

REGIONAL POLICY

TEN YEARS OF THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP: EXPERIENCES AND PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT

The year 2019 marks the tenth anniversary of the inauguration of the Eastern Partnership program that targets the six South Caucasian and Eastern Europe countries that border the European Union: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. The program's main objective was to bring the eastern neighbors closer to the European Union, transfer good practices, develop trade, economy and political arrangements and to help eastern partners in their democratic transitions and in implementing reforms. The main aim of this article is to present the effects of the program on EaP countries and on the European Union's policy towards the East, as well as the main determinants of this program implementa-

tion— both internal and external. The author analyzes the most important external factors in EaP countries' foreign policy, especially Russian policy towards the former Soviet Union and EU's eastern policy in order to point out the basic dilemma and challenge for the EaP countries' foreign policy: The European Union's offer vs Russia's offer. The author also investigates the most important internal factors that determine each country's approach to the EaP program and the probability of its implementation. First and foremost, these factors include the interests of the ruling elites of the EaP countries that are determined by political calculation, social support and unresolved internal conflicts that affect regional relations.

KEYWORDS: *Eastern Partnership, European Union, Russia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine.*

Introduction

The Eastern Partnership project was established following the Russian-Georgian war of August 2008, which revealed the scale of challenges and threats present in Eastern Europe and the Southern Caucasus, and significantly increased the support for the Eastern Partnership idea, since the need to develop a wider commitment beyond the eastern borders of the European Union and a relevant EU policy became urgent at that time. On the other hand, it was the time of the financial crisis and crisis within the Eurozone, which negatively affected the attitude of the member states towards neighborhood policy and expansion, and subsequently receded into the background in the face of the European Union's own internal problems. In 2009, on the initiative of Poland and Sweden, the Eastern Partnership program was launched within the framework of the European Neighborhood Policy. It targeted six countries formed after the collapse of the Soviet Union: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. The program's main objective was to establish a common area of shared democracy, prosperity, stability and increased cooperation. The decade of existence of the Eastern Partnership program is a sufficiently long period to draw certain conclusions in regard to the achievements of the European Union's eastern policy, prompting reflection on the purposefulness, effectiveness and efficiency of the activities undertaken within its framework. The main research question is: What are the effects of the EaP program for individual countries covered by it? Other research questions can also be posed, i.e., Did all EaP countries benefit from program to the same extent? Can the program leaders be determined, and if so, in what areas and why? What were and are the most important factors in the program's implementation? What are the prospects of the program? How can the policy be made truly efficient in the context of the growing differentiation among the eastern partners?

Objectives of the Eastern Partnership and their Implementation

Eastern European countries have become the European Union's immediate neighbors after its expansion in 2004. That geopolitical change led to the introduction of a new instrument in EU policy—the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), which included 16 Eastern European and Southern European countries.¹ The Union started to recognize this region as its immediate neighbor, resulting in the need for the Union to increase political and financial involvement there. At the same time, Eastern European countries have been separated in EU policy from Russia, which did not participate in the ENP. This significantly altered the EU's perception of the region: it was no longer treated as

¹ See: Communication from the European Commission, European Neighborhood Policy, Strategy Paper, 12 May, 2004, available at [https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/2004_communication_from_the_commission_-_european_neighbourhood_policy_-_strategy_paper.pdf], 4 January, 2020.

the former Soviet Union, where Russia played a key role, but as the neighbors of the Union, with the prospect of a rapprochement with the EU.

Maintaining a common framework and communication standards in a diverse neighborhood in the East and in the South was a difficult task. As a result, two regional dimensions of the ENP were defined: the Union for the Mediterranean, covering ten North African and Middle Eastern countries in 2008 and the Eastern Partnership (EaP) for Eastern European and South Caucasian countries in 2009.² It was also facilitated by internal competition between EU member states committed to increasing EU involvement in the south or in the east. EU stressed the fact that the EaP initiative is not directed against Russia.³

The main goal of the EaP was “to create the necessary conditions to accelerate political association and further economic integration between the European Union and interested partner countries.”⁴ The offer of the European Union, which is addressed to the Eastern Partnership countries, includes the opportunity to sign association agreements, create a so-called Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, as well as the liberalization of the visa system or abolition of the visa regime, which is to become a significant modernization impulse for EaP countries according to European politicians. Within the Eastern Partnership, six countries covered by it are offered:

