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EASTERN PARTNERSHIP AS A TEST OF THE EU'S COMMITMENT TO CONFLICTS RESOLUTION



In practice, the Eastern European and South Caucasian region becomes the test confirming or refuting the EU's ability to bring its peacekeeping ambitions to life.

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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 Making a Choice

Parliamentary elections in Georgia, presidential elections in Moldova and local elections in Ukraine: the Eastern Partnership sets its course for the next five years. None of the campaigns avoided scandals and surprises, and the final outcome of the vote has not yet been decided. In Belarus, protests against dishonest elections and authoritarian regime do not subside.

Armenia and Azerbaijan are facing an even more difficult choice: to alter for the diplomatic conflict resolution in Nagorno-Karabakh and start negotiations or to continue hostilities that claim dozens of lives.

What role can and should the European Union play in resolving this and other conflicts in the Eastern Partnership countries? What tools are in the arsenal of Brussels, and which still need to be invented? After all, the request of partner countries for closer attention from the EU to the topic of frozen and active conflicts in the region is more than obvious.

All these and other important October developments in the Eastern Partnership are analyzed in our digest.



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Eastern Partnership as a Test of the EU's Commitment to Conflicts Resolution

Hennadiy Maksak, Foreign Policy Council "Ukrainian Prism"

The European Union takes a keen interest in strengthening its presence in the region as a mediator and partner in conflict resolution since the launch of the European Neighborhood policy and subsequent reformatting of relations with the Eastern European and South Caucasian states into the Eastern Partnership policy. The development of the Common Security and Defense Policy instruments, in parallel with the Eastern Partnership, as well as the strengthening of the strategic vision of the EU global role in international security build-up made it possible to diversify approaches to participation in crises and conflicts management.

Depending on the phase of conflicts in which the EU is involved in the settlement process, as well as the nature of the emergence and dynamics of the crisis development processes, official Brussels demonstrated a wide range of initiatives aimed at prevention, de-escalation, and post-conflict stabilization. In the European Union itself, institutions and mechanisms were created for early detection and response to crisis manifestations and planning of military and civilian missions.

Important elements of the EU engagement include:

Political statements and appeals to the conflict parties, calls for a peaceful settlement of the situation;

Policy of non-recognition of annexation or self-proclaimed independence of territories;

Political support for the peacekeeping efforts of the UN, OSCE, as well as taking part in current and new conflicts resolving initiatives of these international organizations in the region;

Direct participation in the formal and informal negotiation process at the stages of conflict prevention, de-escalation, transformation, transit to post-conflict stabilization (involving some senior EU officials, appointing of an EU special representative to take part in the conflict settlement);

Influencing the parties of the conflict, forcing them to a peaceful resolution of the

Russia's interest in preserving the conflict zones as Kremlin's instrument for influencing the foreign policy is a common important component of the conflicts in the Eastern Partnership region

conflict by the political and diplomatic means (freezing bilateral official contacts between the EU and the aggressor, imposing sanctions against the aggressor, embargo on the supply of weapons, dual-use products to the belligerent parties, etc.);

Initiation of the EU assessment missions to study the situation in the conflict zone, as well as the EU monitoring and advisory missions within the framework of the Joint Security and Defense Policy;

Restoring work of the state authorities, local self-government, law enforcement bodies and social services in the territories affected by the conflict;

Humanitarian support to the population affected by the conflict, assistance in the restoration of infrastructure, special programs for temporarily displaced persons;

Development of the programs to restore confidence between the parties of the conflict;

Supporting dialogue between the parties of the conflict at the level of civil society.

This non-exhaustive list of forms of the EU involvement in the conflict resolution indicates the seriousness of the official Brussels' intentions to promote peace, inclusive of the area covered by the Eastern Partnership policy. However, in practice, the Eastern European and South Caucasian region becomes the test confirming or refuting the EU's ability to bring its peacekeeping ambitions to life. Transnistria in Moldova, Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia, Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan, as well as the Crimea and part of Donbas in Ukraine pose a huge challenge to international security.

Given all the other differences in emerging and existence of these conflicts, the common important component is one and the same: Russia's interest in preserving these conflict zones as a Kremlin's instrument for influencing the foreign policy of the states of the region. Russia's hybrid tools range from attempts of illegal territories annexation, open hostilities, and invasion, to imitation of peacekeeping and mediation initiatives that are not aimed at final settlement of the conflicts.

Against the background of the crisis of traditional international organizations, whose mandate covers conflict prevention and resolution, it is not surprising that, at the moment, the wide range of the EU instruments is not supported by the political will of the member states for deeper involvement in the regional affairs and political confrontation with Russia. All of the above circumstances lead to periodic "unfreezing" in the conflict zones, as well as the complication

of the nature and dynamics of their course. The resumption of full-scale hostilities in the Nagorno-Karabakh region, the creeping occupation of the territory of Georgia, the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war in Donbas region, the absolute default with the observance of the Ukrainian citizens' rights by the Russian occupation administration in the Crimea indicate the need to revise the security component in the EU relations with the Eastern Partnership countries and a more systematic approach to defining the Brussels' role in the conflicts resolution.

Between strategy and reality

Despite the ambitions of strengthening the EU global role in the world, these ambitions have not come to life in the conflict resolution in the Eastern Partnership.

First and foremost, we are talking here about the EU's compliance with the status quo in the OSCE and the UN primacy regarding the existing conflict resolution mechanisms, as well as the existing balance of the global and regional international actors' (France, Germany, USA, Russia) interests.

For example, the **Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit** (as of November 2017) calls for the active EU involvement in the efforts to restore confidence in the conflict zones, existing negotiation formats, including via the European Union direct presence. However, the practical dimension of the declaration, a particular roadmap "20 EaP deliverables for 2020", contains no direct tasks and goals related to the conflict settlement in the Eastern Partnership countries. Against this background, it is not surprising that the results of structured consultations on the future of the EaP beyond 2020 clearly show the partner countries' request for closer attention from the EU to the topic of frozen and active conflicts in the region.

