



EASTERN PARTNERSHIP
Civil Society Forum



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EASTERN PARTNERSHIP PROSPECTS

post-2022

Foreword to the basic report in the
frame of the Civic EaP Tracker Project

Full report



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Eastern Partnership: prospects of post-2022

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Foreword

In 2022, the Eastern Partnership has reached an essential point in its existence. The growing political instability in the region and the deepening of global confrontation push the EU to adjust the principles of its external actions. In addition, the conditions that determine the neighbours' expectations of United Europe have changed, and the peculiarities of the political regimes in many European countries vary. Nowadays, an analysis of what has been achieved within the framework of the Eastern Partnership, as well as its new conceptual setting, is desperately needed.

Was this EU policy, established more than a decade ago for creating a stable and prosperous environment around the bloc, successful? At first glance, the answer would be no, because the most extensive hostilities since the Second World War is raging on the borders of United Europe, and waves of refugees alongside with an energy crisis caused by the aggressive behavior of the Kremlin dictatorship are heading west. In addition, most of the countries participating in the Eastern Partnership have temporarily occupied territories, two are only on the way to a peace agreement between each other, and one has finally become a hostage of a brutal autocracy that squeezes out any dissent and drifts away from Europe. However, these circumstances are not a consequence of the Eastern Partnership. Most of these problems are a severe result of the coexistence of the states of Central-Eastern Europe alongside the Russian Empire, which has not abandoned its anachronistic dreams of seizing territories and spreading spheres of influence. And all these conditions are a challenge for the EU's neighbourhood policy.

Instead, for more than a decade, the Eastern Partnership has been providing new opportunities for states to develop and achieve more ambitious foreign policy goals, and for citizens – hopes for designing more just and

inclusive societies. This policy opened opportunities for broader cooperation with the EU while preserving the national interests of each country. For Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, the Eastern Partnership, in particular, has become an important platform for expressing European integration aspirations and preparing for the EU membership candidate status. In the case of Armenia and Azerbaijan, Brussels' constant contact with the governments of both countries facilitated the involvement of European institutions in establishing peace talks between them. In addition, the Eastern Partnership at one time became a new framework for establishing and developing regional cooperation. The countries covered by this policy were united by a common course of reforms, similar project tasks and the formation of a new civil network.

Europe and the world are no longer what they were when the Eastern Partnership was launched. Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine set out on the path with clear conditions for EU membership, highlighting the different approaches of regional actors to the policy's goals. The Central-Eastern European region targeted by the neighbourhood policy has become an area of political instability and even physical danger. However, such dramatic changes are not a reason to cancel this format.

In 2020, amid the pandemic, the EU demonstrated its ability to respond to new challenges by elaborating the new ambitious agenda of the Eastern Partnership in the Joint Staff Working Document – Recovery, Resilience and Reform. However, after that new challenges emerged much faster than expected. Against the background of international chaos, established relations between the countries of the region and the EU can become a factor in achieving sustainable conditions for the further interaction between governments and societies, as well as a platform for the joint overcoming of challenges that arise constantly. At the same time, the Eastern Partnership can remain an additional tool for projecting the influence of European

institutions on reforms in the EU accession countries from Central and Eastern Europe, an effective platform for the implementation of new projects with Armenia and Azerbaijan, a format for consolidated support of civil society in Belarus in its struggle for freedom and democracy.

In addition, the comprehensive neighbourhood policy is, in particular, a tool for strengthening the resilience of the EU and the countries of the region. In the economic dimension, the effective projects of the Eastern Partnership can help the states of Central and Eastern Europe, primarily Ukraine, to overcome the destructive consequences of the war unleashed by Russia. In addition, improved infrastructure within the framework of this policy (both domestically and internationally) and implemented business development projects can strengthen the ability of governments and societies to resist external economic blackmail. In the political dimension, the Eastern Partnership should continue to be a platform for regional consolidation and coordination of a shared vision of challenges and interests amid growing global instability.

At the same time, the updated EU neighbourhood policy must meet the goals of European institutions in the foreign policy arena. It should be the result of prompt and bold diplomatic actions and strengthen Europe as an international player. At the same time, it cannot be said that all these conditions change the initial goal of the Eastern Partnership to create a stable environment around United Europe. This aim remains valid. New global circumstances require new instruments of neighbourhood policy. In particular, it should now focus more on the security component, both at the level of the region and states, and at the level of individuals. Protection against threats should be a mandatory component and, at the same time, one of the goals of every project within the framework of the Eastern Partnership: from solid infrastructure initiatives to people-to-people contacts.

This report is dedicated to summarizing the interim results of the Eastern Partnership in the five countries of the policy in the recent years and, consequently, the current perception of the prospects of the format in each of them. Based on information about the achievements and expectations of the EU's neighbourhood policy, experts from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine presented a national vision of the Eastern Partnership future. Unfortunately, Belarus is not included in the analysis, because today the state is captured by an authoritarian regime, which effectively terminated relations with the EU and began the destruction of previous efforts in this direction. The only available form of cooperation for European institutions in this context remains the support of the country's independent civil society.

