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Photo by Dimiter Toshkov

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Dear friends and colleagues,

Vacation season may be coming to a close, but EU-STRAT has already been in full swing the last months. Our study of the links between the EU and Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries has taken us all over the continent, in search of answers to the following questions: First, why has the EU fallen short of creating peace, prosperity and stability in its Eastern neighbourhood? And second, what can be done to strengthen the EU's transformative power in supporting political and economic change in the six EaP countries?

First off, during an interview in Warsaw, our Advisory Board member Michał Boni shared his insights on the EaP's progress since 2009 and what the EU can offer EaP countries in order to uphold the reform momentum. Read Mr. Boni's full thoughts on the greatest challenges faced by the EaP countries and how our current political situation may be affecting EU-EaP relations in the following section.

EU-STRAT published four working papers thus far in 2017. This newsletter will introduce a preview of three of these papers: two focusing on 'Soft power, discourses and their reception: EU and Russia compared' and one on scientific cooperation between the EU and EaP.

In this issue, 'Stories from the field' will shed light on what it's really like to be an EU-STRAT researcher. We have included contributions from some of our team members who have participated in field research in Minsk, Chişinău, and Kyiv, as we seek to 'put a face to a name' in terms of who are researchers are and what they're up to. An additional contribution on data collection reveals some of the methods that EU-STRAT researchers have employed in their work performed over the last half year, and what they've learned so far from these experiences.

In its third installment, we feature EU-STRAT's newest policy comment, which outlines the policy implications of a forthcoming working paper on the Association Agreements. The comment

suggests how the EU can make the burden lighter for EaP countries as well as the incentives for reform more visible.



Tanja A. Börzel

Antoaneta Dimitrova

Taking a closer look at some of EU-STRAT's dissemination activities over the past few months, 'EU-STRAT around the world' shares a snippet of this long list. In this section, we dive into events some of our partners participated in in Tbilisi, Moscow, and Miami, and what the main takeaway points of these discussions were. Beyond what's included here, EU-STRAT researchers have been spotted over the past year in Berlin, Warsaw, Vilnius, Odessa, Chişinău, Bucharest, Brussels, Kyiv, Minsk, Leiden, Geneva, Bern, Chengdu, Bergen, and the list continues... all for the sake of acquiring and sharing knowledge and spreading the word about EU-STRAT!

We look forward to seeing some of you at EU-STRAT's Midterm Conference, taking place in Vilnius on 5-6 October 2017. These two days will provide a great opportunity to discuss our research findings thus far and interact with policy-makers from across the EU and EaP countries. Please visit our website if you would like to register.

Wishing you a great start to fall, best regards,

Tanja A. Börzel  
Project Coordinator

Antoaneta Dimitrova  
Project Co-coordinator

## Working together on “medium caliber” goals: a conversation with MEP Michał Boni assessing the Eastern Partnership

Interview conducted by Kamil Calus (Centre for Eastern Studies, OSW), 29 August 2017

Michał Boni is a Member of the European Parliament (MEP) as well as a member of EU-STRAT's Advisory Board.



***Mr. Boni, what is your assessment of the eight years of the Eastern Partnership (EaP)? Has this project met its key goals or has it failed?***

The main goal of the EaP in 2009 was to strengthen relations and cooperation with eastern neighbors of the EU. This is basically one of the EU's key ideas: building a neighborhood through an export of development and peace so that we don't have to import tension and threats. And implementation of that idea, however not perfect, is going well. For example, let's take a look at how the DCFTA has been applied and how the indicators of foreign trade in different EaP countries have changed lately in a positive way. Despite the bad political climate (caused by Russian actions) we can say: We have succeeded! For example, in Ukraine: There is external support, but it is mainly due to the power of the national spirit and the efficiency of governance that this country has managed (despite the ongoing war!) to increase its economic growth rate from -7 % to almost +3 %. What's more, in 2017 thanks to great effort in both Brussels and the EaP capitals, a visa-free regime was granted for Georgia and Ukraine (Moldova implemented the visa-free regime already in 2014), the Association Agreement with Ukraine was signed and signing of a new agreement between EU and Armenia was initiated. Also,

the negotiations on cooperation with Azerbaijan started quite successfully.

Over the past eight years, many things have changed in the world: political tensions have grown, new problems have arisen, and Russia has become an open aggressor. Looking at these changes, I want to say that without the EaP, the situation would be far more dangerous. Maybe some of the EaP countries, not only parts of them (like Crimea and eastern Ukraine), would be annexed.

***In your opinion, are the greatest challenges faced by EaP countries internal or external in kind?***

The EaP prepares countries that are not members of the EU to cooperate within the framework of Europe-wide accepted standards and procedures. Internal factors influence its shape, for example the actions of Ukrainian citizens who – during the Maidan Revolution – firmly expressed their wish to join the EU, and to live in a free democratic country. Now the task of the state and its government is to fulfill this dream. Every country has had similar breakthroughs in its history – let us recall Georgia during the Rose Revolution in 2003. The partnership policy supports the democratic and developmental aspirations of these countries.

