Newsletter

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

Issue 02 | 2017

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Dear friends and colleagues,

Happy New Year! More than half a year underway, EU-STRAT is moving full speed ahead on its eight work packages. To tackle our strategic assessment of the European Union (EU) and Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries, EU-STRAT has delivered its first two working papers as well as two workshops and three policy briefings throughout the EU and EaP countries.

Last July, Vilnius University hosted the first EU-STRAT workshop dealing with Work Package 4, which analyses the strategies of various external actors in the areas of migration, energy, trade, and security in the EaP countries. The premise of the workshop was to review existing literature and assess its applicability to the framework that EU-STRAT is moulding.

Freie Universität Berlin hosted our second workshop in October 2016 to discuss the conceptual framework for understanding varieties of social orders in EaP countries. The workshop set the stage for a systematic mapping of EaP countries in this regard, which will be done through EU-STRAT's Work Package 2.

EU-STRAT also published its first two working papers in October 2016 and January 2017. The first, entitled "Soft, Normative or Transformative Power: What Do the EU's Communications with Eastern Partners Reveal About its Influence?" presents the results of an analysis of EU communications towards Belarus, Ukraine, and Moldova. EU-STRAT partners investigated differences in emphasis on certain issues, such as economic reforms or democratic governance, in order to draw conclusions on whether the EU's official communications allude to the concepts of soft, normative, or transformative power.

The second working paper, "Science Policies and International Cooperation in the Eastern Neighbourhood of the European Union: An Overview", examines science policy and international cooperation projects in Belarus, Ukraine, and Moldova. Its conclusion ruminates on opportunities for and barriers to participation in international cooperation projects faced by the scientific communities in these countries.

In an exciting series of policy briefings, EU-STRAT launched its project on the ground in Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova throughout November. Amidst a tense political climate in Moldova due to the recent elections, EU-STRAT's briefing in Chişinău on challenges to the EU's communication strategy received wide media attention. During the policy briefing in Minsk, around 50 participants discussed scientific cooperation between Belarus and the EU. The briefing in Kyiv was dedicated to the impact of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area on Ukraine's economy.

Tanja A. Börzel   Antoaneta Dimitrova

This past half year also saw important political developments in the EaP region. In November, the pro-Russian Igor Dodon won the Moldovan presidential election with 52.11 per cent of the vote. On the topic of this election, our newsletter features an in-depth policy comment on what Dodan's victory means for Moldova's European integration. While most fear the impact of a pro-Russian president on Moldova's progress in this regard, Kamil Całus' (OSW) commentary argues that the country's oligarchical system will remain its biggest impediment to future development.

We hope you enjoy reading our coverage of these recent events, and look forward to keeping you updated on all the research that EU-STRAT has coming up!

Best wishes,

Tanja A. Börzel   *Antoaneta Dimitrova*
Project Coordinator   Project Co-coordinator

Pro-Russian turn or preservation of "oligarchic" status quo?
Moldova after the presidential elections

by Kamil Całus (Centre for Eastern Studies, OSW)

On the 13th of November, the second round of Moldova's first direct presidential elections since 1996 took place. Igor Dodon, the leader of the pro-Russian Party of Socialists of the Republic of Moldova (PSRM), was announced the winner with 52.11 per cent of the vote. By the wider public, Dodon is considered to represent Kremlin interests in Moldova and has positioned himself as the firm opponent of the ruling pro-European coalition. Yet, he has an uneasy, but rather symbiotic relationship with the oligarchic head of the pro-European Democratic Party of Moldova (PDM). Dodon's election is likely to further consolidate the oligarchic system in Moldova. Instead of Dodon's seemingly pro-Russian agenda, it is this oligarchic consolidation that is likely to represent the greatest threat for Moldova's European integration and may become a major impediment for the implementation of the Association Agreement (AA) with the European Union (EU).

