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Dear friends and colleagues,

After three years, our research project came to a close on 30 April 2019. Through numerous publications and events, we succeeded in our main ambition of providing an inside-out analysis and strategic assessment of the links between the European Union (EU) and Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries. Perhaps more importantly, we built connections across Eastern and Western Europe through challenging but exciting collaborative work. Our partners were based in the Netherlands, Moldova, Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, and Switzerland. The research allowed us to do study trips to growing players in the neighbourhood, such as Turkey and China, and gave us the opportunity to gather in Berlin, Vilnius, Amsterdam, the Hague, Chişinău, Florence, Kyiv, and Minsk, to name a few! All in all, we were fortunate enough to expand our horizons and networks over these three years.

The research in our project was framed by two main questions: First, why has the EU fallen short of creating peace, prosperity and stability in its Eastern neighbourhood? And second, what can be done to strengthen the EU's transformative power in supporting political and economic change in the six EaP countries? We present a new perspective on transition in the post-Soviet region and the role that the EU plays in this through six areas of research, the key findings of which are shared in this newsletter.

On 11-12 April, Leiden University hosted our Final Conference in the Hague. Over two days, we welcomed EU-STRAT partners as well as external speakers from the European Commission, Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Centre for European Policy Studies, amongst others. After a keynote speech from Peter Wagner of the Commission's Support Group for Ukraine, we dove into six panels on EU-STRAT's recent research and a roundtable on the future of EU-EaP cooperation. This newsletter provides an overview of the topics that were covered at the conference, which ranged from how interdependencies affect regime stability to the EU's strategies for engagement in the region.

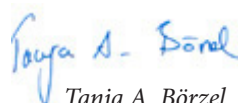
Another article in this newsletter reports on a policy briefing that was hosted earlier this year by our partner institute in Minsk, the School of Young Managers in Public Administration (SYMPA). This briefing focused on comparing state capacity in Belarus and Ukraine.

Lastly, our final policy comment sheds light on the recent roller coaster of developments in Moldova. It looks at the role of the EU, United States, and Russia in bringing an unusual coalition to power and examines the road ahead. How sustainable is the new coalition and what are the implications of this for reform? Freshly returned from a study trip to Moldova, Kamil Caşu (Centre for Eastern Studies) shares his views.

Over the last three years, we published 19 working papers, 8 policy briefs, and a range of reports, videos, and policy comments. While our project may have officially ended, it has fostered a wealth of findings to build on in the future, not to mention forthcoming publications. We have more policy briefs and working papers on the way, with an upcoming journal Special Issue in *East European Politics*.

Please enjoy this final edition and thanks for your support throughout our project. We hope to keep the dialogue going for years to come.

Sincerely,



Tanja A. Börzel
Project Coordinator



Antoaneta Dimitrova
Project Co-coordinator



EU-STRAT Final Conference in The Hague

By Matt Frear and Nina Onopriyчук (Leiden University)

EU-STRAT's co-coordinator Leiden University (LU) hosted the two-day EU-STRAT Final Conference in The Hague on 11-12 April 2019. The conference was the final major event of the three-year Horizon 2020 international research project and provided an opportunity to present the project's inside-out analysis and strategic assessment of the links between the European Union (EU) and Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries.



The conference opened with a keynote speech by Peter Wagner, Head of the Support Group for Ukraine at the European Commission. He noted that the broad scope of the Association Agreement (AA) provided opportunities for the country, but also presented challenges in implementing reforms. Despite these challenges, he argued, the EU has promoted major reforms by supporting the efforts of reform-oriented members of the Ukrainian government and played a leading role in the public administration reform. Peter Wagner proposed that finding innovative approaches where possible in applying some of the existing reform instruments and attracting the best

national talents is the key to success for achieving change in Ukraine. He concluded that the EU is ready to stand by its partner countries in their ongoing reform efforts, noting that sustained and effective reform progress is key to the continued success of the EaP.

