

The Eastern Partnership Beyond 2020: Making the New Deliverables Fit for the Future

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The Eastern Partnership (EaP), launched in 2009, aims at creating a stable, prosperous, and secure eastern neighborhood for the European Union and at providing the countries involved the opportunity to pursue political association and economic integration with it. To date, the EaP has produced a variety of outcomes in relations with the six partner countries. The EU has signed Association Agreements, started to implement Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas, and agreed on visa-free travel regimes with Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. The EU has also helped these three countries to modernize their economies, diversify their trade flows, and improve their energy security, as well as to strengthen civil society and political pluralism throughout the region. While the three associated EaP states have a higher level of ambition towards the EU, the other three followed different tracks. Armenia is part of the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union but has also concluded a Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement with the EU in an attempt to balance its relations. Azerbaijan has tried to capitalize on its role as energy supplier to Europe and has agreed a set of partnership priorities and engaged into negotiations on a new framework agreement with the EU. Belarus has the weakest institutional relationship with the EU, not having even a framework agreement with it.

However, the political, geopolitical, and security situation in the EaP region remains fragile and volatile. This is due to continuous disinformation and hybrid security threats from Russia; ongoing conflicts in eastern Ukraine, Moldova, and the South Caucasus; the illegal occupation of Crimea; and the political crisis and severe violations of human rights and freedoms in Belarus that have triggered new EU sanctions. The situation in the EaP countries is further complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic and social impact. But despite these problems the EU has demonstrated continued commitment to deepening its relationship with the EaP countries, in particular with the three associated ones.

The EaP faces three central challenges in the next decade. The first is the unfinished business of helping the fight against corruption and state capture in the six countries. The second is to adapt the EaP to the EU's objective of becoming a more geopolitically powerful actor, not least on security issues. And the third is to adapt the EaP to the continent's and the world's environmental needs. Meeting all three is deeply in the interest of the EU and EaP states.

In the context of the upcoming **EaP Summit in 2021**, it is important for the EU and the partner countries to increase efforts to consolidate ongoing progress, address current challenges, and set new ambitious objectives. The EU should do the following in particular:

- **Acknowledge that the partner countries have increasingly assumed more responsibility and ownership with respect to the EaP policy**, underlining the need for a continuous effort towards effective cooperation, intense dialogue, and close partnership within the EaP, and for supporting

¹ This input paper also reflects the key recommendations for the post-2020 EaP deliverables outlined in a [non-paper](#) recently prepared and distributed by 37 EU, Georgian, Moldovan, and Ukrainian researchers and think tank experts.

reforms that strengthen resilience, generate positive political, social, economic, and legal change in the EaP countries – based on their individual level of ambition for their relationship with the EU.

- **Highlight the clear ambition of the three associated EaP states and reconfirm the acknowledgement of their European aspirations, pursuant to Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union.** These states should be invited to select meetings of the EU Council and EU working parties.
- Further apply a **smarter, more tailored, and targeted conditionality** to speed up reforms.
- Strengthen the **institutions of democracy, rule of law, and the fight against corruption** throughout the EaP countries, in line with their societies' aspirations.
- **Deepen cooperation in absolutely key areas** for the future of the EaP states, such as **security and the environment**.
- Develop a new flexible, tailored, and comprehensive **Investment and Economic Recovery Plan addressing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the EaP countries, similar to the one developed for the Western Balkan countries**.

In addition, considering the lessons learned from the first decade of the EaP, a new set of key deliverables should refer to the following priority areas for the next five to ten years:

Accountable Institutions, Judicial Reform and the Rule of Law

- With the support of the Council of Europe, the EU should **monitor and guide genuine and measurable reforms to create independent and accountable state institutions** (for example, prosecutors' offices and other law-enforcement authorities and anti-corruption agencies). For this, the EU has to offer clear sets of benchmarks and provide regular assessments of their implementation. Such assessments should be accompanied by **more political and financial support to countries achieving positive results, and economic or political conditionality for those lagging behind**. Efforts to **strengthen parliaments as oversight institutions** are particularly important.
- The EU has been developing new instruments to strengthen the rule of law in member states, such as comprehensive [Justice Scoreboards](#) and rule-of-law reports. **The EU should launch Justice Scoreboards for the EaP or Justice Dashboards** similar to the efforts of the Working Group on Western Balkans of the Council of Europe's [European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice](#), to measure and monitor the state of play in the justice sector of countries.
- The **EU should help the associated EaP countries to carry out preliminary legal screening and self-assessments** to identify gaps, set new ambitious policy interventions, and link them to smart, tailored, and targeted conditionality of the EU funding.
- There is a need for greater cooperation between the EU and EaP countries' law-enforcement agencies with regard to asset recovery, financial crimes, and high-level corruption. **The EU should initiate an institutional dialogue between the new European Public Prosecutor Office and the fraud investigation bodies from EaP countries** on high-level corruption cases and misspending of EU funds in the region.

Security: A Stronger, More Geopolitical EU

- The EU should launch an **EaP Security Compact**. This would bring together EU funds and institutions with those of member states willing to boost security cooperation with willing partner countries.

