

EU-STRAT Report Series

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The EU-STRAT Reports aim to inform the public about preliminary results of our research 'in the making' as well as conferences and other events conducted by EU-STRAT.

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1. Introduction

EU-STRAT's midterm conference entitled "The EU and Eastern Partnership Countries: An Inside-Out Analysis and Strategic Assessment" took place in Vilnius from October 5 to October 6, 2017. The midterm conference is a part of the Horizon 2020 international research project studying the relationship between the European Union (EU) and countries in the European Eastern neighborhood, and has been running since May 2016. The midterm conference was dedicated to presenting EU-STRAT's intermediary research findings related to varieties of social orders in Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries, interdependencies with and soft power by the EU and Russia, and featured insights and debates on the future of the EaP. Bringing together participants from the EU and EaP countries, as well as third countries, the project team aimed to raise awareness of EU-STRAT's research agenda, which is highly relevant to the region's current political situation.

The midterm conference was opened with keynote speeches by Professor Leszek Balcerowicz, Head of the International Comparative Studies Department at the Warsaw School of Economics and former advisor to Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko, as well as Vassilis Maragos, Head of Unit at the European Commission's Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR). The welcoming addresses and keynote speeches began the two-day conference, which included six panel discussions on different topics of EU-STRAT research as well as a round table on the future of the EaP. This report summarizes the sessions based on EU-STRAT's findings thus far as well as the discussions that took place at each session.

2. Welcoming remarks and keynote speeches

2.1 Welcoming remarks

During his welcoming address, Ramūnas Vilpišauskas, Director of the Institute of International Relations and Political Science at Vilnius University, stated that two major aims of the project are to analyse how reforms in EaP countries are taking place and to assess the role of external actors active in the region. The outcomes of the project are particularly relevant for Lithuanian policy-makers, as the EaP has been a priority of Lithuanian foreign policy since it joined the EU in 2004, as also indicated by the attention given to the EaP summit that took place during the Lithuanian EU Council Presidency in autumn 2013. Tanja A. Börzel, EU-STRAT Coordinator and Director of the Centre for European Integration at Freie Universität Berlin, noted that, bearing in mind the difficult history of the region, the fact that the mid-term conference was being held in Vilnius testified to the transformative power of Europe. EU-STRAT Co-coordinator Antoaneta Dimitrova, Professor of Comparative Governance at Leiden University's Institute of Security and Global Affairs, remarked that field research in the EaP over the course of the project thus far had proved very beneficial in terms of seeing first-hand the security and other challenges on the ground in this particular time.

In a subsequent welcoming address, Asta Skaisgirytė, Political Director of the Lithuanian Foreign Ministry, drew attention to the upcoming fifth Eastern Partnership Summit and outlined Lithuania's expectations for it. She noted the importance of evaluating what has been achieved but also of setting objectives for the future. Although many objectives set at the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit in 2009 have been achieved, there is still much to do to ensure that EaP societies feel the benefits of closer relations with the EU and that citizens feel European. Sustainability of the reforms has been challenged by electoral cycles in EaP countries, as the reforms require

strong political will and take a long time. Another important factor is Russia, which contests the sovereign right of its neighbours to make their own foreign policy choices. At the upcoming Brussels Eastern Partnership Summit, the Lithuanian position would be to concentrate on three themes: the EU must acknowledge European aspirations of associated EaP countries, as well as reinforce principles of “more for more” and differentiation, and especially by demonstrating stronger support to countries like Ukraine or Georgia. Other issues to be addressed at the summit were challenges in the EaP as well as the internal challenges facing the EU.

2.2 *Keynote speeches*

Leszek Balcerowicz, Head of the International Comparative Studies Department at the Warsaw School of Economics, spoke on the role of external factors in economics and the political economy of reforms. Balcerowicz highlighted that systems need to be addressed when seeking to implement reforms, looking at a scale of systems from communism to liberalism and from dictatorship to democracy. The worst case can be seen when reforms are still fragile but there is an improving economic situation, and thus there is lack of incentives and will to proceed further with reforms. To remedy this, new incentives are necessary in the EaP, and could take similar form to the plan for Ukraine proposed by former Lithuanian Prime Minister Andrius Kubilius, which was later elaborated on in Kubilius’ speech during the conference. However, these incentives have to be conditional, not just limited to the politicians but rather involving wider society and the opposition. Concluding on a positive note, he stated that despite the deep crisis that Ukraine has found itself in, stabilization of the situation has been remarkable as the government has slashed its budget deficit from ten to three percent of the GDP, increased defence spending, stabilized banks, and there are encouraging signs of reform in the gas sector, judicial sector as well as local governments. Due to this massive stabilization and some important reforms, Ukraine has started to grow, although at a rate of three percent. There is still much to do in terms of de-monopolization and privatization as well as deregulation. One of the most important aims for sustaining reforms must be to ensure productive communication and collaboration between the civil society, external institutions, and the government.

