

THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP AND ESTONIA: Policy Recommendations

IMPORTANCE FOR ESTONIA

The European Union's Eastern Partnership (EaP) establishes a new political instrument for the promotion of democracy and economic reforms in the EU's eastern neighbourhood. Since the war in Georgia in August 2008 and the gas crisis in the winter of 2008/2009, it has become clear that the developments in Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus and the South Caucasus have a direct impact on the security of the EU and Estonia, as well. It is, therefore, in the interests of Estonia to provide maximum support for our eastern partners in their reform efforts and convergence with the EU.

The Eastern Partnership target countries are Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus. The EaP was launched following a proposal made by Sweden and Poland in 2008 to strengthen the eastern dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy. The joint declaration on the EaP was signed in Prague on May 7, 2009. The values that unite the target countries and the EU include the rule of law, the respect for human rights, the promotion of democracy and deeper engagement of civil society. The EaP is divided into four multilateral platforms:

- Democracy, Good Governance and Stability;
- Economy;
- Energy Security;
- Contacts between People.

What is the importance of the EaP? In recent years, Russia has attempted to increase its sphere of influence over neighbouring countries. Moscow wants to control the domestic situation, foreign policy and the economy of former Soviet republics at any cost. By emphasising European values, the EaP counterbalances Russia's influence in the region. The EaP offers the EU opportunities for positive engagement of the region.

Ukraine is a key country for the EaP because of its size and geopolitical position. Therefore, assisting Ukraine should be important for Estonia. Estonia should also attach great importance to the South Caucasus, because the falling of the Southern Caucasus energy corridor under Russian control could increase disagreements over topics linked with Russia within the EU and consequently impair the implementation of the European Security and Defence Policy. Estonia is interested in a European Security and Defence Policy. The adoption of important decisions on Russia-EU relations within bilateral frameworks is not in Estonia's best interests.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The EaP should become an extension of the European Neighbourhood Policy. The EaP's aim is to achieve more than the European Neighbourhood Policy. In the longer term, the EaP should become the main support mechanism, facilitating convergence between the target countries and the EU.

During the next few months, a practical action plan for the EaP should be prepared under the leadership of the European Commission, so as not to reverse or derail, but accelerate the whole Eastern Partnership process after the Swedish Presidency of the EU. Responsibilities for the EaP within the European Commission should be unambiguous and transparent. The EaP will have a limited scope and will remain merely rhetorical, if it is not unequivocally clear who is responsible for it and what criteria will be used to measure the success of the target countries' reform efforts. The coordinator of the EaP should, among other things, liaise with other international organisations that already operate in the region (such as UN, NATO, IMF, OSCE) and coordinate the EU's plans with them.

Estonia should also appoint a concrete unit responsible for the EaP within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, if it has not been done yet. The EaP coordinator in Estonia should initiate new ideas and develop best applications of the EaP for Estonia. The Estonian coordinator should

encourage all relevant local agencies and institutions to define in the near future their specific contributions to the different thematic platforms of the EaP.

At the EU level, clear motivators should be provided for the partner countries to fulfil the European integration criteria. Partner countries would be better motivated to implement the reforms necessary for the fulfilment of the EU criteria, if the positive consequences of the changes were defined in a clear and simple manner. This would probably require the drafting of a personal 'road map' for every country, setting out the aims of both parties (the EU and a partner country), the means/methods/instruments for the achievement of the aims, the measurement criteria for success and failure and, finally, the positive changes that will take effect after the fulfilment of the criteria (such as concessions, allowances and investments by the EU).

In order to facilitate the visa dialogue, the Schengen visa charge should be waived fully or partially (for students, journalists and business people) as of January 1, 2010.

I DEMOCRACY, GOOD GOVERNANCE AND STABILITY

Above all, the EU should prioritise the promotion of a progressive political culture in **Ukraine** and define its requirements and actions concerning the Ukrainian political reforms. Within the framework of this thematic platform, the European Commission should underline the significance of formulating and implementing a strategic development plan for regional policy by the Ukrainian central government. The regional policy plan, prepared by the Ukrainian government, should not focus exclusively on economic development, but has to provide a broader perspective and promote the concept of a nation-state, which would be in the interests of all social groups, regardless of their ethnic and religious backgrounds. It should be pointed out to the Ukrainian government by the EU that it might be useful if Kyiv prepared a specific development plan for the future of Crimea so that to ensure peace and stable future for the whole country. Proposing constructive solutions to local problems in Crimea would increase the reliability of the Ukrainian state and government for the Crimean population. Stability of Crimea is significant, because the status of Crimea has a crucial role to play in the security of the Black Sea region and the whole Europe.

