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The Eastern Partnership: A Policy Striving at Building Good Neighbourhoodliness?

Abstract

The Eastern Partnership of the European Union, launched in 2008 on the initiative of Poland and Sweden, has the characteristics of a very complex policy addressed to three Eastern European countries – Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine, and to three South-Eastern European countries – Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. The complexity of relations rises from the geographical, historical and geopolitical backgrounds. At the same time, these relations are imbued with various complications of internal and external nature. Considering these unusual, but present, complications, the article makes a retrospective of adopted acts that refer to the Eastern Partnership: The Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council "Wider Europe – Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours" and the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council "Eastern Partnership". A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy: "Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe" brings a new impetus in the framework of cooperation relations between the European Union and Eastern Partnership states. The relations are scrutinised through the prism of the neighbourhood policy and the Eastern Partnership policy. Positive and less positive results are revealed, accompanied by inherent challenges; all these serving as a kind of food for positive thinking in building resilience in the Eastern Europe. Relevant matter-of-fact examples are given from all Eastern Partnership countries and the way to discuss them. Open conclusions provide issues to be re-visited (revised) and several recommendations.

Key words: European Union; neighbourhood policy; Eastern Partnership; cooperation; resilience.

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Introduction

At first sight, the Eastern Partnership initiative is a European policy similar to all others. In fact, it seems to be a more appealing one due to on the one hand the complexity of the relations that characterise the cooperation between the European Union and all six Eastern Partnership countries, and on the other hand bilateral cooperation of the European Union with each state. In the framework of the EU's external relations, the Eastern Partnership occupies a very important place. This unique approach is determined by promoting good neighbourhoodliness. Eastern neighbours represent a zone of newly established countries that strive for building their statehood and develop cooperation with well-intended partners in which the European Union plays a significant role.

The Eastern Partnership initiative is a policy in continuous development, being affected by multiple qualitative and quantitative changes in the light of partners' changing behaviour. Because of this the concept of resilience, applied to the EU's policies ought to be visited and re-visited. In doing it, the provisions of EU Neighbourhood Policy and of EU Eastern Partnership will be analysed from this perspective to see to what extent they provide necessary and self-sufficient instruments of cooperation for all involved parties and, if they do, to detect barriers that seem to be inherent and govern intra-partnership cooperation relations.

1. Re-Visiting European Union Neighbourhood Policy

From its inception in 2003, the policy entitled "Wider Europe – Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours" has become an important external instrument of the European Union's cooperation with its neighbours. The document has five parts and one annex with tables and charts. The provisions focus on (1) wider Europe: accepting the challenge; (2) neighbourhood – different countries, common interests; (3) a new vision and a new offer; (4) a differentiated, progressive, benchmarked approach; and (5) next steps (Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament 2003). The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) was conceived to avoid development discrepancies between the European Union and its neighbours in order to strengthen prosperity, stability and security of all involved parties. The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) is governed by the values of democracy, the rule of

law and respect of human rights. The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) works through bilateral, regional, neighbourhood and cross-border cooperation tools.

The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) was designed for 16 neighbouring countries: to the East (6) – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine; to the South (10) – Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Syria and Tunisia.

For certain the neighbourhood policy is one of the most ambitious initiatives of the European Union towards its neighbours, irrespective of their geographical position and their level of development. The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) is fully in harmony with the Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy. It is "an attractive European neighbourhood policy" (Kempe 2007, 188) for Eastern partners of the European Union. Additionally, Member States "have real difficulty in agreeing on the substance of an attractive ENP and in striking a sound balance between offers and demands. This weakens the credibility and impact of the EU's policy towards its neighbours" (Lippert 2007, 187). Scholars identify diverging visions between Member States and European institutions as such and, consequently, a converging approach is necessary to conciliate national and supranational visions.

2. Re-Visiting European Union Eastern Partnership Initiative

The Eastern Partnership (EaP) is a specific initiative, detailing the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) as it addresses only six neighbours: in the East – Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine; in the South-East – Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. This project was started on initiative of Poland and Sweden, and adopted in 2008. The Eastern Partnership (EaP) is based on the principles of international law and fundamental values such as democracy, the rule of law, respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms (Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council 2008).