Vassilis Maragos, Head of Unit at DG NEAR, discussed common challenges and reforms in the EaP countries and the EU as well as results-oriented cooperation. Maragos started his speech by emphasizing the universal character of EU values subscribed to also by neighbourhood countries in the context of the Council of Europe and the UN, and noted that the EU is not aspiring at imposing its values, but wishes to engage with partners in view of promoting these joint values and addressing common challenges. The EU’s focus has been refocused to target the concerns and the interests of EU and EaP citizens. He commended EU-STRAT for being a useful tool for practitioners’ reflection. Since the 2015 Riga Eastern Partnership Summit, the efforts of the EU have been devoted to the four main areas identified at the Riga Summit, namely economic development and market opportunities, strengthening institutions and good governance, connectivity, energy efficiency, environment and climate change, and mobility and people-to-people contacts. Among others, Maragos emphasized the attractiveness of connectivity and people-to-people contacts, as these bring immediate concrete benefits to citizens. The EU allocated €172.35 million in 2014-2016 to broader access to finance initiatives for small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), leveraging additional International Financial Institution (IFI) funding and specifically targeting Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) countries. This contributed to the creation of 10,000 new jobs, and over 100,000 loans to enterprises. One of the new focuses that came after the Riga Summit was security, and the EU is putting together a set of actions in this area. Since Riga, the EU has also

managed to achieve visa liberalization and further implementation of the Association Agreements (AAs) and DCFTAs with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. A new comprehensive and enhanced partnership agreement with Armenia is ready to be signed, while negotiations are ongoing for a new ambitious agreement with Azerbaijan and for partnership priorities with Belarus. While progress has been achieved, important challenges remain. These include the fight against corruption and dealing with banking fraud in Moldova, while concerns related to civil society and human rights remain in Azerbaijan and Belarus. Ukraine's and Georgia's drive for reform as well as macroeconomic stabilization were stressed. The European Commission's document of 20 deliverables for the EaP for 2020 presents a work plan for action for the coming years. This includes concrete deliverables in all areas including good governance and human rights, economic development, transport (corridors, connections), energy efficiency, and youth, amongst others. Maragos stated that from the EU's side going forward, there will be more focus on how to achieve identified goals, supported with financial instruments, as well as more unity of purpose and focus on results.

In a final welcoming address, former Prime Minister of Lithuania and current Member of the Lithuanian Parliament Andrius Kubilius underlined the need for the EU to be particularly active in Ukraine, as Ukraine is a focal point for Russia. If Russia were to lose Ukraine, Russian President Vladimir Putin would lose legitimacy, and therefore reforms in Ukraine should be considered as a strategic goal. In order to help Ukraine get closer to Europe, Kubilius has introduced a new initiative: a Marshall Plan for Ukraine. He also observed that EU membership perspective helped incentivize Lithuania to implement the reforms, and therefore if EaP countries are not being offered membership perspectives, there must be other ways to incentivize them. Thus, more Western investment based on conditionality and the visibility of such investments could increase the support of Ukrainian society for the reforms.

3. Zooming in: Towards a Typology of Social Orders in EaP Countries

Esther Ademmer, Julia Langbein and Tanja A. Börzel began the session with presenting their ongoing research seeking to develop a typology of social orders in the EaP countries. Following the seminal work of Douglas North, John Wallis and Barry Weingast, they suggest understanding the six EaP countries as social systems that have not yet developed from Limited Access Orders (LAOs) based on personal relations to Open Access Orders (OAOs) of impersonal institutions. While building on accounts that position the political regimes in the EaP countries on the continuum between democracy and autocracy or characterize them as neopatrimonial, the concept of LAOs is more encompassing as it allows accounting for the 'double balance' according to which political competition requires economic competition and vice versa. Accordingly, LAOs vary with regard to the degree of access they allow for political and economic resources. Combining a deductive approach based on the North et al. framework and the existing regime type literature with an inductive framework that allows for incorporating key concepts that have proven to be highly relevant to the post-Soviet space (such as limited statehood, state capture), Ademmer, Langbein and Börzel presented a tentative typology of LAOs in EaP countries that shall allow EU-STRAT to come up with a more precise understanding of the causes and consequences of different types of LAOs in the region.

In her comments, the discussant and EU-STRAT Advisory Board member Sabine Fischer underlined the added value of the EU-STRAT project as a whole. EU-STRAT shifts the analysis of the EaP countries from a geopolitical

perspective to internal developments, which is particularly important in today's situation where the rift between the West and Russia is very great. That said, the role of unresolved conflicts should gain more attention in the project's research activities, as they have a strong impact on political and economic developments in the region. With regard to the different types of LAOs that characterize the EaP countries, Fischer encouraged the authors to think more about how the variation in LAOs can be explained. She also noted that the applied framework puts a lot of emphasis on how dominant elites restrict access to political and economic resources but is rather ignorant towards bottom-up pressures as a potential factor to explain different degrees of openness.

During the subsequent discussion with the audience, one topic concerned the role of civil society in determining the degree of access to political and economic resources. While it was acknowledged that civil society should gain more room in the analysis of LAOs, some participants also stressed the ambivalent role civil society can play in political and economic change. In fact, previous research findings imply that civil society does not necessarily support reforms resulting in more openness but is also likely to contribute to the stability of LAOs. For example, mass mobilization does not work all the time in bringing about more openness. Its effects depend on who is mobilizing and the outcomes can be reversed. On a related note, it was suggested that the role of the church in limiting access be studied, as it is an important actor in shaping political developments in the region but has so far not gained sufficient scholarly attention. Other participants encouraged the authors to investigate whether the concept of LAOs has already travelled to other regions in the world and how it has been operationalized in these contexts to avoid normative selection of indicators. Overall, the discussion stressed that both LAO and OAO could be stable and the main question is how you get there. Ongoing research on the typology of LAOs should focus on the intentions of the actors to change or maintain the institutions.

