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Dear friends and colleagues,

With summer break rolling in, we wanted to take the opportunity to let you know about the latest events and publications happening in the EU-STRAT project these last six months.

For its second policy briefing during the project, our partner institution IDIS hosted over 50 stakeholders on its premises in Chişinău on 28 May 2018. With several EU-STRAT researchers on-site to present our latest findings, the briefing centered on interdependencies that exist between the EaP countries and the EU as well as Russia. This newsletter shares the discussions that took place over the keynotes, general overview of findings, and two panel sessions on energy and trade, and then migration and security.

This edition's policy comment, "One country - two economic systems? The 'partial reforms' experiment in Belarus", sheds light on reforms that were introduced in Belarus this past spring. The comment analyzes how these reforms interact with the current landscape, as the country modernizes in terms of technology and private entrepreneurship, while still maintaining its ineffective economic command-and-control model.

We would also like to share summaries of three of our working papers in 'EU-STRAT at Work'. The first of these papers looks at the different strategies used by dominant elites in EaP countries to maintain stability, providing insight into how open access institutions interact with limited access institutions in hybrid regimes. The second paper examines what governance arrangements various interdependencies between Russia and its EaP neighbours are embedded in,

and how such arrangements have affected these interdependencies. Third, we share the results of an investigation into what kind of messages on foreign policy resonate with the citizens in Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine. Last but not least, we present a brief overview of a workshop hosted in Istanbul as part of our research on how scientific cooperation may bring European and local actors together.



Tanja A. Börzel

Antoaneta Dimitrova

In an exclusive interview, Dumitru Alaiba, Program Director at the Centre for Policies and Reforms (CPR) Moldova, dives into the current state of affairs in Moldova, and its progress (or lack thereof) in terms of implementation of reforms. Alaiba highlights the key role civil society has to play in reigniting the reform process.

That's all for now, but stay tuned to our Facebook page and Twitter (@eu_strat) for ongoing updates. In the meantime, have a great summer!

Sincerely,

Tanja A. Börzel
Project Coordinator

Antoaneta Dimitrova
Project Co-coordinator

Interdependencies in the EaP: A Policy Briefing in Chişinău

By Carolina Ungureanu (IDIS Viitorul)

On 28 May 2018, IDIS Viitorul hosted its second EU-STRAT policy briefing in Chişinău on Eastern Partnership (EaP) interdependencies with the EU and Russia in the sectors of trade, energy, migration and security. Over 50 participants from local embassies, political parties, government agencies, academia, the media, and civil society attended the briefing, which included keynote speeches and two panel discussions.

The event was inaugurated with remarks from Daniela Morari, State Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration of the Republic of Moldova, and Fabien Schaeffer, a representative of the EU Delegation in Moldova. In particular, State Secretary Morari stressed the importance of strengthening the strategic dialogue on security, as well as the need for more structured cooperation between the three associated countries and the EU on trade, transport, energy, and digital cooperation.

The overall aims and results of the project thus far in the study of EaP interdependencies were then presented by Laure Delcour (Foundation maison des sciences de l'homme, FMSH) and Ildar Gazizullin (Ukrainian Institute for Public Policy). Laure Delcour discussed the outcomes of Russia's issue-linkage strategy in Moldova¹. She stressed that Russia's strategy has had limited outcomes in the areas where Moldova can use policy alternatives, e.g. migration. She also emphasized the vested interests of local elites as a key factor behind resistance to policy alternatives. This is the case for energy, where rent-seeking practices of the elite prevent the effective exploration of policy alternatives and thereby increase vulnerability to Russia's use of linkages with security issues.

In the first panel, moderated by the Director of IDIS, Igor Munteanu, the participants discussed

the vulnerabilities of EaP countries in the energy and trade sectors. The main issues faced by Moldova in the energy sector were said to include the absence of alternative interconnection solutions, the need for an independent regulatory institution, the unresolved settlement of the gas debt problem, and the need to inform citizens about existing energy issues. As Moldova is strictly dependent on Russia's energy resources, its room for manoeuvre is limited, hence a diversification of gas and energy supply is needed. In contrast, Moldova's trade interdependence with the EU has increased significantly in recent years, thus Moldova was able to withstand pressure from Russia in 2006 and 2014. It was noted by Veaceslav Ionita (IDIS) that since signing the Association Agreement (AA), Moldova's national economy has benefitted, and demand for Moldovan goods has increased on the EU market.