In the **Joint Communication on the Eastern Partnership** (as of March 2020), the European Commission and the European External Action Service, while echoing the 2017 declarations, declare the EU's readiness to promote the peaceful conflicts resolution in the existing formats. Continued support for the population of the affected regions to strengthen their resilience is also mentioned.

The **European Council Conclusions** (as of May 2020) on the conflicts in the territory of the Eastern Partnership partner countries express nearly the same spirit and terms.

Considering the fact that the next Eastern Partnership summit is scheduled for March 2021, it also

In a new document describing the budget for the next seven years, a 30% increase in spending on an EU global role build-up was proposed

makes sense to refer to the policy documents and **priorities of the Presidency of the Council of the EU in 2020-2021 of the states trio** (Germany, Portugal and Slovenia). The joint program states that the presidency, in cooperation with the High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the European Commission, will promote an ambitious neighborhood policy, as well as the conflicts resolving efforts, including those in Eastern Ukraine. An important point is the mention of the need to comply with the five fundamental principles of building the current relationship between the EU and Russia. The program also declares an intensification of the EU's cooperation with the OSCE, taking into account the institutional ramifications and the network of current operations and missions of the organization. Strengthening of the EU's Joint Security and Defense Policy instruments is another priority area for the "trio" leadership efforts.

From strategy to plans implementation

One can rest hopes on the coincidence of these requests with the new strategic agenda of the new European institutions' leadership. For example, in 2019, the new President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, in her electoral program, proposed to reform the voting model for the foreign policy decisions in the EU. This could speed up the decision-making process itself and strengthen the EU's image as a global partner.

Among the promises, she also declared the EC President personal involvement in the coordination of all foreign policy instruments, from the programs development to the Joint Security and Defense Policy. In a document describing the budget for the next seven years, a 30% increase in spending on an EU

In early November 2020, it was finally decided on the form of the third countries accession to defense cooperation within the PESCO framework

global role build-up was put. Needless to say, the coronavirus pandemic made its own adjustments to the plans, given the need to respond to pressing economic and social problems, both in the EU countries, and on a global and regional scale. Perhaps

it was through the prioritization of the fight against COVID-19 that Ursula von der Leyen did not dwell on the topic of international conflicts in the Eastern Partnership region during her 100-day report as the President of the EC. However, we can only hope that the strategic vision of the European Commission's head did not come through fundamental changes.

Some EU initiatives aimed at strengthening instruments of cooperation and solidarity in the field of foreign policy and international security also set for positive. For example, in early November 2020, it was finally decided on the form of the third countries accession to defense cooperation within the PESCO framework. Besides, forming a new EU Global Sanctions Regime for violations of human rights is actively underway. Against the background of the long-term adoption of sanctions against the A. Lukashenko regime, Belarus actively discusses the need to move from unanimous decision-making to a qualified majority of votes. However, putting off the specific tasks for resolving conflicts in the region into the new EU Medium-Term Plan for the Eastern Partnership will be a real litmus test for the EU's readiness to play a global actor role. If such a new plan or roadmap is being prepared for submission at the Eastern Partnership Summit in March 2021, then the partner states should take all possible political and diplomatic actions to push the EU out of the comfort zone of empty phrases wandering from document to document, and propose a coherent detailed position on strengthening its role in the region.

Armenia Struggles with War over Nagorno-Karabakh

Richard Giragosian, Regional Studies Center (Yerevan, Armenia)

With no signs of abating, the war for Nagorno-Karabakh continued unimpeded through the month. Since the launch of a massive military offensive by Azerbaijan in late September, Armenia struggled to support the defense of Karabakh with a series of diplomatic initiatives aimed at securing a ceasefire agreement, while Azerbaijan's attacks and territorial gains continued. The country was also faced with a surge in new COVID-19 cases, threatening an already challenged public health system.



A woman stands outside a shelter in the city of Stepanakert
Photo: Aris Messinis/AFP

DOMESTIC POLICY

Court releases opposition oligarch

Notorious Armenian oligarch Gagik Tsarukyan,

the leader of the opposition Prosperous Armenia party and one of the country's wealthiest men, was released from pre-trial detention on October 22 on

bail of \$206,000. Since parliament removed his immunity from arrest or prosecution as a sitting member of parliament, 63-year-old Tsarukyan was detained for over a month due to a criminal investigation into his role in an alleged case of “vote buying” on behalf of his party’s candidates

in the parliamentary election of 2017. As a leader of the Prosperous Armenia party, the second largest group in the parliament with 24 seats, Tsarukyan has emerged as an outspoken critic of the Pashinyan government and has publicly called for the resignation of the Prime Minister.

Armenian schools closed again

Amid a significant surge in new cases of COVID-19 infections, the Armenian government imposed a second closure of all schools and universities on October 15. The move follows a warning issued by the Armenian Ministry of Health that a record number of new cases of over 1000 infections each day is now threatening to overwhelm the country’s health care system and strain hospital capacity. The surge is directly attributed to the onset of wartime conditions in the wake of Azerbaijani attacks on Nagorno-Karabakh and a resulting breakdown of discipline for social distancing and mask wearing.

Prime Minister convenes crisis meeting with opposition

In an unprecedented crisis meeting on October 12, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan met with senior members of several non-parliamentary opposition parties and groups, including the former ruling Republican Party, the nationalist Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF-Dashnaktsutyun) and the Armenian National Congress (ANC) of former President Levon Ter-Petrosian, to discuss the situation over Azerbaijan’s war for Nagorno-Karabakh. The closed meeting was also reportedly focused on the strategy of defending Karabakh and convened on the “need for national unity.” A similar meeting was held on October 11 with the three parties represented in the Armenian parliament, including senior lawmakers from the government’s ruling “My Step” bloc and the two parliamentary opposition parties, Bright Armenia and Prosperous Armenia. Armenian Foreign Minister Zohrab Mnatsakanyan also attended each of the meetings and presented an update on the diplomatic situation.

