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Introduction: The EaP Summit in Riga: Many Divisions and One Convergence

Vessela Tcherneva

At the upcoming Eastern Partnership (EaP) summit in Riga the EU aims to define its relations with (at least some of) the six EaP countries and to agree on a common philosophy – or approach – to Europe’s eastern periphery. The following collection of views from eight EU capitals not only demonstrates the lines of divisions within Europe but also offers explanations for the motives of the various governments and publics.

Winning the Past

Europe’s divisions don’t just run through current policies – they are also about the legacy of the EaP to date. The initiative’s past betrays a process that is in fact utterly EU-esque: from a set of technical measures the EaP turned into a process that created radically new political realities on the ground, to the surprise of most of the EU itself. But member states see the results of this process very differently. It is a success to countries such as Poland which compare it with the EU’s traction in the Southern Neighbourhood. But it is a failure to countries such as Italy or Spain which blame the EaP for today’s frosty relations with Russia. Winning the narrative about the past and setting the record straight about the EU’s motives, actions, and achievements within the EaP is not only important for the initiative per se, but also politically sensitive for the stakeholders. The issue will not be decided in Riga but the summit will provide indications of where the consensus might emerge.

Offering Carrots: How Big and To Whom?

The biggest stumbling block on the road to Riga was the agreement among the member states to include the language of the Vilnius Summit declaration in the Riga document, namely the “acknowledgement of the European aspirations and the European choice of some partners”. The phrase signals a distant perspective for membership (and is also included conditionally in article 49 of the Treaty on European Union), and it divides European countries according to their reading of the “aspirations”. For those who have fairly recently transformed from a Soviet satellite,

the European perspective in any form is the only carrot that can drive reforms. In Ukraine, where the popularity of the government is likely to decline amid painful reforms and a costly war, the message of political support from Europe is key for sustaining the acceptance of its society's transformation.

Other member states fear the spectre of enlargement and strongly oppose the Europeanisation paradigm. Some also want to avoid repeating the Vilnius scenario and would like to offer Russia a carrot as well, whether by modifying the implementation of the DCFTA with Ukraine or by removing sanctions. The illusion that going back to "business as usual" with Russia is possible seems to be regaining momentum in some parts of Europe.

These two trends will cancel each other out in Riga, which is likely to weaken or even eradicate Europe's message towards the "aspirations" of the eastern neighbours.

East vs South; Elites vs Publics

The summit in Riga takes part amid revision of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), driven by its failure to respond to realities in the regions concerned. The migrant crisis in the Mediterranean highlights the demand by countries in the EU's south such as Italy for more solidarity and political attention to the crises in the broader Middle East. Against this backdrop, the redistribution of funds within the ENP – currently two-thirds for the southern ENP countries vs one-third for the eastern ones – will be difficult to satisfy. Yet spending as much money on Ukraine as on Morocco seems unreasonable and groundless.

The failure of the Arab revolutions in most of North Africa and the return of sectarian politics shifted the debate in many European states from human rights and democratisation to security. Maintaining stability has become the priority for European foreign policy action (often represented by the "interests vs values" dilemma).

However, the division can sometimes occur within the countries themselves: in the Baltic states or Poland, for example, the public sees policies towards the eastern partners as critical for the domestic political agenda; in Sweden or France, decisions are often made by the elites, with the public largely uninterested.

Thus the goals of the EaP summit will become part of a greater bargain for Europe's priorities in its immediate neighbourhoods, east and south, driven by competing incentives and public sentiments.

Redesign or status quo?

Between the desire to redraw the EaP (in countries such as France) and the desire to reiterate the existing instrument and the goals of the initiative (in member states such as Poland, Sweden, or Romania), there is of course Germany. However, Berlin seems more often to take a bilateral track towards the more promising neighbours, instead of using the EaP framework.

There will obviously be little appetite in Riga for Vilnius-like boldness. The message to the EaP countries will be neither very committal nor very satisfying for those who seek closer cooperation with the EU. It should at least be formulated ambiguously enough so that the EU maintains its leverage in region. Europe should converge here.

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Germany and the Eastern Partnership: the view from Berlin

Gustav Gressel

The Eastern Partnership Summit in Riga from 21 to 22 May will be a key event for Europe's foreign policy. The strategic significance of Europe's eastern policy has been highlighted by Russia's pressure on Armenia not to sign the Association Agreements, the ongoing instability in Moldova, a new foreign policy style in Belarus, the Maidan in Kyiv, the invasion and annexation of Crimea, and finally the Russian-Ukrainian war in the Donbas. And it has become obvious that Europe must answer these dramatic events with a different kind of policy: muddling through with a semi-integrative, fair-weather policy is no longer an option.

It might be expected that Germany, which is currently the strongest economic power in Europe and the leader in Europe's sanctions policy on Russia, would be one of the driving nations in Riga. But this is not likely to be the case. The German foreign policy machinery is both too progressive and too conservative to come up with new policy ideas for the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP).

Focus on Ukraine

There is no doubt that Ukraine is at the heart of Europe's neighbourhood policy. This is not only because of the war, but also because Ukraine is by far the biggest and most populous eastern partnership country. Its transformation into a market economy and democratic state, if successful, will have consequences for the entire region. Germany has considerably ramped up its efforts to stabilise and support Ukraine. Alongside financial and humanitarian assistance, Germany and Poland are the two European Union member states most deeply involved in advising on and assisting structural reforms in Ukraine. The informal division of labour seems to be that Germany is taking on energy, financial, and economic issues, while Poland looks after administration and decentralisation. Frequent consultations and visits take place between German and Ukrainian officials and politicians and plenty of working and advisory groups are busy on the issues involved. However, this is happening as part of a bilateral policy, which pays little attention to the ENP's

instruments, since they are perceived as being too weak and too slow.

Ghosts of Ostpolitik

On the other hand, a leaked letter from German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier to European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker urged the European leader to respect Russian concerns about the implementation of the EU-Ukrainian Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area agreement (DCFTA).¹ This showed that some parts of the German foreign policy elite are still haunted by the ghosts of the old Ostpolitik. Russia cites “economic disadvantages” as reasons for objecting to the implementation of the free trade agreement. However, on closer examination, those objections prove to be unfounded; they serve as a tactical delaying manoeuvre to prevent Ukraine from tightening its economic bond with Europe, to stop Ukraine from opening up to other markets beyond Europe, and to preserve Kyiv’s economic dependency on Russia.

