

# EaP Think Bridge

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Eastern Partnership monthly analytical digest

## Outlook for Eastern Partnership: view from the inside



**What should Brussels do to keep all partners interested:  
switch to different speeds or raise the bar for everyone?**

Eastern Partnership foreign ministers meet in Sweden for events marking 10th anniversary of the initiative

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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

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## Eastern Partnership: where to go next?

**The entire Eastern Partnership anniversary year partner countries and European capitals summed up the results of the decade, consulted on structural changes in policy and tried to look beyond the horizon: what's next?**

As expected, the idea of further cooperation and ambitions among partner states are radically different. What will Brussels do: leave the minimum common denominator acceptable to all or move to the Eastern Partnership of different speeds? Analysts present the outlook as seen from each country.

Meanwhile, October was turbulent for the region. Azerbaijan saw another brutal violation of human rights and the use of force against peaceful protesters. For the Armenian government, the month was full of setbacks and scandals. For the first time, Belarus publicly demonstrated a reduction in its obligations to Russia in the military sphere and at the same time reached a compromise with NATO. The focus of Georgia happened to be the scandal around the church. Moldova seems to be entering a new round of political crisis. A turbo-decision-making regime in Ukraine causes concern.

The main developments of the month in the Eastern Partnership are analysed in our digest.



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## Analytica

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# Armenia: A month of setbacks for Armenian government

Richard Giragosian, Regional Research Center (Yerevan, Armenia)

October appears to be a difficult month for the Armenian government with a set of personnel issues and decline in business ratings. At the same time some new opportunities arose in the international arena.



## DOMESTIC POLICY

### Deputy police chief fired for “political” comments

Colonel Hovannes Kocharyan, the Armenian deputy police chief, was dismissed on October 25 after publicly criticizing the Armenian government’s planned introduction of a new system of political appointments for the heads of law enforcement and the powerful National Security Service (NSS). Under previous law, both heads of

the police and the NSS were required to be high-ranking career officers. But under new amendments considered by the parliament, the requirement for such government appointments in the security sector would only be limited to any Armenian citizen above the age of 25 and who has lived in the country for the last four years. According to Vladimir Karapetian, the spokesman of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, the second highest police official was dismissed for making an inappropriate “political state-

ment.” The dismissal comes in the wake of the firing of both the previous police chief, Valeri Osipyan, and the National Security Service (NSS) head, Artur Vanetsian, last month, as each was replaced by interim heads serving on a temporary basis.

## **Prime minister faces scrutiny over “secret” salary raises for officials**

After sparking a flurry of fresh criticism, on October 23, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan strongly defended the decision to effectively double the salaries of ministers and other senior government officials and despite the absence of any formal announcement, insisted that it should not be made secretly. The salary increases, which took effect some four months earlier, were further defended by the government as part of a broader attempt to prevent corruption and institute higher standards for merit and reward. However, the lack of public disclosure and the fact that the raises were financed by using special “bonus funds”, which the 2019 state budget set aside for all government ministries, weakened the government’s defenders. The record of the prime minister’s vocal criticism of similar salary increase for the previous government, which in 2013 he opposed as a manifestation of government “cynicism,” only fueled criticism further. Critics also highlighted the fact that the head of the State Revenue Committee (SRC), one of the most corrupt state bodies in recent years, admitted that he alone received 14 million drams (\$29,000) in bonuses over his eight-month tenure as SRC chief.

## **Surprise resignation triggers internal clash**

In a surprise announcement on October 18, Sarhat Petrosian, the head of the state Cadastre Committee, resigned from his position, which oversees, regulates and registers property and real estate transactions. Petrosian, a widely respected architect and prominent support of Prime Minister Pashinyan, cited incompetence and entrenched resistance to reforms by officials of the government’s Urban Development Committee, adding that he “can no longer tolerate dilettantism and sectarianism bordering on corruption.” In a heated response to the resignation on October 21, Deputy Prime Minister Tigran Avinian criticized Petrosian, and accused him of seeking to overstep his powers and attempt “to operate in the area of urban development.”

## **Clash over Constitutional Court continues**

In a heated and drawn out clash between Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s government and the country’s Constitutional Court, an attempt by the parliament to urge the court to remove its chairman, Hrayr Tovmasian, failed after the other Constitutional Court judges rejected the move on October 14. The parliament adopted a non-binding resolution that urges the forcible removal of the Chief Justice over what it termed “serious procedural violations” in handling the appeal process related to the ongoing criminal case of former President Robert Kocharian, and stemming from the parliament’s allegation that the judge is displaying a lack of impartiality due to Tovmasian’s membership in the former ruling Republican Party prior to his appointment as Constitutional Court chairman in March 2017. Despite the parliamentary attempt by the dominant pro-government “My Step” bloc, the second largest party in parliament, the Prosperous

Armenia Party (BHK), publicly criticized the move and threatened to block further attempts by the parliament to remove Tovmasian.

After several months of a mounting crisis between the government and the court chairman, a criminal law enforcement body initiated a series of interrogations of Tovmasian on October 16, including the questioning of the judge’s elderly father and daughters. Through the end of October, the targeting of the judge continued to focus on allegations of financial impropriety and possible corruption. As part of that investigation, Arsen Babayan,

a former senior parliament staff member was arrested. At the same time, the government also raised direct charges contending that Tovmasian was illegally elected as court chairman by the former Republican Party-dominated parliament. The crisis is further complicated by competing legal interpretations, whereby the terms of the previous Armenian constitution stipulated that a Constitutional Court judge cannot be arrested without the consent of at least five of the eight other members of the country’s highest court. Under constitutional amendments that took effect in April 2018, such permission is needed only in cases where the judge faces prosecution in connection with the performance of their duties. For his part, Tovmasian is arguing that he is protected by the previous version of the constitution and enjoys “full immunity” from prosecution because he was appointed to the court before the constitutional amendments came into force in April 2018.

**After several months of a mounting crisis between the government and the Constitutional Court chairman, a criminal law enforcement body initiated a series of interrogations of court’s chairman Tovmasian**

## ECONOMY

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### Armenia declines in business ranking

In a report issued on October 24, Armenia suffered a decline in its ranking in a key World Bank annual ranking that assesses the ease of doing business in some 190 countries. Although the survey also cited an improvement in the country's investment climate, Armenia ranked 47th, on a par with Moldova, a decline from its 2018 ranking that placed it 41<sup>st</sup>. The report cited a deterioration in two core areas related to entrepreneurial activity: "Protecting Minority Investors" and "Resolving Insolvency." But there was some progress in other policy areas, including the Armenian government's success in having "strengthened minority investor protections" over the past year, and improvements in taxation and construction quality control.

