

Workshop A

The EU's Eastern Neighbourhood and Beyond: Priorities, Perspectives and Challenges

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1. The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and post-Riga Eastern Partnership (EaP): Time for Complex Rethinking? What Is to Be Done?

The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), launched in 2004 and reviewed in December 2015, is a key and crucial part of the European Union's foreign and security policy to help the EU support and foster stability, security and prosperity in the countries closest to its borders. In this context, the European Union works with its ten southern neighbours (Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, and Tunisia) and six eastern neighbours (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine) to achieve the closest possible political association and the greatest possible degree of economic integration. This goal builds on common interests and on common values — democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and social cohesion. It also encompasses support for a market economy, sustainable development and good governance.

The building of a stable and peaceful environment within the immediate neighbourhood, as well as worldwide, remains the main priority of the EU external action. Under the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), the EU will continue to support the development of the Eastern Partnership and relations with individual countries. In case of the Southern Neighbourhood, one of the important prerequisites of the elimination of the migration flows into Europe is the political and economic stabilization of individual countries.

The Eastern Partnership (EaP) is a joint project involving the EU, its Member States and six Eastern European partners: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine.

There are several mutual challenges currently faced by the EaP partner countries. Their common solution supports the cooperation and exchange of best practices. Multilateral cooperation within the Eastern Partnership entails a wide range of issues:

1. Strengthening the institutions and good governance, including resistance to outer changes.
2. Development of market opportunities through economic integration and trade agreements.
3. Ensuring the energy safety and improving connectivity in the field of energy and transport.

4. Enhancing the **mobility of people and people-to-people contacts** through negotiations within the framework of the visa dialogue.

The EU and the partner countries leaders meet every other year in **Eastern Partnership Summits**. The latest Eastern Partnership Summit Declaration, agreed in May 2015 in Riga, reviewed the cooperation and provided the direction for further joint action.

The Summit Declaration in Riga has defined the following 4 priority areas, where efforts must be made in order to achieve progress before commencement of the next Summit of the EU Eastern Partnership:

1. **Strengthening the institutions and good governance.**
2. **Mobility and people-to-people contacts.**
3. **Market opportunities** (promoting small and medium-sized enterprises, etc.).
4. **Connectivity** (interconnectors, particularly in energy).

Following the Summit in Riga, indisputably, it is not possible to maintain unity throughout the six EaP countries anymore, given **the confirmation of their division into the following three groups**:

- 1) **Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine** (these three countries have made a significant progress in cooperation with the EU through the political association and economic integration),
- 2) **Armenia and Belarus and**
- 3) **Azerbaijan.**

The basic **direction of the EU Eastern Partnership for the current and upcoming term** is defined in this Declaration. The participants (starting with the partner countries and ending with the EU institutions) currently **recalibrate their activities, program of activities, and the instruments in accordance with the conclusions of the Summit.**

The persisting fact is, however, that the **partnership** has had a promising start as a political project of strategic importance, and now is **gradually lapsing into the position of an extended program of the “technical and commercial cooperation.”**

Thus, the Eastern Partnership is after the last Summit in Riga in a phase of a certain disenchantment and attenuation. This condition is caused by several reasons, on both sides – the EU side (with its Member States), as well as, the side of the partner countries.

Another player, directly influencing this program, is the **Russian Federation.**

Currently, the main weakness of the Eastern Partnership is its "political jejuneness", as a result of an ineptitude, namely unwillingness of the EU (i.e. some of its members) to offer the eastern partners a clear vision of integration.

The attractiveness of the EU Eastern Partnership is therefore limited to:

1. **"Expanded cooperation" with the EU and EaP countries.**
2. **Visa liberalization.**

The main **limiting factors in the three leader countries of the program ("frontrunners": Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia) can be divided into at least five factors:**

1. **Lack of real and provable commitment of the political elites in the countries of Eastern Partnership to the important and profound reforms. Also the continuance and upkeep of a corrupt oligarchic-management model of these post-Soviet countries is unacceptable for the EU.**
2. **Growing dissatisfaction of the population in these countries, the increase of the Euro-sceptic moods, pro-Soviet resentment, and deteriorating economic and social situation of the ordinary citizens.**
3. Intensive (especially in case of Ukraine), less intensive, and possibly long-term (frozen) **conflicts in the territory of eastern partners** (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova).
4. External influence - hence the **active counteract of the Russian Federation** describing the EU Eastern Partnership explicitly as a hostile project. Aiming to bring it to a halt and a complete decomposition, Russia is using a myriad of tools and methods, ranging from soft to the strongest and most aggressive ones (starting with an open propaganda and threats of restrictions on the work visa issuance, through the annexation of Crimea, and the active support and involvement in local and regional conflicts). The fact is that the Russian Federation perceives the project as being directed against their own interests, in their zone of sovereign influence. The RF accuses the Eastern Partnership and the EU of the negative phenomena occurring in this geopolitical environment.
5. **Launch of a competitive project of economic integration in the form of the Euro-Asian Economic Union**, whose members, amongst others, are also two of the Eastern Partnership countries (Armenia, Belarus).

