December 15, the representatives of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Kyiv Patriarchate and the Autocephalous Orthodox Church reached the historical agreement to establish the Unified

Orthodox Church of Ukraine. [They elected Metropolitan Epiphanius](#) as the new primate of the Church and adopted the Charter of the newly established Orthodox Church of Ukraine. [Simeon, Bishop of Vinnytsia and Bar, and Olexandr](#), Bishop of Prereiaslav-Khmelnysky and Vyshneve, both from the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchate, joined the Sobor of Ukrainian Churches. Importantly, this extraordinary event in the country’s spiritual life did not go unnoticed by the representatives of other religious communities. On behalf of muslims

of Ukraine, Mufti Sheikh Said Ismagilov sent greetings [to Orthodox Christians on establishing the Orthodox Church of Ukraine](#).

The “battles” around the newly established Orthodox Church of Ukraine continued when the Parliament passed bill No.5309 on December 20, [obliging the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchate to rename itself as the Russian Orthodox Church](#). The bill faced extremely negative reaction from the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchate which called on President Poroshenko [to veto the law](#). The President did not follow the clergy’s demands and [signed the document on December 22](#).

Following the lengthy negotiations at St. Sophia’s Cathedral on December 15, the historical agreement to establish the Unified Orthodox Church of Ukraine was reached

In addition to the Church Law, the Parliament churned out other decisions crucial for the country and the international community one after another. One was law No.0206 terminating [the Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership between Ukraine and the Russian Federation](#). It was adopted in early December and [signed by the President](#).

As 2018 drew to an end, Ukrainian legislators yet again extended the moratorium on the sale of agricultural land until January 2020.

They also obliged the Cabinet of Ministers [to draft and submit a bill on transactions with agricultural land by March 1, 2019](#).

ECONOMY

The rising numbers

[The IMF’s decision of December 18](#) confirming the \$3.9bln stand-by program for Ukraine was the most significant and expected event in December. The Ukraine-IMF cooperation program of 14 months focuses on the continuation of reforms to ensure the country’s macroeconomic stability. The important aspect of the program is that the inflation targets set by the National Bank of Ukraine were included as the targets of the [IMF program](#)

[for the first time in Ukraine’s history](#).

[On December 18](#), the World Bank confirmed its \$750mln guarantee to Ukraine to support the country’s policy aimed at facilitating reforms in the banking sector, fighting corruption, ensuring pensions, subsidies and the funding of health care.

The decisions of Ukraine’s international financial partners enabled the growth of foreign-exchange reserves to [over \\$20bln](#) for the first time since 2014 and significantly helped [strengthen hryvnia exchange rate to US dollar and euro](#).

FOREIGN POLICY

The echo of the Kerch Crisis

Russia’s aggressive actions in the Sea of Azov and the Black Sea keep Ukraine in the spotlight of the international agenda.

The House of Representatives in the US has thus introduced a bipartisan [resolution on Russia’s aggression in the Kerch Strait](#). NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said that there was no justification for Russia’s actions and called on it to release imprisoned Ukrainian sailors and the vessels [captured by Russia at the end of](#)

[November](#). Heiko Maas, Foreign Affairs Minister in Germany, echoed NATO Secretary General and [called for the diplomatic resolution of the conflict](#).