### Armenia hosts Eurasian Economic Union Summit

Armenia hosted a summit of the Eurasian Economic

Union (EES) on October 1, with leaders from fellow member states Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Russia, as well as delegations from Iran, Serbia and Singapore. Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan also held side meetings with various leaders, including separate discussions with Russian President Vladimir Putin and Iranian President Hassan Rohani. The Armenian premier also concluded a new trade deal with Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong during the summit, while Singapore also signed a free trade zone agreement with the Eurasian Economic Union. Armenia hosted the summit meeting of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council due to its position holding the rotating chairmanship of the EES. Armenian media coverage of the summit was somewhat eclipsed by a brief but significant meeting between the Russian president and the wife of jailed former President Robert Kocharian at the Russian Embassy in Yerevan.

## FOREIGN POLICY

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### Armenia elected to UN Human Rights Council

In a vote on October 17, Armenia was elected as one of fourteen new members of the 47-member UN Human Rights Council, endorsed by 144 of 193 countries. With Armenian membership running through 2022, the country's new position on the Geneva-based council is expected to foster a more active period of Armenian diplomacy focusing on human rights in terms of international law within the UN system. Armenia's successful election is also widely seen as positive affirmation of Armenia's 2018 "Velvet Revolution," that resulted in peaceful, non-violent change of government hailed as a victory of "people power."

### Latest meeting of Armenian & Azerbaijani leaders

In the latest visit to the region, mediators from the OSCE Minsk Group met with leaders of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Nagorno Karabakh (Artsakh) on October 15-18. As a result of the meetings, the OSCE co-chairmen announced that Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan

and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev have each pledged to intensify efforts to "prepare the populations for peace," adding that they "welcomed the prospect of implementing specific humanitarian and security measures to prepare the populations for peace and reduce tensions." For their part, the mediators called on the conflicting parties to remove "obstacles potentially interfering with" the work of a small OSCE team empowered to monitor the ceasefire along the Karabakh "line of contact" and the Armenian-Azerbaijani border.

Although the Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders have already promised to take "a number of measures in the humanitarian field" and help create "an environment conducive to peace" during a Vienna meeting in March 2019, there has been little demonstrable progress to date. Reflecting the difficulty of the negotiations, the two leaders also engaged in a public "war of words" during an 11 October summit in Turkmenistan. Nevertheless, each side has held informal talks during an official dinner hosted by Turkmen President Gurbaguly Berdymuhamedov, and later agreed to a follow-up meeting by the Armenian and Azerbaijani foreign ministers "before the end of the year," most likely in December 2019.

# Azerbaijan: Brutal use of force against peaceful protesters

October was a critical month in Azerbaijan in terms of domestic policy. In late October, two rallies were held against the lack of democracy and violence against women. These protests were followed by personnel and structural changes in the government. Baku hosted the second International E-Trade Forum which brought together different government bodies, SMEs, and startups. Furthermore, government representatives and journalists of almost 60 states came together for the 18th Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement in Baku.



## DOMESTIC POLICY

### What is happening?

On October 19, National Council of Democratic Forces in Azerbaijan held unsanctioned demonstrations against low salaries, corruption, and anti-democratic practices in the city centre. Initially Baku City Main Police Department offered to hold the rally in Lokbatan area; however, since Lokbatan

settlement is far away from the city, the Council refused the offer.

Before the protest, three metro stations were temporarily shut down to prevent people from joining the rally, and during the protests, the internet connection was weakened or cut off in some areas to prevent people from sharing live videos.

Protesters were shouting “Freedom” and “Resignation” slogans. Hundreds of people including journalists, activists, and the Popular Front Party leader Ali Karimli were violently detained by the police. Karimli, who was released afterwards, said that some 50 organizers of the rally had been detained [even before the rally began](#). He also mentioned that another rally has been planned for November 2.

After the protests, the Azerbaijani government faced intense international pressure. “*We call on the government to credibly investigate reports of police violence, hold accountable those responsible, and release expeditiously those who remain in detention,*” said the statement released [by the US Embassy in Baku](#). Marc Behrendt, director of Europe and Eurasia programs at Freedom House stated that “*The brutal use of force on peaceful protesters over the weekend in Azerbaijan exemplifies the government’s unwillingness to tolerate any dissent and failure to uphold the freedoms of speech and assembly*”. In her statement, Dunja Miyatovic, Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe mentioned that “*... unsanctioned rallies were brutally dispersed by the police, which raise grave concerns about police conduct and people’s right to peaceful protest in Azerbaijan*”. A public statement by Amnesty International reads that “*Azerbaijan remains closed to human rights scrutiny. International human rights monitors, including Amnesty International, continue to be denied access to the country*”.

A day after October 19 rally, Azerbaijani women gathered to protest violence against women. The campaign had started online under the “No Violence Against Women” tag. Few participants were detained and released soon, some of who uploaded their photos showing minor injuries. After the

**Some 50 organizers of the rally had been detained even before the rally began**

protest, the UN released a statement calling the Azerbaijani government to ratify the Council of Europe’s Istanbul Convention. According to the research done by the UN, the price Azerbaijan pays for violence against women is almost 2% of the country’s GDP – in lost economic output caused by irreversible population losses, incapacity, disability, reduced productivity of victims and the costs of providing services [in response to violence](#).

On October 20, another scandal flared up. Audio recordings of conversations between one of the opposition activists, Gultakin Hajibeyli and two foreign diplomats were broadcasted on TV. The content of recordings was about the unauthorized rally and the general situation in the country. The leakage of audio recordings to mass media is considered to be a serious violation of the Vienna Convention; however, there have not been [any officials’ comments yet](#).

## Personnel and structural changes

Last week of October, several personnel and structural changes happened in Azerbaijan. Ramiz Mehdiyev, the head of the Presidential Administration and Ali Hasanov, Deputy Prime Minister resigned. Minister of Economy Shahin Mustafayev was appointed as deputy prime minister. The Ministry of Taxes was eliminated and joined to the Ministry of Economy along with the State Committee for Property and the Antimonopoly Agency for Supervision of the Consumer Market. The Ministry of Economy is now headed by former Minister of Taxes, Mikail Jabbarov. Some experts see these changes as an effort to renew the government; while others believe that there is a need for “real reforms”.