The evolution of a "pro-European" oligarchy

Why is there a pro-European oligarchy in Moldova to begin with? From 2009 to 2015, there were two powerful political and economic groups in Moldova. The first centred around Vlad Filat, the former prime minister of the country, who held office from 2009 to 2013. Filat is also the leader of the Liberal Democratic Party, the biggest pro-European party in the ruling coalition. The second group was led by Vlad Plahotniuc, sponsor of the then second biggest party in the coalition, the PDM. Formally, both Filat and Plahotniuc were representing two main pro-European parties, and came to power in 2009 thanks to their respective pro-Western platforms.

At the same time, both interest groups were in constant competition for influence. The rivalry ended in October 2015 when the Anti-Corruption Centre and the Prosecutor General, both controlled by Plahotniuc, brought charges against Filat for large scale corruption in conjunction with the siphoning of nearly one billion USD from the Moldovan banking sector at the end of 2014. Eventually, Filat was sentenced to nine years in prison and lost control of the prime minister's office, which had until then been occupied by him or his allies. The position was then overtaken by Pavel Filip, an old business partner of Plahotniuc who remained fully dependent on the oligarch.

After Filat's arrest, Veacheslav Platon, a Moldovan banking tycoon, remained the last serious competitor to Plahotniuc. In July 2016, Platon was arrested in Ukraine and extradited – under a dubious procedure – to Moldova. At present, a trial continues against him in Chișinău and it seems highly likely that he will share the fate of Filat in the next few months.

As a result, Moldova has become dominated by Plahotniuc both on a political and economic level. His net worth is estimated at about two billion USD – a third of the country's GDP. Additionally, while Plahotniuc's party controls just 20 per cent of the parliament, the oligarch can still count on about 56-57 Members of Parliament, meaning he controls the majority.

Dodon's victory and the consolidation of a system

Despite his pro-Russian views, Dodon is unlikely to be anti-European or pro-Russian by conviction. His political stance has not been steadfast and changed when it allowed him to secure electoral support: as Minister of Economy in the communist-led government (2001-2009), for instance, he still supported the signing of the EU AA. And despite his formally anti-oligarchic rhetoric, Dodon comes from the establishment, and is also unlikely to challenge the country's existing oligarchic system. He has existing business ties to Plahotniuc, and there is some indication that he is at least partially under his control: Plahotniuc's media conglomerate, controlling about 60 to 70 per cent of all media space in Moldova, supported Dodon's candidacy during the electoral campaign. The Democratic Party apparatus was reportedly also unofficially engaged in the electoral process on Dodon's side. According to popular belief, Plahotniuc used his private secret services to accrue compromising

evidence over the years against Dodon, a tactic he seems to be increasingly employing.

Plahotniuc is likely to have had several motives for supporting his formal enemy in the presidential race. First of all, with Dodon as president, Plahotniuc can mobilise the pro-European electorate, presenting himself as the only effective defendant of Moldova's pro-western course. With Dodon as president-elect, the public's attention has been diverted from the issue of Plahotniuc, "oligarchisation", and the monopolisation of power, to instead the "imminent Russian threat." The Moldovan electorate will probably be presented with a political play in which Dodon pretends to fight Plahotniuc, who, in turn, pretends to oppose the Russian threat, represented by Dodon. Having a pro-Russian president would also be a very convenient excuse for Plahotniuc to slow down certain inconvenient reforms. Additionally, Dodon's victory as an opposition leader allows Plahotniuc to argue that the accusations of him "capturing the Moldovan state" are not true.

By effectively playing on the anti-Russian sentiment of the pro-European electorate, Plahotniuc may be able to win at least partial internal legitimacy. He is badly in need of such support, as currently only about two to four per cent of the electorate trust him as a politician. At the same time, Dodon, with limited presidential power, should not cause any serious threat to the oligarch – at least not in the foreseeable future.