The Eastern Partnership (EaP) works on four cooperation platforms:

Platform 1: Democracy, good governance and stability – administrative reform; integrated border management; justice; fight against corruption; migration and asylum; common security and defence.

Platform 2: Economic integration and convergence with EU policies – transport; small and medium-sized enterprises (SME); environment and climate change; trade and related regulatory cooperation; agriculture and rural development; statistics; harmonisation of digital markets.

Platform 3: Energy security – electricity, gas and oil interconnections; diverse energy supply sources and transit routes; competitiveness; secure energy supply; integration of variable renewable energy sources.

Platform 4: People-to-people contacts – participation in EU international cooperation programmes; capacity to reform; development of cooperation; sharing of good practices in education and research, youth and arts.

The large spectrum of issues covers all fields of social activity. In other words, it assembles a totality of policies, which is characteristic to any Member State and the European Union as a whole. Probably it is the most that the European Union has offered to any partner in the world in terms of designed policy, i.e. a replica of general development based on the same values shared by the European Union and Member States. In fact, it could be compared to a kind of recipe that is offered. Moreover, it is supported by EU financial instruments.

At the level of policy, programmes and instruments, everything is arranged. However, let us see what happens, what are the results and the impact in the Eastern Partnership.

3. Eastern Partnership: Challenging Issues

The Eastern Partnership initiative is a very composite policy as it was conceived within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy. The policy itself is elaborated *a-la carte* to suit the needs of broader cooperation between the European Union and its six Eastern neighbours. The incentives included bilateral and multilateral cooperation between the parties.

Action plans were introduced as concrete measures to attain the objectives stipulated in the agreements concluded by the European Union and Eastern Partnership countries. The deadlines have not always been realistic for the parties that undertook these commitments. This has also affected the perceived credibility of the partners.

Among recent instruments of cooperation there are the Association Agreements concluded with three Eastern Partnership members: Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

These countries, "Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine are considered the locomotives of the Eastern Partnership in concluding and implementing the Association Agreements" (Cucerescu 2016, 109), irrespective of the degree of implementation of the Agreements, taking into consideration internal and external contexts. Other members, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus have not concluded the Association Agreements. Consequently, there are two types of members, according to this category: "insiders of Association Agreements (Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine), and outsiders of Association Agreements (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus)" (Cucerescu 2016, 115).

Moreover, the concluded Association Agreements display a contested membership perspective, i.e. they neither stipulate expressly the possibility to join the European Union, nor deny it. Incertitude hovers above the signing parties. This is crucial for going ahead for all contracting parties to avoid unnecessary speculations and scenarios. Additionally, it could fuel certain threats and create a perfect manoeuvring space for demolitionists of security and peace in Europe. Adam Hug claims that "the EaP was transformed by events from a broadly technocratic exercise into a geopolitical fault line between Europe (and the wider West) and Russia" (Hug 2015, 5). The Eastern Partnership should not be treated in this narrow meaning; it represents more, and it should not stop in front of this ephemeral and inconsistent impediment.

The Eastern Partnership needs a broader vision and a global perspective to be completely effective and efficient. "Rethinking the past EaP strategies is unavoidable, but positive effects of EaP cannot be underestimated. New initiatives must become more pragmatic and goal oriented from both sides" (Kerikmäe 2016, 4). In other words, there are progress indicators: positiveness, pragmatism, purposefulness, bothsideness and innovation. And everybody should keep to them.

A straightforward approach comes from Laurynas Kasčiūnas and Dovilė Šukytė in their joint study *The future of the EU's Eastern Partnership – challenges and opportunities for Lithuania's foreign policy*. The authors elaborate on such issues as dilemmas of the EU Eastern Partnership, EU external relations: lack of consistency, Eurasian Economic Union – an alternative to the EU association policy, Ukraine – the key to the success of the EU Eastern Partnership, as well as alternatives to the association agreements. The authors suggest revision of "the principle... providing for development of democratic and constitutional reforms in partner countries as a prerequisite for cooperation with the EU" (Kasčiūnas, Šukytė 2013, 7).