## ECONOMY

### Baku E-Trade Forum

In late October, Baku hosted the second International E-Trade Forum as a part of the Innovation Week. The International E-Trade Forum is an important platform to discuss the latest trends and novelties in the field of electronic trade. The covered topics included national strategies, facilitation of e-commerce, the impact of e-governance, international

cooperation, cybersecurity & data protection, e-signature & trust marks, artificial intelligence, automation of robotics, blockchain [etc.](#) “*Azerbaijan has a favourable environment for the development of electronic trade and ... our goal is to increase the share of e-commerce in the domestic market, as well as to encourage e-commerce in order to bring national products on the foreign markets,*” [said Minister of Transport, Communications and High Technologies Ramin Guluzade](#).

## FOREIGN POLICY

### NAM Summit

For the first time, the capital city hosted the 18th summit of the Non-Aligned Movement, which is the second-largest organization after the UN. Presidents of Iran, Algeria, Afghanistan, Namibia, Venezuela, Sudan, Cuba, Ghana, Djibouti, Pakistan, and Turkmenistan were among the participants of the summit. The motto of this year’s summit was “Upholding Bandung principles to ensure a

coherent and adequate response to the challenges of the modern world”.

According to Ramiz Hasanov, Azerbaijani Deputy Foreign Minister four documents will be adopted following the summit: a document of the Baku summit; the Baku declaration; a document expressing gratitude to Azerbaijan; and a document [regarding Palestine](#). Furthermore, the chairmanship of the structure passed from Venezuela to Azerbaijan [for 2019-2022](#).

# Belarus: Common ground with the US?

Yuri Tsarik, Center for Strategic and Foreign Policy Studies (Minsk, Belarus)

The domestic agenda remains focused on the upcoming election campaigns, while the government approach is growing tougher. In its foreign policy, Belarus bets on diversification and finds common ground with long-standing opponents.



## DOMESTIC POLICY

### A tough approach

Three elements, including domination of law enforcers following national security thinking, active expansion of the Presidential Administration spin doctors and a pro-social (within the current limited resources) populist economic policy will define the actions of the Belarusian authorities until the end of the 2019-2020 election campaigns.

October saw continued expansion of the Security Service of the President. As part of the celebration of the Security Service 25th anniversary, Aleksander Lukashenko [spoke](#) about it as a key agency in ensuring national security of Belarus with functions going far beyond the protection of the president.

The government's tough approach in the pre-election campaign was expressed in massive [refusal](#) to register opposition and independent candidates, including two

independent candidates in the current House of Representatives, followed by the proactive policy to remove the registered candidates from the race. Out of 60 complaints about rejection of registration as candidates for MP filed with six territorial election committees, only one was satisfied. As of October 31, nine candidates for MP seats [were stripped](#) of registration for various violations and 22 requested to be removed from the race. In this way, the authorities are trying to maintain full control over the election and ensure a predictable outcome, as well as to prevent "politization" of society which could make it easier to organize mass protests or disorders in the following stages.

At the same time, the Russian Federation remains a stable source of security challenges for the authorities at the end of 2019 and in 2020.

## ECONOMY

### Pressure from Russia

In his reply to the Belarusian Ministry of the Interior, Russia's Deputy Minister of Finance officially [described](#) Belarus's claims of compensation for the losses resulting from Russia's oil tax maneuver as an attempt to violate Russia's sovereign right to define and regulate taxes in accordance with its national interests. Apart from that, the letter officially admitted for the first time that the harmonization of the Belarusian and Russian tax legislation envisaged by the deeper integration program should, in Russia's view, be limited to the transformation of the

## FOREIGN POLICY

### The US and Ukraine as priority partners

One of the key developments in October was the [detention](#) of Anna Bogacheva, a Russian citizen and an employee of a troll factory (Internet Research Agency). Sources reported the detention on October 13. By October 15, it was known that Bogacheva had been released. This triggered intense reactions in the Russian and Belarusian media space; Belarus was blamed as a traitor (in Russian sources) and other similar demarches followed. It looks like Belarus is going to become one of the key targets for the intensified work of Prigozhyn's digital agencies and other Russian cyber capacities. The detention of Bogacheva was linked to an attempt of Belarusian special services and law enforcers to obtain additional information about the contacts and the targets for these entities in Belarus, among other things.

At the end of October, Belarus authorities, the US and NATO secretariat managed to perfectly regulate the situation around the DEFENDER Europe 20 drills. Belarusian leadership responded to the participation of neighbouring Lithuania in the drills purely rationally within the principle of reasonable sufficiency.

On the other hand, NATO Secretary General and the military leadership of Lithuania made the respective conciliatory statement. Following the meeting with Jennifer Moore, the US Charge d'Affaires in Minsk, Secretary of the Belarus Security Council S. Zas stated that NATO took into account the position of Minsk while Belarus will react by reviewing its potential measures of response to the drills.

Belarusian tax legislation to match that of Russia with a small adjustment to address "local nuances". In October, Russia thus defined its far-reaching ambitions in talks with Belarus for the first time.

Aleksander Lukashenko's [visit](#) to Kazakhstan resulted in initialing a deal to supply Kazakh petroleum products to Belarus in the amount ranging from 1 to 3.5 million tons a year, and of crude oil in the future. In addition, Kazakhstan will increase the imports of Belarusian foods and components for agricultural machinery. The parties will expand military technical cooperation.

This was the first public resolution of such kind between Belarus and the US in the sensitive military sphere in many years, and the first public downgrade of the level of Minsk's commitments to Russia in this sphere.

The Ukrainian issue took the key spot in the agenda of Belarusian leadership. A. Lukashenko's [talks](#) with Volodymyr Zelenskyi, as well as their joint participation in the Belarus-Ukraine Forum of the Regions went quite positively, both from the emotional perspective and in terms of the agreements they reached.

During the Minsk Dialogue conference, A. Lukashenko even [went as far as](#) hinting to the EU member-states at the need to interfere and support Ukraine's leadership amidst mass protests against the implementation of the Steinmeier formula (implying that "dark forces" have started protests while Europe is silent).

In practical terms, Belarusian talks covered the entire range of bilateral relations. The parties conducted a symbolic "swap of spies" to underline mutual trust in the security sphere. A. Lukashenko mentioned Belarus-Ukraine cooperation in mid-range missile building. The talks also covered further development of industrial cooperation, increase of the flow of goods, including the supply of petroleum

products to Ukraine, and possible supply of crude oil to Belarus via Ukraine. An important factor for Belarus is Kyiv's readiness to buy electric power, including from the Belarus Nuclear Power Plant. At the same time, almost all of the agreements are preliminary and should be finalized on the level of intergovernmental commissions and specific ministries or agencies.

