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A MORE GEOPOLITICAL EASTERN PARTNERSHIP: U-TURN OR "THE LADY'S NOT FOR TURNING"?

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1. Introduction

On November 18, a Joint Communication on the "Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy" was published by the European Commission and the EU's High Representative.[1] This is the result of the ambitious consultation process on this Policy launched on March 4, and an important next step in what hopefully will be much-awaited revitalization of the EU's relations with its neighbours feeding into the European Global Strategy to be published in June 2016. **Building on the Communication, results of the Riga Eastern Partnership summit and other documents, this paper seeks to answer if and what changes have been brought into EU's relations with Latvia's priority region in the European Neighbourhood Policy, that is Eastern Neighbours; and in particular, whether we can speak about geopolitics increasingly taking roots in the EU's policy.** The title of the paper makes a humorous reference to Margaret Thatcher's speech where she vehemently denied any changes in her market policies:

"To those waiting with bated breath for that favourite media catchphrase, the "U" turn, I have only one thing to say. You turn if you want to. The lady's not for turning. I say that not only to you but to our friends overseas and also to those who are not our friends."[2]

In this case, I argue, the EU is indeed slowly starting if not a "U"-turn, then at least an "L"-turn towards a **more pragmatic, interest-driven and strategic** understanding of the Neighbourhood. Referring to public and academic discourses about the EU's role and behaviour in the world, I choose to be provoking and call this understanding **"geopolitical"**. I explain the term in greater detail below.

Eastern Partnership (EaP), the Eastern dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), from the very beginning has been marred by absence of a single clear and universally espoused raison d'être. According to the official narrative, the policy was – and still is – aimed to assist the Eastern Partners in improving the state of their democracy and economy and in stabilization. As Štefan Füle, then the European Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy, said back in 2013,

"Some of you call on me to be more robust to promote strategic games. I will not do. Others call me to promote more robustly the values. Yes, that is the business I am in – to promote the values in the Eastern Partnership. I have problems to participate in the zero-sum game, as I

[1] European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, "Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy" {SWD(2015) 500 final}, Brussels, 18.11.2015, JOIN(2015) 50 final, http://eeas.europa.eu/enp/documents/2015/151118_joint-communication_review-of-the-enp_en.pdf.
Also see other documents listed under "ENP Review: stronger partnerships for a stronger neighbourhood", http://eeas.europa.eu/top_stories/2015/181115_enp_review_en.htm

[2] Margaret Thatcher, "The lady's not for turning", Conservative party conference in Brighton on October 10, 1980, http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2007/apr/30/conservatives.uk

am a believer in win-win games, particularly in dealing with such a strategic partner as Russia. I am not in the business to create new walls – quite to the contrary."[3]

This is the exemplary "anti-geopolitical" EU narrative[4] of fuzzing borders on the European continent and not provoking anyone, least of all Russia.

However, underneath this smooth and virtually altruistic surface, other interests have been trying to (re)define the ENP. For one, the ENP was conceived in view of the 2004 enlargement as a way to deal with the unpredictable new neighbourhood, while the Eastern Partnership dimension (launched in 2009) was sped up by the 2008 Russia-Georgia war. From the inception, the EU saw the policy also as a way to guarantee its own security and welfare – Romano Prodi's famous "ring of friends" metaphor.[5] Merje Kuus aptly described this approach as "a kind of accidental geopolitics".[6] And not everything is accidental. In particular, for the Central and Eastern European states that recently joined the EU, relations with the Eastern Partners became not only a way to maintain good relations with neighbours but also a way of self-positioning on the EU foreign policy scene with "special expertise", defending their economic interests, and, often, keeping the increasingly assertive Russia at bay.[7] As can be seen from the Füle's quote above, indeed the demand for more assertiveness on the EU's side has been on the rise.

What I use here is admittedly a very broad understanding of the "geopolitics", although one should note the term has already been much abused in Brussels and elsewhere. **Geopolitics here is not about assertiveness and domination but rather about realizing that the EU's strategic interests are indeed at stake in its neighbourhood, and moving from abstract, generic principles that are futile or counterproductive to a more result-oriented policy.** This is a way of actively exerting influence in the Neighbourhood to defend own priorities and needs, such as stability, sustainable development and favourable climate for strategic projects. **The EU's geopolitics are not immoral and do focus on the partner states' interests; good news here is that the EU is well positioned for a "win-win" game where both itself and its partners benefit.** As Richard Youngs and Kateryna Pishchikova noted back in 2013, "Europe can be both geopolitical [in the traditional understanding] and committed to reform—but to strike the right balance, the EU must be more strategic"[8]. And as Yauheni Preiherman writes, "the best service the ENP can offer to Belarusian society is available by becoming more geopolitical. A more geopolitical ENP would be more insightful and appreciative of the partners' fundamental needs, concerns, and geopolitical

[3] Štefan Füle, "Statement on the pressure exercised by Russia on countries of the Eastern Partnership", European Parliament Plenary, in Strasbourg, 11 September 2013, SPEECH/13/687.

[4] Merje Kuus, *Geopolitics and Expertise: Knowledge and Authority in European Diplomacy* (Chichester, West Sussex, UK; Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 12.

[5] Romano Prodi, "A Wider Europe – A Proximity Policy as the key to stability" in "Peace, Security And Stability International Dialogue and the Role of the EU", Sixth ECSA-World Conference, Jean Monnet Project, Brussels, 5-6 December 2002, SPEECH/02/619, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_SPEECH-02-619_en.htm

[6] Merje Kuus, *Geopolitics and Expertise: Knowledge and Authority in European Diplomacy* (Chichester, West Sussex, UK; Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 18.

[7] Point corroborated by e.g. Kristi Raik, "Talking Democracy, Thinking Geopolitics", FIIA Comment 11/2011, October 2011, http://www.isn.ethz.ch/Digital-Library/Publications/Detail/?lang=en&id=133410

[8] Richard Youngs, Kateryna Pishchikova, "Smart Geostrategy for the Eastern Partnership", 14.11.2013, http://carnegieeurope.eu/publications/?fa=53571

limitations, without being confrontational. It would also be less arrogant and EU-centric[9]". Exactly such a change is implied here. I elaborate on its origins and markers, ask if we can take it seriously and what are the prospects of EU-Neighbourhood relations.

2. European Union's Geopolitical Soul-Searching

To begin with, why do we have to criticize the European Union for lacklustre approach not bringing any tangible results? Why has it been so difficult for the European Union to adopt a coherent and strong policy towards the Eastern Partnership – at least political if not geopolitical? The reason is not just much-criticized absence of interest and "drive"; rather, there is a whole conjunction of structural factors.

