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Introduction

Kadri Liik

In May 2015 the EU and its eastern neighbours will gather for a summit in Riga to take stock of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) policy. While the summit itself is unlikely to result in ground-breaking decisions, it will nevertheless lay ground for upcoming debates on the future of the policy. Those debates will also be informed by the lessons that the EU and its neighbours extracted from the dramatic Vilnius summit in 2013 and its aftermath.

The situation is complicated. The EU capitals (the views of which are presented in a parallel collection) lack unanimity on the aims or successes and failures of the EaP. The partner countries – whose views are presented here – also have very different expectations and levels of ambition. Only Russia seems to be relatively clear in its aims – to dominate the region, and be forceful in its means.

It is evident that if the EU seriously wants to be a force for democratic transformation and stability in the neighbourhood, it will need to find a way to navigate the complexities of the situation that centre around at least three dilemmas.

Societies and elites

First, there is the question of how to handle the EaP countries' societies and their elites, whose aims are often somewhat contradictory. Most target countries of the EaP got their independence semi-accidentally 20 years ago. The societies were weak, so the statehood was hijacked by often corrupt and self-serving elites. Two decades on, those societies have started to mature and demand law-based governance. That makes them natural partners and allies for the EU. However, the EaP policy is designed to work with the elites. Elites are the ones who can execute the changes that the EU would reward. And the elites' weaknesses have a direct negative effect on that ability: nominally pro-European but effectively self-serving elites discredit the European cause in the eyes of the societies. Elite corruption also erodes statehood and creates weaknesses that can easily be used by third countries for pressure and blackmail. The EU's whole experience with Viktor Yanukovych's Ukraine was an illustration

of exactly that lesson: corrupt elites had made the country so vulnerable to Russia's pressure that the EU was unable to help; it then found itself watching from the sidelines as a revolution swept the hapless leaders away. But the questions – how to help maturing societies to transform their elites; and how to inspire the imperfect elites to execute the needed changes – remain pertinent. To different degrees, they are valid in all EaP countries.

Standards and sovereignty

The second dilemma is between democratic standards and sovereignty. Russia's invasion of Ukraine scared the elites – however selfish and corrupt – in all EaP countries. Not only have the EaP frontrunners tried to intensify their relations with the EU, but also the “laggards” are looking for ways to get closer to Europe in order to hedge against Russia's pressure. However, in the latter case this is not accompanied by democratic transformation. The message that comes from places such as Minsk is almost admirably honest: “Please help to save our independence and sovereignty, even though we will not become a democracy by your standards any time soon.”

In many ways, this is a very legitimate request, but hard to respond to in the framework of the EaP policy, the slogan of which has always been “more for more”: more access for more transformation. At the same time, the answer that the EU will come up with will show something very important about the Union itself: will it remain a technocratic power that is happy to spread democracy and good governance on fertile and uncontested soil, or will it be a geopolitical actor that sees upholding the OCSE-based European order as its responsibility. In its words, Europe subscribes to the latter, but in practice it has yet to find the means to live up to the mission.

Handling Russia

And finally, Europe needs to find a way to handle the inevitable tensions that stem from Russia's views of and ambitions in the region. In the above-described tension between the EaP countries' societies and elites, the EU is bound to side with societies, and Russia is bound to side with corrupt elites, even if the latter are not explicitly “pro-Russian”. This tension is not of Europe's doing: it occurs and has sharpened because of processes that take place in Russia and in the countries concerned. In the EaP region, the maturing societies are starting to set demands. Russia, however, wants to see itself as a great power, and its definition of a great power includes what it calls a “sphere of influence”. Truly

democratic states can never be controlled in ways that Russia would find reliable, so Moscow is bound to focus on elites that are, if not pro-Russian, then at least prone to manipulation.

Russia and Europe each have a drastically different understanding of how to solve the situation. For more than a year, Moscow has uttered veiled and less veiled proposals to conclude a new deal on the spheres of influence. For Europe, however, dividing “spheres” is a taboo. Different European countries may or may not want to see eastern neighbours eventually join the EU, but Europe’s painful history and its lessons effectively condemn them to defend their right to apply. Europe needs to figure out how.

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Riga and beyond, what future
for the Eastern Partnership?

Food-for-thought paper: ARMENIA

Richard Giragosian

1. Summary

- Since its abrupt U-turn in policy in 2013, Armenia has sacrificed its Association Agreement with the European Union in favour of joining the Russian-led Customs Union, thereby deepening the country's already pronounced over-dependence on Russia.
- That surprise move also had several negative repercussions, ranging from a new perception of the Armenian government as insincere and incompetent, to a weakening of the course of reform and the political marginalisation of pro-European reformers within the Armenian government.
- Even so, despite Armenian membership of the Eurasian Economic Union, there is a pronounced degree of sincerity and political will in both Brussels and Yerevan to salvage relations between the EU and Armenia.
- Thus, the outlook for Armenia's position within the Eastern Partnership (EaP) and the future of the Armenian relationship with the EU has two main impediments: (1) a combination of Armenian indecision and an absence of strategic priorities, and (2) hesitation in the face of a possible reassertion of Russian pressure on Armenia, resulting in even less room for manoeuvre and fewer options for Armenia.

