

European Neighborhood

Editors

Dr. Hanna Shelest
Dr. Mykola Kapitonenko

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Contacts:

website: <http://ukraine-analytica.org/>
e-mail: Ukraine_analytica@ukr.net
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/ukraineanalytica>
Twitter: https://twitter.com/UA_Analytica

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EASTERN PARTNERSHIP: WHAT OPTIONS OF DEVELOPMENT ARE NEXT FOR UKRAINE?

Dr Oksana Dobrzanska

Yuriy Fedkovych Chernivtsi National University

In this article, the author researches the Eastern Partnership's achievements and possibilities of further development. There is an attempt to find the reason behind the Eastern Partnership's limited results. Special attention is paid to the Ukrainian case. There are scores of the Association Agreement of Ukraine and the EU' implementation.

Eastern Partnership – Does It Bring the Countries Participating in the Initiative to the Prospect of the EU Membership or Remove Them from It?

The EU Eastern Partnership Initiative, launched in 2009, being a 'branch' of the European Neighbourhood Policy, as from the very beginning, still raises many questions and sparks a lively debate. Approaches of countries to this initiative vary. It seems that the Eastern Partnership unites the countries not at the level of development of bilateral relations with the EU and the ambitions of the EU, but from a geographical point of view.

Obviously, the initiative has raised the question on whether the Eastern Partnership, in the long run, provides the EU membership perspective. The answer is – participation in the initiative does not ensure membership in the EU but does not deny it. This position is disappointing for Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine, which are seeking a clearer prospect of full membership in the EU. As of 2018, it became more and more obvious that the Eastern Partnership countries have different speeds of cooperation with the

European Union. Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine are seeking membership in the organisation, while Azerbaijan, Belarus, and Armenia do not express such a desire. So, the question should be put as follows: Is the Eastern Partnership a European Union's policy of rapprochement with the EU or is it an attempt by the EU to strengthen its influence on the EaP member states while keeping them still at a distance?

What Has Been Achieved within the Framework of the Eastern Partnership?

The next year will mark 10 years of the Eastern Partnership. This is enough time to see and analyse the implications of this initiative. It is worth noting that during this time significant transformations took place with both the initiative itself and the countries. Signing the Association Agreements with Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine in 2014 can be considered as the main achievement of the Eastern Partnership. Undoubtedly, this is a significant step towards rapprochement with the EU and a new stage in relations.

The Eastern Partnership Index 2015-2016¹ provides interesting data on achievements. In this study, two dimensions determine the European Integration Index of the Eastern Partnership countries: Approximation and Linkage. Approximation reflects the degree of implementation by the countries of key EU norms and international standards in certain areas. At the same time, Interconnection (Linkage) reflects intergovernmental ties among business, civil society, and governments in the countries of the Eastern Partnership and the EU. The Index 2015-2016 demonstrated Armenia's progress in approximation to the EU standards and it is placed together with the three AA signatory countries – Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. The worst placed EaP country in Approximation is Belarus.

In contrast, in the Linkage section of the Index 2015-2016, Armenia is placed scarcely better than Belarus, lagging far behind the three AA signatory countries, reflecting a lower intensity of political dialogue and a reorientation of Armenia's trade flows towards Russia since it joined the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). The worst placed EaP country in Linkage is Azerbaijan. Moldova is the frontrunner in both dimensions of the Index 2015-2016 but is closely followed in Linkage by Georgia and in Approximation by Ukraine.

As far as the Association Agreement itself is concerned, in 2018, the Government Office for the Coordination of European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, at the Office of the Vice Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration of Ukraine together with the experts of the European Union Project "Assosiation4U" issued

a report on the implementation of the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the European Union for 2017². This study showed that the overall progress of Ukraine's fulfilment of obligations under the Association Agreement reached only 41%. More concretely, the Verkhovna Rada coped with its tasks at 31%, central executive bodies at 42%, and other bodies of state power at 50%. For Ukraine, the most problematic areas of implementation of the commitments were: public health – 4%; transport, postal services – 11%; public procurement – 22%; environment – 27%; science, technology and innovation, space – 27%; sanitary and phytosanitary measures – 33%; energy efficiency and utilities – 39%.

A positive result of cooperation within the framework of the Eastern Partnership is a visa-free regime with the EU of the three EaP countries – Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. According to the EU ambassador in Ukraine Hugh Mingarelli, the percentage of Ukrainians who go to Europe has grown by 15% during the first year of visa-free regim³.

Regarding the assessment of the Eastern Partnership by the European Union, we can quote President Jean-Claude Juncker, who at the Eastern Partnership Summit in Brussels in November 2017 said:

The Eastern Partnership is first and foremost a partnership of people. It is about improving lives in all of our countries, about bringing our societies closer together. It is about standing up for the values, principles, and aspirations that people in the European Union and in our eastern neighbourhood

² Report on Implementation of the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the European Union in 2017, "EU-UA", 2018 [https://eu-ua.org/sites/default/files/imce/layout_16_02_final.pdf access: 10 September 2018].