Ildar Gazizulin (UIPP) then presented the current transformation challenges faced by Ukraine, and Klaudijus Maniokas (ESTEP, Vilnius) presented the reform path undertaken by Lithuania. Both experts emphasized that national elites either create support for alternatives or block them due to the existence of vested interests and rent-seeking schemes. They referred to positive examples of efforts to reduce external pressure by creating alternatives, such as the recent attempt by Ukraine to challenge its unfavorable gas contracts with Russia in international courts. Such cases highlight the impact of energy on national security.

¹ See Całus K., Delcour, L., Gazizullin, I., Iwański, T., Jaroszewicz, M., and Klysiński, K. (2018) 'Interdependencies of Eastern Partnership Countries with the EU and Russia: Three Case Studies', *EU-STRAT Working Paper No. 10*, Berlin: Freie Universität Berlin.

Participants acknowledged the existence of mechanisms that can reduce or eliminate the vulnerability of the EaP countries to Russia's immediate policies in the neighbourhood. Some transformations have been sped up as a result of Russia's annexation of Crimea and the subsequent crisis in Eastern Ukraine. This created more formal interactions between Ukraine and Moldova as well as Moldova and Romania, which includes stricter controls on the Transnistrian border lining Moldova and Ukraine.

In the second panel on migration and security interdependencies, Moldovan and international panelists exchanged views on how wide regional arrangements, including unilateral migration policies and informal international regimes, affect migration. The panelists portrayed a nuanced picture of migration interdependencies in the region and possible links to the security challenges faced by EaP countries. Marta Jaroszewicz (Centre for Eastern Studies, Warsaw) analysed the migration interdependences between the EaP, Russia, and the EU. Special emphasis was given to the recent mass migration phenomenon from Ukraine to Poland, which underlines the necessity of including individual migrant perspective into studies apart from just the international and governmental policies.



Laure Delcour (FMSH) analysed how regional migration arrangements have affected migration interdependencies². She pointed to the contrast

² See Dragneva, R., Delcour, L., Jaroszewicz, M., Kardaś, S., and Ungureanu, C. (2018) 'How Bilateral, Regional and International Regimes Shape the Extent, Significance and Nature of Interdependencies', *EU-STRAT Working Paper No. 8*, Berlin: Freie Universität Berlin.

between, on the one hand, Belarus – whose interdependencies with Russia are embedded in strongly institutionalized regimes, as a result of which Belarus has no incentive to look for alternative options – and, on the other hand, Ukraine and Moldova. The mobility and migration agreements concluded by these two countries with Russia lack ambition and offer limited opportunities for Moldovan and Ukrainian migrants as compared to the benefits enjoyed by Belarusian citizens. Therefore, in sharp contrast to Belarus, Moldova's and Ukraine's failure to secure better treatment of their migrants in bilateral and regional agreements paved the way for the exploration of other options, primarily labour migration to the EU.



Natalia Albu (Center for Strategic Research, Chişinău) discussed the EU's transition from politics to security policies, as well as the conceptualization of security through two hegemonic models (the EU and Russia). The participants noted that although external actors continue to use asymmetric migration interdependencies to put pressure on the EaP countries in other areas of interest (for instance, Russia expelling Moldovan migrants before Moldova signed the AA), Russia has been losing its position due to its nontransparent and highly centralized migration policy. Therefore, in the near future, EU destinations are likely to become the most popular among EaP migrants. Panelists concluded on the point that the EU-Moldova relationship is in need of fresh impulse, but will only receive it when national authorities stop standing in the way of reform implementation.

One country – two economic systems? The ‘partial reforms’ experiment in Belarus

By Kamil Klysiński (Centre for Eastern Studies, OSW)

On December 22, 2017, Belarusian president Alexandr Lukashenko signed two important decrees: the first ‘On the Development of Entrepreneurship’ and the second ‘On the Development of the Digital Economy’. The decrees foresee an unprecedented opening of the private sector in Belarus, and give strong legal and tax incentives to the IT sector. They are the latest expression of a path that Belarus has taken over the past few years, in the course of which the IT sector has become a priority issue in economic policy. At the same time, Belarus has firmly neglected recent calls by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to restructure its state-owned sector. The Belarusian authorities have thus sent conflicting signals by building islands of a modern economy based on high-tech technologies, a developed service sector and private entrepreneurship, while still sustaining the old ineffective economic model of command-and-control.