One reason obviously is differences in opinion among member states and between them and EU institutions. As mentioned above, the "new" member states prioritize the Eastern Partner countries with whom they can identify easier, but at the same time compete for economic and political presence in the partner states – and not only in the advanced reformers. Germany, the EU heavyweight, is supportive of the Eastern Partnership but cautious, both about the progress and interest of the partner countries themselves and about escalating tensions with Russia too much for too long. As Gustav Gressel writes, while Germany was providing large-scale bilateral support to Ukraine and endorsing sanctions against Russia, there were signs of rising deference to Moscow in the domestic political debate.[10] Germany's pragmatism can be both helpful and damaging to the Eastern Partnership project, depending on the situation, but certainly dampens the more idealistic / geopolitical approach of its Eastern EU neighbours. Meanwhile, countries in the South tend to be less enthusiastic about the Eastern Partnership, but more enthusiastic about improving cooperation with Russia, especially after being hit by the economic sanctions induced by the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. Meanwhile, the EU institutions differ in opinions among themselves – for instance, the Council and the Commission are more focused on economics and security, while the European Parliament is more adamant on democracy matters. As the interested players compete for influence over the EaP policy and the disinterested ones try to divert the EU's resources elsewhere, it is difficult to reach any impactful solution.

Another reason is the EU's "anti-geopolitical" foreign policy identity. The notions of first "civilian" (non-military, e.g. economic) and then "normative" (ideological[11]) "power Europe" have been widely discussed. The broad thrust here is that the EU was established as a transnational unit based on democracy, human rights, rule of law and similar principles, with blurred borders and softened approach to national sovereignty. Thus, for the sake of overall consistency with its own fundamental principles, the EU either does not pursue "high politics" goals or, for proponents of "normative power Europe", has no strategic interests: "The concept of normative power is an attempt to suggest that not only is the EU constructed on a normative basis, but

[9] Yauheni Preiherman, "Belarus and the European Neighbourhood Policy: A Special Case for 'a Special Case'" in "Reviewing the European Neighbourhood Policy: Eastern Perspectives", Europe Policy Paper, ed. by Alina Inayeh and Joerg Forbrig (The German Marshall Fund of the United States, July 2015).

[10] Gustav Gressel, "Germany and the Eastern Partnership: the view from Berlin", 19.05.2015., ECFR, http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_germany_and_the_eastern_partnership_the_view_from_berlin3027

[11] See mainly Ian Manners, "Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?", *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Iss. 40 (2) (2002), http://web.a.ebscohost.com

importantly that this predisposes it to act in a normative way in world politics".[12] Undoubtedly, this approach is not universally shared, especially among the "new" member states, but it has long been one of the predominant understandings of the EU's role in the world. Meanwhile, the "new" EU members had been scorned upon for their allegedly extreme "Russophobia" until after the Ukrainian crisis. Enlargement and in particular the Georgian-Russian war of 2008 brought greater openness, but nevertheless, in circumstances where even discussions on geopolitical or security issues have long been and still are discouraged, again, it is hard to act geopolitically.

At the same time as the EU has been enlarging and trying to come to terms with its own increased diversity, the domestic and international environment has been changing rapidly. On the one hand, Russia, formerly considered a partner, is becoming increasingly assertive and the EU's South-Eastern regions have been massively destabilized. On the other hand, the US has been retreating as the main guarantor of European security and pushing European NATO states to take care of themselves.[13] And the EU's prolonged economic and financial difficulties, plus political resistance to giving over greater funds to the EU institutions, mean that these demands for increased external activity cannot be met with adequate funding. One should also remember that the EU's formal foreign policy is new, established only with the Maastricht Treaty in 1992; the European External Action Service is newer still, and each new Commission brings modified institutional arrangements.

The EU is indeed reacting to the new surroundings. The Consultation Paper leading to new decisions on the European Neighbourhood Policy – part of the long review process – was published on November 18, 2015; the ambitious revamp of the European Security Strategy – now to be called "EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy" – is scheduled for 2016. Federica Mogherini recognizes that the world has become "more contested"[14] and has openly stated that she wants to make the EU's foreign policy more "strategic"[15] and also that the EU should have more "leverage" over "neighbours that have little interest in endorsing EU standards" [16].

"We also need to develop foreign policies that [..] strengthen the statehood of our Eastern partners; that respond firmly to destabilising actions on our borders, while also engaging Russia to restore a sustainable European security architecture and address global challenges."[17]

At the same time, it can already be seen why we should have moderate expectations from the EU's emergent strategic thinking in external affairs.

[12] Ibid., 252.
[13] See this point in e.g. Ian Anthony, Camille Grand, Patricia Lewis, "Towards a New European Security Strategy? Assessing the Impact of Changes in the Global Security Environment", European Parliament, June 9, 2015, and in Toms Rostoks, "Geopolitical Transformations and the EU Eastern Partnership Policy", *Latvia's Interests in the European Union*, 2015/1, 20-1.
[14] Federica Mogherini, "The European Union in a changing global environment: a more connected, contested and complex world", June 2015, http://eeas.europa.eu/top_stories/2015/150627_eu_global_strategy_en.htm
[15] Quoted in Rem Korteweg, "Mogherini's mission: Four steps to make EU foreign policy more strategic", 19.01.2015, CER, http://www.cer.org.uk/insights/mogherinis-mission-four-steps-make-eu-foreign-policy-more-strategic
[16] Federica Mogherini, "The European Union in a changing global environment: a more connected, contested and complex world".
[17] Ibid.

3. Strategic Thinking and Realities of the Eastern Partnership: What Goes Wrong?

Studies of what went wrong with the Eastern Partnership are a popular genre nowadays.[18] However, it is pertinent to include here a brief summary of the points most relevant to this paper's discussion about strategic / geopolitical thinking. Many of these have been induced by the previous structural factors, especially the EU's inability to reach and implement a substantial political agreement and to commit resources, as well as Russia's assertiveness. So, in brief, there is mismatch between the EU's and the partner states' aspirations and policies – in all combinations.

First, there is the major discrepancy between the EU's formal aspirations and the EU's actual policy. The EU has until now viewed the process of cooperation as unilateral convergence of the partner states with the EU's own norms, with approach most resembling the pre-accession one. According to the Prague summit declaration, exactly such approximation "serves the shared commitment to stability, security and prosperity of the European Union, the partner countries and indeed the entire European continent"[19]. The Association Agreements (AAs) even include stricter provisions than the ones with Balkans, although, unlike the Balkans, the EaP partners have never been given a prospect of accession. The AAs also have other shortcomings, e.g. fixing a particular state of the EU *acquis communautaire* for the partners to implement while the EU keeps developing its own legal basis further. At the same time, the EU has not seriously dealt with some substantial issues like security and has committed neither a substantial amount of financial resources nor sufficient political guidance – Jan Techau writes about "a technocratic approach to a political challenge that warranted permanent strategic oversight and diplomatic guidance by prime ministers and chief diplomats". [20]

There have been other pitfalls in the EU's policy, for instance, in supporting regional cooperation among the six EaP countries. This much-needed cooperation is already stalled by weak links or even conflicts among the partners, but on top, the EU actually fosters competition not cooperation: it nominally promotes multilateral links, but distributes bonuses to each partner on the basis of their achievements in bilateral relations.