Russia-understanders on the ascent

Is the German foreign minister breaking away from the German policy of countering Russian aggression against Ukraine? There are worrying signs that he might be. Supporters of reconciliation with Russia are gaining momentum. For the time being, they are hiding their desire for rapprochement with Russia behind biased criticism about Ukraine not reforming quickly enough or not keeping up with the schedule agreed in Minsk. Behind the scenes, the debate continues on the ultimate ends of German policy towards the eastern neighbourhood. Is Germany’s goal to come to terms with Russia, or is it to protect the European choice of the states and societies who are willing to move West?

The strategic debate coincides with increasing frictions between the conservative CDU/CSU and the Social Democrats. The ongoing debate about the oversight of German intelligence services and their cooperation with the NSA has worsened the climate within Germany’s ruling coalition. Now, the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, Ukraine, and the ENP are in danger of being dragged into a re-ideologised battle for Germany’s political identity.

Hitting the brakes at Riga

For all these reasons, Germany will unfortunately not take the

1. Rikard Jozwiak, “In Leaked Letter, Steinmeier Urges EU To Ease Russian Concerns On Ukraine Deal”, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 24 April 2015, available at <http://www.rferl.org/content/ukraine-eu-trade-deal-steinmeier-russian-concerns/26976163.html>.

lead on Europe's neighbourhood policy and will probably try to hit all the brakes it can find at Riga. DCFTA implementation, visa liberalisation, and the membership perspective are the three main topics that should be decided on in Riga – and the German debate on all of them is anything but encouraging. Now would be a good moment for those states who are interested in the continuation of the existing German eastern policy – Poland, Sweden, Romania, and the Baltic countries – to come out in support of Germany's current role in Europe so as to strengthen the domestic legitimacy of the new German foreign policy. Otherwise, Germany's Russia-centric Ostpolitik might soon be resurrected from the graveyard of ideology.

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Italy and the Eastern Partnership: the view from Rome

Silvia Franceson

Given the ongoing tragic events in the near Mediterranean, the attention of the Italian government is now mainly focused on the southern neighbourhood. In Rome's opinion, political instability in some of our southern neighbours, such as Libya, could have immediate political, economic, and migration consequences on Italy and Europe. Therefore, a comprehensive approach that shares the burden among European Union member states is sorely needed. According to the International Organisation for Migration, around 25,703 migrants reached Italian shores between January and April 2015; 1,780 people died and 170,000 people were saved by the Italian Navy.¹ So, Italy's current foreign policy priority should come as no surprise to foreign policy observers.

However, even as Italy tries to convince Brussels of the absolute need for a new European approach towards the south, the eastern neighbourhood has not lost importance in Italian eyes. Of course, there are some important differences between the two neighbourhoods: in the south, a crisis resolution plan is needed, whereas in the east, the objective must be the consolidation of already existing, although sometimes weak, democratic transition processes. This vision is reflected in the 2014-2020 Italian budget for the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP): one-third of the funds are earmarked for the east and two-thirds for the south.

The Russia factor

In considering the east, "the element" that always influences Italian eastern strategy should be remembered: its relations with Russia, a traditional economic, energy, and political partner with whom Italy has had and will always have to deal. However, whereas in the past Rome promoted its unique and privileged partnership with Moscow, it is now looking beyond bilateral relations. The Ukraine crisis has shifted the Italian position on Russia: the country is still a partner, but we cannot ignore what it has done in Ukraine. However, Moscow is still important for Italy, and like it or not, that remains the reality. Former Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi recently wrote an op-ed in which

1. Rosie Scammell and Alessandra Bonomolo, "Italy rescues thousands of migrants in Med in huge weekend operation", *The Guardian*, 3 May 2015, available at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/03/thousands-migrants-rescue-med-weekend-operations-libya-italy-mediterranean>.

he contends that it was a mistake on the part of European and Western leaders not to attend the commemoration of the seventieth anniversary of World War II in Moscow – Western leaders can be easily replaced by leaders from China and India. The absence of the West was not a reflection of strength – rather, it showed weakness and myopia. Today’s challenges cannot be addressed without engaging Russia, he wrote.

In an interview with *La Stampa* on 5 May, Italian Foreign Minister Paolo Gentiloni reiterated Italy’s support for Kyiv and its commitment to the resolution of the Ukraine crisis, which can only come about through a political solution. Sovereignty, territorial integrity, the Minsk Agreements, institutional and economic reforms: these are the key words used by Italian diplomats when talking about Ukraine. Italy also recognises the importance of Ukraine for the Italian economy: Italy is Ukraine’s third most important economic partner in the EU and seventh most important in the world. The immigration issue also plays a role: according to 2014 data, about 10 percent of the non-EU foreign population living in Italy comes from Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries, mainly from Ukraine and Moldova.

Fear of a new Cold War

At the same time, Gentiloni said that we should not “close the door to Russia”, a recurrent formula in the Italian approach to the ongoing crisis. Any effort to reach an agreement must not leave out dialogue with Moscow, which is not only an interlocutor for Italy, but also for the majority of EU member states. We need to find a stable, politic, and balanced compromise between Moscow’s arguments and those of Kyiv’s.

Italy is trying to balance between preserving Ukraine’s territorial integrity and sovereignty on the one hand and maintaining a constructive dialogue with Russia on the other, with a view towards a rapprochement between Moscow and Brussels. A new Cold War scenario would be the worst possible outcome, given the inevitable economic and political consequences that it would have. Italy is already paying a high economic price because of the sanctions regime, and in political terms, Russia must be considered as a key interlocutor in solving some of the hot dossiers, especially in the MENA region, from Libya to Syria to the Iranian nuclear deal. Of course, the Italian position has been widely criticised, especially by Kyiv and Washington.

Not just about Ukraine

For Italy, the EaP is not exclusively related to Ukraine. Belarus

is also important. Italy, although fully aware that Belarus is a long way from being a well-established democracy, believes that Europe should channel the cautious opening signals from Minsk into a more European structured strategy. This might be also due to the relatively strong economic ties between Italy and Minsk: Italy is one of Belarus's top ten commercial partners, with exchanges in 2014 amounting to \$105 million. Azerbaijan also deserves mention: commercial and energy relations are at the heart of Italy-Azerbaijan relations, which, in the last four years, have grown from €200 million to €600 million and have been mainly focused on infrastructure, energy, environment, and health technologies.

Italy recognises that the Ukraine crisis has partially eclipsed some of the successes that have to date been achieved with some EaP partners. But at the same time, Rome sees the Riga Summit as an opportunity to continue the dialogue and to implement economic and political integration as well as freedom of movement. Italy believes it is vital to support the EaP countries who have already signed Association Agreements, that is, Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine, without forgetting to guide the neighbours who are not yet ready to make such a commitment, such as Azerbaijan and Armenia, but who have expressed their will to instate more European-oriented relations.