1. Introduction

Clearly, Ukraine remains the primary theatre of operations for Russia's strategy of retrenchment within its "near abroad" or former Soviet space. As Russia seeks to define and defend its own sphere of influence among the former Soviet states, European engagement is now seen as an unacceptable challenge, equivalent to the perception of NATO expansion as a direct threat to Russian interests. Within this context, Russian policy consists of three primary objectives:

- To undermine the implementation of the EU's Association

Agreements with Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine;

- To divide and destabilise the EaP by weakening the top-tier states (Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine) and restraining the remaining states (Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Belarus);
- To consolidate Russian power and influence throughout its “near abroad” by leveraging a combination of hard power, or “hybrid war” in Ukraine, and soft power targeting the internal vulnerability of the other EaP member states.

2. Lessons Learned

Looking back, there were three significant “lessons learned” from the case of Armenia:

- First, there was an unwarranted degree of confidence and complacency over Association Agreement negotiations with the EaP states, failing to foresee a strong Russian reaction and floundering in building a deeper and stronger pro-European constituency in EaP states.
- There was also a pronounced lack of a proper communications strategy to more effectively define and defend European values in general, and the benefits of the Association Agreements in particular, for the ordinary citizen and consumer within the EaP states, thereby increasing the efficacy of a Russian “soft power” assault.
- Third, there was an incomplete investment in civil society as an anchor to internal reform and as an empowered policy partner between the EU and EaP member governments, thereby failing to focus on internal weakness and vulnerability to externally driven pressure.

3. Opportunities for Armenia

In the face of marginal economic gains and mounting costs, Armenia is increasingly aware of the “opportunity costs” of both joining the Eurasian Economic Union and being dangerously over-dependent on Russia. The new trend, therefore, is one of worry and wariness, seeing the limits of its alignment with Russia and seizing a second chance to forge a relationship with the EU. This is bolstered by two factors: a new challenge to the asymmetry of the Armenian-Russian relationship, whereby Armenia may still be largely pro-Russian, yet much less pro-Putin, and a need for greater external legitimacy, driven by the weakness of the Armenian government’s domestic position as a political transition begins.

4. The Outlook for Armenia

Clearly, in light of the current reality, the EU needs to now explore alternative measures to engage and empower embattled Armenia, but based on a more realistic recognition of the limits and liabilities of Armenia as a partner. And the challenge for Yerevan will centre on the country's capacity and its leaders' determination to withstand a fresh onslaught of Russian pressure and coercion. Thus, for both Armenia and the EU, there is a daunting combination of the fragility and vulnerability of EaP countries with a resurgent Russia intent on pursuing confrontation over cooperation. Yet for Armenia the Riga Summit is the starting point, not the "end state", for salvaging a relationship and regaining a degree of trust and confidence.

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Riga and beyond, what future
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Food-for-thought paper: **AZERBAIJAN**

Leila Alieva

The outcome of six years of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) for Azerbaijan is clearly controversial. Azerbaijan proved its importance for EU energy security and its role in the Southern Gas Corridor by signing contracts on the production and transport of gas to European markets for decades to come. The Trans-Anatolian and Trans Adriatic gas pipelines which replaced the EU's Nabucco project will give the EU alternative gas supplies from Azerbaijan and will contribute to future transregional gas projects. This was hailed by both sides as a success in bilateral relations. Another success story is mobility. In 2013–2014, Baku signed visa facilitation and readmission agreements, a Mobility Partnership, and increased cooperation with Frontex. In sharp contrast with the success in energy cooperation, 2014 was also the year that Azerbaijan's civil society experienced a huge crackdown which paralysed major human rights NGOs and media outlets. According to independent sources, the number of political prisoners has risen to 100. Azerbaijan has not signed either the Association Agreement (AA) or the Deep and Comprehensive Trade Area (DCFTA), as it still is in the process of WTO negotiations (a prerequisite for the DCFTA).

By the EaP Vilnius Summit in 2013, Azerbaijan's European integration aspirations were visibly reduced and Baku expressed an interest in replacing the AA with the Strategic Modernisation Partnership Agreement. The country's interests changed from European aspirations (inserted in the text of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) Action Plan under public pressure) and a wide agenda of integration into the ENP action plan of 2006 into an interest in cooperating in sectors such as economic development, energy, communications, and migration. With a paralysed civil society, these priorities are limited by the interests of the ruling elite which invests heavily in PR and charitable activities in Europe (eg hosting the Eurovision Song Contest in 2013 and the European Games in 2015). Society's capacity to influence decision-making was significantly reduced during this

period.

