

## EASTERN PARTNERSHIP IN THE GEOPOLITICAL CONTEXT OF POST-SOVIET SPACE\*

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### ABSTRACT

**T**he Eastern Partnership (EP) program should be viewed as another attempt to reformat the post-Soviet space along anti-Russian and anti-Eurasian lines and a response to Moscow's integration activities. This is not the first attempt of its kind: the

West has already tried other geopolitical and geoeconomic tools. The final aim, however, has remained the same: Russia's domination and possible integration of post-Soviet regions irrespective of form, even economically adequate, should be prevented by all means.

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**KEYWORDS:** *Eastern Partnership, European Union, Eurasian integration, CIS, Customs Union, geopolitics.*

## *Introduction*

Throughout 2013, Europe was waiting for the third EU summit of Eastern Partnership. Its specter had been haunting Eastern Europe since January 2013, when it was announced that in November 2013 six post-Soviet republics—three in Europe (Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova) and three in Transcaucasia (Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan)—would announce what was expected to become their historic decisions.

The stormy events in Ukraine, which began a week before the Vilnius Summit, went on until the end of 2013, and resumed early in 2014, left the summit no chance, but the Eastern Partnership program survived.

It was formulated by the Polish Foreign Ministry in cooperation with Sweden in 2008 when the Kaczynski brothers, confirmed anti-Russian politicians who called the tune in Poland, declared that their country would become a link between Europe and the post-Soviet countries. The program “offers a framework for deepening and strengthening relations between the EU and its partner countries, for speeding up their political association, economic integration.” Russia, which interpreted this as a confrontational formula, objected by saying that Poland was trying to spread the EU influence into the CIS (read: Russian) responsibility zone; what followed looked very much like a tug-of-war.

In fact, the program was yet another attempt to reformat the post-Soviet space along anti-Russian and anti-Eurasian lines largely prompted by President Putin’s persistent and determined efforts to speed up integration that had become obvious in the mid-2000s.

The EP was not the first program of its type—it was predated by all sorts of geopolitical and geo-economic projects—TRACECA, GU(U)AM, the New Silk Road, Greater Central Asia, the Black Sea-Caspian Region, the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, the Nabucco gas pipeline, etc. All of them were devised, launched, and some of them implemented to reformat the post-Soviet space to prevent Russia’s domination and unification of at least some of the formerly Soviet regions in any form, even if economically acceptable.

Eastern Partnership looked more tempting than its predecessors: the European Union posed as the most successful integration project; as distinct from the United States and NATO, it never pushed forward its geopolitical ambitions. Potential partners were invited to engage in economic integration with Europe, all the more logical because many of the post-Soviet states identified themselves as European.

They joined the project in anticipation of an association agreement with the EU, which presupposed profound and comprehensive free trade. As distinct from other free trade agreements, the European Union invited its future partners to adopt a considerable part of so-called *acquis communautaires* (laws, rules, and norms of the European Union), which meant integration into the economic and legal space of the EU and weaker trade contacts with other partners, of which Russia was one.<sup>1</sup>

In the summer of 2013, the political struggle caused by the approaching summit scheduled for November was growing more and more vehement. Ukraine was confronted by a far-from-easy and

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<sup>1</sup> See: S. Charap, M. Troitskiy, “Russia, the West and the Integration Dilemma,” *Survival. Global Politics and Strategy*, No. 6, 2013, pp. 7-28.

far-from-pleasant choice between an association agreement with the EU and the Customs Union. The first presupposed a free trade area with the EU, which excluded Ukraine from the free trade area of the Customs Union and Common Economic Space (CES). Kiev had been shuffling the Eurasian and European cards for several months before Moscow demonstrated that it meant business (special mention should be made of the positions of two other capitals, Astana and Minsk).

Less than a week before the Vilnius Summit, Ukraine refused to sign the already initialed association agreement, leaving the European political community baffled. The explanations that followed were incoherent and fairly contradictory: at first Kiev complained about the unacceptable conditions of the proposed agreement and then shifted the blame onto Russia and its pressure.

Eyewitnesses say that the passions that flew high in Vilnius brought to mind the Bucharest NATO Summit of April 2008 when Ukraine and Georgia expected to be offered the NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP). To prevent this, President Putin went to Bucharest to persuade the Western leaders to avoid radical steps. Moscow managed to win some time. It is interesting to note that at that time some Ukrainian political scientists were very critical of the obviously pro-Western course of the Ukrainian regime.<sup>2</sup>

Four months later, the Russian-Georgian war buried (probably forever) Georgia's hopes of joining NATO. Two years later, Russia and Ukraine signed the so-called Kharkov agreements. It stands to reason that Moscow regards the free trade area being offered its neighbors as a threat to its own economic security (this is especially true of Ukraine, a close trade partner of the Russian Federation) no matter what the EU's real intentions are.

Even though the EP program has no military dimensions, Moscow and Brussels became locked in a struggle for geopolitical influence on the above-mentioned six Soviet-successor states.

In the latter half of 2013, when it became clear that Kiev was serious about its intention to sign the agreement and join the free trade area, their rivalry reached its highest point. Russia got down to business: it used time-tested (bans on certain Ukrainian products exported to Russia) and newly invented methods (comprehensive ban on Ukrainian export to the Russian Federation); nor did it forget about gas.

## Ukraine: Between the West and the East

Geographically, economically, and geopolitically, Ukraine is the No. 1 player in Eastern Europe. In the early half of the 1990s, it preferred a multivectoral foreign policy; in the latter half of the same decade, it steered toward integration into European and Euro-Atlantic structures.

Russia is insisting on closer and stronger ties with Ukraine for several reasons.

- First, its geostrategic consequence cannot be underestimated: allied with Ukraine, Russia becomes a Black Sea power with an outlet to the Balkans and much stronger positions in Central and Southeast Europe, the Black Sea Basin, and the Mediterranean.
- Second, Ukraine is home to millions of ethnic Russians whom Russia is not going to leave to the mercy of fate.
- Third, Russia moves its gas to Europe across Ukraine.

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<sup>2</sup> See: V.N. Smirnov, "Ukraina v svete sovremennykh vyzovov globalizatsii," *Novaia i noveyshaia istoria*, No. 4, 2008, pp. 26-40.

Ukraine comes second after Russia as the most important state among the former Soviet republics. American scholar Samuel Huntington pointed to Ukraine's special geopolitical location on the "civilizational fault line."<sup>3</sup>

Everyone agrees that Ukraine was and remains critically important for CIS geopolitics. Here is what Zbigniew Brzezinski, a well-known American expert in geopolitics, said in his famous *The Grand Chessboard*: "Without Ukraine, Russia ceases to be a Eurasian empire."<sup>4</sup> This explains the vehemence with which all the post-Soviet republics have responded to the political crises in Ukraine fraught with a changed development vector.

