

PEACE AND SECURITY

STRENGTHENING THE SECURITY AND RESILIENCE OF THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP

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There is a growing sense of insecurity in the EaP region. Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine, the most advanced EaP countries, have become primary targets of the Russian military threats, cyberattacks and disinformation.



EU is uncertain about how to deal with the Russian antagonistic posture in the region. It has no unified strategic long-term vision on the future of EaP and lacks leadership and willingness to deepen its security role in the EaP region.



The EaP needs an enhanced security dimension, which will step-up the EU's cooperation with Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine on strengthening their cybersecurity, intelligence, and defence capabilities.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2009, the EU decided to strengthen the eastern dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) by launching the Eastern Partnership (EaP) – a regional cooperation framework designed to transform Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine in a ring of democratic, prosperous and stable countries by offering them the prospects of political association and economic integration with the EU, in return for democratic and institutional reforms.

Due to the EaP, EU has become one of the most important partners for almost all EaP countries. EU has spent billions of euros for helping EaP countries to promote democratic reforms, build rule of law, strengthen institutional capacities, modernize key economic sectors and infrastructures, enhance social and health services, support small and medium enterprises, and promote educational mobility between the EU and EaP countries, etc.

Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine have advanced the most in their partnership with the EU. All three countries have signed Association Agreements, Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (DCFTA), and Visa Liberalization Agreements with the EU. Due to the DCFTAs, their trade with the EU has increased and their legislation is progressively harmonised with the EU's laws, rules, and standards. With the EU's help, all three countries have succeeded in enhancing their energy security by implementing key reforms, modernizing their critical infrastructure, and building gas and electricity connections with the EU.

Notwithstanding all these successes, the stability and security of Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine remain fragile, mainly because of the Russian obstructive tactics against them. All three countries are considered by Russia as representing its privileged sphere of influence. Therefore, Russia is quite annoyed with the EU's increasing role in the region. While the EU is supporting Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine to build stable, democratic, and prosperous states through strengthening economic ties and building rule of laws in accordance with the European standards, Russia is using separatism, corruption, propaganda, cyber-attacks, energy and economic dependencies, hybrid-tactics, military threats and use of force for destabilizing them and upsetting the EU policies in the region.

In its "Conclusions on Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020, published in May 2020"¹, the EU Council has announced that strengthening the resilience of the EaP will be the EU's major objective in the post-2020 period. According to the same document, cooperation with the Eastern partners in the areas of security and disaster risk management is important for the stability of the whole region and needs a special attention. The Council also took note of the proposal to consider, where appropriate, assisting the Eastern partners countries to strengthen their capacity and resilience as regards enhancing civil protection, fighting against organised crime and other illicit activities, countering terrorist threats and preventing radicalisation, hybrid threats, and malicious cyber activities. At the same time, the EU Council underlined the importance of enhancing, where appropriate, the security dialogue and cooperation in the field of Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP).

Despite this promising wording, the EU is still cautious on expanding its security and defence cooperation with the EaP countries, especially Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. It does not have a strategic long-term vision on the future of EaP and is very divided on how to deal with the Russian antagonistic posture in the region. In spring 2020, France circulated a non-Paper on EaP proposing to strip it of any security-dimension, as well as of the current institutional building and rule of law cooperation, and to focus instead on environment, equality and women rights. In this way, France wanted to reassure Russia that the EaP does not have any anti-Russian purpose.

If endorsed, the French proposal would have inadvertently recognized Russia's supremacy in the region and would have encouraged the latter to step-up its economic, political, and military pressure on Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. The failure of the past European attempts to engage Russia in co-sharing responsibility in the common neighbourhood (e.g. Meseberg Memorandum with Germany and EU – Russia

¹ Council of the European Union, "Council Conclusions on Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020", Brussels, 11 May 2020, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/43905/st07510-re01-en20.pdf>

Partnership for modernization) is a clear indication that Russia is not interested in either co-management or co-existence in the EaP region. In Russia's eyes the EaP is detrimental to its geopolitical interests in the region because it is assisting partner countries to increase their energy security, diversify their trade relations, and strengthen their rule of laws and, consequently, supports them to reduce their economic dependency on Russia and increase their capacities to withstand Russian economic blackmail, internal disruptions and overt threats.