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France and the Eastern Partnership: the view from Paris

Natalie Nougayrède

France has formally supported the European Union's Eastern Partnership (EaP), but its approach to the policy has long been ambiguous. French officials are aware of the value of the EU engaging with the former Soviet Republics who seek to move away from Russian influence, or to balance it, by having a stronger relationship with the EU. And France does not minimise or discount the soft power that the EU can and must deploy in its neighbourhood in order to promote stability. But several factors have meant that France never quite felt itself to be a strong custodian of the EaP nor a major stakeholder in it. As yet, it is unclear to what degree the Ukrainian crisis has led Paris to a reappraisal of what the EaP should become, nor is it obvious what impulses should come from France.

The legacy of Georgia

All this might seem a paradox in light of the fact that France, which held the presidency of the EU at the time, played a key role in the way Europe dealt with the war in Georgia in 2008. That conflict was the starting point for the EU's new eastern policy, which was drawn up as a reaction to Russia's actions in Georgia. But perhaps this is precisely the point: French political priorities, and the way it has tended to relate to Russia, have weighed heavily on its approach to the EaP. France has preferred to deal directly with Moscow rather than to focus on a EU-wide approach towards Russia's neighbours. This largely explains, for example, why France had no qualms about returning EU-Russia relations more or less back to normal only a few months after the Georgia war, despite Russia's ongoing violations of the cease-fire.

The EaP never triggered much interest or diplomatic mobilisation in Paris. In the run-up to its launch in 2009, it was seen largely as the product of Polish and Swedish priorities, at a time when French officials were privately warning against the "anti-Russian" tendencies of those countries. France, at the time, had started negotiating specific deals with Russia, including the highly controversial Mistral warship sale.

Franco-German competition

The larger historical picture should also be kept in mind: France's policies have in many ways resulted from its clear discomfort about Germany's growing economic and political power within Europe. Franco-German competition in the way that the EU has forged its neighbourhood strategies should not be overlooked. Paris was convinced that Germany wanted to pull the EU towards the east because of its own commercial and economic interests, whereas France has all along promoted the notion of a southern-looking EU, focused on the Mediterranean rim and on Africa, regions in which it feels many of its strategic interests lie.

In 2008, those opposing visions clashed in a major way, when France attempted to create a "Union for the Mediterranean", a project that would have brought together Europe's coastal southern countries, North African states, and some Middle Eastern states. There was a strong backlash from Germany. Angela Merkel made it clear to French officials that if EU funds were to be tapped, then that should be conditioned on the involvement of all EU members, as well as Brussels' institutions. Ultimately, the project foundered, crashing mostly on the new realities that emerged from the Arab Spring of 2011.

Focus on hard power

Today, France's waning authority in Europe, mostly linked to its economic difficulties and the sense that it has been largely overtaken by Germany, makes it unlikely that Paris will put much energy into redrawing the EaP. Significant parts of French officialdom are now much more concentrated on the hard-power dimensions of Europe's current challenges – how to strengthen Euro-Atlantic security guarantees at a time when Russia has been trampling on essential rules. In France, there is a strong conviction that the national comparative advantage over Germany, in dealing with Europe's difficulties in the east, comes from French defence capacities and its willingness to deploy them. At the same time, France has struggled to convince anyone that its position alongside Germany in dealing with the Ukraine crisis amounted to much more than sitting in the backseat.

The war in Ukraine has served as a wake-up call in France, as it has elsewhere in Europe, but there are few signs that Paris will become central to building a new EU-empowered policy towards borderland countries. The Paris terrorist attacks have focused French minds on jihadi networks rooted in the Sahel and the Middle East. Public debate in France on Mediterranean migration issues has been intense. Debate has, however, been fragmented

and divisive on the best way to deal with Vladimir Putin's Russia. Europe's southern dimension has arguably become a bigger preoccupation in Paris than its eastern dimension. Getting France to engage more in the EaP may depend on whether a consensus can be built in the EU around the idea that the security and stability of Europe's environment cannot be carved up into different geographical directions, but must be viewed as one single, whole problem that has to be tackled from all sides with equal motivation. Franco-German-Polish dialogue will be key to achieving that.

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The Eastern Partnership: on life support? The view from London

Ian Bond

Latvian Foreign Minister Edgars Rinkēvičs said in February that the EU's meeting with its eastern partners in Riga this month would be a "survival summit". He wasn't exaggerating. The six partners are a disparate group – and the EU's member states are divided on the future of the Eastern Partnership. But the partnership is worth preserving. Here are five ways the EU can do so.

What EaP is for

The EU should decide what the purpose of the partnership is. It has never seemed certain. Some member states want to give the eastern partners a perspective of eventual EU membership; others do not. The eastern partners themselves include three countries (Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine) whose stated aim is to join the EU; two (Azerbaijan and Belarus) whose human rights records and political systems would disqualify them even if they were interested; and one (Armenia) which is so dependent on Russia for its defence that all it can do is try to extract benefits from the EU without provoking Russian retaliation.

At the Eastern Partnership (EaP) summit in Vilnius, in November 2013, the participants acknowledged "the European choice of some partners" and said that the partnership had a particular role in supporting "those who seek an ever closer relationship with the EU". Ahead of the Riga summit, the EU seems unable even to agree to these anodyne phrases. It should be bolder.

The Treaty on European Union states clearly that any European state which respects EU values "may apply to become a member of the Union". By refusing to refer to this language, the EU reinforces two Russian arguments: that the EU does not want the Eastern Europeans; and that this is a region of "privileged interests" for Russia. The EU should say that the door to membership remains open – and that Russia has no right to close it.

Differentiation

The EU should differentiate clearly between the six partners. There is no point in wasting limited EU resources on countries which are not committed to the partnership's democratic and free-market principles. EU programmes and funding should flow to the countries that have made the most progress. Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine should get some reward for their efforts. Tbilisi and Kyiv were hoping for visa-free access to the Schengen area (which Moldova already has); they are not going to get it at Riga. The EU needs to find some way of showing ordinary people that having a closer relationship with Brussels brings a country something other than a Russian invasion.

Where the government is uncooperative, as in Azerbaijan and Belarus, the EU should focus more attention on civil society organisations – including by increasing the resources available to the European Endowment for Democracy. Support for civil society does not have to mean support for the political opposition and confrontation with the existing regime: it can cover help and advice for any non-governmental group able to contribute to a country's progress.

