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Eastern Partnership Summit: compromise for the sake of continuation



The Summit results demonstrated that the European Union is still capable of bringing quite a wide range of aspirations to the common denominator and keeping the initiative afloat even if it does not completely satisfy the needs of some participants

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EaP Think Bridge is a platform uniting expert communities in the countries of Eastern Partnership region to fill the gap in distributing analytical products for stakeholders

The views and opinions expressed in articles are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position of EaP Think Bridge Digest Editorial Board and The Friedrich Ebert Foundation



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Eastern Partnership of “different speeds”

The Brussels Eastern Partnership summit did not bring neither breakthroughs, nor surprises, putting sustainability and stability of the member countries at the forefront. So far, it seems, the relations with the European Union will be reduced to the lowest common denominator of the six partner states.

The European ambitions of the Association Agreements signatories were not supported in the EU. No “carrots” after the visa-free travel and the free trade zone were promised to Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova. No words on the in-depth cooperation with the leaders of the initiative in the “Eastern Partnership Plus” format were mentioned in the final Declaration. Moreover, all attempts to introduce the possible, yet remote aspiration for the EU membership made the opposite effect. Instead the European partners suggested the neighbors should pay more attention to the fulfillment of the commitments they had already undertaken.

Only Armenia was quite satisfied with the summit results as it signed the new Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement. Azerbaijan and Belarus negotiate on elaborating the similar basic agreements.

What is the future of the Eastern Partnership policy? Is the EU ready to work with its neighbors at “different speeds”? The results of the Brussels summit analyzed by Vitali Martynyuk.

More about the summit outcomes significance for each of the EaP states can be found in our monthly reviews.

Olga Chyzhova,
Editor in Chief
EaP Think Bridge Digest

Kremlin added EaP Think Bridge expert Dr. Vugar Bayramov to its “Stop-list”

Dr. Vugar Bayramov, the EaP think Bridge partner, expert and author, was deported from Belarus upon arrival and unable to take part in the round table on the economic cooperation in the Eastern Partnership countries, held by the EaP Think Bridge initiative in Minsk.

On 26, November 2017, Dr. Vugar Bayramov, a citizen of Azerbaijan, with no criminal record or any wrongdoing in any country (including Belarus and Russia) was meant to visit Minsk, Belarus, for the first time but was not allowed to cross the Belarusian border. The Minsk airport border guards provided no explanation for the refusal and Dr. Vugar Bayramov was subsequently deported back to Azerbaijan. The Center for Economic and Social Development (CESD), the Azerbaijani partner of the EaP Think Bridge initiative which Dr. Bayramov chairs, is ranked the top think tank in the Caucasus and Central Asia by the University of Pennsylvania. In its activity, CESD has always striven for the unbiased reporting as it produces the academic publications to boost the economic and social development of Azerbaijan and other regional countries, including the countries of the EU Eastern Partnership. The employees of the Belarus Embassy in Baku verbally confirmed the ban and justified it with revealing the inclusion of Dr. Vugar Bayramov’s name in the Russian “Stop-list”. Because of the obligations imposed by the bilateral agreements with Russia, the State Border Committee of the Republic of Belarus had to return Dr. Bayramov to his departure point in Azerbaijan. The basis for such harsh administrative actions by the Kremlin authorities against Dr. Vugar Bayramov remain unclear and require a detailed explanation. The EaP Think Bridge initiative along with the Center for Economic and Social Development (CESD) calls for the investigation of this case and requests the officials to provide an explanation for these actions to avoid such incidents in the future.

Table of Contents

NOVEMBER IN REVIEW

| | |
|--|-----------|
| ARMENIA: RESTORING & REPAIRING RELATIONS WITH THE EU | 4 |
| Richard Giragosian, Regional Studies Center | |
| AZERBAIJAN: ADJUSTING STATE BUDGET TO OIL PRICES | 6 |
| Vugar Bayramov, Center for Economic and Social Development | |
| BELARUS: NEW CHALLENGES IN FOREIGN POLICY | 8 |
| Arseny Sivitsky, Center for Strategic and Foreign Policy Studies | |
| GEORGIA: THRILLER WITH TERRORISTS IN TBILISI | 11 |
| Lasha Tughushi, Foundation «European Initiative - Liberal Academy Tbilisi» | |
| WILL MOLDOVA MEET THE EXPECTATIONS? | 13 |
| Natalia Stercul, Foreign Policy Association of Moldova | |
| UKRAINE: ANTICORRUPTION NOVEMBER | 15 |
| Oleksii Krysenko, Foreign Policy Council «Ukrainian Prism» | |

ANALYTICA

| | |
|---|-----------|
| EASTERN PARTNERSHIP SUMMIT: COMPROMISE FOR THE SAKE OF CONTINUATION | 18 |
| Vitali Martynyuk, Head of the International Programs of Centre for Global Studies «Strategy XXI», Expert for Foreign Policy Council «Ukrainian Prism» | |

EAP THINK BRIDGE ROUND TABLE

| | |
|---|-----------|
| ECONOMY IN THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP: PARTNERS, COMPETITORS OR BYSTANDERS? | 22 |
| Olga Chyzhova, Foreign Policy Council “Ukrainian Prism” (Ukraine, Kyiv) | |

Armenia: Restoring & repairing relations with the EU

Richard Giragosyan, Regional Studies Center (Armenia, Yerevan)

In a move that stands out as a unique “second chance” to repair and restore the relations with the European Union, Armenia signed a new strategic agreement with the EU in late November, despite an earlier forced sacrifice of the country’s Association Agreement. Although the new EU – Armenia Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) is less than the 2013 Association Agreement, as it has no Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade (DCFTA) element, it serves as a fresh start for the deepening of the relations between Armenia and the EU.



The EU-Armenia Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) offers a fresh start for the deepening of the relations.

Photo by consilium.europa.eu.

DOMESTIC POLICY

Changes in military conscription

Amid a series of the protest demonstrations by several student groups, the country’s controversial restrictions on the military service deferments, the Armenian parliamentarians and the government officials [met with the student leaders](#) to seek to diffuse a tension. The new restrictions were sought by the Ministry of Defense and were formally approved by the Armenian parliament on 15, November. According to the new law, any deferment for a male student would require some education contracts in return for the agreement on a three years military service after completing the studies.

Otherwise, students will be drafted into the army at the age of 18 for a two-year mandatory military service. The critics of the new law argue that these changes would only discourage the stu-

dents from pursuing their scientific careers and could seriously damage the development of the science and higher education in the country.

Armenian government imposes cut to health program

In a controversial move, the Armenian government imposed a serious cut in spending for a public health program that provides couples with support for the infertility treatment. In Armenia, artificial fertility is a fairly expensive medical treatment and in 2015 the government decided to help couples who cannot conceive a child by covering the costs of the treatment. Initially, some 35 couples were chosen as the beneficiaries of the program with \$100,000 in state financing. According to the Ministry of Health,

the official statistics for the period of 2016–2017 revealed that some eight children were born under the state-assisted program of the artificial fertilization. However the data from three Yerevan hospitals involved in the program shows, however, that during the same period 37 children were born under the program. [The officials defended the move](#), arguing that the deeper cuts in the overall state budget of some \$29 million forced the decision, related to a decrease in the state spending on the total budget for the healthcare issues.