Even if the EaP is needed more than ever, it is ill equipped to offset the Russian assertiveness and disruption. After the annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas, the Russia's revisionist foreign policy has become a key challenge for the EaP and the EU's credibility in the region. Russia understands that it cannot match the EU's economic and soft-power attractiveness, therefore, to affirm its dominance in the EaP region,

it uses coercion, hybrid threats, and military force. It is obvious that to deal with this challenge, the EaP needs an enhanced security dimension, which will step-up EU's cooperation with Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine on matters of defence, intelligence, and cybersecurity.

In the following chapters we will try to answer the following questions:

1. Why does the Eastern Partnership (EaP) need a strengthened security dimension?
2. Is the EU prepared to develop stronger security partnerships with its neighbours?
3. Why should the EU become more ambitious about the security dimension of the Eastern Partnership?

1

WHY EASTERN PARTNERSHIP (EaP) NEEDS A STRENGTHENED SECURITY DIMENSION

There is a growing sense of insecurity in the EaP region, especially after the Russian aggression in Georgia in 2008, annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the ongoing war in Donbas. Being aware of the fact that its economic and soft-power clout is no match for the EU's attractiveness, Russia is openly resorting to an array of coercion instruments and military force to project its influence and assert its supremacy in the EaP region. Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine have become primary targets of the Russian military threats, cyberattacks and disinformation.

1.1 EaP UNDER RUSSIA'S MILITARY CLOUT

After annexation of Crimea, Russia has maximized its military power in the EaP region and transformed the Black Sea into a Russian lake. It has initiated a heavy militarization of Crimea, transforming the peninsula in a springboard to project its military power and influence in Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, as well as in the Eastern Mediterranean region, in places like Syria and Libya². Since 2014, Russia has doubled its military contingent in Crimea to almost 32,000 personnel, it has increased six times its armoured vehicles and combat aircrafts, and eight times the artillery pieces³. The railway connection between Crimea and the Russian Federation, opened in December 2019, allows Russia to transfer swiftly additional forces from the North Caucasus. At the same time, Russia doubled its military ships stationing on the peninsula. Most of them are new submarines and missile corvettes, which surpass the capabilities of NATO units in the region. Moreover, Russia has expanded its missile and radar capabilities, which allows Russian military to identify and hit targets in the entire Black Sea and EaP areas.

The annexation and militarization of Crimea combined with

the construction of a bridge over the Kerch Strait, which allows Russia to completely block access to the Azov Sea, have had a negative impact on the economic development in the region. Under the pretext of military exercises and inspections of merchant ships heading to and from the Ukrainian ports of Mariupol and Berdyansk, Russia is disrupting trade routes and restricting freedom of navigation in the Sea of Azov which is vital for Ukraine's economy and national security. Furthermore, the Russian growing military presence in Crimea threatens the implementation of new energy projects in the region such as the Sarmatia project, launched in 2004, involving the export of Azerbaijani crude oil via a pipeline through Georgia, followed by tankers to Ukraine and then overland to Poland and even to Belarus; it inhibits investors from launching new extraction projects on the Ukrainian continental shelf as well; and it may also hinder the implementation of plans to build an LNG terminal near Odessa⁴.

Simultaneously with the militarization of the Crimean Peninsula, Russia is militarizing Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transnistrian region, and is using military drills in these separatist regions to deepen the sense of insecurity in the EaP countries. In Georgia, Russia has deployed the 4th military base in South Ossetia and the 7th base in Abkhazia, which are supported by the 58th and 49th combined army⁵. In the Transnistrian region of Moldova, Russia has around 2000 troops, including 82nd and 113th special "peacekeeping" battalions which are highly prepared units, involved also in military drills with local separatist forces that comprise about 8,000 KGB and Ministry of Interior special troops⁶. Russia helped Transnistrian separatists to modernize old soviet tanks and the Tiraspol military airport and has substantially stepped-up the military exercises of its troops stationing illegally in the region⁷. In August 2018,

2 Luke Coffey, "Russian dominance in the Black Sea: The Sea of Azov", Middle East Institute, Washington DC, 25 September 2020, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/russian-dominance-black-sea-sea-azov>