Dodon's victory should furthermore help Plahotniuc gain international legitimacy. As the Moldovan expert Dionis Cenusa very accurately stated in one of his latest papers, the oligarch will seek to present himself to western partners as a "useful oligarch," who can not only guarantee internal stability, but can also successfully prevent pro-Russian political forces from taking over. This strategy has already proven to be beneficial: as Bucharest perceives the "Russification" of Moldova to be one of its greatest security threats, Plahotniuc can now count on Romanian support, as well as on at least tactical American support. In May 2016, a delegation of Moldovan politicians, including Plahotniuc, was hosted in Washington and met with Victoria Nuland, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs for the U.S. State Department.

Plahotniuc was received for these high-level meetings despite the fact that he does not formally hold a significant political post - officially he is just the vice-president of the PDM. During his meeting with Nuland, she is reported by Moldovan sources to have stated, "continue at the current pace, and we will support you."

Grim perspectives for reforms

Consequently, it seems that the victory of a formally pro-Russian candidate is less of a threat to Moldova's reform program than the oligarchic system. This system by default blocks the country's modernisation and endangers the implementation of the reforms required by the EU AA. The changes foreseen in the AA challenge the oligarchy's direct control over the media, and more importantly, its control over the judiciary, anticorruption structures, and the constitutional court. The declared pro-European oligarch Plahotniuc is unlikely to progress with regard to deep and structural reforms of the state. His control over important political and economic institutions and his financial power have served to secure his assets, as well as his personal security. They have also allowed him so far to prevail over his political and economic adversaries. Jointly, this provides little incentive for him to work towards reforms.

To conclude, as long as the oligarchic system in Moldova remains in tact, the possibility for actual and non-rhetorical domestic change of the country remains grim. And while EU cooperation is necessary for the current government to gain financial aid and legitimacy, the oligarchic system that it embodies is far more dangerous to Moldova's European integration than the election of a seemingly pro-Russian candidate.

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EU-STRAT's first two thematic workshops

EU-STRAT held its first workshops in 2016, both of which laid the foundation for upcoming research in EU-STRAT's Work Packages (WP) 4 and 2. The workshops were dedicated to discussing the conceptual frameworks of EU-STRAT's research on the strategies of external actors (WP4 workshop in July) and on varieties of social orders (WP2 workshop in October).

WP4 workshop in July

On July 14, 2016, the EU-STRAT team at Vilnius University hosted a workshop to discuss the project's analytical framework for comparing the approaches and strategies of selected external actors in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries. The workshop gathered EU-STRAT partners from WP4 that set out to investigate the policies and strategies of external actors in the areas of migration, energy, trade, and security.

Participants from four EU-STRAT partner institutions attended the workshop. They discussed conceptual frameworks that could be streamlined to examine strategies and approaches of a diverse set of external actors: the European Union (EU) and its member states, Russia and the Eurasian Economic Union, China and the United States, to name just a few.

WP4 Workshop in Vilnius

During the workshop, EU-STRAT partners raised a number of issues. They touched on the revival of geopolitical and geo-economic thinking in foreign policy analysis in recent years, as well as on the importance of the domestic context when assessing what legal constraints each EaP country may face when dealing with external actors. They also assessed the applicability of the region-building literature for the work in WP4, and argued that comparative regionalism did not fully tackle the nuanced role of external actors in the post-Soviet space and was thus difficult to employ for EU-STRAT's research objectives.

WP4 partners also stressed the importance of narratives that strategic actors used and noted their relevance for analysing the way external actors promote ideas in the EaP countries. They cautioned against conceiving of actions by external actors as being static or evolving in isolation and hinted at the dynamism of external actions and domestic developments by means of example: Russian military action in Ukraine also reinforced attempts by the Ukrainian government to engage in reforms. Though WP4 will focus predominantly on the strategy of these actors towards EaP countries, partners agreed that the impact of these strategies on developments in EaP countries was crucially shaped by informal rules and interactions of external and domestic actors. After the literature review discussion, a suggestion was made to first identify the level of importance of an EaP country to each external actor and then to compare the goals and strategies pursued by the latter.