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan formally requested Russian aid to Armenia, invoking the terms of a 1997 bilateral Armenian-Russian treaty

New Constitutional Court Chairman elected

In a vote on October 12, members of the recently reconstituted Armenian Constitutional Court elected Justice Arman Dilanyan as the new

chairman of the court. The move follows the adoption of controversial constitutional amendments in June that forced the ouster of the previous Court Chairman, Hrayr Tovmasyan. Those amendments effectively reconstituted the Court by also removing seven judges from the legacy Constitutional Court, which was the sole remaining holdover institution from the previous Armenian government that was replaced in the 2018 “Velvet Revolution.”

Armenia tightens martial law

The Armenian parliament approved a government proposal on October 9 to introduce tighter restrictions on the freedom of expression in accordance with the current martial law declared in the wake of the 27 September offensive against Nagorno-Karabakh. According to the measure, new restrictions would be applied to reporting by both the press and social media users on the war for Karabakh and other “security-related matters,” limiting coverage to a reliance on official sources only, and includes a ban on any “public criticism” of war-related actions or statement by government officials. Any convictions for the violation of the measures would incur harsh punishment of heavy fines and imprisonment of up to two-year incarceration.

National Security Chief fired

In a decree issued on October 8 by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, the director of the Armenian National Security Service (NSS), Argishti Kyaramyan, was fired after serving only four months. Although the announcement of the dismissal failed to provide any reasons, 29-year-old Kyaramyan was widely seen as incompetent and his lack of any previous experience in the security sector raised serious questions over his initial appointment. The move follows an embarrassing case earlier where the previous National Security chief, Artur Vanetsyan, was dismissed in 2019 and then formed a small political party in opposition to the Pashinyan government earlier this year.

Armenia imposes ban on imports of Turkish products

The Armenian government announced on October 16 plans to ban all products and goods imported from Turkey in response to Turkish military support for Azerbaijan's military offensive against Nagorno-Karabakh. Once adopted, the ban on Turkish goods would enter into force on January 1, 2021 for a period of six months. The ban would curtail the roughly \$268 million in Armenian imports of Turkish goods, which mainly consists of about \$70 million worth of clothing and machinery and other equipment worth \$35 million, based on figures for last year, that enters the Armenian market through Georgia.

Armenian parliament approves increased defense spending

Amid the war for Nagorno-Karabakh, on October 7 the Armenian parliament voted unanimously to approve a government request for an increase in defense spending through the remainder of 2020. The \$82-million increase would expand the current \$620-million defense budget for 2020 by roughly 13%. This increase follows a similar emergency request for additional funds to be added to the budget, when the parliament approved a \$310-million increase in April to fund coronavirus-related relief measures and to offset a shortfall in tax revenue from the lockdown of the economy. Finance Minister Atom Janjughazyan reported that the impact from both the COVID-19 emergency and the war over Nagorno-Karabakh will result in a further contraction of GDP, which he said is now expected to decline by at least 6.8% for 2020, with a related widening of the budget deficit to an estimated \$946 million, representing about 7.4% of GDP.

FOREIGN POLICY

Armenia Formally Requests Russian Assistance

In a letter to Russian President Vladimir Putin, publicly released on October 31, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan formally requested Russian aid to Armenia, invoking the terms of a 1997 bilateral Armenian-Russian treaty. Citing the looming threat of an expansion of warfare from Azerbaijani military attacks against Nagorno-Karabakh, Pashinyan noted the danger from both "Azerbaijani-Turkish military aggression" and the deployment by Azerbaijan of "foreign terrorist fighters" recruited by Turkey from the Middle East. By invoking the 1997 treaty, Russia is obligated to hold immediate "consultations to define the type and amount of assistance" to Armenia "to ensure its security." In response, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs promised that "under the treaty, Russia will render all necessary assistance" to Armenia "if military operations take place directly on the territory of Armenia."

In a shift in Armenian policy, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan stated on October 30 that Armenia supports the possible deployment of Russian peacekeepers to Nagorno-Karabakh, which he defined as

an "optimal solution" to the intense attacks and territorial gains by Azerbaijan. He also noted, however, that such a Russian deployment must be "acceptable to all sides."

Renewed diplomatic mediation

In the latest round of mediation on October 30 Armenian Foreign Minister Zohrab Mnatsakanian met with the French, Russian and American OSCE Minsk Group mediation co-chairs in Geneva, while his Azerbaijani counterpart Jeyhun Bayramov met the mediators in separate talks. The Geneva meeting, originally scheduled for the previous day, sought to broker a temporary ceasefire or at least a basic agreement for a brief cessation of hostilities, which both Azerbaijan and Turkey have consistently rejected. Previous attempts to halt the fighting have notably failed, with three preliminary agreements to cease firing brokered by Russia, France and the United States, having collapsed within hours, if not minutes, after taking effect on 10, 17 and 26 October, respectively.

Iran engages diplomatically

On October 29 Armenian Foreign Minister Zohrab Mnatsakanian met in Yerevan with visiting Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, who ar-

Azerbaijan: Internal Problems Postponed for the War

Information agency “Turan”

In October, all domestic and foreign policy in Azerbaijan was associated with military operations to vacate the occupied territories in Nagorno-Karabakh.



Azerbaijani people celebrate in Baku after the president claimed his country's forces had taken Shusha.

Photo: Anadolu Agency

DOMESTIC POLICY

Everything for the front, everything for the victory

In October, all domestic and foreign policy in Azerbaijan was associated with military operations to vacate the occupied territories in Nagorno-Karabakh. With the outbreak of hostilities, all opposition parties, including the most radical-minded organizations like the Popular Front Party and Musavat, declared their full support for the army. In the statements of the parties, it was separately noted that internal issues were postponed until the end of the hostilities, the

government should not worry about the rear and should focus on the liberation of the territories.

Since the start of the military operations, the Azerbaijani army liberated 4 regional centers (Fizuli, Jebail, Zangilan, and Gubadli, all of them were occupied by the armed forces of Armenia in 1993), 3 small towns, and 192 villages. Besides, Azerbaijan completely restored its state borders with Iran, some of which have been under occupation since 1993. The State Border Service of Azerbaijan placed border guards in the liberated outposts. And duty at these outposts has already begun.