**The first public resolution between the US and Belarus in the sensitive military sphere in many years, and the first public downgrade of the level of its commitments to Russia in this sphere on the part of Minsk took place.**

# Georgia: Who is behind digging up dirt?

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

**Georgian Church has the highest credit of trust among Georgian citizens. That is why the scandal with preparing a plot to overthrow a 86-year-old Patriarch Ilia II sent shockwaves across the entire country.**



## DOMESTIC POLICY

### Church intrigues

The sensational statement made by Archbishop Jacob with accusations that current authorities had attempted to overthrow the head of Georgian Orthodox Church – Catholicos-Patriarch Ilia II, provoked tensions both inside and outside of the Church.

The Archbishop said that the meeting where he was “*persuaded to overthrow the head of the Georgian Orthodox Church and elect Shio Mujiri*” took place in the office of Giorgi Kvirikashvili, when he served as prime minister. The participants of the meeting included the prime minister Kvirikashvili himself, as well as the head of the Georgian Security Service Vakhtang Gomelauri and then-minister of the internal affairs (currently prime minister) Giorgi Gakharia.

Moreover, the Archbishop pointed out that it was in fact an attempt to kill the Patriarch. The conspiracy involved both government employees and clergymen including the representatives of top church hierarchy, as well as Archbishop Peter.

Archbishop Jacob also mentioned the name of an influential businessman Vano Chkhartishvili, whose scandalous words were broadcast by Rustavi-2 TV station. Being close to Bidzina Ivanishvili, Vano Chkhartishvili himself told about meeting the head of the administration of the Russian president Sergey Naryshkin, who asked him to overthrow Saakashvili’s government.

In his address the Archbishop used obscene language. The following day he resigned from both positions he held

at the moment – a Chorbishop and the head of the financial and economic council of the Patriarchate. He did apologize for his improper language; however, he did not deny the contents of his statement.

The authorities unanimously called such accusations voiced by Archbishop Jacob “stupid”.

Soon after that the mass media were contacted by a convicted former archpriest Giorgi Mamaladze who asked for a meeting. Some journalists as well as several archbishops also got a letter from Mamaladze, who was charged with [murder attempt of a high-ranking clergyman in February 2017](#).

Information was leaked to the mass media that allegedly it is Mamaladze who accuses the Church of major sins, including sodomy. The scandal keeps unraveling. It is obvious that the key target is the 86-year-old Patriarch, who

**Archbishop pointed out that the conspiracy against the Patriarch involved both government employees and clergymen**

has the highest credit of trust in the country, according to all surveys. Archbishop Peter demands to call for a Holy Synod believing the religious law is being violated. The Synod ends with yet another scandal – a controversy between Archbishop Peter and the Patriarch. Peter is forced to leave the premises and is deprived of his position. In his turn, Peter uses obscene language aimed at the hierarchs.

The society is in general confused, trying to understand who was supposed to win as a result of such a downpour of dirt. Law enforcement authorities did not start any criminal cases as they did not find the proof of a committed crime. No investigation committee was created in the Parliament of the country, while the Patriarchate itself did not make any official statements regarding the issue of an alleged plot.

## ECONOMY

### Tougher monetary policy

At the end of October the Monetary Policy Committee of Georgia’s National Bank took a decision to increase the refinancing rate by 1 percent to 8,5%. The National Bank started a tougher monetary policy since September in order to neutralize the inflation pressure after the exchange rate went down.

The head of the government criticized the position of the National Bank. According to Giorgi Gakharia, such a decision will slow down the country’s economic growth in 6 months.

*“Next year, approximately in six months, it will slow*

*down the economic growth. It is clear that inflation is also a challenge to our economy, and the National Bank has its own mandate, within the frameworks of which it should function. I think that our position as the government of the country is a maximal economic growth”*, Gakharia said.

According to the National Bank, in the third quarter the balance of current operations continues to improve. Ongoing positive trends within the foreign sector, as well as tougher monetary and credit policy should help to stabilize the exchange rate and as a result, will provide for the desired inflation dynamic in the medium-term perspective.

## FOREIGN POLICY

### USA supporting Georgia

US House of Representatives unanimously adopted bipartisan Georgia Support Act. The act had been championed by the Georgia Caucus co-chairs Congressman Gerry Connolly (a Democrat from Virginia) and Congressman Adam Kinzinger (a Republican from Illinois).

The bill provides for special attention to US-Georgia cooperation in defense and security, improving Georgia’s defense capacity, and directs the US Secretary of State to provide a five-year strategy of cooperating with Georgia.

The bill also involves economy, in particular, urging US Trade Representative to move forward with a bilateral free trade agreement between Georgia and the USA.

Moreover, the document contains a call on the US administration to take effective measures in order to boost Georgian resilience to Russian propaganda and false information.

180 days after the bill enters into force the US Secretary of State should provide a report on US-Georgia cooperation based on consultations with the heads of the relevant US bodies.

Further steps include a draft bill, already adopted by the House of Representatives, being sent to the Senate. After the bill is adopted by the relevant Senate committees and during the Senate’s plenary meeting, it will be then directed to be signed by the US President. And in case it is signed, it will come into legal force as a law.

# 180 degree changes or backtracking in Moldova

Laura Zghibarta, Foreign Policy Association of the Republic of Moldova

**The 2019 local elections in the Republic of Moldova are not simply local elections. They are not about the regions, cities, or the villages of the country, or about identifying the most competent public administration. It is power and political implications that are at stake.**



The former power is seeking validation and aims to instill doubt in the leading coalition. The current government has a strong vision of what reforms are needed and is somewhat praised for its accomplishments, as well as guided by foreign partners. Yet its performance is internally deemed as chaotic, inefficient or insufficient. What is more, the Socialist Party and its de facto leader, presi-

dent Igor Dodon, are increasingly successful in cornering their coalition partner particularly. The advent and the aftermath of these elections have been so far, among other key processes, a cause of confusion, if not concern for the future and the direction of the changes that are taking place in the country.

## DOMESTIC POLICY

### A peculiar change in Moldova

The justice sector reform continues to be the focus of the government's efforts. The struggles have prompted some of the most unexpected and sound outcomes. It is, however, difficult to infer whether those have been deliberate decisions, real or forced effects of a system rebuilding. A few had quite major implications. For instance, the controversial 2018 local elections in Chisinau have finally been validated. While Deputy Prime Minister Andrei Nastase, who competed again in the recent elections and was the winner of the 2018 ballot, regards the validation as being fair, Prime Minister Maia Sandu expressed dis-trust for the institutions from the justice sector, as they have yet to undergo reform. The filing of a no-confidence motion against the Sandu government by the former power, the Democratic Party, was also quite surprising and may be considered as elections-related. The democrats had the same rhetoric as president Dodon – dissatisfaction with the lack of policies *for the people*. Dodon has also alluded to the necessity to replace some members of the Cabinet, due to some ministries' performance. Meanwhile, the struggle of identifying a General Prosecutor has yet to be settled. As a result, both the government and the

**In the October local elections, both PSRM and ACUM have championed, with the former in the lead throughout the country.**

coalition are put at a legitimate and real risk of being terminated, and the PSRM with an opportunity to gain even more leverage and power.