The workshop featured an active exchange among all EU-STRAT partners. They eventually agreed that while several of the existing frameworks were useful in explaining strategies and behaviour of certain external actors, there was no single conceptual model in place that fitted all external actors under scrutiny in WP4. Consequently, partners in WP4 will work to develop such a framework.

WP2 workshop in October

EU-STRAT's second workshop took place on October 13, 2016 and was hosted by the team at Freie Universität Berlin (FUB). The workshop's goal was to bring together EU-STRAT partners to agree on the overall conceptual framework for understanding varieties of social orders in the EaP countries, a key objective of WP2. In order to do so, EU-STRAT researchers will seek to determine the degree of political and economic openness pre-

vailing in EaP countries, as well as the distribution of power among important economic and political actors that qualify as members of so-called dominant coalitions.

WP2 Workshop in Berlin

Prior to the workshop, the EU-STRAT team at FUB provided partners with a concept paper, which consortium members gave feedback on in individual reaction papers. The presentation by the FUB team at the workshop was then structured around the main feedback given by partners. EU-STRAT researchers present at the workshop were from Leiden University, University of Birmingham, the School of Young Managers in Public Administration (SYMPA), the Ukrainian Institute for Public Policy (UIPP), the Institute for Development and Social Initiatives (IDIS), Vilnius University (VU), the Lithuanian consultancy ESTEP, and the Foundation Maison des Sciences de l'Homme (FMSH).

Based on the presentation, the workshop participants discussed how to operationalize varieties of social orders. Partners debated how best to identify dominant elites and power networks, as well as organizations and informal institutions that structure political and economic openness in the EaP

countries. They focused inter alia on the potential role of military and secret service organizations, as well as on the need to differentiate between political and bureaucratic actors. After lively debates, the participants eventually agreed on how to move forward with WP2: in the upcoming months, the team at FUB will develop specific guidelines for identifying dominant coalitions in EaP countries in a comparative manner. Country experts will then provide in-depth analyses of available secondary literature and statistics to examine the composition of the dominant coalitions and their relative power in the six EaP countries.

The workshop participants also used the opportunity to discuss ways that allow analysing social orders in breadth and depth in the EaP region. WP2 will start with mapping varieties of social orders in the EaP countries, which should help to identify instances of ruptures or stabilization. In a second step, partners in WP2 will zoom in on these cases and investigate the mechanisms and factors that drove these changes, in order to eventually explain alterations to otherwise relatively stable equilibria of social orders.

When debating such mechanisms for change, participants also critically reflected on the role played by legitimation strategies that dominant elites employ. It was agreed that more work needs to be done on how to conceptually differentiate between various legitimation strategies as either mechanisms of change or as indicators of openness or closedness; a question that would also profit from greater empirical knowledge about differences and commonalities of EaP countries, which is an area of research that EU-STRAT partners in EaP countries will now dive into.

EU-STRAT's first working paper
What the EU says in the Eastern Partnership: differentiation in action

by Matthew Frear (Leiden University)

The first working paper of Work Package (WP) 5 analyses the European Union's (EU) communications towards Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine in a set time period. The research reveals that during this time, February – March 2016, the EU has emphasised different issues in each country, rather than imposing a one-size fits all narrative.

The working paper argues that limiting an analysis of the EU's soft power to norms would be misleading in view of the complex mix of incentives contained in EU policies towards its Eastern neighbours, and the amalgamated image of liberal democracy and economic cooperation in citizens' perceptions.

The paper adopts a broad definition and operationalization of soft power, including both economic power (e.g. trade) and norms and ideas, as well as referring to Nye's original definition of 'getting other states to want what you want'. Transformative power is viewed as focusing on reforms in addition to norms, economic relations and trade.

The communications analysed include press releases disseminated through the respective in-country website for each EU Delegation during the two-month timeframe. Partner institutions in each country used a common range of categories to analyse EU communications and relate the results to the images of the EU as a 'normative power', 'soft power' or 'transformative power'.