Armenian Veteran sentenced to six-year prison term

In a move widely seen as a preemptive strike by the Armenian authorities against the domestic political rivals, an Armenian court on 28, November [convicted](#) a former Nagorno-Karabakh war military commander of the weapons smuggling and money laundering, and sentenced him to six years in prison.

Although the veteran Samvel Babayan has long been a controversial figure, his support for the opposition was interpreted as a trigger for the latest legal proceedings against him. Two of the Babayan's co-defendants were also sentenced to

prison, with one receiving a two year sentence and another one a three year term, while another four defendants were also convicted but receiving suspended sentences. Babayan was the top commander of the Karabakh forces from 1993 to 1999. He was first arrested in March, 2017 after the security forces claimed to have confiscated a portable Igla missile system and alleged that he was behind its acquisition as a part of a broader plot to attempt to assassinate the president. The arrest came two weeks before the parliamentary elections in which Babayan supported an opposition alliance led by the former Defense Minister Seyran Ohanian and two former foreign ministers. The 52-year old Babayan was arrested previously in 2000 and later imprisoned after being convicted of the masterminding a failed assassination attempt against the then-president of Nagorno-Karabakh.

The Armenia-European Union agreement is hailed as a new mechanism for the institutional cooperation fostering between the EU and the Eurasian Economic Union

ECONOMY

Armenian president hails country's growing IT sector

[In a speech in mid-November](#), the Armenian President Serzh Sarkisian hailed the progress in the country's expanding IT sector, citing it as the driver for the development of the Armenia's long sought knowledge economy. Roughly 600 Armenian companies are engaged in the IT sector, providing about 20,000 jobs and responsible for an impressive rate of growth of between 20-25% in the recent years.

Armenian officials downplay impact of looming rise in tariffs

Although Armenia is required to begin a round of the gradual

increases in tariffs on a wide range of imports, the Armenian officials [optimistically downplayed](#) the impact on the economy. Since joining the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) in January, 2015 Armenia limited the negative impact of the trade bloc's significantly higher trade tariffs through a reliance on a set of the "transitional exemptions" on over 800 goods and products. But those exemptions are now due to expire, with economists concerned over what they see as a resulting surge in prices for the basic commodities and staple foodstuffs in Armenia. The possible impact may be especially serious given a dramatic rise of about 40% in the domestic prices for such basic imports. According to the Armenian government, such a development would actually boost the domestic production and better "protect" local products against the "foreign competition".

FOREIGN POLICY

Armenia signs new strategic agreement with the EU

While attending the EU Eastern Partnership Summit in Brussels, the Armenian President Serzh Sarkisian [formally signed](#) the new Armenia-EU Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) on 24, November. The move is seen as an effective success in overcoming the damaging 2013 reversal of having sacrificed its earlier Association Agreement with the EU in favor of committing Armenia to joining the Eurasian Economic Union instead. The agreement is also hailed as a new mechanism for the institutional cooperation fostering between the EU and the Eurasian Economic Union, with Armenia now holding a new sense of the strategic significance as the only EEU member with such a high level of partnership with the EU. The EU-Armenia Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) offers a fresh start for the [deepening of the relations](#), with both the EU and Armenia demonstrating the political will to forge deeper ties in the areas of the political dialogue, justice and freedom, and even security, as well as including legally binding provisions across a range of sectoral areas of cooperation.

Iranian Foreign Minister visits Armenia

In the first high-level visit of a senior Iranian official to Armenia in over a year, the Armenian President Serzh Sarkisian [met on 28, November with the Iranian Foreign Minister m.president](#), Mohammad Javad Zarif in Yerevan. The meeting largely focused on the planned development and deepening of the bilateral economic cooperation and the trade relations, with an added emphasis on the Armenia's pursuit of a greater role as a bridge for the Iranian goods to access the markets of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). The Iranian minister, who was also accompanied by a business delegation, also met separately with the Armenian Prime Minister Karen Karapetyan, to discuss tax treatment for the Iranian investors. The [level of the bilateral trade](#) remains modest, however, with a total trade volume of only \$197.4 million for the first nine months of this year, but representing an increase of about 10% against the same period in 2016.

Azerbaijan: Adjusting state budget to oil prices

Vugar Bayramov, Center for Economic and Social Development (Azerbaijan, Baku)

The decrease in the oil prices urged the government to adjust the budget accordingly and to start the economic reforms within the country. One of such improvements has its first success as a new railway rout was launched. Meanwhile the foreign agenda of the month was dominated by the Eastern Partnership summit.



Negotiations on the base agreement between EU and Azerbaijan are still underway.

Photo by consilium.europa.eu.

DOMESTIC POLICY

Increase in government agencies dynamics and parliament activities

The productivity of several governmental agencies and the parliament of Azerbaijan has been high this November. The 2018 national budget process was accompanied by an intensified public dialogue about the issue, as well as the economic reforms, salaries,

the oil income role in the national economy and the oil income transfers to the budget. The most interesting moments were connected with a demand of some PMs to raise their and other [parliament workers' salaries](#). Additionally, the President of Azerbaijan [fired his numerous high-ranking advisors](#).

Both cases, unseen in previous years, piqued the public interest and demonstrated the structural

changes in the political landscape of Azerbaijan. The economic reforms started after the devaluation of the

national currency transformed into the new dynamics in the political decision-making institutions.

ECONOMY

Baku–Tbilisi–Kars railway gains its momentum

The long-awaited Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, a transport route creating additional freight and passenger links between Europe and China, was launched in October. As expected, already in November, it created the additional momentum to increase the cooperation between Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey. Right after the project launch, the Iranian Minister of Roads and Urban Development Abbas Ahmad Akhouni [proposed to prolong the railway to Tabriz](#), a city in the Western-Azerbaijan province of Iran.

Afghanistan also expressed its interest in the project. The Minister of Finance of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Eklil Ahmad Hakimi [in his interview highlighted](#) that the

route can connect Afghanistan with the European countries. The Afghanistan's participation in the project was also discussed during the European Union's Special Envoy for the Afghanistan Ambassador Roland Cobia's visit to Azerbaijan. In 2009-2013 the Ambassador Cobia was the EU ambassador to Azerbaijan too.

These cases are positive indicators for Azerbaijan. Following the decline of the oil prices, the country tried to diversify its economy and boost the non-oil sectors, especially transport, in order to become a regional railway hub.

The economic reforms started after the devaluation of the national currency transformed into the new dynamics in the political decision-making institutions

FOREIGN POLICY

“The best” EaP Summit

The President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev attended the European Union's Eastern Partnership summit in Brussels. Unfortunately, since the text of the Association Agreement between Azerbaijan and the EU was not fully agreed, it was not signed.

Nevertheless, in the post-summit meetings with the EU officials in Azerbaijan, the President Aliyev [labelled this summit as a “success”](#), emphasizing the importance of the declaration adopted.

The Ambassador of Azerbaijan to the EU and Belgium Fuad Isgandarov commented on the summit,

calling it the [“best Eastern Partnership summit for Azerbaijan”](#).