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Current perception of the EaP policy in Armenia

The most recent survey that assessed attitude of the Armenian society towards the EU (conducted on behalf of International Republican Institute's Center for Insights between November 22 and December 5, 2022) indicates that while evaluating the current state of the relationship between Armenia and the other countries and entities 69% of respondents characterized relations with the EU as good or very good. It is noteworthy that among those who believe that Armenia is heading to a right direction 82% characterized EU-Armenia relations positively, while among those who believe that Armenia is heading to a wrong direction the percentage is much lower – 58%.

According to the survey, the relations with France, Iran, US and China also received high scores as well while Relations with Russia are assessed worse than the relations with the EU.

After the 44-day war, the issues of civilizational choice were prioritized by the Armenian audience. This factor also affected the perception of foreign states by Armenian citizens - the assessment rate of all of them, according to the survey conducted by Russian online media "Caucasus Knot", decreased in comparison to 2019. This is consequence of disappointment in international partners, caused mostly by their position during and after the war.

When talking about attitudes towards the EU, the Armenian political spectrum could be conditionally divided into four major segments. 1. The ruling party which being under strong influence of Russia in practical terms, tries to demonstrate neutrality in the confrontation between Moscow and the West (including the EU), as well as regarding the war in Ukraine. (Political weight of this segment, according to the results of Parliamentary elections in June, 2021, is about 50%, although it is, most probably, decreasing);

2. Two factions of Parliamentary opposition have pro-Russian orientation and trust that Armenia will benefit if Russia succeeds in the war against Ukraine. Part of this opposition (particularly, Republican Party) is at the same time interested in deepening relations with the EU (Political weight of this segment, according to the results of the Parliamentary elections in June, 2021, is about 30%, although is, most probably decreasing, as well). 3. Small pro-Western parties with different extent of anti-Russian moods, having sympathy towards Ukraine. (Average political weight of this segment, according to the results of the Parliamentary elections in June, 2021, is above 10%. Although is the figure, arguably is much higher bearing in mind that part of their potential electorate did not vote assuming that the chances for the success were too low); 4. The parties with no clear foreign policy agenda. (Average political weight of this segment, according to the results of the Parliamentary elections in June, 2021, is about 5%).

There are no reliable surveys proving the orientation of the political elites, however, indirectly the analyses provided above could be proved by the research of the narratives related to the war in Ukraine in Armenian media conducted by Yerevan Press Club. It gives the clue regarding the general public perceptions of Eastern Partnership in the context of the war in Ukraine and leads to the following conclusions: a) Although before the Russian war against Ukraine the EU was perceived as less influential international actor than separate European countries like Germany, France, and the UK, consolidated EU support to Ukraine improved the reputation of the European Union in Armenia; b) the Eastern Partnership is not perceived as policy having significant regional impact, rather bilateral relations (both Ukraine's and Armenia's) with the EU that are not related to the EaP are valued; c) The Russian war against Ukraine is perceived by the majority as confrontation between the "collective" West (including the EU) and Russia, not as a Russian-Ukrainian war.

Armenia's independent expert community's vision of the updated EaP policy

Recommendations for domestic and European policymakers for enhanced cooperation and/or updating the EaP policy.

- Armenian government has to consider CEPA as important part of the comprehensive national development strategy instead of focusing just on the specific areas, where EU support is more instrumental for the concrete period.
- Both the EU and Armenian government have to see the link between sectoral reforms and effectiveness of public administration as a system.
- In the assessment process of CEPA the European Union has to pay more attention to the consistency and quality of practical implementation. Independent civil society and expert community remain major source of reliable information if their selection as contributors to the process is proper.
- Political support of the EU to the current government should not lead to softer evaluation of the progress in specific areas of the EU-Armenia cooperation. This first of all refers to the spheres of democracy, rule of law and human rights.
- Regular mapping of civil society by the EU should reflect dynamics in the operational activities of the concrete CSOs, their integrity and political neutrality/non-partisanship. This is especially important in the situation of deepening division lines in Armenian society.
- Complicated geopolitical situation and Russian war against Ukraine should not lead to further disintegration within the EaP region in general and inside the established institutions: Euronest,

CORLEAP, CSF, and several networks created since 2009.

Consistent efforts on building, despite many controversies, common regional identity should contribute to solidarity on different levels vis-à-vis the Russian war against Ukraine and in view of transformed post-war geopolitical and geoeconomic landscape.

Current perception of the EaP policy in Azerbaijan

Relations of the European Union with Azerbaijan are based on the principles of equality. Notwithstanding bilateral relations with the EU taking precedence over the course of history, the EaP Multilateral Platform expanded the scope of relations enabling Azerbaijan to exchange views on issues of mutual interests and launch various initiatives. The EU remains Azerbaijan's largest trade partner and second-biggest import market. The victory of Azerbaijan in 2020, liberating its illegally occupied territories, and the Russia-Ukraine war completely changed the geopolitical situation in the region and laid down new realities opening new perspectives of collaboration, in particular in the spheres of energy and transportation.

