



EASTERN PARTNERSHIP
Civil Society Forum



**National Endowment
for Democracy**
Supporting freedom around the world



Konrad
Adenauer
Stiftung



**Eastern Partnership
Think Tank Forum 2017**

Chişinău

21-23 September 2017

#EaPTTF2017



IPRE
Institute for European
Policies and Reforms
ipre.md



GEORGIAN INSTITUTE FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES
საგარეო პოლიტიკის სტრატეგიული კვლევების ინსტიტუტი



New Europe Center



BACKGROUND PAPER

Upgrading the Eastern Partnership:

Draft Policy Recommendations for the 2017 Eastern Partnership Summit

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The paper „Upgrading the Eastern Partnership: Recommendations for the 2017 Eastern Partnership Summit” was prepared as a background document for the upcoming EaP Think Tank Forum, to be held in Chişinău on September 21-23, 2017. It also includes a set of draft policy recommendations to be further discussed and reviewed during Forum. The paper has been produced within a project implemented by New Europe Center (former Institute for World Policy), Georgian Institute for Strategic Studies and the Institute for European Policies and Reforms.

The project benefits from the support through the EaP CSF Re-granting Scheme. Within its Re-granting Scheme, the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF) supports projects of the EaP CSF members with a regional dimension that contribute to achieving the mission and objectives of the Forum.

The donors of the Re-granting Scheme are the European Union and National Endowment for Democracy. The overall amount for the 2017 call for proposals is 290.000 EUR. Grants are available for CSOs from the Eastern Partnership and EU countries. Key areas of support are democracy and human rights, economic integration, environment and energy, contacts between people, social and labour policies.

Additional support was provided by the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung for the organisation of the Forum, for dissemination and promotion of the policy recommendations. The opinions expressed in this publication are the sole responsibility of the authors and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the European Union, NED or KAS.

TABLE OF CONTENTS:

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
I. REVIEWING THE STATE OF PLAY OF THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP	5
II. CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES OF THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP	7
ANNEX - DRAFT POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE 2017 EAP SUMMIT	10
AUTHORS	15

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

After eight years of existence, the Eastern Partnership (EaP) needs a new impetus. The initiative has been a mixed bag of successes and relative failures characterized by often conflicting and ambivalent interests of participating Partner States and EU's fluctuating and often less uniform stance.

In spite of all the criticism it has managed to create a positive dynamic in the region, which sought a much-needed political landmark amid turbulent period of geopolitical wrangling. It managed to provide tangible value of visa free travel and trade benefits to advanced, now associated partner states (Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine), and accessibility to approximate to the remaining states (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus), provided that they wish so.

2017 Eastern Partnership Summit in Brussels offers a rare opportunity to resuscitate and revitalize this initiative. Politicians and policymakers on all sides have a chance to present a new political compass, which will serve as a linchpin of the EU's policy towards the region. To succeed in this endeavour strategic and value-based dimensions require no less merit than those of pragmatism and stabilization. Below paragraphs attempt to summarize EaP Policy and introduce a set of Recommendations for the next EaP Summit in Brussels.

EU should give a strategic lifeline to those Eastern Partners, who aspire to advance to the next level and prove it by their steadfast commitment to the Association agenda and thorough, unequivocal and continuous adherence to democratization, Rule of Law and economic reforms. To do so, membership perspective needs to be alive as a political principle. To accommodate divergent interests and aspirations of the Eastern Partners, "multi-speed" EaP approach that will pragmatically reflect political, economic and social dynamics of individual partners could be a solution.

Sober evaluation of Russia's role in undermining existing security architecture and democratic institutions through its hybrid war efforts deserves greater reckoning. Minimizing Kremlin's hostile influence and increasing effectiveness of EaP is possible by refusing to accept Russia's tacit veto over European future of individual partners.

Governments in EaP countries have a duty to increase ownership over reforms and see democratization and economic prosperity as a function of their individual success not an externally imposed agenda. Success on this path depends on their effective and calibrated communication with domestic audiences as well as foreign governments and other opinion making groups. At the same time, the EU's communication is vital in terms of boosting its visibility and footprint in EaP space. These efforts along with smart conditionality will guarantee a more just and equitable approach to individual partner's performance and help gauge their European perspective.

Political efforts coupled with economic benefits such as creation of a Common Economic Area between the EU and Associated Partners will render irreversibility of transformation in individual states plausible. Additionally, connectivity initiatives related to transport and energy sectors together with intensified people-to-people contacts buttressed by deeper and enlarged Mobility Partnerships will increase costs on political elites for any political adventurism.

All in all, it is a shared responsibility of the EU, individual member states and EaP Partners to create a new impetus for the EaP. Notwithstanding discomforting attitudes and disruptions often associated with elites in EaP states, public in those countries should not be held hostage of flawed decisions of their governments. They deserve a voice in opting for a European future.