Limited Access Orders, statehood and state capacity

Esther Ademmer (Kiel University [CAU] and Kiel Institute for the World Economy [IfW]) opened the first panel with a presentation on a typology of limited access orders (LAOs) building on North, Wallis, and Weingast's framework. It identifies four different types of LAOs, characterized by limited competition for political and economic resources and dominant elites controlling access to those resources in post-Soviet states. Cases highlighting the four types of LAOs included Belarus as an example of 'balanced closure', Armenia as an example of 'unbalanced closure', and Georgia as a case of 'unbalanced openness' until 2007, then moving towards 'balanced openness'. Honorata Mazepus (LU) and Tatsiana Chulitskaya (School of Young Managers in Public Administration [SYMPA] and European Humanities University) then presented the effects of state capacity on LAOs, using the examples of Belarus and Ukraine. They proposed that the relationship between regime stability and state capacity could be divided into two aspects:



universalizing and stabilizing. The former – implying universal, impartial and impersonal procedures and rules – has the potential to support change towards a more open access order, while the latter has a stabilizing effect, for both limited and open access orders. In her comments, Iryna Solonenko (European University Viadrina and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Auswärtige Politik) suggested looking at further conceptual links between the findings, especially in terms of the role of state capacity for LAOs.

Understanding the (in)stability of domestic regimes: How domestic actor constellations are strengthened or weakened by patterns of interdependencies

The second session dealt with the (in)stability of domestic regimes. Rilka Dragneva (University of Birmingham [UoB]) and Laure Delcour (Fondation Maison des Sciences de l'homme [FMSH]) presented how international regimes shape interdependencies. Dragneva explained that



interdependencies can be sensitive to the volume of flows and costs of interruption, as well as vulnerable to costs of adjustment. How the scope, depth, bindingness and exclusivity of a regime can contribute to interdependencies was taken into account. They looked at vertical overlaps (bilateral, regional, multilateral) and horizontal overlaps (issue linkage). Dragneva and Delcour concluded that overall, legal and governance features of the established regime between Russia and members of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) challenge the EU's ability to support reforms. Difficulties come from the lack of predictable rule-based

regimes, politicized or personalized modes of interaction and the incentives of elites, complex proprietary patterns, problematic integration in international regimes, and the securitization of interdependence.



Laure Delcour (FMSH) and Marta Jaroszewicz (Centre for Eastern Studies [OSW]) examined the role of bilateral relations between the EaP countries. Based on their research on Belarus's, Moldova's and Ukraine's policy goals *vis-à-vis* Russia, they discussed the concepts of 'bandwagoning' by accommodating the interests of a hegemon, balancing against the dominance of a hegemon, and hedging through either empowering or engrafting. Using the example of Ukraine and Moldova, they underlined that the potential for cooperation on curtailing Russia's influence has not necessarily been realized yet, nor sought out as a strategic priority. Katharina Hoffman (University of St. Gallen [UNISG]) and Esther Ademmer (CAU and IfW) looked at the causal mechanisms behind linkages and ways in which external regimes seek to exert influence through the domestic empowerment of actors. Drawing on cases in the EaP countries, they showed that the degree to which either the EU or Russia can actually inflict costs (through patronage ties, sanctions, crisis support, or elite-learning) depends on the sensitivity and vulnerability of countries to these linkages.

The discussant, Tetiana Kostiuhenko (National University of Kyiv Mohyla Academy), suggested the possibility of using a network paradigm in the future to further illustrate and develop these findings and to find out whether the macro level is

reflected at the micro level with business networks or patronage ties in specific sectors such as energy.

Comparing the approaches and strategies of the EU to other external actors' engagement in the EaP and analysing the susceptibility of domestic actors towards external actors' approaches

Katharina Hoffmann and Ole Frahm (both UNISG) outlined their research on the external diffusion of regime-related principles by Turkey in four cases from the region: Azerbaijan, Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia. They showed that some Turkish business actors lobby for reforms or improving standards in these countries, suggesting that certain actors from hybrid regimes with regional influence may serve the EU as partners in the promotion of economic openness in third countries. Jakub Jakóbowski (OSW) then presented China's strategies towards EaP countries through the cases of Belarus and Ukraine. His research showed that, on the one hand, China has little impact on the political and economic order in Ukraine, as it is currently limiting its engagement there following the Revolution of Dignity. On the other hand, it has facilitated moderate economic opening in Belarus, potentially contributing to a more unbalanced LAO. Marta Jaroszewicz (OSW) and Elyssa Shea