The controversial and uneven results of the EaP in Azerbaijan and Baku's limited aspirations are driven by several factors:

1. Geopolitical

The EU plays an insignificant role in regional security issues. This is particularly true of the “frozen” conflicts which continue to be a major challenge to stability and security for countries which have chosen a pro-European foreign policy and thus face Russian pressure exercised predominantly through these conflicts. The lack of progress in the Nagorno-Karabakh negotiations also affects the EU's image in the region as it plays a supporting role in the Minsk process. The position of the EU in the Karabakh issue – which is a national priority both for the government and for society – is unbalanced. There has never been the same level of support for the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan as there has been for that of Georgia or Ukraine. This decreases the attractiveness of the EaP for all actors. In addition, as the Russia–Ukraine war has shown, the EU cannot serve as a counterbalance to Russian aggressive behaviour in its neighbourhood; this has left the countries concerned to find their own ways of protecting their security.

2. Domestic

Azerbaijan is the only EaP country which is rich in energy resources and fits the classic description of the political economy of oil-rich states. This contributed to “resource nationalism” or “resource curse” and the resulting lack of integrationist drive and democratic deficit. The legacy of Soviet bureaucracy and certain structural factors created specific obstacles to democracy and reform. These calculations were not included either in the strategies of local actors or in EU strategies and instruments for Azerbaijan. European integration requires reforms which put the elite's monopoly on oil resources and political power at risk. On the other hand, the elite also lacks incentives as it is already “integrated” into the EU with its assets, business, and property. Non-integration also allows state actors to balance the interests of regional and extra-regional players, using full control over its energy resources both for commercial and political purposes.

3. EaP design

The EU's alternative agenda – its energy interests – led to lowered

expectations on its part as regards Azerbaijan's performance in reforms. The principle of conditionality was not applied in spite of the obvious and consistent worsening human rights record. The fact of there being around 80 political prisoners did not stop the EU from pursuing relations with Azerbaijan. Moreover, negotiations on a new mode of relations more beneficial for Azerbaijan were taking place against an ongoing, unprecedented crackdown on civil society. On the other hand, the weakness of another EaP instrument – the “more for more” principle – was obvious for a country whose daily income from oil revenues during the heyday of the oil boom often exceeded the annual reward for the successful implementation of reforms. This was not taken into account when designing the EaP for partner states. In such a situation, it would make more sense to shift the funding and the application of this principle to non-state actors.

4. EaP differentiated approach

Non-state actors see the EaP as a missed opportunity for the EU to empower civil society and democratic institutions in Azerbaijan. This empowerment would be possible if a differentiated approach were implemented not “according to the country's specific needs and ambitions”, as expressed by the ruling elite, but to address individual obstacles to reform. The pragmatic nature of EU–Azerbaijan relations risks further undermining democracy in the country, unless the EU stands firm in protection of its values and principles and integrates this into its new strategy and instruments. Any inconsistency in the promotion of its values weakens the EU's position vis-à-vis the government and discourages society from continuing to play an active role in the process of reform.

Opportunities for the EU and Azerbaijan

The decline of world oil prices may lead to a greater acceptance in Baku of the need for sectoral and economic reform, stimulating progress both in regards to WTO accession and then the DCFTA. According to President Ilham Aliiev, there is an understanding that gas revenues cannot replace the income from oil sales, thus there might be greater interest in reforms and a diversification of the economy. Future cooperation with Azerbaijan should dramatically increase the legal status and involvement of non-state actors in all stages of cooperation, programming, monitoring, and reporting on the progress of EU–Azerbaijan relations.

In turn, progress in political reform can be achieved through full and consistent EU support for all non-state actors who promote

democratic reform and through the building of democratic institutions – elections, political pluralism, and an independent judiciary. So far, Azerbaijani civil society – political parties, journalists, human rights activists, think tanks – has been the most active and consistent partner of the EU. Azerbaijani NGOs have been the most active participants of the Civil Society Forum. While their influence on decision-making through the multilateral framework of the Civil Society Forum increased, in the absence of staunch political support from the EU, pro-European activists were vulnerable to state pressure and many ended up in prison or in exile. The EU should try to be more consistent in following through on European Parliament resolutions and trying to get activists released. Even in the most pragmatic of relationships, the EU's inaction when facing violations of basic values and principles will lead to greater insecurity on its borders. The EU must learn from the results of the first years of the EaP. In this regard, the Riga Summit should build its meeting around real issues and be as bold and direct as possible to demonstrate the added value of the EU in the region.

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Riga and beyond, what future
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Food-for-thought paper: **BELARUS**

Dzmitry Halubnichy

At the moment, the relationship between the EU and Belarus is quiet tense. However, there are some positive trends due to Minsk's new role as mediator in the Ukraine peace talks.

