

EASTERN PARTNERSHIP BEYOND 2020

Against the regional, political and security backdrop, the Eastern Partnership (EaP), established in 2009, is still a relevant framework for cooperation with the Eastern European countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine) within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). The current framework for cooperation is the document "20 Deliverables for 2020", which aims to improve the reform process to deliver tangible benefits for the citizens of the EaP countries through 4 key areas of cooperation: stronger economy, stronger governance, stronger connectivity and stronger society.

With a view to establishing a future strategic framework for EaP cooperation and achievement of post-2020 results, the European Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS) have launched a broad and inclusive structured consultation, which ended on 31 October 2019. Based on the results of the consultation, the EC and the EEAS will issue a new strategy for the EaP post-2020 on 18 March 2020, which should carve out a set of long-term EaP policy goals and as such serve as the basis for the EU-Eastern Partnership summit to be held during the Croatian Presidency of the Council of the EU.

In the post-2020 period, the EaP policy should be given a new dynamic and a balanced forward-looking approach, in order to better combine the sectoral and political aspects within the existing framework of cooperation, providing for a more efficient implementation of reforms and meeting the targets. At the same time, a path for EaP countries' more proactive participation should be explored within the format itself, both in terms of the relations with the EU, as well as of deepening regional and bilateral cooperation among the EaP partner countries themselves.

Bearing in mind the real possibilities on the one hand and the pragmatism on the other, the most difficult political task in the process of discussing the future goals and relations with the Eastern Partnership will be to find the right balance between inclusivity and differentiation among the six EaP countries (Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia - signed Association Agreements / Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements with the EU; Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus - cooperation with the EU based on a tailored and individual approach in line with the EU interests).

The relations with all six EaP partner countries are progressing and they are all pursuing horizontal reforms that strengthen their economies and build more resilient societies, thus resulting in tangible benefits to citizens' lives. While most of the current 20 targets are in the implementation phase, there is still room for improvement, with particular attention in the coming period placed on engaging with the civil society, strengthening the rule of law, providing support to judicial reform and fight against corruption.

Deepening of sectoral cooperation and integration with the partners could prove advantageous as the baseline for the further development of the EaP project beyond 2020. Cooperation should be focused on ensuring benefits for citizens and opportunities for young people, better connectivity, especially in the fields of energy, transport, telecommunications, investment and



people-to-people contacts. Visa liberalization has proved successful and partners need to be further encouraged towards continuous fulfilment of the visa liberalisation benchmarks.

(Possible) Points of discussion:

- What should be the priorities and goals of the Eastern Partnership for the period beyond 2020? What role for the EU national Parliaments and the European Parliament?
- Implementation of the “20 Deliverables for 2020”: taking stock and moving forward - best practices and lessons learned?