During the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, Azerbaijan has striven to maintain positive relations with both countries simultaneously, which is in line with Baku's multidimensional and independent foreign policy. Azerbaijan seems to intentionally remain on the sidelines of the Russia-Ukraine conflict to avoid antagonizing either Ukraine or Russia and to realize its independent policy targets while the world is concerned with Russian aggression.

The EU and Azerbaijan have a high level of transport dialogue in the continuation of productive cooperation due to intercontinental and geo-economic maps of Azerbaijan that were boosted with the rise of China, India, and other regional actors. The realization of the

Zangazur Corridor, which is envisaged to include both railway and highway connecting of the regional countries through the territory of Armenia, could be of exceptional importance in a way towards accelerating the regional economic integration and increasing the geoeconomics importance of the South Caucasus. Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Georgia are to establish a "Eurasian Railway Alliance" joint venture with a qualitative multimodal, unified IT system that will smooth transit cargo and logistics services between Europe and Asia through the Trans Caspian International Transport Route, bypassing Russia's transportation capabilities to the EU from Eastern Asia, while increasing the emerging potential of the Middle Corridor with Russia and sanctioned Iran. This new venture can certainly be a part of the East-West and North-South transport corridors, expanding their scope that can enable all the interconnected countries as well as the EU to enjoy a more diversified network and to have access to alternative options.

Along with this, a Russian invasion of Ukraine has far-reaching implications for the Azerbaijan-EU energy partnership. Bearing in mind environmental concerns, the EU is unfolding its holistic approach to the diversification of energy supply sources and shift to renewables. Due to the insecure environment that Russia created in Eastern Europe, the Union increasingly imposes a ban on energy imports from Russia, including gas and oil. In the context of the aforementioned factors, the role of Azerbaijan in the energy security of Europe is highly likely to increase as the EU already seeks to reinforce energy cooperation.

As part of the energy diversification strategies of Europe, Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan, Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum, and the Southern Gas Corridor projects with Azerbaijan are of particular importance, playing a significant role in the current upheaval of the European energy market. The new gas pipeline is supplying Italy, Bulgaria, and Greece. On the other hand,

the EU agrees to block most Russian oil imports by the end of 2022, which can create new rooms for oil delivery initiatives from Azerbaijan to Europe. It should be noted that Azerbaijan, especially newly liberated mountainous regions, have an immense potential for renewable energy investments. It is also relevant for the Caspian Sea, according to World Bank. The technical potential of offshore wind energy in Azerbaijan is estimated to account for 157 gigawatts. Therefore Azerbaijan could be a new location for the EU investments in renewable energy, and there is a wide range of opportunities to strike in this field.

Following the renewal of the European Neighborhood Policy, a new package of new partnership priorities was adopted in 2018, which include strengthening institutions, good governance, economic development including market opportunities, people-to-people contacts, environment, energy efficiency, and environmental issues. In February 2017, the EU and Azerbaijan began negotiations on a new framework agreement with Azerbaijan designed to give new momentum to political dialogue and mutually beneficial cooperation, which is planned to be finalized by the end of 2022.

Azerbaijan is an important energy partner for the EU and plays a pivotal role in bringing Caspian energy resources to the EU market.

EU is also Azerbaijan's largest foreign investor, both in the oil and non-oil sector. The EU-Azerbaijan Partnership and Cooperation Agreement enable gradually bringing in line Azerbaijan's legislation and procedures with the EU's and international trade-related regulations, laws and standards. It can't be denied that the EU productively assists business and investment climate and economic diversification strategies particularly notably through the support to education and regional development.

Azerbaijan's relations with the EU are based on the principles of pragmatism and realistic content. At least in the short and medium-term, no perspective for membership exists.

Azerbaijan, given the globalization and its inter-wined location between regional powers, has no other choice but to implement a multi-vectored foreign policy maintaining positive relations with all sides. Cooperation with the EU is successfully developing in economic terms with an emphasis on the transportation and energy sector, although it does not mean deep political integration of Azerbaijan into the Union. The EU wants stability on the verge of its borders. From this perspective, the geopolitical relevance of the South Caucasus for the EU increasingly gains momentum. Following the liberation of the illegally occupied territories, it stipulated the moral and infrastructural need for Azerbaijan to restore and revive the districts. The mines and other explosive devices in the liberated territories of Azerbaijan pose a serious threat to the life and safety of the Azerbaijani military and civilians in the post-conflict period. Massive mine contamination of the liberated territories also seriously impedes the realization of wide-ranging rehabilitation and reconstruction. In this vein, the role of the EU is expected to come into play. Apart from economic investments, Azerbaijan can undeniably benefit from the EU's deep experience in post-war recovery and reconstruction processes as a role model. However, Azerbaijan expects a single-standard approach and the same amount of grants as provided to Ukraine and Armenia for the same purposes.