The main problems in the EU–Belarus relationship are:

- The presence of political prisoners in Belarus. According to Human Rights Center “Viasna”, an NGO, there are seven, including 2010 presidential candidate Mikola Statkevich.
- Unrecognised elections and an illegitimate president. During the 2010 elections there were clashes between the opposition and the authorities in the course of which many presidential candidates were jailed. The EU did not recognise the elections.
- Absence of the Belarusian Parliament from EURONEST. Belarusian membership of Euronest was automatically suspended after the OSCE declared the 2010 elections flawed.
- Sanctions against officials, journalists, and the private sector including representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

However, there have been some recent attempts to improve relations:

- In 2012, the European Commission launched the “European dialogue on modernisation with Belarusian society”. Although the government was invited to participate, the fact that the initiative originally focused on civil society and the political opposition led to distrust on the part of the authorities.
- In 2014, the European Commission launched the project REFORUM, implemented by the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies (BISS). The idea is to identify and develop concrete proposals for reforms. However, again

the difficulty in engaging the authorities in discussion and implementation of reforms significantly reduces the chances of their practical application.

- EU and Belarusian officials have begun to implement a new format of dialogue known as the Interim Phase, or “consultations on modernisation”. This is a joint project to analyse common approaches to modernisation primarily through cooperation in the fields of investment and trade.

Therefore, the first steps towards the normalisation of EU–Belarus relations should be to:

1. Review the sanctions regime

There are European sanctions against 220 Belarusian citizens, including the political leadership, and 25 Belarusian companies. For comparison, European sanctions on Russia only apply to about 100 individuals and this does not include the top Russian political leadership. A phased lifting of sanctions would certainly have a positive impact on the dynamics of EU–Belarus relations if there were progress made on internal reforms in Belarus.

2. Not let Belarus’s lack of democratic institutions limit the development of EU–Belarus relations

The Belarusian authorities say the EU does not apply this criterion of democratic institutions in its relations with other post-Soviet countries. Minsk feels the EU is driven by geopolitical and economic factors regardless of progress made in the field of reform. For example, the presence of “political prisoners” in Belarus has led to the imposition of sanctions, while “political prisoners” elsewhere (eg Ukraine and Azerbaijan) do not lead to the EU limiting contacts at the highest level. This does not mean that the issue of political prisoners should be completely ignored, but it should not be a major obstacle to the normalisation of relations.

3. Introduce a visa-free regime between the EU and Belarus

The EU and Belarus should start negotiating on visa facilitation and readmission agreements as a necessary step towards a visa-free regime. All technical obstacles to the process of simplification of visa regime have been overcome. Minsk is ready to agree to the package of agreements proposed by Europe back in 2011 on condition that they also apply to Belarusian diplomatic passports.

4. Use existing dialogue formats to shape the future of the Eastern Partnership in Belarus

The EU–Belarus dialogue format – “Interim Phase” of cooperation / “consultations on modernisation” – which is designed to strengthen bilateral cooperation, trade, and investment, could be one step towards the development of a partnership for a new generation if there is the necessary political will on both sides.

For the EU, the aim of the EaP is the implementation of the Association Agreement and inclusion into a free-trade area. For Belarus, as a member of the Customs Union and the Eurasian Economic Union, this is impossible; Minsk views the EaP more as a convenient platform for discussing various bilateral initiatives. So clarity is needed and Belarus’s participation in other integration processes in the post-Soviet space should not be questioned.

Therefore, the main areas of potential EU–Belarus cooperation include:

- investment in key sectors of the Belarusian economy, driving growth through major infrastructural, industrial, educational, and other projects;
- strengthening cooperation in innovation, technology, research, and development;
- strengthening bilateral trade and economic cooperation, creating favourable conditions for small and medium-sized enterprises;
- helping Belarus meet WTO membership requirements;
- promoting a sustainable low-carbon economy and energy efficiency;
- ensuring the effective functioning of the judiciary and promoting the fight against corruption;
- promoting the development of people-to-people relations and strengthening dialogue with civil society;
- working towards a simple increase in the number of diplomatic contacts on common issues. This is very important as both the EU and Belarus are very interested in maintaining stability in Belarus as a key to maintaining stability in the wider region;
- reacting to Russian agricultural sanctions on Europe by creating joint enterprises on the territory of Belarus.

In any case, given that the public sector produces 70 percent of GDP and employs nearly 50 percent of the working population,

political and economic modernisation of Belarusian state and society is impossible without the involvement of the Belarusian authorities. If the EU wants to exert effective influence in this area, it would do well to remember this.

Moreover, Europe should think seriously about how it could use Minsk's new-found role as mediator in the Ukraine talks to create new conditions for a high-level dialogue between Belarus and the EU to shape bilateral relations.

Overall, such an approach could form the basis of a comprehensive agreement on partnership and cooperation between Belarus and the EU, taking into account Belarus's involvement in Eurasian integration processes. This would make EU–Belarus relations more transparent, which, in the context of growing instability in Eastern Europe, could help to strengthen regional security in its “hard” and “soft” forms.

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Riga and beyond, what future
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Food-for-thought paper: **GEORGIA**

Tornike Sharashenidze

The Eastern Partnership (EaP) was widely welcomed in Georgia mostly because it was officially launched shortly after the 2008 Russo-Georgian war and therefore was viewed as an EU answer (in a typical EU way) to Russian aggression.