Early in the 21st century, Russia and the West were locked in bitter geopolitical rivalry for control over Ukraine; the presidential elections of 2004 ended with the drama of the first Maidan and the Orange Revolution. Victor Yushchenko, a pro-Western politician who wanted to see Ukraine in the orbit of NATO and the EU, became president. The Russian expert community, on the whole, agrees that the choice between Russia and the Western zone of influence has been gaining ever-increasing political weight in Kiev.<sup>5</sup>

The West, on the whole, wants to see Ukraine in its sphere of influence for several reasons: it is a tool to be used to contain Russia's geopolitical ambitions. The West expects that, after detaching Ukraine from Russia and including it in its orbit, it will prevent a neo-Russian empire in the post-Soviet space. Washington wants to use "post-Kuchma" Ukraine to neutralize Russia's political and military-political impact in the CIS.

The European Union wants to see Ukraine in its sphere of influence; Brussels keeps Ukraine at arm's length in full accordance with the strategy the West European countries imposed on the EU. This presupposes that Ukraine's desire to join the WTO should be encouraged; the visa regime should be simplified; and duty-free trade should be accepted. Nothing is said, however, about its future EU membership. Brussels wants a zone of economic and political stability based on common (European) values to be spread across the EU and its immediate neighbors.

Gas supplies are one of the major concerns of the European Union: it receives gas from Russia via Ukraine, which means that Brussels does not want a conflict with Russia over Ukraine—energy security comes first.

Since 2004-2005, the relations between Russia and Ukraine have been going from bad to worse. Ukraine is doing everything to prevent Russia from building its influence in the CIS. Yushchenko, as a radically pro-Western politician, clearly wanted to detach Ukraine from Russia to join NATO and the EU. Early in 2008, the Ukrainian leaders tried, in vain, to speed up the process with the help of the United States, Poland, and the Baltic countries.

The main Western integration structures (the EU and NATO in particular) saw the initial conditions indispensable for Ukraine's full-scale integration as their strategy course, while trying at the same time to contain Russia and keep it at a distance. In the final analysis, much was done to reorientate the people and elites toward Western axiological values, social norms, and integration. Amid the financial crisis, Ukraine hoped that the Western financial institutions would come to its rescue to help stabilize the national currency and economy.

We all know what happened after the Vilnius Summit; a week before the summit the Ukrainian opposition poured into Maidan (the square in the center of Kiev.—*Ed.*) to protest against what was

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<sup>3</sup> S. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, A Touchstone Book, New York, 1997, p. 37; *Na fone "oranzhevoi revoliutsii": Ukraina mezhdru Vostokom i Zapadom: vchera, segodnia, zavtra*, ed. by K.F. Zatulyn, The Institute of CIS Countries, Moscow, 2005, 240 pp.

<sup>4</sup> Zb. Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives*, Basic Books, New York, 1997, p. 46.

<sup>5</sup> See: N. Rabotiazhev, "Ukraina mezhdru Rossiei i Zapadom: opyt geopoliticheskogo analiza," *Mirovaia ekonomika i mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia*, No. 9, 2008, pp. 75-83.

presented to the nation as a rejection of “European choice.” A full-scale political crisis or, rather the 2004 Orange Revolution reincarnated, erupted as soon as Yanukovich returned from Vilnius. The struggle for power became obvious and vehement.

Had Ukraine signed the association agreement and joined the free trade area (which was part of the proposed arrangement), this might have become the dividing line in the history of the post-Soviet space, although no instant economic or constitutional changes would have followed. People in Ukraine would have discovered that life had not improved or that it had become much worse.

The association agreement gave Ukraine the opportunity to change its orbit (in full accordance with the zero sum game logic). Russia and the West have returned to it, which means that a different outcome of the summit would have been interpreted as Moscow’s crushing strategic defeat.

Russia had to act and it acted. Throughout 2013 Ukraine was being informed, from all quarters, the Kremlin included, that if it joined the Customs Union it would gain at least \$6 to \$12 billion: Russian gas would cost three times less; there would be no export fees on oil products, while its foodstuff exports would enjoy a preferential regime. On top of this, after switching to the common customs tariff, Ukraine could have counted on compensations.

Moscow had either to return Ukraine to its geopolitical orbit or radically revise its relations with Brussels. It could have joined the EU system and integrated Ukraine into it as an equal partner. It seems that on the way to Vilnius Yanukovich, at heart, expected the latter. In Vilnius he learned that Europe would never accept this scenario.

Kiev hoped to remain in two free trade areas, of the EU and the CIS, nothing new for the rest of the world, but not for the post-Soviet space. It seems that Ukraine tried to capitalize on its special status to set up a tripartite regulating mechanism, which potentially could have served as a platform of discussion of a free trade area from Lisbon to Vladivostok.

The events went in a different direction. Moscow increased its pressure on Kiev; it warned it that if and when Ukraine joined the EU free trade area Moscow would start revising the CIS free trade conditions for Kiev. Brussels, in turn, refused to talk to Moscow in the tripartite format.

Moscow was guided by the following considerations: if the tripartite talks were limited to discussions of the free trade area, the Russian leaders would prefer to stay away. If Moscow had the opportunity to formulate a wider agenda, this format would move the bilateral Russia-EU relations out of stagnation.

It could not be excluded that failure of the dialog idea and fiercer protectionism would force Ukraine to leave the CIS free trade area and would probably bury the CIS.

The process was launched some ten years ago by a series of color revolutions; association agreements with the EU tempted several CIS countries and forced Russia to insist on “either the CIS or the EU” with no other options.

At first, Yanukovich looked at the “defrosted” dialog with Brussels as a factor that consolidated his position in the no-nonsense haggling with Gazprom and Putin; later, Poland’s diplomatic game convinced him that he could place the stakes on an association agreement with the EU.

If Ukraine joined the European economic and political sphere, it would produce a great effect at a minimum cost for European taxpayers. The fairly capacious Ukrainian market might have helped the export-oriented European economy (German in particular) recover from the crisis. As an associated member, Kiev could not count on subsidies, a privilege limited to full EU members.

Yanukovich and the Ukrainian political elite needed association for psychological reasons; national interests were pushed aside and forgotten. The Ukrainians wanted to “become Europeans” in their own eyes, a status impossible within the Eurasian Customs Union of Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan. The presidential team and the Ukrainian political elite were nurturing illusions and succumbed to an obviously inadequate idealistic idea about the European Union and its intentions regarding Kiev.

It seems that the president and his advisors saw through the “rules of the game” formulated in Warsaw, Berlin, and Brussels at the eleventh hour; this left them no time for diplomatic niceties. To

escape from the trap, the president had to announce his decision a week before the summit and in an undiplomatic manner.

In Vilnius, the Ukrainian president tried to beat a retreat to soften the blow: he promised to sign the agreement in March 2014, but the negative scenario was already underway; the EU hinted that it was not ready to start tripartite talks.