The creation of islands of modernity

In 2017, the Belarusian president intensified the positive rhetoric regarding modern technologies and small and medium-sized businesses, which had been around for several years. This development reflects the growing conviction of authorities that the degradation of a significant section of Belarus’ outdated and ineffective industry is irreversible, and that it is necessary to find new sources of budget revenues and drivers of economic growth. The rhetoric was then channelled into legal action, when Alexandr Lukashenko signed a number of decrees, the most important of which were those ‘On the Development of Entrepreneurship’ and ‘On the Development of the Digital Economy’. The former reduced the bureaucratic burden for private enterprises by allowing new firms to submit a single statement for registration without the need to wait for the permission to operate. The decree was supplemented by other regulations that replaced regular inspections of all businesses with

random inspections of only selected entities. The new regulations received a lukewarm response from representatives of Belarus’ business circles. Used to a policy of strict control and far-reaching regulation of the private sector, business owners stressed that much depended on whether and how the regulations would be applied in practice. They have also been sceptical of the possibility that authorities will financially sanction improper organization of work and ineffective management.

The business community evaluated the unprecedented liberal decree concerning the IT sector much more positively. Over the past few years, the IT sector has become – also in the government’s rhetoric – a kind of model for development and innovation to be followed by the entire Belarusian economy. IT firms, part of which are concentrated in the High Technologies Park (HTP) located near Minsk, are among the most rapidly developing business entities in Belarus. Their share in GDP has been steadily increasing. Over 90 % of their production is exports whose value exceeded US\$1 billion in 2017. According to governmental forecasts, the annual income generated by the IT sector will exceed US\$2 billion after 2021 and US\$4 billion by 2030. The aim of the decree is to accelerate this sector’s growth by attracting foreign investors and qualified specialists from other countries, and developing cutting-edge IT technologies for the financial sector – above all cryptocurrencies. For this reason, the HTP comes with a specific special legal status. This status provides HTP-located firms with guaranteed tax reliefs or complete tax exemptions (for example, from value-added-tax), unlimited possibilities for using cryptocurrencies (which in effect implies the legalization of such currencies), as well as visa-free entry and 180-day stays for foreigners employed there. This special legal status has been granted until 2049. Furthermore, residents of the HTP have gained significant liberties with regard to the opening

of bank accounts, settlements with foreign contractors, and the circulation of accounting and technical documentation. Such an island of modernization is unprecedented not only in Belarus, but also globally when it comes to the use of cryptocurrencies. Even though the decree will only come into force on March 28 this year, and some international financial organizations have raised doubts over whether Belarus' regulatory bodies have sufficient oversight capacity for its implementation, IT companies from many countries worldwide (including Brazil, Japan, Israel, Russia and India) have already expressed strong interest in starting a business in Belarus, especially in the area of cryptocurrency trade.

The preservation of the command-and-control economy

In parallel to these liberalizing moves, however, the Belarusian government is continuing to support the increasingly ineffective and expensive economic system based on top-down orders and distribution. Its essential element is the industrial sector, which is predominantly state-owned, produces around 70 % of total GDP, and operates according to Soviet planning and management principles. Alexandr Lukashenko, fearing that the social situation might destabilize in the case of massive dismissals of employees (given that 40 % of the employed worked in the public sector in 2017), for years has consistently blocked not only the liquidation but also the privatization of unprofitable state-owned firms. Revenues from privatization in 2017 only slightly exceeded US\$1 million, while the planned budget revenue from privatization was US\$140 million. The privatization goals for 2018 have been reduced to US\$128 million, which still seems hard to meet. A serious problem is posed by the increasing debt of state-controlled companies, which already shows some features of a loan spiral, given the fact that most of them are de facto insolvent. As a result, some of these companies are short of funds, not only for investments and buying raw materials, but also for paying wages on time. The government thus tries to reconcile a policy of subsidizing these entities, with a rigid loan policy of Belarus' central

bank. According to the IMF, the annual cost of subsidizing the state-owned sector equals 2.2 % of GDP. Consequently, the IMF made the opening of a new credit line for Belarus dependent on the implementation of a programme for restructuring of the state-owned sector, amongst other things. This resulted in a deadlock in the negotiations. Although the authorities do not entirely reject the IMF proposals, they claim that their consideration will be possible at the earliest in 2020 after the parliamentary and presidential elections.