As a result, Azerbaijan is pleased with the support of the EU for the territorial integrity of all of its partner countries as stated in the final document of the fifth Eastern Partnership summit. Also the agreement on the Trans-European Transport Network and softened visa regulation with some EU member states are among the positive moments between the sides. Azerbaijan and the EU agreed on the continuation of their negotiations on the base Agreement, which is a high point in the EU–Azerbaijan relations in the last few years.

Belarus: New foreign policy challenges

Arsen Sivitsky, Centre for Strategic and Foreign Policy Studies (Belarus, Minsk)

Despite the President Lukashenko's absence at the Eastern Partnership summit in Brussels, Belarus set an ambitious goal of signing a fundamental agreement with the EU already in the nearest future. Meanwhile, Minsk is not getting tired of assuring Kremlin of the loyalty to its Union obligations. The country's economy shows a slow but positive trend aided by the liberalization of its legislation.



Instead of the President Vladimir Makei was the head of the Belarusian delegation at the Eastern Partnership Summit.

Photo by consilium.europa.eu.

DOMESTIC POLICY

Economic liberalization pinpointing continues

Against the backdrop of instability both in the country's foreign policy and the economy, the Belarusian authorities continue to make further steps towards the country's economy liberalization. On 23, November Alexander Lukashenko signed a decree on the "[Development of Entrepreneurship](#)", which is a key document in the package of regulations designed to improve the business climate in the country. The de-

creed involves some radical changes for the interaction mechanisms between the government agencies and the business enterprises, minimizing the interference of the government officials with the work of the commercial entities and enforcing the mechanisms of business self-regulation and its responsibility to the society. The minimal level of the state control, however, remains in place.

To reach these goals, the decree will allow starting up a private business by only notifying the authorities about the intended business lines. The list includes

consumer services, tourism, social services, trade and public catering, transportation of passengers and luggage, merchandise production, production of construction materials, and some other popular types of business.

Thus, the document is supposed to cover the spheres where about 95% of the Belarusian small and medium private companies are concentrated. In order to start such a business, a private entrepreneur will have to notify the local executive body using the one-

stop principle. The notification can be sent by the registered mail or via the digital services web portal. The entrepreneur will be authorized to pursue the chosen activity starting the next day.

[Closing the White Legion case](#) and stopping the criminal proceedings against its members, obviously fabricated, became a positive development in the country's domestic policy. The White Legion members were previously charged with establishing an illegal armed group planning a military takeover.

ECONOMY

Positive news

According to [the National Bank of Belarus](#), in January-September, 2017 the country increased its export of the goods and services by 18.2% to \$26.025 bn against January-September, 2016. The foreign trade turnover of the goods and services made up \$51.617 bn, with a 18.6% increase against January-September of the previous year.

In January-October [the Belarusian GDP increased by 2%](#) against the same period in 2016 and made up 86.8 bn Belarusian roubles. Against this backdrop [the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development improved its 2017 forecast](#) on the Belarusian GDP growth from - 0,5% in May to +1,5% in November, while in 2018, according to the bank forecast, the

Belarusian economy will grow by 2%.

[The S&P analysts](#) believe that the Belarusian economy will grow on average by 2% in 2017-2020. This will be possible due to the better bilateral relations between Belarus and Russia, as well as the better economic indicators of its main trade partners: the Russian Federation and the European Union. However, the Belarusian economic situation heavily depends on Russia fulfilling its obligations on the energy supply. In case of a new crisis due to an insufficient supply of the Russian oil, the Belarusian economy is expected to show a moderate growth.

Promoting Belarus's peacemaking image, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Vladimir Makei stated that Belarus is ready to send its peacekeepers to Donbas

FOREIGN POLICY

Between EU and Russia

Against the backdrop of growing uncertainty in the Russia – US relations and the new American law on sanctions approved by the Congress and signed by Donald Trump in August, which is about to enter into force, Belarus continued to be busy implementing its strategy of the foreign policy balancing, as well as strengthening its image of the regional security and stability donor.

[NATO made a final confirmation](#) that Russia left no military contingent or equipment in Belarus after the joint Belarus – Russia Zapad-2017 military drills, thus having dispelled the fears of the countries neighboring Belarus. Such evaluation was based not only on the Alliance's own observations, but was also possible due to the unprecedented regime of transparency and openness of the Belarusian side. Promoting Belarus's peacemaking image, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Vladimir Makei, as a result of a joint meeting of the foreign policy agencies in Moscow on 15, November,

stated at a press-conference that Belarus is ready [to send its peacekeepers to Donbas](#) if such a decision is suitable to all sides.

In this case the initiative reflects the position of Belarus on the matter, first formulated by the President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko in 2014, rejected by Moscow at that moment. After the consultations between Moscow and Washington regarding the possible parameters of such a mission, this statement reflects the Belarusian commitment to a peaceful resolution of the Ukraine – Russia conflict. However, it is quite unlikely that the scenario of the UN peacekeeping mission present in Donbas will be fulfilled due to the rising tensions between Russia and the USA, with Belarusian possibilities of holding the peacekeeping operations under the UN auspices being limited by two squadrons prepared in compliance with the international standards. As for the legal aspect, the Belarusian military personnel can participate in those peacekeeping missions that were authorized by the UNO.

Meanwhile, the Belarusian side tries to improve the Belarusian image in the eyes of the Kremlin making an impression of a trusted ally that fulfills all obligations undertaken in the military and political spheres. For example, on 10, November a joint meeting of the defense agencies of Belarus and Russia took place in Moscow, where [Russia's Minister of Defense Sergei Shoigu](#) stated that the NATO actions in the immediate proximity of the Union State undermine the strategic stability and force to undertake some counter measures of the defense nature. Already after holding the joint meeting, he continued criticizing the Alliance activities and made a statement that NATO [tests the nuclear weapons on the Eastern flank](#). However, the Belarusian side, when commenting on the results of the joint meeting, [did not express its solidarity](#) with the evaluations of the Russian counterparts, having paid attention mostly to the technical details of the military cooperation with Russia.

Minsk also continued its work on overcoming the contradictions in the trade and border control spheres of its relations with Russia. The Ministry of Agriculture and Food of the Republic of Belarus counts on lifting the limitations on supplying [produce from 54 Belarusian enterprises](#).

Minsk intensified the negotiations on creating a single migration space and reciprocal recognition of visa. It means that a foreigner entering one of the two countries with a valid visa is able to enter the second country with the same visa as well. However, this novelty will only be relevant for those states that have the same visa regime with Belarus and Russia.

At the press conference following the joint meeting of the foreign agencies, Vladimir Makei was also forced to comment on the [Alexander Lukashenko's private invitation](#) to the Eastern Partnership summit in Brussels. Judging from those comments, Moscow assumed a rather hardline stance on the issue. As a result, Vladimir Makei was forced to assure the Russian side that Belarus participating in the summit in Brussels will not mean an anti-Russian position.

According to the Minsk official stand, the very process of normalization of the Belarus and the EU relations has no risks for the Kremlin. Moreover, he stated that Belarus will prevent the final declaration of the Brussels summit from being anti-Russian.