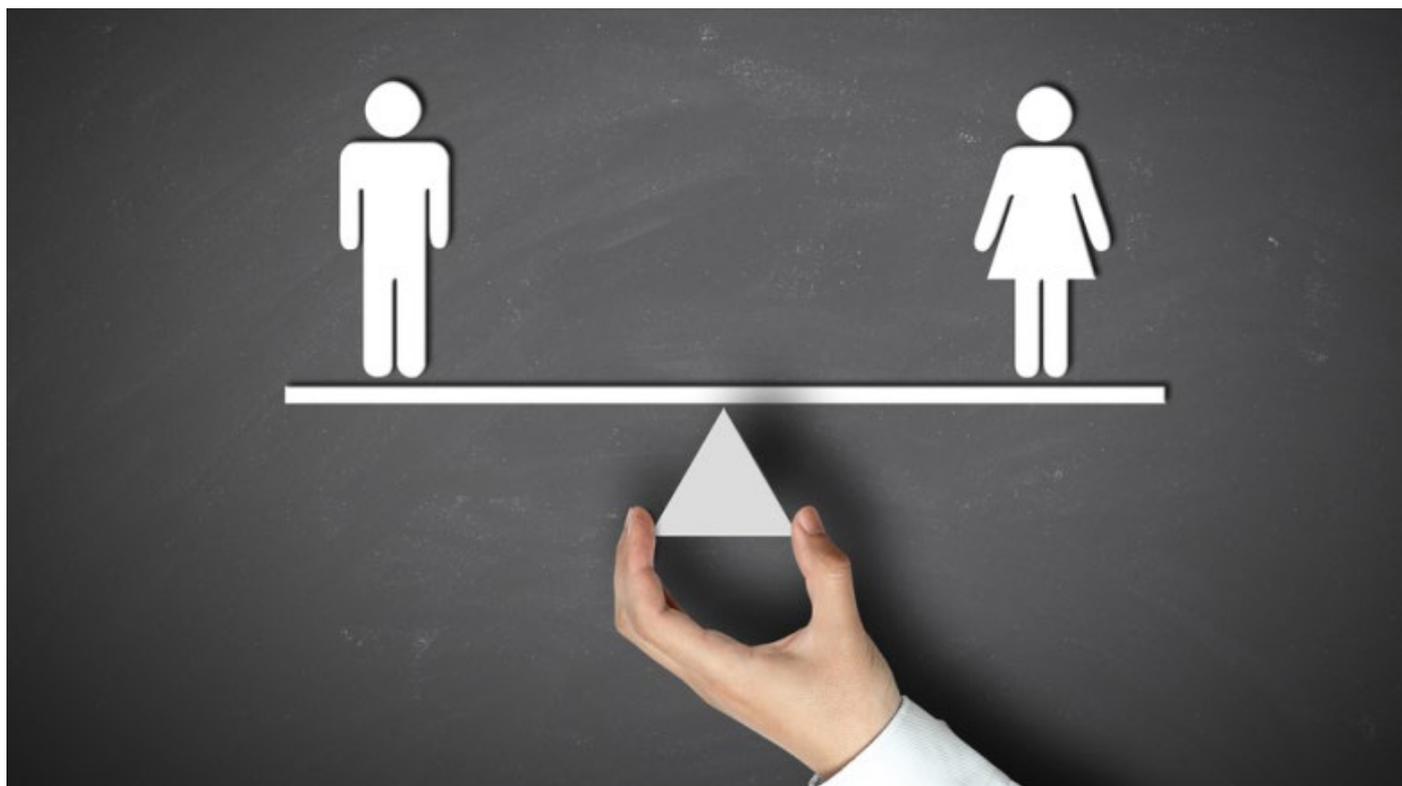
The UN General Assembly requested Russia to end the occupation of Crimea and [the militarization of the Black Sea-Azov region](#).

Notably, Lithuania — the friendliest country to Ukraine by many accounts — went even further, becoming the first EU member-state to launch a procedure of sanctioning Russia for its marine aggression against Ukraine and for [its violation of international law](#).

Are they equal? How Ukraine deals with gender equality issues

Natalia Chermoshentseva, Bureau of Gender Strategies and Budgeting (Kyiv, Ukraine)

Gender equality and anti-discrimination campaign remain on the EU's agenda. Equality between men and women is one of the key values for the EU and for its Eastern Partnership policy. How is Ukraine fulfilling the gender-oriented provisions of the Association Agreement and of the 20 Deliverables for 2020 working document?



The European Union (EU) encourages gender equality through legislation, monitoring, political leadership, raising awareness and project support. The EU's new 2016-2020 Gender Action Plan highlights the need for a change in institutional culture and the importance of using gender analysis to achieve equality and expand rights and opportunities.

The Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit in Brussels in November 2017 expressed commitment to

the promotion of equality between men and women and to the empowerment of women. It also focused on [“the importance of vibrant civil society and gender equality to release the full economic and social potential of their societies, improving economic development and strengthening social cohesion” \(it. 5\).](#)

The text of the Joint Declaration is based on 20 Deliverables for 2020. Focusing on key priorities and tangible

results, the framework [working document was revised in June 2017](#). It clearly lists the key vectors of development for Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries. Notably, the theme of gender equality is a cross-cutting deliverable in 20 Deliverables for 2020 rather than a separate subdeliverable. This signals understanding of how important the gender approach is in the spheres, outlined in the document. Among other things, special attention and efforts are to be focused on countering negative gender stereotypes, gender violence and inequality of pay to men and women.

