![EU-STRAT — The EU and Eastern Partnership Countries — An Inside-Out Analysis and Strategic Assessment]

Opening Conference Report

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1.   Introduction

EU-STRAT's opening conference entitled 'The EU and Eastern Partnership Countries: An Inside-Out Analysis and Strategic Assessment' took place in Berlin from June 8 to June 10, 2016. The conference publically started the three-year research project and fulfilled three goals: first, it provided an opportunity to EU-STRAT's consortium partners to discuss EU-STRAT's research questions and agenda and exchange views on the state of the art of the literature, as well as on first ideas for EU-STRAT's theoretical frameworks and research designs. Second, the conference featured a public roundtable that discussed the current challenges for transforming the European neighbourhood and strategies to overcome them. Thirdly, both the discussions on EU-STRAT's research agenda and on current developments in the region allowed raising the awareness for EU-STRAT's academic and practical goals among the diverse conference participants, comprising students, academics, practitioners, and civil society actors.

The conference was opened with a panel discussion on the topic 'Looking Inside-out: Strategies for Transforming the Neighbourhood' at the Embassy of the Republic of Lithuania in Germany on June 8, 2016. It continued at the premises of the Hotel Angleterre in Berlin-Mitte with a conference programme that was organized around the themes of EU-STRAT's individual work packages (WPs).

This report outlines the major discussions, findings, and insights generated at EU-STRAT's kick-off conference. In order to do so, the next section provides an overview of the public roundtable, followed by brief summaries about key themes discussed in the individual work package sessions.

2.   Public Roundtable: Looking Inside-Out - Strategies for Transforming the Neighbourhood

EU-STRAT's kick-off conference was opened by a public roundtable that discussed the current challenges for transforming the neighbourhood, adopting EU-STRAT's 'inside-out perspective' that puts neighbourhood countries into the centre of analysis.

Moderated by Tanja A. Börzel, EU-STRAT's coordinator and Director of the Centre for European Integration at Freie Universität Berlin, the roundtable attracted more than 50 participants. It featured academics and civil society representatives, such as Elena Belokurova, engaged in the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum and Antoaneta Dimitrova, EU-STRAT's co-coordinator and associate professor at Leiden University. In addition, practitioners joined the panel, including Andrius Kubilius, former Prime Minister of Lithuania, Member of the Seimas and Member of the International Advisory Panel on Ukraine, as well as Igor Munteanu, former Ambassador of Moldova to the United States (US) and Canada, and Director of the Institute for Development and Social Initiatives in Moldova. The panel was completed by Emma Udwin, Deputy Head of the Cabinet of the Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations. The roundtable operated under Chatham House rules.

Tanja A. Börzel opened the panel discussion asking how effective neighbourhood strategies could be designed given that Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries differed substantially from the previous Central and Eastern European accession states (CEECs) and seemed to lack pro-reform elites to be empowered by the European Union (EU). The

panellists stressed that there was a lack of systematic research to identify important differences between CEECs and EaP countries. The sheer lack of a membership perspective, however, seemed overrated to explain reform absenteeism, as there was a considerable amount of EU initiatives and EU member states' interest in the region. The current incentive structure of the EU, however, did not fit the undemocratic elites in EaP countries creating substantial normative dissonances. One of the panellists additionally stressed that the EU's focus on support and incentives had to face the fact that 'you cannot buy sustainable reforms'. Countries could formally adopt a large variety of reforms, but in order to function properly, they must be in the country's interest in the first place - as seen in the case of anti-corruption reforms in Ukraine, for instance. Coherent support to reformists within a country's political and administrative apparatus was key, also to allow elites to show themselves as being successful. Apart of state actors, another panellist underlined the crucial role to be played by civil society to uphold contacts and foster understanding. In this vein, educational programmes between the EU and Russia showed that young Russians were still interested in the EU, despite the fact that the general public debate tended to frame EU influence as 'bad'.