As a result, several days before the Eastern Partnership summit in Brussels, Alexander Lukashenko stated that he is not going to participate in it. Vladimir Makei was the head of the Belarusian delegation instead. [Belarus was mentioned](#) in the summit's final Declaration several times. To be more precise, the summit participants decided that a "critical cooperation" between the EU and Belarus became more comprehensive, including the work of a coordination group Belarus – EU, as well as a dialogue on the human rights and a trade dialogue. Among 20 deliverables the Eastern Partnership faced there is a progress on mobility, including preparing an agreement on a simplified visa regime and Belarus readmission (however, the date of signing is yet to be set).

Many observers pointed at the fact that the absence of Alexander Lukashenko at the Eastern Partnership summit was connected to the Moscow's tough stand on this issue. However, having no special agenda on Belarus at the summit was another reason. It was initially planned that a list of "Priorities of Partnership" by 2020 would be developed by the summit start. However, it is obvious that neither Minsk nor Brussels fulfilled this task. These two reasons altogether resulted in the Lukashenko's absence at the event. Meanwhile, the EU took a quite understanding stand in the matter. The EU Commissioner for European Neighborhood Policy and Enlargement [Johannes Hahn's reaction](#) to the decision taken by Alexander Lukashenko not to visit the summit was rather calm. Despite the moderate results of the Eastern Partnership summit, Belarus sets an ambitious target to develop and sign a fundamental agreement with the EU (similar to the Armenia – EU Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership agreement) in the nearest future.

Georgia: Thriller with terrorists in Tbilisi

Lasha Tughushi, “Liberal Academy Tbilisi” Foundation (Georgia, Tbilisi)

The entire country of Georgia watched live the terrorists deception and elimination in Tbilisi. The incident once again placed the emphasis on the security and inviolability of the state borders issues. Moreover, as for the media space, it completely stole the show from both the economic successes and even from the Eastern Partnership Summit results that proved to be unsatisfactory for Georgia.



In Tbilisi, terrorists fired back at special forces for 20 hours.

Photo by civil.ge.

DOMESTIC POLICY

Anti-terror operation with victims

On 21-22, November in the aftermath of an anti-terrorist operation, Ahmed Chatayev was killed in Beri Gabriel Salosi Avenue in Tbilisi. He was suspected of being the mastermind behind the Istanbul Ataturk airport attack in June, 2016, that resulted in 46 dead and about 200 injured.

The main questions following these developments are mostly concerning how one of the most influential figures of the Chechen wing of the terroristic organization “Islamic State”, a 37-year-old commander of Yarmuk bat-

talion whose name is on the international terrorism black list, happened to enter Georgia. What was the purpose of his stay? Where was that significant armament bought and what was it aimed to use for as the supply was enough to fire back at special forces officers for 20 hours?

During the special operation one person was detained, two group members were eliminated and one person who was in the apartment, [Ahmed Chatayev, blew himself up](#). One representative of the Georgian special forces was killed as he suffered a severe head injury as a result of a grenade detonation. Earlier Chatayev was able to [escape from the Georgian justice](#). In January, 2013 due to the lack

of the evidence all charges against Chatayev regarding the illegal acquisition, possession and bearing explosives were discharged by the General Prosecutor's Office of Georgia. Moreover, Chatayev was reimbursed with 5000 lari that he had paid as bail.

Following the request of the Georgian side, the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation joined the ongoing investigation. The Minister of Internal Affairs of Georgia stated that the investigators are to answer all questions in the nearest future and it is logical to

assume that there is a lot of interest, especially against the backdrop of the fact that, according to the unofficial information, two eliminated men were Russian.

The withholding position of some capitals, expressed by not recognizing the European perspective, is not understood in Tbilisi

ECONOMY

Georgian wine in the Guinness Book Of Records

The Guinness World Records website updated the information in its section on the oldest wines and now there is an article on the oldest wine from Georgia. According to this website, some wine residues discovered south of Tbilisi date back to 6000–5800 BC. The website says that the new discovery is 600–1000 years older than the wine residues thought to have been the oldest before, they were discovered in Iran and date back to 5400–5000 BC.

It is natural that such a discovery can boost not only the historical and cultural, but also economic significance. “Georgia is the homeland of wine”—this is a brand important both for the wine-making and tourism as well.

In January–October, 2017 Georgia exported 61 mln bottles of wine to 50 countries, which is a 59% rise against the previous year. According to the Ministry of Agriculture of Georgia, as for the reported period, the wine export made up \$134.6 mln, which is 52% more against the same period in 2016.

The export growth was recorded with the following countries: China (41%), Russia (87%), Ukraine (48%), Poland (18%), Latvia (31%), Belarus (42%), USA (68%),

Germany (57%), Israel (149%), France (187%), Azerbaijan (76%). And the top five exporting countries include Russia (38.4 mln bottles), Ukraine (6.2 mln), China (6 mln), Kazakhstan (2.7 mln), and Poland (2.2 mln bottles).

Apart from the traditional areas, some new hi-tech and industrial projects are being currently discussed and coordinated. [The launch of the electric buses production](#) is also planned in Georgia. FREGABUS company is creating a consortium together with the Chinese largest corporation ZTE and German EURABUS. According to the memorandum, a plant will be built in Georgia and production will be launched. The main target is an access to the European markets.

Another similar idea appeared in November, which signifies the tendency. The possibility of building a plant on producing eco and hybrid automobiles in Georgia was discussed by the Georgia's Vice Prime Minister, the Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development Dimitry Kumsishvili and the Vice Mayor of the city of Xianyang of the People's Republic of China Zhang Xiaofan at the meeting within the frames of the Silk Road Forum in Tbilisi. Starting January, 1, 2018 the new free trade agreement between Georgia and the PRC will enter into force to create some additional opportunities.

FOREIGN POLICY

Summit of Georgia's shattered dreams

It is obvious that Georgia had great expectations regarding the Eastern Partnership summit. These expectations had to do with acknowledging the European perspective of the country. Many believe that this may become a serious incentive for Georgia and will boost more efficient reforms, better understanding of stability and long-term perspective. The withholding position of some capitals, expressed by not recognizing the European perspective, is not understood in Tbilisi. Despite the contradictions, Tbilisi is ready to deepen the reforms and successfully implement the Association Agreement. Discussions can be heard more frequently regarding some opinions that Georgia needs a plan to figure out when and after taking which measures it can get ready to apply for the EU membership.

According to the U.S. Department of Defense, Georgia will purchase 410 Javelin missiles and 75 Javelin command launch units as well as related elements of logistics

and program support. The Georgian officials highlighted that these weapons are only meant for strengthening the defense capabilities of the country.

The estimated cost of the probable purchase of the Javelin anti-tank missile system is approximately \$75 mln. This information was followed by the negative remarks of the Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. According to the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Grigory Karasin, the Russian side “once again highlighted the risks of the military cooperation deepening between Tbilisi and the NATO member states” and underlined that “Washington changed its training program for the Georgian peacemakers into a program of preparing the regular military units”. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation also mentions some other risks and states that another military training center in Georgia is being planned with the U.S. assistance.