The coding was firstly based on core political science categories such as democracy (elections, separation of powers etc.), rule of law, and individual rights. Secondly, mentions of the economy and market integration, which are at the heart of the EU's integration model, were identified. Thirdly, categories were included such as public administration, reforms in general, and harmonization of standards, which are typical of the EU's conditions for closer integration. Another category accounted for purely factual, often 'event-driven', communications. These have been criticized by some communications analyses as widely used in communicating EU actions, but not very helpful for communicating what the EU does for and expects from EaP countries.

This initial analysis reveals that in terms of content, the EU's communications towards these three different countries vary to a considerable degree. We must note, however, that the limited timeframe of the analysis requires caution in generalising all the paper's findings.

What the analyses show is that in all three countries, event-driven communications are still a part of the total stream of communications. Such communications still appear only moderately helpful in explaining to citizens how the EU engages with their countries and specific concerns. For other forms of communication, the mix is different:

Towards Ukraine, the EU communicates by referring to a full range of areas of engagement, from democracy to security to the economy. The emphasis in the period in question has been on democracy. Setting these results next to public opinion surveys from Ukraine that highlight the aspirations of Ukrainians for freedom of movement, welfare improvement and education opportunities, we can conclude that the EU has the tools to make an impact as a transformative power. Further testing of this preliminary finding through discussions with citizens and focus groups is a necessary step to establish what EU communications reach citizens and what citizens make of them. The importance of regional variation in attitudes in Ukraine should be taken into account.

By comparison, communication towards Belarus has been more one-sided, focusing on rights, norms, and EU values. Based on the share of concepts referring to rights in the total mix of communications to Belarus in the covered period, we can say that the EU presents itself more as a normative power. There are important questions, however, regarding the potential reception of the EU's messages: we see that the reception of EU's norms is not likely to be easy, based on existing value orientations and expectations of citizens. Existing survey data suggest that Belarusian respondents believe that the EU and Belarus should focus on economic and trade relations, visa liberalization, and financial aid, as opposed to democracy promotion.

In the case of Moldova, based on the communication content over the same two-month period, there has been wide and active engagement on the EU's side, focusing on reforms and the economy. The engagement has been broad and suggests Moldova's relations with the EU are in an active phase. The EU emphasized economic and reform aspects rather than democracy and rights, but given the broad range of topics and the emphasis on reforms, we can say the EU communicated as a transformative power during the time period we examined. The question of whether messages about the EU's support and policies have reached citizens in Moldova, remains, however, open. Public opinion trends for the last three years suggest support for the EU is diminishing.

A further element of the analysis for this working paper involved mapping the channels and actors engaged in diplomacy on the EU's behalf in Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova, above and beyond the Delegations themselves. This has provided evidence that member states and their governments and ambassadors are indispensable for communicating the EU's engagement in its neighbourhood. In each country, several member states seem to take the lead, based either on the respective countries' strategies or on the presence of experienced and active ambassador or both. A number of active ambassadors in all three countries provide a voice for the EU's policies and transmit the EU's norms and values. In particular, the ambassadors of Germany, Lithuania and the UK are seen as active in all three countries assessed.

The research conducted in this working paper represents only a first step in the analyses planned for WP5. Establishing the mix of concepts and the underlying policies contained in the EU's official communications does not in itself prove that the EU's norms, values and messages are disseminated among elites, media or the public. Therefore, processes and channels of communication, media actors, and citizens' perceptions will be studied to gain a better understanding of whether the EU messages have reached or indeed can reach the relevant audiences.

In conclusion, the research conducted so far suggests that the EU does demonstrate a degree of differentiation in the messages it is trying to disseminate in Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova. Future working papers will investigate the impact of EU's communications compared to Russia's messages in the region and to assess how effective the EU's soft power is in the face of alternative narratives from Moscow.

Matthew Frear is a lecturer at Leiden University.