Azerbaijan's vision of the updated EaP policy by the independent expert community

Recommendations:

- Ensuring the banking sector's long-term viability and improving access to funding through Azerbaijani banks is vital.
- While Azerbaijan's institutional and regulatory environment for SME policy has improved, boosting policy implementation might assure the sector's continued development.
- Joining the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) would modernize Azerbaijan's economy by improving technology and infrastructure, as well as introducing new regulations aligned with international standards, allowing products to be exported not only to the EU countries but also to the rest of the world.
- Speeding up WTO negotiations in order to promote economic liberalization in the country by implementing WTO rules, which will be required to begin an application for EU association and establish free trade with the EU.
- Promoting economic diversification and the development of a comprehensive and strong manufacturing sector in order to create a long-term development path that allows for free trade participation.
- Modernization of energy infrastructure and effective use of energy resources must be done to ensure adherence to energy supply security standards.
- Adopt robust energy efficiency regulations that take a long-term strategy in order to maintain the country on a sustainable energy path. Increased energy efficiency could help the economy, reduce pollution, and create more jobs.
- Accept short-, medium-, and long-term renewable energy targets, with legislation and policies in place to ensure their execution.
- Long-term transportation and urban development policies must include climate concerns. The country will need to create additional urban infrastructure as the population continues to increase, urbanize, and become affluent.
- Raising awareness of digital transformation and associated instruments among public officials and relevant

legislative bodies, as well as executing specific training programs.

- To secure the engagement of youth and other interested parties from the perspective of long-term growth, the government must encourage innovation and digital transformation projects.
- Maintain its efforts to promote freedom of expression, media independence, and journalistic professionalism, as well as their social protection.
- Taking the National Action Plan 1325 to support the Women, Peace, and Security agenda and promoting awareness campaigns in the field of women's rights and gender equality.

Accelerating the process of revising/approving important documents that obstruct the application of many essential policies regarding cyber strategy, information security, and personal data protection at the national level.

Current perception of the EaP policy in Georgia

EU aspirations among the EaP partner states vary depending on their domestic political dynamics, public support and last but not least the geopolitical context they find themselves in. Over the course of the existence of the Eastern Partnership Georgia has made it clear that it sees itself in the European family. It has even enshrined this mission in its constitution (article 78) by stating that “the constitutional bodies shall take all measures within the scope of their competences to ensure the full integration of Georgia into the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty

Organization”.¹This pledge was upheld by Georgia’s frontrunner status due to its functional institutions and a democratic inertia of a peaceful transfer of power in 2012. Another meaningful factor is the sustainable public support to joining the EU, which hovers around 80 percent for more than a decade or so.²

Lamentably, for the past years Georgia has been in a downward spiral vis-a-vis its European integration goals largely due to its deteriorating state of democracy, undermined rule of law and government’s reckless bashing of dissent.³ These trends have drawn sharp criticism from number of the EU institutions, especially the European Parliament, which issued a resolution and called “on the Georgian authorities to resolutely uphold the highest standards of democracy, the rule of law, judicial independence, fair trials and fundamental freedoms, including in the area of media freedom, and thereby unambiguously demonstrate their political determination to actualise the ambitious European aspirations of the people of Georgia”.⁴

In response, the ruling party’s leaders and its rank and file members alike responded in a menacing and blackmailing tone suggesting that the resolution was offensive, unjust and some even claimed that it might prompt Georgia to reconsider its European future.⁵ To make things worse, there is a growing concern among Georgia’s western friends about where the true allegiance of the Georgian authorities lies considering their ambivalence in supporting its Euro-Atlantic aspirations, its dire democracy record and rather strange war-time sharp criticism of the Ukrainian government when the entire western community rallies behind it.⁶

¹ Constitution of Georgia, Matsne.gov.ge, <https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/30346?publication=36>

² NDI Poll: Georgians Expect Economic Decline, NDI, 2022, https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI%20Georgia%20press%20release_March%202022%20poll_Eng.pdf

³ Georgia’s Score Continues to Fall in Democracy Index, Agenda.ge, 2020, <https://civil.ge/archives/472269>

⁴ Violations of Media Freedom and Safety of Journalists in Georgia, European Parliament Resolution, 2020, www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2022-0239_EN.pdf

⁵ Ketevan Shkirtladze, Georgia’s European Way, Conflicting Messages Ahead of the Vote, Georgia Today, 2022, <https://georgiatoday.ge/georgias-european-way-conflicting-messages-ahead-of-the-vote/>

⁶ Ian Kelly, David Kramer, Putin is Failing in Ukraine But Winning in Georgia, Forbes Georgia, 2022, <https://forbes.ge/en/putin-is-failing-in-ukraine-but-winning-in-georgia/>

Hence, not surprisingly once a frontrunner among the EaP countries, Georgia currently has a tarnished reputation and lukewarm reception in Brussels. This turn of events prompted the demotion of Georgia in the pecking order of the countries of the associated trio favored by Brussels. Apart from all the above-listed, the EU was particularly annoyed by the abrupt withdrawal of Georgia's ruling party from the inter-party April 19 agreement brokered by the European Council President Charles Michel⁷.