Tbilisi reacted to such remarks calmly. The government is not going to abandon its own defense despite the concerns expressed by the Russian side.

Will Moldova meet the expectations?

Natalia Stercul, Foreign Policy Association of the Republic of Moldova (Moldova, Chisinau)

The Moldovan internal situation is getting more tense, while the political manipulation is becoming a determining factor in fighting for the power. The only way for the country to get out of the crisis is with the EU's macro-financial assistance, which in its own way is yet another vote of confidence expressed by the European partners in order to support the modernization of the country. It remains to wait and see if Moldova meets those expectations, especially taking into consideration the President declaring that after the EaP Summit European integration is just a delusion.



On 19, November referendum on dismissing the Chisinau mayor (primar) was initiated by the Socialist party.
Photo by NewsMaker.

DOMESTIC POLICY

Manipulations, political games and coalition alliances

Some heated discussions followed the 19, November referendum on dismissing the Chisinau mayor (primar) Dorin Chirtoaca, initiated by the Socialist party. While the socialists called for supporting the referendum, the pro-European parties called for boycotting it.

The political background of the referendum was getting more and more obvious, and this is exactly what led to its failure. Only 17.54% of population took part in it, with a minimal political turnout of 33.3%. As a result the Central Electoral Commission [declared it as void](#). The citizens are tired of the manipulations, political games of the local authorities, and avoid expressing their political preferences openly, which is quite a worrying signal.

The coalition alliances are being created inside the Moldova's party system before the 2018 Parliamentary elections. The Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS) and the political party Dignity and Truth Platform (PPDA)

declared creating of a European anti-oligarch forces platform aimed to join the efforts of those taking integrity and meritocracy for their main criteria. [According to the PAS Head Maia Sandu](#), this will allow to get rid of the binomial Plahotniuc—Dodon.

ECONOMY

The EU's macro-financial assistance as vote of confidence

The EU Trade Commissioner Cecilia Malmström visited Chisinau on 6-7, November to take stock of the progress made in the EU—Moldova relations and the challenges of the EU-Moldova trade relations. [According to its results](#), not all advantages of the Association Agreement and a free trade zone were entirely examined, with an acute necessity to provide the sectoral thematic explanations for some of the national economy fields and the real examples of the entire range of the EU's trade area opportunities for Moldova. It is important to the EU to be able to rely on the agreements reached and invest into the country [without any concerns](#) that such commitments may not be fulfilled. There is an acute feeling that former trust to the Moldovan authorities is lost.

Keeping in mind the positive results of im-

plementing the priority reforms reported by the International Monetary Fund, the EU decided to provide [the macro-financial assistance worth 100 million euros](#) to Moldova, with 40 million euros provided as a grant and 60 million euros representing a loan. This financing will help to develop the banking system, improve the business climate, help in fighting corruption, money laundering and embezzlement. However, this support will be provided under the certain conditions, which have to do with the implementation of the guiding principles and the recommendations given by the Venice Commission. The vote of confidence expressed by the European partners should be supported by concrete practical steps and results of the Moldovan side.

It is important to the EU to be able to rely on the agreements reached and invest into the country without any concerns that such commitments may not be fulfilled

FOREIGN POLICY

President and prime minister polar positions

The most standing out development of November, 2017 was, most probably, the Eastern Partnership summit, raising the issues of the European reforming agenda promoting and the renewal of the "5+2" negotiations on the Transnistria conflict settlement. On the sidelines of the summit the Prime Minister of Moldova [called on the European officials](#) to keep the political commitment and continue their participation in the relations with the Eastern neighbors. The President's reaction was yet again dramatically polar. [In his declaration](#) he highlighted the illusory character of the European integration and the futility of the Moldovan chances to enter the EU in the nearest decades. His rhetorics yet again included contrasting the pro-European course of the country's development

and its strategic partnership with Russia, however, it is difficult to understand viewing the Eastern Partnership from an anti-Russian point.

After a lengthy pause on 27-28, November another round of "5+2" negotiations on the Transnistrian conflict settlement took place in Vienna. Special attention was paid to the agreements reached by Chisinau and Tiraspol, and the considerable progress made in the negotiating process. [Launching a bridge near the villages Gura Bicului and Bicioc](#) is an important step in the Transnistrian conflict settlement, which will provide some positive changes for the local population and will have a good effect on the entire OSCE zone. However, there is a different opinion that the documents signed in Vienna will further complicate and delay the resolution of the Transnistrian conflict. The decision of the troops withdrawing cannot be taken in haste.

Ukraine: Anticorruption November

Oleksii Krysenko, Foreign Policy Council “Ukrainian Prism” (Ukraine, Kyiv)

November was marked by the “anti-corruption scandals”, deficit of the EU’s foreign policy signals and some prudent economic growth. When it comes to the domestic policy, competing for the “anti-corruption policy” influence is rather acute for the Ukraine’s security agencies. The country’s economic growth is rather uncertain, with its growth rate being insufficient. As for the Ukraine’s foreign policy, the Eastern Partnership summit brought few results, while a spy scandal ruined trust and perspectives inside the Ukraine – Belarus relations. These two were the most significant November developments.



The Prosecutor General Yuriy Lutsenko and Artem Sytnyk, the Head of National Anti-Corruption Bureau.
Photo by Facebook.

DOMESTIC POLICY

Anti-corruption competition beyond common sense

The beginning of the month was marked by the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine (NABU) ongoing anti-corruption investigation of a “backpack case”, with Alexander Avakov, the Minister of Internal Affairs Arsen Avakov’s son involved. However, soon

this high-profile case had to be forsaken. First of all, the court released Avakov’s son from custody on the condition that he appears in court as required, which is a true sign that there will be no anti-corruption sensations related to this case in the nearest future. Secondly, the Head of NABU Artem Sytnyk rather soon turned from a hunter into an anti-corruption and political target. On 3, November the National Agency on

Corruption Prevention (NACP) invited Artem Sytnyk for questioning in relation to the NACP requirements not fulfilled by Mr. Sytnyk (a list of claims to Sytnyk included a possibility for his dismissal in the end). The NABU's Head denied the accusations and in his turn invited the NACP's Head Natalia Korchak for questioning to the NABU's head quarters.

On 14, November, the former Head of NACP Financial Control Department Anna Solomatina accused Natalia Korchak of falsifying the electronic asset declaration results, and also made a statement that the NACP was under the Presidential Administration's control. Later on she published the correspondence with the "curator from the Presidential Administration".

On 16, November, the situation unfolded with the Ukrainian Prosecutor General's Office (PGO) opening a criminal case against Artem Sytnyk due to "disclosing the materials of the recorded telephone conversations without abiding by the relevant legal procedure, abuse of power and so on", and on 17, November the NABU followed with launch of the criminal proceedings against the Prosecutor General Yuriy Lutsenko on charges of the alleged "illegal enrichment".