In the October local elections, both PSRM and ACUM have championed, with the former in the lead throughout the country. This outcome might seem favorable since both form the current coalition in power. A better understanding of the situation, however, can be inferred from the example of Chisinau elections, where the PSRM candidate (Ion Ceban) and ACUM candidate (Andrei Nastase) ~~will~~ faced each other again for the second round on November 3<sup>rd</sup>. The favorite and the winner of ~~in~~ the elections, Ion Ceban, suggested that the coalition be emulated at the city council level, since he believes that ACUM does not have any other options. Aware that such an offer could discredit the bloc ACUM, PSRM and Dodon may be the ultimate winners in Moldova within and outside these elections. It is not surprising then that both parties wanted the Constitutional Court to establish the electoral system (mixed or proportional) based on which the anticipated parliamentary elections could take place.

## ECONOMY

### The cost and the focus of economic change

Moldova will access 40 million euros from the EU, in addition to the three planned installments of the macro-financial assistance program for the country that became available again after being first approved in 2017, but then frozen in 2018. The Government has received a \$46.1 million loan from the International Monetary Fund, too. Both are said to be the foreign partners' response to the accomplishments of the government in the justice sector and in fostering macroeconomic stability, among others. It is also meant to further support the development and implementation of anti-corruption policies, underdeveloped regions, as well as to alleviate the burdens of the budget deficits. The deal with the IMF, however,

remains to be one of the many other subjects of contention between the prime minister and the president. According to it, the increase of the value-added tax for the Horeca sector (hotels, restaurants and cafes) was one of the conditions that led to the credit agreement in the first place. President Dodon believes that such a stipulate may endanger key economic sectors.

To probably ease the pressure coming from the president and address issues other than the high-level ones, Prime Minister Sandu has shown more interest for the 2020 state budget. In particular, the government wants to increase the wages and social aid for teachers and the vulnerable social groups. Making local public authorities more financially independent also seems to be an ambitious goal of the Sandu cabinet, if it stays in power.

## FOREIGN POLICY

### Change in Moldova's foreign affairs – the good and the bad

Moldova's foreign partners seem to be ambivalent in assessing the country's progress. Frederica Mogherini's

visit to Moldova is an important signal regarding the relaunch of Moldova – EU partnership and the latter's increased trust in the government's agenda. The Venice Commission and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe have shown, however, both support

and criticism of some of the initiated justice reforms. The Venice Commission has made it clear that the system is in a critical condition, but the reform of the Supreme Court of Justice and the prosecution office should abide the Constitution. And according to PACE, the changes within the Constitutional Court should have been more transparent. Such major changes will also have to be more in line with the recommendations of the Council of Europe.

The country's foreign affairs seem to be changing, too, although at a slower pace. At the European Conference of Presidents of Parliament, the speaker of the Moldovan parliament, Zinaida Greceanii, has reinforced the fairly recent commitment of the country to a balanced foreign policy. Among other signals that prove this is the official meeting between the Moldovan and the now former Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, as well as the participation of the MFA Secretary of State, Tatiana Molcean,

at the 2019 meeting of CIS Council of Foreign Ministers. The former ended with a cooperation roadmap approved by both parties, while at the latter, the Moldovan delegation did not sign the agreement for a political-military partnership.

The resolution of the Transdnistrian issue is at a stalemate, if not actually backtracking. The 5+2 negotiations on the Transdnistrian settlement concluded in Bratislava without an agreement on a new protocol. The small-steps strategy, followed by the previous government and favored by Dodon, is heavily criticized by Prime Minister Sandu, which indicates that there is no political consensus internally. The strategy may have also been one of the reasons why the region is becoming more daring, since, supposedly, it plans to start issuing Transdnistrian passports in Moscow and other cities in Russia.

# Ukraine: Turbo regime without visible breakthroughs and fails

Sergiy Gerasymchuk, Foreign Policy Council “Ukrainian Prism” (Kyiv, Ukraine)

As expected, electing president Zelensky, forming a monomajority in the parliament of Ukraine and keeping a turbo regime of taking decisions – all of the above set a high bar. Ukrainian citizens count on success. Yet October brought some unconventional and in some way even controversial developments. Some of them, in particular political ones, may have a long-lasting and not necessarily positive impact on the country. As for the country’s economy, October went by without any turmoil. The state also did not achieve any significant breakthroughs in foreign policy.



## DOMESTIC POLICY

### “Steinmeir formula” - a step towards peace or surrender to Russia?

At the very beginning of October the work of the tri-lateral contact group in Minsk became more active. Its

representatives reviewed and signed the “document” that became known as “Steinmeir formula”. It was named after the German president (at the time foreign minister) Steinmeir who defined the main components for the “formula”. The document describes the procedure of holding

elections in so called “republics” and adopting a law on [special status for some areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions](#). The Ukrainian society, and the country in general, reacted in different ways. There has been a wave of rallies under the motto: “No to Capitulation!”. Protests took place on several occasions in different Ukrainian cities. Moreover, some regional and local councils (with their number growing) adopted addresses to president Zelensky calling on him not to allow the implementation of some points of the document and therefore, not to betray the Ukrainian national interests. However, to be fair, it is important to mention that there were those who supported the “formula” as well: [for instance, Kharkiv City Council](#).

The very fact of signing the so-called “Steinmeir formula” was especially difficult to accept for those patriots of the country who are very sensitive to such sentiments (volunteers, veterans of war

**The very fact of signing the so-called “Steinmeir formula” was especially difficult to accept for those patriots of the country who are very sensitive to such sentiments**

between Russia and Ukraine, families who lost their loved ones during the war and other people, simply not indifferent to the future of the country).

There has been certain progress in another crucial sphere, namely fighting the corruption. The Supreme Anti-Corruption Court (SACC) of Ukraine passed its first sentence on corruption. The verdict was delivered to the former judge of the Dnipropetrovsk regional Court of Appeal. The judge will have to pay a fine and is restricted [from holding specific positions for a year](#). It is worth noting that another figure that came under SACC scrutiny was a former top employee of the fifth president of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko Oleg Gladkovsky, who is suspected of abusing his authority. The SACC obliged the former state employee [to pay a bail equivalent to 10.6 ml UAH \(approximately \\$424 000\)](#).