The second problem has been the difference between the EU's and partner states' aspirations. One aspect is some partner states' willingness to *cooperate*, not to *integrate* with the EU. We should not forget that in 1990s the EaP countries were not as interested in integration with the EU, in particular because of the much more intense Russian pressure and domestic conflicts, while the EU itself was not enthusiastic to help. By the time the ENP and the EaP were introduced, large parts of societies and elites in the partner countries developed a rather sceptical attitude to the EU. The EU, on its part, did not succeed in satisfying the most salient

[18] See, among others, Stefan Lehne, "Time to reset the European Neighborhood Policy", 04.02.2014., http://carnegieeurope.eu/2014/02/04/time-to-reset-european-neighborhood-policy/h02l and Richard Youngs, Kateryna Pishchikova, "Smart Geostrategy for the Eastern Partnership".

[19] Council of the European Union, "Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit", Prague, 7 May 2009, 8435/09 (Presse 78), http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/er/107589.pdf

[20] Jan Techau, "Europe's Neighbourhood Policy is in trouble, but not beyond saving", 07.04.2014., http://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/europes-neighbourhood-policy-is-in-trouble-but-not-beyond-saving_1370.html

needs of partner states (e.g. tackling short-term social, economic and security problems) and did not communicate its efforts convincingly enough.

Russia's factor should also be mentioned here. Although no EU's or partners' policy can justify Russia's aggressive behaviour in the Eastern Neighbourhood, the EU could still have chosen a wiser approach. Although the EU has always stressed that the partner states do not have to choose between it and Russia, in fact, there has been some "element of choice" to the policy, as for instance Toms Rostoks writes[21]. For instance, when it turned out that the partner countries cannot simultaneously participate in the Eurasian Customs Union (ECU) and conclude a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) with the EU[22], the EU responded that the AAs "should contribute in the long term to the eventual creation of a common economic space from Lisbon to Vladivostok, based on WTO rules" and invited the Eastern Partners to "deepen their ties with Russia, as we do ourselves, but in a way which is compatible with AA/DCFTA obligations"[23]. However, it was too slow in offering an alternative – a type of agreement which would be accessible also to ECU members. For instance, Armenia decided not to proceed with the AA in September 2013, but only in 2015 did Armenia and the EU finish a "joint scoping exercise" on what an alternative agreement might look like. Negotiations have not yet started.

To reiterate: the EU has not forced any of the six EaP countries to abort their links with Russia and indeed continued dialogue with Armenia and Ukraine when they decided not to proceed with the AAs, as well as with traditionally sceptical Azerbaijan and Belarus. However, the EU should be more flexible in offering cooperation mechanisms that take partner countries' relations with Russia and indeed other regional powers into account and demonstrate – publicly – it is ready to work all other strata of the society, also the Eurosceptics. As a trivial example, if the EU wants to reach out to all strata of the partners' population, why do the websites of the EU delegation to the Eastern partners offer information only in English and, respectively, Armenian, Azeri, Georgian and Ukrainian languages, but not in Russian? Ironically, the website of the Moldovan delegation is the only one offering news in Russian, although most of them are not translated, while the delegation to Belarus only offers information in Belarusian, despite the fact that both Belarusian and Russian languages are recognized as official in this country's Constitution, and indeed only about 23%[24] speak the former.

Thirdly, there have been discrepancies between partner states' declarations and actual policies, as well as inability to deliver, which the EU often chooses to ignore. The contrast might be the starkest with the three "active reformers" – Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine – but one should pay attention to the other three countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus) as well. Below I outline some difficulties each of the six partners is facing on the path to reforms. This is not an exhaustive list since detailed analysis of each of the partner countries lies far beyond the scope of this report, but rather a list of notable examples. Some of these can be observed across several partner states.

[21] Toms Rostoks, "Geopolitical transformations and the EU Eastern Partnership Policy", *Latvia's Interests in the European Union*, 2015/1, 22.
[22] Stefan Lehne, "Time to reset the European Neighborhood Policy".
[23] Štefan Füle, European Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy, "Statement on the pressure exercised by Russia on countries of the Eastern Partnership", European Parliament Plenary, in Strasbourg, 11 September 2013, SPEECH/13/687.
[24] Katerina Barushka, "After decades of Russian dominance, Belarus begins to reclaim its language", 28.01.2015, The Guardian, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jan/28/-sp-russian-belarus-reclaims-language-belarusian

– **Armenia has** experienced economic difficulties rather than growth after joining the Eurasian Economic Union: immediately after accession, in the first three quarters of 2015, its foreign trade dropped by 20%. Trade with Russia, the EEU heavyweight, declined by 14%, and even bigger declines were registered in Armenia's trade with Belarus and Kazakhstan. Trade with the EU also declined – by almost 26%[25]. Thus, until now the new integration mechanism has not justified itself – not surprising taking into account that Armenia does not even share border with any of the EEU members. Armenia's dram was devalued by 15% over the last year, allegedly driving up the prices for electricity, distributed through a Russian-owned company.The increase in prices for 15% led to massive protests this summer. The dram was listed by Bloomberg as one of the currencies most under risk of further devaluation.[26] This exemplifies the risks Eastern Partners suffer due to economic downslide in Russia and China as well as their own imprudent policies and corruption.
  Meanwhile, security remains a problem for Armenia. Azerbaijan has become more assertive recently, while Russia's previously supportive policy became increasingly more ambiguous. And, according to Stratfor, "making concessions on Nagorno-Karabakh now could push the current administration out of power"[27]. It remains to be seen if and how the EU and international community will be able to contribute to peaceful resolution of the conflict.
– Policies of **Azerbaijan**, the second party to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, recently have become increasingly anti-Western.The state is repressing civil society and opposition and openly accusing the West of trying to subvert the existing regime. Conflict in Ukraine and Azerbaijan's fears that the EU does not take its own security problems seriously enough[28], as well as falling oil revenues, are evidently driving Azerbaijani government's fears of a "colourful revolution"[29]. The government is overreacting: most recently, Azerbaijan cancelled a high-level visit by the European External Action Service over a declaration by the European Parliament[30], although the declaration itself had largely symbolic significance. In parallel Azerbaijan is becoming increasingly close with Russia, despite previously being highly cautious of Russian policies – for instance, both countries recently conducted a joint military exercise and there have been rumours about a new Russian radar station in Azerbaijan[31]. Assessments of security situation in the region differ dramatically: according to Stratfor, latest diplomatic activity between Russia and Armenia and Russia and Azerbaijan suggests that "parties are negotiating an arrangement that will soon change the status quo"[32]. PISM, on the contrary, suspects that Russia might want to unfreeze the Nagorno-Karabakh conflicts through creating a false sense of impunity to Azerbaijan, and use this as a pretext for strengthening its influence over both Azerbaijan and Armenia – for instance, through sending