The command-and-control-economy also prevails with regard to Belarus' wage policy. Last year the president promised to raise the average monthly wage in the country to US\$500. To achieve this goal in a highly difficult macroeconomic situation, the government used administrative means of pressure towards the end of the year, and threatened to impose fines or conduct extraordinary audits. In order to meet the requirements, some of the companies needed to take on additional loans. A continuation of this policy may further lead to another devaluation of the rouble. There is also no indication that the authorities will abandon another controversial policy that punishes the unemployed: Lukashenko has recently approved a decree on the so-called fighting against 'social parasitism'. Even though it is still unclear how this policy is supposed to work in practice, from January 1, 2019, unemployed citizens of working age are charged with a special duty to cover the full costs of social services (e.g. healthcare). A similar attempt in 2017 led to a wave of massive protests that eventually forced the Belarusian authorities to modify the decree. The continuation of those activities may not only cause social unrest but may also further strengthen the conservative track in Belarus' economic policy that counters rather than promotes established principles of liberal market economies.

Dangerous illusions

The Belarusian government's economic policy moves are contradictory. On the one hand, 'manual steering' (or state interference) is still used to support the predominantly inefficient

state-controlled sector, which puts a serious burden on the state budget. On the other hand, the government has decided to launch unprecedented liberal reforms in selected sectors. If fully implemented, in the IT sector these reforms might even set the standard for a modern post-industrial economy. As a result, the government has consciously brought about a situation in which two radically different economic models are operating in parallel within one state. It appears that the profitable, already reformed sectors are tasked with financially supporting the inefficient state-controlled sectors, which is expected to ensure social stability.

Ultimately, in the long term, the government hopes that the proportions will be gradually reversed, and that the rapidly developing segments

will form the foundation of the Belarusian economy. The first steps of such a very cautious reconstruction of the economy, which will take years, have been taken. However, the deterioration of foreign trade along with rising debt levels in 2017 suggest that a comprehensive and dynamic reconstruction of the economy is immediately needed in order to build stable foundations for economic growth. Otherwise, Belarus might find itself in a so-called low growth trap for the next couple of years, oscillating around 2 % of GDP, which is insufficient for developing countries trying to approach a higher level of development. It could also plunge back into recession, or even face outright economic collapse. Without further reform of its economy, the political regime of Belarus may risk its own stability.

What underpins regime (in)stability in the Eastern partnership countries?

By Esther Ademmer (Kiel Institute for the World Economy & Christian-Albrechts-Universität Kiel) and Julia Langbein (FUB)

The stabilization of so called ‘hybrid regimes’ that combine democratic institutions (e.g. elections) with autocratic features (e.g. repression) is one of the sobering findings of the research on democracy and transition. This is especially so for the six Eastern partnership countries that are classically associated with hybrid regimes and stand out in their relevance as targets of the European Union’s efforts to promote democracy and economic development beyond its borders. How can these processes of regime (in)stability be analysed and explained?

So far, the literature on democratization considers political conditions as being key for transitions to democracy, but modes of economic governance are hardly taken into account as constituent features of regime types. At EU-STRAT we build on the work of Douglass North, John Wallis, and Barry Weingast (NWW) that have integrated economic and political approaches to argue that the modern world can be divided into two stable types of orders, each characterized by a balance of access to economic and political resources, the so called ‘double balance’: Open Access Orders (OAOs) are marked by open political and economic competition, as opposed to Limited Access Orders (LAOs) that are dominated by a small rent-seeking elite that restricts access to both economic and political resources.

Our research suggests a refinement of NWW’s approach in that we show that the six EaP countries can all be classified as LAOs but do not necessarily constrain access in the political and economic sphere to the same extent¹. The dominant elites in Belarus and Azerbaijan are successful in maintaining stability by restricting access to both political and economic resources

for the benefit of a small elite close to the incumbent leader. Up until 2008, Georgia and Moldova were characterized by comparatively high degrees of political competition between different fractions but a rather restrictive access to economic resources. Later they joined Ukraine in the group of LAOs that allow for relative political and economic competition: Economic rent seeking by the respective dominant political fractions is more restricted due to the fact that some open access rules are also being applied in practice, despite the fact that oligarchic systems still limit full economic access. Last but not least, Armenia combines relative economic openness with strictly limited political competition, though the jury is still out on whether the very recent ouster of Armenia’s Prime Minister by the former journalist and protest leader Nikol Pashinyan leads to greater political opening.