This comes at a wrong time as Russia's unprovoked and atrocious invasion of Ukraine opened a new window of opportunity for the associated trio. Russia's barbaric actions triggered an expedited process of review of applications for the EU candidate status lodged by Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova giving them a chance to seal their European path through formal procedure. Unfortunately for Georgia, the European Commission recommended to the European Council to give Georgia the European perspective until certain priorities are addressed and only after that grant it candidate status.⁸ Considering the latest developments taking place in Georgia and the democracy record of the government, this was no surprise.

In spite of all the malaise related to the behavior of the ruling party, the Georgian people all but deserve granting the EU candidate status by the European Council, in spite of the opinion of the European Commission, as it has staunchly supported the European path through the last twodecades and has never given up the hope of becoming a member of the European family. Moreover, it does have a functioning economy and institutions that are necessary to show it meets the membership requirements. As the EU is more than just a union of prosperous states, it should not forget that it was created for the

perpetuation of peace on the European continent. In the context of the ongoing Russian aggression, Georgia together with other members of the associated trio merit the prospect of European future as it has incurred tremendous costs for its choice.

By not granting EU candidate status to any of the members of the trio and leaving them out in the cold, Russia and other ill-wishers will be bolstered and the pro-European forces in these countries will suffer a devastating blow. By offering the status, the EU will send a forceful message of support to the trio, encourage reforms and democratization in these states and promote respective political elites (those in and outside government) to firmly commit to the European future.

By the end of 2022, the European Commission will review how the Georgian Government addressed the recommendations outlined in its opinion. The question remains if the authorities in Tbilisi will be able to meet those expectations provided that they will have to "de-oligarchize" their political system (get rid of the influence exerted by Bidzina Ivanishvili), do away with political retribution against its opponents, restore rule of law and rectify its record of treating media and civil activists.

Georgia's vision of the updated EaP policy

For Georgian policymakers:

- Based on the European Council conditions on EU candidate status elaborate the roadmap of implementation with the involvement of all political parties and civil society. Ensure immediate return to the April 19 Agreement;

⁷ Georgi Gotev, "Ruling Party in Georgia Dumps Charles Michel's Agreement", July 29, 2022, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/europe-s-east/news/ruling-party-in-georgia-dumps-charles-michels-agreement/>

⁸ Opinion on the Membership Application by Georgia, European Commission, 2022, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ganda_22_3800

- The Georgian Government should immediately change its communication mode and reverse its aggressive, threatening and obstructive tone/attitude towards the EU institutions and Georgia's European allies;
- Georgia should increase its visibility in Brussels and other European capitals to convince EU institutions and member states of its resolve to commit to Georgia's European future.
- Set up a separate entity at the executive level to deal with the Georgia's EU integration process (e.i. like Office on EU integration) and give it as much power as possible; This move will send a strong message about Georgia's European aspirations and commitments to the EU and member states.
- Reinvigorate cooperation and coordination with Ukraine and Moldova in relation to the common EU-related foreign policy aspirations. Plan high level visits to Kyiv and Chisinau to reinforce the image and capacities of Trio.
- Set up the triologue format with the involvement of civil society, government of Georgia and the EU and or Member states.

For the EU Policymakers:

- The EU should avoid splitting up the Associated trio as it will undermine its stance in the neighborhood and lead to more instability and exacerbation of geopolitical competition among various regional actors;
- The EU should set up the EU-MD, UA, GEO summit in the framework of the EaP to encourage a shared vision of European future among the Trio and the EU;
- Set up the clearest and measurable benchmarks/conditionality (leaving no room for interpretation) for achieving the candidate status and strictly monitor their fulfillment. Particular emphasis should be put on "de-oligarchisation", political plurality, rule of law, reform of the justice

system (Judiciary and Prosecutor's Office), media freedom and protection of rights;

- Following the Council's decision, the EU should clearly communicate (to leave no room for interpretation) about its expectations and what needs to be done on the side of Georgia. The EU should also increase its visibility across Georgia via various initiatives/activities and strengthen communication with the Georgian public to counter disinformation and malign, anti-EU narratives following the decision.
- Strengthen and institutionalize the policy dialogue with the civil society on GEO-EU membership process.

Current perception of EaP policy in the Republic of Moldova

The EaP policy has generated a number of important results for Moldova. The signing of the Association Agreement in 2014, complemented by the implementation of the visa free regime and liberalization of exports towards the EU market, have greatly benefited the Moldovan economy and society. The sectoral programs developed by the EU in the field of energy, digitalization or business, provided financial mechanisms for public actors, local entities, entrepreneurs, civil society and journalists. These comprehensive achievements facilitated Moldova's path towards implementation of the key reforms and harmonization of the legal framework in line with EU acquis.

In the context of Russia's aggression against Ukraine and following the granting of the EU candidate status to Moldova and Ukraine on the 23rd of June 2022, the perception of EaP policy in Moldova has faced an important shift. The Eastern Partnership format is no longer perceived as being sustainable and capable to move forward the cooperation between the six member countries, especially on the multilateral track. Given the clear belligerence

of Belarus against Ukraine and offensive rhetoric towards Moldova, the format itself is currently ineffective to generate mutual benefits for the participating countries.