Also, on October 29, President Ilham Aliyev signed a decree on the organization of a special department in the liberated territories. According to the decree, in these areas, the Ministry of Internal Affairs cre-

ates commandant's offices which will coordinate their work with the Ministry of Defense and the State Border Service.

ECONOMY

The government is developing economic plans for the liberated territories

Military operations also affected some economic plans. The government decided to start economic recovery in the liberated territories. The State Agency for Roads began to restore roads leading to the liberated villages of Talysh and Sugovushan, Terter region.

According to the working group on the assessment of losses and casualties as a result of the occupation, the damage from the occupation and war in Kara-

bakh amounted to \$819.15 billion. This list includes losses from the death of the population, servicemen, destroyed cultural and historical objects, natural resources taken out by the invaders, and destroyed enterprises, farms, etc. To compare, the gold and foreign exchange reserve of Azerbaijan as of August 1, 2020 is estimated at \$57.1 billion.

Adviser to the Minister of Economy of Azerbaijan Emil Majidov told TASS that the government plans to attract foreign investments to restore the Karabakh economy: "Azerbaijan has platforms for working with international financial institutions, international investors, and its own citizens with some capital abroad," he said.

FOREIGN POLICY

Third-party forces' intervention in the conflict is unacceptable

In October, the intensity of foreign policy actions rose sharply. Military operations and ways of peaceful settlement of the conflict became the only topic of discussion between President Aliyev and the Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov with their foreign colleagues. In the early stages of operations, telephone conversations were the main format of negotiations. President Aliyev in his numerous interviews with the foreign TV channels, agencies, and newspapers, as well as in his television appeals to the people, harshly criticized the OSCE Minsk Group activities. The President accused the members of the group by saying that during the years of the conflict they did not insist on sanctions against Armenia, the aggressor, and did not achieve from Armenia the implementation of four UN Security Council resolutions on the withdrawal of the Armenian armed forces from the occupied territories of Azerbaijan. Besides, President Aliyev stressed that the phone calls to him were mainly related to the desire to save Armenia from the imminent collapse. Also, Aliyev repeatedly touched upon the statements of the French

President E. Macron about alleged Syrian jihadists' participation in hostilities on the Azerbaijani side.

"Several times I have asked Mr. Macron to provide us with the data they have to investigate this issue together. However, no evidence has yet been provided," President Aliyev said.

Ilham Aliyev also accused the French side of violating neutrality, since France, together with Russia and the United States, is one of the co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group.

In addition, Aliyev said that Russia and Iran illegally send arms supplies to Armenia. He stated that, if necessary, the Azerbaijani side can provide documentary evidence of such supplies.

As for Turkey's participation in this conflict, Aliyev focused on political support and said that Turkey should play a more active role in resolving the conflict.

At the same time, the head of the state Aliyev noted that Azerbaijan is against the involvement of third forces in the conflict and the military intervention of Russia.

The first talks at the level of the foreign affairs ministers of Azerbaijan and Armenia took place on October 10, with the mediation of Russia. As a result of ten-hour negotiations, the parties reached an agreement on a humanitarian truce. However, the agreement was violated with-

According to the working group on the assessment of losses and casualties as a result of the occupation, the damage from the occupation and war in Karabakh amounted to \$819.15 billion

in a few hours. The second agreement on a truce between the parties, mediated by Russia, was reached on October 17. However, it was also broken after a few minutes. Azerbaijan announced the shelling of settlements by the Armenian armed forces.

After two attempts by the Russian diplomats to achieve peace between the parties, their American colleagues got down to business. On October 23, the Americans invited the foreign affairs ministers of Azerbaijan and Armenia to Washington, DC. Following the ministerial meetings with the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs, an agreement was reached to meet in Geneva on October 29. Then the meeting on the initiative of the Azerbaijani side was postponed to October 30. However, the final statement of the co-chairs demonstrated that the parties could not agree on a truce.

In October, Azerbaijan informed about numerous shellings of settlements by the Armenian armed

forces. The largest of these attacks was rocket attacks on Barda and Ganja, the country's second largest city, which, to make matters worse, was outside the war zone. As a result, 39 civilians were killed, including two children aged 2 and 7 years. International human rights organizations "Amnesty International" and "Human Rights Watch", based on the evidence provided by Azerbaijan, stated that Armenia used banned cluster bombs against the civilian population.

Meanwhile, on October 30, the Prosecutor General Kamran Aliyev announced that 10 foreign citizens participating in hostilities on the side of the Armenian Armed Forces in Karabakh were out on the international wanted list. Among these mercenaries there are several French citizens of the Armenian origin, as well as some citizens of the United States, Greece, Georgia, Lebanon, Syria, also of the Armenian origin, and one citizen of Belarus.

Belarus: Violence against Protesters and Diplomatic Scandals

Vadim Mojeiko, Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies (BISS) (Minsk, Belarus)

Lukashenko seeks to replace the protest agenda by discussing amendments to the Constitution, Tikhanovskaya presents her ultimatum, European ambassadors leave Minsk.



Protests in Belarus
Photo: Getty Images

DOMESTIC POLICY

“Round table” in the KGB pre-trial detention centre and Tikhanovskaya’s ultimatum

Peaceful street protests continued throughout October. In addition to the general Sunday marches (with from tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands of participants), there were also marches of pensioners, marches of mothers, marches of people

with disabilities. The government continues to respond with reprisals: since the beginning of the protests, more than 15,000 people have already been detained (including journalists, regardless of whether they have accreditation or not), more than 100 people have been recognized as political prisoners, protesting employees of state enterprises are being fired and students are being expelled. The protest marches are accompanied by the mobile Internet shutdown and closure of the central metro stations.

With ever-increasing frequency, one can see security forces armed with firearms, including automatic ones, besides the traditional arsenal (stun grenades, tear gas, water cannons, etc.). So far, it is mainly used for psychological containment, but there have been shots into the air. The security officials are directly threatening to shoot the protesters from the military weapons.

Svetlana Tikhanovskaya presented her ultimatum, according to which a general strike should begin on October 26. So far, the strikes are targeted and cause not so much economic but psychological damage: the authorities are nervous,

On October 10, Lukashenko gathered some political prisoners in the KGB pre-trial detention centre at a “round table”, allegedly for a dialogue on constitutional reform.

they do not know where to expect the next workers' performances.