I. REVIEWING THE STATE OF PLAY OF THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP

Launched in May 2009 in Prague, the Eastern Partnership (hereinafter EaP) aimed to enhance the relations between European Union states and the six countries participating in the initiative: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Republic of Moldova (hereinafter Moldova) and Ukraine. The main goal of the EaP was to provide for political association and economic integration of the EaP states with the EU. By this, Brussels was willing to get a stable, prosperous and secure Eastern neighbourhood and to create a “ring of friends” expanding from Caucasus to the Sahara (within the wider European Neighbourhood Policy), however, as it turned out, instead of a “ring of friends”, EU got a “ring of fire” at its borders.¹

The EaP has been a heterogeneous creation from the very beginning since it combined states with different ambitions and was perceived in different ways by the EU and its partners. Thus, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus, with some exceptions in the case of Armenia at the beginning, have considered the EaP as a less political and more focused on people-to-people contacts, sectorial and economic cooperation with the EU. While Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine have always viewed the EaP as an opportunity to advance their contractual relations with the EU, willing to get a clear membership perspective. In this regard, to reconfirm this line the EaP associated states have issued recently a statement signed by the Georgian, Moldovan and Ukrainian speakers of Parliaments in which they called upon the EU to provide membership perspective at the next Brussels Summit in November 2017.²

The EU approach towards the EaP and membership issue varies as well. On the one hand, when the EaP was presented in December 2008, the then President of European Commission Jose Manuel Barroso declared that the new policy is not a prelude for further EU enlargement and that the EU is “not in a position to offer prospects of accession”. The Western EU countries somehow endured the scepticism as it was the case of Germany’s Chancellor Angela Merkel statement at the EaP Riga Summit who pointed out that *“the Eastern Partnership is not an instrument for enlargement of the European Union, but it is an instrument of rapprochement with the European Union.”* Another example is the latest EU-Ukraine Summit that did not produce any common statement, precisely because Ukraine was insisting on the explicit reference to the membership perspective, while countries like Germany, France and the Netherlands were against it. In this context, one should also consider the possible implications of BREXIT for the debates on the future enlargement and EaP related developments, as UK was a traditional advocate for membership perspectives and an active voice on EU’s Eastern policy.

On the other hand, EU member states from Central and Eastern Europe underlined on number of occasions that the EaP should however be seen as a lighter version of EU enlargement policy that provides for tools and instruments to better prepare the aspiring Eastern European partners to advance in the future on a process of accession to the EU. This approach has been further supported by the European Parliament, which adopted a Resolution in April 2014, underlining that *„pursuant to Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union (ToEU), like any other European state, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine have a European perspective and may apply to become members of the European Union, provided that they adhere to the principles of democracy, respect fundamental freedoms and human and minority rights and ensure the rule of law”*.³

While having a “toxic” discussion on the EU membership, the EU offered a “lighter” formula of political association and economic integration under the Association Agreements involving a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (AA/DCFTA). The challenge of negotiating the Association Agreement was taken up in 2007 by Ukraine and in 2010 by Georgia, Moldova and Armenia. The later, even though was well ahead in its negotiations on an AA/DCFTA with the EU, buckled under the huge pressure of bilateral interactions with the Russian Federation and in September 2013 and decided not to conclude the new Agreement. Instead Armenia engaged in an accession process to the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). Azerbaijan had initially embarked in July 2010 on the negotiations of a new Association Agreement

¹ EU 'ring of friends' turns into ring of fire, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-neighbourhood-analysis-idUSKCN0RR09020150927>

² Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine Seek EU Membership Perspective, <http://civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=30247>

³ European Parliament resolution on Eastern Partnership countries and in particular on destabilization of eastern Ukraine, 17 April 2014, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&reference=P7-TA-2014-0457&language=EN&ring=B7-2014-0444>

with the EU. However, 4 years later the negotiations were suspended by Azerbaijan that opted for a more tailored bilateral political and economic agreement with the EU without a DCFTA, which is also not feasible unless Azerbaijan joins the WTO. Talks between the EU and Belarus on AA/DCFTA have never been launched. Belarus was always interested to have a new Agreement with the EU, however different from the one providing for Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area. Nonetheless, EU has indicated on many occasions that it is too early for that seeking for more concrete steps from Belarus authorities in the field of human rights and democracy.

In November 2013 at the Vilnius EaP Summit only Georgia and Moldova have initialled the AA/DCFTA. Ukraine „snoozed” the initialling of the Agreement, as the then Ukrainian President announced that its government decided to temporarily suspend the process of preparation for signature of the new Agreement, due to the need to review the measures needed to restore trade relations with the Russian Federation. This decision was received with disappointment by the EU and became one of the biggest failure moments of the Summit. It also resonated in a negative way with the Ukrainian society, as mass protests were unfolded in Kiev and the rest of the country, which later led to the change of the Ukrainian Government. Russia has violated international law and territorial integrity of Ukraine by annexing Crimea and supporting the war in the Eastern parts of Ukraine. Ever since, the Ukraine-Russia conflict has dominated the EU agenda towards the region. The main challenge however was that the EU policy would not become primarily shaped around the Russian factor.

