



# Report on policy briefings in the EaP countries

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## 1. Introduction

This report outlines the major discussions, findings, and insights generated by EU-STRAT's first series of policy briefings. The briefings were conducted in November 2016 in the capital cities of three of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries: Moldova, Ukraine, and Belarus. EU-STRAT partners in each of these capital cities—the Institute for Development and Social Initiatives (IDIS) in Chişinău, the Ukrainian Institute for Public Policy (UIPP) in Kyiv and The School of Young Managers in Public Administration (SYMIPA) in Minsk—hosted the respective briefings. The briefings were attended by local media, academics, think tank representatives, and policy experts, as well as representatives of the European Union (EU) and national governments.

All policy briefings were organised as panel discussions, with opening keynote speeches and a brief presentation of EU-STRAT by project partners, followed by a lively Q&A session with the audience. The briefings had the following aims: 1) to present EU-STRAT to the broader public, including officials from the EU delegations and civil society organisations, media, and policy makers in the partner states; 2) to identify potential partners and sources of information for upcoming field research that will be conducted in various EU-STRAT work packages; 3) to highlight and debate some of EU-STRAT's research questions and findings.

Each briefing was structured around one central question: in Kyiv, participants at the briefing addressed how the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement (AA), and the Deep and Comprehensive Trade Agreement (DCFTA) in particular, are shaping Ukraine's economy. In Chişinău, they examined what the challenges for the EU's communication strategy in Moldova are. And in Minsk, the question of how scientific cooperation between Belarus and the EU evolved was tackled.

The policy briefings were set to occur at a time in which the three EaP capitals continue to face different national contexts, but similar regional challenges. After a devastating banking crisis, Moldova recently elected a new president who intends to reshape the country's foreign policy towards the EU and Russia. While its government is under both internal and external pressure, Ukraine is muddling through anti-corruption and economic reforms, with assistance from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the EU that is conditioned on the progress of these reforms. The business as usual economic model in Belarus has been put to the test by the deteriorating external economic situation in the region caused by the weakened Russian economy and low oil prices. The Belarusian national economy is however also experiencing some positive effects from the trade restrictions imposed by Russia on EU food imports.

Despite these differences, all three EaP countries are facing common global and regional trends, most of which are thought to make European integration more difficult: the uncertainty of the future role of the United States (U.S.) in the region due to recent presidential elections, increasing anti-EU and anti-liberal sentiments in many of the EU member-states—with Brexit being the most notable manifestation of the trend—and the increased geopolitical tension between the EU and Russia. The common challenges faced allowed some similar discussions to occur and shared conclusions to be drawn from the three briefings.

## 2. Overview of the policy briefings

One common feature of all three policy briefings was the presentation of EU-STRAT to the local community. At each event, EU-STRAT partners shared the project's goal of reviewing the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). In doing so, they noted that the EU's overall goal of political association and economic integration between the EU and all of its Eastern neighbours has not yet been achieved. The goals of peace, prosperity and stability have also not been reached, as frozen or even open military conflicts continue in five out of the six EaP countries. Moreover, the traditional differences in democratic and economic development between Central European, South East European and the EaP countries have also not yet been overcome. There is thus a clear need for a strategic assessment of the EU's effectiveness in promoting stability, prosperity, as well as political and economic development in EaP countries. EU-STRAT aims to achieve this strategic assessment by adopting an inside-out perspective: focusing the research on domestic conditions in the EaP countries as well as de-centring the EU by studying the role of select member states and other external actors active in the region. EU-STRAT partners at each briefing additionally outlined the project's major research questions for the audience, which are:

1. What types of social orders characterise EaP countries? To what extent do they allow open or limited access to political and economic resources?
2. How do interdependencies with the EU, Russia and other external actors shape the preferences of domestic actors for change towards more open societies in EaP countries?
3. Are AAs and alternative EU instruments effective in supporting change in EaP countries?
4. What impact do normative discourses used by the EU and Russia have on their shared neighbourhood?

Aside from the presentation of EU-STRAT and shared assessment of the situation overall in the EaP countries at present, each briefing was then tailored to that individual country. The next sections provide an overview of these briefings individually.