## ECONOMY

### Calm and quiet, and hoping for a warm winter

Ukraine’s economy, unlike its domestic policy, has been in relatively “quiet waters” in October. For the first time in almost 10 years the country entered its heating season with record natural gas supplies in its underground gas storage facilities. As of October 25, [gas supplies made up 21.6 bn cubic meters](#) that allows for a smooth heating season. However, these optimistic numbers were tainted by trilateral (Ukraine-EU-Russia) gas consultations

regarding gas transit via the territory of Ukraine, which have not produced [any specific results as of yet](#).

As for the financial market, it can be noted that the National Bank of Ukraine, a government body that exercises financial regulations, made a decision to reduce the interest rate to 15.5% starting from October 25, while inflation, according to the National Bank, will reach 6.3% [by the end of the year](#). Such steps and forecasts made by the Central Bank will to some extent facilitate cheaper loans and better investment climate in the country, however, tangible results of such an approach are yet to be seen.

## FOREIGN POLICY

### NATO – ally, partner or foreign observer?

As for the foreign policy (except for the attempts to determine the date for the first Normandy format summit for president Zelensky), there has not been much going on. Another exception was the visit of the NATO delegation – representatives of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. The last days of October saw the ambassadors of all Alliance member states arriving in Ukraine headed by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg. The delegations visited Odessa and Kyiv. There were some top-level meetings including the meeting with the Ukraine’s minister of defense, President, MPs and civil society representatives. Among other things, NATO Secretary General pledged

constant support to Ukrainian vis- -vis when it came to Ukraine’s territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders and also expressed his support for Ukrainian reforms and economic transformations. In their turn NATO member states highly appreciated peaceful and fair elections of 2019, the results of which [reflect the will of Ukrainian people](#).

It is worth noting that prior to these events a discussion had unraveled in Ukraine on its future relations with the Alliance. Some politicians insist on forced integration. Others believe it is important to concentrate on “homework”. Whichever approach becomes mainstream will determine if Ukraine sees NATO as an ally, a partner or there is no definite answer to this question so far.

# Outlook for Eastern Partnership: view from the inside

The anniversary year of the Eastern Partnership is a time not only to take stock of the success of European Union policy, but also to look into the future. The expectations from the cooperation and ambitions of the six participating countries vary widely: from carefully maintaining a distance in political matters to full integration into the EU.

What should Brussels do to keep all partners interested: switch to different speeds or raise the bar for everyone? Analysts provide the outlook for the initiatives from each of the states.



### The promising outlook of the Eastern Partnership

Richard Giragosian, *Regional Studies Center*

Since the launch of the EU's Eastern Partnership (EaP) programme ten years ago, the impact of the European engagement has been as diverse as the six EaP member states themselves. Yet despite that variance, the Eastern Partnership has been far more successful than many give it credit for. Such under-stated success has been largely due to the more traditional European tendencies of modesty over the gains and benefits more clearly visible to outsiders.

And in the case of Armenia, the Eastern Partnership was an unchallenged success as well, matched by an equally strident positive outlook for the promise of the EaP going forward.

This Armenian optimism stems from several factors and is rooted as much in the past as it is in the present and future. First, Armenia benefited from the EU's modification of the EaP programme by adopting a more nuanced policy of "differentiation." For Armenia, this recognition of the diversity and divergence of conditions and interests of each of the six EaP states, allowed greater flexibility and awarded a deeper European understanding the limits of Armenia's embrace and engagement of the EU.

This was most evident in the case of Russian pressure on Armenia in 2013 that resulted in a forced sacrifice of its Association Agreement with the European Union (EU) and the surprise decision to join the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). Since joining the Eurasian Economic Union, however, Armenia has steadily and stealthily sought to regain and restore relations with the EU, and to deepen its ties to the West more broadly. Moreover, within the broader framework of the Eastern Partnership, for example, the EU-Armenia Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership

Agreement (CEPA) still stands out as an opportunity to regain trust and rebuild relations with the EU. At the same time, the CEPA was also an important contribution to the strengthening of the viability and efficacy of the Eastern Partnership.

A second significant driver of Armenia's positive outlook for the EaP is rooted in the "Velvet Revolution" of 2018, in which Armenia was able to achieve an impressive, non-violent change of government. Capped by a free and fair parliamentary election in December 2018, Armenia was thereby not only able to reinvigorate the EaP but also to reiterate a reaffirmation of European values of democracy and peaceful change through a rare victory of "people power."

And third, looking forward, Armenia now sees a fresh opportunity to leverage the synergy of the EaP and European engagement as an anchor for deeper democratization and enhanced economic reform, as well as trade expansion. Further, Armenia also seeks to utilize the "platform" of the EaP as a means to engage its partners in the wider region. In this way, the EaP platform offers Armenia a mechanism to share reform experience with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, while also seeking bilateral dialogue with Azerbaijan and Belarus within the parameters of the Eastern Partnership. And it is the latter point that demonstrates the future significance of the EaP as a platform for engagement well beyond the EU alone, but between and among the six EaP member states themselves, thereby maximizing the true meaning of the transformative power of European engagement.

**Armenia now sees a fresh opportunity to leverage the synergy of the EaP and European engagement as an anchor for deeper democratization and enhanced economic reform**

# AZERBAIJAN:

## Preserving status quo

Azerbaijan's relations with the EU started in 1999; however, it was not until the introduction of the Eastern Partnership program that the country got individualized support. As EaP turned 10, assessments related to what has changed in Azerbaijan and what are the perspectives of EU-Azerbaijan cooperation beyond 2020 began.

The EU has now become [the first trading partner of Azerbaijan](#) making up 48.6% of its total trade. 26 ministries and public institutions of the country have benefitted from overall 46 twinning projects. There is a success story in bilateral energy cooperation and mobility. Thanks to the EU technical and practical know-how together with joint programs and infrastructure support, Azerbaijan has become a reliable energy partner for the EU. The country has signed agreements to produce and bring Caspian gas resources to the EU market. Furthermore, visa facilitation and readmission agreements made it easier for Azerbaijani citizens to obtain a visa.

The country's economy is growing mainly due to the oil and gas sector and there have been improvements in the business climate. Doing Business Ranking of the World Bank shows that Azerbaijan's economy has entered Top-20 Improvers' list. EU investment in the country has created almost three thousand new jobs. Although all these changes have not happened because of the EaP program, it has played a catalyzing role.