In a way towards improving the security situation in Crimea, an EU representation should be established in Simferopol. The representation would enhance EU's visibility of the in the region. It would facilitate the EU's active involvement at the local level, the provision of assistance to Crimea and the strengthening of a European identity among the Crimean population. The EU representation in Crimea could, *inter alia*, provide assistance and guidance on the following areas:

- diversifying the region's economy, especially in Sevastopol;
- supporting tourism;
- improving local infrastructure (network of city streets – street lighting and pavement; roads, railways, cargo ports);
- modernising the drinking water and waste water treatment systems in cities, towns and villages;
- facilitating dialogue between different communities (e.g. the Crimean Tatars, Russians and Ukrainians);
- promoting European culture (films, theatre, music).

The stability of the **Southern Caucasus** is closely linked with providing solutions to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Finding a positive solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict would provide considerable opportunities for economy and energy security in the whole Southern Caucasus region. In order to stimulate political stability and economic development, the EU should encourage the introduction/launching of a regional trilateral (Georgia-Azerbaijan-Armenia) political and economic cooperation format, for example, a Southern Caucasus Parliamentary Assembly or a Southern Caucasus Chamber for Economic Cooperation and Commerce.

For **Georgia**, one of the main problems throughout the last five years has been the general instability due to external pressures and the resulting permanent 'state of siege'. The main source of the instability is a security deficit, which can be attributed to foreign pressure. The EU cannot take any concrete steps in the framework of the EaP in order to liquidate this security deficit. All the EU can do here is to express consistent and unequivocal support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity and to pursue a non-recognition policy with respect to the occupied territories (Abkhazia and South Ossetia).

One of the crucial systemic shortcomings in Georgia in the context of this thematic platform is the nature of its political culture and the fragmented political landscape. The coalition forces that

operate outside the parliament suffer the most as a result of splintering. Georgian political culture is in essence more inclined towards conflicts and zero-sum games than towards compromises and positive engagement. This is one of the main reasons why the opposition has been divided and unable to cooperate, which, in its turn, has prevented the opposition from participating in parliamentary politics effectively and in a coordinated manner. This has led to the domination of Saakashvili's United National Movement over policy-making at state level. In addition, there are numerous other factors that contribute to these social processes (nepotism as a characteristic feature of Georgian culture, as well as patriarchal tendencies).

For these reasons, the EU should launch programmes within the EaP framework to raise the level of Georgian political culture, including the opposition forces and the ruling party. The programmes should be first and foremost of practical nature, demonstrating European political culture and European public administration practices by way of personal participation. More specifically, Georgian mid-level politicians and civil servants should be offered traineeships at EU institutions (e.g. the European Parliament) or at EU member state institutions. Like language learning through language immersion programmes, an approach based on personal observations and participation – so-called ‘policy immersion’ or ‘administrative immersion’ – would facilitate the “Europeanisation” of the behavioural patterns and values upheld by Georgian politicians.

At the same time, the central government in Georgia should be pressured to continue its practical reform efforts to promote democracy and good governance (especially legislative and judicial reforms). Clear and measurable criteria should be set to track progress in this field. More efforts should be made to increase the authority of the ombudsman institution in Georgia and to depoliticise that position.

Azerbaijan is in essence a classic example of dynastic autocracy. It is complicated to have constructive working relations with Baku while promoting democracy and good governance that anticipates a regime change in Azerbaijan. Hence the keyword for Azerbaijan is ‘stability.’ This does not mean, however, that the EU should give up on democracy and good governance in Azerbaijan. The question is rather what priority level is assigned to these issues and what kinds of instruments are used to bring them about. In the context of democracy and good governance in Azerbaijan, we would recommend to focus on the promotion of civil society and contacts between people.