The "anti-corruption month" reached its climax on 29, November: the operatives of the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) under command of the PGO prosecutors detained seven NABU employees. The reasons, conditions and results of this detention are fundamentally different depending on which competing side provided this interpretation and/or explanation (NABU vs. SBU and PGO). The SBU justified its actions by suppressing the NA-

BU's illegal operation regarding the first deputy of the State Migration Service of Ukraine (MIA agency) Dina Pimakhova. The NABU, in its turn, qualified the SBU actions as brutally compromising its special operation on detecting the members of an organized crime group in the State Migration Service of Ukraine and accused the PGO of disclosing some personal data of the NABU's secret agents. As a result the President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko made several statements in the course of briefing in the PGO saying that 1) "the conflict between the anti-corruption agencies in Ukraine is reminiscent of some Latin American carnival", 2) the actions of the Ukraine's security agencies are "beyond the common sense competition", 3) "our society is waiting for a war on corruption and other crimes, not for a war of the compromising materials".

As for the aftermath of the "November anti-corruption competition", the results of the developments included losing trust for both anti-corruption agencies and the Ukraine's legal system in general.

In November the Global Terrorism Index was also published, with Ukraine ranking 17th as a country with a high level of the terrorism influence. In 2016 Ukraine was placed 11th, which signifies some improvement against the previous year. The main reasons behind the Ukraine's "high" position in the rating are the military actions in Donetsk and Luhansk regions, as well as the low efficiency of the Ukrainian security forces.

The aftermath of the "November anti-corruption competition" included losing trust for both anti-corruption agencies and the Ukraine's legal system in general

ECONOMY

Two steps forward—one step back

The macroeconomic stability was a November's key point, while the defining feature of the Ukrainian economic dynamics remains to be the "development with an insufficient growth rate". Given the general economic growth, the growth rate of the Ukrainian economy somewhat decreased by the end of the year. For example, according to the results of the third quarter, the Ukraine's GDP increased by 2.1% against the same period in 2016. However, the first quarter GDP went up 2.5%, second – by 2.3%, and the third one – by 2.3% against the same periods of the previous year respectively.

The European Federation of Energy Traders (EFET) for the first time included Ukraine in its top twenty Europe's best gas hubs, placing Ukraine 18th. It was also

stated that Ukraine needs to continue the liberalization of the gas market.

In November the international ratings agency Standard & Poor's affirmed Ukraine's long-term sovereign credit rating in foreign and national currency at "B-". A short-term sovereign rating in foreign and national currencies was affirmed as well at "B". The rating outlook was "stable", which reflects the "view that over the next 12 months the Ukrainian government will maintain access to the official creditor support by pursuing the reforms on the fiscal, financial and economic fronts, and that the Verkhovna Rada is able to broadly pass key reforms, thereby implementing the International Monetary Fund requirements for a new tranche".

According to the "Paying Taxes-2018" (a joint annual publication by the World Bank Group and PwC, which is a part of the Doing Business rating) results,

Ukraine went up and now ranks 43rd out of 190 countries. This is considerably better than a year ago: in 2016 Ukraine ranked 84th. However, the Ukrainian taxation system still needs further reforming. For ex-

ample, according to PwC, tax compliance in Ukraine on average takes 327.5 hours per year, while in the EU it is only 161 hours and the global indicator is 240 hours.

FOREIGN POLICY

Same old songs

The fifth Eastern Partnership summit in Brussels was the key November foreign policy development for Ukraine. However, this summit brought no considerable results particularly for Ukraine: it lost the hope to receive the EU macro-financial assistance worth of 600 mln euros and the “European perspectives” were left behind the frames of the Ukraine – EU relations, the final Declaration only acknowledged the “European aspirations and the European choice” of the relevant partners. On the contrary to the Declaration made at the previous summit, which included statements condemning the “illegal annexation of the Crimea”, this summit’s Declaration does not make any statement regarding the situation involving Ukraine and the Crimea. The Russian observers highlighted this issue and perceive it as the EU’s readiness to take into account the Russian interests in the region.

As for the current EU’s position regarding the Russian military aggression, it has rather softened to general phrases and principles, like: “The European Union remains committed in its support to the territorial integrity, independence and sovereignty of all its partners”.

On 14, November the Third Committee of the UN General Assembly adopted an updated draft of the resolution on the human rights in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea. The adopted resolution confirms that “there exists an international military conflict between Ukraine and the Russian Federation, condemns the enforcement of the Russian law on the temporarily occupied territories and obliges the Russian Federa-

tion to implement the interim decision adopted by the international court of the United Nations on restoring the rights and freedoms of Ukrainians in the Crimea”. The draft resolution was adopted by a vote of 71 in favor to 25 against, with 77 abstentions.

On 30, November Ukraine signed the Government of Ukraine – United Nations Partnership Framework for 2018-2022, with an estimated budget of \$675 million. The assistance will be provided in four main areas: “sustainable economic growth, environment and employment; equitable access to quality and inclusive services and social protection; democratic governance, rule of law and civic participation; human security, social cohesion and recovery”.

The key negative foreign policy development in November was the “spy scandal” in the Ukraine – Belarus relations, which, despite the ruined Ukraine – Russia relations, had previously remained at a high level of cooperation. On 17, November the news appeared that a Ukrainian Radio journalist based in Minsk Pavlo Sharoyko was arrested by the Belarusian KGB and charged with espionage. Igor Skvortsov, an employee of the Ukrainian Embassy in Belarus, was accused of espionage as well and was declared a persona non grata. Moreover, on 20, November, the Belarusian KGB detained Alexander Skiba, the Head of the JSC Weighting Plant (Kostiantynivka, Donetsk region) under the corruption charges. The “anti-espionage initiatives” of the Belarusian KGB were well known to the President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko, which can considerably complicate the bilateral relations in the future.

Eastern Partnership Summit: compromise for the sake of continuation

Vitali Martynyuk, Head of the International Programs of Centre for Global Studies “Strategy XXI”, Expert for Foreign Policy Council “Ukrainian Prism” (Ukraine, Kyiv)

Before the Eastern Partnership Summit took place in Brussels on 24, November every side had its own views, expectations and intentions. However, the Summit results demonstrated that the European Union was still capable of bringing quite a wide range of aspirations to the common denominator and keeping the initiative afloat even if it did not completely satisfy the needs of some participants.



The 5th Eastern Partnership (EaP) summit in Brussels on 24 November, 2017.

Summit of compromise

The fifth Eastern Partnership Summit was supposed to answer to the main question: how will this EU initiative develop further on? However, more radical wording appeared just before the summit, asking if this initiative was to exist at all, and if it had any added value for the participants?

Brussels decided to keep the initiative, and that is why places at the heart of the current Summit [a search for the ways](#) to strengthen cooperation and achieve stronger economy, governance, connectivity and society. While evaluating the initiative overall as a successful one, the President of the European Council Donald Tusk highlighted the agreement to deliver the

new [political and economic objectives by 2020](#), especially reinforcing cooperation in a number of specific areas, such as small and medium-sized enterprises, digital economy, broadband investments, and investments in transport, energy and infrastructure projects. These priorities are suitable for all partner countries and do not provoke criticism of the third parties, such as Russia, at least within the interpretations of the Joint Declaration of the Summit.