Following the same line of ideas, in the findings of the study *Civil Participation in Decision Making in the Eastern Partnership Countries* by Jeff Lovitt, there are highlighted key areas of efficient and inclusive policy making that are valid for Eastern

Partnership countries. Among them are: free access to information; detailed annual budgets and expenditure statements; government websites that are easily navigable, civil participation in political decision-making that will be informed and inclusive if advance notice of public consultation processes is provided; citizens' initiatives; within the framework of the open government partnership, opportunities for public participation and access to information, in particular open data portals, have been further strengthened; adoption of green papers; public consultations at central, regional and local level which should become standard practice; public consultations should as standard practice include online consultations, expert working groups, and public hearings; effective, high-quality policies and laws that require clear procedures, professional drafting skills, and a thorough consultative drafting process; monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of policies and decisions at central and local government level should be mandatory; civil society organisations in the six Eastern Partnership countries should equip themselves with expertise in the drafting of legislation; guidelines aimed at promoting civil participation in political decision-making; the governments of the six Eastern Partnership countries have an opportunity to build on existing standards and good practice (Lovitt 2016, 10-103). These findings are presented in a soft way, being called challenges, but, in fact, they may be called systemic chronic problems identified before the Eastern Partnership was launched. This is a long discussion initiated in the 1990s, but still on current agenda. The explanation is very simple: post-independence established systems oppose resistance to everything coming from the outside as it could be an existential threat to the systems themselves.

A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy: "Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe" represents a recent initiative evolved from vision to action in promoting citizens' interests. The title of the policy speaks for itself. It states that the principles guiding the external actions are: unity, engagement, responsibility, partnership. The principled pragmatism is to guide the EU's external actions. It sets the priorities: security of the Union, state and societal resilience for the East and South, an integrated approach to conflicts and crises, cooperative regional orders, global governance for the 21st century. The EU's priority for the neighbourhood, including the Eastern one, relies on investing in state and societal resilience, because "a resilient state is a secure state, and security is key for prosperity and democracy" (A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy: "Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe" 2016, 23).

Cooperation relations are to fully benefit from the potential of all involved partners, because all of them have something to give for their mutual benefit. It is

a win-win approach that should be considered when speaking about the Eastern Partnership.

The dialogue needs a multi-faceted approach. For this reason, in the following chapter several slices of a sociological survey will be discussed. The survey was performed in one Eastern Partnership country and it focuses on different aspects of the relations between the European Union and Moldova; even though the survey was conducted a couple of years ago, it is still of great significance today.

4. A Sociological Example: Moldova

A concrete case in the Eastern Partnership is Moldova. The sociological survey "Widening the European Dialogue in Moldova" presents Moldovan citizens' interesting perceptions concerning cooperation relations in Eastern Europe and the aspirations shared by respondents. Out of multiple questions 31 (Qi–Qxxxi) the most relevant ones for the purpose of this study were selected.

Qi) Have you ever heard of the following organisations? (%)

	Yes	No
1. European Union (EU)	98,2	1,8
2. NATO	86,6	13,4
3. Eurasian Customs Union (ECU)	85,1	14,9
4. Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)	87,1	12,9
5. Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO)	32,4	67,6

Qii) To what extent are you interested in … %

	Very much	Rather interested	Rather not interested	Not at all interested	Do not know
1. What is happening in the EU	30,2	37,1	19,4	11,3	2,0
2. Relations between Moldova & the EU	37,4	35,1	15,4	10,0	2,1
3. Relations between Moldova & the ECU	35,3	32,1	21,5	6,3	4,8
4. Relations between Moldova & Russia	47,4	32,7	12,6	5,1	2,2

Qiii) How would you describe in general the relations between … ? (%)

	Very good	Rather good	Rather bad	Very bad	Do not know
1. The EU & its Eastern Neighbours	16,1	42,6	13,3	3,3	24,7
2. The EU & Moldova	17,5	51,0	15,9	3,7	11,9
3. The EU and Russia	8,9	30,4	34,1	12,3	14,3