### 2.1 *Kyiv*

Entitled "The EU-Ukraine Association Agreement: how is it shaping Ukraine?", the policy briefing in Ukraine took place on November 14, 2016 at the hotel Kyiv with 24 participants. The event was organised by EU-STRAT's in-country partner, UIPP, with the assistance of other members of the consortium, the University of Birmingham and the Lithuanian consultancy, European Social, Legal and Economic Projects (ESTEP). Panellists and keynote speakers were drawn from the Ukrainian government and the research and expert community: Kataryna Wolczuk and Rilka Drageva-Lewers from the University of Birmingham, Algirdas Šemeta the Business Ombudsman in Ukraine, Igor Burakovskiy from the Institute for Economic Research and Policy Consulting, Andriy Nikitov from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), Anna Artemenko from the Anti-Monopoly Committee of Ukraine, Darius Žeruolis from ESTEP, and Ildar Gazizullin and Maxim Boroda from UIPP.

Ildar Gazizullin and Maxim Boroda from UIPP opened the briefing by presenting EU-STRAT's motivation and objectives. The first of the keynote speeches was then delivered by Rilka Drageva-Lewers, a Senior Lecturer at the University of Birmingham, who spoke on the correspondence between the internal reform agenda in Ukraine and the AA framework. She elaborated on some of the internal and external challenges for EU-Ukraine cooperation, stemming from the complexity of the AA itself (which makes its implementation a difficult and long-

enduring task), as well as from the Ukraine-Russia conflict and the diversity of preferences and positions amongst the EU member states.

Another keynote speech was delivered by Andriy Nikitov, Head of Division for Trade and Sectoral Cooperation in the EU department at the MFA, who presented recent economic and political milestones of bilateral cooperation. According to him, Ukraine was determined to use the EaP as a platform for pursuing its national interests, particularly in seeking to promote its economic and governance reforms. He suggested that the EU should take a differentiated approach to the EaP countries without lowering its targets with regard to domestic reforms because of different speeds of integration.

The policy briefing participants discussed how the enlargement waves have influenced the ENP as well as the recent challenges of economic integration between Ukraine and the EU under the DCFTA. The discussion concluded with the recommendation of better communication between stakeholders on the outcomes of the DCFTA's implementation and a more evidenced-based analysis and planning of trade liberalisation policies.

During the Q&A session, the participants discussed a number of issues, including the importance of establishing DCFTA dialogue platforms between the government and businesses. Such dialogue should be properly institutionalised and based on evidence, for example, derived from impact assessments. The assessments should go beyond pure trade (export-import) implications, but include a fiscal or regional dimension. Meanwhile, there is a large information gap on the AA in Ukraine, which undermines efforts to mobilise public support for relevant legislative changes and to take advantage of new opportunities for doing business with the EU.

Another issue was the role of the AA as a transformational instrument, given its comprehensive and binding nature. The substance of the AA was found to be comprehensive enough to correspond well to many of the reform priorities of Ukraine (even though the agreement's targets were based on the *acquis*, which was often difficult to implement in Ukraine's national context). The institutional framework of the AA implementation was also appropriate to settle possible disputes and ensure a certain degree of flexibility with regard to implementation modality and timelines, e.g. in such sensitive areas as environmental protection.

Overall, the briefing participants concluded that the DCFTA could become a foundation for long-term political and economic transformation of Ukraine. It was recommended that clear links should be established between the many and currently unknown Europeanisation activities with specific positive impacts. Such information should be communicated regularly to the key stakeholders in order to ensure that there is continuing support for the implementation path.

## 2.2 *Chişinău*

IDIS hosted the policy briefing "Challenges for the EU's Communication Strategy in Moldova" on November 22, 2016 with 60 participants. The briefing featured a panel composed of EU-STRAT's co-coordinator Antoaneta Dimitrova of Leiden University, as well as Susanne Kiefer, Senior Specialist of the EU's East StratCom Task Force, and Ruxandra Stanciu, Press and Information Officer of the EU Delegation in Moldova. The panel also included three representatives of Moldova's think tank and media community: Vasile Botnaru, Country Director of Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty (RFE/RL); Ludmila Barba, Senior Editor of the TV program 'European Vector' from Moldovan national public television; and Iulian Groza, Director of the Institute for European Policies and Reforms (IPRE), who is also Former Deputy Minister of the MFA. The briefing attracted a substantial amount of both local and international media attention, including six TV teams and a live online broadcast from the event. Members

of the local diplomatic corps and EU Delegation, the Moldovan government, and local universities were among those in attendance.