Russia’s aggressive stance in the region seriously undermined the main objectives of the EU to ensure stabilization and modernization in the EaP area. The new challenging environment between EU and Russia required a much more developed strategy towards Russia, aiming at deterring future aggressive actions and security risks related to the EaP partners and EaP in general as a project of stability, development and security in the region.

In the end, in June 2014 *Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine* signed the AA/DCFTAs and thus became associated partners of the EaP. To date, the AA/DCFTAs with Georgia and Moldova fully entered into force as of July 1st, 2016, while the EU-Ukraine Agreement, after a delayed internal ratification procedure by the 2016 Dutch referendum, is expected to enter into force on the September 1st, 2017.

Out of all six EaP countries, the ones that signed the AA/DCFTAs are also the most advanced in terms of relations with the EU. As demonstrated by the Eastern Partnership Index⁴, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine are leading the process of approximation to the EU, while others have a more limited interaction with Brussels⁵. The associated partners are in pole position precisely due to the signature and implementation of the Association Agreement. On top of this, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine enjoy the visa-free travel with the EU, which, coupled with the access to the EU’s Common Aviation Area (so far open for Georgia, Moldova and soon eventually to Ukraine), is considered the biggest tangible achievement that is felt by the ordinary citizens. In fact, the visa-free travel was a result of the implementation of the set of reforms contained in the Visa Liberalization Action Plans (VLAPs) for the three countries. The VLAP has been labelled as the most powerful incentive that led to a series of reforms in the area of document security, migration and border management, fight against corruption and organized crime, ensuring the respect for human rights and equality of chances on all grounds.

Although *Armenia* joined the EEU, in October 2015 the EU has decided to initiate negotiations on a Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with Armenia, that was initialled in March 2017⁶ and is expected to be signed at the EaP Summit in Brussels. The new EU-Armenia agreement is in fact a softer version of the AAs, without the ambitious DCFTA component, but lighter free-trade provisions that had to be adjusted to Armenia’s commitments under the EEU. It also provides for opening talks on the

⁴ Eastern Partnership Index, <http://www.eap-index.eu>

⁵ NOTE: An update to follow as the new EaP index shall be issued soon.

⁶ https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/armenia/23120/joint-press-release-european-union-and-republic-armenia-initialling-eu-armenia-comprehensive_en

Common Aviation Area and the starting of the Visa Dialogue when conditions are due. CEPA should also generate more EU funding to support its implementation.

In November 2016⁷, the EU has announced its readiness to launch negotiations on a new comprehensive agreement with *Azerbaijan*, broadening the scope of bilateral cooperation in line with the objectives of the reviewed ENP in 2015. In spite of severe deterioration of the situation in the area of human rights in Azerbaijan over the recent years, the EU has launched the official negotiations on the new agreement in February 2017. The situation on human rights in will be important in the context of the progress of the negotiations. Azerbaijan is also seeking to get access to the Common Aviation Area.

Reflections on a new bilateral contractual framework between the EU and *Belarus* are still pending. The main preoccupation of the EU in its relations with Belarus, still remains the situation in the area democracy and human rights. Belarus was the only EaP country confronted by prolonged EU restrictive measures that relates to general arms embargo introduced in 2011, as well as on asset freeze and travel ban against four individuals⁸. However, this started to change in early 2016 due to a new re-engagement policy of the EU towards Belarus. In February 2016⁹, after the release in August 2015 of all remaining political prisoners, the EU has lifted the restrictive measures against 170 persons and three companies affiliated to the Belarusian authorities. The EU-Belarus cooperation went beyond the interactions in the framework of the multilateral track of the EaP and regular Human Rights Dialogues. In April 2016, the EU-Belarus Coordination Group was initiated as a format for structured bilateral multi-issue dialogue. The EU attaches a particular attention to the cooperation with local civil society organisations that are invited in different EU-Belarus dialogue formats, including the EU-Belarus Human Rights Dialogue and the most recent Coordination Group.

All these developments in individual EaP countries, underline a *de-facto* distinction within the EaP region into Associated and non-Associated Eastern partners, which introduces a need for an upgraded „multi-speed” design for the EaP that shall accommodate the level of ambition, engagement and commitments of the EU and individual EaP countries as provided by the respective bilateral arrangements. A further “zoom-in” from the EU to the Association partners group is required, but still keeping a solid multilateral dimension of the EaP with the involvement of the six countries in all possible configurations. Looking back at the basic EaP principles of ownership, responsibility and differentiation, EaP countries should become more active themselves in developing a “multi-layered” regional cooperation. In fact, the political elites and the opinion-makers in the three associated countries are willing to get an acknowledgment of the membership perspective, even if a part of EU states are sceptical about it.

II. CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES OF THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP

Despite certain positive developments transposing the EaP political and normative framework into national agendas in particular of the Associated countries by means of AA/DCFTAs and visa liberalization, the real results of transformation as perceived by society within these countries, continue to be long awaited. There is a growing trend that the AA/DCFTAs are delivering less that it was expected. On one hand, unlike the countries that joined the EU and the pre-accession states, the Associated EaP countries do not have the access to the structural EU funds to that extent that would allow these a smooth modernization.¹⁰ On the other hand, the poor practical implementation of reforms remains to be one of the main criticism for the majority of the EaP countries, if not all.

In this regard, one of the key challenges of a sustainable transformation in the EaP countries are the veto powers of the vested interests, systemic corruption, and poor functioning state institutions. This is confirmed by the most recent Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index (2016)¹¹ that underlines that

⁷ <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/11/14-azerbaijan/>

⁸ <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2017/02/27-belarus-arms-embargo-sanctions/>

⁹ <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2016/02/15-fac-belarus-conclusions/>

¹⁰ A bittersweet victory: Ukraine's Association Agreement with the EU, Oksana Khomei, Alena Permakova, Dmytro Sydorenko and Balazs Jarabik, <http://www.neweasterneurope.eu/articles-and-commentary/2404-a-bittersweet-victory-ukraine-s-association-agreement-with-the-eu>

¹¹ http://www.transparency.org/news/feature/europe_and_central_asia_an_overall_stagnation

capture of political decision-making is one of the most pervasive and widespread forms of political corruption in the EaP regions. In the majority of the EaP countries, there are close links between politicians and business owners. Companies, networks and individuals unduly influence laws and institutions to adapt policies, the legal framework and the wider economy to their own interests.

In addition to that, the relevance of the EaP policy was always determined by the geopolitical realities, in particular by the different foreign policy goals of the EU and Russia. This introduces another crucial challenge for the EaP – the Russian factor. The new EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy¹² states that for the EU, managing the relations with Russia represents a key strategic challenge. On the other hand, Russia sees the EU as a serious geopolitical rival and has stood firmly against the EaP countries' closer cooperation and integration with the West. From Russia's perspective, the EaP is viewed as being in direct competition with Russian interests in the post-Soviet space, which is perceived by Russia as its 'zone of influence'. While Russia views the struggle over the EaP as one of the key interests, for the EU it is a matter not only of interests, but primarily of values and security at its borders.

It has to be underlined that since the EaP was launched, EU has repeatedly declared that it is not a policy directed against Russia. Nonetheless, the Russia's continuous assertive actions against individual EaP countries, indicates that it was not convincing enough for Moscow, at least until 2013 when the EU and four out of six EaP countries advanced seriously in concluding new AA/DCFTAs. Moscow aims at weakening the EU leverage over the EaP region, undermining the basic pillars of the EaP and pushing especially the most advanced countries to embark on the alternative Russia-led Eurasian political and economic integration process. In this context Russia, has unfolded a variety of measures that were a combination of soft and hard power tools.

In a broader context, it should be admitted that Russia's assertiveness on the EaP also strengthens the influence of the vested interests in the respective countries, which often use the pressure from Russia as an excuse against pursuing a sustainable reform agenda. Consequently, the geopolitical competition over pro-European and pro-Russian vectors pushed the EU into supporting pro-European governments regardless of their track record of reforms. Moreover, in Moldova it also contributed to a polarisation of the society, as the political parties were calling on the citizens to choose between Russia and the EU, rather than focusing on real issues of reforms. Since 2014, Georgia and Ukraine is much less polarised over geopolitical vectors.

To overcome this, EU policies towards individual EaP countries need to become more effective on the ground. This means that the EU should be more politically engaged in securing the track-record of reforms and applying corresponding support instruments that should not simultaneously infringe upon the sovereignty of the respective countries and follow the objectives enshrined in the bilateral agreements with the EU. In case the EaP governments are not advancing on systemic reforms, the EU should go beyond general statements on reform goals and step-up to assist the governments in developing and implementing more concrete reform agendas, while closely monitoring the delivery on benchmarks, under strict and targeted conditionality on financial assistance.

Moreover, to be more effective in tackling the Russian factor the EU should be united, more creative and proactive in addressing the roots of the challenges. The task for the EU is very complex and will also demand a balance between pursuing a 'selective engagement' with Russia when their interests overlap, as stated in the EU's Global Strategy, and further developing the potential of the EaP policy to strengthen partners' resilience, as defined in the most recent Joint Communication of the European Commission and EEAS to the European Council and European Parliament outlines a strategic approach to resilience in the EU's external action¹³.