4. How Interdependencies Shape Social Orders in EaP Countries

EU-STRAT has also undertaken a systematic and comparative analysis of interdependencies existing in Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine across various key sectors, such as security or energy, with Russia and the EU. Contributors to this research have sought to study the extent to which interdependencies affect the preferences, bargaining power, and strategies of key domestic actors in EaP countries, and thereby reinforce certain LAOs or support the transition to OAOs. Rilka Dragneva-Lewers began the panel by defining the role of interdependencies in the various social orders, admitting that they could be both under- and overestimated and it is important to look for the key interdependencies, how they have developed and where they exist.

Marta Jaroszewicz noted that during the process of mapping interdependencies, it became clear to the researchers that Belarus is a different case where more interdependencies vis-à-vis Russia exist than in the other two countries studied, Ukraine and Moldova, especially in the areas of energy and security. However, in trade interdependencies with both Russia and the EU, Belarus exhibits similar patterns to those observed in the two other EaP states. Belarus is also a special case in terms of the internal regime and its impact on the level of vulnerability or sensitivity to certain policies of external actors including linkage strategies applied by Russia or the EU. The authoritarian nature of governance in Belarus limits the options Minsk has for decreasing its sensitivities to Russian economic support. On the other hand, the lack of political competition tends to decrease vulnerabilities in that there is no criticism from the domestic opposition when choosing policy options. Over time, Belarus' interdependence with Russia in the areas of energy, migration, security and trade has grown. Belarus is

a close military ally of Russia, it has formed a common Regional Army Group and a Joint Regional Air Defence System, and recently hosted a joint strategic military exercise of the armed forces of both Russia and Belarus. In the case of energy, Russian supplies constitute nearly 100 % of domestic gas consumption. Belarus' vulnerability in the area of migration arises from the growing trend of outbound migration of highly qualified individuals to the EU and even larger temporary labour migration to the Russian market, coupled with the negative demographic trends inside Belarus. At the same time, Minsk has been the net beneficiary of Russia's issue-linkage policy. Moscow has made significant concessions in terms of energy prices and economic cooperation to sustain its security interests in Belarus and to keep its political loyalty.

Ildar Gazizullin presented the case of Ukraine. He noted that in Ukraine, there is a lot of dynamism and observable increasing interdependence with the EU relative to that of with Russia. Dependency on Russia in areas like the energy sector is, however, disadvantageous and there is a wish to change it. The EU framework has helped to reduce dependencies. In the area of trade, Ukraine has demonstrated a positive turn towards the EU DCFTA, in the increasing of quotas and decreasing of trade barriers. Dependency is also changing in the area of migration, as visa free movement has been positively received by the local media. Security remains the least researched area. In terms of peace settlement, Ukraine is increasingly dependent on external actors. At the same time, the conflict with Russia has also forced Ukraine to manage to do a lot on its own in terms of ensuring its security and diminishing its dependence on Russia.

Laure Delcour introduced the case of Moldova, noting that the situation seen in Moldova is one of contrast. In two sectors, energy and security, Moldova has been vulnerable to Russia's policies (even if to varying degrees), given the absence of an alternative option. The two other issue areas, trade and migration, highlight more balanced links between Russia and the EU. Critical connections exist between energy and security. The energy-security nexus comes from two factors: privatization in the early nineties (Gazprom has majority shares of Moldovagaz, thus making Moldova even more dependent) and the Transnistrian conflict. The most important element in this nexus is the energy debt accumulated by Transnistria. The vested interests of local elites were identified as a key factor behind resistance to policy alternatives. A very different picture exists in the trade-migration nexus. In contrast to the energy-security nexus, with the introduction of harsher migration rules, Russia failed to successfully retaliate against Moldova's decision to sign the AA/DCFTA because of the existence of an alternative destination for labour migrants, namely the EU.

Members of the audience commented on the scale of corruption in EaP countries, particularly with regard to Moldova and the energy sector, where energy benefits were alleged to be keeping proxies regimes intact and Russia has not been allowing Moldova to implement the EU directive on unbundling the energy sector. It was proposed that the energy interdependency with Russia could be weakened if there was a replacement of the political elite in Moldova, as the main challenge in EaP countries is inertia of the elite. Another commented that the scale of interdependency itself is important, as all Soviet countries were made energy poor, but the difference in paths of later development depended on decisions made in the early years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In the early 1990s, cheap gas from Russia was elevated to the status of national priority, and EaP elites were not ready to assume the role of statehood, rather searching for access to rents.

It was also observed that Russian influence is usually studied very superficially and randomly, a more systematic approach is needed and the issue of corruption should be discussed on both sides (for EU and EaP countries) not

only where the corruption is occurring. Some in the audience commented that the EU and EaP countries are becoming more interrelated over time and thus the Russia factor will be decreasing in the coming years. It was also questioned whether the researchers might plan to assess what will happen after 2020, when all the transit contracts expire.

EU-STRAT panelists concluded that informal negotiations between the domestic elites of the EaP countries and their external partners can often supplement or even override existing agreements or negotiations. This is not necessarily due to the poorly designed dispute settlement mechanisms, but rather a result of the personality-based policy-making, and the pervasiveness of business and state capture in the EaP countries and Russia.