Another panellist added that the uniform EU toolbox was ill-equipped to address highly diverse countries, such as Moldova, Ukraine or Belarus and reminded that CEECs had been a lot more similar to one another. EU strategies were likely to work differently in a country like Ukraine, in which the political process was shaped by oligarchs, than in Belarus, where it was firmly controlled by the president. In addition, Russia had also played a different role during CEECs' EU accession processes. In this vein, another panellist underlined that Russia's increasing assertiveness created a new environment in the neighbourhood that had the potential to shape the EU rather than the other way around. It was especially the prevalence of Russia's media channels which were also promoted by local elites that made it difficult to convey alternative viewpoints or messages within EaP countries.

Tanja A. Börzel then asked how the EU's pursuit of interests could be combined with its declared promotion of values in the region. In response to that question, one panellist stressed that the EU was not backpedalling on the values agenda, but that it would need to deviate from being concerned about governance issues only. It was franker to acknowledge that there were also other objectives at stake. This approach was also likely to make the European Neighbourhood Policy more effective, if it was possible to convey that the improvement of the rule of law was in the strategic interests of a country, for instance, to secure higher amounts of foreign direct investments. Another panellist recommended that the EU returned to its own origins by promoting functional cooperation, as the simple takeover of the acquis communautaire had not been a modernization program. Infrastructure investments, for instance, in which EU money was visibly spent, might help in this regard. The roundtable also discussed the role of Russia in the neighbourhood, arguing that Russia had increased the insecurity in the region and that it was seemingly suffering from a 'postcolonial hangover'. On a more positive note, another panellist remarked that Vladimir Putin would help Europe move to improve its foreign policy strategy in the region. And other panellists called on the EU not to give up on promoting human rights in Russia, as Russia was more than its President.

The discussion was ensued by a Q&A section that centred especially on the question of whether there was not an irresolvable conflict between the promotion of stability and democratization. One panellist noted that so far, the EU had often privileged stability over democratization. Another panellist also pointed to the fact that the refugee deal

with Turkey and the promise of visa liberalization had the potential to undermine the credibility of the strict conditionality that the EU had tied to visa liberalization in the case of EaP countries.

3. Work Package Sessions

3.1 WP2: Unpacking social orders in the Eastern Partnership countries

The aim of Work Package 2 is to provide a conceptual framework to EU-STRAT's inside-out-analysis of the Eastern neighbourhood in order to understand domestic incentive structures for stabilizing existing limited-access orders (LAOs) or supporting the transition to open-access orders (OAOs). It develops an analytical grid to understand the varieties of social orders in post-Soviet states, as well as their dynamics and embeddedness in interdependencies with the EU, Russia, and other actors in the region. Its contributors assess different forms of social orders that are marked by a lack of political and economic competition in the post-Soviet space and set out to identify the drivers that encourage or impede transformations towards more OAOs.

The session devoted to this work package was started with a presentation of a first proposal by Esther Ademmer, Julia Langbein, and Tanja A. Börzel of how to grasp different varieties of social orders in the EU's Eastern neighbourhood. In order to develop a more fine-grained understanding of LAOs in the post-Soviet space, they suggested to distinguish regime type and statehood as two major aspects of social orders that affect the performance of regimes, and hence, their stability and survival. The assumption was that the stability of LAOs is not exclusively based on repression and coercion. Depending on the degree of statehood and regime type, LAOs can develop forms of input and output legitimacy to generate social acceptance and voluntary compliance ensuring regime stability.

The input was then discussed by Antoaneta L. Dimitrova and Mitchell Orenstein. Dimitrova argued that it was challenging to map informal institutions empirically and within the duration of the project. She also critically reviewed some of the indicators put forward in this regard. In addition, Dimitrova underlined that it was crucial to consider the strategic planning capacity and autonomy of bureaucracies, and recommended including a public administration component into the concept of statehood. Mitchell Orenstein stressed the importance of departing from a twofold distinction that one may read into the conceptual framework of Douglass North et al. ('Violence and Social Orders: A Conceptual Framework for Interpreting Recorded Human History', 2009). North et al. are broadly distinguishing between LAOs and OAOs. He recommended clearly identifying how these concepts differed from more classic distinctions of democratic and authoritarian regimes and reminded of indicators that allow for a continuous assessment in this regard, such as Freedom House. He then also raised the question of how state-like the EaP countries actually were given their limited capacity and the context of frozen conflicts, as well as the importance of Russia in the region. In addition, Orenstein underlined that the context of these countries mattered, especially against the background of the rising geopolitical competition with Russia. In the subsequent discussion with the audience a number of conceptual issues to consider in this WP were raised, such as formal legality as a constitutive value, beliefs, as well as the conceptual distinction of legitimization strategies and their effectiveness. Overall, the discussion stressed the need for interaction among EU-STRAT's diverse work packages to shape a consistent conceptual framework for the entire project.