¹² http://www.eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top_stories/pdf/eugs_review_web.pdf

¹³ Joint Communication to the European Council and European Parliament „A strategic approach to resilience in the EU's External action, 07 June 2017, https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/27711/strategic-approach-resilience-eus-external-action_en

Against this background, today the EaP criticism is mostly related to the fact that: (1) it does not properly deal with security, (2) the initiative has been lacking the most powerful incentive – EU membership, (3) the allocated funds are insufficient to generate significant changes and approximation with the EU and (4) it has a too technocratic approach. These criticisms in some ways resonate with the reality. However, these critiques have also been challenged. Those who oppose greater EU engagement with the EaP partners question the necessity of offering more to these countries until they deliver on what they signed up for and meet their commitments. This means full implementation of the Association Agreements and the DCFTAs, as well as other bilateral or multilateral programs agreed between the EU and partner countries. In fact, the EU itself offered to the EaP countries room for manoeuvring.

The ENP review that took place in 2016 set a new priority that was surprising for many. Instead of aiming transformation in the EU neighbourhood as it was the case before, the EU decided to focus on stabilization. The EU shifted its policy from attempts to export and promote values and democracy to an approach that could be rather described as realism, if not pragmatism.¹⁴ In practice it means that the EaP countries would be able to pick up the policies where these see more benefits and avoid inconvenient conditions from the side of EU, especially for countries that do not have such contractual relations as the Association Agreement. The step taken by the EU is a demonstration that the EU's policy in the Eastern Neighbourhood is difficult to call a success. The main reasons behind the difficulties to employ EU policy in the EaP are the inconsistencies of EU in providing incentives-based policy (with the exception of visa-free), a high degree of lack of understanding of certain EU and members states officials towards the region, a rather one-sided approach on agenda setting despite the claims of "joint ownership", lack of EU membership and a strong Russian influence on the region.¹⁵

Although there is a struggling task to identify the best ideas on how to deal with the Eastern Partnership in the future, there is a general consensus about the need to upgrade and reshuffle the initiative in order to make it more functional – this is precisely why the EU High Representative and Vice-president of the European Commission Federica Mogherini has put forward the Joint Staff Document "Eastern Partnership – 20 deliverables for 2020", which in the meantime was discussed and endorsed by the EaP Ministerial in June 2017¹⁶.

By this new instrument, the EU is aiming both at providing more tangible results to benefit the citizens in the EaP countries and at achieving the overall goals of increasing stabilisation and resilience in the EaP region as provided by the ENP Review and the new EU Global Strategy. One should welcome the European Commission and EEAS's approach to bringing certain pragmatism into the reflections about the future of the EaP. However, what should be avoided is that the respective deliverables and corresponding targets become too pragmatic and not include more ambitious measures by limiting themselves to those that have already been agreed on by the EU and EaP countries until now. The prioritization on a set of concrete EaP deliverables reveals a more structured and targeted approach from the EU side that has the potential to make the EaP more operational and indeed attempting to embrace the objective of bringing more tangible results to benefit the societies from the EaP countries.

Against the above-mentioned background, annexed to this paper a set of Draft Policy Recommendations for the EaP Summit in Brussels are presented to be further discussed and improved during the EaP Think Tank Forum that will be held in Chisinau on September 21-23, 2017.

¹⁴ Judy Dempsey, The EU's Shift From Transformation to Stabilization, <http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/66455>

¹⁵ Maryia Hushcha, From Prague to Riga: Has the EU's Eastern Partnership Been a Failure? <http://www.e-ir.info/2017/04/14/from-prague-to-riga-has-the-eus-eastern-partnership-been-a-failure/>

¹⁶ https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/28117/eu-revises-20-key-deliverables-2020-eastern-partnership_en



**National Endowment
for Democracy**
Supporting freedom around the world



**Konrad
Adenauer
Stiftung**

**Eastern Partnership
Think Tank Forum 2017**
Chişinău
21-23 September 2017
#EaPTTF2017



DRAFT POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE 2017 EAP SUMMIT

*To be further discussed and updated during the EaP Think Tank Forum
(Chişinău, September 21-23, 2017)*

This Policy Recommendations have been developed and endorsed by a group of over 60 experts representing the think tank community from the EU and Eastern Partnership countries, during the EaP Think Tank Forum held in Chişinău, on September 21-23, 2017¹⁷. The Forum was organised within a project implemented by New Europe Center (former Institute for World Policy, Kiev), Georgian Institute for Strategic Studies (Tbilisi) and the Institute for European Policies and Reforms (Chişinău) in close cooperation with the EaP Civil Society Forum. The project benefited from the funds provided through the EaP CSF Re-granting supported by the European Union and National Endowment for Democracy. Additional support was provided by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation (KAS). This Policy Recommendations represent the general line of opinions expressed by the experts that participated at the EaP Think Tank Forum and in no way, it shall represent the official position or the views of the European Union, NED or KAS.