³ Кількість українців, які їздять до Європи, зросла на 15% (Number of Ukrainians Traveling to Europe Has Grown by 15%), "RBC – Ukraine", 11 June 2018, [https://www.rbc.ua/ukr/news/kolichestvo-ukraintsev-kotorye-ezdyat-evropu-1528711511.html access: 28 September 2018].

collectively share. Through the Eastern Partnership, the European Union has helped to create 10,000 jobs, train 20,000 people, and provide over 100,000 loans to companies. We have improved access to free legal services, invested in transport links, promoted gender equality, and helped thousands of students to move between Europe and the Eastern Partnership region. As we look to 2020 and beyond, now is the time for even more action. We are on the right track, let us stay the course.

The Reasons for the Lack of Effectiveness of the Eastern Partnership

However, most experts and analysts are less optimistic about the effectiveness of the Eastern Partnership. What are the reasons behind this? We can specify a few of them:

Conceptual Weakness

- The initiative brings together very different countries, in terms of both economic and political indicators. At the moment, this distance has become even greater, as Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine signed the Association Agreements, while the other countries – Azerbaijan, Belarus, and Armenia – do not have such an agreement.
- It does not foresee EU membership (although it does not deny it). The lack of clear membership prospects impedes member states. However, the EU, which understands its own problems and risks, cannot give a promise of membership, and should also be understood.
- It does not foresee resolution of territorial conflicts.

Five of the six Eastern Partnership countries have territorial problems (Azerbaijan and Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh, Georgia because of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, Ukraine with illegally annexed Crimea and separated districts of Donetsk and Luhansk regions). If the EU declared that within the framework of the Eastern Partnership, a mechanism for the settlement of territorial conflicts would operate, it could undoubtedly be of interest to the participating countries. In the words of the EU, Brussels maintains a firm and consistent policy of supporting the territorial integrity of partner countries in the Eastern neighbourhood (European Commission, 2017). Changes that have taken place since 1991 in exercising control over the territories are not recognised. The EU also supports ongoing dialogues with the aim of reaching peaceful and sustainable solutions. Still, the Eastern Partnership is not a platform for solving this painful and vital problem.

Crisis in the EU

- The economic crisis at the beginning of the Eastern Partnership has led to the financial inability of the EU to allocate more money to the eastern direction of its foreign policy. Since the founding of the Eastern Partnership in 2009, the EU has contributed €5.4 billion (\$6.4 billion) in grants for the six states. That does not include bilateral agreements: e.g., Ukraine received some €13 billion in loans after domestic political upheaval and Russia-backed violence in recent years.⁵
- The EU migration crisis has affected the electorate of many countries, which has led to an increase in support for populist

⁴ Press Release 2017 Eastern Partnership Summit: Stronger Together, European Commission, Brussels, 24 November 2017, [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-17-4845_en.html access: 07 September 2018].

⁵ B. Riegert, *EU Offers Eastern Partnership Members Money, Motivation*, "DW", 24 November 2017, [https://www.dw.com/en/eu-offers-eastern-partnership-members-money-motivation/a-41509363].

right-wing parties. In France, party France National and Freedom Party in the Netherlands have got 13% of votes; Danish People's Party in Denmark – 21%; in Italy, the League – 17.4%; in Hungary, Jobbik – 19%; in Austria, Austria Freedom Party – 26%; the Finns in Finland – 18%. They oppose increase in funding going beyond the organisation. Moreover, such a trend threatens the integrity of the European Union itself.



intensification of the EU activity in the post-Soviet space is perceived by Russia as an 'intervention' in its sphere of influence

The Russian Factor

One of the important factors is that the Eastern Partnership Initiative involves countries that traditionally were in the area of special interests of the Russian Federation. The EU assured the Russian Federation that this initiative was not created 'against Russia'. Yet, we understand that the intensification of the EU activity in the post-Soviet space is perceived by Russia as an 'intervention' in its sphere of influence.

Russia's official position on the Eastern Partnership was previously formulated by Russia's Permanent Representative to the EU Vladimir Chizhov, who stated that Moscow "opposed the fact that the countries were faced with an artificial dilemma: either ahead, in a bright future with the European Union, or back – with Russia."⁶ If the EU

uses 'soft power' to spread its influence, then Russia is a fan of 'soft power' and 'hard power'.

Thus, as of 2018, we see the situation where Russian troops are present in three countries of the Eastern Partnership: Georgia (South Ossetia), Moldova (Transnistria), and Ukraine (East of Ukraine and annexed Crimea).

What Are the Options for Improving the Eastern Partnership?

The imperfection of the Eastern Partnership is understood not only by the analysts of the participating countries, but also by the European Union. We recall that in 2011, at the Eastern Partnership Summit in Warsaw the 'more for more' approach was proposed. It envisaged more funding for countries that are more active in the initiative.