[25] Lragir.am, "Armenia is pushed out of Eurasian Economic Union", 31.10.2015, http://www.lragir.am/index/eng/0/country/view/34848

[26] Srinivasan Sivabalan and Paul Wallace, "10 currencies that may follow tenge in tumble triggered by China", 20.08.2015, http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-08-20/10-currencies-that-may-follow-tenge-in-tumble-triggered-by-china

[27] Stratfor, "Gaming out Nagorno-Karabakh", 21.09.2015, https://www.stratfor.com/analysis/gaming-out-nagorno-karabakh

[28] Seba Aghayeva, "Azerbaijan made concessions to EU by signing Riga summit declaration – top official", 22.05.2015, http://en.trend.az/azerbaijan/politics/2398054.html

[29] On fears see Kamran Ismayilov and Konrad Zasztowt, "Azerbaijan's risky game between Russia and the West", PISM Policy Paper, No. 32 (134), October 2015.

[30] Eldar Mamadov, "EU and Azerbaijan: breaking up or muddling through?", 16.09.2015, http://www.eurasianet.org/node/75116

[31] Kamran Ismayilov and Konrad Zasztowt, "Azerbaijan's risky game between Russia and the West".

[32] Stratfor, "Gaming out Nagorno-Karabakh".

peacekeepers.[33] Like Armenia, Azerbaijan is now in need of both economic stimuli and security reassurances.

- **Belarus** continues manoeuvring between the EU and Russia; Ukrainian conflict and Russian economic downslide have a milder impact on its economy, since it also managed to profit through exporting its own and allegedly re-exporting European produce to Russia. Lukashenko managed not only to prolong credit payments to Russia but is also poised to receive a USD 3.5 bn loan from the IMF. However, trade with Ukraine fell, and so do revenues from oil refineries and potash exports, two main pillars cross-subsidizing Belarus's command economy. GDP is also in decline, and the government faces increasing difficulties to maintain its main promise to the population – social stability.An increasing number of employees face salary delays, part-time working hours and even forced unpaid leaves. Politically, Lukashenko faces ever-increasing pressure from Russia that already guarantees survival of his regime. The recent presidential elections "campaign" was marred by the question of Russia allegedly planning to build a military base in Belarus, something Lukashenko denied vehemently. However, he told journalists he and Russia were discussing a missile defence system for Belarus, which could be used against, inter alia, NATO bases in Poland (!)[34]. Contrary to Armenia and Azerbaijan, in the case of Belarus, the EU has been too lenient. After Lukashenko released six political prisoners and despite the overtly undemocratic presidential election, the EU on October 29 decided to suspend sanctions against the bulk of sanctioned Belarusian officials for four months[35] (it seems, potentially allowing them to relocate frozen assets). This will not reassure Belarus or induce it to democratise. The most important aim for the EU right now would be to concentrate on working together with Belarus on issues of free movement, education, sustainable social and economic development and those reforms to which the Belarusian government is already committed *and* which will likely bring positive results.
- **Georgia**, possibly the most successful reformer, is facing not only frozen conflicts (remember the "borderisation" incident this summer when Russian forces transferred South Ossetian border further to the south, gaining control over a plot of land where the international Baku-Supsa oil pipeline is located) but, again, economic hardship and increasingly sceptical society. Georgian lari was devalued by 30% in the last year, and despite the events in Ukraine, 31% of population is in favour of joining the EEU over the EU (compare to only 11% in November 2013). The main benefit Georgians expect from the EU is economic growth[36], but the DCFTA will likely bring positive effects in medium to long term. Visa liberalization is another issue that is highly salient for the Georgian society but where no breakthrough has been achieved until now (should the EU consider waiving visa fees for Georgians as an interim measure, while it is resolving technical issues with the government?).
- **Moldova** brought one of the last months' biggest disappointments to the EU, as it became clear that the pro-European governing coalition has been engaged in a USD 1 to 1.5 bn bank

[33] Kamran Ismayilov and Konrad Zasztowt, "Azerbaijan's risky game between Russia and the West".

[34] Alexander Lukashenko and Belarus's defence minister Andrey Ravkov quoted in Александр Алесин, "Вместо авиабазы Беларусь хочет получить от России новые самолеты", 31.10.2015, http://naviny.by/rubrics/politic/2015/10/31/ic_articles_112_190163/; "Министр обороны Беларуси: смысла в российской авиабазе нет", 22.10.2015, http://naviny.by/rubrics/politic/2015/10/22/ic_news_112_465486/

[35] "Belarus: EU suspends restrictive measures against most persons and all entities currently targeted", 29.10.2015, Delegation of the European Union to Belarus, http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/belarus/press_corner/all_news/news/2015/2015_10_29_en.htm

[36] "Gay rights in Georgia", 20.05.2015, The Economist, http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21651689-attitudes-homosexuality-become-staging-ground-countrys-choice-between-west-and; "NDI poll: most Georgians continue to support EU membership; many still politically undecided", 19.10.2015, National Democratic Institute, https://www.ndi.org/August-2015-Political-Poll-PressRelease-Georgia

fraud (one eighth of Moldova's GDP) that caused depreciation of the leu and hurt ordinary Moldovans[37]. This led to massive protests, until eventually the parliament dismissed the government; in case a new government is not approved within three months, early elections that the protesters demanded will be held. On this wave of popular discontent, anti-EU communist and socialist parties gained popularity. The EU cannot ignore the corruptness of the "pro-European" government anymore (indeed it has done so for too long, despite good evidence that the "pro-European" forces had already committed numerous offences[38]), but should it support a Moldovan Maidan if it is run by forces opposed to democratic and market reforms? Two separatist regions of Gagauzia and Transnistria are yet another potential destabilizers of the Moldovan regime.

– Finally, **Ukraine** continues to suffer both from Russia's aggression – admittedly the heaviest drain on the government's scarce resources – and from its own reluctance in implementing the necessary reforms (including fight against corruption). Ukrainian leaders face a tough challenge of consolidating the polarized society and catering to voters' demands. According to a recent opinion poll, 70% percent of Ukrainians believe their country is "moving in a wrong direction"; the percentage of those who strongly disapprove of the president, parliament and the cabinet is, respectively 40%, 48% and 54%[39]. And in the recent municipal elections, approximately 2 million internally displaced residents from South-East were denied the right to vote[40] – which means there will be 2 million people for whom local power authorities will be illegitimate. Anders Åslund recently published a strong critique of the current Ukrainian regime for its failure to limit the exorbitant costs of national elections, cleanse and privatise the state enterprises that currently feed "grey cardinals", and force the "grey cardinals" out of ministries where they currently control political decisions and engage in criminal activities.[41] Similarly to the Moldovan case, the EU must not only support the ruling coalition but also be more vocal in condemning any proven infringements, in order to avoid being associated with crime and low living standards in the eyes of the population.