On the other hand, the unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and lack of progress towards the resolution, the existence of anti-democratic practices including corruption, violation of human rights, restrictions in freedom of expression and freedom of media, and restricted civic and political environment continue to remain an obstacle to the stronger progress in the country. There is a lack of well-established transparency and accountability mech-

anisms for the European investment and implemented projects. Also, restrictions in civil society engagement weaken monitoring mechanisms.

In EaP Index 2017, Azerbaijan took fifth place in Approximation to the EU dimension. The country was [lowest ranked](#) for Democratic Rights and Elections, Independent Media, Freedom of Speech, Assembly, and Independent Judiciary.

Recently there have been few gestures by the government such as mass pardon of political prisoners and release of opposition activists; however, latest rallies, violent detainment of protesters and journalists show that the government continues to neglect the EU's efforts of promoting good governance.

On October 11, the EU delegation and different stakeholders in Azerbaijan held structured consultations about the future of Eastern Partnership, in which the main discussion topics were sustainable development in human capital and economic spheres, strengthening of cooperation with the EU and enhancing good governance.

In line with the country's balanced foreign policy, Azerbaijan keeps its distance from all geopolitical actors. The most probable scenario for the EU-Azerbaijan relations, especially in the framework of EaP is the preservation of the current situation in good governance and mobility areas and enhanced cooperation in connectivity, energy, and economic develop-

ment spheres.

Since Azerbaijan plays a key role in the international transport corridor; potential routes for EU-Azerbaijan cooperation are main sectors of the economy including trade and energy. Political reforms and maintenance of democratic institutions can only be achieved via full EU support to the non-state actors; however, delivery of tangible results will take time.

**The most probable scenario for the EU-Azerbaijan relations is the preservation of the current situation in good governance and mobility areas and enhanced cooperation in connectivity, energy, and economic development spheres.**

## Serious prospects

Yuri Tsarik, *Center for Strategic and Foreign Policy Studies*

The prospects of Belarus's participation in Eastern Partnership are currently more serious than ever before.

Overall, given the successful experience of interaction between Belarus and the EU within this initiative — especially from 2015 — and given the dynamics of the geopolitical situation around Belarus, cooperation with the EU becomes an important priority both of foreign and domestic policy for Minsk. Success in the interaction with Brussels is welcomed by a great share of the population, more Belarusians trust the EU than the UN or the Eurasian Economic Union, and key steps in bilateral relations have positive implications for many Belarusians. In other words, there is every condition for the development of the Belarus-EU cooperation to be driven in the eyes of Minsk by both a technical pragmatic approach, as well as political interest.

In this context, the program of further development in Belarus-EU relations is quite specific and ambitious. The key focus in it is further progress in migration issues, including simplification of the visa regime and shorter time for border crossing between Belarus and the EU for the citizens of both sides. Both are interested in this and an agreement on visa facilitation is expected to be signed no later than in 2020. The Belarusian side proposed decreasing the time needed to cross the EU border to 1 hour as a quantitative indicator of development within the Eastern Partnership

framework in October 2019. The EU's acceptance of this proposal envisages serious funding for the modernization of infrastructure of the respective border crossing points between Belarus and Lithuania and Poland.

The second key vector in the EaP interaction is further discussion and signing of an agreement on the priorities in the Belarus-EU partnership. Here everything depends on the issue of the Belarusian Nuclear Power Plant. Given the position of Lithuania, the EU insists on including provisions about ensuring the security of the Belarusian Nuclear Power Plant into the agreement on priorities. Minsk insists that the issue of the power plant could be looked at separately from the priority agreement agenda, even though there is no other comprehensive agreement framework for a "separate" solution on the nuclear power plant in the Belarus-EU relations. The interaction of the two sides is likely to become more dynamic after Minsk launches industrial exploitation of the plant in January 2020.

Finally, the parties can start discussing the framework agreement on partnership and cooperation after signing the agreement on priorities.

The partnership framework could create the proper normative foundation for the interaction of the two sides. But the detailed discussion of this issue can probably start only after 2021.

**There is every condition for the development of the Belarus-EU cooperation to be driven in the eyes of Minsk by both a technical pragmatic approach, as well as political interest**

## On the threshold of Europe

Lasha Tughushi, *Liberal Academy Tbilisi Foundation*

Along with discussing the achievements of the recent 10 years that have passed since launching the Eastern Partnership program, one question can often be heard: what is next?

As for Georgian achievements, they are truly essential. Among them the following can be found: Association Agreement with Europe, visa-free regime, launching free trade zone, tuning of legislation and therefore, standards, education exchange programs as well as extremely important cooperation in energy, technology, transport and communications.

At the same time, it is agreed upon that the Eastern partnership program needs a new energy flow, more dynamics and more importantly it needs predictability of reaching the final goal of EU membership. In its turn, the democracy level, well-being and stability in the Eastern Partnership countries are essential to the EU.

Yet it is difficult to speak about general development without an opportunity to develop economic and human capital. Growing competitiveness as well as orientation on convergence of systems require mobilizing resources. For a country with few resources, such as Georgia, this means a serious challenge, and therefore EU support is vital. A single yet flexible financial instrument aimed exclusively at the Eastern Partnership countries should become a means of such strong support.

What should Georgia expect in terms of economic inte-

gration? Full integration with EU markets after managing free trade format. More than this, it is desirable that Georgia applies for a membership in Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) in the short term, since that would mean an important step forward.

Along with Ukraine, Georgia may make the real difference when it comes to the Black Sea regional development from the point of view of both energy and transport corridors. Georgia might also play an important part in providing security in the Black Sea area against the backdrop of Russia's stronger military presence in the region.

In order to develop human resources, it would be reasonable for the EU to recognize both degrees issued by Georgian universities (nostrification) and professional qualifications on the EU territory.

Further cooperation in legal reforms is crucial, since it will allow Georgia to come closer to relevant European standards in the legal system. In fact, it is the judicial system that is probably the most sensitive issue on the way to a more democratic Georgia. Moreover, it is essential to develop cooperation with EU peace-making mission.

Nevertheless, there are expectations in the air that this process will finish with Georgia becoming an EU member and will not get lost in the endless maze of changes.

**Eastern partnership program needs a new energy flow, more dynamics and more importantly it needs predictability of reaching the final goal of EU membership**

### The importance of EU's clear position

Ludmila Nofit, Natalia Stercul, *Foreign Policy Association of the Republic of Moldova*

The need to access the entire set of main achievements and challenges the EU faced while implementing Eastern Partnership policy within the past decade provided for large-scale and inclusive structured consultations both in partner countries and in the EU. Their top priority was discussing the conditions for further promotion of European interests, values and security both inside and outside the EU, thus creating a stronger Europe. The issues discussed included future scenarios for EaP development, the ways for their transformations and the input of each participant into further cooperation.