The different strategies used by dominant elites to maintain stability in various types of LAOs provide insights into how open access institutions interact with limited access institutions in hybrid regimes. First, the presence of multiple equilibria raises the question of what specific thresholds of political and economic opening are associated with stability and regime inertia, rather than instability and change. Second, regional or international organizations, especially the European Union, often target such hybrid regimes for economic cooperation and international democracy promotion. They negotiate liberal trade regimes, try to foster the establishment of institutions facilitating private business activities, or promote rule of law reforms and free and fair elections. Without a detailed understanding of how economic and political institutions interact in such hybrid forms of social orders, international engagement may result in unintended consequences further limiting rather than opening access to political and economic resources.

¹ See Ademmer, E., Langbein, J. and Börzel, T. A. (2018) ‘Varieties of social orders: The political and economic fundamentals of hybrid (in)stability in the post-Soviet space’, *EU-STRAT Working Paper No. 11.*, Berlin: Freie Universität Berlin.

How bilateral, regional and international regimes shape the extent, significance and nature of interdependencies

By Rilka Dragneva (University of Birmingham)

The strong asymmetric interdependence that links the post-Soviet countries to Russia has been one of the defining features of their political and economic development over the last two decades. The Ukraine crisis brought into sharp relief the role of interdependence as a critical factor for regional integration in general and the integration of post-Soviet countries with the European Union (EU), in particular. The ensuing discussion, however, often betrays the assumption that interdependencies are a natural and stable inevitability, a power reality to be ignored at one's own peril. What it obscures is that interdependence is a "situation partially created by policy itself"¹. It is the outcome of a political game where a range of interests is involved, resulting in a set of governance arrangements. Such arrangements are critical in defining the nature and pattern of interdependencies, including the shifts they may undergo. In the aftermath of the dissolution of the USSR interdependence is fashioned by the way relations between the newly independent states have been structured, revealing complex dynamics that the 'natural inevitability' assumption obscures.

This paper² examines what governance arrangements interdependencies between Russia and its neighbours are embedded in and how such arrangements have affected those interdependencies in their own right. Firstly, the paper analyses the role of arrangements resulting in formal international agreements, but also other less institutionalized interactions and transactional relations established between the post-Soviet states since the early 1990s. We examine the regimes established between Russia and three of its neighbours, Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine. These countries demonstrate

important variations in terms of the depth and structure of their engagement with Russia bilaterally but also in terms of their participation in the regional regimes led by Moscow. Secondly, we recognize the multiplicity of governance arrangements relevant to interdependence. Countries participate in a variety of governance frameworks: bilateral, regional or global. Some of those are initiated by Russia, others are concluded without its participation. The proliferation of such arrangements creates dynamics, which has remained under-researched or, particularly in the case of regimes involving the EU, has been discussed predominantly through the prism of geopolitical rivalry.

The paper discusses regimes and interdependence in the areas of trade, migration, energy and security. Our findings demonstrate important differences between Belarus's position vis-à-vis Russia compared to that of Moldova and Ukraine. Yet, the more striking finding is that formal regimes do not make a pronounced difference to interdependencies. Given that regimes tend to be weak and non-transparent and, with a few exceptions, offer limited constraints on Russia, they tend to perpetuate interdependencies. What matters, however, is how Russia uses these regimes for its purposes and the extent to which they provide a scope for the EaP countries to exploit policy alternatives.

In this sense, there are important policy implications for the EU. The EU offers rule-based and transparent regimes to the EaP countries in marked contrast to Russia's governance approach to the region, which is premised on the use of weak and non-transparent regimes, allowing for opportunistic departures. This would suggest that if the EaP countries were to decrease their sensitivity to Russia's policies, it would be beneficial for the EU to offer not only rule-dense regimes, i.e. such providing extensive regulatory and legislative alignment, but also to offer actual policy alternatives.

¹ Keohane, R. and Nye, J. (2012) *Power and Interdependence*, London: Longman, p. 6.