Now, if we talk about the eastern policy of the EU, the „more for more“ approach seems most suitable to me – the more we see progress in implementation of reforms in the EaP countries, the more support we should offer these countries on their way to the EU and their social and economic development. I think that the elites in each EaP country have realized the developmental potential offered by the cooperation with the EU and possible membership in this organization.

This, however, does not change the fact that the Russia factor makes it difficult to achieve EaP goals. Conflict continues, and Russia skillfully supports and exploits the weaknesses of these countries: in government, in economy, in the deficit of pro-democratic attitudes.

***Now that the DCFTA and visa liberalization – important stimuli for domestic reforms – have been or are close to being accomplished, what can the EU offer to the EaP countries to uphold the reform momentum?***

This is why we are now working together on new, “medium caliber” goals. The autumnal summit will be dedicated to this issue, among others. It is clear that the more the EaP countries progress on their path towards development, the more flexible and comprehensive the neighborhood policy framework must be. This is necessary if we want to help our EaP partners to address their key problems, and these problems differ in each case. In Ukraine, the crucial issues are reforms, development, and above all, safety. In Moldova, we need to avoid destabilization and neutralize the threat to democracy. In the case of Georgia, the key focus is on the further increase of economic opportunities and utilization of existing ones. In Belarus, it is important to conduct a policy of economic support in order to avoid an extreme economic crisis. At the same time, we have to offer backing for the civic movements in this country – support the foundations of future democracy. For Armenia, it is necessary to keep an eye on the progress of advancing democratic reforms, and also to relieve tensions resulting from history and geography. And finally, Azerbaijan, where it’s crucial to support open trade and future development, but also to remind this EU partner about European standards for justice and democracy.

The recent document<sup>1</sup> created by the European Commission and the European External Action Service provides implementation of very practical

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1 In December 2016, the European External Action Service and the European Commission launched a paper that identifies 20 deliverables for 2020 in order to contribute to cooperation between the EU and EaP countries.

goals (with specific deadlines) and formulates 20 specific tasks addressing real problems at hand. I do not think that the governments of EaP countries are less motivated to achieve these tasks. This is due to the fact that the main goal – whether it be membership of the EU or development of economic cooperation – also requires the implementation of these 20 points. This in turn means the implementation of concrete reforms in these countries, such as reform of the judicial system or real implementation of the institutional fight against corruption. Only once these issues have been addressed would it be possible for Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia to start talks about membership.

***Russia increasingly acts as a soft power, for instance through Russian TV channels. How can the EU better communicate its goals and values and win the hearts and minds of the people in Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova, for instance?***

I don’t think this is a proper question. Brussels’ task is to support the development of EaP countries, but responsibility for the process lies with their national governments.

The EaP is more than the framework policy of the EU: it’s a bilateral cooperation plan with its closest neighbors, with the goal of mutual understanding and support. This cooperation involves primarily the development of economic and trade relations, implementation of common energy policy, and of course, the development of people-to-people contacts – undoubtedly the liberalization of visas has helped in this regard. How can we win the hearts of the EaP citizens? With the prospect of joining a group of countries linked by common democratic values and that are economically strong through their unity.

***To what extent do Brexit or the refugee crisis, to name a few internal problems of the EU, affect its policy towards the EaP countries?***

The EU has its problems, but it solves them step-by-step. The economic crisis is already behind us. The issue of refugees lies in its management. Actually, with regard to the refugee crisis, I perceive it as

a window of opportunity for closer cooperation between the member states and EaP countries in such fields as border security, implementation of biometric control, supplementation of data in international databases, cyber security, etc. Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia have experience that we need to appreciate and skillfully utilize.

***Do you share the fear among many in Poland that, for instance, the EU may lose its principled stance towards Russia, as it struggles with Brexit and the refugee crisis?***

Fortunately, the Union consists of 27 Member States, some of which have historical experience of dependency on the Russian Empire or the Soviet Union. This experience clearly affects their current perception of Russia, therefore, I do not see such risk. On the other hand, the problems

are still there. In my view, Russia is indeed interested in expanding and strengthening control over the situation in the EaP countries. The important difference between Russia and the EU is that the latter accepts and respects diversity. Unfortunately, this cannot be said about Russian politics. Therefore, if one is thinking carefully about the development of the EaP, he or she must be unbending in relations with Russia.

Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia – these are countries that have not only declared their willingness to either join or cooperate with the EU, but that are already pursuing reforms and creating opportunities for economic cooperation. Europe does not enforce its rules by force. These rules of partnership were fully accepted by both parties.