The first keynote speaker, Antoaneta Dimitrova, EU-STRAT partner from Leiden University, presented the results of EU-STRAT's analysis of the EU's official communications on its delegation websites for Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine. The second speaker, Susanne Kiefer, Senior Specialist of the EU's East StratCom Task Force, highlighted the shift in EU communications from impersonal to personal stories and narratives. The panel members concluded on the need to reformulate EU messages to ensure greater reach of the target audience and greater impact in Moldova.

According to event participants, the EU's projected normative power will largely determine success or failure in the Eastern Neighbourhood. This discussion drew on Antoaneta Dimitrova's presentation of EU-STRAT's quantitative analysis of the EU's official communications, which generated insight into whether the EU communicates as a soft, normative or transformative power. It was pointed out that there has been quite some differentiation in the official communications towards Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine: the EU emphatically addressed Belarus as a normative power, while Ukraine and Moldova were addressed with an emphasis on reforms, i.e. as a transformative power.

Following up on points from the keynote speeches, the character of EU communications was noted to be changing, with the shift from impersonal to personal stories and narratives, from official to social media sites. Participants noted that new types of campaigns have arisen, such as the anti-corruption campaign 'Red card to corruption', which involved Moldovan football players and sport personalities, thus targeting a broader audience domestically. In the same vein, the EU Delegation has created the new post of 'press officer', whose task is to change technocratic language into a more direct and engaging discourse towards the citizens, one based on clear benefits and mutual respect. The current major objective of the EU Delegation in terms of communication was stated to be restoring the trust of the Moldovan people in the EU and the EU's credibility. According to panellists, the polarisation of media outlets and their ownership created barriers in the ability for different external actors—especially the EU—to send messages, and for citizens to receive them. It was asserted that the EU could persuade its audiences through usage of success stories and honest reporting, though the media channels through which these messages could arrive are few.

Representatives from think tanks and media outlets subsequently shared their views on what they believed citizens want to know about the EU, and how they assessed the effectiveness or resonance of the communication policy currently being implemented by the EU Delegation, as well as whether the EU can overcome the tendency to address elites and experts, and instead develop a narrative directly appealing to citizens. In this regard it was mentioned that journalists need to be active and critical of the 'free lunch' information provided by various media outlets. The audience was cautioned against accepting a simplified version of Moldova's closer EU integration, one which highlighted the benefits the EU would give without emphasising the substantial effort needed from the Moldovan side.

Some panellists criticised the changes in the EU's communication discourse in Moldova, stating that the EU was not flexible enough and poorly addressed the real feelings of the population. Relatedly, it was asserted that the Moldovan people needed to receive fewer geo-political messages, and more specific content-related

communication on real issues that citizens were concerned about. It was noted that the expectations of the public needed to also be balanced and well-managed on a consistent basis, and not just at specific moments in time. It was suggested that since politicians were responsible for the loss of confidence that had occurred, the EU should thus revise its approach and self-assessment methods. The EU was also critiqued for sending incoherent messages, which was purported to have been the case with the recent presidential elections in Moldova. When the EU supported a government that was massively contested by the population, this apparently delivered a confusing message to the public.

### 2.3 *Minsk*

The policy briefing, “Challenges for EU-Belarus Scientific Cooperation” took place on November 24, 2016 at the Hotel Europe, with 54 participants. Participants at the event came from Belarusian universities, higher education institutions, research institutions, NGOs, think tanks, and the diplomatic corps residing in Minsk. The panel included experts from a variety of backgrounds: Frederik Coene, Head of Operations at the EU Delegation in Minsk; Aleksa Bjelis, from Magna Charta Observatory and former rector of Zagreb University in Croatia; Dimiter Toshkov, EU-STRAT's partner at Leiden University; Olga Meerovskaya, the national contact point for Horizon 2020 in Minsk, and Vladimir Dounaev, from the Independent Bologna Committee. The discussion was moderated by Ina Ramasheuskaya from SYMPA.

The briefing focused on the challenges and accomplishments of scientific cooperation and academic mobility in the EaP countries. Participants discussed the importance of bringing together academic research and practical experience for the economic and political development in Belarus. They also elaborated on some of the challenges and opportunities for transition EaP countries face in accessing EU research funding. Ina Ramasheuskaya and Tatsiana Chulitskaya, also from SYMPA, presented EU-STRAT and its significance for Belarus, as well as the need to engage with target audiences in Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine.