5. Competition or Complementarity? External Actors and their Strategies towards the EaP Countries

The moderator of the panel, Ramūnas Vilpišauskas, introduced the aim of the research in progress: evaluating the strategies and approaches of external players towards the EaP countries, with the later aim of investigating the opportunities and constraints that these policies bring for the EU's strategy in the region. Contributors to this research have developed a conceptual framework for evaluating each external actor along the lines of their guiding principles, goals, objectives, and carriers of external policies as well as target groups. An analysis of six external actors was introduced during the panel: China, the EU, Russia, Poland, Germany, and France.

Szymon Kardaś introduced the case of China. China's grand strategy and foreign policy are embedded in its domestic politics. The modernization and on-going transformation of Chinese politics, economy and society are to a significant extent driven by the Chinese Communist Party's willingness to stay in power. Foreign policy is subordinated to these domestic factors and serves as a way to provide a conducive international environment for domestic reforms and to strengthen the Party's internal legitimacy. China's fundamental goals towards EaP countries represent the mixture of China's general approach to the external world and a specific approach to these states as part of the former Soviet Union. On the one hand, EaP countries do not differ significantly from other countries, especially in the developing world, and they remain relatively low on the list of China's foreign policy priorities. On the other hand, however, the creation of the New Silk Road (One Belt One Road, the Belt and Road Initiative) put China's goals towards Belarus and Ukraine in a new context. Both countries gained in importance as transit through their territory offered the shortest transport route from China to the EU. Analysing the goals of China vis-à-vis the EaP region, there are two contradictory trends: first, China seeks to have relations with stable, predictable and independent partners in the region due to the projects China wants to implement; second, China is interested in closer relations with Russia. So, it is prepared to be sensitive towards the questions Russia feels strongly about, like the Ukrainian case. The instruments that China employs in the region are the standard instruments: strategic partnership agreements and the establishment of special relations (such as with Belarus currently). In the economy, instruments are about credit-lines, state guarantees, as well as help in infrastructure projects (again, the current example would be Belarus).

Margarita Šešelgytė introduced the case of the EU, observing that while the EU sees itself as a global actor in terms of geographic outreach and power elements, other actors tend to view the EU as a regional player or describe it as a civilian or normative power. The core principles for the EU in the global order are multilateralism

and the rule of law, and the protection and promotion of these principles is one of the major goals of the EU. According to Šešelgytė, neighbourhood policy is important for the EU, and both neighbourhoods (Eastern and Southern) are viewed as equally important. The main goal of the EU in EaP countries is building security through cooperation and good governance. The EaP has complex organization, involving different areas of cooperation such as trade, energy policy, internal security and mobility. Different goals and working methods of the EU institutions unfortunately quite often create challenges for the implementation, coordination and strategic unity of the EaP. In EaP countries, the EU also suffers from “grandiosity of the ambitions” but “timidity and insufficiency of implementation.” The EU is only involved to a limited extent in solving the ongoing frozen conflicts in the region.

Kataryna Wolczuk noted that Russian goals in the region are explicit, but the instruments are not. Russia’s quest for great power status is clear and well emphasized by Russian politicians. The country seeks hegemony in the region and, according to Wolczuk, is the most ambitious of all the external actors in the EaP. Russia has two concepts of sovereignty: a) far abroad (traditional) and b) near abroad limited sovereignty. In line with the conception of the ‘near abroad’, Russia does not consider itself to be an external actor in the EaP countries, and these countries are considered most important to it. Russia uses a variety of tools to reach its goals, and has phenomenal capability for issue-linkage. Russia is, however, not an “authoritarianism exporter”, LAOs are rather a tool/strategy but not a goal. The weaker the states in the region are, the easier it is for Russia to pursue its goals in the region. Despite clear goals, tools, and capacities, Wolczuk noted that Russia is a relatively inconsistent and incoherent actor. She observed that while the main goal of Russia stays stable, the manner in which this goal is implemented changes. Russia’s policies can shift quicker than the EU’s, and its incentives and strategies are tailored to its policy goals.

Laure Delcour presented the findings of research on the strategies of three EU member states: Poland, Germany and France. There are considerable differences in how each country sees itself and how it acts vis-à-vis EaP countries. Poland is a policy entrepreneur, which means active engagement through bilateral initiatives (e.g. security in Ukraine, support for democratization, less prominent in economy), as well as in formulation of the EU’s policies. The EaP for Poland has strong historical, societal and cultural links; its goals in the EaP are support for sovereignty of EaP countries as well as their political transformation. Poland advocates a far-reaching level of integration, not excluding membership. Germany acts as a policy shaper, having a strong influence on final decisions. Eastern Europe is perceived as a key region (historically and economically) in Germany’s foreign policy, but there is also a crucial emphasis on Russia. The Ukraine conflict served as turning point in attitude vis-à-vis Russia (even if the consensus is fragile), but not so much vis-à-vis the EaP. Germany is a pragmatic supporter of the EaP and considers it as a tool for stabilization and democratization, but not as a path towards future enlargement. France regards itself as a normative (but not exclusively civilian) actor and a (potential) cultural pole of influence, and it views multilateralism as the cornerstone of the international system. Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus are, however, not policy priorities for France. France is opposed to enlargement and reluctant towards visa liberalization.