## A look at science policies and international cooperation in the Eastern Neighbourhood

by Dimiter Toshkov (Leiden University)

The EU has well-developed science, research, and innovation policies, and international cooperation is a major element and a strategic priority of these policies. Science diplomacy is increasingly seen as an important tool for the EU to develop cooperation with third countries, including the countries from the Eastern Neighbourhood of the EU. In this regard, scientific cooperation is important for assessing the general relationship between the EU and the Eastern Partnership (EaP), and a theme for study by EU-STRAT.

The first part of this effort is the working paper ‘Science Policies and International Cooperation in the Eastern Neighbourhood of the European Union: An Overview’, in which Tatsiana Chulitskaya and Ina Ramasheuskaya from SYMPA and Honorata Mazepus and Dimiter Toshkov from Leiden University review the institutional framework and the implementation of the programmes for bilateral and multilateral scientific and educational cooperation between the EU and the countries of the EaP.<sup>1</sup>

The paper takes stock of the existing programmes for scientific and educational cooperation and academic mobility between the EU and the countries from the EaP and provides a systematic review via document analysis and interviews of existing programmes, projects, and practices of academic mobility and scientific cooperation. It features an inventory of relevant, completed and on-going projects<sup>2</sup> and an analysis of this data that characterizes the progress, level of participation of the research communities in the EaP, and other relevant parameters, such as the distribution of projects and participating institutions across broad scientific fields as well as disciplines.

The analysis of the current state of science policy in Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine shows that underfunding and administrative fragmentation continue to hamper development. Important national differences can be observed, however, with Ukraine being most active in the field of science policy (and international cooperation in particular), and further interesting national policy trajectories can be noted (for example, the emphasis on commercialization of research in Belarus). We also note the continuation in the traditionally strong role of the National Academies of Sciences in setting and implementing research policies in the EaP countries. This is an important feature of the EaP countries, as the Academies of Sciences are typically closer to the state than the universities are, both in terms of institutional links and organizational missions.

The paper recognizes that the EU is not the only actor these countries cooperate with in the fields of science and R&D, but it is a major partner. There are indications that scientific cooperation with Russia remains strong in Belarus, is in practice being deferred in Ukraine, and is of decreasing importance in Moldova.

The openness of EU science policy and programmes has resulted in a high number of projects involving institutions from Belarus, Ukraine, and Moldova. Their involvement has already been considerable under the FP7, but there are indications that participation in the H2020 programme will be even higher (especially as Ukraine and Moldova have only been fully associated to the programme since 2015 and 2016 respectively).

1 ‘Science Policies and International Cooperation in the Eastern Neighbourhood of the European Union: An Overview’, published in January 2017 as EU-STRAT Working Paper No. 2.

2 Available online at eu-strat.eu.

The paper concludes with some recommendations that address some of the important barriers to the scientific communities in the EaP countries for participating in international cooperation projects.

The following activities could more actively engage research institutions in these countries in scientific cooperation and academic exchange with the EU and its member countries:

(1) Wider outreach of dissemination activities on running programmes and projects and information campaigns about existing opportunities to cooperate with the EU.

(2) Targeted activities to identify a wider range of research institutions in the EaP countries that can be engaged in scientific cooperation.

(3) Facilitation of scientific cooperation projects' registration with the authorities (especially important for Belarus), and a preferential taxation regime for grant funding.

(4) Facilitation of mobility among faculty and students: removing administrative barriers, making it possible for them to leave for medium- and long-term exchange programmes and fellowships.

(5) Building capacities of research institutions in the EaP countries (especially outside the capital cities) to handle the paperwork required for applying to scientific cooperation or exchange programmes.

(6) The EaP governments should develop ways to encourage domestic research institutions to actively participate in international scientific cooperation (make it one of the criteria for funding, establish annual awards for accomplishments in international cooperation, etc.)



*Dimiter Toshkov is an associate professor at the Institute of Public Administration, Faculty of Governance and Global Affairs, Leiden University.*

## Russian Soft Power: Official Discourses and Less Official Actors

by Matthew Frear and Honorata Mazepus (Leiden University)

What are the components of Russia's soft power? Applying 'soft power' has become an officially accepted and widely used element of Russia's strategy towards Eastern Partnership countries in the last decade. We examined different aspects of Russian soft power in two different working papers concerning EU-STRAT's research on 'Soft power, discourses and their reception: EU and Russia compared'.

Our research focused on both official foreign policy discourses and the work of quasi-autonomous non-governmental organizations. One working paper has focused on a systematic analysis of the three most recent Foreign Policy Concepts (FPC) of the Russian Federation and five annual Presidential Addresses to the Federal

Assembly during President Vladimir Putin's third term.<sup>1</sup>

The results of the analysis of the FPCs show that there is a great deal of continuity in the attention dedicated to the discourses on sovereignty and power, on civilization and identity, and on prosperity since 2008. While the existing studies on Russian foreign policy discourse have tended to emphasize questions of a Russia identity or Eurasian civilization, in practice economic foreign policy discourses are no less important than civilizational ones in all three FPCs.