Qiv) What is the perception of Moldova in the EU? (%)

23,0	Positive
24,5	Rather positive
22,3	Neutral
14,6	Rather negative
10,3	Negative
5,3	Do not know

Qv) What is the perception of the EU in Moldova? (%)

40,1	Positive
24,5	Rather positive
17,0	Neutral
7,6	Rather negative
7,5	Negative
3,3	Do not know

Qvi) How would you describe relations between the EU and Moldova? (%)

31,4	They are equal and mutual beneficial relations
34,7	They are mainly in the interests of the EU
24,5	They are mainly in the interests of our country
9,4	Do not know

Qvii) Do you think that relations between EU and Moldova are improving, worsening or not changing? (%)

39,0	Improving
43,5	Not changing
8,4	Worsening
9,1	Do not know

Qviii) Do you think the EU is interested in developing closer links with Moldova? (%)

50,4	Yes
31,0	No
18,6	Do not know

Qix) Have you heard about the Association Agreement that the EU and Moldova are planning to initial in the near future? (%)

50,0	Yes
43,5	No
6,5	Do not know

Qx) If the Association Agreement is initialled, what implications this would have for Moldova? (%)

				Do not know
26,7	Lower prices on goods & energy	62,3	Living costs would increase	11,0
62,0	Trade with the EU would increase	26,4	Limited access to the EU market	11,6
30,9	Higher level of security & protection	56,4	More problems and pressure from Russia	12,7
44,4	Greater mobility/freedom of movement	43,1	More control of/limited mobility	12,5
49,0	Better education/access to EU HEIs	38,2	Expensive & lengthy reforms of education	12,8
44,8	More economic prosperity	41,6	Costly reforms, and economic decline	13,6
49,4	Political stability	37,4	Political uncertainty	13,2
46,2	Eradication of corruption	40,6	Hidden corruption	13,2
43,2	Rule of law and independent judiciary	42,7	Rule of law on paper only	14,1
43,3	More freedoms and rights	43,4	Life will remain the same	13,3
31,0	Resolution of Transnistrian conflict	54,3	Worsening of Transnistrian conflict	14,7

Qxi) What types of cooperation are currently developing between the EU and Moldova? (%). *Multiple choice question*

43,0	Economic cooperation	25,8	Visa partnership & mobility
40,9	Trade cooperation	18,3	Moldova's participation in EU institutions
31,1	Student exchange	16,0	Public administration reform
30,8	Fight against corruption	12,0	Scientific and technical cooperation
29,4	Cross-border cooperation	8,0	Civil society forum
28,5	Business forum and cooperation	0,5	Other
27,2	Cooperation between local and the EU's authorities	18,7	Do not know

Qxii) Which of the above are most successful? (%)

15,5	Economic cooperation	4,4	Business forum and cooperation
8,1	Cross-border cooperation	3,1	Moldova's participation in EU institutions
7,9	Student exchange	1,8	Public administration reform
7,9	Trade cooperation	1,7	Scientific and technical cooperation
6,4	Cooperation between local and the EU's authorities	0,6	Civil society forum
5,9	Visa partnership & mobility	32,1	Do not know
4,6	Fight against corruption		

Qxiii) Which of the above are least successful? (%)

14,8	Fight against corruption	3,8	Public administration reform
6,6	Economic cooperation	3,6	Moldova's participation in EU institutions
6,5	Business forum and cooperation	2,8	Scientific and technical cooperation
5,7	Trade cooperation	2,2	Cross-border cooperation
5,0	Visa partnership & mobility	2,1	Civil society forum
4,8	Student exchange	0,2	Other
4,4	Cooperation between local and the EU's authorities	37,5	Do not know

Qxiv) Have you ever heard about DCTFA for Moldova? (%)

35,0	Yes
65,0	No

Qxv) What specifically does it involve? (%). *Multiple answers question.*

35,7	Liberalization of trade of goods and services
10,6	Free movement of citizens (without visa)
5,4	Reduction of customs duties
3,4	Development of economic, social and political bilateral cooperation
2,9	Free movement of labour force
1,1	Cancellation of export duties
1,1	Investment growth in Moldova
1,4	Other
46,3	Do not know