The terms chosen to describe various actors were further discussed with the audience. It was noted that Russia might better be described as ‘flexible’, rather than ‘inconsistent’, because one could view Russia as actually being very ‘consistent’ although ‘flexible’ in its application. Russia’s flexible consistency can be observed in examples, such as that it has offered to be a security provider to Armenia, while it exports weapons to Azerbaijan in order

to demonstrate to Armenia its dependence on Russia and to emphasize the importance of loyalty. With regard to Germany, the focus on the year 2014 and the Ukraine crisis as a turning point was critiqued, as according to one participant, change was already mounting sooner around 2011-12 with the Russian parliamentary elections and Putin's return. The researchers were encouraged by one audience member to take a more dynamic approach in their assessment.

It was agreed amongst the panelists that not every sector should be analysed for each external actor, as not all sectors are equally important, as particularly demonstrated by the case of France, where just migration and security were examined due to their high relevance to EaP countries.

6. The EU, Russia, and the Citizens of the Eastern Neighborhood: from Messages to Evaluations

The panel presented research on the elements of soft power of the EU and Russia in Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine. It has covered the results published in three EU-STRAT working papers: first, focusing on the content of official messages of the EU, second, analysing quantitatively the official foreign policy communications of Russia, and third, showing the data on actors and channels transmitting Russian messages and on how Russia and the EU are portrayed on the evening news of the main TV channels in the EaP countries.

Antoaneta Dimitrova and Ina Ramasheuskaya presented the main findings of a large scale analysis of the EU's messages published on the EU delegation websites to the three EaP countries over a period of six months. Country coders from all EU-STRAT's local EaP partners contributed to the analysis, which brought a structural insight of how the EU communicates in terms of core concepts. What the analysis showed is that the EU's messages differ per country. Specifically, while the EU's messages focus on the economy, reforms, and democracy in Moldova and Ukraine, human rights are the most frequently raised issue in Belarus.

Honorata Mazepus summarized the results of the analysis of the Russian official discourses. One of the conclusions was that the idea of the so-called "Russian world" is not explicitly promoted in the foreign policy documents and presidential addresses. However, the inquiry into unofficial channels and informal actors linked to Russia demonstrated that diverse organizations promoting Russia's soft power are present in Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine. As discussed by Matthew Frear, these actors operate in the sphere of culture, religion and security and target compatriots and Russian-speaking communities.

Next, Dimiter Toshkov shed light on another important aspect of the EU's and Russia's soft power: how the two actors are presented on national TV stations in the three countries. The monitoring of over 370 hours of TV material by researchers from SYMPA (Belarus), IDIS (Moldova), and UIPP (Ukraine) showed that Russia does not dominate TV news and that the coverage of the EU and especially its member states is more extensive. Also, despite many online sources presenting biased or misleading information, the national (state-run and private) TV stations present mainly news items without an evaluative tone. The main country differences are that Belarusian channels cover Russia more positively and in the context of the economy, while Ukrainian channels almost entirely negatively and in the context of security.

Tatsiana Chulitskaya, the panel's discussant, observed that it was very interesting to conduct research in which Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine were at the same time subjects and objects of research. One of the findings that Chulitskaya emphasized was the room for improvement the EU has in terms of its communications, especially about the norms and values that it wants to promote (especially when it comes to the Belarusian case). Building on what was achieved, the discussant suggested several ways in which the research agenda could be expanded in the future. One of the avenues for future research could be investigating how the Russian media portray the EU and the EaP countries. Also, building on the analysis of the pro-Russian actors in the EaP countries, future studies could explore further how active, massive and influential they really are. Another idea presented by the discussant was to look at the civil society organizations that are promoting European discourses in the countries.

During the Q&A session with the audience, Tanja A. Börzel complimented the data and analyses accomplished by the teams working on soft power. The subsequent discussion focused on how the presented results fit with the opinion polls about the image of the EU and Russia in the EaP countries, what the role of the less mainstream media is, and what the financial capacities of pro-Russian organizations are.

7. Roundtable: the Future of the EaP – a Valuable Framework for Both Sides?

The second day of the conference opened with a roundtable on the future of the EaP, moderated by Tanja A. Börzel, Director of the Centre for European Integration at Freie Universität Berlin. It further featured an esteemed group of experts: Taras Kuzio (Johns Hopkins University), Vassilis Maragos (European Commission, DG NEAR), Dzianis Melyantsou (Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies), Igor Munteanu (former Ambassador of Moldova to the USA; IDIS), and Khatuna Salukvadze (Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Georgia to Lithuania).

The roundtable began with the remarks of Taras Kuzio, Senior Research Associate at the University of Alberta's Canadian Institute for Ukrainian Studies and Non-Resident Fellow at Johns Hopkins University's Center for Transatlantic Relations, who identified three domestic and three geopolitical certainties defining the situation in Ukraine. The three domestic certainties are that 1) there is no alternative to European integration in Ukraine, 2) with the elections forthcoming, there will be no change in the current political vision and Poroshenko most likely will win, and 3) the process of de-sovietization will continue. The three geopolitical certainties surrounding Ukraine are that 1) there will be continued Russian hostility towards EU enlargement, 2) the domestic drivers of Russian foreign policy towards the Ukraine will not change, even if Putin were no longer to be in power, and 3) although it is a commonly held belief that Russia understands Ukraine better than the EU, this notion is not true. According to Kuzio, Russians do not actually understand Ukraine, as they lack understanding of what the domestic drivers of the Ukrainian political system are. He noted that the critical unanswered questions impacting Ukraine moving forward are whether there will be a change in the German power balance, whether sanctions remain on Russia, whether Ukraine is supplied with lethal weapons, and how Russia would react to that potential situation.