<sup>1</sup> 'A New Turn or More of the Same? A Structured Analysis of Recent Developments in Russian Foreign Policy Discourse' published in May 2017 as EU-STRAT Working Paper No. 3.

There is less consistency in the Presidential Addresses to the Federal Assembly since 2012 and the issues that are emphasized appear to be very event-driven. The analysis shows that the self-image Russia presented through the discourses in these particular foreign policy documents is of an economically flourishing Russia in a consolidated multipolar world order, a country prepared to work in mutually-beneficial way with other countries, while stressing respect for each other's sovereignty. Economic discourses in Russian foreign policy are important, and should not be overlooked, regardless of whether the professed ambitions are realistic or achievable.

While these official foreign policy documents did not explicitly emphasize the concept of the 'Russian world' or any specific neo-imperial idea of Eurasianism, these concepts can be found in other arenas of application of Russian soft power. Another working paper has mapped the network of influential actors who have the potential to transmit Russian messages and target various audiences.<sup>2</sup> A growing constellation of organizations and associations linked with and promoting Russian political influence, values and messages can be identified in Belarus and Moldova,

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2 'The Elements of Russia's Soft Power: Channels, Tools, and Actors Promoting Russian Influence in the Eastern Partnership Countries' published in August 2017 as EU-STRAT Working Paper No. 4.



*Matthew Frear is an assistant professor at the Institute of History, Faculty of Humanities, at Leiden University.*

while in Ukraine their number is diminishing. A wide variety of actors focusing on 'compatriots' and Russian-language speakers, often linked to their local Russian embassies, reflect the key ideas of the 'Russian world' narrative. Next to Russian identity (with common 'Slavic' heritage playing a similar role), shared Orthodox religion is stressed and transmitted correspondingly by the Russian Orthodox Church and affiliated organizations in all three countries.

Our two working papers show that to understand how Russian soft power works in the Eastern Partnership countries we need to look at different kinds of sources of information. On the one hand, the narratives presented in the foreign policy documents show us how the Russian authorities want to be perceived in the international (diplomatic) community, stressing mostly the issues of sovereignty and security in the world order, but also Russia's role as an economic and cultural centre of gravity. On the other hand, the particular narratives of the 'Russian world' are promoted less on the official level, but more by multiple non-state actors spreading the ideas about the common identity of Russians, Russian speakers, and other people in Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova.



*Honorata Mazepus is a post-doctoral researcher at the Institute of Public Administration, Faculty of Governance and Global Affairs, at Leiden University.*

## Stories from the field

by Honorata Mazepus and Antoaneta Dimitrova (Leiden University)

### *Pilot studies: an inside-out perspective*

One of the objectives of our research on ‘Soft power, discourses and their reception’ is to study how citizen preferences for international cooperation with the European Union and Russia are shaped. In our preparation of data collection, the Leiden team visited each of our local partners in Minsk, Chişinău, and Kyiv. Apart from very productive discussions and hard work on the survey experiment, we came back with plenty of observations and impressions. Here are a couple of the most memorable ones.

### *Minsk: GUM, hipsters, and protests*

We set off to Minsk to finalize the survey experiments with our partners at SYMPA: strengthening manipulations, polishing the language and translation. During this couple of days, we saw Minsk as a city of contrasts.



Map of Belarus

On the one hand, it seems stuck in the past because of the dominance of social realism in the architecture, the high presence of state security on the streets, and posters on every corner reminding citizens of their duties (and of their taxes) and of the Second World War. The visit to GUM (Gosudarstvennyj Universalnyj Magazin, one of Minsk’s oldest and largest department stores) took us back in time, bringing back the memories of the products, particular behavior of staff, and smells straight from the times of the People’s Republics of Poland and Bulgaria.

On the other hand, the city centre of Minsk is full of luxury goods shops, has a McDonalds, and KFC. In the evening, we noted bars mixed with the interesting phenomenon of afterhours barbers and hairdressers full of young hipster-looking people getting their beards and hair styled.

Even more strikingly, a 15-minutes *marshrutka* ride out of the centre reveals completely different scenery with unpaved roads and old wooden houses scattered between large apartment blocks. At the time, the first Minsk protest action against the so-called ‘social parasite law’<sup>1</sup> were taking place. All the contrasts of the city manifested themselves in the highly controlled march of the protesters: the generation of people who lived under the Soviet regime, the modern youth of Minsk, and the security services watching them as they marched.

We enjoyed the discussions we had with a large team of our local partners, as they commented on our survey questions by explaining to us the complex mixture of identities and past histories that hide behind a seemingly homogenous Belarus.