The opposition called its supporters to Maidan; Victor Yanukovich not only failed to solve some of the problems in Vilnius, he swept them under the carpet and created new headaches.

The EurAsEC and the Customs Union were two important steps on the road toward closer economic integration into the post-Soviet space; without Ukraine this process becomes lightweight and shallow. Economic rivalry across the post-Soviet space might become exacerbated, while the positions of Ukraine and Russia in the rapidly unfolding geopolitical battle for the resources of Northern Eurasia will be weakened. From this it follows that the choice of trends and forms of integration of Ukraine with Russia and the EU has become critically important for the future of Europe and Northern Eurasia.<sup>6</sup>

We should bear in mind that in the near future domestic policy will not allow Ukraine to join the Customs Union.

There are three possible scenarios of future integration processes in Ukraine.

- First, it might speed up its EU and NATO membership at the cost of worsened relations with Russia.
- Second, it might remain devoted to its “bi-vectored” integration with the EU and Russia: it will be closely associated with the EU (and remain outside NATO) while remaining economically dependent on Russia.
- Third, the split elites and the split nation will not allow Ukraine to become fully integrated either into the EU or into the EurAsEC: it will remain a “geopolitical space” between the EU and the EurAsEC.

By the late 2000s a new player, China, had arrived in the region. Andrew Wilson has put its role in a nutshell: “China’s new role in Eastern Europe gives Ukraine more wriggle room, as does a weak and introspective EU, a distracted U.S. and a more mercantilist Russia.”<sup>7</sup>

Some think that “there have been certain signs of an emerging new political and ideological phenomenon, which could be called ‘East Ukrainian Europeanism.’ In contrast to Ukrainian ethnic nationalism, of which Western Ukraine is the stronghold, East Ukrainian Europeanism wants to create a political nation that unites all citizens irrespective of language, religion, or ethnic affiliation on the platform of sovereignty and with the strategic goal of Ukrainian admission to the EU in combination with exclusive relations with Russia.”<sup>8</sup>

## Belarus: Driven into an Impasse

In Vilnius, Belarus surprised no one: its relations with the EU and the West have a long and far from simple history.

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<sup>6</sup> See: V. Pantin, V. Lapkin, “Vnutri- i vneshnepoliticheskie faktory integratsii Ukrainy s Rossiei i ES,” *Mirovaia ekonomika i mezhdunarodnye otnoshenia*, No. 11, 2012, pp. 50-56.

<sup>7</sup> A. Wilson, “Between Adolescence and Adulthood. Ukraine at Twenty: What Have We Learnt?” *Russia in Global Affairs*, No. 1, 2012.

<sup>8</sup> D. Yefremenko, “Life after Vilnius. A New Geopolitical Configuration for Ukraine,” *Russia in Global Affairs*, No. 4, 2013.

An attentive observer of Belarusian foreign policy will conclude that its unilateral devotion to Russia is skin deep: from time to time Minsk, Moscow's closest ally, demonstrates that it can balance out its foreign policies.

Belarus is of critical importance for Russia's defenses, security of the CSTO members, efficient anti-missile and air defenses, and the military-political stability of the CIS countries in general. As the direct neighbor of NATO, it is the westernmost outpost of the CIS. Its military-industrial complex remains the most important component of the CSTO's military-technical might.<sup>9</sup> Its advantageous geographic location has made it a transportation and logistics hub of the EurAsEC and the Customs Union and the "gates" to the EU. The pipelines that cross its territory bring hydrocarbons (Russian and Central Asian) to the EU; stronger integration within the Customs Union and the CES makes the republic's positions even stronger.<sup>10</sup>

The economic and political closeness of Belarus and Russia has been institutionalized: no other state in the world belongs to an equally large number of alliances with Russia's participation: the Union State, EurAsEC, CIS, Customs Union, Common Economic Space, and, in future, Eurasian Union. In the last decade, the ideas of stronger integration (up to and accepting the Russian ruble as common currency or even forming one state) lost their former popularity, although they remain on the bilateral agenda.

The two countries have a similar set of features peculiar to them both and to no other post-Soviet state. On 1 January, 2012, Belarus joined the CES EurAsEC and thus assumed responsibility to reform its economy within the emerging common market of Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Russia. Its military strategic importance for Russia cannot be overestimated if we bear in mind the history of previous confrontation in Europe. Minsk is an active and consistent participant in military integration within the CSTO. Moscow and Minsk favor the coalition approach; in other words, this is a symbiosis of the armed forces of the two countries and an imitation of a single joined force. This cuts down military spending and optimizes the control and command system. The two countries have signed over 30 treaties in the military sphere.<sup>11</sup>

Since 2001, Russia has poured about \$50 billion into Belarus in the form of preferences for fuel and raw material supplies, which speaks of long-term strategy. To a great extent, subsidies are related to the idea of a union between Russia and Belarus.

In an effort to remain politically independent of Moscow and preserve his country's sovereignty, Alexander Lukashenko acts "on the sly"; this may compensate for possible losses if Russia revises the economic element of the two countries' bilateral relations. In this event, Minsk should be ready to face another wave of economic and energy pressure.

For a long time, the Belarusian leadership remained convinced that the European Union was not seeking a regime change, but would be satisfied with its evolution through harmonizing positions and that partnership with Brussels would not cost Belarus its sovereignty. This explains why Minsk regularly tried to find a way out of the impasse in which Minsk found itself because of the EU and Western strategy designed to minimize its foreign policy contacts. The Belarusian political establishment has no choice but to resist the pressure of Brussels, Warsaw, and Vilnius; it is watching Ukraine and Moldova (which are also the participants of the Eastern Partnership program) drift

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<sup>9</sup> See: S. Astakhova, "Voenno-tekhicheskoe sotrudnichestvo Rossii i Belorussii," *Rossia i novye gosudarstva Evrasii*, No. 3, 2009, pp. 61-69.

<sup>10</sup> See: S. Astakhova, "K uchastiiu Belorussii v Tamozhennom Soiuzе," *Rossia i novye gosudarstva Evrasii*, No. 1, 2010, pp. 64-71; idem, "Belorussia v poiskakh novykh ekonomicheskikh partnerov," *Rossia i novye gosudarstva Evrasii*, No. 2, 2010, pp. 73-79.

<sup>11</sup> See: E. Tsedilina, "Rossiysko-belorusskie otnosheniya i interesy bezopasnosti RF," *Rossia i novye gosudarstva Evrasii*, No. 3, 2009, pp. 18-35; S. Astakhova, "Voennoe sotrudnichestvo Belorussii i Rossii," *Rossia i novye gosudarstva Evrasii*, No. 3, 2013, pp. 50-57.

toward the EU while trying to arrive at a more acceptable form of international cooperation in the region.<sup>12</sup>

The main obstacles on the road to economic integration between Russia and Belarus are the different economic mechanisms, different models of market reforms, and the fact that these differences are too serious and the gaps too wide to be bridged any time soon. It seems that President Lukashenko will resist Moscow's efforts to "push" him into a real union state to the bitter end.