- (1) Association Agreement of the given partner country with the European Union;
- (2) Establishing a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) between the European Union and individual countries covered by the program;
- (3) Deepening cooperation in the control of common borders, related to the desire to establish a visa-free regime for the citizens of both sides in the long-term, and shorten the time to the liberalization of the visa system;
- (4) Cooperation in the field of energy security;
- (5) European Union’s support of the economic and social development of partner countries.⁵

The Eastern Partnership is not an expansion strategy, it is an instrument bringing the partner countries closer to the EU in the economic sphere, but not politically (as it will not lead to future EU membership). Deepening relations with the European Union depend on the partners’ progress in introducing such values as democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights and in implementing the free market economy principles. Thus, the Eastern Partnership is based on conditionality, that is, the diversification of the European Union’s policy towards individual states depending on the scale of their ambitions, political will and opportunities to act.

The initiative is a manifestation of the EU’s operational policy of “soft power,” and is meant to be a significant impulse for modernization. The Eastern Partnership encourages multilateral projects which, through financial assistance, aim for economic and political changes to the rules relevant in the European Union. Cooperation takes place through institutions such as Euronest, a parliamentary assembly of deputies delegated from the European Parliament and parliaments of countries participating in the Eastern Partnership, Civil Society Forum and summits with heads of state and government (held once every two years) or ministers (held annually).

² See: E. Korosteleva, “The Eastern Partnership Initiative: A New Opportunity for the Neighbors?” *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, Vol. 27, No. 1, 2011, pp. 1-21.

³ See: M Łapczyński, “The European Union’s Eastern Partnership: Chances and Perspectives,” *Caucasian Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 2009, p. 155.

⁴ *Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit*, Council of the European Union, Prague, 7 May, 2009, available at [https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/31797/2009_eap_declaration.pdf], 4 January, 2020.

⁵ See: Available at [https://eeas.europa.eu/diplomatic-network/eastern-partnership/419/eastern-partnership_en], 11 November, 2019.

So far, six Eastern Partnership summits have been held in:

- (1) Prague, 7 May, 2009
- (2) Warsaw, 29-30 September, 2011
- (3) Vilnius, 28 November, 2013
- (4) Riga, 21-22 May, 2015
- (5) Brussels, 24 November, 2017
- (6) Brussels, 13-14 May, 2019.

Up until now, association agreements with the European Union have been signed by Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia. Citizens of these countries can already enter the EU without visas, and the commercial part of the agreements is gradually being implemented. Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine: Association Agreements and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements concluded in 2014 have already entered into force, giving a new dimension to mutual relations. Armenia: in 2017, on the occasion of the Fifth Eastern Partnership Summit, a comprehensive and enhanced partnership agreement was signed. Azerbaijan: in 2017, negotiations on a new comprehensive contract have started. Belarus: The EU is deepening its critical engagement with Belarus through carefully balanced bilateral actions.⁶ As of now, due to many reservations about the Belarusian authorities' observance of human rights and civil liberties, Belarus has limited access to the financial projects envisaged in the Eastern Partnership, participates in the group's work only at ministerial or ambassador level, and members of the Belarusian parliament are not present in the Euronest parliamentary assembly.

From the EU perspective, the Eastern Partnership has made 10 notable achievements over the last decade:

- (1) The EU has concluded new political and economic bilateral agreements;
- (2) More trade and investment opportunities emerged between the EU member states and the six Eastern partner countries;
- (3) More diversified and vibrant economies emerged across the region, which attract investments and create jobs;
- (4) Better transport links and infrastructure;
- (5) Visa-free regimes have been put in place between the EU and Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova;
- (6) Greater energy resilience and efficiency through decreasing energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions;
- (7) Support for young people, particularly in terms of developing their skills and fostering their employability;
- (8) More accessible and convenient public services for citizens across the region;
- (9) Easier access to a high-capacity broadband internet network for 2 million scientists, academics and students;
- (10) Greater awareness of the EU among residents of the Eastern partner countries.⁷

⁶ See: Available at [<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/pl/policies/eastern-partnership/>], 17 April, 2019 (in Polish).