1 See, for example, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/16/belarus-fine-unemployed-social-parasite-law>

### *Beyond the 'electronic' truth*

Field trips are probably the most fantastic activities in the framework of EU-STRAT. They allow you to “catch” the experts and activists, to find yourself in their environment, to switch from passive reading to active conversation, to add a very human dimension to the usual monitoring of the country via media and social networks, and to compare the real truth with the electronic ‘truth’. These trips create the opportunity to grasp the social and economic context in which the analyzed processes occur. Better understanding of this context is crucial. Even if I have already been to Ukraine dozen of times, every single visit brings about new enriching elements. This was also the case during my trips to Belarus and Moldova/Transnistria, where I was able to supplement all the information I had gained from my prior readings and preparations with a range of different senses. On the practical level, field trips also make you more familiar with local people, their habits, and cuisine. And sometimes they even let you spot your fellow namesakes from the past, like in Minsk!



**Tadeusz Iwański (Centre for Eastern Studies - OSW) during field research regarding 'bilateral, regional, and global interdependencies and regime (in)stability in the EaP countries'**

### *Chişinău and its surroundings: the EU flags and ribbons of Saint-George*

When we arrived in Chişinău, we immediately felt a different atmosphere than in Minsk: a less orderly city centre, damaged pavements, and, most strikingly, more vibrant streets. One of the highlights of our trip was a visit to the city market, where locals sell their agricultural products and handcrafts. It is this unconstrained entrepreneurship that made Chişinău feel so different from Minsk.

Although the city is visibly poor and in need of big investments, people used their freedom to try to make a living. Greater political pluralism was immediately visible in the streets as well. The number of EU flags in taxis, offices, and on buildings is probably larger than in the new member states that joined the EU since 2004. The ribbons of Saint-George expressing either respect for the Soviet Army or support for Russia are also often displayed by regular citizens.

Our partners from IDIS organized two groups of participants to pre-test the survey experiment: one in the municipality of Budesti and one in the small town of Ialoveni. In both cases, we met very

pro-active local governors who showcased their projects to us. The mayor of Budesti took us on a tour and proudly talked about what she had achieved for the community thanks to her ability to attract European funding: renovation of a hospital, an active cultural centre with an extensive library for children, computer facilities, and well-attended classes for youth about citizenship and different political systems, as well as a shop



Market in Chişinău

selling (very tasty!) locally-brewed beer. We were deeply impressed by this village with its involved community striving to improve the situation and its beautiful landscape.

We met wonderful people, but also saw normal

life: people exercising in the parks of Chişinău or selling their fruits and vegetables. We were impressed by the city life, but also aware of the great expectations that the Moldovan people have from the European Union.

### *Kyiv: War and Easter eggs*

We arrived in Kyiv at the beginning of April to finalize the Ukrainian version of the experiments and to collect our first data with the help of UIPP. After the events of 2013-2014, the city has changed once again. We saw many construction and development projects that have popped up and got a feeling that Kyiv (and Ukraine) is now at a critical junction, from which the city will hopefully develop into a great modern metropolis rather than slip back into stagnation. The challenges are huge, though, and visible in the public spaces of the city, with graffiti calling for the fight for freedom, commemorative remains of the barricades left around Maidan, and photos of those who lost their lives in the conflict in Luhansk and Donetsk regions.

For our data collection we met with a group of young people, who were all very pro-active, well-

educated, and mostly working in the private sector. These young people were anticipating the visa-free movement with the EU to gain more opportunities. But we also saw extremely young boys walking in the streets with their military uniforms on. This stark reminder of the impact that the conflict with Russia has on Ukrainian society gave us an unsettling feeling, despite the vibrant city life of Kyiv.



Easter egg festival in Kyiv

We can probably best summarize our impressions from the trip to Kyiv with a photo of the Easter Egg Festival on display in one of the main squares. Why this photo? Because the Easter egg is a symbol of hope.

*Photos in this article were taken by Honorata Mazepus.*



Graffiti in Kyiv



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## How are we collecting data and what have we learned so far?

By Veacheslav Berbeca (IDIS), Maxim Boroda (UIPP), Honorata Mazepus and Antoaneta Dimitrova (UL)

EU-STRAT uses a wide variety of methods to study the politics, economy, and societies in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries. For the research surrounding 'Soft power, discourses and their reception', we have conducted several studies that involved extensive data collection by EU-STRAT's partners from Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine. Collecting empirical data in the region is one of the key commitments of the research consortium, especially as we strive to present an inside-out perspective. But as with every empirical data collection process, there are serious challenges involved. Here are a couple of lessons that we have learned so far.

### *TV-monitoring*

Watching news programmes every evening can be a strenuous exercise. Our local EaP partners spent long hours watching the evening news, analyzing news items in terms of their content and frames and entering the results into Google forms structured to capture the main themes and tone of the messages. In Ukraine, the task became more burdensome when it became clear that the majority of news items were negative and left our researcher with a feeling of disappointment about developments in his country. He also noted that making sense of political events presented on TV is challenging, as different channels cover the same events in very different ways. These observations are important in themselves and invite further reflection about the challenges of providing and receiving high quality media coverage and independent journalism.