3.2   WP3: Interdependencies and regime instability in the EaP countries

A systematic and comparative analysis of interdependencies across various key sectors and countries over time is the overall objective of Work Package 3. Its contributors study the extent to which interdependencies affect the preferences, bargaining power, and strategies of key domestic actors in EaP countries, and thereby reinforce certain LAO or support transition to OAO. In the course of EU-STRAT, WP3 investigates whether interdependencies in one area (e.g. energy) affect interdependencies in another area (e.g. security) and how such overlaps are managed. Of interest are interdependencies of a variety of EaP countries, such as Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, and the South Caucasus countries, with various external actors, such as Russia, the EU, Turkey, and China.

During EU-STRAT's opening conference, Ildar Gazizullin and Rilka Dragneva-Lewers introduced the approach of Work Package 3 and gave an overview of some of its key deliverables. It was suggested to disaggregate the EU when studying interdependences, for instance, by scrutinizing more closely those countries that are also being studied in Work Package 4. In addition, a differentiation between high versus low value added sectors was considered helpful for the analyses included in this WP. Likewise, the nexus between trade and security, as well as energy, trade, and security was stressed as being important for understanding developments in the EU's Eastern neighbourhood. Contributors to this WP also aim at understanding how patterns of interdependencies affect domestic actor constellations in this region.

Esther Ademmer discussed the input given for this work package and underlined that it was important to unambiguously define the term interdependence in order to capture what exactly characterizes and establishes an interdependent relationship in the first place. She hinted at the differentiation between interconnectedness that may be established through trade or migration flows, for instance, and costly effects of transactions. The latter definition was employed in the classic literature on interdependence, as put forward by Keohane and Nye, for example. She also argued that it was key to conceptualize the diverse significances and natures of interdependence and suggested using the differentiation between sensitivity and vulnerability employed in the classic work on interdependence.

EU-STRAT partners and conference participants further discussed the conceptual and empirical tools that were needed for the analyses planned in WP3. The discussion underlined that the data collected in the course of this work package would need to enable its contributors to assess both the importance and extent of interdependencies in the region, as well as reasons for and ways in which countries make costly changes to them. Panellists and the audience also debated how to analyse the way bilateral, regional and global regimes, such as WTO or regional trade agreements, shape the nature of interdependencies in the region.

In addition, those engaged in the discussion stressed that it was important to understand the impact of changing interdependencies on the prevailing social orders in EaP countries. In this vein, it was suggested to closely analyse what kind of costs emerged for which actors in different interdependent relationships. Did costs from interdependence arise for parts of the dominant elite or for those outside of it? This WP needed to ask who the gatekeepers were that controlled the costs associated with interdependence. Relatedly, it was also argued that WP3 contributors should consider the public administrative capacity necessary to provide public goods and deal with

changes in interdependent relationships in the first place. It was also underlined that external actors may use and abuse interdependencies to affect stability and instability in EaP countries. In order to better understand the nature of interdependence others hinted at studying the ease with which certain commodity groups could be exported to other countries and how differences in this regard shaped regime stability.

Another major point of discussion centred on the need for coordination between different WPs. It was suggested that the time period analysed in WP3 should be chosen in coordination with WP2, while the choice of external actors should be consistent with WP4. Likewise, it was suggested that WP2, 3, and 4 closely coordinate the theoretical concepts that are being employed.

3.3   WP4: Approaches of the EU and its member states compared to other external actors

Since the Ukrainian crisis, it has been clear to outside observers that the EU is no longer the only game in town in its Eastern neighbourhood. EU-STRAT's WP4 addresses the fact that countries in the Eastern neighbourhood also interact with Russia, the US, Turkey, China, and various international organizations, including NATO, the IMF, the World Bank, OSCE, Council of Europe, and the Eurasian Economic Union. It investigates the opportunities and constraints that emerge for the EU's Eastern neighbourhood strategy and policies from the diversity of external actors, on the one hand, and the diversity of positions inside the EU, on the other. More specifically, this work package will analyse and compare the content, sources, and consequences of external actors' approaches towards the Eastern Partnership Initiative and the partner countries.