To sum up, the EU's strategic thinking has been underdeveloped, and it had problems dealing not only with factors external to the partnership (Russia) but also with difficulties its partners are facing domestically. I will proceed with discussing the already introduced and expected changes to the EU's policy as well as some additional important steps.

[37] For details see AlJazeera, "Moldova's $1bn bank fraud prompts massive rally", 06.09.2015, http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/09/moldova-1bn-bank-fraud-prompts-massive-rally-150906143127034.html

[38] Denis Cenusa, "Post-Vilnius Moldova: between reform shortcomings and geopolitical dilemmas", *Latvia's Interests in the European Union*, 2015/1, 50.

[39] Gwendolyn Sasse, "Ukraine's testing local elections", October 23, 2015, http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategiceurope/?fa=61728&mkt_tok=3RkMMJWWfF9wsRonvKXNZKXonjHpfsX56O8lUKWylMI%2F0ER3fOvrPUfGjI4AS8tkI%2BSLDwEYGJlv6SgFSrnAMbBwzLgFWhI%3D

[40] Adrian Karatnycky, "A democratic misstep for Ukraine", 28.10.2015, http://www.politico.eu/article/democratic-misstep-for-ukraine-local-elections/

[41] Anders Åslund, "Ukraine can beat its political corruption", 19.10.2015, http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/ukraine-can-beat-its-political-corruption

4. Eastern Partnership in 2015: Consolidating Strategic Thinking or Breaking Apart?

The "new geopolitical circumstances"[42] led to a process of review of the European Neighbourhood Policy that was officially launched by the European Commission and the High Representative on March 4 this year. The Latvian Presidency of the EU Council strongly endorsed and contributed to the process, and the Riga EaP summit in May provided key high-level political input to the consultations. The European Commission's and High Representative's communication on Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy was published on November 18, 2015[43]; as evident from the title, this is not the final EU decision but rather a more advanced and detailed exposition of the views currently prevalent in the EU. The next step will be additional consultations among the Member States and the partners, which will hopefully lead to binding decisions. However, the Communication demonstrates that, to a great extent, a new consensus has been reached. To illustrate the changes in the EU's approach to the Eastern Neighbourhood, I compare the abovementioned document of November 18 as well as the Joint Consultation Paper of March 4[44] and the Riga Summit Declaration[45] to the Prague Summit Declaration[46] (2009), singling out several key aspects.

– **Keystones of the EU's attraction**. The Prague declaration stressed "fundamental values" and believed that partner countries' "approximation towards the European Union" will bring the desired "stability, security and prosperity of the European Union, the partner countries and indeed the entire European continent"[47]. It also decided that "the main areas of cooperation" will be democracy, good governance and stability; economic integration and convergence with EU sectoral policies; energy security; and contacts between people – importantly including energy security but omitting the need to work on frozen conflicts. The 2015 documents exemplify a clear shift. On the one hand, the EU's offers became more specific and tangible, focusing in particular on security sector reform, energy, the DCFTAs and Mobility Partnerships, a visa free regime; and on the other hand, the Riga Summit reaffirmed "the sovereign right of each partner freely to choose the level of ambition and the goals to which it aspires in its relations with the European Union"[48]. This wording is arguably the closest the EU leaders ever got to accepting some partners' aspirations to membership, and it recognizes that the approximation to the EU standards is not the only

[42] Ina Strazdiņa, "You cannot serve them all from the same pot", *Latvia's Interests in the European Union*, 2015/1, 81.
[43] European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, "Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy".
[44] European Commission, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, "Joint Consultation Paper: Towards a new European Neighbourhood Policy", JOIN(2015) 6 final, Brussels, 4.3.2015.
[45] Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit (Riga, 21-22 May 2015), www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/international-summit/2015/05/riga-declaration-220515-final_pdf/
[46] Council of the European Union, "Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit", Prague, 7 May 2009, 8435/09 (Presse 78), http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/er/107589.pdf
[47] Ibid.
[48] Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit.

possible choice. This has been a major step in making the EU's policy better adapted to realities on the ground.

– Accordingly, the principle of **differentiation**, which was barely admitted in the Prague Summit declaration, has become the major innovation – "the hallmark"[49] – in the Review:

"Where partners have shown less engagement, or none at all, the review of the ENP should consider the reasons for this, and examine ways to fit better the aspirations on both sides."[50]

Previously the blame for incompliance with the EU's norms was put entirely on the partner states, while the EU espoused the infamous conditionality or "more-for-more" approach that could also be translated as "reforms first, money, possibly, later". Now the EU itself is ready to re-evaluate expectations and, although conditionality has not been totally scrapped, to cooperate not only with the most euro-enthusiastic partners. In the words of Latvia's foreign minister Edgars Rinkēvičs, "after six years, it is obvious that you cannot serve them all from the same pot"[51]. If implemented prudently and conducting thorough research on partners' situation and needs, this can be considered a major "geopolitical" step that is likely to increase the EU's influence throughout the EaP region.

– Approach to **economic reforms** in the partner states has changed as well, but is still to be fine-tuned. The Prague Summit strongly supported economic reforms in the partner states as a way to achieve "sustainable economic development of the partner countries". What it failed to acknowledge was that long-term positive effects do not in themselves exclude short-term adaptation costs, which could endanger political stabilization and not underpin it[52]. Since not all of the partner states have been active in reforms, opinion has shifted towards the more pragmatic focus on *cooperation* – recognizing that not all partner states are interested in AAs / DCFTAs and, at the Riga Summit, agreeing to offer alternative contractual agreements to Armenia and Azerbaijan as well as some additional cooperation possibilities but not yet a new agreement to Belarus. If implemented well, this policy will strengthen the EU's economic presence in all six partner states. What the EU is only starting to realize is that DCFTAs themselves have some inevitable shortcomings, namely the need to implement reforms with expected painful short-term effects and open up partner countries' economies that still have difficulties competing with the EU. This has been briefly acknowledged in the Consultation Paper, but there are no direct signs that such short-term oriented assistance will be tailored to, and sufficient for, the reformers' needs. There are also some other weak points in the EU's policy that could have been prevented, such as incomplete opening of its own market to partners' agricultural produce. The EU does offer technical assistance to the partner states but this is not sufficient to resolve all difficulties with implementing the ambitious DCFTA provisions. The November 18 Communication highlights the importance of jobs and growth, promises increased cooperation with the International Financial Institutions, greater focus on attracting investments, and even – a

[49] European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, "Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy".

[50] European Commission, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, "Joint Consultation Paper: Towards a new European Neighbourhood Policy".