It is thus important to evaluate the progress and to set the tasks for solving the challenges faced by the partner states in this area.

Where is Ukraine in this context?

The analysis of the Gender Equality and Non-Discrimination as a cross-cutting deliverable included evaluation of progress in the areas specified by the joint staff working document. Among others, these areas include the following ones:

- gender analysis of policies and programs implemented by EaP countries;
- availability/effectiveness of anti-discrimination laws and entities to ensure equality;
- ensuring opportunities for women within EU competitions for the youth;
- ensuring opportunities for women

in overcoming the gender gap in the access to finance.

Article 420 in Chapter 21 of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement (AA) writes that the AA should ensure the accomplishment of a number of goals, including gender equality and equal opportunities for women and men in employment, education, training, economy and society, and decision-making. It refers to some directives on gender equality. Article 419 of Chapter 21 also mentions gender equality under the title of [Cooperation on employment, social policy and equal opportunities](#).

Goal 1: Include gender issue in the state policy with accessible detailed data on gender issues in policy by every area and with better gender statistics available. Implement gender action plan.

Ukraine has made significant progress in adopting basic documents to strengthen the gender equality policy over the past eighteen months.

Gender issues were included in the Government Priority Action Plan for 2018 for the first time. In April 2018, the State Social Program to Ensure Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men Through 2021 was adopted. For the first time since Ukraine ratified the Convention in 1981, a National Action Plan (NAP) was developed and approved in September 2018 to implement recommendations of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women listed in the Concluding Observations on the Eighth

Periodic Report of Ukraine concerning its compliance with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women through 2021.

The revised National Action Plan for implementation of UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security until 2020 was assessed and adopted in September 2018. Importantly, Ukraine is the only country to have adopted the NAP while in a military conflict.

In addition to drafting and passing framework documents, Ukraine has abolished provisions that discriminated against women. The Ministry of Health abolished Decree No256 from December 29, 1993, with the list of arduous and hazardous work banned for women. These included food and tobacco production; fermentation facilities; railway and metro transport maintenance; work at automobile, sea and river transport; print production; agriculture and many more. We now live in

a different time and conditions of work have changed accordingly. The list was no longer compliant with Ukrainian and EU laws, or Ukraine's international commitments on gender policy.

Gender Budgeting in Ukraine is another good practice. Implemented with the support of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) since 2013, the project aims at enhancing economic efficiency and transparency of budget allocations taking into consideration the different needs of women and men. The project

works actively with the Ministry of Finance. Gender approach and gender-oriented budgeting have thus been integrated into the 2017-2020 [Strategy for the Reform of the Public Finance Management System](#).

Taras Shevchenko Kyiv National University has launched the first Master's Degree program for Gender Studies at its Sociology Department. The first group of students includes 8 women and 2 men.

The challenges in achieving this goal include implementing the practice to apply gender analysis in developing and monitoring public policies; integrating gender priorities into sectoral reforms; establishing an effective mechanism to implement the above documents on the ground; and test-driving the monitoring and evaluation of the documents adopted. Collection and application of disaggregated data by gender is an outstanding issue too.

Goal 2: Adopt anti-discrimination laws. Move forward in harmonization of respective laws. Assess performance of established authorities in charge of ensuring equality. Effectively monitor anti-discrimination laws.

The Law On Preventing and Combating Domestic Violence came into force. It introduced criminal responsibility for domestic violence. However, ratification of the Istanbul Convention remains essential. It is important for Ukraine's prospect of joining the EU, but more so for providing a comprehensive

Ukraine has made significant progress in adopting basic documents to strengthen the gender equality policy over the past eighteen months

approach to the fight with violence against women and for strengthening protection from discrimination. Unfortunately, the Istanbul Convention remains a tool of manipulation and only exists as a plan for now.

The national gender mechanism was strengthened. Implementation of gender equality was integrated into the function of the Vice Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration. The post of Government Ombudsman for Gender Policy was established, together with the support staff.

Ministries now have a practice of setting up separate sectors on gender equality and a respective network of contacts within different departments of one Ministry, The Ministry of the Internal Affairs being one example.

Still, human and financial resources remain quite limited, and the activities implemented are not comprehensive at the level of some ministries, oblasts and consolidated territorial communities.