3 Polish Institute for International Affairs (PISM), "The Significance of Russia's Militarisation of Crimea", Warsaw, 03 March 2020, https://pism.pl/publications/The_Significance_of_Russias_Militarisation_of_Crimea

4 Ibidem

5 Gustav C. Gressel, The Eastern Partnership's missing security dimension, LibMod Policy Paper, June 2020, available at: https://libmod.de/wp-content/uploads/LibMod_PolicyPaper_EasternPartnership3.pdf

6 Ibidem

7 Jamestown Foundation, "Russian Military Developments in Trans-

Russian and the Transnistrian military forces also rehearsed a river-crossing military drill, which was condemned as provocative by the Moldovan authorities and OSCE. Russia is also using the Kavkaz (Caucasus) military drills to exert pressure on Georgia. In the latest Kavkaz-2020 drills that involved approximately 80,000 soldiers, 250 tanks, almost 500 armoured personnel carriers, around 200 pieces of artillery, Russian forces have exercised in both Abkhazia and South Ossetia, illegally seized from Georgia in 2008 and annexed to the Russian Federation⁸.

1.2 EaP, RUSSIA'S CYBERATTACKS PLAYGROUND

Since 2014, Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova have been experiencing a growing number of cyberattacks by Russian state and non-state actors⁹. These cyberattacks are targeting election systems, critical infrastructure, and governmental agencies, putting them under constant stress and impacting European institutions and companies as well. In the spring of 2014, Russian-affiliated hackers were sending malicious code onto Ukraine's IT systems, trying to generate political chaos as a smokescreen for Russia's military aggression in the Eastern Ukraine. Three days before the Ukrainian presidential election in May 2014, hackers struck Ukraine's Central Election Commission and disabled parts of the network using advanced cyberespionage malware. The Central Election Commission was attacked again in October 2014, when hackers shut down its website ahead of the parliamentary elections. In 2015, hackers used so-called BlackEnergy malware that disabled parts of the Ukrainian power grid. It was the world's first known successful cyberattack on a large energy company. The electricity blackouts affected about 230,000 Ukrainians for up to six hours.

A year later, in December 2016, hackers managed to turn off the lights in a large part of the Ukrainian capital using even more sophisticated cyber tools. The world's most financially damaging cyberattack until now took place also in EaP region, in 2017, when hackers used "NotPetya" malware to wipe data from the computers of utility companies, banks, airports and government agencies in Ukraine. This cyber-

attack also ravaged multinationals like the Danish shipping giant Maersk, logistics giant FedEx, pharma company Merck and other major corporations. The "NotPetya" assault, which was launched on Ukraine's Constitution Day, costed around \$10 billion to clean up and is considered the most damaging attack in history that affected the EU as well. According to U.S. officials citing classified reports, the CIA has concluded with "high confidence" that "NotPetya" malware was created by the Russian GRU military spy agency.

On 28 October 2019, a large-scale cyberattack was perpetrated against the private and public websites, servers and operating systems of the Administration of the President of Georgia, the courts, various municipal assemblies, state bodies, private sector organisations and media outlets¹⁰. As a result of that cyberattack called "I'll be back", 15,000 private and public owned websites were shut down, the servers and operating systems of the attacked organisations were significantly damaged, severely affecting their functionality. According to the United States and the United Kingdom separate statements on the issue, the attack was carried out by a unit of Russia's GRU military intelligence agency known as Unit 74455 and Sandworm¹¹.

Moldova has also experienced a range of cyberattacks targeting government institutions and private sector companies¹². According to the Intelligence and Security Service of Moldova, in 2015, it prevented 27 attempts to breach government information systems, with one of the attacks targeting 12 government agencies through a Trojan virus. In June 2015, the National Bank of Moldova experienced Ddos attacks on its website, temporarily shutting it down. The government systems are usually subjected to mass attacks during major political events, such as parliamentary or presidential elections. During the 2016 presidential elections, Moldova experienced large-scale cyberattacks on government entities, Central Election Commission websites, the observation missions, and media outlets. In the second round of elections, the Central Election Commission has registered 680 thousand cyberattacks.

