



ENC SUMMARY

THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP — Deliverables, Prospects and Challenges

June 2017

Research staff at European Neighbourhood Council (ENC).

This publication is a summary and analysis of the event “The Eastern Partnership: Deliverables, Prospects and Challenges” which took place in the European Parliament on the 6th of June 2017, co-organized with the European Alliance for Georgia (EAFG).

The information in this publication includes information from the event as well as input from the European Neighbourhood Council’s (ENC) local Eastern Partnership (EaP)¹ Academic Council Members, and ENC research staff.

ABOUT THE EVENT

The fifth EaP summit will take place on the 24th of November in Brussels. In light of this upcoming summit, the ENC co-organized a roundtable discussion with the European Alliance for Georgia (EAFG) to highlight the prospects, expectations and challenges for the countries in the region.

Hosted in the European Parliament by the MEPs **Norica Nicolai** and **Jaromir Štětina**, the discussion focused on the EU’s foreign policy towards the six EaP countries and how the existing security threats in the region could be addressed. Furthermore, the discussants asked how the EU’s internal difficulties are affecting the EaP countries.

CONTEXT

In terms of European integration, the EaP countries have seen progress in recent years: visa-free travel was granted to both Ukraine and Georgia during 2017, while Armenia’s handling of its first election after the constitutional reform showed many improvements. Ukraine’s Association Agreement (AA) and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) was fully ratified by all EU member states between 2014 and June 2017.

On the other hand, the region is facing a great deal of uncertainty, argues ENC’s Academic Council member **Dr. Kevork Oskanian** (University of Birmingham). He suggests that the internal difficulties inside the EU, such as

¹ The EaP is an initiative by the European Union (EU) to strengthen the relation with its Eastern neighbors. The six countries included in the partnership are Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

Brexit and the possible search for fundamental reform, would lead to a more inward-looking approach from the EU's side.

Russia's constant direct or indirect presence in the region, together with the United States (US) President Trump's unpredictability, is contributing to the uncertainty of the future – 'all eventualities would have to be taken into account and prepared for', Dr. Kevork Oskanian notes.

Another ENC Academic Council member and Chairman in European Neighbourhood Policy at College of Europe, **Prof. Tobias Schumacher**, highlights the unstable security situation in the EaP area. Almost all countries are experiencing some sort of political tension at the moment.

A conflict that potentially could escalate quickly into full-scale war is Nagorno-Karabakh, between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The problem is – according to Prof. Schumacher – that the EU seems to ignore these dangerous developments by conforming after a 'business as usual' -approach. 'The South Caucasus as a hotbed of unresolved territorial conflicts is increasingly forgotten', notes Prof. Schumacher.

However, the most prominent case of conflict in the region is Ukraine, where a war has emerged in the Eastern part, after the Russian annexation of Crimea in February 2014.

Keeping the constant security threat in mind, the Ukrainian government must in addition make progress in the reform process as part of the EaP framework.

ENC Academic Council member and Associate Professor at Odesa Mechnikov National University **Sergii Glebov**, explains that the institutional and legislative reforms already implemented as part of the reform process risk failure due to the different political and economic interest of ruling elites in Ukraine – an issue that the EU is well equipped to tackle.

For instance, the EaP framework should include local civil society organizations to a wider extent, to support and strengthen their work and input to the reform process. 'A possible alternative would be to re-direct structural EaP funds from governmental recipients to the non-governmental sector', Prof. Glebov suggests.

Moldova has often been discussed as a success story in terms of European integration within the framework of the EaP. The country seems to have benefited from all aspects of its EU Action Plan – economically, politically and socially.

Senior Lecturer at Free International University of Moldova (ULIM) **Larisa Patlis**, one of ENC's Academic Council members, is raising the visa liberalization as one of the most important aspects for the public in Moldova. 'Even citizens residing in Transnistria, Moldova's breakaway region, were motivated to apply for Moldovan biometric passports', she says. Several reforms concerning economy, trade, public administration, energy, anti-corruption and the judiciary have been successfully implemented.

Unfortunately, political turmoil has slowed down the process and there doesn't seem to be a consensus between the Moldovan politicians, which is also confusing the public opinion on European integration. 'A clear de-politicized public awareness is required, to focus on understanding, accepting and sharing the values of a united Europe', Ms. Patlis said.