Gender equality and non-discrimination are included in the 2018-2021 Communication Strategy of European Integration. Raising wider awareness of European values and rule of law standards, ensuring gender equality and overcoming discrimination of any form is one of the Strategy communication goals. However, education campaigns on discrimination and ongoing monitoring of anti-discrimination laws remain an important task for Ukraine. The installment of a clear mechanism of responsibility for discrimination, including discrimination by gender, remains essential.

Goal 3. Young women targeted in EU4Youth initiatives (75% of the target audience).

This goal is accomplishable. Gender equality is defined as a key deliverable of the Program (including through the Women in Development approach) in the second phase of the project. Young women are defined as a priority group. Equal participation is one of the Project indicators.

For Ukraine, the involvement of young women in competitions (50-75% of all target groups) remains an important issue, especially with regard to young women from the countryside.

Another important task is to increase the participation of young women and ensure mechanisms of their easy access to participation in the project competitions. Final conclusions can be drawn following the completion of the projects.

Goal 4: EU's contribution to the Women in Business program. Help to eliminate gender inequality in accessing funding from at least 50%

of local banks supported under the Women in Business program.

This task is important for Ukraine given its current significant gender disproportions in the representation of women in business. Women own only 22% of businesses and manage only 6% of large companies. Moreover, local development strategies and plans do not have a focus on the access to financial services for female entrepreneurs in local communities. Financial capability of women in Ukraine is nearly 25% below that of men.

Still, this goal can be described as fairly accomplishable. The Small Business Support Group works within the Women in Business aiming at supporting the participation of

women in business and the access of female entrepreneurs to funding. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development offers grants to SMEs as partial compensation of consultancy fees and provides access to financial resources via lines of credit for women-led SMEs at local banks. In addition to that, the program offers trainings, mentorship and other support allowing women-entrepreneurs to share their experience and learn from each other. Previous expert evaluations confirm successful interim results in different sectors. [The program has supported 17 projects in Ukraine at EUR 149.9mn.](#) 15 EU4Business support centers have been established throughout the country.

Where are we moving?

The trends described above show that Ukraine has made significant progress in gender policy implementation over the past years. A lot has been done, and a lot is yet to be done. Improving the laws, including the ratification of the Istanbul Convention, remains in focus. So do integrating a comprehensive gender approach into sectoral reforms and strengthening the gender mechanisms, especially on the ground. This requires political will and engagement of all respective players, as well as proper investment resources. Promoting the principle of equal rights and opportunities for men and women through the general anti-discrimination culture remains essential. Strengthening political representation of women at all levels is still important.

Progress should follow two parallel tracks. The first one includes strengthening gender legislation and special and specific implementation measures, integrating specific gender tasks and goals into the reform agenda, strengthening the national gender mechanism and implementing thereof in practice. The second one includes the implementation of a comprehensive gender approach in all strategies, policies and reforms in Ukraine to ensure equal rights and opportunities for women and men in all spheres of public life.

The new law introduced criminal responsibility for domestic violence

Women own only 22% of businesses and manage only 6% of large companies

The Assembly of Changes of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum

Hennadiy Maksak, national coordinator,
Ukrainian National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (Kyiv, Ukraine)

The Annual Assembly of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum took place in Tbilisi in December 2018. Despite the fact that this event is annual and is rather routine for the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, this time was different in terms of both its format and content.



Photo by eap-csf.eu

There are several reasons for this. However, all of them played a significant role when defining and shaping this event.

The Assembly puts emphasis on four key issues

Let us start with the factors immediately concerned with the Eastern Partnership development as part of the

EU European Neighbourhood Policy.

First of all, the Eastern Partnership Summit in Brussels in November 2017 saw the official launching of a certain “road map” for the Eastern Partnership development, which is provisionally called “**20 deliverables to 2020**”. This document contains 4 priority areas and 20 deliverables in different spheres of multilateral and bilateral cooperation with the European Union and partner states.

This was the first year when 20 deliverables proved to be a real guideline for shaping the agenda for the Forum, its working groups and subgroups.

Secondly, in March 2018 the European Union officially introduced **a renewed structure** of multilateral cooperation, with the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum being a part of it. It is indeed a welcome development that the new multilateral architecture secured additional provisions for bigger political involvement of both six partner states and other international stake holders. There are now better opportunities for the civil society to influence the process of decision-making. The Forum made a stronger appearance at different international EaP platforms: from participating in EaP MFA meetings to a more practical line of work involving panels and expert groups. It was the Forum's new role in the system of multilateral cooperation evaluation that provided new directions and approaches when preparing for the event in December.