The Eastern Partnership needs a new impetus in order to become more effective and successful. For that, the EU and EaP states need to reform the initiative so it deepens the economic cooperation by creation of a common economic area; makes a stronger emphasis on the security dimension; boosts its cooperation in energy issues; reconsiders the direct budget support and the macro-financial assistance; improves the communication strategy in order to adapt it to local needs; considers giving access to EU programmes and agencies; and make available the EU membership perspective for countries that aspire to become members and deliver on the committed reforms.

Thus, the following recommendations shall be considered for the next EaP Summit aiming at upgrading Eastern Partnership so that it better fits the challenging realities, EU's objectives and partner countries divers expectations:

¹⁷ NOTE: More details about the EaP Think Tank Forum Programme, participants and results of the discussions could be found here: www.ipre.md/eapttf2017

Strategic, political and security aspects

1. **The EU** should keep an open-door policy and send a clear and frank message to the Associated EaP countries with regard to the European integration perspectives. Hence, the membership perspective needs to be alive as a political principle if one desires to see the EaP to succeed. This means that guarantees under Article 49 need to apply with respect to those partners, who thoroughly implement AA and DCFTA provisions and demonstrate enduring commitment to democratic consolidation. Finally, it will reinforce reform-minded political actors in the partner countries and hand the EU leverage to positively influence political discourse and reform process in respective states.
2. The aspiring **EaP countries** should work in an inclusive manner towards building a national consensus to unite society over the narrative that the ultimate goal of the implementation of the AA/DCFTAs is to transform the countries into functioning modern and prosperous democracies. The European integration or the prospect for the accession to the EU should not be a goal in itself, but rather a vehicle to secure the sustainability of transformation.
3. **The EU** needs to employ “multi-speed’ EaP approach that will pragmatically reflect political, economic and social dynamics found in individual partner states. However, EaP should still keep a solid multilateral dimension with the involvement of the six countries in all possible configurations. This approach will smartly accommodate divergent EaP partners’ political aspirations with respect to the EU and leave the door open to those aspiring for more advanced relations, provided that they show enduring commitment to the Article 2 of the Lisbon Treaty.
4. **The EU and EaP partners** should further develop the multilateral dimension of the EaP. The EaP countries have been primarily pursuing a bilateral dialogue with the EU. The EaP became valuable as a regional platform, going beyond the EaP institutional layers such as EURONEST Assembly, EaP Civil Society Forum, EaP Business Forum. Thus, new non-institutionalised formats such as EaP Youth Forum and most recent EaP Mass Media Forum have been established and are successfully contributing to the regional identity for the Eastern Partnership, and should be further supported by the EU and EaP governments. However, **EaP countries** should become more active themselves in developing a “multi-layered” regional cooperation.
5. **The EU’s** differentiation towards EaP partners should not be made to the detriment of democratization. Democratization should remain a key pre-condition for the EU’s deeper engagement with Partners. At the same time, **any EU engagement** with EaP partners should not compromise on values and should focus on discouraging any actions of the vested interests directed against these values.
6. Stabilization of in the EaP will remain the short to medium term priority of the EU. However, **the EU needs** a more long-term approach not only in ensuring stability, but also in creating a proper environment for its sustainability. The success of the EaP was and will always be dependent on how the individual EaP partners and the EU fine-tune their interests in long-term.
7. **The EU** should pay more attention to address security challenges not only by “soft power” mechanisms, but also expand their reach and role in the settlement of the Russian sponsored conflicts in the EaP states. The security challenges that affect the entire region demand more vision and tools from the EU in terms of strengthening the cooperation across the security and defence sectors. **The EU** should both help consolidate the capacities of the interested EaP countries to resist, but also to build-up more trust and confidence within the EaP in the first place. Thus, the upgraded EaP should give more attention to measures that would support external resilience of EaP countries to ‘hybrid threats.’

8. **The EU** should offer the possibility for EaP states to have a greater involvement in the CSDP cooperation. Moreover, **EaP countries** themselves should deepen their joint cooperation in the area of security and defence capabilities. The new EU's Global Strategy paves the way for the greater political and security integration of the EaP countries into the European Union. Even though conflict prevention is mentioned among the aims of the EaP 2020 deliverables, there are no milestones or targets providing for concrete measures. Despite the fact that a work plan is developed within the EaP CSDP panel, the Brussels Summit would be a great opportunity to solidify the cooperation between EU and EaP states in this area.
9. **The EU** should rethink how money is spent in the EaP and a better balance between budgetary and project-based support should be found. Thus, a part of the funds from the EU budgetary support should be allocated to project based activities that would support a specific reform. The EU should strictly follow the smart conditionality approach - no reforms, no disbursements. The EU macro-financial assistance shall be conditioned with concrete reform implementation measures that refer not only to the micro-economic indicators, but concurring also with conditions in the area of good governance, rule of law, democracy and human rights. The MFA shall be divided in smaller milestones, the implementation of which would be awarded with a new MFA instalment. The MFA payments shall follow the principle "strict but fair".