Eastern Partnership may be rightfully dubbed as a successful initiative that managed to bring positive changes to its member states in general and to the Republic of Moldova in particular, however, the potential of this initiative has not been fulfilled to the fullest. The need to apply a differentiated approach to the directions of cooperation in various regions of each country, as well as a more detailed wording for principles of sustainable democratic development and inclusiveness, defining the initiatives and suggestions as medium-term and long-term cooperation perspectives remain the most crucial issues highlighted by almost all EaP member states. For the Republic of Moldova it is mainly about the issues of priority directions for cooperation in security and improved stability for institutionalized state bodies as well as opportunities to widen the range of goods exported to the European market.

Taking into account new pro-European authorities coming to power in the Republic of Moldova, the country enters a new stage of its relations with the EU. The goal of European integration is solid and is among the country's foreign policy priorities. Therefore, it is seen as important to carry on the ongoing reforms aimed at modernizing the state and increasing living standards for the country and its citizens; to strengthen the features of economic integration and broaden its opportunities on the EU mar-

ket, as well as to implement in practice the underlined development priorities in jurisdiction, government management, civil sector and education.

Considering the changes the latest decade brought, it is indeed a fact that the Eastern Partnership platform is no longer a top priority within the European agenda. Domestic organizational and functional challenges, security issues and regional political development weakened the EU position regarding the European Neighbourhood Policy. However, the future of EaP member states is still important to its European partners and requires a constant ongoing dialogue, a stronger communication strategy and the completion for the ongoing reforms and transformations in these countries in accordance with the European standards and democratic principles.

It is most likely that the idea of "Eastern Partnership+" with a differentiated approach to partner countries while acknowledging their interaction with the third party will take shape. Changing the strategy of interaction between EU and Russia will, in one way or another, influence the EU policy to the Eastern partners.

As for EaP member states, it is crucial to have a clear EU position regarding an opportunity for a practical implementation of integration mechanism. The lack of clarity concerning this issue leads to new challenges. Another key factor is resolving frozen and active military conflicts in the region that destabilize the situation and slow down the development of these states. All of the above requires the development of pragmatic measures and a multifaceted evaluation for future EaP initiatives that will prevent and solve conflicts and provide for stronger security in general. Interaction, integration and interdependency between EaP states and EU have to be implemented taking into consideration the changed security landscape of the Eastern neighbourhood.

**Eastern partnership program needs a new energy flow, more dynamics and more importantly it needs predictability of reaching the final goal of EU membership**

### It's high time to implement "more for more" principle

Yurii Vdovenko, *Coordinator UNP CSF EaP*

Ten years ago, founding states of the Eastern Partnership pledged to develop a partnership as a common endeavour to bring their relationship to a new level, without prejudice to individual partner countries' aspirations for their future relationship with the EU. On the eve of a new decade, there is a unanimous agreement among the participants that the Policy needs a fresh boost, new strategic directions and concrete milestones that would lead the EU and Eastern European partners towards new opportunities for greater integration with the EU.

European integration is one of the key goals of the five-year program of the new Ukraine's government, KPI-based document introduced in late September. Fulfilling obligations under the Association Agreement is the task set for nearly every ministry, even if not directly mentioned so. Vice Prime Minister for European and Euroatlantic Integration is responsible for reaching the main objective in this field: by 2024 Ukraine should meet the criteria for membership in the European Union. Although becoming the EU member is not a five-year goal, it is country's strategic course, enshrined in the constitution.

Eastern Partnership remains an important platform for Ukraine-EU cooperation, but the policy must consider Ukraine's geopolitical aspirations and achievements as well as "more for more" principle. As the Eastern Partnership's general goal is to bring the partner countries closer to the EU, the key question is to formulate a vision for further development of relations with the associated countries who like Ukraine aspire for a deeper integration with the EU. For the next period beyond 2020, success of EaP and the whole European Neighbourhood Policy will be judged by the EU's ability to help Ukraine along with Moldova and Georgia to succeed. For the Associated Partners (AP), Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, the new Strategy could serve as forward-looking strategic agenda with final goals, which should go beyond and focus on an increased cooperation and deeper integration with the EU.

The Association Agreements could serve as a mechanism to ensure the gradual integration of AP into the EU internal market and fulfillment the Copenhagen criteria. In this case the AP are interested not only in monitoring the integration processes and assessment of progress, but also in developing effective programs for this purpose, opening new support tools, i.a IPA-style methodology,

providing consultation mechanism (i.a. on the updating of the EU acquis). The EU support could include tailor-made instruments like those that were used to speed up the process of the integration of Western Balkans.

Developing a structured, institutional dialogue on issues related specifically to the implementation of the AA/DCFTA, would be one of the practical examples of differentiation. EU and AP should initiate regular informal DCFTA ministerials supported by expert-level meetings to prepare the ministerials. Such informal meetings should be further expanded to other areas of the AA in particular digital, customs, energy spheres.

As a next step towards functional and institutional integration, economic and sectoral integration with the EU, the AP may be invited, when issues of common interests are being debated, to meetings of the EU informal Councils on the economy and single market, energy, transport and digital policy, social policy, education, research and innovation, as well as on foreign affairs, defense and justice and home affairs. Meetings, with a mutually agreed regularity, of the AP with COEST will create an efficient steering mechanism for the implementation of the AA/DCFTAs and help develop further reform agendas. AP may also be invited to the meetings of Council working parties on sectoral issues on ad hoc basis.

The existing EU technical assistance to AP for alignment of legislation and its implementation should be extended to ensure efficient implementation of the AA and support integration processes. It is important to set up the EU Association Investment Platform, which can be launched and managed by the EU institutions in cooperation with IFIs and National Investment Councils to assist Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova in the investment process. The Platform will also encourage direct contacts among SMEs from EU member states and the partner countries. With a purpose to encourage regional political and economic cooperation of the EU AP it is important to consider establishing the EU - Associated partners Association Council. This body together with EU institutions could establish instruments of regional cooperation in areas of trade agreements, technical assistance, sharing the best practices, facilities, economic growth agenda, investment trust funds, youth exchange and professional training, rule of law and democracy peer reviews.

**New EaP Strategy must consider Ukraine's geopolitical aspirations and achievements as well as "more for more" principle**

# EaP Think Bridge

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