(Freie Universität Berlin [FUB]) presented their analysis of the strategies of security actors towards EaP countries. Focusing on Ukraine, they looked at NATO's, the EU's, and the OSCE's security assistance to the country and concluded that the



different approaches taken by these actors could facilitate the opening of the LAO, but only over time. Laurynas Jonavičius and Dovile Jakniūnaite (both Vilnius University [VU]) presented their research on the susceptibility of domestic actors towards external actors' approaches, arguing that it highly depended on interdependencies. They suggested that Russia is able to play a dominant role in Belarus's economic, energy and security affairs. The EU, however, has the potential to offer support for Belarusian sovereignty in the face of increasing Russian aggression. Recent tensions between Minsk and Moscow could thus be considered a 'barred' window of opportunity for the EU, with ongoing Russian-Belarusian interdependencies posing some constraint.

Steven Blockmans (Centre for European Policy Studies) offered comments on the session. He noted how the methodological deficiencies of North et al. were complemented by the research of the project and highlighted the great potential for further research, especially with regard to China's involvement in the area. In response to a question about the conditions under which opening can be promoted during wartime, the panellists contended that it is possible to push for reform during wartime as long as some flexibility is offered and the external actors coordinate their action.

Effects of Limited Access Orders on science policy and scientific cooperation

The second day of the EU-STRAT conference kicked-off with a presentation on the effects of LAOs on science policy and scientific cooperation

by Dimitar Toshkov (LU, European University Institute), Ina Ramasheuskaia and Natallia Rabava (both SYMPA). They showed that the science policy process in Belarus has been highly centralized and focused on commercializing science. In Belarus, emphasis has been laid on the 'hard sciences', especially since less profitable social sciences might influence the state's political ideology. By contrast, the LAOs in Ukraine and Moldova allow for more pluralism in science. Based on the similarity of some of the findings in all three countries, Elena Belokurova (German-Russian Exchange in St. Petersburg and EU-Russia Civil Society Forum), wondered whether legacies of the past were more important than the type of LAO.

Implementing the Association Agreements

Klaudijus Maniokas (European Social, Legal and Economic Projects [ESTEP]) presented research on the legal harmonization in the EaP countries that have concluded an AA with the EU. He showed that the transposition and implementation of harmonization is patchy, but better than expected, because of an ongoing informal adjustment to the AAs that reduces the scope of the commitments. He nevertheless underlined that AA-related rules are not at the core of government policy in any of

Ukrainian regulators are still insufficiently independent and competent. She suggested the EU needs to promote reform of regulatory bodies to help ensure the implementation of reforms. Focusing on Ukraine since 2008, Ildar Gazizulin



(Ukrainian Institute for Public Policy [UIPP]) then discussed whether trade liberalization had helped to consolidate the position of rent-seeking elites. He showed that trade liberalization between the EU and Ukraine has had some positive effects on the agrifood sector, the ownership structure of which is more diverse than that of the other key sectors. However, he underlined that it has primarily benefited big firms owned by members of both the dominant and rival elites.



these countries. Laure Delcour (FMSH) examined the extent to which independent regulatory bodies in charge of implementing the AAs are affected by state capture. Her research showed that contrarily to their Georgian counterparts, Moldovan and

Rilka Dragneva (UoB) addressed the impact of the interdependence with Russia on the implementation of the AAs. She argued that the AA countries differ in the embeddedness of their EU choice and their resilience to dependence on Russia and that the EU thus needs to examine and understand the potential geopolitical consequences of the AAs. The discussant, Wojciech Konończuk (OSW) wondered whether the main threat to the AAs was not Russia but rather the low quality of the ruling elites in the AA countries. A question was posed whether AA rules were relevant or affordable for the societies in question. The panellists suggested that some reforms may benefit the EaP countries more than harmonization with the *acquis*, yet the EU's overall role in reform was crucial.