At the same time, Lukashenko seeks to split the protest movement and replace the protest agenda by discussing some amendments to the Constitution. They invite loyal political forces and business unions to these discussions. The time frame for the constitutional amendments is tight but uncertain, as is the mechanism for their adoption. On October 10, Lukashenko even gathered some political

prisoners in the KGB pre-trial detention centre at a “round table”, allegedly for a dialogue on constitutional reform.

ECONOMY

The loan easy come easy go

For fear of the growing workers' discontent, the authorities are trying to support employment at the state-owned enterprises and provide them with subsidies of at least €650 million, although they previously planned to abandon this harmful practice.

Against this background, enterprises are growing stocks of unclaimed finished products (€1.7 billion worth), and the public has devaluation expectations.

However, the National Bank still manages to keep the Belarusian ruble exchange rate, although inflation is accelerating.

Belarus received a \$500 million loan from the Russian-controlled ESFR, but this money immediately went for debts to Gazprom, and it was not enough to pay the interest. Moreover, Belarus will not get €5.8 million from the EU within the framework of the cross-border cooperation program since the tranche is blocked by Lithuania.

FOREIGN POLICY

Sanctions and diplomatic scandals

The EU has adopted the first package of sanctions on Belarus and is preparing the second, which will include Alexander Lukashenko.

For the first time, the Belarusian Ministry of Foreign Affairs imposed retaliatory sanctions against the European officials and also demanded that Lithuania and Poland cut down the staff of the embassies in Minsk. As a result, almost all EU countries recalled their ambassadors from Minsk for the consultations. The Ambassador of Ukraine was handed a note because of Zelensky's decree on attracting highly qualified specialists from Belarus to the country.

EU High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy Josep Borrell said in the European Parliament that the situation in Belarus is not improving, and the prospects for dialogue are limited: “I say limited, so

as not to say anything at all”. And this was after the telephone conversation with the head of the Belarusian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Uladzimir Makei.

The United States also imposed sanctions for Lukashenko to secure the release of Vitaly Shklyarov, a political prisoner of Belarusian origin but with an American passport. Three days later, Shklyarov flew to Washington.

Tikhanovskaya continues to meet with the Western officials and politicians - Foreign Affairs Ministers of the Baltic States and Canada, and representatives of the Scandinavian countries. Meanwhile, Lukashenko met with the head of the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service Sergei Naryshkin. The press secretary of the Russian president noted that the main thing for Putin and Russia is not relations with the Belarusian president but relations with the Belarusian people.

Georgia: Street Protests or One-Party Parliament?

Lasha Tughushi, Liberal Academy Tbilisi (Georgia)

The parliamentary elections took place on October 31 with 9 parties surpassing the threshold of 1%. However, 8 of these 9 parties are boycotting the work of the parliament. With the second round of the elections ahead, a series of protests took place in several cities of the country. Electoral commissions and courts have received a significant number of claims from opposition parties and observers of non-governmental organizations.



Opposition protest rally near the Georgian parliament building in Tbilisi
Photo: Associated Press

DOMESTIC POLICY

Only one of nine parliamentary parties accepts the election results

According to the proportional system, the current ruling party “Georgian Dream” got the number of mandates equivalent to 48,23% of the total votes, with winning 13 out of 30 single-member constituencies.

Ex-president Mikhail Saakashvili’s “United National Movement” took the second place getting 27,17% of votes. In the first round they did not manage to win any single-member constituencies; however, their candidates will dominate in the second round compared to other opposition parties. The remaining 6 parties were not able to get even 3%, but overall strengthened the opposition front. Only one out of 8 parties, “Alliance

of Patriots of Georgia” is openly against NATO, the remaining 7 parties are clearly pro-Western.

According to recent reports, “Georgian Dream” has already received 74 seats in 150-mandate parliament. Yet this is not sufficient as 76 mandates are required to form the government. Nevertheless, it is enough for this party to win three out of seventeen single-member constituencies in the second round of the elections. It is worth noting that the ruling party could not win any out of 8 single-member constituencies in Tbilisi. Therefore, Tbilisi is still “off-balance”.

The opposition and independent observers will appeal against the district electoral commissions as they believe the election protocols contain some inaccuracies. The political opposition directly attacks election administration and the authorities stating that the elections were falsified. OSCE/ODIHR international observers, the European Parliament and others issued a statement noting the elections were competitive,

“Georgian Dream” needs only three more mandates to form the government

and fundamental human rights were observed. However, they mentioned some drawbacks as well.

The current situation is rather complicated as the opposition does not give

while the authorities do not want to make any concessions. It is difficult to imagine that the “Georgian Dream” of Bidzina Ivanishvili agrees to new early elections. The opposition is trying to protect their votes and is heating up tensions calling on the people of the country to take part in street protests. If compromise is not found, the worst-case scenario involves streets protests with unpredictable development of the situation, while the best-case scenario is that partially completed one-party parliament is formed, being a serious predicament for a political crisis.

It also needs to be taken into consideration that Covid-19 pandemic numbers are growing, which is probably the result of the increased mobility among the population due to the current political processes. The daily growth numbers already exceed 2900 infected people.

ECONOMY

Covid-19 hits Georgian lari

Covid-19 continues to make a negative impact on the country’s economy. According to the National Statistics Office of Georgia and its preliminary evaluations, September 2020 saw a decrease of the real GDP (Gross Domestic Product) by 0,7 % against the same period last year. In particular, the decrease was observed in the following sectors: transport and warehousing, food supply, art, entertainment and leisure as well as construction, professional, science and research activities, and also information and communication sectors.

Georgia’s national currency, lari, has been losing its value again recently. According to the recent Bloomberg report US dollar trades at 3,3550 lari. In October lari lost approximately 15 tetri against the value of dollar. Official authorities link this to the escalation of the country’s political situation. The National Bank is attempting to stabilize the exchange rate of Georgian lari and from time to time sells dollars at the monetary exchange.