Close association with Russia sets Minsk apart from the other members of the EP program. The EU has introduced sanctions against Belarus to punish it for lack of democracy, even though on the eve of the Vilnius Summit the list was shortened and the term extended for another year. Throughout 2013, there were rumors that President Lukashenko might be invited; a miracle did not happen: Foreign Minister Vladimir Makey came to Vilnius to represent his country.

He carefully explained Minsk's official position, pointed out that in its present state the Eastern Partnership program stood no chance of being effectively implemented, and added that what had been done so far caused "mixed" feelings in his country. It is argued that the partners were pushed toward a "false choice" between the content and pace of modernization and the forms and modalities of cooperation and integration strategies. Minsk did not want new dividing lines in Europe.

In fact, the country is dissatisfied for several reasons.

- First, cooperation within the EP program was worsened by the far from good relations between Minsk and Brussels; this became especially obvious after the 2010 presidential election in Belarus. The EU returned to its methods of coercive diplomacy (limited contacts and sanctions against official persons, journalists, and private business). Seen from Minsk, this was an attempt to interfere in the country's internal affairs and demonstration of double standards.
- Second, Minsk was badly disappointed with the results: there was no promised macro-financial aid and support of infrastructural projects in the multilateral dimension. The European Commission did not respond to the projects devised by Belarus, Lithuania, and Ukraine; it insisted, instead, on its preliminary political conditions.
- Third, institutionally, Belarus did not become a full-fledged member of the Eastern Partnership program; it was and is discriminated against. It is kept away from the program's bilateral dimension, which means that the country is partly involved in the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP). The country is excluded from the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly because its parliament has not been recognized as legitimate. As distinct from other countries, its president is not invited to the EP summits.

This explains the skepticism that reigned in Belarus on the eve of the Vilnius Summit: The political community would have been mollified if the president had been invited to the summit and the country as a whole asked to engage in more pragmatic cooperation. It would have also been happy if the EU dropped its habit of lecturing on the human rights issues.

Štefan Füle, Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighborhood Policy, dampened the hopes by saying that the European Union would be ready not only to consolidate bilateral relations, but also to start talking about revising the program and extending financial support to promote modernization as soon as Minsk released its political prisoners and rehabilitated them.

In March 2012, he initiated the European Dialog on Modernization of Belarus, which envisaged exchange of views and opinions between the EU and Belarusian civil society and political opposition

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<sup>12</sup> See: *K Novoy Tsentralnoy Evrope. Preodolenie krizisa Tsentralnoy Evropy cherez stroitelstvo novogo makroregiona. Proekno-analiticheskiy doklad*, Project head Yu.Yu. Tsarik, Minsk, 2013, 23 pp.; M. Laumulin, "Beloruskaia politologia v poiskakh vykhoda iz geopoliticheskogo tupika," *Kazakhstan v globalnykh protsessakh*, No. 4, 2013, pp. 27-41.



on the needed reforms. It was expected that the sides would talk about political and judicial reforms, human contacts, economic policy, trade, and market relations.

It should be said that while moving toward Europe, Minsk will never sever its relations with Russia for the simple reason that it will never receive from the EU what it receives from Russia: multibillion subsidies in exchange for imitated integration and political declarations of eternal friendship. Against the background of the Kremlin's annual energy grant of nearly \$10 billion, the meager 600 million euros for six EP countries look like a mere pittance.

On the other hand, Minsk has never hesitated to use its relations with the EU as a trump card in its talks with Moscow and as a possible source of loans and investments. Today, the EU can do nothing to stimulate reforms in Belarus. In the absence of direct economic advantages, Minsk has every reason to dismiss the integration project as insignificant.

The Belarusian experts are very critical of the EP program and EU policy in general, which fails to stimulate changes in the EP partners. The program fell into the gap between the two main trends in EU policy: expansion and the so far vague foreign policy.

Brussels has failed to fulfill the conditions declared by the EP program, which strongly affected the entire atmosphere. In 2012, the EU revised its EP policy to introduce the "more for more" principle: more integration with the EU for more progress in reforms. The EU, however, remains politically inconsistent for certain geopolitical and economic reasons.

In other words, the European Union remains on the side of some countries even if they fail to fulfill their obligations, while others (Belarus being one of them), which Brussels finds less important in the context of its geopolitical and economic preferences, are left out in the cold. The fact that there are political prisoners in Belarus is used to introduce sanctions against officials and enterprises, although an identical situation in Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Russia does not limit contacts with their leaders.

There is the opinion in Minsk that the wide gap between the geopolitical rationality of European politicians and their sham democratic idealistic statements has undermined the authority of the EU as a global player (to say nothing about the EP program).

The Vilnius Summit could have allowed Minsk to restore political relations with Brussels, had the Belarusian leadership been inclined toward fine gestures, while Brussels demonstrated patience and offered attractive stimuli for cooperation. In real life, relations were driven into an impasse.

## **Armenia: Facing a Dilemma**

Armenia established friendly or even allied relations with Russia; at the same time, it was determined to rely as much as possible on the United States and Europe to partly compensate for its orientation toward Russia in the security sphere. Erevan has already received weapons and military equipment from Russia, money to develop its economy comes from the United States, foodstuffs and humanitarian aid are provided by the European Union (until March 1993 it reached Armenia via Turkey), and fuel for its fighting army is supplied from Iran.

Its multivectoral (albeit fairly limited) policy, "complementarism" in Armenian political parlance, is one of the country's basic foreign policy principles. For many years it gave Armenia the opportunity to adequately respond to threats and challenges in a fairly narrow geopolitical corridor. For some time it was closely connected with the balance of power between the regional and non-regional actors that developed in the 1990s: its military-political alliance with Russia and multidimensional economic processes did not arouse any opposition from the other external actors even though Erevan maintained contacts with the United States, the EU, etc.

Armenian experts insist that Armenian complementarism is very different from the multivectoral policies of other Eurasian countries. Consistently implemented from the first days of Armenian independence, it proved to be more successful in Armenia than elsewhere; the presence of Armenian diasporas in Russia, the U.S., and European countries, as well as influential Armenian communities in Iran and elsewhere in the Middle East also helped.<sup>13</sup>

The European Union would like to see the Southern Caucasus in its sphere of economic, cultural, and political domination; it is Armenia's important partner, although Brussels has not made much progress to date in institutionalization, which leaves much to be desired: the cooperation projects within the ENP and EP are not effective enough.

On the eve of the summit, the Armenian media discussed the possible effects of Erevan's lower representation (a minister instead of the president) in view of the planned visit of Russian President Putin. Armenia's response to suspended European integration was much less vehement than in Ukraine: small and scattered rallies demanded that President Sargsian sign the association agreement.

