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**The eastern dimension of the European Neighbourhood  
Policy: strategic challenges for the EU foreign policy**

**Abstract:** The article examines the main achievements and shortcomings of the Eastern dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy. Special attention is paid to the analysis of the

main approaches of reforming and strengthening the efficiency of the EU strategy towards the countries of the Eastern Partnership.

**Keywords:** European integration, association, the European Neighbourhood Policy, the Eastern Partnership.

As a result of institutional changes and deepening political union the enhanced EU has evolved considerably and has become more prepared for the transition to the global role in the post-bipolar international system. At the same time the recent geopolitical challenges led to the reconsideration of the EU foreign policy strategy and elaboration of a new approach in its relations with the neighbouring countries. The EU ability to reform its conceptual basis and to propose more effective frameworks of cooperation within the European Neighbourhood Policy will outline the future of the integration project as well as the perspectives of the European security system, in general.

The 2004–2007 historical enlargement eastwards has led to the search of adequate instruments and mechanisms of the EU policy towards its new neighbours. The main challenge for the EU in its Eastern policy is now the ability to combine the obvious refusal from the logic of enlargement (so called 'enlargement fatigue') with the EU positioning itself as a normative power with the ability to disseminate or even impose its norms and values on other actors.

The European Neighbourhood Policy and differentiation of the eastern dimension in the second half of 2000s (German project of 'ENP plus' and establishment of the Eastern Partnership in 2009) were elaborated, first of all, as alternatives to offering full membership. The idea of obtaining all advantages of cooperation with the EU including access to the EU internal market was envisaged while preparing the ENP and was first expressed by the former President of the European Commission R. Prodi in his statement 'sharing everything with the Union but institutions' [1].

The year of 2014 was a demonstration of positive movements in the EU Eastern policy. The signature of Association agreements with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine in June 2014 and granting visa-free regime to Moldova in April 2014 led the ENP to a new stage. At the same time new challenges and threats such as Ukrainian crisis require the EU to be more cohesive and able to rapid response.

The EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy F. Mogherini and Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement J. Hahn presented a joint consultation paper 'Towards a New European Neighbourhood policy' in March 2015. The document is an attempt to undertake a fundamental review of the principles on which the policy is based as well as instruments to be used. The main topics raised in the document are inability of the ENP to respond adequately to the recent challenges and threats, the rationality of preserving a single framework to cover both Eastern and Southern dimensions of the ENP. The joint consultations of the EU institutions, member-states and partners will be finalised in autumn in a Communication setting out proposals for the future direction of the ENP.

Taking into consideration the experience of operating the ENP we can outline the following problems and risks which can affect seriously successful implementation of the programme.

The first challenge is definition of the final goals of the programme. There is an obvious discrepancy of the defined goals and stimulus. The goal of accession is certainly the most powerful stimulus for reforms. At the same time one of the main obstacles for the EU Eastern policy is the absence of a membership perspective which decreases the motivation of partners. The lack of consensus as to the further enlargement eastwards gives no opportunity to set up the European perspective for the participants of the Eastern Partnership. There was no breakdown at the EaP summit in Riga (21–22 May 2015), the final declaration of which just stated that 'Summit participants acknowledge the European aspirations and European choice of the partners concerned as it is stated in the Association Agreements' [2].

Implementation of the principle 'everything but institutions' leads to a serious problem for the partner countries. The necessity to harmonise their legislation and to implement *acquis communautaire* without entering the EU leads to the creation of hi-

erarch asymmetric relations of 'centre-periphery' model [3, 44] where the agenda is set up by the EU while the partners are not able to influence the decision-making process and the proposed norms and principles are not discussible.

The second challenge is the necessity to correlate approaches actively used within the ENP and adopted from the strategy of enlargement. The principle of political conditionality which means the outline of frameworks and conditions for conducting reforms as well as the mechanism of incentives ('more for more' principle) was rather effective while implementing the EU enlargement strategy towards the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and Western Balkans. At the same time it demonstrated limited effect in the countries-participants of the ENP both in its Southern flank (absence of reforms, Arab revolutions as a result) as well as its Eastern flank (f. e. Armenian and Ukrainian case on the eve of the EaP Vilnius summit in autumn 2013). An opposition of political elites to the reforms which are regarded as a threat to their interests and power, as it was during the presidency of V. Yanukovych in Ukraine, leads to the necessity of adapting the EU policy instruments in the region. As a result the EU policy instruments were supplemented by the principle of socialization which means strengthening the dialogue with the specific target groups of national decision-makers and opinion formers (not only bureaucracy and politics but actors from civil society, scientific and expert communities). [4, 59] One of the examples of implementing the principle of socialization is introduction of the EaP multilateral platforms, mainly Platform 4 'People-to-people contacts'. The alternatives of stimulating the reforms can also be proposed by deepening cooperation in such specific spheres as sectoral integration within the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade agreements (as incentives for the business circles) and visa liberalization regime. At the same time one doesn't need to overestimate the effects of such instruments, f. e. Belarus takes the 5 place within the overall amount of the C-type short-term Schengen visas issued to the third states and is a world leader in the per capita number of Schengen visas. [5] Though this case demonstrates the limits of the ENP's transformative power as widening people-to-people contacts

doesn't lead to the expected effect of disseminating the European values and principles and further democratisation of the state.