Developing EU engagement strategies in the EaP region

Kataryna Wolczuk (UoB) presented findings evaluating EU assistance for the implementation of the AAs. She noted the difference between EU support in Georgia (mainly technical assistance) and the EU's dual track approach in Moldova and Ukraine (technical assistance and institution (re-)building). She further highlighted



desynchronization in the three countries: While AA implementation is moving ahead, state capacity to back it up is still lagging behind. She noted that building capacity is not only a massive challenge for AA countries, but also for the EU itself as it would require better coordination of the AA process inside the EU. Antoaneta Dimitrova (LU) then discussed the lessons learned from the EU's Eastern enlargement. She suggested that one lesson that tends to overshadow the others is that conditionality works, especially with an accession perspective. She argued that this shifts the focus away from reforms that could be supported and that would be crucial to implement the complex AAs, such as institution building

for economic development or state capacity. Dimitrova concluded that many issues remain unresolved when it comes to matching domestic developmental needs in AA countries to the need to implement an all-encompassing set of EU rules.

Finally, Matthew Frear (LU) focused on the EU's alternative and complementary strategies, more precisely on perspectives from Belarus and Moldova on the recent '20 Deliverables for 2020' initiative. He argued that if the project is to succeed, the EU has to work with the incumbent authorities, but must engage with other actors (civil society, local and regional authorities) as well. He noted the EU had to be wary of deliverables being fulfilled in a manner that still limited citizens' access to politics or business and instead merely benefited the supporters of the incumbent regimes. Margarita Balmaceda (Seton Hall and Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute) praised the panellists for highlighting how decisions and choices made by the EU could work in some cases, but not in others, and suggested that some EU thinking could be better matched to recent developments. She further argued that reforms require political will on both sides.



Roundtable: The future possibilities of EU-EaP cooperation and challenges for policy makers and researchers

By Matt Frear and Nina Onopriychuk (Leiden University)

The conference culminated with a roundtable on the future possibilities for EU–EaP cooperation. Elyssa Shea (FUB) began by explaining the approach taken by EU-STRAT to develop scenarios for EaP countries. Natallia Rabava (SYMPA) outlined two pessimistic scenarios for Belarus. These were a status quo scenario that might involve some economic reforms, but would not change the ruling system overall, and a scenario of stronger closure, in which resources are further restricted.

Kamil Całus (OSW) did not see opening or the status quo as possible options for Moldova. Instead, the scenarios foresaw either political or economic closure for Moldova due to a range of ongoing trends that the EU was largely unable to counteract. Klaudijus Maniokas (ESTEP) offered



two divergent scenarios for Ukraine. One would see gradual opening of the domestic social order, while the other would see a gradual closure.

Once the discussion was opened, Iryna Solonenko (European University Viadrina and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Auswärtige Politik) mentioned that it is important for the EU to develop the capacity to react swiftly on the ground, and that this could have an effect in terms of facilitating opening or preventing closure in EaP countries. Wojciech Konończuk (OSW) stressed that the EU should be more openly critical of domestic elites that were pro-European but corrupt. Johanneke de Hoogh, the Special Representative for the Eastern Partnership of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands stated that EU member states engaged with EaP partners to varying degrees and that they had different positions on how to pursue these relations. She suggested that the EaP agenda will need a new political narrative, but finding common ground between the 34 countries of the EU and EaP remains a challenge.



Policy Briefing on state capacity in Minsk

By Natallia Rabava and Ina Ramasheuskaya (School of Young Managers in Public Administration)

On 17 January 2019 in Minsk, the School of Young Managers in Public Administration (SYMPA) organized a EU-STRAT policy briefing focused on comparing state capacity in Belarus and Ukraine. Participants of the event represented several state institutions, such as the Ministry of Economy and Minsk City Council, as well as international organizations like the UNDP. Also represented were national NGOs and civic initiatives, research institutions, such as the Economic Institute of the National Academy of Sciences and Research Institute of the Ministry of Economy, in addition to private businesses and academia. The event was also attended by media representatives, including Belapan news agency and BelSat TV company.