In September, Armenia announced that it wanted to join the Customs Union and be involved in building the Eurasian Union. Russia and Kazakhstan immediately agreed, while Minsk was in two minds: Armenia looked like a rival of Belarus as far as Russia's grants and subsidies were concerned.

Under the pressure of what can be called a blockade and the disappointment of the failed (fairly high) expectations of strategic partnership with Moscow, Armenia could have acted in a way that Russia could have interpreted as a geopolitical U-turn away from Moscow. Indeed, most of the industrial enterprises that Russia received as payment for Armenia's debts are still idling; the repeated requests for \$2 billion to revive the Armenian economy have fallen on deaf ears. A grant intended to minimize the losses caused by the higher gas prices has not arrived. There is another, even more important, factor: Russia sells its weapons to Azerbaijan.

On the other hand, Russia is involved in building the Armenian stretch of the Iran-Armenia gas pipeline; it pays for rehabilitation of the Sevan-Hrazdan Cascade Hydropower System; in 2008, the Armenian railway was transferred to Russian business under a concession treaty.

It should be said in all justice that, at first, President Sargsian intended to initial the agreement at the Vilnius Summit. According to what he said (he probably planned to play the trump card as Ukraine had done), his decision to join the Customs Union did not mean the end of the dialog with Europe. During his previous presidential term, Sargsian worked hard to convince the voters that the country's Russia-ensured security combined with association and wider cooperation with "democratic Europe" would create no problems at all.

Brussels, however, thought differently: it hinted that after deciding to join the Customs Union Erevan had lost its opportunity to initial the association and free trade area agreement. Tactically, Armenia will profit from joining the Customs Union: it will receive cheaper gas, free access to the markets of Russia, Kazakhstan, and Belarus, and stronger regional security. Russia will gain no economic advantages, but will satisfy its political interests.

Erevan was confronted with a dilemma: it could not retreat from its previous decision to initial the agreement without marring its international image as a reliable state. If it turned out that it was Moscow that had forced Armenia to act against its national interests, the Armenian public would change its opinion about Russia.

The Armenian elite regards its alliance with Moscow as temporary and enforced by the far from friendly geopolitical environment, having Turkey as a neighbor, and the country's de facto state of war with Azerbaijan. The Armenian top crust does not associate its future with either Russia or the

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<sup>13</sup> See: S. Minasian, "Vneshniaia politika postsovetsoy Armenii: 20 let odnovremenno na neskol'kikh stuliakh," *Mirovaia ekonomika i mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia*, No. 1, 2013, pp. 85-92; R. Melikian, "The Eurasian Union, European Union and Armenian Complementarism," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 2, 2013, pp. 46-55.

CIS integration structures. The new generation associates the future of their country with the EU and NATO. Armenia could remain Russia's friend, but not ally, along the way, but Russia, in turn, should not interfere with Armenia's advance toward Europe.

*From the very beginning Europe warned Armenia that it would not be able to join two formats and that, therefore, it should either accept Moscow's patronage or the economic dividends of the European Union.*

On the other hand, the top crust was in turmoil: at the latest presidential election, Raffi Hovannisian, the pro-Western opposition leader, reaped 37%, a highly impressive result.

In Russia, little is said about Armenia and the related problems; yet as soon as it became clear that Armenia intended to initial the association agreement, President Putin hinted that no economic dividends could compete with Russia-ensured security. He was heard and understood; it was with heavy heart that the Armenian president set out for Brussels.

## The Georgian Dream

In November 2003, the Rose Revolution brought to power new political leaders led by Mikhail Saakashvili; they were even more open than their predecessors about nationalism and the pro-Western political vector and more convinced that Georgia's future lay outside post-Soviet space and was associated with the EU and NATO.

Its leaders and ideologists were convinced that Georgia should detach itself from the old mentality that is dying hard in all post-Soviet republics to become a quintessence of Western liberal "soft power" or, rather, a model of its successful implementation in a given country to be reproduced across the former Soviet space. The United States and West European countries, which wanted to create transportation corridors between the Caspian/Central Asia and Europe bypassing Russia, devised the TRACECA project, in which Georgian was expected to play the key role.<sup>14</sup>

On 1 October, 2012, the parliamentary elections in Georgia changed a lot in the country's foreign and domestic policies. Brought to power by the parliamentary elections, Bidzina Ivanishvili was determined to normalize relations with Russia.

Shortly before the Vilnius Summit, Mikhail Saakashvili, a vehemently pro-Western politician, left the political stage: an impressive political U-turn. Very much as expected, in Vilnius, Georgia, represented by incumbent Giorgi Margvelashvili, initialed the association agreement.

Throughout the last year of his presidency (when he lost part of his previous powers), Saakashvili held forth about the dangers of returning to the sphere of Russia's influence.

Early in 2013, Stratfor, an American private analytical company, published a forecast for the year 2013, in which it warned the Georgians about the negative effects of a foreign policy volte face; this was undisguised pressure pure and simple.

The authors were obviously convinced that the coming to power of very rich Ivanishvili and his Georgian Dream Party would increase Russia's influence in the republic, mainly because the anti-Russian camp was weakened by the loss of Saakashvili, its leader. The report said that in 2013 Georgia might find itself in a quandary since other regional players (Azerbaijan) might be dissatisfied with the new political reality. There was a leak: it was alleged that head of the First Department of the CIS Countries of the Russian Foreign Ministry had made a statement to the effect that the Georgian authorities had started negotiations on resuming their CIS membership. Tbilisi was indignant.

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<sup>14</sup> See: Th. de Waal, *Georgia's Choices. Charting a Future in Uncertain Times*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2011; D. Fean, *Making Good Use of the EU in Georgia: The "Eastern Partnership" and Conflict Policy*, September 2009, IFRI, 22 pp.

Prominent Russian political scientist and Editor of *Russia in Global Affair* Fyodor Lukyanov asked in his article, which appeared in *Rossiskaia gazeta* on 6 February, 2013, titled “Do we Need Georgia?”: “Do we need to return the relations with Georgia to an acceptable level?” and answered: “In fact, NATO is no longer that important; there are no prospects of a closer union in the same way as there are no interests that could have justified extraordinary efforts. This is all true from the mercantilist point of view. On the other hand, no matter what, Georgia remains very close to Russia culturally and historically. In the contemporary world, where community has become skin-deep and where alienation on fundamental issues is coming to the fore, it is unwise to squander these ‘assets,’ to say the least.”

To escape enslavement by Turkish and Azeri capital, Georgia needs the Russian market and Russian investments. Russia needs a stable, predictable and, at the very least, non-hostile neighbor on its North Caucasian border and free transit of goods to Armenia. This means that restored CIS membership, probably followed by membership in the Customs Union, etc. remains on Russia’s political agenda.