EaP deliverables by 2020 and beyond

10. Reviewing the 20 EaP deliverables for 2020. The targets should be more ambitious. Not all milestones and targets have clear and measurable indicators. There is a need for a greater differentiation between the EaP states and not to focus only on issues that are of interest for the EaP governments (as suggested by the ENP review), but also on issues raised by EaP societies. The process of compilation of a set of steps to be taken by 2020 should not focus only on technical issues, but also need to keep an eye on strategic development of the EaP.

Cross-cutting EaP deliverables

11. **The EU** shall further support the development of think-tanks, civil society and grass roots organisations in the EaP countries and closely monitor the environment and encourage the cooperation and interaction between the local EaP civil society organisations and EaP governments. One particular recommendation is to provide permanent support to think-tanks and CSOs and not only when the incumbent governments from the EaP countries are opposing reforms. Continuous support for to the EaP Civil Society Forum is of particular importance, in order to multiply initiatives like the EaP Civil Society Fellowship program. Moreover, **the EU and EaP** countries develop new support and inclusive cooperation programs involving other specific societal groups and communities, such as such as churches and different local ethnic communities.
12. **The EU** should expand its Strategic Communication efforts in the region. Thus, the capacities of StratCom East Task Force should be increased and strategic communication capabilities in the EaP countries should be strengthened. The fact that communication became a cross-cutting deliverable by 2020 is the right step forward. During the last two years, the EU's communication improved, especially in light of events in Ukraine.
13. **The EU and EaP countries** should address the communication and visibility gap between the EaP countries and the EU itself. The EaP 2020 deliverables should include corresponding targets, and provide for relevant implementation actions in the EU itself (e.g. support communication campaigns about the EaP within the EU member states, conduct regular survey in the EU about EaP countries etc.).

14. **The EU** should increase its visibility in the EaP countries through further promoting its programs, projects and activities, provide support for independent media and media literacy of various groups and back-up initiatives aimed at reducing the polarization within the EaP countries.
15. **The EU** should allocate more resources in order to support local independent media content in Russian/local languages, countering Russian disinformation efforts. **The EaP countries** should also address the issue of media concentration and transparent ownership.

Economic development and market opportunities

16. **The EU** should be more ambitious in providing support for the implementation of the DCFTAs, in particular by establishing tailored legal approximation facility to support the transposition of the EU acquis in the associated countries. Moreover, **the EU** should also support other DCFTA related aspects that have a multiplying effect, for instance the Vocational Educational Training (VET) programmes. In this regard, the EU should also encourage in the EaP Associated countries to better align the work-force related implications of the DCFTAs and the skills that young people are leaving schools and colleges with in the respective countries.
17. **The EU and EaP Associated countries** should negotiate and conclude tailored Conformity Assessment Agreements in order to boosting export opportunities to the EU in particular on high-value industrial products.
18. **The EU and EaP Associate countries** should undertake concrete steps in order to develop a common economic area, with the possibility for extending the area to other EaP countries upon institutional compliance. The common economic area would speed up transformation in the countries that would join. However, a solid package of support should be offered so that countries could benefit from the common economic area that would be similar to the European Economic Area.
19. **The EU** should consider the expansion of additional multi-year zero-tariff quotas for the EaP states (especially those implementing the DCFTA) in order to support modernization of various sectors by providing a permanent support to the industries that lack readiness to face the competition on the EU market.
20. **The EU** should consider granting access for the Associated EaP partners to the Single European Payment Area (SEPA) with the goal of bringing additional tangible results for the citizens and create new opportunities for an improved trade and investment. The EaP deliverables should provide for a set of more concrete targets related to the governance and supervision of the financial and banking sectors, given the vulnerabilities of this sector in most the EaP countries.

Strengthening institutions and good governance

21. **The EU** needs to have a more serious approach in supporting the democratization and institutional resilience of EaP Partners (fight against corruption, developing institutional capacities and concrete capabilities) and clearly link this paradigm to overall security of these states. It is the democratic vacuum and the under-reformed and incapable institutions of the EaP countries that make them vulnerable to the external security threats.
22. While engaging with the existing governments from the EaP region, **the EU** should seek stronger cooperation with reform-minded elites and agents of change from within the state institutions, law enforcement and regulatory bodies to increase their independence from the vested interests.