[51] Ina Strazdiņa, "You Cannot Serve Them All from the Same Pot", 83-4.

[52] See Council of the European Union, "Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit".

bold decision under present circumstances – improved access to the EU market for skilled professionals from the partner states.[53] However, it remains to be seen how the EU will gather support of international and its own investors and whether it will be finally able to reach out to all parts of the partners' population. Marginalized groups tend to suffer most from economic liberalization, and this may overlap with overall scepticism about EU integration.

- EU's role in promoting **regional security** is poised to gradually increase – potentially another valuable step for increasing its strategic presence and leverage. I use terms "gradually" and "potentially" because it remains to be seen whether the EU can efficiently promote peace in the region. The first step has been taken – the EU acknowledged the need "to do more together with our partners" in the security field, also through field presence. However, while the EU welcomes Eastern Partners' contribution to its missions, it is slow on detailing specific measures *it* could take *for* the partners. The November 18 Communication outlines numerous directions where the EU could step up its cooperation with partners, but these mostly remain technical. There is only one sentence that indicates the EU's potentially increasing political role, and this one is generic: "In line with the EU's Comprehensive approach to external conflict and crises, all means available will be used, including – where necessary, CSDP missions and operations or the EU' Special Representatives – to support the management of crises and the settlement of protracted conflicts in the neighbourhood."[54]
- **Multilateral cooperation** within the Eastern Partnership is slowly crystallizing around specific projects – a positive development taking into account that in general, the six partner states have few common interests. By promoting overall trust in the region, the EU positively distinguishes itself from Russia's "divide and rule" policy as well as promotes its own interests and those of its partners. **Trade, transport / transit / interconnections** and **energy** have been justly recognized as the major areas for cooperation; more than one page has been dedicated to energy in the Riga Summit Declaration, although, as will be shown later, there are still certain shortcomings. The growing EU's focus on specific projects – preferably visible and highly salient ones – proves that the Partnership is increasingly being filled with substance.
- **EU's openness to new areas of cooperation** is to be commended, although there is still a certain danger of **over-fragmentation**. As a positive example, the EU has started to work with the Partners on digital economy – a Belarusian initiative. On a more critical side, the Riga Summit Declaration makes references to combatting climate change, gender equality and numerous technical details that, worthy as they are, make it difficult for an inexperienced reader to single out the key message. The November 18 Communication is better at this and indeed admits that the EU should focus on the key issues, but distribution of resources among different spheres of cooperation will remain an issue.
- The EU has started to take **public opinion** in the partner states seriously – a long-needed change. In particular, strategic communication – including protection against (Russian)

[53] See European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, "Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions" Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy".
[54] Ibid.

propaganda – has acquired great political salience. The Latvian EU Presidency held the first Eastern Partnership Media Conference on the eve of the Riga Summit. In the Joint Consultation Paper, the EU also asks how it could better involve "civil society in its widest sense" and "network different parts of the partner populations". Again, it remains to be seen how these promises are executed, and I am offering some recommendations below. However, the very fact that the EU is reconsidering its highly inefficient communication strategy and trying to reach out to broad strata of partner countries' populations already augurs well for its strategic influence. Around 2009, the EU arguably did not care much what the voters in partner countries think of it, and only focused on some key constituencies like NGOs and political parties, many of which had no wide-scale grass-root support. At the same time, it is positive that the EU continues to uphold its demands for **democracy and human rights** – thus giving hope that it will not overtly support authoritarian regimes.

- Relations with **third states**, unfortunately, remain underdiscussed – a major miscalculation in the EU's nascent "geopolitical" thinking. Prague summit promised to engage the OSCE, Council of Europe and OECD but only mentioned third countries as project partners to be attracted on a case-by-case basis. The Joint Consultation Paper reaffirmed the EU's interest to cooperate with the OSCE and Council of Europe and asked how to "ensure greater coherence between the ENP and the EU's relations" with "neighbours of the neighbours", namely Russia and Central Asian states. However, this dimension clearly remains underexplored: there is no consensus on dealing with Russia, no specific desire to engage Turkey, no discussions on China's growing presence, and unjustified tardiness, if not fear, of engaging the US. Turkey and Russia were very briefly mentioned in the November 18 paper, but China and the US were ignored, despite China's growing presence in Eurasia including its New Silk Road Initiative, and the potential US contribution to security and development of the region. Indeed, the Latvian EU Presidency initiated and tried to promote the idea of a Euro-Atlantic Eastern Partnership, including several events in Washington, DC, and a specially requested Atlantic Council paper[55]. However, the EU institutions evidently denied possible US involvement, in line with their overall panic about "provoking Russia"[56], and there have been no serious discussions on the Latvian initiative.
- **Technical aspects** of the EaP implementation merit the most detailed and practical attention: the whole policy not only has faults in design, but also fails at the implementation stage. Judging from the November 18 Communication, it seems that the EU has finally realized that its support entails very cumbersome procedures that can easily discourage partner states. Thus, for instance, annual reports will be replaced with more flexible and user-friendly mechanisms.[57] A serious problem, unfortunately, is the lack of available **funds** as the Riga Summit made no new political commitment which could overrun the EU budget dedicated in the 2014-2020 multiannual framework. The November 18 Communication promises improved aid distribution and increased cooperation with the International

[55] Frances G. Burwell, "A Transatlantic approach to Europe's East: Relaunching the Eastern Partnership", Atlantic Council Transatlantic Relations Program, May 2015.

[56] On provoking, see e.g. Shaun Walker, "EU Eastern Partnership summit will highlight failure of plan to check Russia", 20.05.2015, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/20/eu-eastern-partnership-highlight-failure-plan-check-russia

[57] European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, "Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions" Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy".

Financial Institutions, but it is evident that, unless the EU becomes very inventive in supporting the partner states with other means, the lack of funding will continue to dampen its influence and credibility.