Thirdly, the keynote while preparing for the annual Forum's Assembly was **the internal reform** of the Civil Society Forum, which was approved just before the annual meeting even though the work on it had been in progress for two years. This was not the first attempt to optimize the Civil Society Forum's work. By the way, previous reforms also took place in Batumi, Georgia, in 2014. This time the transformations were aimed at improving the active participation of the civil society in expertise and advocacy while assisting the EaP policy both at the European level and at the level of national partner states. It is natural that detailed information on new reforms took a central stand during the Assembly in Tbilisi.

Fourthly, the agenda experienced a significant influence of the upcoming **10th anniversary of Eastern Partnership policy initiative**, which will be celebrated in May 2019. Apart from the official celebrations planned in many capitals of EU members and partner states there are also legitimate expectations that next year should be dedicated to reflecting upon the Eastern Partnership future while searching the answer to the question what will follow after 2020, when the above-mentioned road map is no longer valid. This issue was also discussed at the Forum, which is understandable as it is the institution within EaP frames.

Worrisome elections in the region

However, it is important to keep track of both domestic and regional political features that influence the course of the Assembly and its thematic layout. It is worth mentioning that the events in Eastern Partnership countries dedicated to the 100th anniversary of declaring independence in five out of six states in 1918 made a strong symbolic

impact, as it was in Tbilisi that the independence of three South Caucasian states was declared. This very symbolism, the similarity of situations with modern-day reality in the region, where all countries are subject to Russia's hybrid aggression attacks, did not allow the participants to concentrate solely on official celebrations and promising expectations.

Uneasiness was imperceptibly present and made its impact on the discussions due to the peak season of elections in the majority of EaP countries, with the outcome of the elections not always being predictable within the context of following the way of European integration for these countries. In case of both recent direct presidential elections in Georgia and snap elections in Armenia the results were quite positive, however, the parliamentary elections in Moldova present a significant threat to the very possibility of following the democratic route of development and keeping a pro-European foreign policy orientation. Another challenge is presented by both presidential and parliamentary elections in Ukraine in 2019. Furthermore, there is a possibility of Belarusian presidential elections being held in 2019 instead of 2020, which

might be a worrisome development taking into consideration Kremlin's recent pressure on official Minsk forcing the latter into stronger integration within the frames of the Union State of Belarus and Russia in December 2018.

the upcoming European Parliament elections in 2019, where different surprises are also possible against the backdrop of populist sentiments in EU member states, should also be remembered.

In fact, these very factors made up the basis for shaping the thematic layout of the Civil Society Forum. Therefore, all formal and informal parts of the Assembly, panels, sessions and groups were organized correspondingly.

Unfortunately, ambitious agenda was not always balanced by sufficient political level among EU and EaP representatives. For instance, Ukrainian top-level speakers could not make it due to their workload towards the end of the year. The same situation could be observed with EU high-level speakers, with Commissioner Johannes Hahn recording a video message for the event.

South Caucasus in the center of discussions

It can be said that the Forum developed a political focus on the region of Caucasus against this backdrop, which is in essence not a disadvantage at all but an additional feature that logically fits the context of democratic transformations in Armenia during the Velvet revolution.

The main role of Armenia's civil society in the transfor-

This was the first year when 20 deliverables proved to be a real guideline for shaping the agenda for the Forum, its working groups and subgroups

mational processes happening in the country was on multiple occasions highlighted during the Assembly. The co-chair of the EaP Civil Society Forum Steering Committee Haykuhi Haratunyan shared her inspiring story, while the EaP CSF Activists Award was given to Armenian civil activist Davit Petrosyan for his active involvement in the events of the Velvet Revolution. It is a welcome development that the civil society and its active role in the democratic transformations was stressed upon during the panel by Armenia's Minister of Foreign Affairs Zohrab Mnatsakanyan.

Special attention should be paid to the high level of interest to the Assembly demonstrated by Georgia's top authorities. Georgia's prime-minister Mamuka Bakhtadze's speech was the high point of the Assembly's first day, while the country's speaker Irakli Kobakhidze launched the political part of the Forum on the second day in the Georgian Parliament.