The EU and Ukraine signed the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) on 27 June 2014 as a part of their broader Association Agreement (AA). It has been ratified by all signatories except The Netherlands, which will have to propose a solution following the rejection of the AA at a Dutch referendum held on 6 April 2016. The European Commission presented a recommendation on 4 May 2016 to grant a visa-free status to Kosovo and Turkey - provided the latter meets all necessary conditions set out in the Visa Liberalization Roadmap by June 2016. On the other hand, 'Visa Liberalization Dialogues' continue with Ukraine and Georgia.

At present, the key objective of the European Union is to **stabilize its immediate neighbourhood. The European Union and its Member States urgently need to promote an active implementation of the revised European Neighbourhood Policy**, its new priorities, more flexible use of financial instruments, and to strengthen the differentiated partnership that reflects the realistic needs of the partners.

It is important to place the main emphasis on the **development of the Eastern Partnership policy and the EU relations with the individual countries; i.e. to**

promote democratization and reform processes in these countries, including the security field, while **taking into account the differentiation between partners**. It is still necessary to promote **the individual approach to each of the six Eastern Partnership countries**, depending on their ambition and the extent of close proximity of the EU and its standards.

In order to promote the development of relations with those countries of the **Eastern Partnership** (Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia), which have signed the **Association Agreement / Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (AA / DCFTA)**, the **European Union** should strongly **advocate the implementation of reforms improving the business and investment climate** in these countries, thereby assisting their economic integration into the EU.

Association Agreement / Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (AA / DCFTA) have proven their success and can be regarded as indispensable tools and a mechanism of association relations and economic integration with the partners.

Due to the ongoing conflict, it is important to pay a special attention to Ukraine. **Ukraine is the largest neighbour of the Slovak Republic and it also represents the external border of the EU and NATO**. The EU should fully support Ukraine in implementing reforms, predominantly in the fight against corruption, improving the law enforcement, judicial reform and the reform of public finances.

Extract: “Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe”***A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy***

It is in the interests of our citizens to invest in the resilience of states and societies to the east stretching into Central Asia, and south down to Central Africa. Fragility beyond our borders threatens all our vital interests. By contrast, resilience – the ability of states and societies to reform, thus withstanding and recovering from internal and external crises – benefits us and countries in our surrounding regions, sowing the seeds for sustainable growth and vibrant societies. Together with its partners, the EU will therefore promote resilience in its surrounding regions. A resilient state is a secure state, and security is key for prosperity and democracy. But the reverse holds true as well. To ensure sustainable security, it is not only state institutions that we will support. Echoing the Sustainable Development Goals, resilience is a broader concept, encompassing all individuals and the whole of society. A resilient society featuring democracy, trust in institutions, and sustainable development lies at the heart of a resilient state. State and societal resilience is our strategic priority in the neighbourhood. Many people within the scope of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) both to the east and to the south wish to build closer relations with the Union. Our enduring power of attraction can spur transformation and is not aimed against any country. Within this group are currently countries such as Tunisia or Georgia, whose success as prosperous, peaceful and stable democracies would reverberate across their respective regions. The ENP has recommitted to Eastern Partnership and southern Mediterranean countries wishing to develop stronger relations with us. We will support these countries in implementing association agreements, including Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (DCFTAs). We will also think creatively about deepening tailor-made partnerships further. Possibilities include the creation of an economic area with countries implementing DCFTAs, the extension of Trans-European Networks and the Energy Community, as well as building physical and digital connections. Societal links will also be strengthened through enhanced mobility, cultural and educational exchanges, research cooperation and civil society platforms. Full participation in EU programmes and agencies will be pursued alongside strategic dialogue with a view to paving the way for these countries' further involvement in CSDP. Resilience is a strategic priority across the EU's east and south both in countries that want stronger ties with the EU and in those – within and beyond the ENP – that have no wish to do so. The EU will support different paths to resilience to its east and south, focusing on the most acute dimensions of fragility and targeting those where we can make a meaningful difference.

*On 23 May 2016, a meeting of the EU + EaP was held at the level of the Foreign Affairs Ministers, evaluating the implementation of commitments of the Riga Summit, and reviewing the future direction of the partnership. The EU institutions, Member States and partner countries presented their opinions on **the status, challenges and perspectives of the Eastern Partnership** in regards to the upcoming Summit in 2017. Attention was paid to **the reform issues** (some partner countries had depicted the fight against corruption and the rule of law), implementation of the Association Agreements / Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (AA / DCFTA) in cooperation with Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus based on the principle of differentiation. **All partner countries have confirmed their interest in further development of cooperation with the EU.** The EU institutions along with several delegations emphasized the importance of the multilateral dimension of the EaP. Furthermore, a significant attention was paid to the conflicts in the region (mainly in Ukraine and Nagorno-Karabakh). Many Member States supported the pre-requisite **visa liberalization for citizens of Georgia and Ukraine.***

Within the activities of the **Slovak Presidency of the Council of the EU**, the Eastern Partners have been invited to two ministerial meetings (JHA in July 2016 in Bratislava, EVIRO in October 2016 in Luxembourg) and to the **informal lunch** taking place on **3 September, 2016** on the outskirts of Gymnich. By the end of the year, the SK PRES should additionally start the preparatory discussions on the **Eastern Partnership Summit** that will be held in 2017.