The third challenge is the increasing divergence in the aspirations of partner countries as only three of six states (Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine) have proclaimed the EU membership as a strategic goal of their foreign policy, while two others (Armenia and Belarus) became the members of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). On one hand, the EU partly tried to take into account different motivations of the partners by introducing the principle of differentiation which was later widened by implementing de-facto the principle of 'regatta' (efficiently used within the enlargement process) and 'more for more' principle — more support for the partners in exchange of more progress in conducting reforms. On the other hand, different aspirations were not considered while elaborating the common standard approaches including evaluation mechanisms.

The EU is now actively discussing the possible revision of programme mechanisms. The Joint Consultation paper presented in March 2015 outlines such priorities of reforms as differentiation and flexibility: the doubts on the necessity of such formats of evaluation as annual reporting for those who do not choose to pursue closer political and economic integration; adaptation of the 'more for more' principle to a context in which certain partners do not choose closer integration, in order to create incentives for the respect of fundamental values and further key reforms; proposition of deeper format of relationship to satisfy the aspirations of those who do not consider the Association agreements as the final stage of political association and economic integration. [6] The main idea of such changes is an adequate response to the requirements of partners with different level of ambitions.

The fourth challenge is the necessity of strengthening multilateral approach aimed at stimulating horizontal integration between the partners. The combination of bilateral and regional approaches was rather effective in the EU policy towards the countries of CEE in the 90-ies and Western Balkans within the Stabilization and Association process. By launching the Eastern Partnership in 2009 the EU tried to promote regional cooperation, mainl

within the four thematic platforms (Democracy, good governance and stability; Economic integration and convergence with the EU policies; Energy security and People-to-people contacts) and flagship initiatives such as Integrated Border Management Programme or Regional Energy Markets and Energy Efficiency.

At the same time the internal regional factors (Armenia-Azerbaijan relations, Russian integration strategy) have weakened integration ties between the partner countries. For the last two years the EU was mainly concentrated on renewal of its bilateral ties with the partners. Though realisation of the concept of the EU normative power requires strengthening of the regional component with its further connection to the similar projects in the neighbouring regions, such as Western Balkans. The EU is partly trying to implement such approach by including Moldova into the Central European Free Trade Agreement and by integrating Ukraine and Moldova into the European Energy Community, while Georgia obtaining the status of the candidate country in this organisation.

The fifth challenge that needs to be tackled by the EU and its neighbours together is more flexible participation of the third states in the programme and the EU more active support of its partners in their interactions with their own neighbours (mainly, Russian Federation, Central Asia states and Turkey). Such strategy could be implemented within a 'variable geometry' model with different levels of engagement of each of the participant under the ENP umbrella.

One of the main problems that threaten seriously the EU policy in Eastern Europe is the recent crisis in the EU-Russian relations. The ENP was from the very beginning regarded by Russian Federation as the anti-Russian policy aimed at decreasing its influence in the region of its vital interests. The current crisis raised the debates in expert community as to the EU strategy towards Russia. War in Ukraine and transformation of Russia's strategy from the soft power terms (carrots and sticks, EU-style integration) to the tough power policy have marked not only the failure of Russian integration strategy in Eastern Europe but also the EU failure to use the ENP as an instrument of soft influence and changing Russia. Experts from the European Council on

Foreign Relations consider that the EU now needs to find a European variant of 'co-evolution' (US-China model) in its relations with Russia that will allow both sides to co-exist with and set workable redlines. [7, 6] Such a strategy includes not only deterrence and providing the security guarantees for the EU members, first of all Baltic States and Central and Eastern Europe, but also efforts on consolidating the EU own political space and strengthening EU value-based institutions.

Besides the logic of containment the alternative approaches of overcoming the EU-Russian crisis are proposed, f. e. a block approach — the EU cooperation with the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). [8, 4] On the one hand, it is a possibility to minimise Russian monopoly of the political agenda within the EEU and to develop EU relationship with the EEU members (Kazakhstan, Belarus, Armenia). On the other hand, it is a chance to set a positive agenda in bilateral relations and to shift the competition back onto the economic field rather than on military one. The EU ability and readiness to implement such an approach will be tested by the EU-Armenia negotiations on the provisions of a new agreement after Armenia's refusal to sign the Association agreement and its decision to become a member of the Eurasian Economic Union.

And finally, the EU needs to elaborate an adequate response to the conflicts and crisis in the neighbourhood. The ENP and EaP lacked a security dimension from the outset, there was an insufficient level of their integration into the EU common policies such as Common Foreign and Security Policy and Common Security and Defence Policy. The EU has already made some cautious attempts to engage the partners within the CFSP/CSDP initiatives (f. e. cooperation with CFSP/CSDP bodies such as the EU Military Committee or partners' participation in the EU operations). At the same time there is a vital need of the EU more active involvement into the security issues in Eastern Europe. By now the EU has limited experience of operations in the region conducting 3 civilian operations in EaP states: the EU Advisory Mission for Civilian Sector Reform in Ukraine, the EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia and the EU Border Assistance Mission to Ukraine and Moldova.

Over the past ten years the ENP has evolved from technocratic to a value-oriented programme which leads to the EU further identification as a normative power. Though a lot of efforts should be still taken towards its becoming a more coherent and better focused foreign policy instrument. The recent changes in the European geopolitical area require formalization

of a new conceptual approach in the EU strategy towards its eastern neighbours which should be focused on the issues of further differentiation of its policy towards the partner states, more effective correlation of the EU aims and partners' demands, flexible mechanism of third countries' participation and, definitely, openness of the final goals of the programme.

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