Aleksa Bjelis, of the Magna Charta Observatory, then delivered the keynote speech. As the former rector of Zagreb University, he has first-hand knowledge of reform of the scientific research system in a post-socialist state, and the role of the EU in this process. The speech provided context for the ensuing discussion of scientific cooperation and academic principles. Utilising his background experience of serving in various EU councils and associations dealing with higher education and innovation reform, Aleksa Bjelis highlighted the main challenges and opportunities for transition countries that want to utilise available EU research funding in the most efficient way.

Additionally, Dimiter Toshkov of Leiden University presented the initial results of EU-STRAT's study of research cooperation and academic mobility between the EU and Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine, as well as how this fitted into the context of broader societal transformations.

A number of interesting points with regard to the problems and perspectives of international scientific cooperation with Belarus and other post-Soviet countries were raised throughout the lively discussion that followed. In regards to scientific cooperation between the EU and EaP countries, collaboration at all levels was identified as rather sporadic and poorly institutionalised. Representatives from academia in the EaP countries often faced barriers utilising existing opportunities of engaging with EU institutions because of internal system limitations (and differences to the EU academic space), but also due to ambiguous criteria for participation in the

joint programmes and projects on the EU-side. Participants at the policy briefing discussed, for instance, the lack of bilateral contacts with EU member states in the past five years, making it difficult for Belarusian universities and institutes to make and sustain partnerships with research institutions from the EU. Specifically, this has made it problematic for Belarusian researchers to form successful consortia with EU researchers who have been able to win EU research funding. Still, it was noted that despite these difficulties, the participation of Belarusian organizations in Horizon 2020 and its predecessors has been quite high thus far, on par with Ukraine and some EU member states from Eastern Europe.

The panellists discussed the patterns of academic cooperation between Belarus and the EU, concluding on the need to widen the selection of Belarusian academic partners and to provide financial support to ensure greater academic mobility. Thus far only a few select institutions have participated in EU-funded projects.

Various barriers to this expansion were discussed, including the lack of awareness, complexities of preparing and submitting an application, and bureaucratic obstacles researchers encountered in their home organizations. Furthermore, a lack of co-ownership was felt in EU-funded projects, where Belarusian organisations felt that they should “abide by the rules” set by the EU, without having a say in the development of these rules.

Other interesting points made throughout the discussion included the absence of national scientific and academic mobility strategies, the lack of transparency in the budgets of Belarusian universities, the (lack of) progress in the Bologna road map with regards to student mobility, and the perspective for formalisation of scientific cooperation with the EU via special bilateral agreements.

### **3. Main conclusions**

The policy briefings also resulted in some broader conclusions on the EaP, the AAs, and the EU’s communication with EaP countries.

#### **3.1 *The accession toolbox and EaP countries***

The waves of enlargement in 2004 and 2007 were unprecedented not only in terms of the quantity of new member states joining, but also because of the post-communist change it induced. The EU and the European Commission in particular rose to the challenge and created a very detailed toolbox, based on the principle of conditionality. However, it remains to be seen, whether it can be used effectively in the Eastern Neighbourhood, particularly, whether EU law is a suitable blueprint for development.

The goals of economic prosperity and peace remain largely unattained in all EaP countries. The EU toolbox applied during the enlargement waves over the past two decades is still effective, but needs to reflect the complexities of the frozen conflicts (in five out of six EaP countries), among other things. In addition, the EU continues to view the EaP as an important institution-building framework and a way for expanding a common European market, similar to how it was applied for the candidate countries. The EaP countries also consider the EaP as an important platform for promoting national interests, including free trade and people-to-people contact. Varying speeds and patterns of European integration with regard to the EaP countries reflect both

differences in local contexts, and in the effectiveness of the EU toolbox largely developed since the last wave of enlargement.

Given that the EaP countries are increasingly dependent on EU support, however, Brussels could become a more active player in the national policy environment. Towards this end, the EU should not just be committing resources at a very general level (to ensure macro-stabilisation), but should rather focus on identifying proponents of change and endow them with resources, if necessary. Strong national administrations that enjoy public support are a precondition to the success of the EaP countries.