1.3 EaP DISRUPTED FROM WITHIN

At the same time, Russia has intensified its disinformation and propaganda campaign against Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine aiming at dividing and antagonizing their societies, discrediting their institutions, undermining their democratic systems, and

nistria Worry Moldovan Officials", 25 October 2012, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/508fc2642.html>; Radio Free Europe, "OSCE Expresses Concern Over Russian Forces Actions In Transdnier", 16 August 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/a/osce-expresses-concerns-russian-forces-transdnier/29437831.html>

8 Luke Coffey, "Kavkaz-2020: Russian military exercise sends message to South Caucasus", <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1740021>; Mark Galleotti, "Kavkaz 2020: Russia's latest military exercise highlights its strengths and limitations as a regional hegemon", Middle East Institute, Washington DC, 04 November 2020, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/kavkaz-2020-russias-latest-military-exercise-highlights-its-strengths-and-limitations>

9 Politico, "How Ukraine became a test bed for cyberweaponry", 14 February 2019, <https://www.politico.eu/article/ukraine-cyber-war-frontline-russia-malware-attacks/>

10 EURACTIV, "Georgia reports massive cyber-attack 'carried out by Russia'", 21 February 2020, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/eastern-europe/news/georgia-reports-massive-cyber-attack-carried-out-by-russia/>

11 BBC, "UK says Russia's GRU behind massive Georgia cyber-attack", 20 February 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-51576445>

12 DigitalReport, "Moldova: State of Affairs Report", 18 April 2018, <https://digital.report/moldova-state-of-affairs-report/>

disrupting their partnerships with the EU and NATO. It uses online social platforms (e.g. Facebook, Odnoklassniki), Russian mass-media, orthodox clergy, pro-Russian political parties, and non-governmental organizations to spread fake news and advance anti-Western propaganda designed to antagonize Ukrainians, Moldovans and Georgians against the EU, USA and NATO and to portray Russia as a protector of the traditional values endangered by the “Western moral decadence”.

In Ukraine, Russia is quietly reconquering the lost information space with the help of its political proxies¹³. According to the journalists from the respected investigative Ukrainian TV show *Schemes* (a joint project of the Radio Liberty and UA: First TV channel) Russia's ally in Ukraine, Viktor Medvedchuk, Chairman of the Opposition Platform-For Life party, has a 24.66 percent stake in Ukraine's most popular TV channel *1+1*. Moreover, in the past few years, Medvedchuk has reportedly built up a formidable Ukrainian media empire that includes the TV news channels *NewsOne*, *112*, and *ZIK*. The TV channels and online outlets linked to Victor Medvedchuk have been highly active in recent campaigns in discrediting Ukraine's reform agenda and promoting anti-Euro-Atlantic narratives.

In Moldova, Russian influence over Moldova's information space remains untouchable and has even increased in recent years¹⁴. Russia finances in non-transparent ways the Russian language press in Moldova and has a noticeable influence over the most popular Russian language newspapers, as well as online websites and news portals with high audience like *Sputnik.md*, *noi.md*, *point.md*, and *KP.md*, which follow the same anti-West narratives from the Kremlin. The first channel of the Russian state television *1TV.RU* and *RTR Moldova*, a branch of the Moscow-based *Russia-1 (Россия-1)* continue to be among the most popular TV channels in Moldova. Moreover, about two-thirds of the broadcasted media is concentrated in the hands of the most powerful local politicians who are either loyal or have various connections to Russia, primarily Igor Dodon, the incumbent President of Moldova, and two fugitive oligarchs, Vlad Plahotniuc and Ilan Shor, both accused of being behind the \$1 billion banking fraud of 2014. In February 2020, Russia has strengthened its control over the Moldovan broadcasted media with the help of Russian Businessman Igor Chaika, the son of Russia's former Prosecutor General, Yuri Chaika, who bought *Primul TV* and *Accent TV* associated to the pro-Russian Socialists Party (PSRM) and, personally, to the family of Igor Dodon, the incumbent President of Moldova.