The prime-minister of Georgia made a promise to the public that total lockdown is not going to be launched, however, target measures will be taken in order to stop the spread of Covid-19.

FOREIGN POLICY

West calls on reviewing the evidence for violations

Ever since Georgia’s independence was restored 30 years ago, the voice of the West has always been heard in the domestic policy of the country. Even though today the West is mostly concentrating on their own problems, Georgian voters listen carefully when it comes to the opinions of Europe or America. In their joint statement on the results of the elections the EU Delegation and the US embassy to Georgia highlighted that:

“With regard to the ongoing electoral process, we encourage political parties to continue addressing allegations of electoral violations by using the legal

means within the democratic processes that Georgia has built over the past 20 years.

A credible and inclusive legal process for remedying substantiated electoral violations is necessary to ensure that the will of the voters is respected, that public confidence in the electoral process is assured, and to ensure the public can accept the election results as legitimate. We stand ready to contribute as required to achieving these objectives.

Georgia needs a parliament able to play its role to address the immediate challenges of economic turmoil, a pandemic and regional tensions, as well as to enact additional reforms to improve the country’s democratic, legal and electoral processes for the future. All political sides need urgently to take responsibility for ensuring such an outcome.”

Moldova: on the Finishing Straight

Sorin Șclearuc, Foreign Policy Association of Moldova (Chișinău)

In the Republic of Moldova, October was marked, first of all, by the expectation of the presidential elections scheduled for November 1, as well as by the official start of the pre-election race, while the rest of the news feeds faded into the background or were used for the candidates' PR activities. The already low level of pre-election rhetoric fell even lower: in the process, the registered participants switched to deaf and cynical tone and reproaches against each other.



Igor Dodon did not come to the debate at the invitation of Maya Sandu.

DOMESTIC POLICY

Waiting for the outcomes

The Central Election Commission announced the rules for the presidential elections in Moldova in the context of the pandemic. The CEC chairman of the Republic of Moldova, Dorin Chmil, [specified](#) that on November 1 all polling stations in the country would be equipped with protective and disinfecting equipment, and officials would comply with the rules established by the National Commission of Public Health. He added that 8 million lei (about \$500 thousand) worth protective equipment, such as face masks, gloves, disinfectants for hands and surfaces,

protective screens, thermometers, suits, were purchased for 2,143 polling stations.

In light of the events in Belarus, the presidential candidate Igor Dodon, on his [YouTube channel](#), stated that “our security officials have enough resources to deter Maidan”. [He also added that](#) “We do not have the protest potential like Belarus. Unless it is brought from abroad, it will not take place. I do not believe in destabilization and “maidans” with no external actors’ geopolitical support. Otherwise, with a strong government in the country, any attempt to destabilize the situation will lead nowhere”.

The independent candidate for the presidency of

the Republic of Moldova, Igor Dodon, [did not respond to the invitation and did not come to the debate](#), organized on October 27 by Maia Sandu, his opponent from the Action and Solidarity party.

Meanwhile, a former ally in the AKUM bloc, and now a presidential candidate, Andrei Nastase, suggested that Maia Sandu should [withdraw from the election race](#) in his favor and received a logical refusal. Nastase's ratings leave him an extremely vague chance of reaching the second round.

While the rest of the presidential candidates were engaged in the usual campaigning, the Shor Party technologies did not stand still. In their promo video, the party chairman [Ilan Shor virtually returned to the streets of Orhei](#). Ilan Shor, sentenced to 7.5 years for fraud, is now hiding in Israel, while the Court of Appeal has been considering an appeal against his sentence, for the third year now. Meanwhile, in the video, Shor is talking to Violeta Ivanov, his party's presidential candidate. Earlier, [during the event](#) where Violeta Ivanov was officially presented as a candidate for the presidency, the leader of the Shor party also

The European Union and relevant international organizations should closely monitor the situation in the Republic of Moldova

appeared virtually on the human-size screen.

On October 21, Bogdan Tirdea, an MP from the Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova, [presented his new book](#) "Civil Society of Moldova: Sponsors. NGO-crazy. Culture wars". The deputy writes there about the "postmodern army" funded from

abroad, the "Soros network" of nongovernmental organizations and compares the budgets of public organizations with the budgets of hospitals.

In this context, the Ambassador of the European Union to the Republic of Moldova, Peter Michalco, [reacted to the attacks against the civil society](#), and noted that he is "alarmed by the rude, unfounded and malicious attacks on the civil society and independent media in the Republic of Moldova".

The Eastern Partnership National Civil Society Platform [released a public document](#) expressing its concern about this situation and calling for an end to the attacks on the civil society. The document was signed by all 92 member organizations.

ECONOMY

No new restrictions due to COVID-19. But it is not certain

While [Germany](#) and [France](#) renewed lockdowns, Igor Dodon [stated](#) that the authorities refrain from imposing new restrictions due to the spread of COVID-19.

He noted that the suspension of "economic activity in April-May hit the economy very seriously." Igor Dodon also emphasized that "in the second quarter of this year, we had a decline in GDP by 14%, and in general for the first half of this year - minus 8%." According to him, an unprecedented drought has also hit Moldova this year. "We received a loan from the IMF this year to support the economy. Our balanced foreign policy and our pragmatism are yielding concrete results. Also, the Russian Federation was always there and helped. We are considering the possibility of supplying grain from Russia for the state reserve. Anyway, for today the food security of Moldova is ensured," added Igor Dodon.

However, these statements are more likely of a

pre-election context and are intended to show that "the situation is under control". Given the growth in the number of people infected with COVID-19 in the Republic of Moldova, it is possible that after the elections (and possibly after the second round), the authorities will announce new restrictions and follow the example of the European countries.

The Ministry of Finance of Moldova and the European Commission signed an agreement on gratuitous financing of the Republic of Moldova for €9 million. [According to the Infotag news agency](#), the funds are for the project "Fund to support healthcare system response to COVID-19 emergency and reforms under the Moldova-EU Association Agreement".