⁷ See: "Top 10 Achievements of the Eastern Partnership in the Last Ten Years," Brussels, 10 May, 2019, available at [https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/factsheet_eap_10_years_2019.pdf], 20 January, 2020.

Internal and External Determinants of the EaP Implementation. EU's Offer vs Russia's Offer

“Ten years after the EaP was launched, it seems fair to say that the neighborhood has not experienced a steady increase in prosperity, democracy and stability”⁸. We can point out and discuss the main internal and external determinants that have shaped the EU's relations with the EaP countries.

The most important external factors in the development of the Eastern Partnership program include the policy of the Russian Federation, which is perceived as the main actor in the post-Soviet space, and the policy enacted by the European Union. The basic dilemma and challenge for EaP countries' foreign policy is the EU's offer vs Russia's offer. In 2008, former EU Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso declared that in comparison to the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), the new eastern policy would be a significant “step change,” and would project EU's soft power into the former Soviet Union. In president's opinion, the Eastern Partnership “shows what could be called the power of soft power, the ability of the EU to attract others and bring about changes in societies.”⁹ If soft power is to be understood in the classic sense, as “the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion and payment,¹⁰ then the Eastern Partnership “is supposedly a medium for such attraction, and for co-opting the eastern neighbors around the EU's agenda”¹¹.

In European policy, the post-Soviet space, and especially the countries of the Southern Caucasus (Azerbaijan and Georgia) were considered a source of energy that provides an alternative to Russian gas and oil, contributing to supply diversification. There were plans to build the so-called Southern Gas Corridor (after the Nabucco pipeline project was abandoned in 2012), in which Azerbaijan played the role of gas supplier (rich deposits of the Caspian Sea), and Georgia as one of the transit countries.¹² That project has become a part of the game between Russia and the EU, especially following the crisis in EU-Russia relations over Ukraine. Another field of play between the EU and Russia was the so-called colored revolutions in the former Soviet Union, including the Revolution of Roses in Georgia in 2003, Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004 and Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan in 2005. Russia perceived the support of EU politicians as interference in the internal policy of those countries, and the EU intruding in the Russian sphere of influence.

The situation within the European Union itself poses a problem in program implementation and development. This is due to several crises in which the Union has found itself in recent years, and, among others, the financial crisis in the eurozone, migration crisis, Brexit and the debate on the future of the Union and the process of deepening integration. All of the above result in a decrease in the EU countries interest in foreign policy, especially in the Eastern neighborhood and differing attitudes of individual member states.

Russia's policy presents a huge challenge for the EU policy in the Eastern neighborhood. Russia has been perceiving the Eastern Partnership as an initiative that impedes the economic and geopolitical interests of Russia in the post-Soviet space. Moscow seeks to include its neighbors in its

⁸ S. Saari, S. Secrieru, “Introduction. Doom or Bloom for the Eastern Partnership,” in: *The Eastern Partnership A Decade On*, ed. by S. Saari, S. Secrieru, European Union Institute for Security Studies, Paris, 2019, pp. 5-7.

⁹ P. Runner, “Brussels to Project ‘Soft Power’ in Post-Soviet Zone,” *EUObserver*, 3 December, 2008.

¹⁰ See: J.S. Nye, Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, Public Affairs, New York, 2004, pp. 191.

¹¹ K.L.G. Nielsen, M. Vilson, “The Eastern Partnership: Soft Power Strategy or Policy Failure?” *European Foreign Affairs Review*, Vol. 19, No. 2, 2014, pp. 1-19.

¹² See: A. Jarosiewicz, “The Southern Gas Corridor. The Azerbaijani-Turkish Project Becomes Part of the Game between Russia and the EU,” *Point of View*, 20 August, 2015, available at [<https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/point-view/2015-08-20/southern-gas-corridor-azerbaijani-turkish-project-becomes-part>], 30 December, 2019.

sphere of influence, so it makes an effort to prevent former Soviet republics from forming a rapport with the European Union and to force them into the Russian project of reintegration of the former Soviet Union in the framework of the Eurasian Economic Union. Russia continues to use existing political and economic relations (including energy dependence) and is willing to provide unconditional financial support. The most important instruments of Russian policy towards the so-called “near abroad,” as the post-Soviet space is defined, include:

- (1) soft power—the influence of the Russian language or the Orthodox religion, implementation of Putin’s doctrine of “Russkij mir” (Russian world);
- (2) military (preserving the so-called frozen conflicts);
- (3) political (reintegration of the post-Soviet space);
- (4) economic (gas crises, food embargoes).