However, EU integration has never attracted as much interest in Georgia as NATO integration has. Popular support for it remains strong, but NATO is still viewed as the guarantor of security and is thus more attractive. The EU had to wait to receive its share of popular attention until 2013, when the Association Agreement (AA) between Georgia and the EU was initiated. It looked as if Georgia's efforts were finally being appreciated by the EU as well. Thanks to the AA, the EaP started to look rather successful from Georgia's perspective too.

As the AA is a milestone for Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations, there are some less grandiose but still quite important achievements that should not be overlooked and that have made the AA itself possible.

For example, Georgia has restored its food security agency. Maybe there still are some issues related to food security in Georgia, but the fact itself is quite symbolic. Under the Saakashvili administration, Georgia made many reforms but often at the expense of ignoring EU procedures. The former government viewed EU regulations as an obstacle to rapid reform. It was thought that reforms needed strong political will and free markets, not regulatory bodies. However, the agency reappeared in 2011, under the Saakashvili administration, which meant that Georgia was adopting a more balanced approach, taking the EU perspective much more seriously (no doubt, partly due to the fact that the NATO integration process was stalled after the 2008 war).

The AA was initiated in November 2013 under the new government (and signed in June 2014). This was a quick and unexpected success made possible by several factors:

- The new Georgian administration made some concessions during negotiations with the EU (on issues where the

Saakashvili administration had been intransigent).

- Despite being rightly accused of having failed in some reforms, it has to be admitted that the new administration demonstrates more commitment to EU standards and regulations than the old one.
- The EU itself was shocked by developments in Ukraine and Armenia. As Ukraine under President Viktor Yanukovich slipped away at the very last moment and as Armenia was “convinced” by the Kremlin not to go ahead with the AA, Georgia (and Moldova) had to be rewarded.

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As for other achievements, Georgia has passed an anti-discrimination law. The draft of the law has been modified in order to pacify conservatives who are still quite powerful in the country. Moreover, after the transfer of power in 2012 there were some cases of violence against minorities which alarmed many human rights activists. But since the law was passed, the situation looks to be much better than before.

In general, human rights issues have been widely addressed thanks to the EaP. Namely, a Personal Data Protection Inspector’s office has been created. The office has ambitious plans and vast resources. Now it is up to Georgia’s citizens to benefit from this novelty. Moreover, Georgia also now has a labour inspection office. This office is still quite weak (it has no executive authority) but it collects facts and cases of abuse. The real problem is still a lack of information in society; people are not aware that the opportunities they have are thanks to Georgia’s rapprochement with the EU.

A border-management strategy has been developed which has already given some tangible results. A “green border” has been introduced at most checkpoints (meaning improved infrastructure and living conditions for border guards). This is

one of the achievements that distinguishes Georgia in the region.

Despite these reforms, the prospect of visa liberalisation still looks rather remote for Georgia. It could be a problem since a visa-free regime with the EU is something that Georgian society aspires to. It could be a real, tangible breakthrough and a great success story. Of course, there is the Moldovan scenario, but this is not really relevant for Georgia since Moldova is a unique case thanks to its ties to Romania. In fact, over the last few years Georgia has had the worst record for rejected Schengen visas among EaP countries. That is a problem that stems from severe economic and social conditions in the country. No matter how many innovations Georgia introduces and how many laws it passes, the EU may remain reluctant to commit to visa liberalisation.

As for the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA), it is both an opportunity and a challenge for Georgia. Georgia exports mainly beverages and agricultural products which are destined for former Soviet republics. After 2012, Russia reopened its market to Georgian products and this was too tempting for Georgian entrepreneurs to turn down. The main challenge for the DCFTA will be not so much standard and quality control on the part of Georgian producers as the lack of awareness of the opportunities that the European market represents. Few Georgian business owners have used the trade privileges provided by the Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP). The DCFTA is far more publicised than the GSP and therefore Georgian entrepreneurs should have a much bigger interest. But it will still take some time to make them shift their interest towards the EU market.

So the main issue is a lack of awareness of the opportunities that the EU represents and this issue was not really addressed in the past. However, in 2013, under the auspices of the Office of the State Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, the Information Centre on NATO and the EU was created (based on the old NATO Information Centre set up in 2005). The creation of this new agency demonstrates Georgia's new priorities.

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Food-for-thought paper: MOLDOVA

Stanislav Secrieru

1. Attitudes towards European integration

Society. Public opinion is more aware of the European integration process than of the Eastern Partnership (EaP), as the latter is too technical for the average citizen.

Support for EU accession declined from 72 percent in 2007 to 40 percent in 2015. Several elements are behind the trend. This is due to a freer media environment which reflects a variety of opinions. Since 2009, Russia has stepped up its negative media campaign against the EU and actively advertised the Customs Union and then the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). The Moldovan government also had a weak communications strategy, though this was corrected ahead of elections in 2014. Moreover, since 2009, Moldova has been governed by pro-European coalitions (with the word “European” in their name); their failures and corruption scandals affected society’s perception of European integration. And finally, not all government reforms have been popular or translated immediately into palpable effects.