Vassilis Maragos, Head of Unit at the European Commission's DG NEAR, presented the EU perspective on what lies ahead. The EU is further developing the concept of differentiation while the focus will be on implementing AA/DCFTAs through the Association Agendas with Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine as well as through the

Partnership Priorities with Armenia, Belarus, and Azerbaijan. In all EaP countries, concrete actions have been implemented and their efficiency upgraded. The latest development is the Commission's document of 20 deliverables for 2020, which includes goals for transport, energy efficiency, SMEs, digital economy including roaming, and civil society. An initiative regarding the empowerment of young people will also be introduced at the Brussels Eastern Partnership Summit in November 2017. The EU focuses inter alia on entrepreneurship education and ensures that over 20,000 young people/youth workers from partner countries are involved in Erasmus+. The EU has also broadened the outreach and targeted support to grassroots civil society organizations. Using thematic initiatives, such as EU4Business, EU4Energy and EU4Youth, one of the EU objectives is to communicate, promote, and to explain the EU approach in strategic fashion with the intention of motivating people to engage with the EU and simultaneously demand reforms from their governments. The collaboration between DG NEAR and EU-STRAT plays a role in this, as reaching out to academia, think tanks, journalists, researchers and activists is a way to pass EU messages to the public, while at the same time gaining a better understanding of the needs and aspirations of citizens. According to Maragos, what is needed right now is the unity of power and action.

Dzianis Melyantsou, Senior Analyst at the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies, emphasized that in Minsk three emotions prevail regarding the EU's approach towards Belarus: frustration, irritation, and lack of trust. First of all, frustration, which is related to the way that Minsk views the EaP as a means of modernizing the country through money. Therefore, due to the fact that Minsk has not managed to receive a lot of money from the EU recently, the common opinion is that the EaP is not good. The irritation stems from bad press about Belarus that often emanates from the West, such as a 2010 *New York Times* article entitled "Lukashenko the Loser". Finally, Melyantsou noted that Belarus feels a distinct lack of trust towards the EU. According to him, after the EU brokered the agreement for Ukraine with then President Viktor Yanukovich, the perception is that the EU forgot their end of the deal immediately, including its guarantees, and President Lukashenko took note of this.

Igor Munteanu, former Ambassador of Moldova to the United States and current head of the Moldovan think tank IDIS, observed that Moldovan citizens were happy about the visa free regime and that the DCFTA had enhanced possibilities for the Moldovan economy to find alternative markets. Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine are leading in the approximation of the *acquis*. Nevertheless, Moldova faces geopolitical and internal challenges, such as oligarchs and political corruption. Public support for the EU is not strong, as the EU is blamed for not being able to help to ensure security in the region, not providing enough funds, and for not granting accession perspectives. Munteanu noted that the EU also has to partially accept the blame for not doing enough to prevent corruption. The EU and Russia are competing for support within Moldova, and as of now, when Moldovan society is asked who the bigger supporter and strategic partner of Moldova is, society often points to Russia.

Her Excellency Khatuna Salukvadze, current Ambassador of Georgia to Lithuania, emphasized that European integration has proved to be one of the major driving forces of Georgia's reform process and democratic transformation. The EaP has provided a concrete framework for the realization of the vision of building a truly democratic state, based on shared European values. Georgia has gained a lot from the EaP and during the past several years has accomplished most of the prospects offered by the EaP. Today Georgia is an associated partner of the EU and is implementing the AA/DCFTA, and it also successfully completed visa liberalization and joined the Energy Community. Education and culture are areas in which Georgian citizens also benefit greatly from EU instruments and programmes, such as Horizon 2020, Creative Europe and Erasmus+, where Georgia is one of the

most active EaP members. The reform process and economic transformation in Georgia are in full swing, according to Ambassador Salukvadze. Trade with the EU has increased over the past years, culminating in the EU becoming Georgia's number one trade partner. The Ambassador also highlighted that when heading to the EaP Summit, there is a need to look ahead to the new opportunities that would prepare grounds for a deeper level of integration with the EU.

Participants engaged the panelists in a discussion on what role the EU could play for EaP countries in terms of security. One panelist noted that while the EU is not a security provider, at the same time it could engage more within the framework of the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), particularly with cyber and security reform. Particularly, as all the EaP countries are interested in participating in CSDP missions. This would provide an opportunity for greater cooperation in the field of security. Another panelist agreed that the EU could play a vital role in the future in helping Belarus with security.