While in general the news in Ukraine seemed to be presented at a rather high speed and often in a sensational way (especially domestic news), our researchers in Belarus observed the opposite: predictability and repetitiveness of information presented in the news in accordance with the official line. This demanded persistence, resistance to boredom and endurance to keep focused and

watch the news carefully for four months every day!

### *Survey experiments*

#### *Design*

Survey experiments are not an easy method to implement in cross-country research, yet they promise innovation and interesting results, if successful. Our survey aims to discover what factors influence whether an individual in Belarus, Moldova, or Ukraine wants his country to establish closer ties with either Russia or the EU. We are interested in whether putting an emphasis on a particular motivation to cooperate (for example, economic gains or shared historical identity) makes people lean more towards one of the big neighbours. The main advantage of having an experiment embedded in a survey is random assignment of participants to different conditions, which allows comparisons of mean responses of participants assigned to control (in our case: no emphasis) and to test (in our case, for example: emphasis on economy, security, or identity) conditions.

The Leiden team, as designers of the survey and leading team for the data collection, travelled to Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine for pilots and consulted extensively with each country team. We needed to carefully prepare the text and translation of the experimental manipulations and to pre-test the survey. But that was only part of what needed to happen. Next, the local investigators needed to find willing participants and administer the surveys.

#### *Data collection*

Apart from designing experimental treatments that could resonate with citizens in the three countries, the recruitment of participants was one of the biggest challenges. Not only because of the

potential political implications of the questions in Belarus, but also simply because of the (lack of) willingness of people to spend their time on participation. As we could not reward participants for filling in the survey with a payment and did not have the resources to hire a public opinion agency to conduct the survey for us, we had to rely on the local contacts of our partners and their creativity in approaching potential participants.

We aimed to collect diverse samples that included citizens of different ages, education levels, and world-views (which sometimes overlapped with ethnicity as well). In general, younger people expressed more interest in participation than older generations. Younger and higher-educated participants found it easier to fill in the survey, whereas older participants sometimes struggled to understand the questions and the purpose of the survey and in several cases dropped out from the study as it was too hard or too long for them. We did however make a sustained effort to also involve people older than 20 or 30, as they are less likely to be captured by many projects relying on the participation of young people, especially students. An idea for building on this project's work and methodological experience would be to run a nation-wide representative survey (experiments) on the same topic in the three countries.

In the short focus groups that followed the administration of the survey, participants often acknowledged the importance of the topics in the questionnaire for their societies. In Moldova, a common opinion was that economic themes should be a priority for policy makers in order to improve the situation of ordinary people. Participants frequently mentioned that Moldova needed to maintain good relations with Russia as well as with the EU. In Moldova, it was much easier to receive responses from the Moldovan/ Romanian population than from ethnic minorities, among whom the EU-related questions provoked certain reticence and even hostility.

### ***Interviews on scientific cooperation***

SYMPA coordinated interviews as a part of EU-STRAT's research on scientific cooperation. With the help of IDIS and UIPP, we aimed to conduct 10-15 semi-structured interviews with members of the Belarusian, Moldovan, and Ukrainian scientific communities who have participated in programs of scientific cooperation with the EU. We were interested in how scientists and program administrators assess the impact of these programs on their project management practices, scientific methodology, and broader social development.

As a starting point, we used a database provided by the IncoNET EaP project, which helped us to identify contact points on scientific cooperation in the Eastern Partnership countries. Subsequently, we approached potential interviewees with a request to talk to us either in person or by phone. To get enough responses, we needed to follow up with different strategies in each country.

In Belarus, the head of the National Contact point, Olga Meerovskaya, provided us with invaluable assistance in bringing us in touch with a diverse pool of participants of EU-supported programs. In Ukraine, we asked those who initially agreed to an interview to link us with other potential interviewees. In Moldova, we used the conference organized by the Horizon 2020-funded project "EaP PLUS" to approach scholars and project managers.

The results of these interviews are presented in EU-STRAT Working Paper No. 5, "The Effects of the EU's Scientific Cooperation Programmes on the Eastern Partnership Countries: Scientific Output and Broader Societal Impact".

**Ina Ramasheuskaya (SYMPA),  
during field research on  
'Scientific cooperation'**



## ***General lessons and recommendations***

Despite the challenges, the data collection is now almost complete and we look forward to analyzing the results of the survey, which we will share in the coming working papers. In general, we have learned that it is worthwhile to design studies carefully and pre-test questions and approaches in pilots, before embarking on

a large-scale data collection. We also found that translating questions together helped to phrase them in the most understandable and clear way for the context – national or local – in which they were to be posed. Also, small financial support for the participants would have made everyone's work easier and would have rewarded the participants for their time and effort: so maybe it is time to consider changing the EU rules on that?



