Report: High Level Conference on the 10th Anniversary of the Eastern Partnership

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The high-level conference was organized by a key note and closing speech, remarks, and two panels followed by Q/A sessions. This report will briefly summarize the main points of most speakers. Persons not referenced in this report are moderators Deputy Director-General of DG NEAR Kataríná Mathernová and Co-President of EURONEST Rebecca Harms, Managing Director of European Union External Action Service Thomas Mayr-Harting, and Ukrainian Civil Society Forum representative Hennadiy Maksak.

Distributed Materials:
1. Top 10 Achievements of the Eastern Partnership in the last 10 Years
2. New Eastern Europe: Eastern Partnership Turns 10 (May-August No 3-4 2019)

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Speakers Summaries:

The keynote by President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker largely reiterated benefits with reference to precise economic statistics of negotiated FTAs, DCFTAs, and AAs, including visa liberalization.\(^2\) He stated that EaP countries have been incentivized by being able enter freely into negotiations over what is best for them in bilateral relations, yet by taking advantage of the EaP platform a country like Georgia, for instance, “has become 100% a European country.”\(^3\) Additionally, he stressed continuing to work on making governance stronger vis-à-vis the judiciary and corruption, and to settle bilateral, unresolved conflicts. The speech by President Juncker is available [here](https://example.com). Recapping the motto “stronger together,” Minister of Foreign Affairs of Romania Teodor Meleșcanu assured that the EaP agenda with a focus on “tangible benefits for citizens” will remain a top priority for the Romanian presidency. Opening remarks by European Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations Johannes Hahn emphasized the EaP’s success in applying the principle of differentiation, offering loans in local currencies in order to support SMEs, working with Ukraine to potentially establish two more European schools on the Tbilisi model, and interlinking energy, transport, and infrastructure. A particular challenge remains to motivate EU youth to reach out to their counterparts in EaP countries in order to reinforce cross-cultural relations. The speech by Commissioner Hahn is available [here](https://example.com).

The first panel (EaP10—achievements and challenges in delivering concrete results to citizens) opened with President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko. To the question of what were 3 key achievements for Ukraine in the last 10 years, President Poroshenko exclaimed “Everything!” The transformation for him began Nov 2013 Summit in Vilnius when the AA rejected by ex-President Viktor Yanukovych brought millions to the street demanding European integration. Therein began the process of reversing a failed state due to bankruptcy, inflation, and illegal annexation of Crimea and war in the Donbas.\(^4\) The last 5 years have brought a definitive rise in social standards in education, pensions, and health care, steps toward decentralization and fighting corruption, resilience in state-building, protecting the Ukrainian language, army, and security—“largely” thanks to DCFTA process and visa-free regime. Now, President Poroshenko is requesting ”more for more” in an energy union for continental energy security, digital union, Schengen union, and custom union.\(^5\) He finished with a special thanks to President Juncker for “bringing Ukraine back to the European continent” and President of the European Council Donald

\(^2\) President Juncker verbally cited an increase in trade with all EaP countries (i.e. volume; earmarked 120M and 125K loans, with half in local currency; and 30K jobs, with a focus on SME, sustainable, and inclusive development) bringing it to #10 regional trading partner for EU. The references come from DG NEAR’s factsheets for SMEs and Youth.

\(^3\) [Junker Says Georgia Is 100% European Country](https://example.com) (Georgia Today)

\(^4\) President Poroshenko verbally cited -14% GDP and a 49% inflation, with last 5 years to +3% GDP and 6% inflation.

\(^5\) [Poroshenko: Cooperation with EU should be expanded under ‘more for more’ principle](https://example.com) (Ukrinform).
Tusk for sanctions against Russia. When questioned on whether he has advice for incoming President Volodymyr Zelensky: "follow the track introduced by Poroshenko."

Second, Minister of Foreign Affairs Azerbaijan Elmar Mammadyarov was asked how the EaP perceived on the ground and what it is has delivered to citizens of Azerbaijan. He cited successful trade cooperation in that EU has become a major partner and Europeans are now major investors into economy, as well as a comprehensive strategic agreement currently being negotiated. Other advantages are access to Europe, visa facilitation, cross-cultural connectivity for general population and youth of Azerbaijan. In a personal anecdote, Minister Mammadyarov reminisced being asked whether he considered the South Caucasus European post-USSR collapse. Now, "aspirations on the ground are overcoming the past" and Europeanization is "probably best way to proceed for national interest of country.” Current priorities include a southern gas corridor as a key area of geostrategic collaboration, the 2020 project delivery of energy to Greece and Italy, and follow up discussions on an interconnected pipeline expanding to the Southern Balkans. In addition, Azerbaijan is considering expanding transportation connectivity beyond Baku-Tbilisi-Kars to east-west and north-south.