– **Participation of the EU's member states** remains a sensitive issue. As Stephan Lehne writes, "Currently, member states sometimes 'outsource' the promotion of values to the EU while taking care of (business) interests themselves"[58]. Although on some occasions the Eastern Partnership policies at the EU level overrun national ones (e.g. trade policy or sanctions imposed by the EU Council), they generally run "in parallel with the bilateral cooperation between the EU and third states" as presupposed also by the Prague Summit Declaration. This, on the one hand, allows the member states to keep ownership over this policy, but on the other hand, weakens the EU's strategic outreach at a time when it is an absolute imperative to coordinate all available resources. The Joint Consultation Paper and November 18 document both raised the question of coordination, but what is needed first is greater debate within the EU – an unlikely development taking into account the general "Eastern Partnership fatigue". Again to quote Richard Youngs and Kateryna Pishchikova, "Ministers, members of the European Commission, policy documents, businesspeople, and analysts all concur that the EaP needs to be more strategic. In itself, this much-repeated cliché tells us little. The whole question is what strategic means."[59]

5. Maximizing Eastern Partnership's Strategic Influence: Conclusions and Some Other Considerations

To sum up, the future of the Eastern Partnership looks precarious but not pessimistic. A shift towards more "geopolitical" EU thinking about the Eastern Neighbourhood has clearly been visible; the Joint Communication published on November 18 shows that the EU has started to take greater interest in its partners and treat them as real neighbouring countries with real policies, publics and preferences, not as six idealized, abstract, and apolitical states analysed out of their context. The EU has also started to ask itself provocative and plain uncomfortable questions, a crucial step for a change in the status quo. If we compare the main preoccupations of the partner states with the responses currently discussed by the EU, the picture looks ambiguous but not outright gloomy. The EU's policy will remain under-resourced and, to a large extent, based on goodwill, but it will likely become more attentive to each of the partner states and their specific needs. Here, we must also consider how we measure success: if it is a sphere of strong EU's influence, it will likely never be achieved; high-quality reforms, complete stabilization and growth are still remote goals; but if we expect increased EU's presence and contribution in both short and long term, the Neighbourhood Policy Review is a favourable development. If the EU manages to overcome own fatigue and prevent the EaP from excess fragmentation, indeed we will be able to speak about a successful "geopolitical" revamp of the EaP policy.

The aim of this concluding section is to revisit some EaP policies in greater detail in order to suggest additional possibilities for action, or to bring attention to certain caveats. A detailed

[58] Stefan Lehne, "Time to reset the European Neighborhood Policy".
[59] Richard Youngs, Kateryna Pishchikova, "Smart geostrategy for the Eastern Partnership".

review of all the EaP policies lies outside of the scope of this paper, and indeed my first recommendation to the EU would be to develop substantial and systematically organized analytic resources, including specialists fluent in EaP languages. The EU needs both to refine its strategic thinking and to gain a better understanding of the realities in the Eastern Partnership on the ground; thus, political and technical thinking must be closely coordinated when dealing with foreign policy. However, there are some additional points that merit greater attention.

1. **Careful selection of interlocutors in the partner states and reaching out to the societies**. As mentioned above, the Moldovan fraud is a blatant example of how the EU can hurt its own interests by over-relying on seemingly "pro-European" parties that sometimes only pay lip service to reforms, and failing to react when first signs of serious misdemeanour appear. The EU should work with all partner governments in the region in a pragmatic fashion, but it should not create impression of a politicized and partial external player that is ready to support any loyal political force regardless of its own often-quoted principles and values. A good way for the EU to differ from Russia is to bring to the table all major stakeholders from every country, including opposition forces, and to facilitate as open a dialogue as possible[60]. These efforts should be widely publicized as far as the situation allows. In cases where such a dialogue is impossible, the EU should take a good note of these groups' concerns and promptly address them. This will strengthen, not weaken the EU's policy through taking care of potentially serious concerns that remain ignored by the EaP governments, channelling tensions in a productive manner, hopefully contributing to an atmosphere of understanding and trust, and countering Russian propaganda that poses the EU as a hegemon not caring about marginalized and weak groups.
2. In general, the EU should reconsider its **communication strategy** in greater detail. Although there are frequently difficulties with reaching out to the partner countries' populations, the EU commits many errors that could have been easily prevented, like the abovementioned absence of information in Russian and large volumes of unclear and nonprioritized information, to which recipients cannot relate (why, if one opens the website of the EU delegation to, for instance, Belarus, news in the RSS feed on the first page are dedicated to elections in Zanzibar and European Commission meetings with the New Zealand Prime Minister[61], not to the latest achievements of the EU member states and EU-sponsored projects?). Conclusions of the Eastern Partnership Media Conference as well as numerous recent projects on the media / communication issue already include very realistic recommendations[62]. In a similar manner, the EU should reconsider its support for civil society, moving away from large centralized projects that can only be implemented by experienced project managers, to the European Endowment for Democracy – a highly efficient and flexible but under-resourced instrument that can only support 10% of

[60] See e.g. Recommendations from the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Conference (Riga, May 20-21) (2015); Jana Kobzova, "Eastern Partnership after Riga: rethink, reforms, resilience", ECFR Riga Series, ECFR, May 19, 2015, http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_eastern_partnership_after_riga_rethink_reforms_resilience3037

[61] http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/belarus/index_en.htm last accessed on November 2, 2015; both news mentioned here are dated with October 29.

[62] See e.g. the LIIA's publication, *The different faces of "soft power": The Baltic States and Eastern Neighborhood between Russia and the EU*, ed. by Toms Rostoks and Andris Spruds (Riga: Latvian Institute of International Affairs, 2015), http://liia.lv/en/publications/the-different-faces-of-soft-power-the-baltic-state/

proposals[63], despite the fact that it only gives out small grants. And being even more provocative – the EU might gain better visibility and reputation by supporting micro projects like remote schools and informal folk song and dance ensembles that are still popular across the region, rather than centralized communication campaigns by PR businesses.

3. **Relatedly, the EU can assist partner countries in prosecuting criminals.** As Anders Åslund writes, "Western governments can act on this information [about money-laundering by so-called grey cardinals] and investigate the grey cardinals' money laundering in their countries, as Switzerland reportedly is doing with regard to one of the foremost grey cardinals"[64].
4. **Hastening efforts on attracting foreign investments and opening new market possibilities to EaP states**. Since the EU's own resources remain limited and will likely not increase until 2020 at the very earliest, the EU should step up its efforts to mobilize funds for EaP development from other sources. As mentioned above, economic and social well-being of the population at large will be crucial for success of reforms in the long term, and popular discontent could even endanger them in the short term. Investments in the EaP need not come only from the EU states; rather, the EU should explore all possible mechanisms for helping these countries attract funds from abroad, such as credit guarantees mentioned by Frances Burwell, etc.[65]

   Taking into account that trade with all six EaP countries constitutes only approx. 2% of the EU's total external trade, the EU should evaluate its trade with Eastern Partners not from the purely economic point of view but as a strategic investment (that will potentially bring good returns). For instance, support to Moldova's agricultural sector that suffered from Russian sanctions[66] has potential of dramatically improving Moldovans' attitude towards the EU. Cooperation with and support for Ukraine's high-tech sector[67] would dramatically support its economy and, again, counter Russian propaganda allegations about the EU trying to impoverish its partners.
5. Improving mobility – including now-ignored **labour mobility** – will greatly contribute to economic growth and open new possibilities to EaP migrants who are now heavily dependent on the increasingly unfriendly Russian labour market. Studies demonstrate that such a decision would not actually overwhelm the EU's labour market and will even help to regularize already existing illegal immigration from these countries.[68] The EU, in the November 18 Communication, offered not to open its labour market to skilled labour but also to promote employability in the partner states; however, if unskilled labour cannot be accepted, even greater priority should be attributed to promoting employability of risk groups "on the ground".
6. **Taking partners' energy security very seriously**. Reasons for this are self-evident; however, the November 18 Communication paper only promises that the EU "will enhance

[63] Richard Youngs, "The European Endowment for Democracy, two years on", 04.09.2015., http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategiceurope/?fa=61190&mkt_tok=3RkMMJWWfF9wsRonvKXNZKXonjHpfsX56O8lUKWylMI%2F0ER3fOvrPUfGjI4AS8tkI%2BSLDwEYGJlv6SgFSrnAMbBwzLgFWhI%3D

[64] Anders Åslund, "Ukraine can beat its political corruption".