Communication

The EU should communicate better. At the Vilnius summit, the then Swedish foreign minister, Carl Bildt, said that “[Vladimir] Putin makes you an offer you can't refuse; the EU makes you an offer you can't understand.” The EU has to do a much better job of countering misunderstanding and misinformation about the impact of cooperation with the EU. The Ukrainian president's website is in Ukrainian and Russian; if Petro Poroshenko thinks it is politically acceptable to speak to Russian-speaking Ukrainians in their native language, why does the EU delegation in Kyiv only provide information in Ukrainian and English?

Political or technical?

The EU should stop thinking that the EaP is a purely technical exercise. Putin is right to think that it could lead to some dramatic changes in Europe. The EaP was never intended to be a geopolitical project, but if it results in some of its members adopting EU standards, open markets, and above all the rule of law, it will produce a decisive break with the Soviet past. The EU needs to understand that such change is inherently threatening to Putin's interests – which by no means implies that the EU should accommodate him.

Russia

The EU should assume that Russian hostility to the EU's relationship with Ukraine will continue. In 2004, Putin said that Russia would welcome Ukrainian membership of the EU. Since 2013, he has exerted enormous efforts to prevent Ukraine getting any closer to the EU. Russia's objections to the EU-Ukraine Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA), which is the centrepiece of the Association Agreement, are specious. Moscow has no more right to seek amendments to the DCFTA to favour its own economic interests than the EU has to demand changes in the arrangements for the Eurasian Economic Union. Russia clearly wants to ensure that Ukraine cannot profit from the DCFTA; the amendments it has proposed would damage both EU exporters and Ukrainian consumers. The EU should make clear -that implementation of the DCFTA will start as scheduled on 31 December. And the EU and its partners should be ready to resist and respond to any Russian retaliation.

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Six key aspects of Spanish policy towards the Eastern Partnership: the view from Madrid

Francisco de Borja Lasheras

Realism

The main factor shaping Spain's approach to the Eastern Partnership Project is what is predominantly thought of in Madrid as realism. Thus, in the run-up to the Riga Summit, the government is keen to avoid a "Vilnius II" scenario. Madrid sees the dynamics of the 2013 summit in Vilnius – in particular, the Brussels-led diplomacy with then-President Viktor Yanukovich's Ukraine and the increasing tensions with Russia – as having aggravated or at least contributed to the outbreak of the crisis in Ukraine. Hence the current emphasis on realistic deliverables and the concept of a "working summit" in Riga, as opposed to a grandiose one.

Still, the line between realism and a Kissingerian Realpolitik is sometimes unclear, given other foreign policy positions taken by Spain's current conservative government. This is clearly the case when it comes to fostering relations with powers (China, US, Russia) or strongmen (such as Egypt's Abdelfatah Al-Sisi) over human rights or other normative considerations.¹

Caution

This factor applies not only to relations with Russia but also to managing the expectations of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries – in particular, over the prospects for EU enlargement in the near future.

On the Russian question, many policymakers in Madrid perceive the lack of sensible offers to Moscow (for example, on visa liberalisation), coupled with the lack of real will to engage with Russia's interests and concerns – or a veiled desire to balance Moscow at any cost – as trigger factors in the Ukraine crisis. This must be viewed in light of the concept of a "strategic partnership" between Europe and Russia (and between Spain and Russia) which, though increasingly under fire, still influences thinking in Madrid. This is especially evident in Foreign Minister José Manuel García-Margallo's statements on the topic of Europe and Russia, although senior officials also go public in criticising Russia's actions in Ukraine, particularly the annexation of Crimea.

1. Francisco de Borja Lasheras (14 Jun 2014) 'Four Spanish factions on Russia and Ukraine'. Available online at http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_spain_on_russia_and_ukraine_the_understanders_the_equidistan274

Though the EaP is valued as a framework both for strengthening the EU and its member states' relations with the six partners and for reforms within them, according to this way of thinking Europe should also provide incentives to Moscow in return. That is, a sort of "carrot-based off-ramp" approach, which should serve to de-escalate tensions over Ukraine. Above all, in the view of most policy makers in Madrid, Europe should avoid isolating Russia and unnecessarily ratcheting up tensions with the Kremlin, in spite of a recognition of the latter's agenda of instability.

But caution is also a relevant policy approach when it comes to creating unrealistic expectations among EaP countries – to avoid putting the cart before the horse, so to speak. Diplomats in Madrid are adamant that the European Neighbourhood Policy is not, cannot, and should not be used openly, at least at this stage, as a precursor to enlargement. There are misgivings when it comes to the EU making "unrealistic" promises of "European perspectives" in the short to medium-term, absent a political consensus within the EU to that end -and on the future of enlargement proper-.

Gradualism

Nonetheless, the current Spanish government has also made several overtures to EaP countries, through diplomatic visits and other such measures. Madrid places a strong emphasis on incrementalism: should countries make progress in reforms required by the EU, the EU should respond accordingly and provide political support and economic, financial, and expert assistance. But, in the same light, incentives (and related key decisions) should not be provided in advance, in the absence of real reforms – hence Madrid's and other member states' stance on visa liberalisation for Ukraine at the Riga Summit.

So Madrid's line can be summarised as "reforms and standards first, status and incentives later". The perception is that there is often insufficient emphasis on good governance and rule-of-law reforms, and on transformation in general.

Coherence

Some in Madrid are critical of the EU's inconsistent approach to the different partners and challenges posed by the EaP, whether from a geopolitical or a human rights perspective. The perception is that this inconsistency defeats the very purpose of the EaP project and weakens the EU's common foreign policy. For instance, the overemphasis on Ukraine should not limit the attention paid to countries such as Georgia or Moldova. In the view of Madrid, Europe should try to avoid double standards and reward clear reform deliverables.

2. Francisco de Borja Lasheras (9 March 2015) 'View from Madrid: Spain's balancing act on sanctions'. Available online at http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_view_from_madrid_spains_balancing_act_on_sanctions311280

In the same vein, senior officials in Madrid insist on the need for Europe to design a sensible relationship with those countries that may not be willing to “Europeanise” any time soon, but which are still relevant on other grounds, such as Azerbaijan or Armenia.

Increased engagement

Despite the common perception that Spain is aloof from the EaP project, given its pressing interests and demands in the Southern Neighbourhood, Madrid’s overall engagement has increased somewhat. This is probably true at least in terms of diplomacy (as shown by visits to the Eastern Neighbourhood by senior diplomatic officials) and the increased relevance given in Madrid to the EaP question, not least after the Ukraine crisis. This goes hand in hand with some diplomatic overtures to countries that aren’t particularly like-minded on this topic, such as the Baltic states, or close partners on other European matters, such as Poland, aimed at fostering foreign policy convergence (or at least at clarifying respective policy assessments).