In 2014, President Vladimir Putin presented his vision of Russia’s foreign policy towards the post-Soviet space as an outline of the conceptual foundation for Russian dominance in the former Soviet Union—Russia is the center of a special, spiritual and civilizational community referred to as the “Russian world.” “That community takes the form of concentric circles, the first one of which is based on the close ties,

- first and foremost, between Russia and Ukraine, and
- secondly, with Belarus.”¹³

The new doctrine is based on several principles of Russia’s policy:

- (1) Russia is the guarantor and defender of the rights of Russian-speaking people;
- (2) “Good neighborly relations” is a precondition of Moscow’s recognition of independence and territorial integrity;
- (3) Use of force is a legitimate way to defend compatriots.

Russian policy towards the post-Soviet space is mainly based on the use of “soft” measures such as media propaganda, pro-Russian political movements’ activities, cooperation with the Orthodox Church, building up ties between people and businesses in order to foster anti-Western and pro-Russian attitudes in the societies of former Soviet republics.

Violation of Ukraine’s territorial integrity in 2014 by annexing Crimea and supporting separatists in the eastern Ukraine has shown that Russia can use its military to implement its policy of domination in the post-Soviet space. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, each military conflict in the Southern Caucasus has erupted, continued and was put on hold with the active and decisive participation of Russia. Political and military domination is the main pillar of Moscow’s policy in this region, which no one has been able to successfully contest.¹⁴ Open attempts to undermine the dominant position of Russia by Turkey, the U.S. and the EU have been either averted or unsuccessful, despite their growing ambitions and interests. A vivid example was the failure of Georgia’s integration with NATO (the war of 2008). Russia, which has been continually active in the security sphere, could use its forces in the so-called “frozen conflicts,” effectively blocking the progress of EaP countries’ European integration. In none of the four regional conflicts (Abkhazia and South Ossetia in

¹³ M. Menkiszak, “The Putin Doctrine: The Formation of a Conceptual Framework for Russian Dominance in the Post-Soviet Area,” *OSW Commentary*, 27 March, 2014, available at [<https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2014-03-27/putin-doctrine-formation-a-conceptual-framework-russian>], 8 January, 2020.

¹⁴ See: A. Jarosiewicz, K. Strachota, “Nagorno-Karabakh—Conflict Unfreezing”, *OSW Commentary*, 26 October, 2011, available at [<https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2011-10-26/nagorno-karabakh-conflict-unfreezing>], 8 January, 2020.

Georgia, Armenian-Azeri conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, Transnistrian conflict) has the situation improved; on the contrary, all have remained highly volatile. Russia, whose troops are present in the conflict region, remains the only entity capable of playing the situation out in its favor, and aims to destabilize the internal situation in the EaP countries. In 2014 and 2015, treaties of alliance and integration between Russia and Abkhazia and South Ossetia have been signed as a result of the Georgian-Russian war in August 2008. They sanctioned the effective incorporation of both entities into Russia, while maintaining the façade of statehood. From Moscow's point of view, the signing of those treaties (Russia recognized Abkhazia's and South Ossetia's independence in 2008, however, Moscow has not decided on complete annexation) ends the Georgian-Ossetian and Georgian-Abkhazian conflicts. The weak reaction of the Georgian authorities to the signing of the agreements testifies to a sense of powerlessness in the face of Russia's actions and the lack of faith of the elite and society in the possibility of regaining control over South Ossetia and Abkhazia in the foreseeable future, or in the help of the West in achieving this goal.¹⁵ The conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh remains volatile and the resumption of military operations cannot be ruled out (a short-term thawing of the conflict occurred in 2016, during the four-day war in Nagorno-Karabakh), as evidenced by the fact that the armament buildup, especially on the part of Azerbaijan, and the number of border incidents has also increased.¹⁶ Russia is likely to actively participate in each attempt to change the status quo in Karabakh, if any are made.