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## Making Association with the EU a Modernizing Tool: towards a more focused, developmental and innovative approach<sup>1</sup>

by Klaudijus Maniokas (ESTEP), Katarzyna Wolczuk (UoB), Laure Delcour (FMSH), Rilka Dragneva (UoB), Darius Žeruolis

The 8th anniversary of the Russian-Georgian war is a good occasion to assess the EU's response to the Russian challenge to its neighboring countries such as Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova and the EU at large.

Part of the EU's response back in 2008 was to offer Georgia a new type of agreement, which could have brought relations to a new level. This new agreement finally took the form of an Association Agreement (AA), which was negotiated with three Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries, Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova, and finally entered into force for all of them this year, fulfilling the EU's promise of 2008.

The AA was meant to become a major tool not only to enhance relations with the EU, but also to help to modernize or even transform Eastern EU members in a similar manner to what was achieved during the latest EU enlargement to Central and Eastern Europe. Was this a feasible expectation? Does the AA have the potential to become a major modernization tool?

While the AAs offer a template for reforms in order to address weaknesses of the partner countries, such as weak state institutions, lack of competitiveness and socio-economic misdevelopment, importing the *acquis* by the partner countries is not only not the solution to these problems, but may actually exacerbate them. This is primarily because it is questionable whether these countries have the capacity to ensure the effectiveness of the vast and sophisticated corpus of rules they are importing, and, whether the *acquis* actually helps address the immediate developmental objectives of these countries. The

suitability of the *acquis* for fast and cost-effective modernization of the state and economy is not clear.

This paper also examined what kind of support for the implementation is provided by the EU and whether there is a recognition of the 'commitment-capacity gap'. The analysis of all three associated countries indicated that only in the case of Ukraine have some deliberate, proactive adaptations taken place. The dramatic events of 2014 and Russia's punitive measures against Ukraine prompted the EU to provide more tailored and flexible assistance to ensure support for institutional reforms, as a precondition for legal approximation. Curiously, however, this greater volume of assistance as well as enhanced flexibility at the macro-level does not contribute much to ensuring the actual effectiveness of the EU's technical assistance. If anything, it seems that too much assistance is offered to Ukraine without due synchronization and sequencing of reform measures in general and implementation of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) in particular. In Moldova, a back-to-basics approach was offered only after the 2014 banking scandal. While the EU provides considerable assistance to Moldova, it is not (yet) fully attuned to the fundamental weaknesses of the Moldovan state institutions. In Georgia, it seems that the EU is conducting 'business as usual', although there is some evidence that it has started to take into account the developmental needs of the partner country.

To sum it up, the paper concludes that there is a rather limited appreciation of the challenges and resulting adaptations, which is somewhat surprising

<sup>1</sup> This policy comment covers the main conclusions of the forthcoming EU-STRAT working paper 'The Association Agreements as a Dynamic Framework: Between Modernization and Integration' (by Katarzyna Wolczuk, Laure Delcour, Rilka Dragneva, Klaudijus Maniokas & Darius Žeruolis) and develops some of its policy implications.

given the EU's extensive experience of supporting reforms in a demanding context, such as in the Western Balkan countries. In particular, the EU has changed its policy in the Western Balkans into focusing on governance capacity and growth enhancing environment as a precondition for implementing the acquis. While it is actually even more warranted in the EaP countries, our analysis indicates that this has been the case only to a limited extent insofar as priorities have been defined in the Association Agendas and only with moderate adjustments as far as assistance is concerned, above all in Ukraine.

The problem might acquire a new dimension in the near future. As the burden of commitments stemming from the AA becomes heavier, and there is no clear short-term benefit similar to the visa-free regime, the first cracks in its implementation become obvious. One likely scenario is that the associated EaP countries will only pretend to take the AA on board while the EU will pretend not to notice this.

The situation might worsen if the EU does not make the burden lighter, the focus more relevant, the incentives more visible, and if the associated countries do not step up their efforts of implementation. To avoid creation of yet another Potemkin village, efforts are needed on both sides. How to make the AA more focused and lighter? Association Agendas currently negotiated with Moldova and Georgia are the tools specifically designed to focus their efforts. Association institutions are the second formal tool at the disposal of the EU.

Regarding the Association Agendas, while they recognize the need for fundamental reforms, such as a well functioning civil service, rule of law, property rights, and the relevant priorities were included in the Agendas, fundamental reforms were added on top of the already numerous obligations of the AA related to the acquis adoption. So the Agendas are not focusing the AA, but making the burden even heavier. Real focusing would imply a review of certain obligations stemming from the AA, postponing them, and agreement on a limited number of priorities.

Association institutions such as the Council, the Committee, and sub-committees in particular might also guide the process better by having fundamental development objectives in mind. Currently the approach seems to be rather fragmented and dependent on specific understanding and commitment of specific services of the European Commission.