The actual implications of this Spanish attention to the East, particularly in the context of uncertain political change in Spain as well, remain unclear, bar some gestures here and there. Nevertheless, the profile of Eastern Europe in Madrid’s foreign policy and decision-making circles has increased since the Ukraine crisis. This may also be seen within the context of the current Spanish Government’s clear attempts to increase its global diplomatic standing, now that it has a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council.

Balancing competing foreign policy demands

Still, Spain epitomises Europe’s current foreign-policy quagmire of having to extinguish fires across the east and in the Southern Neighbourhood (if not further afield, such as in the Sahel). In the context of refocusing priorities, Spain is -unevenly- concentrating the sheer weight of its diplomatic and scarce resources on areas of traditional interest, such as North Africa and Latin America. Such areas still account for most of the diplomatic initiatives to have emerged from Madrid in recent years (such as the flurry of high-level brinkmanship over the various Mediterranean crises, from migration to the Libyan conflict).

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Taking the neighbours seriously: the view from Stockholm

Anke Schmidt-Felzmann

Sweden and Poland were the two main players in the EU promoting a dedicated Eastern Partnership (EaP) policy within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy. It was fortunate that Sweden held the Presidency of the European Council in 2009, when the EaP was launched. By contrast, the Swedish general election in September 2014 and the new government's initial struggles in office coincided with the escalation of Russia's war in Ukraine. This was unfortunate timing, both for the neighbours and for the EU's EaP policy.

A staunch commitment to the eastern neighbours

In the aftermath of the Georgian-Russian war, Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt joined forces with his Polish colleague, Radoslaw Sikorski, to promote the EaP. Swedish security experts had issued a stern warning about Russia's likely future challenges to the European security order and, from a Swedish perspective, efforts had to be stepped up to counter the negative trends in the region. Under Bildt's leadership, Sweden's foreign policy was characterised by unequivocal support for the eastern partners. The importance of the EaP for Sweden is reflected in the attention paid to the partnership countries and to Russia in each of the annual Swedish Foreign Policy Declarations between 2009 and 2014. Moreover, Russian state-controlled media such as RT, Tass, and Sputnik regularly mocked Bildt during his last few years in office, which was a testament to the important role he played in mobilising stronger EU involvement in the region.

That the EaP initiative would face setbacks hardly came as a surprise to Sweden. The Foreign Ministry carefully monitored regional developments. The violation of Georgia's territorial integrity, the situation in Belarus and relations with Russia received, in addition to the EaP, considerable attention in Sweden's 2009 Foreign Policy Declaration. These issues, and also energy relations with the Caucasus countries, were the focus the following year, and in 2012 the declaration noted the deterioration of the situation in Ukraine, the consequences that that would have for Sweden's development aid to the country,

concerns about Belarus, but also the implications of Russia's accession to the WTO.

In February 2013, the Swedish Foreign Ministry noted worrying trends in the EaP region. The appointment of a Swedish "Eastern Partnership" ambassador was a clear acknowledgement of the fact that the Vilnius Summit the following November would be an important milestone. The Foreign Policy Declaration that year noted the financial commitment that Sweden and the EU had made to help the EaP countries. At the same time, Bildt noted the dangers inherent in the deliberate decision of the Russian government to prioritise the modernisation of its armed forces – to the detriment of economic modernisation and Russian society. In his farewell speech in September 2014, Bildt acknowledged that he had underestimated the destructive potential of the changes that had taken place in Russia under President Vladimir Putin's leadership.

Tenacity pays off in the long run – terror does not

Considering the resources and energy that Sweden has invested in the EaP, Stockholm can hardly be satisfied with its record, which has been mixed, if not poor. Instead of enjoying greater stability, security, and prosperity in 2015, the eastern partners – and even, remarkably, several EU member states in their vicinity – now have to grapple with serious domestic challenges and find ways of effectively combatting the gamut of Russia's methods of hybrid warfare. Still, after many years of limited progress and setbacks in the Eastern Neighbourhood, the first half of 2014 saw, alongside an intensification of Russian aggression against Ukraine, the most significant positive development yet. That Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine signed and ratified the bilateral Association Agreement (AA) and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) with the EU constituted a clear success. That Moldovans, Armenians, and Azerbaijanis now enjoy easier travel to the EU is also a sign of progress. Moldova's positive trade development with the EU in 2015 confirms the value of the DCFTA in promoting reforms in the EaP countries. In the case of Ukraine, the postponement of the DCFTA implementation might be seen as a major disappointment, although the consensus of most experts is that pushing for implementation in 2015 would have done more harm than good.

Shaky at home, but committed to helping the eastern neighbours

Speculation was rife about whether Sweden without Bildt as its foreign minister would be a force for the eastern partners to

reckon with. The general election in September 2014 seemed to confirm the worst fears: the new government's first few months in office were characterised by ambiguity. Doubts increased about how Sweden's new "feminist foreign policy" would be applied to relations with Russia and the eastern partners, and the war in Ukraine in particular. Analysts and observers on both sides of the Baltic Sea were especially unsettled by the scant attention paid in the 2015 Foreign Policy Declaration to the crisis in Ukraine, to Russia, and to the EaP.

The declared ambition of pursuing a "new role for Sweden in the world" in practice meant breaking with the strong and principled stance that Carl Bildt had pursued. Sweden's allies in the EU began to worry about the mixed signals the new government was sending Russia at an absolutely crucial time for Ukraine and the region as a whole. Both Prime Minister Stefan Löfven and Foreign Minister Margot Wallström came to realise, however, that breaking with their predecessors' policy served neither Sweden's interests nor those of the eastern neighbours. In that respect, Wallström's visit to Ukraine in late November 2014 was a turning point. She gained first-hand insight into the severity of the challenges faced by the government in Kyiv and confirmed that Sweden would support Ukraine, no matter what.

The following spring (2015), Wallström embarked on a course of active engagement in the EaP. She also held numerous meetings with other EU member states to discuss the way forward with the EaP, and travelled to the region with like-minded EU colleagues. In her visit to Moldova, she was accompanied by Lithuania's foreign minister, while her Danish and Polish counterparts joined her when she visited Georgia. Wallström also participated in the meeting of the Visegrad countries to discuss the EaP, a few days before the Riga Summit, accompanied by her Romanian colleague. The sudden activism confirmed the impression that the Swedish Foreign Minister had turned over a new leaf in her commitment to the region.