### *3.2 Association Agreements as a way forward*

Much of the results of the recent progress in establishing a legal framework for cooperation (AAs and DCFTAs) are yet to be seen. To ensure a positive impact of such an enhanced economic and political cooperation, an inclusive and transparent public policy process in both the EaP national capitals and the EU member states is needed. This will be impossible without high quality analyses of sensitive issues and well-targeted communication campaigns. The AAs with DCFTAs launched between Moldova, Ukraine and the EU can be viewed as a modern integration instrument, since they enumerate concrete and binding commitments. In fact, they form a state-building framework based on the legal approximation of about 90 per cent of the EU acquis. The AAs have therefore ambitious agendas with unprecedented legal complexities for a wide range of sectors and areas.

Since the AAs are binding legal frameworks, sophisticated monitoring mechanisms are in place, and therefore, implementation or non-compliance matters. Still, the EU has demonstrated a remarkable flexibility in adjusting to the changing environment, such as attempting to negotiate the compatibility of the DCFTA and the Customs Union with Russia in order to avoid trade restrictions for Ukraine (which, however, did not result in the compromise desired).

The legal complexities of AAs pose implementation challenges for the EaP countries, all of which have weak governance, which in turn makes transformational change even more difficult. Political systems with weak competition, limited statehood, strong vested interests and regional interferences (not just in trade) all serve as barriers to transforming societies in line with the EU blueprint. Therefore, the AAs should not be viewed as a quick fix, but as a long term transformation process impacted by many local and external factors.

### *3.3 Public support for and communication of the European integration process*

There is a need to enhance dialogue on European integration and its implications for national policies by establishing different platforms for engaging relevant stakeholders. Communication between the EU and the EaP countries is becoming even more important as it targets not just the elites (in government-to-government technocratic dialogue), but also the citizens, increasingly via social media. There are still significant information asymmetries and gaps to be addressed, particularly, with regard to the EU agenda and the perceptions of the EU. A deficit also remains in terms of information on current developments in bilateral relations. The clash of different narratives and development ideologies in the region as well as the lack of free and professional media in EaP countries often undermine trust and lead to societal polarisation.

National businesses, academia and other stakeholders face barriers when seeking to access or utilise available knowledge on opportunities for engaging with the EU market or institutions. Public engagement is crucial for public support of European integration. As the case of Brexit shows, the general public needs to understand the implications and facts of Europeanisation. Therefore, a wide group of stakeholders needs to be engaged in policy dialogue. Informing the business community (not just exporters) about the AAs is also relevant given that there is only very generalised information publicly available in the EaP countries. Finally, the academic community in the EaP countries faces barriers including the lack of awareness of potential opportunities and the bureaucratic obstacles researchers encounter in their home organisations, among others. In the case of scientific cooperation between the EU and EaP, the criteria for participation in joint programmes and projects often remains ambiguous on the EU-side, urging the need for clearer communication.

There should be regular and detailed national reports on progress concerning the implementation of AAs, focusing on progress towards concrete outcomes. This would help to ensure government accountability and to keep stakeholders informed. For instance, in Lithuania, each EU-related piece of legislation was flagged and then given priority in the national parliament. Persisting informational asymmetry on the side of the EaP countries implies that national businesses are poorly prepared to compete on the EU market and to adapt to EU norms.

Furthermore, taking into account the national context in each of the EaP countries is important when crafting communications or technical assistance. EU-STRAT's inside-out approach towards analysing the region and the EU's transformative power can therefore help to better understand how this multilateral and bilateral cooperation should develop.



## **The EU and Eastern Partnership Countries An Inside-Out Analysis and Strategic Assessment**

Against the background of the war in Ukraine and the rising tensions with Russia, a reassessment of the European Neighborhood Policy has become both more urgent and more challenging. Adopting an inside-out perspective on the challenges of transformation the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries and the European Union face, the research project EU-STRAT seeks to understand varieties of social orders in EaP countries and to explain the propensity of domestic actors to engage in change. EU-STRAT also investigates how bilateral, regional and global interdependencies shape domestic actors' preferences and scope of action. Featuring an eleven-partner consortium of academic, policy, and management excellence, EU-STRAT creates new and strengthens existing links within and between the academic and the policy world on matters relating to current and future relations with EaP countries.