² See Dragneva, R., Delcour, L., Jaroszewicz, M., Kardaś, S., and Ungureanu, C. (2018) 'How Bilateral, Regional and International Regimes Shape the Extent, Significance and Nature of Interdependencies', *EU-STRAT Working Paper* No. 8, Berlin: Freie Universität Berlin.

How should the EU speak to the citizens of Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine to gain their support?

By Honorata Mazepus, Nina Onopriychuk, and Suzan Saris (Leiden University)

After an extensive review, the European Union revised its Neighbourhood Policy in 2015 and, as a consequence, its cooperation with the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries. One of the changes that followed the review was the enhancement of communications of the EU's policies and goals in the EaP through the EastStratCom Task Force. In times of intensified disinformation and the increasing presence of fake news, the EU recognized the need to promote its own messages in the contested EaP information space.

Against this background, we—a team of researchers involved in the EU-STRAT project—decided to investigate what kind of messages on foreign policy resonate with the citizens in Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine. The departure point for our investigation¹ was the idea that to communicate effectively the EU needs to understand what types of messages shape the attitudes towards the EU and Russia in the EaP. To contribute to this understanding, we researched experimentally to what extent various messages affect the preferences and beliefs of citizens in Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine. The underlying assumption of our study was that individual preferences for international cooperation are to some extent open to influence through framing, persuasion and information provision. Therefore, we investigated how different framing of international cooperation might influence citizens' preferences for cooperation with the EU and Russia. In doing so, we built on previous research about the soft power of the EU and Russia in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine. In practice, in the context of the experimental survey we presented to the participants a text with one of six frames highlighting the importance either of economy, security, values or identity and

measured the influence of each of these frames on preferences for international cooperation. In cooperation with EU-STRAT's local partners (SYMPA, IDIS, and UIPP), we collected near 600 responses from participants across the three countries.

Our main insight from the experiment is that thematic frames—frames that are general and not personalized or emotional—of international cooperation have only very limited potential to directly influence people's support for cooperation with the EU and/or Russia. However, the results of our analysis showed that such frames might be more potent in affecting the beliefs of people about the effects of cooperation with different partners on desired outcomes, such as economic benefits, security, and good governance. These beliefs as such are strong predictors of the preferences for international cooperation partners.

In addition, we analysed the relationship between the preferred media source of news and respondents' preferences for cooperation with the EU. We found that only in Belarus are there clear differences in average levels of support for the EU among consumers of different media: those who use media sources alternative to the state ones showed higher levels of support for closer cooperation with the EU. In Moldova and Ukraine some media types, including social media (when used as a source of political information), are associated with significant polarization of opinions about the cooperation.

Finally, we analysed the results of the survey to see what variables are associated with the support for cooperation with the EU. We found that the EU support in our sample is related to a mix of attitudinal and demographic variables. Most importantly, beliefs about the effects of cooperation have the strongest and most consistent associations with support. Those who believe that the EU brings economic benefits or contributes

¹ See Toshkov, D. Mazepus, H., and Dimitrova, A. (2018) 'What Kinds of Messages Can Influence Citizen Support for Closer Cooperation with the European Union? Evidence from the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood', *EU-STRAT Working Paper No. 9*, Berlin: Freie Universität Berlin.

to the security of their country, support the cooperation with the EU more. European identity and the importance of traditional values also have significant effects on support (positive and negative respectively). Once the beliefs are taken into account, political knowledge, interest and media use do not seem to matter much. Similarly, differences across demographic groups and even across countries, disappear once the beliefs about cooperation are accounted for.

In conclusion, taking into account the limitations of our sample and the scope of the study, our findings indicate that when communicating with the citizens of Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine, the EU should keep in mind three things:

(1) Thematic general frames have very limited effect on support for the cooperation with the EU and alternative types of frames should be considered;

(2) The Internet and social media as sources of political news seem to have a polarizing effect on support for cooperation with the EU in free media environments of Moldova and Ukraine and a positive effect in the constrained media environment of Belarus;

(3) The beliefs about the effects of cooperation with the EU in terms of economic and security benefits have the strongest association with the support for closer cooperation with the EU and might be a good starting point when developing communication strategies.

Workshop in Istanbul

Diverging Lines: Dialogue and Cooperation in Research on the Eastern Black Sea Region

On 8 June 2018, a EU-STRAT workshop organised by the University of St. Gallen and a Turkish partner, the Bogazici University, took place in Istanbul. About 15 participants from Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Ukraine, Belarus, Turkey as well as Norway and Switzerland came together to share their views on diverging lines in research on the Eastern part of the Black Sea region, which includes Turkey alongside the above mentioned post-Soviet states. The endeavour was part of EU-STRAT's engagement with the question of how scientific cooperation may bring European and local actors closer.