Although the EaP policy delivered a number of sizable results and benefits for Moldova in the last 13 years, its importance after June 2022 is less relevant for the candidate countries. After receiving the EU candidate status, Moldova and Ukraine are supposed to become subjects of the EU's enlargement policy, which is accompanied by the new financial and technical cooperation instruments. Access to the instrument of pre-accession funds in the following years in case of Moldova and Ukraine will generate more ambiguity within the Eastern Partnership, given the different budgetary instruments developed for candidate and non-candidate countries.

It is still unclear how the EU will accommodate the transition of these countries towards the new budgetary instruments and dialogue formats. However, one could expect that this transition will lead to the rethinking of the EaP initiatives and programs for the participating countries and reevaluation of its core priorities.

The Republic of Moldova's vision of the updated EaP policy

A set of recommendations for the fine-tuning of the core objectives and format of EaP policy must be taken into consideration:

- The EU should consider the **reformation of EaP policy multilateral track** and development of a separate cooperation platform for Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia, focused on exchange of good practices and experience on the EU accession path. Such a platform could be established after the upgrading of the Associated Trio towards the Candidate Trio platform and its formal institutionalization by the EU.
- Assist the candidate countries in the process of **implementation of conditions** for opening the negotiations talks by identifying potential areas of immediate budgetary and technical support.
- Scale up the **financial support for the national platforms of the EaP Civil Society Forum** and facilitate their participation in the monitoring and evaluation of governments' progress with the implementation of key actions for opening the negotiation talks.
- Speed up the inclusion of the candidate countries into the **framework of the instrument for pre-accession funds** and establish direct budgetary support programs in line with the core benchmarks for the opening and running the accession talks.
- Consolidate its **security dialogue** with Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia through a shared framework of experience, knowledge, best practices and capabilities. EU should expand the direct budgetary support for defence as part of the European Peace Facility, aimed at strengthening the capacities of the strategic planning, operational, communication and cyber policies of the candidate countries.
- Initiate talks with **defence and intelligence institutions** in the candidate countries in order to support their active participation in the PESCO projects of significant interest for each individual state.
- Enforce cooperation with the candidate countries in the field of fight against corruption, financial crimes and asset recovery. Consolidate the **dialogue between the European Public Prosecutor Office (EPPO) and fraud investigation bodies** in order to actively investigate the financial irregularities with the EU money in Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine. Facilitate

the exchange of investigative operational information between the national and EU institutions (OLAF and EPPO).

- Enable the **full liberalization of trade** and elimination of tariff quotas for key agricultural exports, such as apples, plums or grapes from Moldova. This will help to offset the inaccessible markets in Russia and Belarus and prevent the bankruptcy of a significant number of farmers, but also small and medium enterprises.
- Ensure full and smooth integration of the candidate countries in the EU's Energy Union. **Speed-up the construction of the energy grid connection with Moldova**, which is now scheduled to be finalised by 2024.

Current perception of the EaP policy in Ukraine

Since the inception of the EaP Ukraine has taken a special position on the policy and its bilateral and multilateral tracks. While acknowledging its European aspirations and interest in the development of bilateral cooperation with the European Union, official Kyiv expressed its reluctance to the multilateral track and overall EU's approach towards copying Ukrainian-EU bilateral negotiation framework and applying it to the other partner states.

At the level of official communication in Ukraine, bilateral relations with EU and Eastern Partnership policy have always been positioned as two different policies with respect to the European Union. Even administering functions of the bilateral and multilateral track were largely divided between the different government bodies. All commitments under the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement and subsequent bilateral agreements are overseen by the Governmental Office for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, while participation of

Ukraine in the multilateral EaP architecture is coordinated by the profile department of the MFA. That said, there is no surprise that Ukrainian citizens cast vast public support for the integration of Ukraine into the EU, while they are much less aware of anything related to the Eastern Partnership policy. There is a lack of opinion polls related to the EaP policy and Ukraine.

Ukraine's participation in the Eastern Partnership before the full-scale Russian aggression in February 2022 may be divided into three layers: bilateral cooperation, Trio initiative and multilateral mechanism for all six partners.

As mentioned above, bilateral relations with the EU have been always prioritized by the Ukrainian elites. Ukraine demonstrated significant progress in deepening sectoral integration with the EU, calling for 4 Unions: customs, digital, energy and integration into the Schengen area. Integration into the EU has been declared a state course, envisaged by the norms of the Constitution of Ukraine. Politically, official Kyiv traditionally benefited from the annual EU-Ukraine Summit and a very intensive agenda of the Association bodies at the governmental, parliamentary and expert levels.

After the EaP Summit in December 2021, Ukraine became frustrated with the Trio format as this club of three partner states has not succeeded in actively influencing the EaP agenda in the run-up and during the Summit. Many joint proposals, as well as European perspective pledges, went unanswered by the EU side. Especially, Ukraine was frustrated by the arguably inadequate response from the EU side to the security related requests from the three partner states, both in terms of institutions and substance security component of EaP which was very weak.