Although Stockholm's renewed activism has remained largely under the radar, there is no doubt about the strength of Sweden's engagement in the EaP process. The Swedish Riksdag ratified the EU's Association Agreements with Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine in late November, recognising their choice to take the "European path". In December 2014, Stockholm signed an agreement with the UNDP in Ukraine, which saw it commit to financially support "early recovery and reconciliation" in Eastern Ukraine. Sweden also had a visible presence at the international donors' conference for Ukraine in April 2015. More recently, in mid-May, Wallström announced that her government would

provide medical aid to wounded civilians and military personnel in Eastern Ukraine.

After a period of uncertainty during the new government's first few months in office, Sweden once again has adopted a clear position on Russia and the EaP partners, and is now pursuing active diplomatic engagement with its EU partners and those in the EaP region. Although Wallström's voice is less audible in the debate, she has embraced the sharp and outspoken approach to foreign policy that Bildt was known for. She also shares his frankness. Indeed, Wallström has not exactly minced her words in recent months. Her Twitter account, @margotwallstrom, provides ample examples (see, for example, a tweet posted on 14 January 2015 which demanded that "Russia cease its aggression", and one on 5 March 2015 which called for the release of Ukrainian pilot Nadiya Savchenko).

Furthermore, Swedish diplomats strongly reject the somewhat muffled criticism of Kyiv, Tallinn, Vilnius, and Riga that has been expressed by those who support an appeasement policy towards Russia. Stockholm finds utterly unacceptable the idea that "Ukraine brought this upon itself" or that Russian aggression against Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia is "the Baltic states' own fault" – views that are nevertheless becoming widespread in some European capitals, including Brussels. Where Sweden is considerably more cautious, though, is on the question of a stronger military presence in the Baltic region and the provision of military support to Ukraine (even if the Swedish Armed Forces did deliver 15 armoured vehicles to Ukraine in early March 2015 to support the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission). On the whole, however, Wallström sides with German Chancellor Angela Merkel, and the view that there can be no solution besides a diplomatic one.

Balsam for the neighbours, or a return to harsh geopolitical realities in Riga?

The EU's member states demonstrated strong unity on sanctions against Moscow in the year following Russia's occupation and annexation of Crimea. However, with the conclusion of the ceasefire deal in Minsk in February 2015, deep divisions have arisen between the member states. In this light, the question of which commitments the EU should make, and which signals it should send to the eastern neighbours at the Riga Summit, are crucial ones that require firm answers. For Sweden, it is clear that a positive signal must be sent to the eastern neighbours. It is also clear that a strong message must be conveyed to Russia that its continued aggression with its hybrid methods of warfare

against the EaP countries and even EU member states will not be tolerated.

Sweden will also keep its foot firmly planted in the doorway to EU membership, and will not back down and allow the door to close. During his visit to Ukraine in March 2015, Prime Minister Löfven made his government's view crystal clear: that once Ukraine has fulfilled all of its commitments under the AA and DCFTA, the logical step will be to prepare an application for EU membership. "Sweden stands fully behind Ukraine's vision of an ever closer relation with the European Union", he said, because "for Sweden there is no doubt that Ukraine is a part of Europe and has a clear place in Europe". On the back of this newfound clarity, Sweden's representatives in Brussels are continuing to do everything they can to turn the tide of the EU's internal debate and fight the increasingly popular view that the EU should keep its head down on the membership question. Along with its Baltic partners, Stockholm has insisted that, at the very least, the language of the Vilnius Summit declaration must be included in the Riga Summit declaration too – namely the "acknowledgement of the European aspirations and the European choice of some partners" (as well as "their commitment to build deep and sustainable democracy").

From Riga towards a new realism: appeasement as the new normal?

A major concern for Sweden – one shared by its Baltic, Polish, Romanian and Bulgarian partners – is the creeping normalisation of the status quo: that an acquiescent acceptance of the simmering war in Ukraine has become the new "normal" in Brussels, and in many other national capitals. It may seem as if Sweden itself is a guilty party in that respect, but a distinction must be made between the almost non-existent public debate in Sweden and the Swedish Foreign Ministry's and diplomatic corps' strong and active engagement in Brussels and in the EaP region. While the latter continue their work in different EU capitals and on the ground in the EaP countries, the Swedish public pays scant attention to the Eastern Neighbourhood because of "conflict fatigue" and the "normalisation" of Russia's war in Ukraine. Coverage of developments in the EaP region by the Swedish media is neither systematic nor consistent. While reports of Russia's territorial violations in the Baltic Sea and airspace regularly appear in the news, Ukraine and even the precarious position of the Baltic states receives little coverage. Neither has much attention been paid to Wallström's hectic shuttle diplomacy during the weeks leading up to the Riga Summit. Meanwhile, Sweden's embassies and ambassadors continue to work hard in the Eastern Partnership countries. They also lend active support

to civil society actors and political leaders to help their efforts to implement necessary, but difficult and painful, reforms.

In the run-up to the European Council meeting in June 2015, when leaders will decide whether to extend the package of sanctions against Russia, Sweden stands firmly alongside those who advocate the continuation of a principled sanctions policy. It is likely that the Council will approve the extension of current EU sanctions against Russia until 31 December 2015. The question is what will happen after that? It is implausible that on 1 January 2016 peace will break out in Ukraine or that Europe's unsettled security order will be restored. The manner in which the Kremlin orchestrated the 9 May victory celebrations in Moscow left little doubt that Russia is continuing to scale up its readiness to engage in full-scale war.

Looking ahead, there is no doubt that Stockholm will continue to condemn the annexation of Crimea and Russia's ongoing aggression against Ukraine. It is also Sweden's firm view that Russia must not be given a veto on the implementation of the EU's DCFTA with Ukraine, Moldova, or Georgia. Stockholm is also keen on developing better relations with Minsk, but not at any cost. Following the emerging consensus in Brussels that greater emphasis in the EaP policy must be put on fundamental state-building, Sweden will continue its longstanding tradition of supporting its partners with technical expertise. With the recent appointment of economist Anders Aslund and Carl Bildt to the advisory team that will guide Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko through difficult state-building reforms, a substantial Swedish influence in Kyiv is guaranteed. At the same time, Stockholm will also devote its attention to the other five eastern partners and will, without doubt, do more than its fair share in the EU to help develop a more effective policy towards the neighbours, in order to gradually help restore stability and security in the Eastern Neighbourhood.