In Georgia, the International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED), a Georgian election and democracy watchdog, has uncovered organised networks on Facebook

that operated in a coordinated manner to artificially amplify and disseminate content from the pro-Russian outlets *the News-Front* and *the Sputnik*¹⁵. *The News-Front* was established in occupied Crimea in 2014 and launched in the Georgian language in October 2019, one year before parliamentary elections. The ISFED found that *the News-Front* attempted to instigate and antagonize the Georgian Facebook users, divide the society, create political polarization, employing a range of tactics to spread anti-Western and pro-Russian messages. *The Sputnik* also used fake Facebook accounts to artificially amplify content in Georgia. Aggregate reach of the 11 pages and 41 groups *the Sputnik* used to spread mainly non-political content was almost 2 million Facebook users. It is not ruled out that these covert operations were designed to establish *the Sputnik* as a reliable source of information on various general issues, boost traffic to its website, and maybe collect the personal data of the Georgian Facebook users. In April 2020, Facebook removed the global *News-Front* and *the Sputnik* infrastructures from its platform, banning *the News-Front* from re-establishing itself on the network.

1.4 EaP LACKS CYBERSECURITY, INTELLIGENCE, AND DEFENCE CAPABILITIES

Neither Ukraine nor Georgia and Moldova have sufficient cybersecurity, intelligence, and defence capabilities to withstand Russia's hard power assertiveness in the EaP region. On the contrary, all three countries have structural weaknesses in all the aforementioned areas that makes them very vulnerable to foreign security threats.

Cybersecurity

Ukraine managed to put in place better capabilities and capacities to deter cyberattacks. The Secret Service of Ukraine (SBU), the State Service for Special Communication and the National Police's cybercrime departments are well staffed and work closely with Ukraine's telecommunication providers and private sector IT companies. However, despite repeated security sector reforms, Ukrainian authorities failed to delineate the overlapping competences of different intelligence and investigative services, while Ukraine's criminal and procedural laws need to be overhauled¹⁶. Unlike Ukraine, Georgia has adopted modern Western cyber standards and legislation and its 2012 law on cybersecurity is regarded as the best in the EaP. Nevertheless, its cyber-resilience and cyber-hygiene both in society and the private sector are questionable¹⁷. The “I'll be back” cyberattack carried out in October 2019, which

¹³ Taras Kuzio, “Russia is quietly occupying Ukraine's information space”, Atlantic Council, 27 June 2020, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/russia-is-quietly-occupying-ukraines-information-space/>

¹⁴ Euronews, “How Russia's soft media power is battling for Moldovan minds”, 05 October 2020, <https://www.euronews.com/2020/10/05/how-russia-s-soft-media-power-is-battling-for-moldovan-minds>

¹⁵ Zentrum Liberale Moderne, “Russian Propaganda Leveraging Social Media and Coronavirus in Georgia Ahead of Elections”, 24 August 2020, <https://libmod.de/en/russian-propaganda-leveraging-social-media-and-coronavirus-in-georgia-head-of-elections/>

¹⁶ Gustav C. Gressel, The Eastern Partnership's missing security dimension, LibMod Policy Paper, June 2020, https://libmod.de/wp-content/uploads/LibMod_PolicyPaper_EasternPartnership3.pdf

¹⁷ Ibidem

took down over 15.000 private and public websites and servers in Georgia, revealed unsatisfactory response capacities, and weak cyber-hygiene and security standards in the private sector, judiciary, and government. In its turn, Moldova has a divided IT security sector that lacks adequate cyber capacities¹⁸. Since 2010, its cyber security centre (CERT) has been integrated in the State Enterprise Special Telecommunications Centre, which is part of the Security and Intelligence Service (SIS) of Moldova. Also, in 2010, the General Prosecutor's Office established a special Division for Cybercrime Investigation, and SIS established a Department for Combatting Cybercrime. In 2012, the Ministry of Interior also set up its own Centre for Combatting Cyber Criminality. At the same time, the private-public partnerships between the government and the IT sector are insufficiently developed.