As a result, in 2015 if they had to choose, 50 percent of Moldovans would opt for the EEU and 32 percent for the EU, with 13 percent undecided. Moreover, national minorities (Russians, Ukrainians, etc.) would overwhelmingly support the EEU option.

Political class. Support for European integration among the political elites is circumstantial and heavily constrained by economic interests. Enthusiasm for European integration ends when it encroaches on the business interests of top politicians.

The Communist Party (PCRM) promoted EU integration until 2009; after losing the elections it campaigned for Eurasian integration, only to switch to a slightly EU-friendly stance ahead of the 2014 elections. Among the three pro-European parties, the Democratic Party (PD) and the Liberal Party (PL) often did not meet their self-avowed commitment to European integration. Until 2014, several ministers nominated by the Liberal Democrats (PLDM) were the driving force behind EU integration. With fewer mandates in parliament and dependent on PCRM votes to sustain government, the PLDM cannot be an engine for EU

integration. The European People's Party (EPP), which broke away from the PLDM, represents the promise of a renewal of the centre-right in Moldova.

Two political forces have emerged which support the EEU or Moldova's self-reliance: the Socialists and "Our Party". Both are built around individuals who serve as political locomotives, capitalise on populist sentiment, and have made anti-corruption pledges, in contrast to the pro-European government beset by scandals. Both benefit from Russian financial and media support to various degrees. Both are expected to do well in local elections in June 2015. Indeed, a big win might trigger changes in the parliamentary majority.

2. Main accomplishments of European integration (2009–2014)

Legal and economic impact. The Association Agreement (AA), which includes the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA), was concluded despite EU bureaucratic inertia, a Russia trade embargo, and a threatening regional environment. So far, the AA has been ratified by half of the EU member states. It deepens political and economic linkages, which any political force in Moldova will find difficult, if not impossible, to reverse. Negotiations involved many Moldovan officials, familiarising them with EU procedures. Thus, the group of technocrats with experience with the EU has expanded. Moreover, there has been an immediate impact on trade. In the first two months of 2015, exports to the EU accounted for 67 percent of all Moldova's exports.

Energy diversification and efficiency. Moldova joined the Energy Community in 2010 and started to modernise its legal base. With EU financial support, it implemented an energy and biomass project (2011–2014), helping public institutions to switch from expensive gas-generated heating to cheaper and more energy-efficient biomass heating systems. The EU has extended this project for another three years. Brussels also contributed €7m to the gas interconnector between Romania and Moldova, with the first gas deliveries being made in early 2015. However, further financial support is needed to make the project fully operational.

Increased mobility. Since 2014, Moldovans have had freer and cheaper access to the EU. There has been a visa-free regime in place since April 2014 for those with biometric passports. Since then, Moldovans made 460,000 trips to the EU; just 1,355 citizens were not allowed to enter the EU and 2,379 overstayed the 90 days' term. By April 2015, almost 76,000 people in Transnistria

had received a Moldovan biometric passport (27,357 passports were issued last year). With the 2012 signing of the agreement on a Common Aviation Area with the EU, low-cost flights to and from Moldova have started. Moldova's inclusion in Erasmus Plus has expanded categories of citizens who can benefit from the programme (not only students, but also lecturers).

Sectoral reforms, but still much to do. European integration triggered important reforms. In education, anti-corruption measures have been adopted for school graduation exams and vocational schools reform has been initiated. In the justice sector, important anti-corruption legislation has been adopted and anti-corruption institutions developed. The first case of a judge convicted of corruption was recorded in 2014. The visa-free system has had a positive impact on police reform; trust in the police has jumped from 33 percent in 2013 to 42 percent in 2014.

3. Main failures of European integration (2009–2014)

Democratic backsliding. Moldova's democratic path is uncertain. There are few improvements in building a sustainable democracy (one of the stated objectives of the European Neighbourhood Policy). The mass media is increasingly concentrated in a few hands, while parliament has failed to adopt a new Broadcasting Code. Foreign mass media (ie Russian) shapes public opinion to a great extent. Enacting of amendments on party financing has been delayed, as has the financial decentralisation of local administration. The most recent parliamentary elections were problematic as an opposition party was removed just days before the vote, voting rights of citizens residing in Russia were limited, and clone parties were allowed to run. The EU closed its eyes to some of these abuses, thus indirectly encouraging nominally pro-European parties to persist in democratic backsliding.

Inefficient institutions. Anti-corruption measures have not paid off so far, while institutions have been deliberately weakened and have, as a result, underperformed. The National Integrity Commission, which is supposed to review conflict of interests and revenue declarations, is understaffed and underfinanced and has few powers. The National Anti-Corruption Agency has not tackled high-level corruption, which endangers national security and economic stability and hinders demonopolisation and deoligarchisation.