[65] Frances G. Burwell, "A Transatlantic approach to Europe's East: Relaunching the eastern partnership".

[66] See e.g. Victor Chirila, "Towards a new European Neighbourhood Policy: A Moldovan perspective", no date, http://www.infoeuropa.md/files/catre-o-noua-politica-europeana-de-vecinatate-o-viziune-din-moldova.pdf

[67] See e.g. Greg Satell, "Could Ukraine be the next Silicon Valley?", 24.11.2014, Forbes / Tech, http://www.forbes.com/sites/gregsatell/2014/11/24/could-ukraine-be-the-next-silicon-valley/

[68] Luca Barbone, Mikhail Bonch-Osmolovskiy, and Matthias Luecke, "Labour Migration from the Eastern Partnership countries: Evolution and policy options for better outcomes", tender EuropeAid/130215/C/SER/Multi, April 2013.

full energy market integration with the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia through the Energy Community."[69] While Azerbaijan is energetically independent from Russia, Armenia and Belarus remain vulnerable. It is vital for the EU's new Energy Union and for the Eastern Partnership to include all six Eastern neighbours in cooperation to the greatest extent possible.

7. **Reconsidering the EU's approach to Russia as well as signals that are sent to the Eastern Partner states**. The EU indeed should not convey an impression that its policies are anti-Russian, lest of all to partners' governments and societies. It might be a strategically sound decision to engage in technical negotiations with the Eurasian Economic Union, although no illusions should be harboured about dialogue with the EEU being more constructive than the one with Russia. The EU could use this opportunity to reiterate and widely publicize its idea for "the longer term goal of a wider area of economic prosperity based on WTO rules and sovereign choices throughout Europe and beyond"[70], or put more simply, a trade area potentially encompassing the EU, Russia, Eastern Partner states and other Eurasian stakeholders.

   In parallel, the EU should work to reengage Russian society and offer new forums for dialogue among the EU, Eastern Partners' and Russian players who are ready to participate[71]. There are numerous EU and non-EU foundations sponsoring such dialogue; additional co-financing or political support from the EU might assist in generating trust on the level of people-to-people relations.

8. **Reconsidering and stepping up cooperation with the USA and NATO, in particular, in light of the TTIP negotiations**. A careful analysis of the US policy in the Eastern Neighbourhood shows that its aims and instruments are not fundamentally different from those of the EU; thus, there is no substantial reason to speak about "provoking" Russia. For instance, both the EU and the US support economic development, free media, fight against corruption, and stabilization of the partner states. On October 22, Barack Obama once again vetoed a bill stipulating provision of lethal aid to Ukraine[72] – a measure to which many European governments have objected. And as Frances Burwell correctly notes, the EU and NATO (driven by the US) cooperated closely during the first rounds of enlargement in Central and Eastern Europe – and NATO both offered a greater feeling of security and promoted democratic principles in these states.[73]

   The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, or TTIP, creates an imperative for joint EU-US-EaP cooperation; those EaP countries that already have a DCFTA with the EU will definitely be affected by this deal between world's two largest economies, and the other three are likely to be indirectly affected as well.[74]

9. **Consider China's role in the Neighbourhood**. China is slowly expanding into Central and Eastern Europe, and this can bring both positive consequences (increased trade and

[69] European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, "Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions" Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy".

[70] Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit.

[71] See "Reviewing the European Neighbourhood Policy: Eastern perspectives", Europe Policy Paper, ed. by Alina Inayeh and Joerg Forbrig (The German Marshall Fund of the United States, July 2015).

[72] "Dr. Bucshon's statement on President Obama vetoing National Defense Authorization Act", 22.10.2015, http://bucshon.house.gov/press-release/dr-bucshon%E2%80%99s-statement-president-obama-vetoing-national-defense-authorization-act See also e.g. Kristin Archick and Derek E. Mix, "CRS Insights: U.S.-EU Cooperation on Ukraine and Russia", 13.03.2015.

[73] Frances G. Burwell, "A Transatlantic approach to Europe's East: Relaunching the Eastern Partnership".

[74] Ibid.

investments, new transit links), but can also make partner countries politically, economically and environmentally vulnerable. Victor Yanukovich before his ousting reached a more than USD 3 bn deal with China on building a port and developing food production in Crimea,[75] and was promised Chinese defence against a nuclear attack (!)[76]. Some authors go as far as to say that Vladimir Putin did not want increased Chinese influence in Ukraine,[77] and that China was thus sending a message to Japan and its other opponents in Asia over territorial disputes[78]. (Interestingly, Japan did offer support to Ukraine.) While this, if true, is a rather extreme example, a very realistic scenario is China's expanding in this region with its new One Belt, One Road transportation initiative – a strong imperative for the EU to broaden its new "geopolitical" thinking.

As can be seen, the EU has substantially changed its thinking in the broad terms; however, it is still in the beginning of its "geopolitical" turn. First, the EU's strategic documents have to be fine-tuned, responding to all outstanding questions. Secondly, although the changes offered in the Joint Communication of November 18 reflect the broad consensus shared both by the European Union and its Eastern Partners, it remains to be seen how the planned changes are rendered in the European Global Strategy. Thirdly, and most importantly, the changes must be operationalized. In rapidly changing international circumstances, the EU needs to act decisively and fast, translating into tangible policies as much of this consensus as possible, lest it slips into irrelevancy.

[75] Idil P. Izmirli, "Sale of Crimean land by Yanukovych: 'Made in/for China'", *Eurasia Daily Monitor* Vol. 11, Iss. 24, 06.02.2014, http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=41930&no_cache=1#.VjgtOysbY1Y

[76] Massoud Hayoun, "China's 'unusual' nuclear pact with Ukraine's Yanukovich", 07.03.2014, http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2014/3/7/china-s-unusual-nuclearpactwithukrainesyanukovich.html

[77] John C. K. Daly, "Was Russia's Crimea annexation a move against China?", 13.05.2014, http://www.silkroadreporters.com/2014/05/13/russias-crimea-annexation-move-china/

[78] Massoud Hayoun, "China's 'unusual' nuclear pact with Ukraine's Yanukovich".