Natallia Rabava, the Founding Director of SYMPA, introduced EU-STRAT and the project's research on state capacity. She was joined by Dr. Antoaneta Dimitrova, Dr. Honorata Mazepus (Leiden University), Dr. Tatsiana Chulitsakaya (European Humanities University, SYMPA) and Ina Ramasheuskaya (SYMPA). Antoaneta Dimitrova highlighted the importance of statehood and state capacity for post-Soviet states, and Belarus and Ukraine in particular, as well as how the EU and international organizations approach relations with them. Honorata Mazepus discussed how the project conceptualized and operationalized state capacity: at the level of development of the public administration system (administrative capacity), and at the level of public services provided to citizens.

Tatsiana Chulitskaya explained how these concepts were applied in the case of Belarus. Administrative capacity was described as largely inherited from Soviet times, functioning relatively well but in a very politicized manner. The quality of public services was evaluated as quite high as compared to other countries in the region. At the same time, these services may have different levels of development or quality. For example, the land cadaster (public record of real estate) was quite highly rated, indicators for education and health care (such as literacy and life expectancy)

were also rather good, but the quality of these services is under question. Regional cohesion was also seen as quite 'normal' in terms of differences between regions (oblasts) of Belarus, although the discrepancy between urban vs. rural and the capital vs. other cities appears to be increasing. Ina Ramasheuskaya presented the case of Ukraine. Unlike Belarus, Ukraine's public administration system was reformed several times since the breakdown of the USSR. After 2014, the new government declared the goal of developing the system in accordance with democratic principles and 'best practices'. In this sense, it has more potential than the unreformed Belarusian administrative state. However, public services are in general less developed than in Belarus, and regional cohesion is also a big challenge.



Participants discussed other indicators and instruments that could be used in the future to assess the services provided by the state. EU-STRAT only took into account the transport infrastructure, while other aspects were not assessed. Another point made was that, when it comes to the land cadaster, a large percentage of land is owned by the state in Belarus, and there is almost no land in general circulation. So, it is comparably easy to centralize, digitalize and maintain the land cadaster, but its usefulness is under question. Lastly, a better 'baseline' or normative point for comparison would be useful to understand which system is more effective and how much the levels of development of a particular service differ.

Unpacking social orders in Eastern Partnership countries

By Tanja A. Börzel (Freie Universität Berlin) and Antoaneta Dimitrova (Leiden University)

To unpack social orders, the leading team at FUB together with all the teams and scholars of the project set out to further develop and apply the broad theoretical framework by North et al. to the EaP countries. The framework was subsequently used to explain the dynamics of political, economic and societal processes in the region. Developing new insights on political and economic orders in the region, founded on theory guided research, was an important contribution to the whole project. Building on extensive literature reviews, new frameworks, typologies and conceptualizations were developed for different types of regimes based on differential access to economic and political resources and – separately – for components of state capacity.

The FUB team incorporated insights from research on political and economic regime typologies and dynamics into the approach of North et al. to overcome the frequent separation of the study of political and economic institutions. They developed a measurement of political and economic access, and subsequently applied it to EaP countries. They demonstrated that countries of the EaP differ substantially in the way they restrict access to political and economic resources and showed that four distinct types of orders emerge in that respect. This work allowed for some theorizing about the changes needed to move countries associated with each type of order toward more openness or closure. Building on this and further EU-STRAT work, specific policy recommendations for the EU were developed, suggesting differentiated ways of how to deal with EaP countries that belong to different types of social orders.

Using the same approach of creating a new framework and set of indicators based on a broad literature review, the LU team developed an assessment tool of state capacity in a post-communist context, which was then used to evaluate state capacity in Belarus and Ukraine. The comparison was based on extensive empirical work by the teams in Belarus and Ukraine and led to broad insights on the relationship between regime

stability and state capacity, proposing that it could be divided into two broad aspects: universalizing and stabilizing. The former (e.g. capacity to administer) – implying universal, impartial and impersonal procedures and rules – has the potential to support change towards a more open access order, while the latter (e.g. capacity to deliver basic goods and services) has a stabilizing effect, for closed as well as open access orders. During a policy briefing in Minsk in January 2019, the results were discussed with civil servants, NGOs and representatives of the European Commission delegation in Minsk. All stakeholders were interested in the new assessment model, while the discussion with NGOs provided further insights on aspects of state capacity.