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ECFR Riga Series
Views from the EU

Estonia and the Eastern Partnership: the view from Tallin

Marge Mardisalu-Kahar

As the Riga summit approaches, the Eastern Partnership (EaP) is very much in focus. As always, big deliverables are expected from summits. This time, no game-changing Association Agreements will be signed, but it is to be hoped that positive messages will emerge about the progress of the implementation of the agreements and about visa issues. This EaP summit is taking place within the broader context of the review of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), in many ways as a consequence of Russia's destabilisation of the eastern neighbourhood as well as of the deteriorating situation in the south. It is important that the EaP policy should not be weakened in this process.

Since the launch of the European Union's EaP policy in 2009, Estonia has been one of the policy's biggest supporters. The Estonian Government has identified EaP as one of its foreign policy priorities and the creation of the Estonian Center of Eastern Partnership in 2011 was one manifestation of this commitment. However, the mission is definitely much broader than just an intergovernmental undertaking. Especially in light of recent events in Ukraine, Estonian society wishes very strongly to assist the EaP countries. One example of the more prominent role that civil society is taking is the significant increase in activities being carried out by Estonian Civil Society Organisations in EaP countries, whether in working for reform or assisting the huge number of Internally Displaced People in Ukraine.

Sympathy towards the partners, scepticism towards EaP

In Estonian public discourse, EaP is first and foremost perceived as a framework for developing bilateral relations with the six partner countries – Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Belarus. The EU's EaP initiative is seen as a useful tool, not as an ultimate goal. The main aim is fostering the well-being, stability, and democratisation of EaP countries, and by doing so, making the neighbouring region more prosperous and stable. This has led to close interaction between Estonia and the three associated states – Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine.

This cooperation, again, includes many societal groups as well as the countries' governments, because various sectors of society in these countries feel they can benefit from Estonian transition experience.

Since the Vilnius summit in 2013, Estonian society has viewed the EaP with growing scepticism, above all because of the policy's lack of ambition and the absence of an EU membership perspective for the associated EaP states. This is considered to be one of the main demotivating factors for those societies, which is hindering their reform processes. In Estonian public debate, people genuinely seem not to understand why this perspective, or "a carrot", cannot be put in place to incentivise the EaP countries. No one in Estonia takes seriously the prospect of Ukraine, Moldova, or Georgia becoming EU member states in the near future, but the long-term option should be there. This perception is very much based on Estonian own experience – the reform process, one of the true success stories of the EU's transformative power, was not easy for the country, and without a clear EU perspective, the situation would have been much more difficult. Explaining the difficult reform process and showing the benefits of the transformation to society at large has also been one of the priority issues for the Estonian Center of Eastern Partnership. The Center has focused its efforts on enhancing the capacity of local people to take ownership of communicating the positive effects of the reforms.

Estonia notices the South

What implications will all this have for the Estonian position on the ENP review, to be completed by the end of this year? One aspect that seems to be changing within Estonian public discourse on the ENP is that there is a growing understanding of shared responsibility in the entire neighbourhood. The tragic events in the Mediterranean are increasingly becoming an internal issue for Estonians.

ENP countries have different ambitions as regards their relations with the EU, and this must be addressed by the new ENP policy. Three countries in the EaP region have stated their wish to become members of the EU, whereas the other three, for many different reasons, have chosen very different paths. Moreover, support for reforms and for the EU as a partner varies a lot in EaP countries. The three countries which have chosen the association track with the EU have completely different needs to the other three. Moreover, before Vilnius, the entire ENP policy was very much based on the philosophy of enlargement, which in turn was based on the assumption that the EU was irresistible

and attractive. However, in the post-Vilnius reality, “the end of history” paradigm has been pushed back by new security concerns. Based on those considerations, fundamental questions have been asked in the ENP review document about the future levels and instruments of cooperation.

Values and interests

This brings us back to the old dichotomy between values and interests. In the attempt to find a new balance in the neighbourhood policy between the two, a clear danger emerges that the value-based approach will suffer and that the EU’s political commitment towards these countries will be weakened. In order to avoid that, it is very important that the EU does not do anything to lower the level of ambitions of those EaP countries that want a deeper integration with the EU. The Vilnius declaration from 2013 spoke of the possibility of deeper economic integration and this should be elaborated on further. It would be detrimental to the EU’s interests to lower those ambitions, whatever the reasons that might seem to argue otherwise – either the fear of further provoking Russia or a general enlargement fatigue. Estonia, because of its own experience, is most likely to remain one of the member states that pursues a more ambitious track with regard to EaP countries.

The future of “more for more”

Another danger is the possible departure from the incentive-based approach, the more-for-more principle that was stated as the main guideline for the ENP in the 2011 review. Abandoning this principle would mean the EU’s ability to stick to the conditionality principle would be reduced, and conditionality is a very important tool in pushing forward reform in associated states. Therefore, it is very important to stay true to the more-for-more principle, so that it can be applied both in terms of political and financial support to those countries that choose further integration with the EU. Again, coming back to the Estonian experience – change is possible, but each country needs to be committed and motivated. For this to happen, the ENP toolbox should be used as efficiently as possible.

For those EaP countries that for various reasons have chosen a different path, it is their sovereign right to choose the precise level of cooperation they wish to take in their relations with the EU. For the EU, however, even if this cooperation is limited only to some specific sectors, it is still important to streamline the value-based approach. An old mantra – values are our interests – very much applies here. To take one example – in the field of e-governance, in

which Estonia is clearly one of the leading countries in the region, developing only ICT infrastructure without paying attention to e-participation, e-democracy, and transparency would mean the effect on society would be very limited.

In conclusion, a lack of ambition in EaP policy would be detrimental to the EU's as well as Estonia's interests, because it would demotivate the most ambitious partners and risk depriving the EU of the leverage to demand real results on the reform track. In Riga, it is important to reaffirm the EU's commitment towards the EaP countries. Estonia can be expected to do its part during its EU presidency in 2018 in promoting the reform process in EaP countries. Before then, of course, many variables may influence the situation in our fast-paced world. These include the unpredictable behaviour of Russia towards Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova, both in terms of direct security threats and in terms of sabotaging the reform process by different means; the EU's ability to stand united in its foreign policy decisions; the Brexit-loaded United Kingdom EU presidency during the second half of 2017, right before the Estonian one; and most importantly, the actual achievements by the EaP countries themselves in reforming their societies and economies.