Intelligence and security sector

Building strong, efficient, and trusted security and intelligence services focused on intelligence-gathering, counter-intelligence, counter-terrorism and protecting state secrets is an essential prerequisite for any credible strategy to offset Russian efforts to destabilize Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova from within through covered operations. Unfortunately, in all three countries, the security and intelligence services are still struggling to overcome the KGB heritage and too often they are used as tools of power, intimidation, and vendetta in the domestic political rivalries. In Ukraine, SBU is one of the least reformed state structures. So far, all attempts to reform the Ukrainian intelligence sector have largely failed¹⁹. SBU continues to combine its state security functions with law enforcement powers which are not appropriate for a democratic society. On the other hand, the SBU image and credibility has been tarnished by several scandals with its Main Directorate for Combating Corruption and Organized Crime (Directorate-K), whose agents have been known to shake down businesses for bribes and raid the offices of companies competing with those connected to the president and oligarchs they serve. In Moldova, Security and Intelligence Service (SIS) shares the same structural vulnerabilities as the Ukrainian SBU but it is much less efficient and resourceful²⁰. SIS managed to preserve large competences inherited from the soviet KGB. It combines the tasks of an intelligence service and law enforcement agency and this pattern gives it substantial undemocratic influence in the Moldovan internal affairs. The image of the SIS authority has been severely damaged by the illegal detention and deportation of seven Turkish nationals working for a private high-school chain linked to the Turkish exiled cleric Fethullah Gulen²¹. In June 2019, the European Court of Human Rights

(ECHR) ruled against Moldova, stating that SIS had violated the rights of the seven teachers by deporting them to Turkey in September 2018. Georgia is instead the most advanced EaP country in reforming the security and intelligence sector according to the Western standards. Due to the reforms implemented during the Saakashvili time, the Georgian Intelligence Service (GIS) lost its enforcement functions inherited from the soviet KGB. In March 2020, NATO included the GIS in its cyber-threat exchange network thus recognizing the Georgia's reform achievements in the intelligence sector. However, there are still questions about the GIS's efficiency in preventing the security threats faced by the country²².

Security and defence cooperation

Russia uses military pressure to intimidate the EaP countries, especially Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova. None of three countries is capable to completely offset the Russia's military aggressiveness, yet, by strengthening their defence capabilities they could reduce the effectiveness of the Russian military blackmail and coercion. Ukraine has proved this fact during the war in Donbas against the Russian military aggression. With the Western support and advice, it managed to enhance the equipment, training, and skills of its army. As a result, Ukrainian armed forces have been able to prevent Russia's attempts to escalate the war in Donbass. However, Ukraine has advanced insufficiently in modernizing its navy and air force, as well as in reforming its ministerial bureaucracy, logistics, and defence planning²³. Unlike Ukraine and Moldova, Georgia has advanced considerably in reforming its Ministry of Defence, defence-acquisition, and logistics and defence-planning according to NATO standards, which has allowed it to purchase some modern Western weapon systems. It has also a small number of well-trained and equipped units that participate in NATO and EU international missions. Nevertheless, for the most part the armed forces are inadequately funded and trained²⁴. Moldova has progressed too little in reforming its security and defence sector. It allocates approximately 0,3 to 0,4 percent of its GDP on defence, which is regarded as one of the lowest across Europe. The underfunding, geopolitical divisiveness of the Moldovan society, chronic political instability and corruption have obstructed the reform and modernization of the armed forces, which are heavily dependent on the outdated Soviet equipment²⁵.

¹⁸ Digital, Report, "Moldova: State of Affairs Report", 18 April 2018, <https://digital.report/moldova-state-of-affairs-report/>

¹⁹ Gustav C. Gressel, The Eastern Partnership's missing security dimension, LibMod Policy Paper, June 2020, https://libmod.de/wp-content/uploads/LibMod_PolicyPaper_EasternPartnership3.pdf

²⁰ Ibidem

²¹ BalkanInsight, "European Rights Court Censures Moldova for Depor-

ting Turks", 11 June 2019, <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/06/11/european-rights-court-censures-moldova-for-deporting-turks/>

²² Gustav C. Gressel, The Eastern Partnership's missing security dimension, LibMod Policy Paper, June 2020, https://libmod.de/wp-content/uploads/LibMod_PolicyPaper_EasternPartnership3.pdf

²³ Ibidem

²⁴ Ibidem

²⁵ Ibidem

2

IS EU PREPARED TO DEVELOP STRONGER SECURITY PARTNERSHIPS WITH ITS NEIGHBOURS?