Going further in depth, we mapped networks between politicians, officials and entrepreneurs in three regions of Ukraine. Zooming in to the regional level provided some understanding of the dynamics of existing networks and their different shape in different settings: hierarchical and multiple networks were found. These different networks present a clear picture of limited or partly open orders at the regional level that might be related, if not directly, to citizen satisfaction with public service provision, which differs considerably in the three investigated regions.

Last, but not least, Vilnius University, ESTEP, IDIS, FUB and LU worked on different scenarios for the future political and economic developments in the EaP countries, with a view to what tools the EU could apply to promote opening or avoid further closure. The scenarios that emerged remained true to the project's inside-out approach and highlighted worrying trends in Moldova, stagnation in Belarus and some potential for opening in Ukraine. Ultimately, we concluded that despite concerning trends overall and the EU's own constraints in moving further in relations with the region, the tools currently at the EU's disposal can be applied in a robust and targeted manner to avoid negative developments, especially where power asymmetries are providing an advantage.

Bilateral, regional and global interdependencies and regime (in)stability in the EaP countries

By Ildar Gazizullin (Ukrainian Institute for Public Policy)

We provided a comparative analysis of bilateral, regional, and global interdependencies across key areas such as trade, energy, migration and security, amongst the EaP countries. Knowledge of the implications of such (inter)dependencies helps identify what incentives domestic elites and societies face, on the one hand, and the role that the European Union (EU) and other external actors play in promoting or impairing change, on the other hand. A database on the extent and significance of interdependencies has been made available on our website.

Our research found that the formal and informal practices and vested interests of the local elites often end up as key explanatory factors for varied domestic responses to interdependencies with the EU or Russia. Russia is agile in exploiting existing interdependencies with EaP countries and applying issue-linkage strategies. For example, security has emerged as Russia's preferred leverage and has repeatedly been used in connection to energy or trade. Security interdependencies with Russia have only expanded since the independence of the EaP countries.

By contrast, we found that the EU has made limited (if any) use of issue-linkage strategies. Instead, the EU relies upon sector-specific conditionality (e.g. macro-financial assistance in return for anti-corruption reforms). Yet, the EU's ability to offer incentives and rewards for compliance with its targets often evolves in conjunction with Russia's strategies and the EaP elites' determination to change their policies. Furthermore, it contrasts with Russia's governance approach to the region, which is premised on the use of non-transparent schemes, allowing significant discretion. In order for the EaP countries to decrease their sensitivity to Russia's policies, the EU has to offer not only rule-dense regimes, providing extensive regulatory and legislative alignment, but also policy alternatives. These EU alternatives need to address the extent to which EaP countries feel costly effects due to

changes in Russia's policies, such as in the energy sector. An analysis we performed on four cases of interdependencies (Moldova-Ukraine, Ukraine-Belarus, Belarus-China, and Azerbaijan-Turkey) showed that relationships between EaP countries are often weak: there are hardly any significant trade, energy, migration flows and security interactions that tie the EaP countries together. And the links that do exist tend to be determined by the local elites, who seek to maximize their own benefits and/or hedge their risks. Furthermore, the legacy of the Soviet economic system continues to undermine countries' efforts in addressing such risks effectively. Therefore, the nature of partnerships between the EaP countries, but also those held with Turkey or China, are ad hoc and do not seem to be sustainable.

Four mechanisms linking different types of domestic social orders and interdependences were also identified in the EaP countries: patronage (by the neighbouring country/elite), crisis support (such as loans), (economic) sanctions, and elite-learning (imitating practices of the neighbouring elites). The effect of each of these linkage mechanisms on regime (in)stability varies, depending on the initial degree of political and economic access and the type of interdependencies.