Third, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belarus Vladimir Makei was asked what the EaP has delivered for citizens and business in Belarus post-normalization of relations. He started, “Belarus wanted to be in [the EaP] from the very beginning” as a zone of prosperity and well-being. Economic cooperation has propelled EU to Belarus’ second most important partner— “but more to be done.” In the humanitarian sphere, there has been the establishment of a Belarus-EU coordination group for dialogue on humanitarian/human rights/democracy issues as well as the current implementation of a national action plan on human rights. Financially, Belarus has been working with EU financial institutions such as EBRD, and on other “sensitive issues of privatization.” Still, challenges remain. Minister Makei emphasized low domestic visibility of EaP initiatives, and especially the East-West/Russia-EU divide in which Belarus suffers—which is why they are in favour of an "integration of integrations” to unite EAEU and EU process.

Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sweden Margot Wallström and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Poland Jacek Czaputowicz spoke together. Considering themselves as the “godparents of EaP,” they are “proud” and conscious of responsibility it entails. Going forward, there must be a special focus on youth. Minister Wallström commented EaP 10 years from now, in a visionary manner that drew a giant applause from the audience: "maybe some countries have already joined the EU and [we] won't need this platform anymore.” Minister Czaputowicz outlined the EU’s expectations for the EaP countries as

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6 Minister Mammadyarov verbally cited EU becoming a major trading partner with 42% share.
7 Minister Makei verbally cited EU trade jumping from 26% to 30% share.
8 Eastern Partnership states may join EU during next 10 years (112 UA).
(1) legal approximation (2) institutionalization (3) deeper sectoral cooperation. It is perhaps time to add “something” to the AAs for those countries that are ready: an "AA+" so to speak; the potential to establish a Secretariat to maintain contact with the EU institutions; a creation of a presidency of EaP countries that will engage in dialogue and initiatives with the presidency of EU cooperation; and potential for the creation for a FTA amongst the EaP countries like CEFTA for the Western Balkans. Czaputowicz’s message for the EaP countries “to take more responsibility for themselves [instead of EU doing ‘everything’] and demonstrate that they are organized” – (points to Azerbaijani and Armenian representation to cooperate amongst each other) – Last, he explicated the lack of a very important dimension: a geopolitical-geostrategic united policy vis-à-vis Russia that would take into consideration both the respective sphere of influence and the various commitments of the EaP countries.

Last, Founder of Crosspring B.V. Maurice Beckand Verwee commented on challenges faced by entrepreneurs in the EaP region. On the country level, he cited a small market size, a lacking legal framework for regulation and flexibility, and an absent “mature ecosystem” of investors that all contribute to high-risk investments. Second, he lamented EaP tech talents are in fact moving to offshoring companies developing for the EU or the United States instead of adding to local portfolio development. Last, and most interestingly, he spoke of corruption at a regional level: “it is a challenge, but fortunately, the tech industry is not yet understood by oligarchs so they don’t know how to influence.” In order to make the highest impact on tech development, Verwee argued against the EU providing grants with limited strings as “they [EaP entrepreneurs] get more lazy,” thus highlighting an inherent tension in the debate concerning the EU having ‘too many’ strings attached to ensure entrepreneurial accountability, or just ‘not enough.’

Dialogue continued in the Q&A period with, most notably, a Transparency International representative citing money laundering, the golden visa process, and cryptocurrency flowing from Russia through EaP countries into the EU as particular challenges to the EaP process.

Opening remarks for the second panel by High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission Federica Mogherini focused on delivering on people’s aspirations in an uncontroversial manner vis-à-vis the various EaP countries’ responsibilities to their other neighbours. She emphasized that the EaP is not a defense alliance—it seeks to strengthen resilience of those involved as organically grown from the inside rather than imposed from the outside. She further prioritized the importance of civil society organizations and young people to support future change. The speech by High Representative/Vice-President Mogherini is available here.