Qxvi) The EU believes that Moldova is …? (%)

	Yes	No	Do not know
1. Strategic partner of the EU	35,9	45,7	18,4
2. Friendly country	80,6	11,8	7,6
3. Security threat	11,8	75,0	13,2
4. Second-class country	42,6	39,1	18,3
5. Foe	5,0	80,3	14,7

Qxvii) The EU sees Moldova? (%)

				Do not know
86,8	Peaceful	10,2	Militant	3,0
20,7	Developed	75,7	Laggard	3,6
72,0	Spiritual	24,5	Non spiritual	3,5
51,5	Independent	45,7	Dependent	2,8
73,7	Open	23,6	Closed	2,7
81,1	Partner	14,4	Rivalry	4,5
63,7	Democratic	33,5	Undemocratic	2,8
44,5	Legal-based	52,2	Illegal	3,3
15,2	Strong	82,1	Weak	2,7
90,1	Friendly	6,0	Hostile	3,9
55,3	Important	41,2	Insignificant	3,5

Qxviii) How would you describe relations between the EU and Moldova? (%)

9,2	Active cooperation in many spheres
32,7	Gradual cooperation
41,7	More talking than concrete actions
6,0	Lack of any cooperation
10,4	Do not know

Qxix) Would you agree that Moldova could learn a lot from the EU in relation to …? (%)

	Fully agree	Rather agree	Rather disagree	Absolutely disagree	Do not know
1. Democracy & effective governance	43,7	32,8	10,0	4,2	9,3
2. Market economy	47,6	32,0	9,6	3,4	7,4
3. State security	39,4	29,9	14,3	4,5	11,9
4. Multiculturalism	31,6	27,8	17,7	9,8	13,1
5. Religious toleration	23,8	24,7	22,7	13,5	15,3

	Fully agree	Rather agree	Rather disagree	Absolutely disagree	Do not know
6. Social security	38,9	30,8	11,1	7,0	12,2
7. Transparent and easy accessible judiciary	37,5	30,8	11,2	6,1	14,4
8. Effective labour market	45,2	28,8	12,8	5,0	8,2
9. Reforming education system	41,2	28,7	11,8	7,6	10,7
10. Fight against corruption	44,9	24,5	12,9	7,3	10,4
11. Reforming agriculture	43,0	30,2	10,5	5,5	10,8
12. SME development	41,6	31,4	9,9	4,3	12,8
13. Protection of environment	43,0	30,2	10,9	4,3	11,6

Qxx) Is the Transnistrian conflict an obstacle for Moldova's closer integration in the EU? (%)

70,2	Yes
17,6	No
12,2	Do not know

Qxxi) Could the EU and Russia work together to resolve the Transnistrian conflict? (%)

31,1	Yes, it is important they work together
21,4	To a degree: they have different approaches, which may be difficult to reconcile
37,0	No, they are rivals in this region
10,5	Do not know

Qxxii) Is Moldova's foreign policy more orientated towards …? (%)

19,4	Russia including the ECU
46,1	The West/ EU
11,6	Neutral
15,0	Multi-vector
7,9	Do not know

Qxxiii) If a referendum about Moldova's future were held today, how would you vote in it? (%)

35,9	For more cooperation with Russia and Eurasian Union
31,8	For more cooperation with the EU
25,0	For more cooperation with both
2,0	Against cooperation with both
5,3	Do not know

Qxxiv) If you had to choose between admission to the ECU or the EU, which option would you vote for? (%)

40,4	ECU
44,3	EU
4,9	None of the aforementioned
10,4	Do not know

Qxxv) Which sentiments do you have when thinking about the EU? (%). *Multiple choice question*

46,8	Hope
21,5	Faith
20,3	Distrust
18,7	Concern
13,8	Enthusiasm
12,8	Indifference
9,2	Pride
6,2	Alienation
4,6	Do not know