2. Recalibrating Europe-Russia Relations: Time for Strategic Reset or a Defense of the Status Quo?

The relations between the **European Union** and its Member States on one hand and the **Russian Federation** on the other, have deteriorated remarkably in connection with the **crisis of 2014 in Ukraine**. The Russia-EU relations, continuing to be determined by the **conflict in Ukraine** and the **sanctions regime** are still characterized by **mutual distrust**. Currently, the main objective is to prevent a further deterioration.

Russian leadership does not see a need to change the current "**demonizing policy of the West**". Moscow officially "does not expect lifting of sanctions" claiming that the Russian economy has adapted to the sanctions. Aside from the prevailing aggressive rhetoric, **Russia is seeking to "consolidate" the relations with the West**. Nonetheless, not by changing its **strategic objectives towards Ukraine**. Russia continues to expect that after the failure of "the power solutions"

and "trade through Minsk Agreements", the West could be forced into "an agreement" regarding Ukraine.

Russia realizes, that it is increasingly difficult to maintain **the unity of the EU on the issue of sanctions**. Germany, solid in its stance toward sanctions, simultaneously **supporting the increase of NATO capacities in Eastern Europe**, is trying to gradually **create room for certain lifting of sanctions**. Germany expects that this will gradually pave the way for **de-escalation of tensions in Ukraine and in the Russia-EU relations**.

Russia is, however, feeling reinforced on the international scene (Syria) also due to the development in Ukraine, and expects a visible change in the political stance of the EU on the issue of sanctions. **Efforts to assuage the attitude towards Russia are also indicated by the initiatives in the European Parliament**. The Leadership of the European Parliament decided on 2 June 2016 to **resume the dialogue with the Russian Parliament**, except the sanctioned Members of the Parliament.

The EU externally declares a consensus of the Member States with regards to the sanctions against Russia; lifting the sanctions is conditional on the full implementation of the Minsk Agreements. However, the extensive publicity and increasing interest of some EU members (Hungary, Italy, Austria, as well as Germany and France) in a political debate indicates a **frail state of the opinion unity, despite of how it's presented externally**.

Regardless of the **strained bilateral relations**, the EU should focus on maintaining a **dialogue with Russia** and continue the (technical) cooperation in various areas of interest. **The Russian side** would discern the interest of the EU in communication with the Euro-Asian Economic Union positively.

The area of **research and education** is a **positive example of cooperation** between the **EU and Russia**, important for the development of interpersonal relations. According to the European Commission this has always been successful.

At the last meeting of the **EU Foreign Affairs Council (FAC)**, which took place on 14 March 2016, the foreign ministers unanimously agreed on **five principles governing the European Union's policy towards Russia**:

1. **Implementation of the Minsk Agreements as the key condition for any substantial change in the EU's stance towards Russia.**
2. **Strengthened relations with the EU's Eastern Partners and other neighbours, in particular in Central Asia.**
3. **Strengthening the resilience of the EU (for example energy security, hybrid threats or strategic communication).**
4. **Need for selective engagement with Russia on issues of interest to the EU.**
5. **Need to engage in people-to-people contacts and support Russian civil society.**

The Russian Federation currently represents a strategic dilemma for the European Union. Along-term **axiom of Russian foreign policy on respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the countries** was overcome with the **annexation of Crimea**.

The quality of the Russian relationship with the European Union is determined by the demeanor of the Russian Federation in conducting the regional issues with the emphasis on the neighbourly relations.

Questions for Discussion:

- Is the Eastern Partnership project currently really "politically exhausted"?
- Isn't it true that the Eastern Partnership project is de facto a (too) "neo-liberal" project of the EU without "social dimension"?
- Is the project of the European Union sufficiently attractive for the Eastern Partnership countries and their citizens? Is the European Union sufficiently "visible" in these countries?
- The priority task of the Ukrainian Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe and their special mission of observers is to monitor the security situation in the east of the country. Is this mission sufficiently strong and effective?
- Are the restrictive measures of sanctions imposed by the EU on the Russian Federation effective? Do they fulfill their purpose?
- *"Ukraine will definitely not be able to become a member of the EU in the next 20-25 years, and not of NATO either,"* said the European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker. Is this decision right?