During the war of Russia against Ukraine, the Trio lost its relevance for Ukrainian authorities due to many interconnected reasons. First, the response of Moldova and particularly Georgia to the Russian aggression since 24th of February did not meet Ukrainian expectations.

The Ukrainian Minister of Foreign Affairs Dmytro Kuleba, as well as other members of the Government, unleashed harsh criticism towards an ambiguous position of the partner states. The tensions have been provoked by the issues of poor solidarity in sanctions against Russia. Moreover, Ukraine was concerned with Moldova's and Georgia's applications for candidacy status in parallel with Ukraine. Any delay in the progress of Chisinau and Tbilisi could have caused inhibition in the European integration of Kyiv. Back then, it was considered a risk for the Ukrainian pitch under special circumstances. Naturally, at that juncture, there was no real will on the Ukrainian side to act in communication with the EU in the format of three.

Second, Ukraine being now under exceptional conditions is the core beneficiary of the EU assistance. EU provides macro financial support and military assistance, launches the Platform for the Recovery of Ukraine, delivers humanitarian help, accommodates Ukrainian war refugees etc. Such a level of the EU's backing is accessible for Kyiv without addressing more modest EaP resources (in comparison to the current needs of Ukraine). In these areas of cooperation with the EU, the Trio format is also not needed.

A multilateral track for six partners (or five partner states, since Belarus suspended its participation) presents little added value for Ukraine. Being focused on the bilateral track, Ukraine paid less attention to participation in all multilateral initiatives of the Eastern Partnership. At the highest level, during EaP Summits, political messages in joint declarations were blurred by Russia's friendly states, Armenia and Belarus. No strong wording or decision against Russia was adopted in that format. That is why Kyiv preferred political statements of the EU-Ukraine summits or GUAM organization to those of the EaP format.

At the same time, it must be admitted that Kyiv has always demonstrated interest in new financial instruments, which were proposed to the partner states in the framework of the

Eastern Partnership policy (Horizon 2020, Creative Europe, SME, Erasmus Europe etc.). the European Investment Plan or financial resources under the Team Europe initiative, which provided new possibilities for cooperation under the new EU financial framework for 2021-2027 were of significant interest for the Ukrainian side

In the process of war, the official Kyiv is interested in potentially all EU resources, which might be allocated to war-affected areas of Ukraine to recover and rebuild a normal life. Therefore cooperation with IFIs under the EaP framework might also create a real financial vehicle for the Ukrainian government. Before Ukraine official joins the IPA instrument, it should explore all the existing EaP programs to cover current needs.

Ukraine is still interested in the EaP policy, being aware of the fact that such policy might be beneficial for other partner states to find resources to counterbalance Russian influence in the region of Eastern Europe and South Caucasus.

Finally, Ukraine will prioritize deep and substantial integration into the European internal market and a comprehensive cooperation agenda with the EU in all sectors. It is a natural process, bearing in mind overwhelming support among citizens of Ukraine for joining the EU. In October 2022, opinion polls in Ukraine demonstrated over 90% of popular support for the EU's membership in Ukraine (Rating Group agency).

Entering the accession process as a candidate country will further decrease the relevance of the multilateral EaP architecture for Ukraine.

Ukraine's vision of the updated EaP policy

The new status of Ukraine, Moldova and, soon, Georgia in relations with the EU emphasizes the update that the policy of the Eastern Partnership demands. This format of relations

should not come into conflict with the aspirations of Kyiv, Chisinau and Tbilisi to become part of the United Europe and cannot be a substitute to themembership. However, Ukraineis interested in preserving and developing this policy as a tool for establishing regional stability and guaranteeing the shared prosperity of the Eastern European countries. In this context, the Ukrainian expert community sees the following essential and promising directions for the implementation of the Eastern Partnership in the future:

At the level of relations of the entire

Eastern Partnership region with the EU:

- Strengthening of regional security cooperation. Nowadays, the topic of security unites almost all the states of the Eastern Partnership and is worrisome forof the whole Europe. The ongoing Russian aggression poses existential risks for Ukraine, daily deaths and injuries among military and civilians, humanitarian disasters, and the destruction of infrastructure. Armenia and Azerbaijan are looking for ways to permanent peace, which would guarantee the sustainable development of both countries and stability in the South Caucasus. Moldova and Georgia are still dealing with the problems associated with the presence of the Russian threat coming from their temporarily occupied territories.

Due to the different nature of the challenges faced by the states and the peculiarities of their foreign policy orientations, it is currently impossible to find a common regional security denominator. However, the Eastern Partnership could help to set contacts and to solve problems related to soft security and the consequences of hostilities, including joint initiatives for the rehabilitation and reintegration of veterans and refugees, demining areas, restoring destroyed infrastructure, and focusing on programs and facilities that would guarantee the personal safety of citizens. Investing in developing good governance

and justice mechanisms should also be a priority in creating a stable environment in the region. In addition, within the framework of the Eastern Partnership, it is possible to create a platform for finding solutions to establish a safe environment for trade and economic activity in the Wider Black Sea region. First, it is about the joint efforts of Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova and the EU; however, Azerbaijan and Armenia may be also interested in securing this region. Also, an effective step in improving regional security cooperation could be the more active involvement of the Eastern Partnership countries in the EU PESCO Initiative. It is necessary outline the possible contribution and proposals of the states regardingthis European policy. Each of the states of the region has its own security challenges, so it is a depositoryof experience in minimizing or eliminating them. In addition, it is necessary to maintain the EU's attention to counteracting Russian hybrid threats in the countries of the Eastern Partnership. Moscow may consider individual countries of the region as a springboard for further undermining the continental security infrastructure.