These priorities have to be supported via focused EU assistance. Novel approaches developed in this regard in Ukraine might be extended to Georgia and Moldova, including the Support Group, assistance focused on reforms via delegated agreements, and direct financing of the "reform posts" in the civil service.



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## EU-STRAT around the world

EU-STRAT partners have been engaged in a variety of dissemination activities this year, ranging from presentations for local Ministries of Foreign Affairs, to workshops with academics and policy-makers alike. In this section we've provided a small sample of what's been going on around the world.

### *Tbilisi: EU-STRAT discussing "Georgia's European Way"*

On 13-14 July 2017, Dr. Laure Delcour (FMSH) was a panelist at the conference "Georgia's European Way", which gathers government officials and parliamentarians as well as business, civil society, academia and media representatives from both the EU and EaP countries. She took part in the panel "Eastern Partnership - What is next for the EU's Associated Partners?". During the conference, Dr. Delcour argued that most instruments used in past relations between the EU and EaP countries have not been fully implemented (for instance the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements or even the European Neighbourhood Policy Action Plans). She also pointed out that the EaP offers major new instruments, and Georgia (like Moldova and Ukraine) needs to make full use of them. The implementation of the Association Agreement and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas are long-term processes that require time before the full benefits can be reaped. According to Dr. Delcour other instruments, such as instance mobility partnerships, need to be better exploited, also on the EU's side. As she concluded: it does not make much sense to discuss the next steps if the current ones have not even been fully implemented, even though a longer time horizon (and therefore clearer perspectives for EaP countries on how to get closer to the EU) are also needed to anchor the reforms and make them sustainable.

### *St. Petersburg: EU-STRAT in dialogue with students from Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus*

Dr. Szymon Kardaś (OSW), a member of the team that studies external actors in the EaP, was a lecturer in the summer school "The Eurasian Economic Union and the European Union: Politics, Economics, Security" from 9-14 July 2017. The summer school took place in St. Petersburg and was attended by students from Russia, Poland, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Belarus. Dr. Kardaś gave short lectures and interviews regarding Russia's foreign policy – especially towards EaP countries – and energy relations between Russia and the EU. The main aim of his presentation was to critically reflect on the Russian narrative regarding the sustainability and credibility of the Eurasian Economic Union as an international organization similar to the EU and therefore to assess its activities towards the EU and EaP countries. Secondly, the presentation was an attempt to show to what extent strengthening the cooperation by some of the EaP countries – especially Ukraine – with the EU enabled them to decrease the level of economic (with special reference to energy) dependence on Russia.

Dr. Kardaś also participated in a conference entitled 'Studying EU-Russian Relations: Theories and Methods in Russia and Abroad', which took place in St. Petersburg from 27-28 June 2017. The conference addressed the difference in studies of EU-Russian relations in Russia and abroad, which has contributed to failure in the practice of EU-Russian relations. One of the key issues discussed by the panel was the research narrative applied by different academic institutions in the transatlantic area dealing with EU-Russia relations. The key argument made by some Polish scholars was that the practice in this area of naming the war in Ukraine 'civil war' or 'conflict' awarded Russia with soft power benefits by avoiding talk about the violation of territorial integrity.

***Miami: EU-STRAT at the EUSA Fifteenth Biennial Conference***

EU-STRAT partners presented ongoing research at the European Union Studies Association Conference in Miami on 4 May 2017. The panel entitled “The European Union’s Approach to its Eastern Neighbors: Introducing an Inside-out Perspective for Analysis”, featured researchers from Freie Universität Berlin and the University of St. Gallen. A paper co-authored by Esther Ademmer, Tanja A. Börzel, and Julia Langbein presented a conceptual framework and a

preliminary empirical application on how to grasp varieties of social orders in Eastern Partnership countries. The second paper by Katharina Hoffmann and Dirk Lehmkuhl elaborated on a heuristic for assessing the strategies of external actors and their influence on social orders, focusing especially on the case of Turkey. The paper presentations were followed by a vivid and insightful debate with the audience and Wade Jacoby – the discussant to the panel – that provided constructive and inspiring ideas on how to further shape EU-STRAT’s research.

**Join us at EU-STRAT’s Midterm Conference in Vilnius!**

EU-STRAT’s Midterm Conference, taking place in Vilnius, Lithuania from 5-6 October 2017, offers participants the chance to gain insight into all aspects of our project’s research. Across one keynote, six panels, and a roundtable, ample opportunity will be given to dive into our study of the Eastern Partnership countries.

We hereby kindly invite you to register for the event. Join the discussion about how interdependence shapes social orders and what strategies Russia and the EU pursue towards the region. You can also learn about recent research on how the EU communicates with Eastern Partnership countries and what kind of soft power Russia uses in return.

The program with details on all sessions and the registration form are available on EU-STRAT’s website ([eu-strat.eu](http://eu-strat.eu)). We look forward to seeing you in Vilnius!