Determining the membership perspective for the Eastern partners became a dilemma to the EU. It was clear that Brussels did not want to document it and left only [a neutral phrase](#) that “the European Union acknowledges the European aspirations” of its associated countries and “welcomes their European

choice”. It is difficult to reconcile these words with the EU statement, and [personally one by Donald Tusk](#), regarding their “common future” and “the sovereign right of each of our European neighbors from the East to choose the level of ambition”. No answer was provided to the following question: what exactly the maximum level of these ambitions is and what the partners from the East can count on.

The Eastern Partnership regional stability is the main target for the initiative as the majority of the partner countries suffer from the military conflicts. Therefore, the EU Declaration yet again confirmed its support for the territorial integrity and sovereignty for all partners and called for resolving the conflicts in a peaceful way. This compromise points neither at the reasons for the conflicts, nor at the ways of their likely resolution, nor at the Russia’s destructive role, which, in one way or another, is present in all the instability zones.

However, the most important thing for the EU is that the positions of all partner countries are to be taken into account in order to satisfy the participants to the greatest extent possible and to keep their interest in the Eastern Partnership.

To Summit at «different speeds»

At the current point the Eastern Partnership is a “different speed” initiative, where three countries (Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova) are leading as they are associated states with a free trade zone and visa-free regime, Armenia has a Partnership Agreement, while Azerbaijan has some negotiations, and Belarus is being careful and limits itself to the bilateral and multilateral formats of the EU cooperation.

The aspirations regarding further cooperation are also on the different levels: from the EU membership to a simple mutually rewarding economic cooperation without a political component. This situation is without a doubt understood in Brussels, and therefore a different level of ambitions for the partner countries is declared, however, some attempts are made to avoid the Eastern Partnership fragmentation. That is exactly why the EU rejected the format “EaP PLUS” much discussed before the Summit and referred to the common OSCE and UN principles while highlighting stability, with no side acting against the latter.

Armenia is one of those few that achieved the desired result at the Eastern Partnership Summit in Brussels. The EU–Armenia Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement was signed, which takes the relations to the next level of the enhanced political dialogue and economic cooperation. This will allow Yerevan to receive more of the European assistance while not deteriorating its relations with Moscow. Many experts suggested that Yerevan and Moscow view this agreement as a bridge between the EAEU and the EU. Even while giving his speech at the Summit, the [Presi-](#)



Armenia is one of those few that achieved the desired result at the Eastern Partnership Summit in Brussels.

[dent of Armenia Serzh Sargsian stated](#) that: “many international counterparts of ours describe Armenia as a nation that brings various integration processes closer to each other”.

Determining the membership perspective for the Eastern partners became a dilemma to the EU

Following such a successful example Belarus, while being tied to Russia under a series of obligations within the frames of the Union State, Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), and the Eurasian Customs Union, started to talk about a new format of the relations with the EU. “Signing an agreement on partnership and cooperation is a matter of a short-term perspective», – [said the Foreign Minister of Belarus Vladimir Makey](#). And the most important aspiration is not to shape the way to consistent bonding with the EU but to get the economic dividends. Minsk was quick on the uptake and decided to use the Armenia’s successful experience, playing getting closer to the EU as “[launching pragmatic cooperation](#) between the EU and the Eurasian Economic Union”.

Azerbaijan had one big goal to achieve at the Summit: that is to raise the question of violating the territorial integrity of the country and the illegal deployment of the Armenian troops on the territory of Azerbaijan. It is exactly the reason why the President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev did not attend the previous 2015 summit in Riga, and it is exactly why [his entire speech at the Brussels Summit](#) was devoted to this issue: “The territorial integrity of Azerbaijan has the same value as the territorial integrity of any other state, and it must be restored”. Even though Baku’s position was not entirely reflected in the Declaration, however, the Azerbaijani side was satisfied with the results of the summit as its final document supported the territorial integrity of the member states.

Georgia was not overly ambitious over the Eastern Partnership Summit and therefore had a positive reac-

tion to its results. The Georgia's Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili underlined that [the Georgia's progress and its successes were unanimously acknowledged](#). "It's important that this format proved as a tool enabling Georgia to take such significant steps as the Association Agreement, FTA, and visa liberalization», – said the Head of Georgian Government. He also underlined that the European reforms continue to be held in Georgia, and stressed the importance of the time when the EU will be ready to include Georgia into its member states.

Moldova, just as Georgia, did not have any ambitious goals regarding the Summit. Its main task was to achieve continuous financing for its domestic reforms – in October the EU withheld 28 mln euros over the justice reform hold-up in Chisinau. Having received the EU's credit of trust, Chisinau had a positive reaction following the Summit results.

As for Ukraine, it is obvious that it had the biggest demands to the Summit, even though the expectations were quite predictable. Before the Summit the Ukraine's Minister of Foreign Affairs Pavlo Klimkin made [a clear statement](#) that no break-through political decisions should be expected as a result of the Summit, while dubbing the Eastern Partnership as a "box with tools".

In short, the Ukrainian demands were as following: a potential EU membership; an investment plan for Ukraine; acknowledging Russia as an aggressor state; new formats for the countries having signed the Association Agreement.

The most important thing for the EU is that the positions of all partner countries are to be taken into account in order to satisfy the participants to the greatest extent possible and to keep their interest in the Eastern Partnership

Already in the course of the Summit the President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko spoke about the Russia's aggression and called for determining the membership perspectives and using Partnership potential to the [greatest extent](#): "Ukraine counts on the so-called "four unions": the Energy Union, the Digital Single Market, the Customs Union, and the association with the Schengen zone". The European Union reactions to all Ukrainian offers included declaring support for its "European aspirations" and territorial integrity, reminders of the "partner countries participating in the European Energy Union creating " and the "cooperation on the digital markets harmonizing". Instead of an investment plan there was some sustainable development agenda. Ukraine did not get the results it wanted, and therefore will focus on developing the bilateral relations with the EU. Following the Summit Pavlo Klimkin [tweeted](#) that the "European future is the relations between Ukraine and the EU".

EU replied to expectations with requiring reforms and "20 Deliverables for 2020"

The above-mentioned stability is being viewed by the European Union not only as an opportunity to counteract the hybrid threats, but also as a society development and creating the stable government systems by holding the domestic reforms in the partner countries. "Sustained and effective reform progress is a key to the continued success of the Eastern Partnership", – states the Summit Declaration.

In order to provide an incentive for the partner countries' governments, the European Union made it clear that the financial assistance is closely tied to the reforms: "The EU financial support to its partners will be conditioned by the concrete reform steps". This is clearly in evidence in the Ukraine's case, as it is struggling to receive the third 600 mln EU tranche since Ukraine has not fulfilled the EU requirements.

The EU's financial instrument is a rather efficient stimulating agent and an indicator of the relations within the Eastern Partnership. In the course of the Summit it was announced that the EU has provided 5,4 bln of the financial aid to its partners since 2009. This factor is quite appealing to the partner countries including those actively involved in other economic organizations. It is obvious that the Eastern Partnership financial component will continue to be the factor tying together the partner countries moving forward with a different speed and the EU.

