

The Eastern Partnership Future Made to Measure

Background

The Eastern Partnership (EaP) was set up in 2009 as a joint policy initiative aiming at deepening and strengthening relations between the European Union, its Member States and the six EaP countries of Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan.

Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia have concluded Association Agreements with the EU, which include Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas, with Georgia and Ukraine seeking to integrate more deeply, aspiring to membership of NATO and the EU. Armenia concluded a Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement with the EU and Azerbaijan started negotiating a Comprehensive Agreement; both benefit from visa facilitation agreements with the EU. Belarus is furthest from the EU because of its poor record on democracy and human rights but is set to achieve visa facilitation soon.

All six countries are, to a certain extent, within the sphere of influence of third countries and have varying degrees of relations with them, mostly in terms of economic or security aspects.

Context

As the EaP turned 10 last year, the EU and several stakeholders are trying to formulate the priorities for the future or at least the coming 10 years of the EaP. The EU-EaP Summit on 19 June 2020 will give a major impulse to this debate. Thus, the EP is working on a Recommendation to the other EU institutions in the run-up to the summit.

On 18 March 2020, the European Commission published a Joint Communication on “Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020: Reinforcing Resilience - an Eastern Partnership that delivers for all”, which sets out the Commission’s updated, results-oriented agenda towards the EaP. The main long-term policy objectives focus on the EaP countries’ resilience in terms of their economies, the rule of law and security, environment, digital transformation, and societies. These are supported by the underlying concepts of “smart differentiation” (mainly in bilateral relations), “smart conditionality” (“more for more” and “less for less”; serious stagnation of reforms would mean a suspension of support, except for civil society), and “cross-cutting deliverables”.

On 11 May 2020, the Council adopted Conclusions on the EaP policy beyond 2020, which also focuses on inclusiveness, differentiation, and the incentive- and conditionality-based approach. The main offer to the EaP countries are political association and economic integration. In terms of reforms, the EaP countries’ ownership, the EU’s guidance and joint monitoring should be improved. The Council is also calling for a “renewed and strengthened commitment to the fundamentals”, emphasising the importance of the rule of law.

This reevaluation of the EaP and the Summit take place in the context of the global COVID19 pandemic, which has had a grave impact on the societies and economies of the EaP countries so far. The Commission has mobilised an emergency support package for all six countries in March 2020, making available Euro 140 million for immediate needs and up to Euro 700 million for short- and medium-term support to the social and economic recovery.

Greens/EFA WG AFET Position and Vision

The Commission's joint Communication is giving a needed update to the policy priorities of the EaP. However, it does not set out an actual vision or long-term perspective for the six partner countries. It does not offer any structural upgrade or reshaping of the relationships or framework, as well as no new incentives beyond the AA/DCFTA/visa liberalisation trinity.

While the Council does not address these issues either, it puts a very strong focus on gender equality, climate, digital and youth issues (all of which it asks to be mainstreamed), as well as emphasising the importance of working with civil society. These demands would be a welcome addition to the EaP policy beyond 2020.

The starting point of our European solidarity must be the support for a **free choice** of the citizens of our Eastern European partners to determine a free, democratic and sustainable future for their countries as our partners and eventual EU members.

The EU must devise a **sustainable and credible strategy for long-term engagement**, focusing on not only stabilisation and market-access but more so on **democratisation** and **people's well-being**, with ambitious and transformational goals:

- Achieving high standards of democratic practice is a continuing struggle in all EaP countries. While a side note in the Joint Communication, the EU has to **focus on genuine rule of law reform**, which is core to **democratic transformation** and countering the growing authoritarian tendencies in many EaP countries.
- The EU should offer real **perspectives for the integration of EaP countries**, including eventual EU membership. The full implementation of the current agreements between the EU and EaP countries is the first step in this gradual integration process, after which more incentives modelled on partnerships with other non-EU countries should follow. The EU should advocate for more bold interpretation of the "more for more" principle, thus suggesting that the **membership perspective**, as a final stop of the policy, is not ruled out within the EaP framework. As the incentives of the Association Agreement or its perspective are wearing off, the EU should come up with **strong additional incentives** to reinvigorate the conditionality approach. Offering the perspective of the labour market to some and visa liberalisation to the other EaP countries can be one such incentive.
- We deplore any policies based on dividing spheres of influence and stand firmly against any expansionist attempts to crash sovereignty and the free choice of the citizens in our partner countries, as well as against occupation or domination by foreign powers. The EU cannot ignore the geopolitical character of the region and its perceived role as a **security** actor by some EaP countries. A lack of EU presence and inaction vis-a-vis partners in the EaP will create space for **other global players** to take up. Increased cooperation with like-minded actors could mitigate the negative effects of third powers' rise. The EU and NATO should, therefore, strategically target their perception within the region and take a strong stance on individual cases of third actors' interference. In cooperation with the EaP countries, the EU and its Member States should also establish a **more coordinated policy towards Russia**. Against this backdrop, we reconfirm once more our strong support for the OSCE principles, such as sovereignty, territorial integrity, peaceful settlement of disputes, and the right to self-determination and the free choice of alliances of all EaP countries.
- It must continue its **holistic approach** to the EaP by maintaining an open door and support for all partners, while offering enhanced perspectives and **tailor-made**