The Western capitals looked unconcerned about Georgia’s new Russian course, which means that the process was either initiated or, at least, approved by the West.

In the spring of 2013, Georgia and the United States invigorated their military contacts. Georgia could have more effectively used its transit and transportation functions and intensified regional and inter-regional cooperation if it decided to extend the functioning and planned transportation and energy corridors to Russian territory and to switch them to Armenia. The Georgian leaders intend to demonstrate that the anti-Russian transport and communication projects in the Caucasus have not lost their importance.

We need to remember that any attempts by Georgia to move closer to Russia are stymied, something the EU and the United States did not allow Saakashvili to forget. Today, Ivanishvili and Margvelashvili are in a similar position.<sup>15</sup>

## Unique Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan, which belongs to several civilizational-historical and geopolitical entities, stands apart from all the other post-Soviet states. On the one hand, it is part of the Greater Caucasus; on the other, it is closely tied to Iran by their common history: for several centuries it was part of the Persian civilization. In view of the obvious demographic expansion of Iranian Azerbaijan, this factor has not lost its pertinence. Ethnically and linguistically (since 1991 also politically), Azerbaijan is closely connected with Turkey, as well as the Turkic Central Asian republics. It figures prominently in Caspian geopolitics and, finally, despite two decades of active de-Sovietization and de-Russification, Azerbaijan is still part of the post-Soviet space with all of its common and individual features.<sup>16</sup>

Its Russian community of 160-170 thousand is the largest in the Southern Caucasus, while Russia is the permanent or temporary home of up to 1 million (or even 2 million according to unofficial count) Azeris. Some of them have built multi-million fortunes.

The republic has preserved the largest area in the Southern Caucasus of the Russian language and culture. On the other hand, Baku and Moscow, which are developing economic and cultural ties, disagree on many political and military issues.

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<sup>15</sup> See: A. Nursha, “Itogi parlamentskikh vyborov v Gruzii i evolutsia vneshnepoliticheskikh ustanovok gruzinskogo rukovodstva,” *Kazakhstan v globalnykh protsessakh*, No. 1, 2013, pp. 39-57; L. Di Pippo, *Between Hesitation and Commitment: The EU and Georgia after the 2008 War*, A Joint Transatlantic Research and Policy Center, Johns Hopkins University-SAIS, Washington, D.C., 2010, 59 pp.

<sup>16</sup> See: S.E. Cornell, *Azerbaijan since Independence*, M.E. Sharpe, New York, 2011, 483 pp.

As distinct from Armenia, Azerbaijan, an oil-rich country, is free to pursue its own foreign policy without looking back at Russia, the West, and Iran. As distinct from the Central Asian countries, Baku does not use its relations with the West and China to compensate for its excessive dependence on Moscow (and vice versa). Not infrequently, Azerbaijan tries to capitalize on the disagreements among the power centers (without siding with any of them) in its interests and draw Turkey into the game. It relies on petrodollars and its role in the energy and communication projects to play these foreign policy games.

President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev attended the Vilnius Summit; he pushed aside the warnings coming from the expert community that the republic would gain nothing from its association with the EU; shortly before the summit, Brussels had been biting critical about the presidential election in Azerbaijan.

The Azeri delegation arrived in Vilnius firmly convinced that no documents with the EU should be signed and no promises should be given to the Customs Union. Baku concentrates on cooperation in the energy sphere to diversify energy supplies to Europe to lower its dependence on Gazprom of Russia. The Azeri leaders have correctly decided that since Europe badly needs the Transadriatic gas pipeline, it should not be worried about the elections in Azerbaijan. In the next 25 years, Azerbaijan will supply Europe with 10 billion cr m every year under the Shah Deniz-2 project.

On the eve of the summit, Azerbaijan officially disproved all allegations that it was declining associate membership under Russia's pressure. Baku announced that it needed and would insist on a document better adjusted to the level of its cooperation with the European Union; it invited Brussels to sign an agreement on partnership that presupposed mutual respect and equality of the sides. Baku pointed out that the conditions under which the associated country may aspire to become a member were unacceptable.

The relations between Azerbaijan and the EU had been going from bad to worse since early 2013. In February, Baku accused Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and Štefan Füle, Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighborhood Policy, of interfering in Azerbaijan's domestic affairs: they called on the Azeri authorities to ensure prompt, fair, transparent, and independent investigation of the arrests of deputy head of the Musavat Party and the leader of the Republican Alternative Party.

In March, Baku invited the OSCE to readjust its mandate in Azerbaijan to limit its involvement to the role of project coordinator; interpreted as an effort to interfere in the cooperation between the OSCE and the local NGOs, this did nothing for relations between this European structure and Baku.

A big pipeline game, however, is going on. In April 2013, the Nabucco Consortium offered the Shah Deniz Consortium 50% of shares in the Nabucco-West pipeline, which seriously aggravated Baku's relations with Moscow. Azerbaijan refused to extend the lease of the Gabala Radar Station; Moscow responded by cancelling the agreement on moving Azeri oil via the Novorossiisk oil pipeline.

It is interesting to note that Baku is a past master in manipulating EU energy interests. SOCAR of Azerbaijan bought Greek gas transportation company DESFA in violation of the notorious third energy package, under which one and the same company should not be engaged in production and transportation. Baku buried the much promoted Nabucco together with the European eastern energy strategy geared toward diversification of gas supplies to the regions that so far depend on Russian gas.

In the last few years, Baku has poured a lot of money and effort into setting up its lobbies in the European Union; this means that in the future it might tie together energy supplies and the Karabakh issue.

Relations with Russia are not smooth either; Azerbaijan regularly attends the CIS summits mainly to maintain contacts with the presidents of the other post-Soviet countries.

Baku deliberately stays away from the Customs Union and the CSTO (within which Russia is allied with Armenia, a sworn enemy of Azerbaijan). With huge oil and gas reserves, Baku can afford

to be independent of Moscow on the foreign policy scene. In 2010-2012, Moscow and Baku signed several contracts on arms deliveries; the first, worth \$4 billion, began being implemented in 2013.

The Gabala Radar Station was closed in 2013—Russia's only military facility (or, rather, military base) in Azerbaijan. It was functioning as the Daryal information-analytical center to avoid the constitutional ban on foreign military facilities in Azeri territory.

Today, Azerbaijan is no longer fascinated by tens or even hundreds of millions of dollars, recently seen as unbelievably huge sums. This means that the radar station was closed out of principle: Baku could not tolerate the most favored nation regime Russia had extended to Armenia in military cooperation. Moscow, however, no longer needed the station, but responded in kind.

In May 2013, it discontinued the oil transit contract. Baku is fully aware that so-called post-Soviet integration (in any form) was not initiated by Kazakhstan, Belarus, or any other post-Soviet country. The process was initiated by the leaders of Russia who seek to ensure Russia's internal interests rather than to pursue foreign policy aims.