Weak communication. A lot has been done, but few know about it. Overall, Moldova made remarkable progress on EU integration in 2009–2014. But neither the government nor

the EU has been any good at communicating with the wider public, in particular with national minorities. There were few creative campaigns targeting various audiences. The information strategy improved in 2014 due to elections, but this was too little, too late. The combination of corruption scandals and weak communications undermined support for EU integration and gave a golden opportunity to other actors to win the hearts and minds of Moldovans.

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Riga and beyond, what future
for the Eastern Partnership?

Food-for-thought paper: UKRAINE

Dmytro Shulga

1. Attitudes towards European integration

The overwhelming Ukrainian perception is that the level of attention and engagement from the EU is inadequate and does not meet our ambitions. The Ukrainian parliament defined the ultimate foreign policy goal of seeking EU membership back in 1993; since then, it was confirmed repeatedly, but never met a welcoming response from the EU. The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), launched in 2004, did not offer the prospect of membership for Ukraine – even after the Orange Revolution the same year which clearly manifested the democratic and European choice made by the majority of the Ukrainian people.

For bilateral Ukraine-EU relations, the Eastern Partnership has provided no real added value – unlike with the other countries in the region to which the EU extended offers already tested with Ukraine.

All successive Ukrainian governments sought good relations with both natural poles of gravity – Europe and Russia. The business interests of the home-grown oligarchs required access to the both markets anyway. Thus, since the 1990s Ukraine has persistently refused Russian invitations to join post-Soviet supranational integration frameworks (due to a fear of losing sovereignty) and has at the same time promoted free trade in the post-Soviet area (with Russia, until 2011, refusing due to protectionism). Ukrainian official documents defined European integration as the priority foreign policy goal, but with the reservation that at the same time good relations with Russia should be maintained. The short-term priority was (and still is) to have both free trade areas at the same time – with the EU and with Russia.

For society, Europe has not been a factor in domestic policies until very recently. The Russian factor was much more evident in political debates, touching the complex question of Ukrainian post-Soviet identity. Until 2014, Ukrainian population overall had a very positive attitude towards Russia and this is why there was a distinct lack of domestic support for NATO membership (in 2002-2010).

This positive attitude towards Russia survived bilateral quarrels over the Black Sea Fleet in the 1990s, the gas wars of 2006 and 2009, and began to suffer only after the Georgian war of 2008. With a lot of family ties as a Soviet heritage, with the Russian language widely spoken, Russian media easily accessed and Russian border open, Ukrainians have been pretty exposed to Russian soft power. They have tended to perceive Russia as a closer and more understandable option when compared to Europe which was associated first of all with higher living standards. The image of the latter, however, suffered a lot as a result of the financial and economic crisis. The same crisis in Ukraine made the 'Orange' government fail and got President Yanukovich elected in 2010.

Europe became a domestic political factor in 2013 because of the saga of the Association Agreement (AA). With his popularity declining, President Yanukovich was in desperate need of financial and political support to secure his position in power. President Putin forced him to make a zero-sum 'either/or' choice and Moscow's sticks and carrots proved to be more powerful than those of the EU.

Most people who stood on the Euromaidan in the winter of 2013-14 knew little about the EU or the AA. The progressive part of society came to protest against the abandonment of the last hope for a democratic, accountable and responsible government – Europe. In essence, this was a protest against a corrupt regime which was only tolerated for as long as there was any hope of a long-term prospect of a European model of development.

This unexpected and unusual protest with people suffering, struggling and dying under the European flag also saw the first signs of disillusionment with the EU as it expressed its 'deep concern' and hesitated to apply personal sanctions against key figures of the regime.

The subsequent Russian aggression in Crimea and the Donbas clearly made the biggest impact on current Ukrainian attitudes towards the EU. As a result, the current figure of support for the EU (52%) is the highest ever measured (with the alternative Russian-led Eurasian Union having only 12%). Now the political class is clearly united around European integration too. At the same time, this is because they have no other option. In fact, the EU is being widely criticized for its perceived insufficient level of practical support for Ukraine in this time of war.

2. EaP successes and failures

Relationship status. The AA saga began back in 2005 when after the Orange Revolution the EU proposed negotiations on a 'new

enhanced agreement' with Ukraine. These negotiations started only in 2007 and until September 2008, many EU member states were opposed to the very notion of 'association' as an implication of potential membership.

Now that the AA has been signed, the question arises of what happens next. It is difficult to explain, especially to those who stood for the European dream on the EuroMaidan and now defend a European future from Russian aggression, that the EU is simply tired and not ready to offer the prospect of membership to Ukraine.

Economic integration. The EU was a hard negotiator during DCFTA talks, trying to limit Ukraine's access to the EU market. It was not a development support mode, but rather a standard 'take it or leave it' trade bargain. In 2004-2013, there was no preferential expansion of EU trade with Ukraine: it did increase twice (from €19bn to €38bn), but at the same time EU trade with Russia increased more than twice (from €131bn to €326bn). Still, Ukraine has become an important market for the EU: in 2013, German trade volume with Ukraine (€6.9bn) was larger than that with Greece (€6.5bn).