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The second panel (Looking forward—future of the Eastern Partnership—towards stronger economies, governance, connectivity, and societies) opened with the Prime Minister of Georgia Mamuka Bakhtadze who cited Georgia as an example of the “transformative power” of the EU. He spoke at length, weaving a narrative of Georgia’s EU aspirations as a “civilizational choice” that they have paid a “very high price” for—and still, Georgia is prepared and willing to go beyond with further integration\textsuperscript{10} as “together with Georgia, the European family is stronger.”

Next, the Prime Minister of Moldova Pavel Filip affirmed his country’s commitment to continue working towards good governance, harmonization, and legislation application. His five key messages to convey were to (1) move cooperation to cohesion (2) citizens should benefit (3) stabilize economic development as EaP countries still vulnerable to external shock (4) focus on security and resilience (5) be open to new horizons.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia Zohrab Mnatsakanyan expressed a narrative on the EaP region—with a focus on Armenia—is in fact, “all about the same Europe” in an attempt to reinforce shared values, people, neighbourhood, etc. based on shared understandings on the calamity of war and goal of prosperity. On the question of Nagorno-Karabakh: Azerbaijan’s talk of “political will” earlier as a response to Q&A on the lack of progress made by Armenia, Russia, and Azerbaijan\textsuperscript{11} to address precise issues of status and security goes “both ways,” in that all countries cannot get exactly what they want. He, however, affirmed the EaP as a useful facilitator to reduce hatreds and misunderstandings on the conflict.

Last, the European Commissioner for Trade Cecilia Malmström and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania Linas Linkevičius emphasized on the need for EaP countries to unlock their potential vis-à-vis EU but also with each other in increased intraregional people-to-people contact and exchanges.

The Q&A period for the second panel was cut short due to time constraints. Minister of Foreign Affairs of Finland Timo Soini and Commissioner Hahn concluded the conference with recognition and thanks to all speakers and contributors.

\textsuperscript{10} PM Bakhtadze at EaP Conference: Georgia ‘Deserves More’ (civil.ge)
\textsuperscript{11} Mammadyarov: Armenia, Azerbaijan have to start substantive talks (Azer News)
Assessment:

This high-level conference was both a stimulating and useful platform to review the main economic, political, and social successes and challenges of various EaP policies, whilst emphasizing the need to continue taking stock beyond 2020. Every speaker contributed a particular nuance from the perspective of their national government or represented organization. EU representatives often evoked an official narrative the EaP as a non-confrontational platform vis-à-vis Russia, instead based on the realization of shared ambitions and shared values. President Juncker and Minister Wallström complemented each other, albeit controversially, the former asserting that through the EaP platform “Georgia has become 100% a European country” (Juncker) and the latter that ten years from now some EaP countries may become a part of the EU (Wallström). Indeed, the giant applauses in response to these visionary statements evidenced the Europeanizing ambitions of EaP conference participants. Likewise, Georgian and Ukrainian representatives as DCFTA beneficiaries clearly stated their aspirations for further integration and the possibility of EU membership going forward, and Azerbaijani and Armenian representatives wove in narratives of the increasing ‘Europeanness’ of the South Caucasus post-USSR collapse. These exchanges in fact continue to highlight a severely lacking dimension of EU foreign relations: the need for a coherent and united geopolitical-geostrategic policy vis-à-vis Russia given the EaP countries residing in the latter’s sphere of influence.

The conference also underlined some important criticisms of the EU vis-à-vis the EaP countries themselves, particularly the need for the latter to take more responsibility in organizing intraregional economic, political, and social endeavours and exchanges. In this regard, intraregional cooperation to resolve the ongoing conflict of Nagorno-Karabakh between Armenia and Azerbaijan was prodded at several times by EU representatives and civil society representatives during both the Q&A periods at this high-level conference and the following Civil Society Forum at the Permanent Representative of the Czech Republic to the EU in Brussels.

Still, the key take-away of the conference remains the unprecedented fruitfulness of the EaP in building bilateral and multilateral relations between the EU, Eastern Europe, and the South Caucasus. If the EaP is to continue generating enough mutual benefits to make it another ten years, policymakers on both sides must: first, greatly increase the visibility of EaP benefits at the grassroots level as tailored to the various demographic and ethnic intersections of society; and second, acknowledge and tackle technocratic and strategic challenges as related not only to Russia, but also to ‘neighbouring’ China, Turkey, and Iran.