In August 2013, President Putin came to Baku on a working visit; we do not know what the two presidents talked about, but we can guess that they discussed Iran's military activity in the Caspian, the Middle Eastern developments, and the Nagorno-Karabakh settlement. In October, Moscow officially supported Ilham Aliyev at the presidential election. The last few months before the election transformed Azerbaijan into a hub of international activity: Western politicians and heads of CIS states replaced each other in Baku with kaleidoscopic speed.

On 9 October, 2013, Aliyev was elected president for the third term running; as could be expected, the OSCE ODIHR severely criticized the election campaign; the United States and the U.K. added their share of the same. The ODIHR, however, went too far: its extremely biased report caused disagreements between it and the OSCE, European Parliament, and PACE observers.

Azerbaijan has demonstrated a lot of skill and inventiveness when adjusting its strategy to the phobias of the United States and the European Union related to Russia's "oil and gas weapon" and the ambitions of the "energy empire." It is seeking ways to balance out Moscow and the Armenian lobby in the United States and Europe and to draw certain circles in the West to its side in order to finally resolve the Karabakh conflict in its favor.

At the same time, EU membership is not among Baku's priorities. On the eve of the Vilnius Summit, it suspended its participation in the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly, a component part of EP, to register its protest against Point 32 of the resolution of 23 October, 2013 of the European Parliament on the European Neighborhood Policy, which said in part that "the latest presidential election, held on 9 October, 2013" in Azerbaijan "once again failed to meet OSCE standards."

To sum up, the relations between Russia and Azerbaijan are highly contradictory even if both sides want to maintain them at a constructive level. Moscow, however, is not ready to abandon Armenia and side with Baku on the Nagorno-Karabakh issue. Today, Russia and the West prefer the status quo, which means that Moscow will try to preserve the precarious balance between Erevan and Baku.

Cooperation between Russia and Azerbaijan is anything but consistent; relations between the two countries might become better or much worse depending on what Baku wants.

Russia consistently supports the people in power in Azerbaijan, while Azerbaijan can hardly hail Russia's stand on Nagorno-Karabakh.

Strategic oil and gas pipelines across Georgia and Turkey could liberate Azerbaijan from dependence on Russia. Its advantageous geographic location and rich natural and financial resources make Azerbaijan important for Turkey and Russia.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> See: G.B. Vagif, "Azerbaidzhan v orbite mirovoy diplomatii," *Rossia i musulmanskii mir*, No. 9, 2011, pp. 74-81; M. Kolesnichenko, "Azerbaidzhan v sisteme mezhdunarodnykh otnosheniy," *Rossia i musulmanskii mir*, No. 3, 2012, pp. 81-89; E. Mekhdiyev, "Geostrategicheskie interesy NATO v Azerbaidzhane," *Rossia i musulmanskii mir*, No. 10, 2009, pp. 77-89;

## Moldova on the Road to Europe

Today, Moldova's foreign policy is a mixture of Russian, European, and Rumanian factors. Like Georgia, Moldova has a headache of its own—an unrecognized territory called Transnistria. From time to time, Washington turns its attention to Moldova mainly because it borders on Ukraine, which seems to be unsure of its geopolitical orientation.

The latest sociological polls in Moldova reveal that the public has shifted its interest from European integration to the Russia-initiated Eurasian Union. During his visit to Brussels in November 2010, Prime Minister of the Republic of Moldova Vlad Filat, leader of the Alliance for European Integration, officially confirmed for the first time that his republic wanted to join the EU. Later, in his address at the EU-Moldova Forum held in March 2011, he outlined the measures that would make Moldova a European country: it should acquire an efficient economy, build a law-governed state, reform its defense and security structures, and uproot corruption. The frantic efforts at Rumanization failed to uproot the idea that the country should join Europe as an independent and united state.<sup>18</sup>

The Social-Democratic Party of Moldova and the Party of the Communists of the Republic of Moldova insist on the country's membership in the Customs Union. They are counting on lower prices for Russian gas, direct access to the capacious Russian market, investments, a better status for Moldovan labor migrants in Russia, and settlement of the Transnistria question.

Today, Moldovan trade with the EU is asymmetric: within the agreed quota Moldovan products are not taxed in the EU, while duties are imposed on European products in Moldova. This, however, does not help products from Moldova gain popularity in the European Union because of their inferior quality. Local observers say that the agreements which the Moldovan leaders signed in Vilnius (association, the free trade area agreement, and liberalized visa regime) can be described as important steps. In the next few decades, however, Moldova will remain outside the EU.

Within the East European context, economic cooperation between Russia and Moldova is of great importance. In 2013, Moldova joined the CIS free trade area under a corresponding agreement; the republic is part (together with practically all the Balkan states—Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro, and Macedonia) of the East European free trade area. Some experts think that Moldova can become a mutually advantageous trade corridor between the CIS and Eastern Europe.

According to Dirk Schuebel, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to Moldova, Brussels would not object to Moldova's membership in the Customs Union, but would abolish the preferential trade regime.<sup>19</sup>

Seen from Brussels, Moldova looks like the next EU member; while Ukraine is lobbied by Poland, Moldova has Rumania on its side. There are suspicions that Bucharest is determined to return its lost territory. Some countries (Moldova in particular) do not hail the prospect, so Rumania started talking about reunification within the European Union. Pro-Russian experts are convinced that Rumania is in no hurry to settle the border issues precisely because of the planned Anschluss.

The republic's new leaders, who came to power four years ago, made Moldova the best possible partner for the EU within the EP program; Prime Minister Iurie Leancă confirmed the republic's course toward European integration; he added that Kiev's sudden volte face might prove useful to

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R. Musabekov, "Where Fields of Attraction Overlap. Azerbaijan between Turkey and Russia," *Russia in Global Affairs*, No. 3, 2011; E.E. Nuriev, "Rossiisko-azerbaidzhanskie otnosheniia v sovremennykh politicheskikh realiiakh," *Problemy natsionalnoy strategii*, No. 1, 2011, pp. 95-119; P. Hanna, "Azerbaidzhan: probka v Kaspiyskoy butylke," *Rossia i musulmanskii mir*, No. 7, 2011, pp. 71-78; S. Cherniavsky, "Rossia i Azerbaijan v postsovetskiy period," *Rossia i musulmanskii mir*, No. 11, 2011, pp. 47-57.

<sup>18</sup> See: Yu.V. Belikova, A.L. Bovdunov, "Moldavia-Rumania: perspektivy sblizhenia," *Problemy natsionalnoy strategii*, No. 2, 2011, pp. 70-86.

<sup>19</sup> See: S. Astakhova, "Moldavia v ozhidanii peremen," *Rossia i novye gosudarstva Evrazii*, No. 1, 2012, pp. 89-94.

Chisinau: Brussels might have even better and clearer offers for Moldova: a visa free regime might be exchanged for an initialed association agreement.