During the last thirty years (Transnistria "declared independence" from Moldova in September 1990) no real progress has been made towards the resolution of the frozen Transnistrian conflict. On the contrary, Transnistria has effectively consolidated its unrecognized statehood, and Russia preserves a continuous military presence in the republic. In the event of real rapprochement between Chisinau and the European Union, which could threaten the geopolitical interests of Tiraspol's main protector, Russia, the risk of the conflict escalation could increase, and Russia could use it to block the progress of Moldova's European integration. Russia retains all of its current tools of influence on the Moldovan political scene, which mainly includes: supplies of energy resources, access to the Russian market for Moldovan agricultural products, the influence of Russian media, policy towards the Moldovan diaspora in Russia, corruption schemes using Russian business and the potential exacerbation of the dispute around Transnistria.¹⁷

Another type of instruments in Russian policy are the economic energy-related measures—gas supplies, gas crises and food embargoes. Due to their geographic locations, Ukraine and Belarus were of key importance in Russian energy policy as transit countries, but after several gas crises Russia began to implement projects that bypass the current transit countries, such as Nord Stream I, South Stream (ultimately withdrew from this project) and Turkish Stream.

When it comes to internal factors that determine the participants' attitudes to the program and the chances of its implementation, the most important are the interests of the ruling elite of the EaP countries. They are based on political calculation, social backing and regional relations. Carrying out structural reforms in EaP countries is difficult due to internal factors that inhibit changes, such as oligarchic connections, corruption, and the nature of authoritarian regimes. In certain EaP countries, the dominant foreign policy vector is pro-Russian, which may be a result of various conditions: political, economic and social. Armenia and Belarus are members of the Eurasian Economic Union.

¹⁵ See: M. Falkowski, "Russia is Absorbing South Ossetia," *Analyses*, 25 March, 2015, available at [<https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2015-03-25/russia-absorbing-south-ossetia>], 8 January, 2020.

¹⁶ See: R. Sadowski, "Partnership in Times of Crisis. Challenges for the Eastern European Countries' Integration with Europe", *Point of View*, 18 July, 2013, available at [<https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/point-view/2013-07-18/partnership-times-crisis-challenges-eastern-european-countries>], 4 January, 2020.

¹⁷ See: J. Strzelecki, "Changing Russian Tactics towards Moldova," *Analyses*, 25 June, 2019, available at [<https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/node/27340>], 8 January, 2020.

Armenia has an unresolved conflict with Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh, and a significant number of its citizens rely for sustenance on money transfers from family members working in Russia. There are new hopes for reforms after Pashinyan's revolution¹⁸ and the My Step coalition's victory in early parliamentary elections in Armenia in 2018.¹⁹

Azerbaijani elites are rather skeptical about EU policy towards the former Soviet Union and prospects of its economic integration with the European Union. Within Azerbaijan, support for the EaP is difficult to secure because of the perceived lack of EU's support for the country's territorial integrity (European Union has avoided taking sides in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict). Therefore, the EaP is predominantly seen as a means of asserting the country's role as a major regional and international energy player and obtaining the EU's support for the development of its strategic energy infrastructure.²⁰

Moldova's foreign policy was characterized by perpetual instability and absence of a distinct long-term vision. Chisinau's international activities were determined, on the one hand, by the need to find a balance between Russia and the West, which involved periodically intensifying or loosening ties with one or the other side as needed. When in 2009 a coalition of four parties that supported integration with the EU came to power in Moldova, it made European integration the main objective of its policy. It stemmed from their desire to curb Russia's political, cultural and economic influence on Moldova.²¹ That was one of the reasons why Moldova was open to the Eastern Partnership program and had high expectations. Several years later, when the anticipated results were not achieved, the support for the idea of integration began to decline. The pro-European coalition had not been able to restructure the Moldovan state, which was still largely based on Soviet models, eradicate the endemic corruption that affected all spheres of life, or achieve a tangible improvement of the economic situation. Yet another internal factor is the Transnistrian problem. The existence of Transnistria in its present form means that Chisinau is effectively unable to control more than 30 percent of the total length of its borders (around 450 km), which creates the perfect conditions for smuggling. The protracted Transnistrian problem has led to the permanent presence of Russian armed forces in the territory that legally belongs to Moldova, and it is used as an argument against possible military cooperation between Moldova and its Western partners. Criticized by the EU for the absence of reforms and fully subordinated to the oligarchs, Chisinau is only interested in strengthening those elements of cooperation with the EU that give Moldova (and its political elites) tangible financial benefits.²²