At the opening conference, Ramūnas Vilpišauskas started with a presentation of the WP's central research questions, such as: what are the key differences in policy preferences, approaches and strategies of external actors with regard to key sectors of the economy? How do the approaches and strategies of external actors relate to the EU's strategies and policies in the EaP countries? How do external actors seek to establish linkages to key domestic actors? To what extent do the policies of external actors create opportunities or constraints for various groups of domestic actors? And how susceptible are local societies in the EaP countries towards the goals and means underlying the strategies of the EU and other external actors?

Vilpišauskas also gave a brief tour through the literature that has so far dealt with related research questions such as the literature on Europeanisation and external governance. He also outlined that WP4 would combine these strands of literature with work on international relations, geopolitics, foreign policy, and regionalism; starting with a workshop in Vilnius in July 2016. This workshop would also further explore the framework employed in WP4 to analyse how external actors affect the incentive structures of those actors in the so-called dominant coalitions of EaP countries. Vilpišauskas also raised some of the key challenges that WP4 would need to deal with, such as making sure that the analysis coherently applies the overall 'inside-out' framework of the project; and dealing with external actors even though they represent the 'blind side' of the political economy framework of Douglass North that is otherwise prominently employed in this project.

Vilpišauskas' presentation was complemented with further input by Dirk Lehmkuhl and Rafal Sadowski. They added thoughts on whether external actors should be treated as 'black boxes' or whether the work package needed to

analytically acknowledge the diversity of actors within 'Russia', the 'EU', and elsewhere. Sadowski argued that the EU should not be treated as a unitary actor and that it was valuable to grasp the essence and effect of different bilateral policies of EU member states on EU policies towards its Eastern partners. He suggested specifically focusing on regional formats within the EU (Visegrád 4, Baltic 3). Dirk Lehmkuhl reminded of the challenge to conduct such an analysis for six EaP countries, but agreed that internal actors within the external actors should be included into the analysis, given that there are different players (not necessarily connected with the state), which act independently from their governments. The panel also raised the question of how to deal with the study of unintended consequences of external influences. Rafal Sadowski argued that they should be given specific attention because they might have an impact on the situation in EaP countries (for example, Russian involvement in the Syrian conflict and its consequences for relations with Turkey, as well as for Russia's image in the EaP).

Mitchell Orenstein then reflected on the panellists' input and argued that what was needed for WP4 was a synthetic framework that includes internal and external variables into the analysis in order to explain regime dynamics in EaP. He stressed that the currently popular transition framework focused mainly on internal factors, but that most of the regimes in the EaP could not exist without the external support either from the EU or Russia. Orenstein posited that a change in alliances caused regime change - triggering the question of what caused countries to change alliances in the first place. He also argued that it was security, not development that was the most important issue for the region - bad news for the EU since it lacked instruments in this respect. Softer incentives did not work because they could be counteracted by the use of security threats and made Russia's tools more viable.

Orenstein's comments were critically debated: Vilpišauskas remarked that this approach was at odds with the inside-out analysis enshrined in EU-STRAT's set-up and reminded that Ukraine, for instance, did not change alliances, but tried to balance multiple external actors for a long time. Other discussions with the audience raised the issue of how to identify strategies of a variety of diverse external actors, and how to distinguish between external actors' strategies and practices, including statements or other forms of soft power. Another recommendation from the audience was to analyse those EU member states that have a stake in and power over the EaP and might be pulling strings besides the scenes. And finally, the importance of closely looking into the specific actors that are addressed and targeted by external actors was underlined, hinting once again at EU-STRAT's inside-out perspective.

3.4 WP5: Soft power, discourses, and their reception: EU and Russia compared

The assumption that the EU is a 'soft power' plays a major role in inspiring countries to establish closer relations, yet it is currently being re-examined. One the one hand the EU's capacity to exercise soft power in its neighbourhood is constrained by multiple crises and the EU's inability and unwillingness to offer a membership perspective to neighbourhood countries. On the other hand, the EU's soft power is challenged by the rise of Russia and its own soft power with an array of instruments and ideas aiming to exercise its own attraction in the common neighbourhood.