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ECFR Riga Series
Views from the EU

Poland and the Eastern Partnership: the view from Warsaw

Piotr Buras

Six years ago Poland, along with Sweden, initiated the European Union's Eastern Partnership (EaP). The project was intended to strengthen the EU's ties with its eastern neighbours, to advance these eastern partners' democratic and economic transformation, and to encourage them to cooperate more closely with each other. Warsaw believes that the EaP has been a success, especially in view of the developments that have taken place in the southern neighbourhood. Three countries (Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia) have signed Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area agreements (DCFTAs) with the EU. Despite many setbacks and challenges, all three are on a path towards modernisation in accordance with European rules and values.

However, Poland's perception is not completely shared across Europe. Many countries believe that the EU's expansion to the east formed the root cause of the geopolitical conflict with Russia. This is one of the reasons why, at the Riga summit and on the future of the EaP, Warsaw is focusing on reiterating the progress and commitments that have been made so far, rather than launching new initiatives or articulating far-reaching visions.

From technocratic to emotional

The EaP has come a long way since 2008: from a technocratic project aimed at fostering EU member states' interests in the eastern neighbourhood to an object of hatred in Russian propaganda, a supposed example of the West's incursion into Moscow's sphere of vital interests. This unexpected development has set the parameters for Poland's new approach to its pet project. The EaP is no longer seen simply as a set of tools, more or less efficient, to bring eastern neighbours closer to European standards. Instead, it has also become a highly political issue – the more so since any backtracking on the EU's commitments, not to mention scrapping the EaP, would suggest that the EU buys into the narrative that its policy of engagement with the post-Soviet republics has gone too far. This interpretation has been clearly rebuffed by Poland. Warsaw contends that the current stand-off between Russia and the EU was caused not by

the EaP, but by Russia's choice to turn against the West, largely because of domestic policy issues (and by Moscow's refusal to accept democracy in Ukraine). To blame the EU (and the EaP) for this conflict would be a fatal mistake; it would put the EU on the defensive in the propaganda war and it would likely lead to poor policy recommendations.

Send a signal

Instead, Warsaw thinks that the EU needs to "reconfirm its commitments" towards the EU's eastern neighbours, especially towards those who have already signed DCFTAs. Those agreements should be ratified as quickly as possible by all EU member states, and the Riga summit should send a clear signal that the "European aspirations" of these countries are being taken seriously. The wording of documents that come out of Riga should not contradict what the EU has represented in the past years – and this refers both to the issue of a general openness for new members (as stated in the EU Treaties) and to the question of visa liberalisation, which should be introduced as soon as the partner states meet the necessary technical requirements. Both issues seem to be contentious within the EU. But from the Polish perspective, the measure of success or failure for the Riga summit will be the way that the EU approaches these issues, rather than any spectacular deliverables, which are very unlikely to emerge in any case. In the current circumstances, if the EU were to shy away from openly upholding its policy, it would be devastating for its image and discouraging for the societies in Eastern Europe, where the ongoing adaptation process entails a lot of hardship.

The question of "neighbours of neighbours"

Clearly, the priority of the Eastern Partnership in the coming years should be the swift implementation of the DCFTAs as well as the efficient monitoring of this process. Poland has been sceptical about delaying Ukraine's DCFTA from entering into force until 2016 and it is opposing any further concessions to Russia on the issue. The question of how to refer to the "neighbours of the neighbours" (or, really, the one big "neighbour of the neighbours") in the Riga documents remains controversial: Poland is reluctant to give Moscow leverage on the EU's relations with its eastern neighbours. Economic integration is key, and the growth of trade exchanges between the EU and Georgia and Moldova has been seen as one of the positive developments and, indeed, one of the main examples that the EaP is working. Increased support for the development of small and medium enterprises in EaP partner states (SME Facility) should be one of the concrete contributions that the EU makes to the improvement of economic structures in those countries.

No less importantly, Warsaw believes that the EaP remains an useful instrument for the countries in the east. Sectorial dialogues, regular summits, and other meeting formats should not be underestimated, because they give the political elites of the eastern neighbours an opportunity to socialise with their EU counterparts – and Poland’s experience from its own pre-accession process shows how important that is. And even more reluctant partners seem to acknowledge the positive record of EaP cooperation in the most advanced countries of the region. Armenia, despite its decision to join the Eurasian Economic Union, is ready to negotiate a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement and Belarus wishes to sign an agreement on visa facilitation.

Similarities and differences between East and South

Obviously, the discussion about the future of the EaP cannot be isolated from the larger context of the review of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). Poland has showed more interest in the southern neighbourhood in recent years and months (the speech of Polish Foreign Minister Grzegorz Schetyna before parliament in April 2015 represents a good example). However, its perception of the EU’s neighbourhood comes down to principle: there is a substantial difference between the east, where we have European partners with European aspirations, and the south, where this is clearly not the case. Poland’s insistence on keeping up and strengthening the EaP reflects this attitude: the east is qualitatively different (which does not mean more important) from the south, and the EU’s policy instruments need to address this fact. Differentiation, tailor-made policies, flexibility – Poland supports all these key concepts of the ENP review, feeling that they should naturally lead to a stronger and more focused engagement with the most advanced EU partners in the east.

Powerplay in Brussels: Commission or EEAS?

A more strategic approach is required as well, possibly involving a relaxation of the conditionality principle, whose application has failed both in the east and in the south. Action Plans and long lists of detailed commitments served bureaucratic purposes, but had little impact on the ground. However, Poland faces a dilemma here. Poland fears there could be negative consequences if the ENP – and logically also the EaP – were to become more of a foreign (and security) policy tool, in which the European External Action Service (EEAS) rather than the Commission was in the driving seat (although this is not likely to happen under the current ENP review). The Commission has proved over the years to be more sympathetic to Poland’s concerns, and has pursued the mission

enshrined in the Treaties with regard to the neighbourhood. On the other hand, the EEAS is perceived as being the domain of the bigger member states and thus is less predictable in terms of the application of commonly agreed EU policies.

With regard to the east (as well as to the south), Poland has no illusions about the fact that stabilisation and prosperity are unlikely to be achieved quickly, nor about the ENP and EaP as the most important tools to reach this goal. The limits of these policies as largely technocratic instruments (which will not change in a meaningful way after the ENP review) are apparent in an environment that is more and more dominated by security and geopolitical challenges which they are not well suited to address. So, as much as the EaP is important for Poland as a flagship project of its diplomacy and an important symbol of EU's engagement in the increasingly contested post-Soviet region, tackling the most pressing problems (especially in Ukraine) will require solutions going far beyond the EaP (such as high-level diplomacy, substantial economic support, security sector cooperation). But in Riga, the EU needs to confirm that it is ready for this long adventure – which is why a new endorsement of the EaP is essential.

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