In May 2013, European emissaries in Moldova finally set up the Pro-European Coalition to neutralize the communists who were trying to pull the country into the Customs Union, set up a more or less stable parliamentary majority, and put together a pro-EU cabinet. This was when Brussels arrived at the unprecedented decision to offer the republic associated membership.

The relations between the European Union and Moldova were far from easy: early in 2013, the Moldovan leftist powers were pushing the country toward a referendum on Customs Union membership; certain problems will loom on the horizon in the near future. Pro-Russian Transnistria and the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia create certain problems: the Gagauzes insist on guarantees that Moldova will not be unified with Rumania within the European Union. In view of the republic's extreme poverty, even Russia's very limited financial support to the recalcitrant regions suffices.

On the eve of the Vilnius Summit, Chisinau was a stage of huge rallies of those who wanted to see the country in the Customs Union. Every year Moldovan guest workers in Russia transfer over \$2 billion to the republic; this sum is practically equal to Moldova's annual budget and is more than what Moldovan guest workers in the EU can manage. People want to be sure that the chosen integration course will make their lives better; the country's foreign policy course comes second.

It should be said that on the whole and at all times the people in Moldova remain leftist-minded: the Alliance for European Integration should thank the EU and the United States for its three years in power. They funded the pro-European part of the Moldovan elite and lavished all kinds of grants and loans on the republic. As the recognized leader of the Eastern Partnership program, Chisinau went to Vilnius fairly sure of the results.

Experts have already warned that even though Moldovan wines are exported to the EU countries under a special quota, associated membership (to be introduced within the next twelve months, according to EU politicians) will do nothing for wine exports: Europe produces good and high quality wines in its own territory. This means that Moldovan wine-growing and agriculture will suffer or even die.

Here is another telltale fact: every year 700-800 Moldovan families apply to the Russian Migration Service in Chisinau for an exit permit to Russia. A free trade agreement with the EU will open the gates for big business from Europe, which will bury local small businesses—shops, cafes, and even apiaries. Their owners across the country are trying to get rid of them before it is too late.

Moldova pays more for Russian gas than the other CIS countries (\$400 per 1 000 cu m on average). After it joins the Customs Union, the price will drop by half, which means cheaper gas and heating for the people. Even if the price of gas climbs up over time, it will still be lower than what Europe pays.

Moldova could become a window for investors wishing to work in the Customs Union markets; its membership will guarantee it tens of thousands of jobs in the first few years, which would begin the country's revival.<sup>20</sup>

The Moldovan expert community is convinced that Moscow wants to draw their country into the Eurasian Union using Transnistria by way of blackmail. It will capitalize on the sentiments of the communist electorate of Moldova and on the referendum initiated by the Social Democrats about unification with the Eurasian Union to make Transnistria more attractive. Moldova will be invited to form a federative state with Transnistria. This is a new model of spreading Russia's influence in the region, which perfectly fits Vladimir Putin's integration plans in the CIS. Recent and active Rumanization has split the Moldovan society into two camps.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> See: L. Fokina, "Moldova na pereputye mezhdru ES i TS," *Rossia i novye gosudarstva Evrazii*, No. 2, 2013, pp. 43-52.

<sup>21</sup> See: S. Astakhova, "Moldavia posle prezidentskikh vyborov: problema Pridnestrovia I otnoshenia s RF," *Rossia i novye gosudarstva Evrazii*, No. 2, 2012, pp. 43-54.



In August 2012, a Coordination Center for Eurasian Integration was opened in Chisinau to ensure a systemic approach to Eurasian integration and extend financial support to the republic's most promising economic branches.<sup>22</sup>

Meanwhile, the political crisis in Moldova has been worsening; political life is in chaos, even though the country continues moving toward integration with the EU. After signing the agreement in Vilnius, the country moved closer to its European destiny; observers note that Russia, albeit indirectly, is responsible for this success: Brussels demonstrates leniency toward countries that persist in European integration despite Moscow's pressure.

Secretary Kerry came to Moldova a week after the Vilnius Summit; Chisinau interpreted this as a sign of support of the country's European dream, especially obvious against the Ukrainian background.

As soon as Russia pulls its peacekeepers out of Transnistria, the Rumanian and Moldovan nationalists will abandon all pretence and start using force. Rumania and Moldova will accelerate the unification process, which will raise a wave of Rumanian nationalism and give rise to ethnic and territorial conflicts in East European and other countries (old and new NATO members). Moldova, Rumania, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Turkey (there are their ethnic minorities in Moldova and Rumania) will inevitably be drawn into the conflicts; if exacerbated the Transnistrian conflict will suck Russia and Ukraine into the turmoil as well.

Twenty years of independence have proven to be too short a period for Moldova to identify its priorities and development vectors because of the policies pursued by all the Moldovan presidents, M. Snegur, P. Luchinsky, and V. Voronin, the Alliance for European Integration, and Nicolae Timofti, the present president of Moldova. After twenty years of independence, the country has found itself in an impasse because the choice of development strategy was highly politicized.

## Conclusion

The Vilnius Summit demonstrated that European strategy in the post-Soviet space is short-sighted: two countries out of six remained within the EP program, Belarus moved away long ago; Azerbaijan prefers to keep at a certain distance; and Armenia prefers Moscow. After many years of persistent efforts, the EU is left with Georgia and Moldova, two countries burdened with numerous problems. As for Ukraine, it is beginning to drift again toward Russia and the Eurasian integration structures.

It is too early to say that Mr. Brzezinski's nightmarish prophesy—"without Ukraine (and Belarus.—*M.L.*), Russia ceases to be a Eurasian empire" and will never restore its geopolitical status—is coming to pass.

The future of the Eurasian Union is dim<sup>23</sup>; its opponents are numerous; they should not be sought for in the West or among its alternative structures, but among the corrupt bureaucrats of the post-Soviet counties.

The regional elites are growing rich on transborder deals and on grants from the center; this is true of Russia, as well as of Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine.

The post-Soviet elites, those which are not drawn into integration and those which participate in it and have remained in power since 1991, will never part with their sovereignty. Kazakhstan and

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<sup>22</sup> See: L. Fokina, op. cit.

<sup>23</sup> See: T. Bordachev, E. Ostrovskaya, A. Skriba, "The Choice and Challenge of Eurasian Integration. How to Make It Equally Beneficial and Effective," *Russia in Global Affairs*, No. 4, 2013; M. Simon, "Revnost i somnienia. Obraz evraziyskoy integratsii v evropeyskom mediyonom prostranstve," *Rossia v globalnoy politike*, Vol. 11, No. 5, 2013.

Belarus broadly hinted at this at the Minsk Summit in October 2013 and at the meeting of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Union in Moscow in December 2013.

This means that Europe and the West will succeed, more or less, to split Eurasia, since many (if not all) post-Soviet countries need to counterbalance Russia for tactical or strategic reasons.

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