In 2017, the European Parliament issued recommendations⁷ to the Council of the European Union, the European Commission, and the European External Action Service on the Eastern Partnership policy on the eve of the initiative summit on 24 November. This is the so-called 'Eastern Partnership+'. What is this? Here we are talking about an expanded partnership model for the EaP countries that have already signed the Association Agreement (for Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine). The 'Eastern Partnership+' format should include the creation of a trust fund, a new European investment plan, a mechanism for financial support for the implementation of association agreements, etc. In addition, Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova should be given the opportunity of potential membership in the Customs,

⁶ A. Terehov, Чижов В.А.: Южный поток надо сделать приоритетным проектом ЕС (Chizhov V.: North Stream Must Be Made a Priority EU Project), "Nezavisimaya Gazeta", 18 May 2009, [http://www.ng.ru/courier/2009-05-18/9_chizhov.html access 29 of September].

⁷ The "Eastern Partnership Plus" Is the EU's Failure, "New Eastern Europe", 07 December 2017, [<http://neweasterneurope.eu/2017/12/07/eastern-partnership-plus-eus-failure/> access 05 September 2018].

Digital, and Energy Unions, association with the Schengen area in the case of countries fulfilling their obligations under the Eastern Partnership and the Association Agreement⁸. On the other hand, even the implementation of the 'Eastern Partnership+' will not guarantee aspired membership in the EU.

In our opinion, these proposals could really change the approach of the Eastern Partnership countries to the initiative. However, these recommendations were not taken up during the Eastern Partnership Summit in Brussels on 24 November 2017. Perhaps the EU fears that the 'Eastern Partnership plus' is to become an 'Eastern Partnership minus'. It is clear that the implementation of the 'Eastern Partnership+' proposals will deepen the gap between the countries that have already signed the Association Agreements (Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine) and the other countries of the Eastern Partnership (Azerbaijan, Belarus, Armenia).

That is why even if the EU decides to implement some 'Eastern Partnership+' thesis later, it must preserve support to civil society and tolerate no compromise on support for the democratic and pro-European aspirations of the societies of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Belarus. Also, from the Eastern Partnership countries' side, their governments must focus on institutional reforms, making them sustainable and less dependent on changes in political power and less susceptible to political instability.

At the same time, at the summit in Brussels, the focus was on 20 key tasks for the



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period up to 2020⁹. Among these tasks are 'stronger economy', 'stronger government', 'stronger interconnections', and 'stronger society'. Attention should be drawn to the fact that the practical results by 2020 are designed taking into account changes in the Eastern Partnership region, the development and implementation of the EU Global Strategy for Foreign Policy and Security, the comprehensive review of the European Neighbourhood Policy, as well as the provisions of the EU and Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova Association Agendas, the partnership priorities for other partner countries¹⁰.

One more very important detail is that the EU should play a more proactive role in fostering a joint EU response to the long-term security threat posed by Russia to the EU, Russia's neighbourhood, and Europe as a whole.

Conclusions

The problem of the Eastern Partnership is that it has been trying 'to unite annuity countries' since its creation. Now we see that the Eastern Partnership countries move

⁸ The "Eastern Partnership Plus" Is the EU's Failure, "New Eastern Europe", 07 December 2017, [<http://neweasterneurope.eu/2017/12/07/eastern-partnership-plus-eus-failure/> access 05 September 2018].

⁹ Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit, Council of the European Union, Brussels, 24 November 2017, [<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/31758/final-statement-st14821en17.pdf> access 05 September 2018].

¹⁰ H. Masak, *Виміряти «Східне партнерство»: як оцінити успішність ініціативи ЄС (Eastern Partnership: How to Evaluate Success of the EU Initiative)*, "Європейська правда", 11 October 2017, [<https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/articles/2017/10/11/7072039/> access 03 September 2018].



Ukraine wants to see from the EU a clearer perspective on its membership in the organisation, more active participation in solving the armed conflict with Russia, deepening of bilateral relations

in the EU cooperation directions at different speeds. This is a problem for the EU because a gap between these two country groups became bigger. That is why methods and tools should be different.

Ukraine tries to use the Eastern Partnership instrument as a tool of Euro-integration process. However, as we can see in the Report on Implementation of the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the European Union in 2017, the scores are

not high enough. Therefore, Ukraine has to increase the pace of domestic reforms.

In addition to its steps towards the EU, Ukraine wants to see from the EU a clearer perspective on its membership in the organisation, more active participation in solving the armed conflict with Russia, deepening of bilateral relations.

Oksana Dobrzanska, PhD, Assistant Professor at Yuriy Fedkovych Chernivtsi National University, Ukraine. She is a member of NGO "Quadrivium". Oksana received her PhD in Political Science in 2013 ("The Eastern Partnership Initiative in Implementation of the European Union Foreign Policy"). Her main field of interests: the EU foreign policy, European Neighbourhood Policy, Eastern Partnership, Euro-integration of Ukraine.