Policy briefings in Eastern Partnership countries

In November, EU-STRAT partners hosted special policy briefings in Kyiv, Chișinău and Minsk. The policy briefings aimed to introduce EU-STRAT to a wider audience ranging from European Union (EU) delegation officials and the local diplomatic corps, to the broader public of civil society organisations, local media and policymakers. In addition to outlining the concept, research objectives and scope of EU-STRAT, the briefings were intended to launch a discussion between researchers and a variety of interested stakeholders in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries. Each briefing was therefore focused on a specific theme relevant to the local policy community and EU-STRAT researchers.

Challenges for the EU's communication strategy in Moldova:
Policy briefing in Chișinău

On November 22, the Institute for Development and Social Initiatives (IDIS) in Chișinău conducted its first policy briefing dedicated to the challenges of the EU's communication strategy in Moldova. 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 was complemented by three representatives of the think tank and media community of Moldova: 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 think tank Institute for European Policies and Reforms (IPRE), and Former Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). It was attended by close to 50 participants and attracted a substantial amount of both local and international media attention (including six TV teams and a live online broadcast from the event). MFA officials, diplomats from the EU delegation, and other embassy staff were among the audience.

At the policy briefing, IDIS representatives first presented the concept, structure, partners and the scope of EU-STRAT. Antoaneta Dimitrova subsequently shared the results of EU-STRAT's first working paper that discussed different ways in which the EU had communicated with different EaP countries in the past (see a summary of the main findings on p. 7-8 of this newsletter). Her presentation especially drew on the findings of a first quantitative analysis of the respective EU

Delegations' discourses in three EaP countries. Susanne Kiefer, of the East StratCom Task Force, also gave a short presentation. The East StratCom Task Force was set up primarily to increase effective communication and promotion of EU policies towards the Eastern Neighbourhood, and to better address disinformation activities by external actors. Susanne Kiefer highlighted the manner of strategic communication recommended to various actors communicating about EU-related topics.

Policy briefing in Chișinău

Ruxandra Stanciu, Press and Information Officer of the EU Delegation, emphasized the need for the EU to regain its credibility in the Republic of Moldova by focusing in its communication on highlighting, in an accessible, simple manner, how regular citizens could benefit from EU support and assistance in their daily lives. This was an ongoing process that was changing the technocratic language into a direct and engaging discourse based on trust and clear benefits. The current major objective of the EU Delegation in terms of communication was to restore the level of trust in the EU and its credibility corresponding to the support and assistance given. It is also to counteract disinformation by explain-

ing the true values that uphold the European construction, as well as the principles and standards that make the EU socio-economic and democratic model a success. Insufficient outreach to citizens had created a gap of legitimate feedback to the EU Delegation, according to Ruxandra Stanciu. She added that the polarization of the media environment in the Republic of Moldova had made it more difficult for the EU to get through with an unbiased message. Ruxandra Stanciu also stated that the EU might persuade its audiences by reporting on personal success stories of EU assistance, by addressing the citizen – as the main partner and beneficiary of EU support – and by communicating more accurately about its values. Yet, association of the EU with various political evolutions in the Republic of Moldova has impeded the passage of an unbiased, accurate message to the public about the EU's efforts in this country.

Representatives from think tanks and media outlets subsequently shared their views on what they believed citizens wanted to know about EU, and how they assessed the effectiveness or resonance of the information policy by EU Delegation. They were also asked whether and, if so, why the EU had been less forceful than Russia in putting its message across the EaP states. Was this due to a lack of commitment to the future integration of EaP countries into the EU from EU member states, or

due to failures in communication? Could the EU overcome its tendency to address elites and define a narrative to appeal to citizens more directly? In his reply, Vasile Botnaru, Country Director of RFE/RL, cautioned the audience against accepting the simplified version of Moldova's closer EU integration that promoted EU benefits without demanding substantial efforts on the Moldovan side. He also voiced disagreement with the latest changes in the communication strategy of the EU in Moldova, saying he felt that the EU Delegation was less interested in interacting with the real feelings of the population. Since politicians were responsible for the loss of confidence that had occurred, the EU should revise its approach and self-assessment methods. He also suggested that the EU should not rely on interlocutors without credibility.