For **Belarus**, we recommend to consider opportunities of positive engagement in cooperation with Ukraine. Sharing joint reform experiences with Ukraine could apply a similar working format as Nordic-Baltic joint development aid in the Balkans. The focus for Belarus should be at general contact-building with mid-level government experts and at increasing their links with European democracies as many levels as possible. For start, neutral issues such as economic reform, general capacity building for institutions, managing government archives, crisis management and disaster coordination system, civil emergency planning should be preferred, while topics such as human rights, free media and democracy should be kept at a much lower profile.

II ECONOMY

It is important that business activities of small and medium enterprises are supported and encouraged in all EaP countries. Special focus should be at rural areas, in the agricultural sector and in the Black Sea region. We would particularly emphasise the importance of assisting alternative commercial activities in Sevastopol, where the possible departure of the Black Sea Fleet in 2017 can cause a significant decrease in economic activity, because currently, around 70% of the population of Sevastopol are directly or indirectly employed by the Russian Black Sea Fleet. One possible overall objective for this thematic platform is to facilitate the opening of the European market by securing the conformity of local products to quality standards.

From a more general perspective, it is important that legislative measures together with appropriate implementation mechanisms are defined to promote the creation of a transparent business environment and to root out top-level corruption. This objective also concerns democracy and good governance, as well as the media environment and journalistic professionalism.

The activities of small and medium enterprises offering tourism and recreational services, should be especially stimulated in areas around the Black Sea. That region has a great potential, yet it does not attract foreign tourists at the moment.

A free trade agreement is of critical importance to Georgia.

III ENERGY SECURITY

Ukraine should be required to take specific steps to reform its energy sector and to increase the transparency of its energy policy decisions. Also, Ukraine should be offered continued support in achieving closer integration with the European energy market, as well as in the modernisation of Ukraine's gas transit system.

From the EU perspective, **Georgia and Azerbaijan** have a central role to play in securing access to the energy resources (natural gas and oil) of Central Asian countries – Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan. Georgia and Azerbaijan are part of the 'transport corridor', through which the above resources are brought to European markets. However, the two countries differ in some aspects. Azerbaijan, in addition to being a transit country, is also an important exporter of energy resources. Georgia has no gas or oil fields, but it holds a central position in the Southern Caucasus transit route for energy resources. As an alternative to the Black Sea ports located on the territory of Georgia and the pipelines running through Georgia, transit routes go through Russia or Turkey (and Iran).

It would be undesirable for the EU if the energy markets of Georgia and Azerbaijan were to fall under the sphere of influence of Russia. If the proportion of Russian energy supplies were to increase, it would have a political and psychological effect on the EU, which could contribute to internal divisions in the EU and damage the trust between EU member states. In addition, such a development would probably affect the implementation and effectiveness of the Common Foreign and Security Policy.

In recent years, Turkey has become much more economically and politically active in its closer neighbourhood. At the same time, during the last five or six years, Turkey has ceased to view itself as a component of a future political and economic architecture in Europe or as a partner for the EU, but rather as an autonomous regional superpower. If this trend continues in the medium-term perspective, the EU could find itself in a situation where it has to compete with Turkey's economic and political ambitions in both the Greater Middle East and the South Caucasus. This would also affect matters related to energy security.

IV CONTACTS BETWEEN PEOPLE

In general, more information about the EU should be made available under this thematic platform. Increasing the number of EU information points in the region would help to avoid the problem of non-implementation of EaP initiatives due to a lack of knowledge about the existence of the initiatives. Teaching of English and French in EaP countries should be supported extensively in order to enable international cross-sectoral cooperation and to facilitate retraining. Deeper engagement of civil society could involve the raising of awareness among citizens of how they could contribute to civil society and exercise their control function over governments concerning the fulfilment of reform criteria.

More efforts should be made to distribute information about EU academic exchange and aid programmes; increase student exchange programmes and study visits; advertise more extensively opportunities about volunteer programmes involving the EU and EaP countries; and enable EU-supported traineeship programmes for journalists (at European media corporations). More information about the developments in EU member states would make Europe more attractive in areas dominated by Russian mass media that is financed by the Kremlin. Contacts, cooperation and visits between the European Parliament and the Crimean Parliament should be continued.

The EU should establish a foundation for the development of new free media, which would encourage the setting up of new web-based portals, would provide free Internet access in public areas and would support portals that translate Western news into local languages and local news into English. In Crimea, Moldova and Belarus, the EU should support oppositional i.e. pro-Europe print media and assist pro-Europe TV channels that were to be broadcasted outside the capitals of EaP countries.