The document consists of four components: strengthening the capacity of the health system to respond to the emergency situation due to COVID-19 (€5 million), strengthening oversight capacity, corporate governance and risk management in the financial sector (€2 million), strengthening the rule of law, justice and security (€1 million), capacity building and resilience of local media (€1 million).

In the hope of a good outcome

The European Union and relevant international organizations should closely monitor the situation in the Republic of Moldova, as the presidential elections, scheduled for November 1, will be a real “test of democracy and the rule of law,” the European Parliament [said](#) in a statement.

On October 20, the European Parliament adopted a report with assessment of the implementation of the Association Agreement between the EU and the Republic of Moldova, with 554 votes in its favor, 70 against it and 65 abstentions from voting. The text reaffirms the EU’s commitment to support the “Europe-

an path” through the political association, economic integration, and reforms. The text also emphasizes “Moldova’s constructive contribution to cooperation within the Eastern Partnership framework”.

MEPs also call on the Moldovan authorities to ensure “free and fair” elections and to continue improving the relevant electoral legislation. The Moldovan authorities should also refrain from changing rules and regulations for political gain, “which will always end in political unrest and instability affecting commitment to structural reforms,” the European Parliament said in a report.

How not to get Ukraine Fatigue?

Sergey Gerasimchuk, Foreign Policy Council “Ukrainian Prism” (Kyiv, Ukraine)

While inside Ukraine October was marked by some political turbulence, in the international arena the situation was quite stable, if not favorable. It seems that Europe is not as tired of Ukraine as Moscow would like it to be. However, it is not entirely clear to what extent the political events of October, many of which will have “long-term implications”, will affect the subsequent development of the country. After all, the Zelensky’s team mono-majority seems to have come to an end, a constitutional crisis is brewing in the country, and the support of partners is not unlimited.



22nd Ukraine-EU Summit
Photo: Reuters

DOMESTIC POLICY

Local election: a new alignment of forces in the regions of Ukraine

In October, the local election, held on October 25 throughout Ukraine, except for the temporarily occupied territories of Crimea and Donbass, was undoubtedly the main event in the country. The main

intrigue of the autumn election marathon hinged on one question: will the pro-presidential party in power, Servant of the People, repeat its last summer’s triumph? No miracle happened.

First, voter [turnout](#) during the 2020 campaign was the lowest in the whole elections history in the independent Ukraine (which can be interpreted both

as fear of the coronavirus and as disappointment in “new faces”). And secondly, the local electorate gave its sympathies mainly to proven mayors and their parties. In all major cities of Ukraine, from Kharkiv to Lviv and from Kyiv to Odesa, the former mayors remained at the helm.

And with the so-called presidential “poll”, the situation looks very ambiguous. In mid-October, President V. Zelensky in his [video message](#) said that on the local elections day he would pose five questions to compatriots. Such an “initiative” from the head of the state caused a critical reaction. According to the Constitution of Ukraine, the president is not endowed with such powers. And the announced president’s “poll” is, at least, beyond the legal field of Ukraine. The issue of financing the presidential initiative also

On October 27, the Constitutional Court of Ukraine recognized criminal article #366-1, which provides liability for inaccurate declaration of income by the civil servants, as non-compliant with the Constitution

sparked a heated discussion. After all, this is taxpayers’ money, or party money, which, according to the current legislation, indirectly is also taxpayers’ money.

The Constitutional Court of Ukraine also added fuel to the domestic politics fire. By its [decision](#) of October 27, the panel of judges recognized criminal article #366-1, which provides liability for inaccurate declaration of income by the civil servants, as non-compliant with the Constitution. Ac-

According to the CCU, criminal liability for committing such offences is excessive. The decision will have long-lasting consequences, both in the Ukrainian society and domestic affairs and in relations with the Western creditors. At its core, it curtails and stops a set of laws and measures to combat corruption.

ECONOMY

“Banking opposition”

Series of scandals shook the National Bank of Ukraine. In early October, on a National Bank Council’s [meeting](#), among other topics, several financial, organizational and personnel issues were discussed. In particular, the NBU Council decided to reprimand the First Deputy Governor of the NBU Kateryna Rozhkova and the Deputy Chairman of the Board of the National Bank of Ukraine Dmitro Sologub, and express incredulity to them. Let us remind you that both persons are to some extent “proteges” of the previous head of the board, who resigned the summer. The reasons for this decision are allegedly the violation of the regulatory acts of the National Bank.

The main financial donor of Ukraine, the IMF, reacted with lightning speed. The IMF Resident Representative Mr. Gosta Ljungman noted that ensuring the NBU board responsibility should be carried out in accordance with

the fundamentals of the National Bank governance. The governance criteria were developed jointly in consultation with the IMF specialists. And decisions of this kind, made by the Council of the National Bank, undermine the credibility and authority of the regulator, primarily at the international level. It should be mentioned that the independence of the National Bank is one of the key points of the agreements between Ukraine and the IMF.

The US Embassy did not remain aloof from these events. They noted their [concern](#) about the reprimands for Rozhkova and Sologub. Also, the American diplomatic mission said that a strong and independent National Bank is critically important for the further economic development of Ukraine.

But the partners’ concern did not help the “disgraced bankers” from the “old team” and in late October Rozhkova was [deprived of her powers](#) in the field of banking supervision.

FOREIGN POLICY

Continuous support from Western partners

Traditionally, autumn brought revitalization to the international agenda. A number of official visits of representatives of the highest echelon of power abroad took place. At the same time, some partners visited Ukraine. In

early October, the President of Ukraine paid an official visit to Brussels, where the 22nd Ukraine-EU Summit took place. Agreements on cooperation in the fight against coronavirus, actions aimed at a ceasefire in Donbass, and further reforms in Ukraine became the main [results](#) of these meetings. The Ukrainian delegation was headed by President V. Zelensky, the EU side was represented by the President of the European Council Charles Michel and the

head of European diplomacy Josep Borrell. During the negotiations, they paid attention to macro-financial stability and NBU independence issues. Also, the EU representatives once again expressed their full support for Ukraine in its fight against the aggressor, the Russian Federation.