- **The EU should help to build capacity and develop cooperation with EaP cybersecurity institutions.** All EaP countries have reformed or created new such institutions (cyber-incident response teams, cyber-forensic departments, and specialized departments within police and intelligence agencies) in the past years. However, these remain under-resourced. Cooperation could include **intelligence sharing and mutual learning on cyber threats, assistance in securing governmental communications and critical infrastructure, and joint cyber exercises.** **The launch of the EU-Ukraine cyber dialogue is a welcome development and similar platforms with Georgia and Moldova should be created.**
- Opening the way for interested EaP partners to work within **the European Union Agency for Network and Information and the Rapid Alert System on Disinformation** could be a significant step forward for cooperation in further consolidation of the joint effort in countering the disinformation in the region.
- An **EU-EaP security platform dedicated to countering hybrid threats should be launched.** The EU should support EaP partners in **developing and implementing national mechanisms for effective early warning and response to security hybrid threats.**
- The EU should create an **Eastern Neighborhood Intelligence Support and Coordination Cell within European External Action Service** that will coordinate assistance to the EaP countries and facilitate practical exchange of intelligence. This could function like the support group for Ukraine.
- **The EU and selected EaP partners could develop “soft” military cooperation.** Many EU member states would be interested in boosting such cooperation and efforts in this direction could also be significantly scaled up if the EU were to dedicate parts of its neighborhood funding to it. This cooperation could take the form, for example, of admitting officers from EaP countries to the military Erasmus program, offering EU funding for EaP officers to study in military academies across the EU at various stages of their careers, and providing experts to revise military education and training in EaP countries.

Environmental and Climate Resilience: A Green Deal for Eastern Partners

- **The European Green Deal** is highly relevant for the EU and EaP states. They should develop a **common approach on the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism**, which will be one of the key elements of the Green Deal, in order to avoid this having a negative impact on trade between EU and EaP countries.
- To address the structural weakness of state institutions responsible for implementation and oversight of the green agenda, the post-2020 deliverables should be geared towards **institutional strengthening and better implementation and monitoring of environmental legislation with the effective participation of civil society.**
- The EU should focus on supporting cooperation between EaP governments and civil society and on the **greening of school curricula.**
- The EU should launch and support projects that help the environment, raise awareness of environmental concerns, and simultaneously increase EU visibility. The following two schemes would do so:
 - **The Euro-bicycle:** the EU could co-finance the creation of bicycle-sharing schemes in the five largest cities of each EaP state in cooperation with local municipalities. The bicycles could be blue with yellow stars and could be a symbol of EU support to eco-friendly mobility, and an almost omnipresent advertisement for the EU. This should be matched with support for better cycling infrastructure.

- **The Euro-charger:** a similar approach could be adopted regarding the installation of charging stations for electric cars in the largest towns in the EaP, as a way to facilitate transition to greener cars.
- The EU should open the participation in its **hydrogen strategy for a climate-neutral Europe and the European Clean Hydrogen Alliance** to the willing EaP states.

Resilient, Fair and Inclusive Societies: A People-centric EaP

- It is important for the **EU to scale up its financial support for CSOs and independent media. While continuing to apply strong conditionality to all the governments of the region**, the EU also needs to focus on supporting the professionalization of civil society, **strengthening the institutional capacity of think tanks** via targeted institutional funding, and simplifying financial support tools for grassroots CSOs (for example, re-granting).
- The EU should also insist on citizens' participation and engagement, transparency, and accountability as key principles of governance in the EaP.
- The issues of brain drain and demographic change in the EaP countries must be tackled. The EU should encourage and support structured dialogues on the implementation of circular migration schemes and linking EaP countries' diaspora in the EU to the good governance agenda.

Resilient, Sustainable and Integrated Economies

- Full integration into EU's Single Market is the next logical step of deepening economic integration. **The EU and the three associated EaP countries establishing jointly a roadmap on their gradual and tailored accession to the four freedoms during the next ten years** should be a key deliverable.
- The EU should conclude **agreements on conformity assessment and acceptance of industrial products** with Moldova, Ukraine, and other willing EaP countries, subject to a positive assessment of their national institutional and regulatory framework.
- Another long-talked-about measure is the acceptance of the associated EaP states into the **Single European Payment System**, which might bring wide benefits for people who travel and do business in the EaP and EU countries.
- The three associated EaP states should be invited to join the European Agency for the Cooperation of Energy Regulators.
- Integration of willing EaP states into the European Networks of Transmission System Operators for Electricity and for Gas would provide significant mutual benefits.
- Deeper liberalization of services should also be promoted: liberalization of telecommunications, transport services, and postal services could significantly increase trade and business relations between the EU and EaP countries.
- EU aid to infrastructure-development projects should envisage not only loans but also grant support, accompanied by proper accountability monitoring.

Resilient Digital Transformation

- The EU should accelerate the **abolition of roaming fees between the EU and the EaP countries** on a bilateral basis. An important step is to conclude agreements on mutual recognition of electronic trust services that will facilitate trade and economic cooperation by allowing cross-border e-services, recognition of e-signature, and digitalization of services.
- Digital integration should be based on the **harmonization of legislation on personal-data protection** (including the General Data Protection Regulation, other EU acquis, and relevant Council of Europe conventions), with necessary EU support.
- **Inclusion of the three associated and other willing EaP states into the EU's Digital Economy and Society Index** will help to assess their digital performance and track the evolution in digital competitiveness
- Movement towards further integration into the Digital Single Market should provide opportunities for interested EaP countries to join **the EU's digital, research, and ICT innovations policies, programs, and initiatives. This includes the European Open Science Cloud, the European High Performance Computing Joint Undertaking, the Coordinated Plan on Artificial Intelligence,** and the deployment of secure 5G telecommunication networks.