In its “Conclusions on Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020, published in May 2020”, the EU Council has announced that strengthening the resilience of the EaP will be the EU’s major objective in the post-2020 period. According to the same document, cooperation with the Eastern partners in the areas of security and disaster risk management is important for the stability of the whole region and needs a special attention. The Council also took note of the proposal to consider, where appropriate, assisting the eastern partners countries to strengthen their capacity and resilience as regards enhancing civil protection, fighting against organised crime and other illicit activities, countering terrorist threats and preventing radicalisation, hybrid threats, and malicious cyber activities. At the same time, the EU Council valued the importance of enhancing, where appropriate, security dialogues and the cooperation in the field of Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP).

Despite this promising wording, EU is rather hesitant about expanding its security and defence cooperation with the EaP countries, especially Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. EU does not have a united strategic long-term vision on the future of EaP, it is very ambiguous on how to deal with the Russian antagonistic posture in the region and it lacks leadership and willingness to deepen its security role in the EaP region²⁶. While Romania, Poland, Sweden, the Baltic States as well as the European Parliament are favouring a stronger EU commitment towards more advanced EaP countries, Germany, France, Denmark and Netherlands have become more sceptical towards continuing the EU enlargement. Concurrently, EU’s Mediterranean states have rather an ambivalent attitude towards the EaP and are by and large concerned with the southern dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). On the other hand, Austria endorses a ‘model of neutrality’ as a way of avoiding the geopolitical tensions in the Eastern neighbourhood²⁷. According to this model, the EU

would focus mainly on strong development aid and strengthening economic and trade relations with the EaP countries.

It is true that, in the aftermath of the conflict in Ukraine, Germany has become much more aware of the destabilizing role that Russia is playing in the EaP region. It has initiated and supports the prolongation of the EU sanction regime against Russia. However, in May 2019, on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the EaP, the ruling Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union and Social Democratic Party coalition in the Bundestag voted a parliamentary motion which shows that the current political leadership is much less enthusiastic about the membership perspective for the EaP countries than it was in 2017²⁸. The German political elites and society remain very cautious about provoking Russia in the Eastern neighbourhood. Hence, they do not have much enthusiasm either for continuing the EU enlargement or increasing the EU security role in the region. They are rather interested in reconciling and finding a new arrangement of peaceful co-existence with Russia.

France is also looking for ways to mend its own and the EU’s relationship with Russia. In spring 2020, France circulated a non-Paper on the Eastern Partnership proposing to deprive it of any security-dimension, as well as of the current institutional building and rule of law cooperation, and to focus mostly on environment, equality and women rights²⁹. In this way, France wanted to reassure Russia that the EaP does not have any anti-Russian purpose. Had it been approved, EU would have recognized Russia’s supremacy in the region and would have encouraged the latter to intensify its economic, political, and military pressure on Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

²⁶ Österreichische Gesellschaft für Europapolitik, “10 Years Eastern Partnership – The EU and its Strategic Dilemma”, ÖGfE Policy Brief 14’2019, <https://oegfe.at/2019/06/10-years-eap-strategic-dilemma/>

²⁷ Ibidem

²⁸ German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP), “The Future of EU’s Eastern Partnership Beyond 2020”, December 2019, https://dgap.org/sites/default/files/article_pdfs/dgap_report_gherasimov_eap_strategy-group.pdf

²⁹ Gustav C. Gressel, The Eastern Partnership’s missing security dimension, LibMod Policy Paper, June 2020, https://libmod.de/wp-content/uploads/LibMod_PolicyPaper_EasternPartnership3.pdf

3

WHY SHOULD THE EU BECOME MORE AMBITIOUS ABOUT THE SECURITY DIMENSION OF THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP?

The past European attempts to engage Moscow in co-sharing responsibility in the common neighbourhood (e.g. Meseberg Memorandum with Germany and EU – Russia Partnership for modernization) have failed. Military aggression against Georgia (2008), annexation of Crimea (2014), war in Donbas, are a clear indication that Russia is not interested in co-management and co-existence with the EU in the common neighbourhood. On the contrary, Russia wants the West to recognize its undeniable pre-eminence over the region, which in fact would mean the certain demise of the EaP.