Qxxvi) Which EU countries do you like the most? (%). *Multiple choice question*

38,2	Germany	1,6	Finland
27,6	Italy	1,5	Greece
20,8	France	1,0	Ireland
10,7	Great Britain	0,8	Hungary
10,3	Romania	0,7	Estonia
3,9	Spain	0,7	Denmark
2,5	Austria	0,6	Luxembourg
2,1	Portugal	0,5	Lithuania
1,8	Bulgaria	0,5	Slovak Republic
1,7	Sweden	0,5	Belgium
1,7	Netherland	0,1	Latvia
1,7	Czech Republic	30,5	None/Do not know
1,6	Poland		

Qxxvii) How many times have you visited the EU? (%)

11,0	Once	1,4	10 times
5,3	Twice	0,2	11 times
4,1	3 times	0,2	12 times
1,8	4 times	0,1	13 times
2,2	5 times	0,5	15 times

1,1	6 times	0,1	18 times
0,6	7 times	0,6	20 times
0,4	8 times	0,1	30 times
0,3	9 times	70,0	Never

Qxxviii) Have you ever had any problems when opening a Schengen visa? (%)

5,1	Yes
15,1	No
79,1	Never applied
0,7	Do not know

Qxxix) What other countries have you visited? (%)

48,4	Russia	0,2	Cyprus
35,5	Ukraine	0,1	Armenia
6,2	Belarus	0,1	Azerbaijan
1,6	Kazakhstan	0,1	United Arab Emirates
1,5	Israel	0,1	Estonia
1,3	Turkey	0,1	Uzbekistan
0,6	Georgia	0,1	China
0,4	United States of America	37,7	None/Do not know

Qxxx) Will Moldova become a member of the EU? (%)

46,8	Yes
33,6	No
19,6	Do not know

Qxxxi) If yes, when do you think this is likely to happen? (%)

0,4	2013	0,6	2027
8,5	2014	0,6	2028
17,7	2015	4,3	2030
8,5	2016	0,2	2032
6,2	2017	1,1	2033
8,8	2018	0,2	2034
1,1	2019	1,5	2035
17,3	2020	1,5	2040

0,2	2021	0,4	2045
1,3	2022	1,3	2050
5,8	2023	0,2	2070
0,9	2024	0,4	2100
5,3	2025	5,5	Do not know
0,2	2026		

The answer for Qi is that the EU receives 98,2%. For Qii relations between Moldova and Russia obtained the highest score of 47,4%. The perception of the EU in Moldova (Qv) is positive with 40,1% as of Moldova in the EU is 23% (Qiv). Altogether positive and rather positive attitudes constitute 2/3 (Qiv and Qv). The relations between the EU and Moldova are equal and mutual beneficial with a score of 31,4% (Qvi). 39,0% of respondents answered that the relations between EU and Moldova are improving (Qvii). 50,4% believe that the EU is interested in developing closer links with Moldova (Qviii). As for the types of cooperation that are currently developing between the EU and Moldova (Qxi), economic cooperation represents 43,0%, trade cooperation – 40,9%. As for the success of the types of cooperation, they are below the expectations (Qxii). Moldova is believed to be with 80,6% (Qxvi) and seen with 90,1% (Qxvii) as friendly country by the EU; these are the highest scores. When asked about to describe the relations between the EU and Moldova, the respondents think that it is more talking than concrete actions with 41,7% (Qxviii). When thinking about the EU, Moldovan citizens display such sentiments as hope, faith, etc. (Qxxv). An alarming answer is offered to Qxxvii: 70,0% did not visit the EU at all (Nota Bene: these are the answers of those who live in Moldova, excepting diaspora and mobility of the working force). Moldovan citizens are optimistic, they think the country will become a member of the EU with 46,8% (Qxxx). But when, the answers cover a period of up to 2100 (Qxxxi).

All in all, the answers are positive or highly positive and seem to be imbued with optimism. Is it an exaggerated optimism? At first sight, it could seem for an unarmed eye. But it is not for sure. It speaks about the heritage of Moldova: geographically, the country is situated in the Eastern Europe, the extremity of Latin people; linguistically, the Romanian language (mother tongue of 82% of Moldovans) belongs to the Romance family of languages; historically and culturally, Moldova is linked to Europe.