It is worth noting that both Georgian politicians made positive remarks on the level of cooperation with the civil society in Georgia and on its role in securing the chosen European way of this South Caucasus state. It would not be an exaggeration to say that a lot of credit should be given to the Georgia's Civil Society Forum National Platform as it managed to establish a solid contact with Georgian authorities and directly participated in developing the constitutional reform. Some instruments used by Georgian counterparts can be successfully adapted at the level of other Civil Society Forum national platforms, for instance, signing memorandums on cooperation between the platform and the parliament, the platform and the government.

Civil society not ready for compromise as well

As for the content of the event it should be mentioned that the Civil Society Forum traditionally manages to diagnose rather clearly those societal and political issues that Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine are facing. It suffices only to have a look at the texts of speeches given by the representatives of the Civil Society Forum at different levels of meetings among EaP leaders, as well as the statements and resolutions of the Civil Society Forum Steering Committee.

This time during the meeting in Tbilisi the following issues again were discussed: human rights, fighting corruption, fair and untainted elections in EaP region countries, rule of law, public administration and judicial reforms. A video message from Bill Browder on campaigning for sanctions against human rights violators on the EU level, with providing Magnitsky Act as an example, was quite

Uneasiness was imperceptibly present and made its impact on the discussions due to the peak season of elections in the majority of EaP countries

motivating.

The forum's domestic "mechanics" this year was also different from the usual chronic electoral process as a result of the Forum's internal reform which ensured two main changes – a two-year working cycle and a different timetable and decentralizing the election process for the Civil Society Forum Steering Committee members. On one hand, it did allow for more time to hold important talks and attract attention to vital issues for the states in the region. On the other

hand, it was a nostalgic moment for the Forum's long-time participants when adrenaline level and unofficial agreements are kept to a minimum. The only elections held were to elect the members of the Arbitration Committee created as a result of the internal reform, and voting to determine the winners of the Civil Society Forum re-granting projects.

It will be fair to say that not everything was done the way it had been planned. First and foremost, let us turn to the resolutions, which are traditionally made following the results of the Assembly. This is when a traditional sore point – a low level of compromise regarding the text – comes into the picture. Unfortunately, the civil society does not greatly differ from the official authorities of EaP countries; they dilute EaP Summit texts until they are unrecognizable. Overall, Centenary Resolution can be named in terms of good content.

The tiring search for mutually acceptable wording forced Ukrainian and Georgian Civil Society Forum National platforms to prepare a separate statement, which clearly highlighted the necessity to restore territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine and Georgia over occupied territories and which confirmed without corrections that the EU should assist these countries in counteracting Russia's hybrid aggression.

In the end, each platform committed to a duty of suggesting its own interpretations of evaluating the situation in their own countries, which led to an even bigger devaluation of the general resolution. Thus, the rationale for modifying the approach to shaping concluding documents was questioned.

Progress monitoring

Unfortunately, the work on **Eastern Partnership Index**, the Forum's main monitoring document that provides comparative evaluation of the progress made in bilateral and multilateral integration and cooperation in the EaP region, was still in progress by the beginning of the Assembly. It should become a clear signal for the future that it is necessary to revise methodology for better timing and accessibility.

The EaP index can be one of those instruments that can

facilitate a more active involvement in decision-making process of the EU and national governments as well as reform advocacy.

It is also desirable to see the Forum's more active involvement in the systematic monitoring of "20 deliverables to 2020" implementation. This year mobilizing all national platforms in order to conduct a joint research of EaP countries success in achieving the deliverables was not accomplished. At the moment of hosting the Assembly only the Civil Society Forum Ukrainian National Platform supported by the EU project "Common Synergy" had its own complex analysis of Ukrainian track record on the way to achieving EaP 20 deliverables.

The situation may experience a positive change in 2019 as the Civil Society Forum Secretariat resource support for national platforms is increasing and a part of it can be used for operational needs. Taking into account contin-

uous calls coming from European institutions regarding the necessity to focus the Forum on 20 deliverables, a joint complex analytical product can become a major asset.

Summing up, it can be agreed that the Forum is on the brink of major changes. It is essential that its role as an indispensable partner, which broadcasts civil society voices from Eastern Partnership countries addressing European institutions and national governments and offering practical steps for developing European Neighbourhood Policy, should get stronger.

It is also extremely important that 2019 should see the Forum and platforms completely immerse into work on the EaP new horizons after 2020. Moreover, there is a lot of interest to such projects both on the level of EU member states and on the level of official Brussels.

The two main changes were a two-year working cycle and a different timetable and decentralizing the election process for the Civil Society Forum Steering Committee members

EaP Think Bridge

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