This EU-STRAT workshop reflected on persisting diverging lines in research approaches, concepts and in the assessment of results. The workshop participants discussed critically how international funding schemes influence the research topics, privilege experienced partners, are sometimes vulnerable to political tensions between partners, but are nevertheless important resources to increase knowledge and mutual understanding of developments in the countries of interest.

“Because of our own government failing to deliver, Moldova does not deserve an EU membership perspective” – An interview with Dumitru Alaiba

Dumitru Alaiba is Program Director at CPR Moldova, an NGO launched in Chişinău, and former Head of the Moldovan Prime Minister's Economic Council Secretariat (2013-16) – an initiative supported by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. The interview was conducted by Kamil Calus (OSW).



We are approaching the tenth anniversary of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) initiative. How would you assess these ten years for Moldova?

It is a good initiative, despite its criticism. The EaP was the instrument that intensified the dialogue between the EU and Moldova. In the end, it brought the Moldovan people tangible benefits, such as the right to travel freely to the EU, thanks to visa liberalization – something unimaginable a decade ago. The Association Agreement (AA) and DCFTA are a major opportunity to transform our country and bring it closer to EU standards. We saw progress in the reforms when the authorities were striving to achieve certain benchmarks like the AA or visa liberalization, when they felt the pressure. But now we are witnessing a roll-back. As long as the politicians had these incentives, they had to ‘behave’, or to at least ‘tick all the

boxes’, if not do reforms in reality. They never wanted true reform, but were careful to at least keep the appearance of their pro-Western and pro-European orientation. Now, when Moldova already has these ‘carrots’, the elites simply revert to their old ways, because they believe that what was obtained is actually irreversible. I would say that we have missed a good moment to push harder and the ‘positive pressure’ on these countries is now lacking. Today we are again (as back in 2000’s) at the point where society is infected with fear, and attacks on civil society happen more and more often. Its members are being persecuted and denigrated. This is not because of the EaP, this is in spite of it.

Even just five years ago, the EaP looked much more optimistic than now. There were a lot of expectations, hopes and praises; there were a lot of positive assessments of the reform process the EaP was promoting. Moldova was considered to be the pioneer, the frontrunner, a country which, among other states in the region – had “the highest mark for deep and sustainable democracy” (EaP index 2013). Today, in 2018, it’s impossible to even imagine someone saying something similar to this about Moldova. Our country failed to live up to the expectations and hopes that were put on it. Authorities are trying to mimic the success, but it’s simply not there. We are making huge steps backwards.

What, in your opinion, is the key reason for this situation?

Corruption. Everything leads to this one problem. It is, first of all, political corruption that we must blame for the stagnation of our country – when the elected simply do not do their job, because

they are busy maintaining and advancing their private interests. We can speak about corruption as the main impediment to our economic development. We can also see how it causes the rise of inequality and social tension. Corruption eats up the population's disposable income through exaggerated prices and tariffs, keeping the people poor. Corruption is the reason why our court system is broken. Corruption exacerbates the security threats Moldova faces. The financial crimes that took place in Moldova in 2014 were a major security threat caused by high-level corruption. Today, with the recent invalidation of a democratic vote on Chişinău's mayor by court decree, we must speak about corruption as a clear impediment to the functioning of the democratic institutions, and democracy in general.

So the EaP has failed to address the corruption in Moldova? Is this the fault of the programme itself?

I will be frank. While the biggest part of responsibility for this situation is ours, a part of responsibility should be accepted by Brussels for not being tougher on corruption, human rights infringement, and destruction of democratic institutions. For example, for ten years we knew very well that the National Bank of Moldova is captured and politically controlled. Same goes for the Prosecutor's Office or National Anticorruption Center or the court system. We witnessed a number of 'reforms' of these institutions, staff was changed, and the heads of institutions were replaced a few times. This hasn't changed the situation, and yet most outside of Moldova really wanted to believe that maybe it will work this time. The high degree of tolerance and acceptance of backsliding, one after another, is what brought us here. But you cannot really blame the EU. People really wanted to believe...

And the other part?