5. EaP Multilateral Events

Just for scientific curiosity, the calendar of multilateral events was checked. The first half of 2017 includes about 40 events organised both in the EU and in EaP countries (European External Action Service 2017a); in the second half it is planned to organise 65 events (European External Action Service 2017b). Their topics are quite diverse: CSDP High Level Conference for alumni from EaP countries; CSDP Orientation Course for EaP Countries; eHealth Workshop; EaPeReg Benchmarking Expert Working Group – Workshop (Tbilisi); 12th Transport Panel; 1st Panel on Rule of Law – focus on cybercrime; Panel on CSDP; 5th Panel on Environment and Climate Change; 12th EaP Public Administration Reform Panel; 2nd International Women's Entrepreneurship Laboratory in the Eastern Partner region; Regional transport investment conference; investment opportunities for the transport sector (including a dedicated session for EaP); Panel on Migration and Asylum – expert meeting on border and migration management in emergency situations; Workshop/seminar on "Development and management of databases in civil service"; 3rd Master Class for Commercial Attachés; Training on "Organizational Structure and Professional Competency of Leadership in the Civil Service"; Seminar on integrity in higher education; 5th Panel on Statistics on innovation and R&D; Workshop/seminar on "Certification of civil servants: Challenges and prospects"; 17th Platform 2 on Economic Integration and Convergence with EU Policies; 16th Panel on Integrated Border Management; 17th Platform 1 on Democracy, Good Governance and Stability; Senior Officials Meeting; Annual workshop of EaP energy regulatory bodies; Panel on Migration and Asylum – return, readmission and reintegration; Seminar on "Main Approaches to Reforming the Institute of Self-Government in the Eastern Partnership Countries"; 17th Platform 4 on People to People contacts; Skills Matching conference; 3rd Eastern Partnership Youth Forum; Research and Innovation regional event on funding for innovative companies; 17th Platform 3 on Energy Security; 16th Trade Panel (re-launch); Trust & Security Workshop; eTrade Workshop; eSkills Workshop; ICT Innovation Workshop; Reflection Seminar on CSDP; Conference with academia and civil society from EaP countries on CSDP developments and partnerships; Moldova National Forum on creative industries; Workshop for media and communication experts on CSDP; 6th Meeting of Marie Skłodowska-Curie

actions National Contact Points: provision of support to facilitate the participation of EaP representatives.

There are a lot of EaP multilateral events, in total 105 only for 2017, but a pertinent question is to what extent they are productive. As the sociological survey mentions that the perception is that it is more talking than concrete actions. Obviously, the focus is on the benefits for the recipients of these events as they are the main targets for sharing experience and good practices. Another important issue in this context is related to cost-impact dichotomy, which seems to be ignored or consciously assumed by decision-makers. In case it is consciously assumed then a strategy for continuous improvement is highly needed in this rapidly changing world.

Conclusions

The above-mentioned facts are conducive to certain emergent conclusions on the EU's policy towards the Eastern Partnership. These open conclusions urge one to re-visit (revise) the cooperation between the European Union and Eastern Partnership countries as many times as needed to assess its effect on building bridges that serve the interests of the European Union and Eastern Partnership countries.

A lot of events with participation of public officials are organized, however they seem to be inefficient. The proposal is to change the format of these meetings by inviting non-state actors (in a large sense of the concept) to obtain a balance between the officials and civil society representatives – at the same time it would be better to have more civil society members than officials. This would increase the efficiency of the EU's policy and agreements in all Eastern Partnership countries.

Finally, a couple of ideas should be considered for Eastern Partnership initiative in order to strengthen what has been started:

- To develop a better EU communication strategy at all societal levels in Eastern Partnership countries;
- To open all EU programmes to Eastern Partnership countries;
- To increase the mobility of people from the Eastern Partnership;
- To continue and develop the differentiated approach;
- To maintain the more-for-more principle in political and institutional relations with Eastern Partnership countries;

- To think about a common security strategy both for the European Union and the Eastern Partnership.

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