In Russia's eyes the EaP is detrimental to its geopolitical interests in the region. EaP is assisting partner countries to increase their energy security, diversify their trade relations, and strengthen their rule of law. In practical terms, this means less dependency on Russia and increased capacities to withstand its economic blackmail, hybrid disruptions, and coercion. Moscow is aware that it cannot match the EU's economic and soft-power attractiveness, consequently, to affirm its dominance in the Eastern neighbourhood, it will continue to challenge the EU policies making use of hard security tools: cyberattacks, hybrid warfare, and military threats and force.

In the past 20 years, EU has been compelled mainly by events to assume the role of conflict management in the Eastern neighbourhood³⁰. It has also initiated and financed reform

programmes in the field of civil security cooperation, such as reform of police, prosecutors' office, courts, and civil protection. In December 2014, at the request of Ukraine, the EU has launched the European Union Advisory Mission (EUAM) aiming at assisting the Ukrainian authorities to reform the civilian security sector through strategic advice and practical support for specific reform measures based on EU standards. It has also helped Ukraine to streamline its cyber security architecture. Yet, the EU and its members states have generally avoided cooperation with Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova on hard security issues³¹. This stance did not appease Russia's mistrust towards EaP, but instead deprived the EU of a powerful tool to promote rule of law reforms, combat corruption and strengthen security resilience in all three countries.

Given the current circumstances, the EaP is needed more than ever. However, focusing primarily on trade, rule of law, and soft security matters, it is poorly equipped to offset the Russia's disruptions and hostility. The Russian revisionist foreign policy has become a major challenge for the EaP and the EU's policies in the region. To withstand this challenge the EaP needs an enhanced security dimension, which will step-up the EU's cooperation with Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine on strengthening their cybersecurity, intelligence, and defence capabilities³².

³⁰ European Union Institute for Security Studies, (EUISS), "The Eastern Partnership a decade on", CHAILLOT PAPER / 153, July 2019, https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/cp153_EaP.pdf

³¹ Gustav Gressel, Nicu Popescu, "The Best Defence: Why the EU Should Forge Security Compacts with its Eastern Neighbours", 03 November 2020, <https://ecfr.eu/publication/the-best-defence-why-the-eu-should-forge-security-compacts-with-its-eastern-neighbours/>

³² Ibidem

ABBREVIATIONS

AA	Association Agreement
DCFTA	Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas
EaP	Eastern Partnership
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
EU	European Union
EUAM	European Union Advisory Mission
GIS	Georgian Intelligence Service
GRU	Main Intelligence Directorate of Russia
ISFED	The International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy
PSRM	Socialists Party of the Republic of Moldova
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
SBU	Secret Service of Ukraine
SIS	Security and Intelligence Service of Moldova
USA	United State of America

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STRENGTHENING THE SECURITY AND RESILIENCE OF THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP



There is a growing sense of insecurity in the EaP region, especially after the Russian aggression in Georgia in 2008, annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the ongoing war in Donbas. Being aware of the fact that its economic and soft-power clout is no match for the EU's attractiveness, Russia is openly resorting to an array of coercion instruments and military force to project its influence and assert its supremacy in the EaP region.

Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine have become primary targets of the Russian military threats, cyberattacks and disinformation. None of the three countries has sufficient cybersecurity, intelligence, and defence capabilities



to withstand Russia's hard power assertiveness in the EaP region. On the contrary, all of them have structural weaknesses in all the aforementioned areas that makes them very vulnerable to foreign security threats.

In its "Conclusions on Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020, published in May 2020", the EU Council has announced that strengthening the resilience of the EaP will be the EU's major objective in the post-2020 period. Nevertheless, EU is rather hesitant about expanding its security and defence cooperation with the EaP countries, especially Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. EU does not have a unified strategic long-term vision on the fu-



ture of EaP, it is very ambiguous on how to deal with the Russian antagonistic posture in the region and it lacks leadership and willingness to deepen its security role in the EaP region.

EaP is needed more than ever, yet it is ill equipped to offset the Russian assertiveness and disruption. Russia's revisionist foreign policy has become a key challenge for the EaP and the EU's credibility in the region. It is obvious that to deal with this challenge, the EaP needs an enhanced security dimension, which will step-up EU's cooperation with Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine on matters of defence, intelligence, and cybersecurity.

Further information on the topic can be found here:
www.fes-moldova.org