Participants also inquired about whether the multilateral aspects of the EaP had been successful thus far, as well as whether societies were relating to this framework. According to one panelist, the visibility of the EaP remains very low in Belarus, and distrust remains an issue between the EU and Belarus. This distrust might, however, be overcome in time through small stories of success as well as cooperation in the areas of interest for both the EU and Belarus, such as security. It was nevertheless also noted that a similar distrust also remains in Belarus towards Russia, as well as fear. As for Moldova, another panelist noted that the current political balance favoured oligarchic groups in the country, and thus he would expect a stronger role to be played by the EU in investigations and instruments against this, as well as more assistance through the transformation. He stated that the EU was losing the normative competition in the region currently. In regard to Georgia, one audience member noted that the country could help other states by sharing the experience of how it successfully and creatively implemented reforms. A panelist also added that it was valid to compare Georgia and the functioning of its institutions with those in the western Balkans, several countries of which are currently in membership negotiation talks with the EU.

8. Economic Integration Projects in the Post-Soviet Space: Commitments and Implementation

EU-STRAT has also undertaken a critical evaluation of how the new set of AAs that the EU has put in place with Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia affects domestic actor coalitions and sectors. The research thus far has also assessed legal and political compatibility between the EU engagement strategies and membership of EaP countries in the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). Rilka Dragneva-Lewers opened the panel by defining the differences between the EAEU and the EU. There is a strong policy drive for engagement with the EAEU. Regarding engagement with Ukraine, the EU saw the case of Ukraine as a bilateral and sovereign choice, while for Russia it was a regional and manipulative decision. The EU looked at current obligations, while Russia looked at the future goal of an open-ended commitment. These different positions led to different conclusions on how the situation should be handled. According to Dragneva-Lewers, the EU seeks technocratic solutions. There are three characteristics of the EAEU that make it difficult to understand: 1) there is no clear division of competences between institutions, as well as institutions and member states; 2) institutions are not functioning as a supranational body; 3) there is no body to punish deviation. The challenge is that the EU areas overlap with the

EAEU's agenda. The EAEU is a multilateral forum that Russia can manipulate. The EU has to conduct a different exercise that is not a purely legal interpretation. Rather, it needs to see how integration is negotiated.

Laure Delcour observed that Armenia has proved to be the most interesting case demonstrating the foreign policy autonomy limits of EaP states. It was the only country to successfully finalize negotiations on an AA, but then was forced to withdraw and join the EAEU. In 2010-13, Armenia carried out substantial reforms and regarded cooperation with the EU as a legitimate template for modernization. The decision to join the EAEU was made under enormous pressure from Russia beginning in early 2013. Even when joining the EAEU, Armenia tried to preserve some complementarity and made it clear before the Vilnius EaP summit that it would still be seeking a far-reaching agreement with the EU. A new comprehensive partnership agreement was negotiated in 2015 and initiated in March of 2017, the political portion of which was mostly taken from the draft of the AA. The trade part has been affected by membership in the EAEU. The final verdict on Armenia's flexibility in terms of cooperation with the EU depends, however, on how Russia perceives this cooperation. The question lies in whether Russia will consider Armenia's membership in the EAEU as a sufficient guarantee of its loyalty to Russia, or whether it will use its multifaceted bilateral ties with Armenia to undermine the implementation of the EU-Armenia Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA).

Kataryna Wolczuk introduced an analysis of the AAs between the EU and EaP countries. She pointed out that the narrative surrounding the AAs is very ambitious in terms of promoting economic integration with the EU. However, justification of a massive *acquis* transfer is that it serves the purpose of modernizing the EaP countries, although membership is not on the agenda. There is a massive mismatch between the commitment and institutional, human, and economic resources needed in those countries in order to fulfil this commitment. EU-STRAT researchers have been exploring to what extent this mismatch is understood by the EU and what mechanisms have been used in particular in the pre-association period in order to ensure implementation. The results showed that many commitments are made, but there are not always enough rewards on the other end. Export of the *acquis* and modernization are not always occurring at the same time.

One discussion after the panel revolved around the issue of flexibility, specifically what kind of flexibility the EU should take into consideration within the EaP countries, and how the EU could demonstrate flexibility itself. The EU is quite protective of its member states' interests, which can be seen in the limited degree of liberalization of trade in agricultural products.

There was a question on how the findings presented in this session could be linked to EU-STRAT's conceptual framework on social orders. The observation was that thus far, the link between the research performed on the AAs and then the OAOs and LAOs categorization is missing. Further discussions addressed whether agreements like CEPA could prove to be a middle way alternative for the countries in between the EU and Russia. Additionally, it was noted that although CEPA does not have a DCFTA part, the AA part remains, which might be very far reaching in some areas. Finally, the discussions developed around the potential further actions that Russia could take. Russia could still undermine implementation of CEPA when the agreement is in force. The EU has to think about its strategy in the case that Russia does decide to apply punitive measures to Armenia. The EaP countries that chose to join the EAEU have equally chosen to cooperate with the EU, and thus the challenge for the EU is to respond to this choice, and not to just stick to a technocratic story.

9. The Impact of Scientific Cooperation with the EU on Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine

Dimiter Toshkov introduced the steps taken by the teams to assess the impact of scientific cooperation between the EaP countries and the EU. He also explained the mixed methods approach used in this part of the project to address the research question. Two aspects of scientific impact were the subject of investigation: scientific productivity and broader social and policy impact of cooperation.