Kiev is pushing for the formulation of new, ambitious program goals, and above all, strives intensely to obtain a guarantee of membership prospects. In the beginning, Ukrainian officials expressed their dissatisfaction with the fact that the EaP places them in the same category as all other EaP partners without regard to their experience or aspirations. Besides, the Ukrainian crisis of 2013/2014 (civil protests against president Yanukovich's regime—Revolution of Dignity, annexation of Crimea, the hybrid war waged by Russia against Ukraine in Donbass) presented a huge challenge

¹⁸ See: A. Miarka, "Velvet Revolution in Armenia and its Influence on State Policy: Selected Aspects," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol. 20, Issue 4, 2019, available at [https://www.ca-c.org/journal/2019/journal_eng/cac-04/04.shtml], 27 January, 2020.

¹⁹ See: W. Górecki, "Armenia: Pashinyan's Bloc Wins the Election", *Analyses*, 10 December, 2018, available at [<https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2018-12-10/armenia-pashinyans-bloc-wins-election>], 15 January, 2020.

²⁰ See: K. Wolczuk, "Perceptions of, and Attitudes towards, the Eastern Partnership amongst the Partner Countries' Political Elites," *Eastern Partnership Review*, No. 5, 2011, p. 6.

²¹ See: K. Całus, "The Unfinished State. 25 Years of Independent Moldova," *OSW Studies*, 14 December, 2016, available at [https://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/prace_59_ang_25_years_moldova_net.pdf], 8 January, 2020.

²² See: K. Kłysiński, T. Iwański, K. Całus, "Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus on the Eastern Partnership," *Analyses*, 22 November, 2017, available at [<https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2017-11-22/ukraine-moldova-and-belarus-eastern-partnership>], 15 January, 2020.

for the EaP.²³ Significant progress in the reform process has been made by Ukraine despite extremely challenging conditions, including an ongoing conflict in the east of the country. Much work is still required, which includes the fight against corruption and improvement of the business climate. Ukrainian citizens support Europeanisation and expect more effective reform implementation from the government.²⁴

The attractiveness of the EaP for Belarus stems from its geopolitical significance as a counterbalance to Belarus's dependence on Russia. Belarus sees the EaP membership as a pragmatic step towards dialog with the EU.²⁵ In itself, the EaP does not offer sufficient financial incentives to Belarus to embark upon political and economic reforms.²⁶ It should be emphasized, however, that the Eastern Partnership is the first initiative that conditionally integrates the previously isolated Belarus into the European circle and outlines the prospect of its cooperation with the European Union. Over the years, the Lukashenko regime has been and still is a barrier to the democratization process in Belarus, and it is difficult to predict progress in rapprochement with the EU. Nevertheless, the Ukrainian crisis pushed Minsk to strengthen the European vector in its foreign policy and to seek the normalization of EU-Belarus relations.²⁷

In the case of Georgia, the positive effects of the EaP are apparent in the economic sphere and in the tourist industry, since mobility has increased and Georgia has become increasingly more connected with Europe. Georgia has been one of the most successful partners within EaP initiative, achieving considerable success in implementing policies and following the European Union integration path ever since the Rose Revolution in 2003.²⁸ There is still, however, a number of obstacles for Georgia on its path to the West, especially associated with Russian policy towards Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Conclusions

Since the launch of the European Neighborhood Policy in 2004, the situation in the spheres of key importance for the EU, such as democratization, free-market transformations, European integration, political stability and regional security, has not improved significantly.²⁹ The parties involved in the EaP program are more concerned with maintaining the dialog than with achieving specific results or progress in the process of European integration. This shows the limited possibilities of the EU's ability to influence its Eastern neighbors. Due to the gap between the expectations of the partner countries and their elites on the one hand, and what the EU has to offer on the other, the EaP countries have shown only limited commitment to integration with the EU and transformation in accordance with EU models. These are long-term processes that may produce tangible benefits only if their ultimate aim was clearly defined, which is not the case—the Eastern Partnership initiative is not the same as the EU accession process.