After his visit to the EU capital, the president left for Britain, where he also had several official meetings. The Constitutional Guarantor met the members of the Royal Family and had a meeting with the British Prime Minister B. Johnson. During a two-day visit to Great Britain, two [strategic documents](#) were signed between the countries. The first of them is a memorandum, which provides for the re-equipment of the Naval Forces of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. In particular, they mean the joint production of missile boats and loan guarantees for these needs from the British government, about £1 billion for more than 10 years. The second document is the Agreement on Political Cooperation, Free Trade and Strategic Partnership, which will replace the Association Agreement in Trade with Britain after its final Brexit. The head of the UK government [said](#) that the commitment to Ukraine is “strong as a rock” and that Britain is 100% with Ukraine.

As for the visits to Ukraine, in mid-October, Polish President A. Duda paid an official visit to Kyiv. The presidents discussed a number of burning issues. In a joint [statement](#), the Ukrainian side once again acknowledged Poland’s unwavering support in the fight against the Russian aggression. The Ukrainian leader also stressed the role of Poland as a “locomotive” of the Ukraine’s interests in Europe. In particular, they emphasized the common position on the Nord Stream 2 project (a Russian gas pipeline bypassing Ukraine, Poland, directly to Germany, which makes Europe’s energy security dependent).

But in October, Ukrainian focus was not Europe alone. On October 16th, the head of the Ukrainian State visited Turkey. During the visit, the heads of the states touched upon a wide range of issues: from the NATO membership to the de-occupation of the Crimea. They had separate discussions on cooperation and security in the Black Sea region within the framework of the regional mechanisms and the NATO mechanisms.

In general, the visits confirmed the partners’ attention to Ukraine and their readiness to develop strategic cooperation with the EU, Britain, and Turkey.

EaP CSF COVID-19 timeline tool

NEW COVID-19 TIMELINE

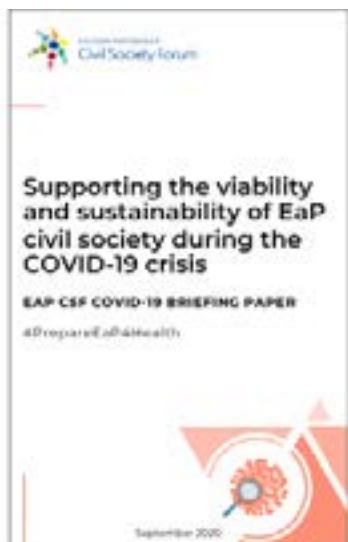
Compare governmental measures

While most of the Eastern Partnership countries adopted a similar range of measures to slow the spread of the virus at the beginning of the crisis in March 2020, their approaches have diverged quite significantly when it comes to reopening the economy and society, to mitigating the broader socio-economic effects of the crisis, and indeed to responding to resurgences in case numbers.

With this in mind, EaP CSF created an interactive timeline, charting the key measures and milestones

from the COVID-19 crisis for each of the six EaP countries in the areas of health, economy & society, and rights & freedoms. Whether you wish to compare countries' approaches, or learn more about the response of one particular government to the ongoing crisis, [this tool presents](#) a comprehensive overview of the experiences of the EaP countries at this unprecedented time. The tool is updated weekly on Fridays and covers the period from March 2020 ongoing.

EaP CSF COVID-19 Briefing Paper: Supporting the viability and sustainability of EaP civil society



Civil society organisations have been at the forefront of efforts to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Eastern Partnership region. In a crisis which has put the crisis management capacities of the EaP governments to the test, CSOs have stepped up to the plate, mobilising in defence of fundamental rights and freedoms, and in support of vulnerable groups and the economy. In this last COVID-19 briefing paper, the EaP CSF discusses the challenges that CSOs have been facing and how stakeholders can support them. This is the fourth and final publication of our COVID-19 Briefing Paper series covering the challenges that CSOs are facing during this unparalleled crisis, and the ways that key international stakeholders can support the viability and sustainability of the EaP civil society sector going forward. View all publications [here](#).

EaP CSF COVID-19 Re-granting

We received 80 applications to our regranting scheme supporting Forum members' COVID-19-related activities. The Re-granting will support CSOs working with populations severely affected by COVID and will provide funds to CSOs so they can adjust to new modes of operation. Projects touch upon a variety of

issues: legal aid, psychological support to vulnerable groups, addressing needs of persons with disabilities, and building capacity of CSOs affected by the COVID crisis, among others. The selection will be made by evaluators nominated by each NP. Results will be announced by mid-November.

EaP Think Bridge

Project is implemented by



NGO Promotion of Intercultural Cooperation (PIC) is a non-governmental, non-profit organization aiming to promote international cooperation and intercultural dialogue. The goal of PIC is to raise awareness in different groups (youth, students, business, journalists, state and local authorities, academics, etc.) on the issues of international, intercultural relations, global and local socio-political problems.

<http://ngopic.org.ua/>

Supported by:



The project benefits from support through the EaP Civil Society Forum Re-granting Scheme (FSTP) and is funded by the European Union as part of its support to civil society in the region. Within its Re-granting Scheme, the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF) supports projects of its members that contribute to achieving the mission and objectives of the Forum.

<https://eap-csf.eu/>

Network founded by:



Foreign Policy Council "Ukrainian Prism" (Ukraine) is a network-based nongovernmental analytical center, the goal of which is to participate in providing democratic ground for developing and implementation of foreign and security policies by government authorities of Ukraine, implementation of international and nation-wide projects and programs, directed at improvement of foreign policy analysis and expertise, enhancement of expert community participation in a decision-making process in the



Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies (BISS) is an independent think-tank, founded in 2007 by a group of leading scientists and civil activists. BISS's mission is to provide a holistic picture of socio-political processes in Belarus based on empiric studies.

<https://belinstitute.com/>



The Regional Studies Center (Armenia) is an independent think tank based in Armenia. The RSC conducts a wide range of strategic analysis and objective research, implements a number of educational and policy-related projects, and develops policy initiatives aimed at bolstering political and economic reform and conflict resolution in the broader South Caucasus region.



The foundation Liberal Academy Tbilisi (Georgia) is a nongovernmental, 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.

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