Toshkov presented a snapshot of the results of the bibliometric analysis of collaborations between Western and Eastern scholars. As one of the interesting observations, he noted that between 2000-2016 Belarusian scholars produced a relatively high number of publications. The funding for research leading to those publications came from national, EU and Russian sources. The teams also investigated the structure of co-authorship and found that there was a variation among the EaP countries. In Moldova, for instance, there was more co-authorship with EU-based than with Russian scientists. Another observable trend was a high level of continuity of cooperation with the same partners. In general, the EU is the most important source of foreign funding in Ukraine and Moldova and second most important source in Belarus. There is a growing share of EU-funded publications in all three countries, but at the same time, the scientific productivity in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine has declined relative to their economic size.

Toshkov emphasized that it was important to put the results of the bibliographic data analysis of the three countries into a broader context. Putting the results into a comparative perspective and accounting for the size of the GDP shows that Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine do not perform much worse in terms of publication output than smaller post-communist EU member-states such as Latvia or Bulgaria.

The results of the analysis of funding supporting collaborations showed that the EU is not the only 'game in town' when it comes to the scientific cooperation. Although EU funding has a positive effect on the number of publications, it does not radically transform scientific productivity. It rather serves as a "lifeline to science in the EaP region, helping it to avoid collapse in the tumultuous period after 2000".

Honorata Mazepus presented the results of the interviews with EU scholars and project managers who have collaborated with partners from the EaP countries. The analysis demonstrated that Western partners praised the quality of their Eastern partners. It also showed that participation in EU-funded projects is highly path-dependent: once an EaP institution participated in an EU funded project, it is more likely to participate again. The EU partners struggled with evaluating political and social impact of the cooperation and thought that it was rather small. They noted some impact on the institutional practices of the partners, but not much on public policy or on the society in general. These results might have been affected by the nature of the projects: the majority of EU-funded projects were related to the hard sciences and were quite technical, therefore the impact could have been quite narrow. Although the researchers expected 'brain drain' as a side effect of international cooperation, it was not observed by the interviewed scholars. The barriers that were brought to attention by Western partners were the regime in Belarus, instability in Ukraine, visas and language skills in all the countries, as well the bureaucratic burden of the EU projects.

Ina Ramasheuskaya presented the results of the research in Belarus. She pointed out that the biggest added value of the EU projects in Belarus was that they helped to socialize Belarusian scholars, especially the young

ones, into the European research community. Interestingly, in the case of Belarusian institutions, a discrepancy was found in the numbers of European projects indicated on the Horizon 2020 website and the number of projects registered by the national scientific authorities. It was noted that the discrepancy was due to the fact that the Horizon 2020 count does not include institutes and researchers who work on the projects as sub-contractors rather than full-fledged partners. Another observation was that the potential impact on domestic policy is not so much related to the actual research, but rather to the status of the project leader, i.e. if he has either formal (e.g. advisory board member) or informal connections to the government, the policy impact may be higher. Unintended policy implications might occur as well.

Regarding the results of the interviews, Tatsiana Chulitskaya outlined the barriers to cooperation between EaP countries and the EU in the scientific sphere. There were several common barriers named in all three countries. One of them is the poor level of English language training of researchers in EaP countries. Another shared difficulty is the lack of institutional capacities of national research institutions in preparing proposals and other necessary documentation for European-funded projects. In Belarus, results show a lack of institutional support for cooperation with the EU in the field of social sciences, and general domination of EU-supported projects in hard sciences. In the case of Moldova, one of the biggest challenges is 'brain drain', resulting in the shortage of young human resources in the national research institutions as well as poor working conditions, career perspectives, and a problematic system of national funding. Key challenges in the Ukrainian case are: the lack of support for scientific cooperation from the universities' administrations and authorities of the country, certain gaps in legal regulation of the implementation of EU-supported projects in the country, and the lack of experience with such projects in the national research institutions.

Participants engaged the panel in further discussion on what the impact of EU-STRAT and scientific collaboration between the EU and EaP countries was on society in EaP countries. It was agreed that the impact thus far had not clearly been shown, although it is very hard to measure impact in this context. It was noted that socialization is a common effect of these collaborations, and one positive effect was gaining local research teams in EaP countries. Participants commented on a variety of variables that could potentially mitigate the impact, such as whether the government in an EaP country is using the research, or the magnitude of the intervention that these projects bring. One panelist commented that policy-makers are always slow to take research findings into consideration, but think tankers and academics should aim to make their research usable for policy-makers.

While the scale of impact was not agreed upon, it was further noted that one must question what would happen without these collaborations, and specifically without the funding that EU cooperation brings to research institutions in EaP countries. It was noted by one panelist that the next stage of research will draw out how scientific cooperation affects LAOs, which may aid in answering some of the questions discussed during the session.



The EU and Eastern Partnership Countries An Inside-Out Analysis and Strategic Assessment

Against the background of the war in Ukraine and the rising tensions with Russia, a reassessment of the European Neighborhood Policy has become both more urgent and more challenging. Adopting an inside-out perspective on the challenges of transformation the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries and the European Union face, the research project EU-STRAT seeks to understand varieties of social orders in EaP countries and to explain the propensity of domestic actors to engage in change. EU-STRAT also investigates how bilateral, regional and global interdependencies shape domestic actors' preferences and scope of action. Featuring an eleven-partner consortium of academic, policy, and management excellence, EU-STRAT creates new and strengthens existing links within and between the academic and the policy world on matters relating to current and future relations with EaP countries.