Overall, dependence on Russia remains significant for all EaP countries. A number of factors aggravate this dependence, such as weak formal regimes, the personalization of dependence, weak integration in international regimes, and the securitization of interdependence. Given such context, the EU needs to better diagnose stakeholder preferences, while keeping the emphasis on good governance and civil society participation in the policy process. EaP countries continue to require more responsive assistance with the costs of policy implementation and should be supported in accessing rule-based, predictable international regimes, such as the World Trade Organization dispute settlement process.

The approaches and strategies of the EU and other external actors

By Ramūnas Vilpišauskas (Vilnius University) and Elyssa Shea (Freie Universität Berlin)

The European Union (EU)'s EaP policy targets a group of countries that interact with other external actors, such as Russia, the United States (US), China, Turkey, NATO, or International Financial Institutions (IFIs). Our research has contributed to enhancing the understanding of how the EU interacts with these actors in the EaP countries as well as how domestic actors within EaP countries react to external influences in terms of their incentives to transform their political and economic institutions towards greater openness.

We found that the various EaP countries and processes within them occupy different strategic importance for each external actor. Based on a conceptual framework we developed to analyse the strategies of external actors, we were able to put these actors into three groups: those that support transformation, those that support the maintenance of societies with limited political and economic access, and those that appear ambivalent towards transformation. Western actors like the EU, the US, NATO, and IFIs support reform measures for transition in EaP countries, at times coordinating their approaches. Despite fears that the Trump presidency might alter that shape of the US democracy promotion in the Eastern neighbourhood, our research found that no major shifts in strategy have occurred thus far as compared to the prior administration. In the second grouping, Russia supports the perpetuation of limited access societies in the EaP through its efforts to promote regime stability and maintenance of support for ruling elites responsive to its demands. Meanwhile, China was characterized as more ambivalent about transition reforms than expected. On the one hand, by prioritizing business-like relations with ruling elites, it indirectly contributes to regime stability. On the other, China's activity in the region may also contribute to general opening of regional economies and promote a more

competitive regulatory environment. Our findings supported that Turkey is also an ambivalent player, in that it promotes both openness and closure of regimes. Despite moving towards authoritarianism domestically, some Turkish actors have promoted values and practices of competitive openness in the EaP region.

Our research also sought to assess whether, to what extent, and under what conditions, external actors can influence domestic processes in EaP countries. We found that the domestic structures of dominant coalitions and patterns of interdependencies with external actors differ in Belarus and Ukraine, resulting in different levels of influence of interdependencies on domestic coalitions. In Belarus, dominant elites around the president prefer to cooperate with external actors that do not affect the stability of the regime or that contribute to the preservation of 'the social contract' between ruling elites and population. Cooperation with the EU is pragmatic but limited to technical issues, while personalized and informal relations with Russian authorities as well as interdependence with Russia increases the susceptibility of domestic elites to its influence, at least in the short-term. In Ukraine, the effectiveness of reforms proposed by Western actors has depended on the state of the Ukrainian economy and the intensity of the Donbass conflict: the deeper the economic crisis and the more intense the military activity in Eastern Ukraine, the greater the Ukrainian elite's susceptibility to carrying out reforms. The West's and the EU's depletion of positive conditionality was another contributing factor. Finally, we found that the effectiveness of reforms in specific sectors depended on the presence of domestic actors partnering with Western external actors. Strong interest groups that opposed reforms in specific sectors may have had a negative influence on the reform implementation process.

Soft power, discourses and their reception: Comparing the EU and Russia

By Honorata Mazepus (Leiden University)

Nowadays, the EU's communications towards neighbouring states do not land in a neutral context, but in a contested and turbulent regional and international environment. In this environment new ways of spreading (mis-)information via TV channels, social media and paid contributors ('trolls') combine with old-style propaganda aiming to mislead and distort actual news. The EU's soft power in its neighbourhood is challenged by Russia's policy towards neighbouring countries, its communication strategy and the spread of disinformation in Europe and further abroad.

Our project delivered several important insights concerning the EU's portrayal in Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine and citizens' perceptions of both the EU and Russia as important external actors. Our findings show that the EU's recent strategy of differentiating its approach towards individual Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries is reflected well in its official communications. However, the analysis of the style and format of local messages and citizen responses to the way the EU communicates at present suggests that these communications can be further enhanced by making them more personal and targeting specific benefits of EU assistance for citizens and groups.