²³ See: E. Tsybulenko, S. Pakhomenko, "The Ukrainian Crisis as a Challenge for the Eastern Partnership," in: *Political and Legal Perspectives of the EU Eastern Partnership Policy*, ed. by T. Kerikmäe, A. Chochia, Springer International Publishing, Switzerland 2016, pp. 167-168.

²⁴ See: J. Kobzova, "Can the Eastern Partnership Work?" *European View*, Vol. 11, 2012, pp. 209-2014.

²⁵ See: E. Korosteleva, "Change or Continuity: Is the Eastern Partnership an Adequate Tool for the European Neighborhood?" *International Relations*, Vol. 25, No. 2, 2011, pp. 243-262.

²⁶ See: K. Wolczuk, op. cit.

²⁷ See: S. Saari, S. Secrieru, "Executive Summary," in: *The Eastern Partnership A Decade On*, pp. 2-4.

²⁸ See: A. Chochia, J. Popjanovski, "Change of Power and its Influence on Country's Europeanization Process. Case Study: Georgia," in: *Political and Legal Perspectives of the EU Eastern Partnership Policy*, p. 197.

²⁹ See: R. Sadowski, op. cit.

The cost of rapprochement with the European Union may be too big for the political elites of EaP countries, and the benefits will not be able to compensate for the losses. The challenges and goals of shaping the EaP offer for every country are very diverse. They differ according to the degree of each state's political will to carry out reforms, which does not depend on whether a country has signed an EU association agreement. For instance, Armenia is currently undergoing reforms without an agreement, while in Moldova, a country associated with the EU, there is a regress in this matter.

There is a growing differentiation between EaP countries' ambitions in their relations with the EU. There are the three countries that have stated their wish to become members of the EU, and three others, which have chosen very different paths for a variety of reasons.³⁰ Two groups of countries can be distinguished according to their advancement in the implementation of the EaP program:

- (1) The frontrunners are Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, the three EaP members that have already achieved the three most important goals, having signed association agreements with the European Union, agreements on the free trade area and visa agreements. So the natural question is—what's next? What can and should the European Union offer these countries next?³¹
- (2) Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus, with their lukewarm view of the EU and their Russia-oriented foreign policy, have not achieved any EaP goals, and are involved in Russian integration projects in the post-Soviet space (Armenia and Belarus are members of Eurasian Economic Union). Azerbaijan is more interested in economic contacts with the EU and in the transportation of its energy resources to Europe. Given the difficult geopolitical situation, Armenia was forced to abandon economic integration with the EU in favor of joining the Russian reintegration project for the former Soviet Union. The authoritarian governing style of the Belarus leader Alexander Lukashenko, and his recent attempts to balance between Brussels and Moscow suggest that the EU needs to develop an individual approach to Minsk.

The EaP program has brought varied and ambivalent results for different countries. There are significant differences between the six partnership countries in their approach to and assessment of the program. For Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova, the Eastern Partnership is a stage on the road to EU membership, but without clear perspectives, while for the other three countries it is a chance to develop economic cooperation.

The Eastern Partnership initiative has created a framework and mechanisms of cooperation with the European Union. Still, countries within the EaP have not yet achieved significant progress in modernization or reform implementation, none of the six EaP countries achieved the anticipated progress in the four areas that are considered essential by the Union: democratization, free market transformation, political stability and regional security. The effectiveness of the support programs financed by the EU and their positive impact on the situation in partner countries is dubious. From the EU perspective, internal developments in partner countries raise a number of concerns. On the one hand, positive examples of changes do exist. On the other hand, the EU disapproves of the deteriorating democracy. The partner countries are also disappointed with EU policy. They are unable to bear the substantial costs of transformation and integration with the EU, especially since the ultimate objective of such integration has not been clearly defined.

EaP countries are trapped between the EU and Russia. It seems that only a clear perspective of EU membership would be able to persuade some of the EaP countries to clearly indicate the Western course of their foreign policy. Otherwise they will fall into the arms of Russia.

³⁰ See: *Political and Legal Perspectives of the EU Eastern Partnership Policy*, p. 278.

³¹ See: M. Falkowski, "EU-Georgia: Visas Abolished—What Next?" *Analyses*, 29 march, 2017, available at [<https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2017-03-29/eu-georgia-visas-abolished-what-next>], 18 November, 2019.