23. The EU should ensure a closer oversight on the process of fighting political and high-level corruption as well as vested interests in the associated EaP countries. The same refers to the deliverable on implementing reforms in the judiciary sector. Thus, an upgraded EaP should provide for Associated partners a special mechanism to ensure constant monitoring and conditioned support of justice sector reforms and fighting high-level corruption. From this perspective **the EU** should keep the enlargement-like toolbox open and draw inspiration from positive examples that managed to secure systemic reforms in the EU accession process or within EU member states. An example of this is the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism that was designed for Romania and Bulgaria.

Connectivity

24. While the EaP deliverables are setting ambitious targets on improving transport connectivity, it should also include concrete targets to road transport services with the aim of liberalizing them for the AA/DCFTA countries by 2020.

25. Cooperation in energy and transport areas should be boosted. Energy issues are gaining an increasing importance for certain EaP countries that lack alternatives for energy supply. **The EU** should offer financial assistance and political support to strengthen energy independence from Russia. This should take place through development of energy infrastructure with such elements as gas interconnectors, high-voltage transmission lines, and programmes for green energy development. Moreover, **the EU** should closely monitor and support the effective implementation 3rd Energy Package with all EaP partner countries members of the Energy Community Treaty.

26. One of the specific added values proposed already under the EaP 2020 deliverables relates to the harmonisation of the roaming tariffs within the EaP countries, a process which already started within the EU as for June 15, 2017. However, this target should be revised and become more ambitious so that citizens from the EaP could already benefit from 'Roam-Like-At-home' by 2020. This could become a strong incentive especially for people who have relatives and intense contacts in the EU.

Mobility and people-to-people contacts

27. **The EU** should open Visa Dialogues with the other EaP countries. By 2020 the citizens of at least one more EaP country should benefit from visa-free travel to the, given the security conditions and proper internal reforms are in place. **The EU** needs to use this tool for all the EaP countries both as an opportunity to improve mobility and people-to-people contacts with the EU, as well as a means to leverage transformation in the respective countries. **The EU** should ensure that Visa Dialogues with the three EaP Associated states are used in order to assess the progress in the implementation of the justice and home affairs reforms.

28. **The EU** should enlarge and deepen the Mobility Partnerships with all EaP countries.

29. **The EU and EaP countries** should further support exchange and cooperation amongst academics, students and researchers as it plays an important role in furthering the people to people agenda and building up domestic capacities, in the framework or beyond the existing programs like Erasmus, H2020, Jean Monnet. It would serve the EU's and EaP states interests very well to lend more targeted support to EaP Universities and Think Tanks specifically to enable them to interact, compete and cooperate with their EU counterparts.

AUTHORS



Leonid Litra is a Senior Research Fellow at the New Europe Center, previously served as Deputy Director at the Institute for Development and Social Initiatives “Viitorul” in Chisinau (Moldova) where he is now an Associate Fellow. Leonid has co-authored many publications on democratization of the post-Soviet area, European integration and frozen conflicts. He was at the basis of “European Integration Index for Eastern Partnership Countries” and a regular contributor to the Nations in Transit Report on Moldova of the Freedom House and to the Bertelsmann Transformation Index. Leonid was a Carnegie Research Fellow at Yale University and holds a master degree from the European Institute of High International Studies in Nice in International Relations and European Studies.



Irakli Porchkhidze is the Co-founder and Vice-president of the Georgian Institute for Strategic Studies (GISS) since 2012. He concurrently holds the position of Dean of the Law School of Ilia State University. From 2010 until October 2012 Irakli has been the First Deputy State Minister for Reintegration. In 2008-2010 he served as the Deputy National Security Advisor to the President of Georgia and Deputy Secretary of the National Security Council of Georgia. In 2004-2006 he launched and headed the Civil Registry Agency. The reform of the agency became the flagship case of Georgia’s institutional transformation. Irakli holds master’s degree in International Affairs and Political Science from the School of International and Public Affairs of Columbia University and Central European University. He is also a fellow of the Draper Hills Program of the Center on Democracy, Development and the Rule of Law at Stanford University.



Iulian Groza is a career diplomat and an expert in foreign policy, European affairs and good governance. He is a former Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration of the Republic of Moldova (June 2013 to March 2015). Before that he served in different capacities at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration, including as Director General at the Directorate for European integration. He was posted as well to Brussels at the Moldovan Mission to the EU. Currently he leads the Institute for European Policies and Reforms (IPRE) and is a Board member of the Institute for Strategic Initiatives (IPIS). Mr. Groza is a PhD candidate at the Moldovan State University and holds a BA degree in international law. He also did postgraduate European Studies at Birmingham University and Security Studies at SNSPA in Bucharest. Iulian is an FCO Chevening Scholar. Mr. Groza holds diplomatic rank of Minister-Counsellor.