The security issues in the Eastern Partnership region, significant not only for Ukraine, but for the other initiative members as well, are also interpreted within the frames of the domestic reforms. The majority of the Ukrainian experts that took part in a Center

for Global Studies "Strategy XXI" [survey regarding the state capabilities to counteract the hybrid threats](#) (being supported by the EU and the International Renaissance Foundation) named the reforms according to the EU standards to be. the main input in the stability and common security.

The Summit Declaration highlights "the EU's strengthened role in conflict resolution" even "including the EU field presence in conflict regions, when appropriate". This phrase was perceived in Ukraine as the EU's readiness to send its mission to Donbas. However, the "20 Deliverables for 2020" plan does not include such aims. As for the security issues, it mostly draws attention to counteracting the organized crime and the hybrid threats, cyber security, strengthening cross-border cooperation and disaster prevention, response and crisis management as well. The importance of cooperation in the area of the Common Security and Defense Policy and the partners' valuable

contribution to the EU missions and operations was also highlighted.

The reforms in the partner countries were also included in the “20 Deliverables for 2020” plan, which, as states in the Summit Declaration, is, “delivering tangible results in a transparent and inclusive manner, as well as strengthening resilience”. This document became a practical guidebook for the more active cooperation in the Eastern Partnership multilateral format. Its analysis by the Ukrainian national platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum points at the obviously realistic targets for 2020, at least for the majority of the countries. That is probably why the mentioned plan often has a remark: “for three countries”.

Even though in the course of the Eastern Partnership Summit not enough attention was paid to the transitional results of the plan which were drawn up to November, 2017, however, both the EU and the Eastern Partnership in general will have another opportunity to do a transitional evaluation of this document in 2019, before holding the next summit, and will probably correct the set targets.

Eastern Partnership is moving on

Therefore, the European Union managed to get to the level of perceiving the initiative as common for all partner states, and even to take into account the attitude of the third countries, with Russia being first and foremost, having stated that the Eastern Partnership “is not aimed against anyone”. Moreover, Belarus was inspired by signing the Agreement with Armenia

to search for a format of negotiable relations with the EU. It is obvious that Moldova and Georgia will concentrate on the domestic reforms and further sectoral integration with the EU in the short-term perspective.

Ukraine, having stated that summit results were expected, decided to differentiate its bilateral relations with the EU and the Eastern Partnership as a format of a multilateral cooperation under the EU auspices. Ukraine may become the initiative leader when achieving 20 Eastern Partnership Deliverables as it has al-



The President of the European Council Donald Tusk evaluated the initiative overall as a successful one

ready fulfilled them partially. However, Kyiv needs to pay more attention to the EU recommendations, especially those concerning the domestic reforms and the European financial assistance, since such an approach will be clearly transferred to the European Fund for Sustainable Development.

The Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum may play an important role both providing assistance to the partner countries trying to achieve their deliverables by 2020 and get closer to the EU, and searching for the regional cooperation mechanisms suitable for all countries.

In order to provide an incentive for the partner countries' governments, the European Union made it clear that the financial assistance is closely tied to the reforms

Brussels should, without a doubt, maintain the level which will satisfy all sides in order for the Eastern Partnership to be efficient and viable in the future. However, the EU also has to increase the integration level for the initiative leaders and admit their possible membership in the perspective, no matter how distant this perspective might be as “more for more” principle is still relevant.

Photos by consilium.europa.eu.

Economy in The Eastern Partnership: partners, competitors or bystanders?

Olga Chyzhova, Foreign Policy Council “Ukrainian Prism” (Kyiv, Ukraine)



No general economic platform for the Eastern Partnership countries can't yet be discussed. The states build their economic relations within the region and with the third parties without regard for the other participants in this EU policy. But in the future this site can become especially interesting to launch a dialogue between the European Union and the Eurasian Economic Union. These are the conclusions of the EaP Think Bridge international expert round table, held on 27, November in Minsk.

The coexistence of the EU and Russia integration initiatives was the focus of the discussion. Indeed the Eastern Partnership countries are divided into two camps. On the one hand, Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova, the signatories of the Association Agreements with the European Union, are already benefiting from the free trade zone. While Armenia and Belarus are the members of the Eurasian Economic Union led by the Russian Federation, which, however, does not prevent them from seeking the ways to enter the European markets.

«Why should the European Union speak to the

Eurasian Economic Union? We now have this stalemate between the West on the one side and Russia on the other side. And I'm quite sure that this stalemate is not beneficial for any party: neither for the West, nor for Russia, and definitely not for those Eastern Partnership countries between those two blocks», — said **Nikolaos Gavalakis, the Director of the Regional Office «Dialogue Eastern Europe» at Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, while opening a discussion.**

«The negotiations between the EU and the EEU are just beginning. And such pragmatic dialogues will take place, this is the beginning of a technical

interface — not political or ideological but technical. For Belarus, this process is of great importance», — continued **Rosa Turarbekova, an associate professor at the Belarusian State University.**

After signing the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement with the EU at the Brussels summit, Armenia can become a link between the two poles. And Belarus is closely watching this experience.

«The Eastern Partnership is becoming more Eastern and more about the partnership, where countries like Armenia are becoming important actors, bridges for the EU and the EEU cooperation», — said **Richard Giragosian, the Director of the Regional Studies Center (Armenia).**

Although the experts acknowledge that the benefits of cooperation with the EU and the membership in the EEU are incomparable, let alone the political and ideological component of the partnership.

«Comparing the EU and the EEU is like comparing the Zhiguli and Mercedes. Both vehicles are able to move, but they are different. Although Zhiguli is more usual for the Moldovan citizens, but the Mercedes does not have to be repaired twice a year. Although the problem for Moldova is not only to choose a car, but also to learn how to drive», — said **Danu Marin, an Expert of the Foreign Policy Association of Moldova.**

And while the statistics does not yet show a significant shift in the economic indicators of Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia after the entry into force of the free trade zone, but some positive changes in the countries are noticeable.



«A free trade zone is not about the trading. First of all, it is about those internal transformations that should occur in the countries that signed the Association Agreement. And the Agreement itself is not about the benefits, but first of all it is about the responsibilities», — stressed **Yuri Vdovenko, the Deputy Chair of the Council of Foreign Policy «Ukrainian Prism».**

During their visit to Minsk, the EaP Think Bridge initiative experts also discussed the cooperation opportunities for the civil societies of the countries of the region with the members of the Belarusian National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum. And they also summed up the results of the Brussels EaP summit with the students of the Faculty of International Relations of the Belarusian State University.



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www.prismua.org

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www.regional-studies.org



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www.cesd.az



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by analyzing international processes, and developing programs and projects.

www.csfps.by



The foundation Liberal Academy Tbilisi (Georgia) is a non-governmental, nonprofit organization, committed to promoting core democratic values, supporting peace-building and European and Euro-Atlantic integration and with that fostering the democratic development of Georgia and the

whole Southern Caucasus region.

www.ei-lat.ge



Foreign Policy Association (Moldova) is Moldova's leading foreign policy think-tank, committed to supporting Moldova's Europeanization, integration into the European Union and a viable settlement of the Transnistrian conflict.

www.ape.md