Iulian Groza, Director of IPRE, mentioned that the Moldovan audience needed to receive fewer geopolitical messages, and more specific content-related communication on real issues the citizens are concerned about. When the EU supported a government that was massively contested by the population, it delivered a confusing message to the public. He furthermore stated that expectations of the public needed to be balanced and well-managed on a consistent basis, not just at specific moments in time.

Scientific cooperation and academic mobility in Belarus and the EaP:
Policy briefing in Minsk

On November 24, SYMPA, EU-STRAT's Belarusian partner, held a policy briefing at the Hotel Europe in Minsk focused on scientific cooperation and academic mobility. Participants at the event represented Belarusian universities, higher education institutions, research institutions, NGOs, think tanks, and representatives of the diplomatic corps residing in Minsk. Approximately 50 people attended the event.

The panel included participants from a variety of backgrounds: Frederik Coene, from the EU Delegation in Minsk; Aleksa Bjelis, from Magna Charta Observatory; 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 Inde-

pendent Bologna Committee. The discussion was moderated by Ina Ramasheuskaya from SYMPA. The event was opened by Frederik Coene, who spoke of the importance of bringing together academic research and practical experience for economic and political development in Belarus. Ina Ramasheuskaya and Tatsiana Chulitskaya, also from SYMPA, subsequently 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 a keynote speech. Aleksa Bjelis is also the former rector of Zagreb University, giving him 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 utilize available EU research funding in the most efficient way.

Policy briefing in Minsk

Dimiter Toshkov from Leiden University presented the first working paper of EU-STRAT's Work Package 7, outlining how the study of research cooperation and academic mobility fitted into the context of EU-STRAT. He also presented some results of the study on institutional frameworks of cooperation between the EU and Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine.

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.

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. This had 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 had been quite high so far, on par with Ukraine and some EU member states from Eastern Europe.

The question most often raised during the discussion was how the reach of EU funding programs could be expanded within Belarus. So far, it seemed like only a handful of institutions successfully participated in numerous 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 organizations 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 formalization of scientific cooperation with the EU via special bilateral agreements.

The impact of the EU trade agreement on Ukraine:
Policy briefing in Kyiv

The policy briefing in Kyiv took place on November 14, 2016, at the Hotel Kyiv. The event was organized by the Ukrainian Institute for Public Policy (UIPP) with the participation of other partners of the project consortium, the University of Birmingham and the Lithuanian consultancy, ESTEP. The purpose of the briefing was to present the project and discuss how the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement (AA), particularly the Deep and Comprehensive Trade Agreement (DCFTA), is shaping Ukraine's economy.

Panelists 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 Birming-

ham, Algirdas Šemeta, the Business Ombudsman in Ukraine, Igor Burakovskiy from the Institute for Economic Research and Policy Consulting, Andriy Nikitov from the MFA, Anna Artemenko from the Antimonopoly Committee in Ukraine, Darius Žeruolis from ESTEP, and Ildar Gazizullin from UIPP.

Maxim Boroda and Ildar Gazizullin from UIPP opened the briefing by presenting EU-STRAT's motivation and objectives. Andriy Nikitov from the MFA 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. According to Andriy Nikitov, Ukraine was determined to use the EaP as a platform for pursuing its national interests, particularly to promote its economic and governance reforms. Rilka Dragneva-Lewers from the University of Birmingham presented 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), the Ukraine-Russia conflict and the diversity of preferences and positions of EU member states.

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 institutionalized and based on evidence, for example, from impact assessments. Such assessments should go beyond pure trade (export-import) implications, but include a fiscal or regional dimension. Meanwhile, there was a large information gap about the AA in Ukraine, which undermined efforts to mobilize 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.

Policy briefing in Kyiv

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 Europeanization activities with specific positive impacts. Such information should be communicated regularly to the key stakeholders in order to ensure that there was continuing support for the implementation path.