WHERE DO WE STAND?

Mr. Johannes Hahn, the Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, is now visiting all EaP countries ahead of the EaP summit in November. 'The EU is working with all six countries bilaterally and multilaterally', **Mr. Vassilis Maragos**, Head of Unit Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus and Eastern Partnership at Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG-NEAR) noted during the event in the European Parliament with ENC and EAFG.

The 2020 Deliverables focus on four thematic areas (good governance, economy, connectivity/transportation and people-to-people contact) and two crosscutting activities (civil society, strategic communication). The document comprising these aims is currently under revision.

Mr. Maragos revealed that the focus will be on a fewer number of deliverables in the future. 'There is need for a more pragmatic and realistic approach', he said.

Mr. Boris Iarochevitch, Head of Division EaP, Regional Cooperation and Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) at the

European External Action Service (EEAS) agreed that the approach should be more pragmatic and realistic. He warned that the overall environment in the region is not that conducive despite the fact that some of the EaP countries are aiming for EU membership.

During an [ENC In-Depth Podcast](#) with Mr. Iarochévitch on the 6th of June, he noted that one must consider what kind of tool the EaP is – it is not designed for conflict resolution, for instance. He underscored that the focus should be on maintaining European aspirations throughout the region.

‘Implementing the *acquis* of the Association Agreements (AA) is hard as it is’, Mr. Iarochévitch said at the event, emphasizing that the regional governments must be the ones to keep up the pace in the reform process – not the EU. He also recognized that the EaP instrument is not for security, but for resilience in the administrative, political and economic fields. It is not meant to be against any third party (e.g. Russia).

Georgia’s Ambassador to the EU, H.E. Natalie Sabanadze, was also one of the panelists, describing the situation from an EaP country’s perspective.

As Mr. Iarochévitch did, Ambassador Sabanadze emphasized that the initiative is not meant to be against anyone and added that no partner country was forced to choose sides between East and West. ‘For Georgia, the choice is about transformation and what country we want to be – we did that choice a long time ago, and are already reaping the benefits’, she noted.

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?

‘Integration is not only about EU membership, it’s much broader than that; essentially it comprises economic and political approximation over a wide range of areas’, said Ambassador Sabanadze during the event – a statement that appears to fit quite well to the original idea of the EU’s EaP instrument.

One must truly acknowledge the worrying developments in the region, obstructing European integration. Despite that, one should not forget that the countries have in fact been making progress since the EaP was implemented eight years ago.

Armenia and Azerbaijan are in the process of signing new agreements with the EU. For Armenia, the negotiations with the EU recently finished with the

Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA). Details are not public yet, but Mr. Iarochevitch revealed that the trade relations would be limited due to Armenia's membership in the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU).

Azerbaijan is still negotiating with the EU on their new agreement. Negotiations will probably not be concluded before the summit takes place in November.

During 2017, visa liberalization has been granted to Georgia and Ukraine, joining Moldova who received visa free travel in 2014. As already recognized, visa liberalization is an important step for building public confidence in the European integration process and remains among the most popular themes, according to surveys carried out by the Caucasus Research Resource Centers (CRRC).

While the EU is aiming for more pragmatism in its relation to the EaP countries, the partner countries could ask to take the security environment into consideration. 'The EaP security matters are also security matters for the EU', according to Ambassador Sabanadze.

'A clear goal is very important to drive Georgia's agenda forward', she claimed – a request that might be true for other EaP countries as well.

CONCLUSIONS

EaP is facing a turbulent period, but sees concrete opportunities as a result of the upcoming Summit in November and positive developments tied to visa liberalization. Open and honest dialogues between the EU and the EaP countries are required to evaluate, reconsider and perhaps determine what types of re-structuring is needed for each individual partnership as well as the instrument as a whole.

Important factors to take into consideration include:

- Prioritizing security concerns of EaP countries, including Georgia, while avoiding the neglect of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict
- Focusing on Transnistria and their positive use and application of Moldovan biometric passports as a result of visa liberalization

- Working closely with non-governmental and citizen's associations in EaP countries on issues surrounding good governance, anti-corruption and transportation
- Considering the option of re-directing EaP funds in the Ukraine from government agencies to non-governmental groups and organizations in an effort to curb corruption

PARTNERS

The parliamentary roundtable was held in cooperation with the European Alliance for Georgia (EAFG).