The other part of the blame is definitely on the Moldovan society. The administration and law enforcement malfunctioned, the political opposition failed to apply enough pressure, mass media was, and is, conveniently politicized,

while independent parts of civil society were too modest in their action to mobilize public pressure. Unfortunately, we have to admit that the traditional NGOs could have done better. They are very good at writing papers, making PowerPoint presentations, infographs, and reports, but not effectively promoting the values that they hold dear, actually reaching out to the people, campaigning openly, or protesting, if necessary. Too many are hiding behind neutrality and so-called constructiveness. As an NGO, you are supposed to stick to your values and fight for them if you have to, raising awareness in and outside of your country.

This is basically how I explain to myself how Moldova got to where it is today. Bad people acted and succeeded and good people failed. It was a slow process marked with a lot of denial of reality both inside and outside the country. Lately, it has dangerously accelerated...

What could be a new source of this 'positive pressure' you've mentioned? What could replace the old incentives?

We must create more pressure from inside, and we need help in doing that. And when it comes to the external partners it would be important they understand they should support the active part of civil society, which is ready to promote their values, and they should stand in their defence if necessary. Fortunately, the EU has already realized that there is a need to support these internal drivers of change. Lots of funds are being mobilized to support the free media and civil society, and that's good. New types of organizations and initiative groups are starting to appear. What we need now is to accelerate the social pressure to a maximum, for we don't have much time. With every extra day this system survives, it becomes more resilient.

How can the EaP be adjusted to address the needs of the region better?

There are advantages of seeing all countries grouped together in the EaP. Together, we stand a bigger chance of keeping the EaP high on the

EU's political agenda, while alone, we would be much less relevant. But, on the other hand, all the participating countries are different and it's really hard to come up with one common agenda for all of them. It looks a bit like a group of countries that are kept together by western partners not because of the clear intention to help them develop and reform, slowly converging to the same set of values, but in order to keep them relatively stable, relatively quiet, and prevent them from causing any significant problems. We, who live in these countries, are not happy with this perspective. We want more. The main question – where we are going – has not been answered clearly and unequivocally. We want to know we are heading towards the values we aspire to – EU values. We must be told the door will open when we knock.

But, in this context, what about membership perspective for joining the EU?

We had ten years to prove we deserved membership perspective. If we acted, we would have succeeded. But we didn't. Membership perspective for Moldova is now not on the table, first of all, because our government failed to deliver. Because of this government, and the previous, and the one before, and so on, Moldova has not deserved this perspective. External factors may vary, but we can only blame external factors when we know we did all that was in our power. Now, I think we should expect what is realistic. A European perspective for a country like Moldova, in which democracy is in decline, human rights and fundamental freedoms are under big threat, while corruption in full swing, would not be serious. The government turned away from the core European values, and we basically deprived our advocates in Brussels of any argument that would allow them to even raise this question. Of course I want my country to be in the EU. But at the same time I want it to be a very natural, organic process of transforming

our society. On a positive note, I am hopeful that soon we will have the right to dream about an EU membership perspective.

In the last ten years the EU's popularity in Moldova dropped sharply from around 75 % in 2009 to 40-45 % in 2018. What's the main reason for that? Can Brussels do something more in this regard?

I don't think Brussels has too much to do with the EU's popularity in Moldova today, and especially not ten years ago. There is significant improvement in the way that Brussels is promoting the EU and its values. The EU is not using its own propaganda, but resorts to facts and figures, which is always more difficult. I think that there is a different explanation for these popularity polls. First of all, in 2009 we had a different government – a de facto authoritarian regime, but nominally pro-European. Although the progressive part of the population was against it, that government was enjoying true support of around 50% of the population. While promoting EU integration (despite lack of real intentions to conduct reforms), it was indeed popular at the same time. Today's government also represents a de facto authoritarian regime, nominally pro-European, but is deeply unpopular, even illegitimate. Ten years ago, the EU's popularity was thanks to, and today it is in spite of, the politicians in government who promote it. This is how I explain this deviation to myself. I honestly could not say which one is better.

Another thing is of course Russia, which back in 2009 was not that aggressive in attacking EU values and the EU's popularity in EaP countries and promoting their idea of the 'Russian World' (*Russkii Mir*). But I always like to look first at the problems inside the country rather than blaming it all on external factors, while ignoring what we could have done ourselves.