incentives to the partner countries, which implement genuine democratic reforms. Devising a separate framework for the associated countries would only split up the partners into different groups, leaving some behind and damaging the EU's credibility and commitment to these partnerships. For example, specialised task forces like the Support Group for Ukraine should also be established for the other associated countries, while keeping the option open for the others, as all EaP countries benefit from targeted help in implementing reforms.

- Gender equality and women's rights still pose a major challenge in the EaP countries, and the silence on gender policy of the AAs and the new Joint Communication are not helping. The EU must, therefore, include **gender mainstreaming** in its relations with the EaP countries, putting a particular emphasis on women's representation at all levels of political and societal life.
- Generally, the EU must use its normative power and continue being a champion for the **rights of vulnerable people**, including minorities, LGBTIQI+, and children. In the EaP, **labour rights** and the situation of **young people** also deserve special attention.
- In order to be more effective in safeguarding those rights and to strengthen domestic oversight over democratic reforms, the EU should also increase cooperation with and support for like-minded **civil society** groups in the EaP countries, including knowledge sharing and exchange of experience among civil society organizations.
- The region is still marked by frozen conflicts and ongoing fighting in Eastern Ukraine. The EU must develop a **more active role in their peaceful resolution**. It should also enhance cooperation on building state and societal resilience to security threats, in particular countering propaganda and **disinformation**, in the EaP and the EU, as well as taking precautions against the increasing threat of cyber-attacks.
- Engendering robust democratic transformation requires sturdier support for freedom of speech and **freedom of independent, fact-based media**. The EU should strengthen the conventional as well as digital media landscape in the EaP countries through awareness campaigns, capacity building, and standing up against the violations of freedom of speech.
- The EU should not only update but, more importantly, **upgrade sectoral cooperation**, especially on **climate, energy** and **digitalisation** (including energy efficiency, connectivity of transport and sustainable diversification of energy network infrastructure, environmental challenges, media and information literacy, and digital skills). Part of unlocking the EaP countries' potential is also encouraging increased **regional cooperation**. In this context, we welcome the focus of the Joint Communication on sustainable, rules-based and secure **connectivity**, especially in promoting a beneficial involvement of the EaP partner countries in connecting Europe and Asia.
- The planned policies for the EaP region should strongly resonate with beneficial developments in the EU. Therefore, the EaP countries should be better integrated into the **European Green Deal**. The environmental and economic benefits of such cooperation should be made clearer to the local population as well as political elites.
- Given the success and tangible benefits to citizens since the establishment of the EaP, the EU should reinforce and, where possible, increase the EU's and EaP countries' common efforts on **people-to-people** contacts and exchanges in order to build mutually positive images of each other among the population.
- The EU should widen its **demographic scope** and engage the significantly large groups that were given less attention before. Particularly the middle-aged and elderly who, compared to younger people, are generally more critical towards the

EU and its normative influence. Alternative narratives based on common historical and cultural European identity should be emphasised for these groups.

The Commission's initial response to the current health and economic crisis in the EaP countries is a welcome step, but given the level of integration with the EU, **further measures** should be considered that are also offered to other, closer non-EU partners (e.g. involvement in the Joint Procurement Agreement, exemption from the export authorisation scheme, priority under the UCPM, etc.). Most importantly, the EU should help EaP countries deal with **long-term effects**:

- Help establish **epidemic strategies**, focusing on the most vulnerable groups, including the elderly, homeless, seasonal workers, and migrants
- Ensure that governments do not **misuse their extended powers** by cooperating with international and national civil society organizations
- Support developing national action plans for sustainable **economic recovery**
- **Communicate** more effectively on the support provided to partners
- Revise the Joint Communication on the EaP beyond 2020:
 - Add "**public health resilience**" to the five policy priorities, including cooperation between public health authorities, research facilities, emergency capabilities, etc.
 - Address **economic and security challenges** following the pandemic