In 2014, Russian aggression caused great economic instability in Ukraine. Direct damage from the war was significant (estimated at 20% of industrial potential destroyed or not under Kyiv's control), but much greater was the impact of the broader feeling of insecurity – as it caused significant panic, devaluation (three times over one year), price rises, unemployment, impoverishment, and lower production.

In response, in 2014 the EU launched autonomous preferences for all imports from Ukraine, applying its DCFTA obligations unilaterally. But at the same time, the implementation of DCFTA chapter of the AA (i.e. Ukraine's obligations under the DCFTA) was postponed until 2016, which leaves doubts as to what will actually happen and when. Its implementation is of paramount importance to send a reassuring message to potential investors who so far have been reluctant to come to Ukraine. Otherwise, the country will be left dependent on financial aid. So far, even with preferential treatment, Ukraine's exports to the EU fell in 2014 by 0.9 percent.

Energy. The security of gas transit is the EU's clear interest in Ukraine. In 2009, when Russia interrupted the gas supply to Ukraine and to Europe through Ukrainian territory, it was actually pressure from the EU and its member states that made the

then Ukrainian Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko go to Moscow to sign a highly disadvantageous 10-year gas contract with harsh conditions dictated by Putin. This contract gave him huge political leverage over Ukraine. In spring 2014, Russia stopped delivering gas to Ukraine but continued gas transit through Ukrainian territory to the EU. Still, the European Commission stepped in to save European gas transit from potential disruption, and facilitated the EU-Ukraine-Russia trilateral interim deal for the winter 2014-15 and spring-summer 2015. It is remarkable that, 24 years after the dissolution of the USSR, the former Soviet gas border still exists as under the long-term contracts of European companies with Gazprom the point of gas delivery continues to be Ukraine's western border. Thus, European transit through Ukraine continues to be a Ukraine-Russia issue.

At the same time, Ukraine became a member of the Energy Community in 2010 and started to approximate its regulations on gas and electricity markets to those of the EU. When joining the EC, Kyiv's major expectation was not greater transparency of the most opaque, corrupt and ineffective sector, but rather that the EU's abandon Russian offers of alternative gas transit routes. However, things started to move under the new government when the corrupt Rosukrenergo intermediary company was removed in early 2014 and the basic law on the gas market was adopted in spring 2015 in conformity with the Third Energy Package.

Mobility. On the eve of the EU's Eastern enlargement 2004, the respective candidate countries were obliged to introduce visa requirements for Ukrainian citizens. Before that, Ukrainians were able to travel visa-free across the whole post-communist area from the Adriatic and the Baltic to the Pacific. Since then, the visa regime and the Schengen 'paper wall' has become quite a sensitive issue affecting the EU's image in the eyes of ordinary Ukrainians. The 'visa facilitation agreement' has not produced any tangible simplification; there are particular problems not in the refusal rate which has been quite low for Ukraine (2 - 3%), but in the low number of long-term multiple-entry visas.

Only after some hesitation did the EU finally offer a set of criteria for a visa-free regime for short-term travel ('Visa Liberalisation Action Plan', VLAP) in late 2010. The implementation of VLAP criteria met resistance from political and economic vested interests, so Ukraine was only able to officially end the first phase of VLAP implementation and start the second phase in 2014. For the time being, the biggest challenge is the low capacity of various governmental bodies responsible for VLAP implementation. Thus, according to the latest assessment of the European Commission published on 8 May 2015, Ukraine has yet to de-

monstrate further progress to gain the visa-free regime.

The Common Aviation Area (Open Sky) agreement between Ukraine and the EU was initialled at EaP Vilnius summit in November 2013, but still has not been signed because of disagreement between the UK and Spain over the mention of Gibraltar in the text.

Reforms. The ENP and EaP have not produced much success in stimulating domestic reform in Ukraine. Though no-one disputes that Ukraine is also responsible for this, one should at the same time acknowledge the EU's flaws. The bilateral practical instrument - the Action Plan - contained a list of almost 300 vague priorities for Ukraine's homework, but, unlike the political guiding documents with candidate countries, it lacked benchmarks, timeframes, and linkages to EU aid, and was not supported by serious monitoring. Moreover, the EU could hardly expect serious financial leverage with the total amount of aid of less than 1% of Ukraine's state budget.

The situation started to change recently, with the new Association Agenda agreed in early 2015 being a more concrete document and for the first time containing short-term reform priorities with benchmarks. The EU Support Group for Ukraine, the EU Assistance Mission to Civilian Security Sector Reform and other expert advisory missions have been launched. The major question is at the receiving end – with Ukraine's unreformed civil service, the level of governmental absorption capacity remains very low.

Overall, at present, the most effective leverage on reforms in Ukraine seems to be the Western macro-financial assistance. IMF programmes (17 and 15 Bio USD for short- and medium-term) are among the most important policy guiding documents for the government for the time being.

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