EU-STRAT's Work Package 5 analyses the EU's soft power compared to Russia. It looks beyond generalisations about the rival narratives disseminated by the EU and Russia in the EaP countries to analyse what messages both sides actually project, through which channels, and with what effect on various audiences in Belarus, Ukraine, and Moldova. The work package will examine how values, norms and messages from the EU and Russia interact in

practice, employing a variety of research methods to generate original data in cooperation with partner institutions in Belarus, Ukraine, and Moldova. Initially the discourses that the EU and Russia seek to project in the region will be identified and the channels of communication that each actor employs will be mapped. Then the messages that are actually getting through to the general publics in Belarus, Ukraine, and Moldova will be identified through media monitoring. Using a variety of focus groups and survey experiments, Work Package 5 will also investigate audience reception to the EU's and Russia's discourses. The culmination will be a policy paper with recommendations on how to enhance the EU's soft power in the region, taking Russian narratives into account.

At the opening conference in Berlin, Antoaneta L. Dimitrova started her presentation by discussing the diverse ideas in the literature about what the EU represents in terms of normative or soft power. A soft power got others to want what it wanted by influencing other countries' preferences by means of ideology, culture, international institutions, and norms. A normative power was a power that placed its universal principles and norms (such as human rights or rule of law) at the centre of its relations with other countries. Dimitrova underlined that it was an illusion to think that only EU ideas, values and messages determine the EU's power of attractiveness. The EU also stood for achieving prosperity. Further, the EU might turn out as a hard power interested in security. The broad debate about soft coercion and the weaponization of culture were also noted in this context.

In their comments Elena Belokurova and Igor Munteanu raised important issues for consideration and questions for further discussion. Belokurova advised the researchers to distinguish between messages and channels. While the EU seemed to have a clear message, Russia conveyed diverse messages that could be picked up by various domestic actors. With regard to the channels used to convey these messages, the EU often resorted to official discourse, while Russia used popular means of mass media, such as TV, radio, movies etc. It is also important to consider in both cases the tools of public diplomacy, such as exchange programmes, promotion of educational programmes, youth forums etc. Moreover, Belokurova pointed towards the lack of homogeneity in who formulated messages from the EU or Russia, as well as the need to reflect the diversity of potential target audiences in the region and their reactions.

Igor Munteanu underlined that the WP should put emphasis on the instrumentality of discourses, when they mobilized support with ideas. He also pointed out that it was important to examine the recipients of soft power by identifying the targets and the reasons for their susceptibility to either the EU's or Russian discourses.

In the subsequent Q&A session some colleagues encouraged WP5 researchers to examine local anti-propaganda initiatives, for example in Ukraine. Others advised the authors to focus on specific case studies, such as the communication of the failure of visa facilitation: Did Russia convey the message that it welcomed refugees and workers, while the EU did not even welcome tourists? Further, the researchers were reminded to keep EU-STRAT's overall framework in mind and investigate the link between soft power and the stability of LAOs and/or chances for transition to OAOs. Emphasis should be put on understanding the extent to which soft power shaped domestic incentive structures and how the resonance in EaP countries with Russia's discourses affected the EU's soft power.

3.5 WP6: The Association Agreement and other engagement strategies for the neighbourhood

Incorporating insights from other work packages, the aim of WP6 is to provide a critical evaluation of how the new set of Association Agreements (AAs) that the EU has put in place with Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia affects domestic actor coalitions and sectors. The work package also examines complementary EU instruments, such as the European Endowment for Democracy or the proposed Energy Union, and explores alternative strategies for engagement with those EaP countries which currently do not have an interest in or prospects for further integration with the EU. It asks, inter alia, how the functioning and implementation of the AAs is shaped by domestic factors such as state capture or the preferences of rent-seeking elites. It also investigates the extent to which external (f)actors impact the implementation of the AAs and cooperation-oriented engagement frameworks.