- Strengthening the resilience of the countries of the region to threats through a comprehensive deepening of regional cooperation. For years, the Eastern Partnership for many actors was primarily an instrument of interaction between the EU and individual countries of Central Europe and the South Caucasus. This created the conditions under which the participants of the policy acquired varying degrees of integration and interest in the format. Security and economic challenges require the strengthening of general regional cooperation, which, however, is often hindered by individual political contradictions between the states.

In this sense, the Eastern Partnership can become a platform for deeper practical rather than political cooperation. Thus, the

role of sectoral cooperation between the countries of the region is growing. It may include resources for researching opportunities and needs for the development of regional trade, creating new transport infrastructure and supporting small and medium-size enterprises, with a special emphasis on technological and digital projects. Further development of inter-expert, inter-scientific and people-to-people contacts in the region should contribute to the implementation of these projects.

Also, bearing in mind the changing conditions in the European energy market and the growing need for modernization of the sphere, joint energy projects between the states of the region are becoming especially relevant. The demand for Azerbaijani energy resources is growing in the countries of Southern and, partially, Central Europe. Ukraine and Moldova are looking for the opportunities of closer cooperation in the field of electricity as well. The role of renewables is increasing in all the countries of the Eastern Partnership. These and other issues may become the focus of projects supported within the framework of the reformed Eastern Partnership.

- Creation of a separate track of cooperation and project implementation control for Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia. Kyiv, Chisinau and Tbilisi are currently in much more advanced positions in cooperation with the EU within the framework of the Eastern Partnership than the rest of the countries in the focus of the policy. Therefore, in matters that do not concern the deepening of regional cooperation, but concentrate on the bilateral relations of the states with the EU within the framework of the format, it is necessary to note the achievements of Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia and to create a new system for evaluating the success indicators of decisions and projects and a new system for supporting and encouraging changes.

- Establishment of a new format of relations with representatives of the civil society of Free Belarus. In the interests of the Eastern Partnership region and the entire EU, it is necessary to identify the actions of the regime that seized power in Belarus as a threat to common regional security. Countering its aggressive and treacherous policy and creating conditions for stability in Central Europe requires the active support of the civil society of Free Belarus. At the same time, it should be recognised that the implementation of EU approaches applied to the other countries of the Eastern Partnership is irrelevant in the case of Belarus. In fact, nowadays the country cannot be a contributor to the improvement of regional cooperation except at the interpersonal level.

At the level of bilateral cooperation between Ukraine and the EU within the framework of the Eastern Partnership:

- Stable support to Ukraine during active hostilities and during the country's recovery. While countering the Russian invasion, the Ukrainian state cannot function without stable foreign aid. The most important issues – such as support for the defence sector, the social sector and the reconstruction of critical infrastructure – are generally secured via contacts at the highest level. However, there are still less topical problems that are not adequately resourced e.g. targeted humanitarian assistance to victims of hostilities, providing internally displaced persons with job positions and income, supporting educational institutions and students who cannot fully carry out their activities due to the war, and many other issues. Overcoming these challenges, which are not part of the priority level of international aid to Ukraine, could be prioritized by the Eastern Partnership policy.

In this regard, the fact that Ukraine proves its readiness and will to continue participating in EU programs supporting small and medium-size enterprises,

Horizon Europe, Creative Europe and others is important. These initiatives are essential for maintaining the integrity of Ukrainian society and its ability to further contribute to the development and reconstruction of Ukraine.

- Use of Ukrainian proposals and scientific developments in joint European defence procurement. By successfully resisting Russian aggression, Ukraine proved that it is an important contributor to the security system of the whole of Europe. The involvement of Ukrainian manufacturers and developers of defence equipment and technologies in the procurement of security structures of European countries would be a logical continuation of this fact and may eventually strengthen the region's resistance to threats and resilience. Moreover, such a step, through international cooperation and improvement of the work of the relevant industrial sector, could strengthen the defence capability of Ukraine itself in the long term.

At the level of bilateral cooperation between countries within the framework of the Eastern Partnership:

- Implementation of infrastructure projects between the individual countries of the Eastern Partnership. There are many opportunities for the implementation of bilateral initiatives between the states of the region, which could solve their critical problems and spill over to other states of the policy. For example, strengthening the stability of Ukraine and Moldova requires the development of transport and energy infrastructure between the two countries. Since these two countries are in the more advanced positions in relations with the EU, the implementation of joint projects between them could become the first example for similar successful initiatives in other Eastern Partnership states.

Eastern Partnership: prospects of post-2022



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