At the kick-off conference, the discussion was opened with input by the EU-STRAT partners Rilka Dragneva-Lewers, Kataryna Wolczuk, and Klaudijus Maniokas. Dragneva-Lewers and Wolczuk presented the approach of WP6 and stressed that the diversity of instruments that the EU employs remained a challenge for mapping them coherently. They stressed that the deliverables of this WP focused on the AAs, but also went beyond these agreements only. Among the first research tasks was the analysis of the AAs as a broader framework, in terms of how they responded to domestic actors' needs, as well as to changes in the geopolitical environment. In addition, the WP contributors studied the dynamism inherent the AA process, seeking answers to the question of how the AAs were set up and whose problems and solutions were supposed to be addressed with this instrument.

Klaudijus Maniokas added that this WP was also important to understand the incentives that helped to introduce change under specific conditions and in specific sectors without the prospect of EU membership. In this regard, he asked whether the EU had the necessary capacity to transform Eastern neighbours into so-called OAOs marked by political and economic competition. He also reminded of some of the lessons of previous enlargement rounds, namely that adjustment costs were short term, but had previously especially emerged for smaller companies, while long-term benefits emerged for larger ones. A key challenge would hence be to learn how to shift these costs.

Andrius Kubilius and Iryna Solonenko discussed the input given by the work package leaders and co-leaders. Andrius Kubilius noted that the EaP would need to be modernized and asked what kind of engagement model could be implemented, especially in Ukraine, if an outright enlargement policy was not in the political cards of the EU for the time being. He wondered whether the EU's policy towards Greece might represent an alternative: a big financial package - like a Marshall plan - coupled with a very strict conditionality might help to initiate reform processes in Ukraine. Iryna Solonenko suggested clearly defining whether the focus of interest in this work package was about the implementation of the AAs or regime dynamics. In the latter case, she recommended looking at specific sectors and at how the EU impacted transformational processes, as most changes are domestically driven, but the EU and Russia could tip the balance towards or away from reforms. Solonenko also suggested studying specific actors that were strengthened or weakened in this process, especially in the civil society domain, mentioning consumer organizations or trade unions as examples. In the subsequent discussion with the audience, it was stressed once again that the question of how the AAs impacted social orders in the Eastern neighbourhood was crucial; also because

there were huge and potentially unrealistic expectations towards the Agreements as representing 'quick fixes' for the neighbours.

3.6   WP7: Scientific cooperation

Work Package 7 studies scientific cooperation as a major instrument of the EU to foster the exchange of ideas between citizens, companies and other societal actors in the EU. Its aim is to systematically analyse how scientific cooperation impacts the development of bilateral and multilateral ties and the support of stable liberal and democratic societies and vibrant economies in EaP countries. It asks how specific types of social orders in the EaP countries affect the ways in which EU research and academic mobility programmes are being carried out and how scientific cooperation can be designed to support socialization in democratic values.

At the kick-off conference, the work package leaders Ina Ramasheuskaya and Dimiter Toshkov briefly presented the main research questions, approaches, and specific tasks to be fulfilled by Work Package 7 to answer its research questions. The presentation outlined that this WP combined various methodological approaches, such as document analysis, interviews with science policy-makers, scientists, and scientific project managers in the EaP countries, as well as bibliometric analysis. The WP co-leaders also stressed once again that scientific cooperation was a major channel to transform societies in a bottom-up manner and that WP7 had the goal to investigate whether this channel was working or not in the Eastern neighbourhood.

The input was discussed by Honorata Mazepus who outlined some of the main challenges of this WP: she asked about the data availability for mapping bilateral cooperation and suggested following up careers of those engaged in scientific cooperation programmes to get an idea of its societal impact. She also mentioned that it might be worthwhile to analyse the impact on the EU in terms of brain gain, for instance. In the subsequent discussion with the audience, it was mentioned that capacity-building might be important to enable different communities to respond to scientific cooperation programmes in the first place, and that there could be a substantial time lag in the effect of scientific cooperation on domestic societies and values. Others stressed that it was highly interesting to study and understand who exactly got engaged and why, as there was a substantial difference between relatively strong cooperation in natural science, as opposed to rather weak cooperation on humanities and social sciences in the case of Belarus, for instance. Overall, the work package was praised for its ambitions, while stressing the need to focus on its goals, especially to study how scientific cooperation might change incentive structures of dominant coalitions in EaP countries.

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.