Following the evening news in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine for four months in 2017, we gathered unique data about how the EU is represented on major domestic TV news channels. Our analysis of the news showed several clear trends. First, the EU as a whole is mentioned much less frequently than its individual member states. Nevertheless, the number of all mentions of the EU and EU member states is higher than the number of mentions of Russia in the news items we analysed. Second, the mix of themes in the context of which the EU and member states are discussed is different in each country. In Belarus, the EU received much less coverage linking it to the economy than Russia did. In Moldova, the EU and its member states were

more frequently present in the economic news than Russia. The Moldovan news emphasized the EU's role in the country's economic and political reforms. In Ukraine, the EU member states were mentioned most frequently in news items discussing security. EU member states were also frequently mentioned in news items presenting international events and agreements in which the Union plays a role. Third, the news about the EU provides prevalently general information about international meetings and events.

Complementing these analyses, we used survey experiments to study whether particular frames about international cooperation can influence citizens' preferences for cooperation with the EU and Russia. We found that frames about international cooperation that are general and not personalized or emotional—typical frames found both in the EC Delegations' communications and in the national news—have only very limited potential to directly influence people's support for cooperation with the EU. Moreover, we found that beliefs about the effects of cooperation have the strongest and most consistent associations with support for the EU or Russia. Those who believe that the EU brings economic benefits or contributes to the security and good governance of their country, support cooperation with the EU more.

Our main conclusions were that for the EU to increase its soft power through communications, its messages need to focus on the tangible benefits of cooperation with the EU for the citizens in the EaP countries in the spheres of economy, security and governance. Also, the frames used to present cooperation should be more personalized, emotional, and contain human interest stories. Finally, to enhance the visibility of the EU in the EaP countries, the messages need to capitalize on the interest of the news outlets in stories about the member states.

Making the Association Agreements work: How the EU can support transformation in the Eastern Partnership region

By Rilka Dragneva-Lewers (University of Birmingham)

While the European Union (EU) has a long record of engagement in the post-Soviet region, its move to sign Association Agreements (AAs) with Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia represents a fundamentally new step. While the AAs do not promise membership in the EU, they aim to enable these countries' deep integration with the EU as well as the modernization of their economies through extensive institutional and regulatory convergence with EU templates. As we argue in this project, the achievement of these objectives is untested and particularly problematic: not only are the AAs an instrument of unprecedented scope and complexity but also one that requires implementation by countries characterized by lasting legacies and fundamental domestic institutional weaknesses.

Overall, we find that implementation of the AAs is characterized by diverse patterns across the three countries as well as sectors and that there is a range of factors behind this. The analysis shows that weak state capacity, and especially state capture, represents one of the most critical obstacles to implementation. For example, examining the implementation of commitments in the energy sector, in particular the need to establish an independent energy regulator, we found different patterns of regulatory development in the three countries corresponding to different levels of state capture. Thus, we argue that long-term policy results remain premised on changing the fundamental relationship between dominant elites and the political system.

In this vein, our analysis also focused on the extent to which greater economic and political competition can be achieved as a result of greater market opening. Accordingly, we investigated the extent to which trade liberalization under the AAs affects the position of dominant coalitions across a range of sectors. Our empirical results in the case of Ukraine are not conclusive, yet unequivocally demonstrate the importance of the political economy of rent-seeking practices to realize the

benefits of the AAs. This means that the EU's policies need to be accompanied by more nuanced mechanisms, such as strict monitoring of EU rule implementation and more assistance to strengthen state units capable of promoting strategies for inclusive development.

The project also analyzed the implementation in sectors where the AAs do not deliver the specific and relatively quick rewards seen in trade or visa liberalization. Focusing on a set of case studies, we establish that while implementation is patchy in transport, energy, and the environment, it is better than anticipated. This is explained by the on-going informal adjustment of the AAs. While this process may deliver on some formal implementation markers, it also raises important policy implications, namely that the discretionary nature of the process has the potential to create significant uncertainty over future regulation.

Another important aspect of our analysis centred on the role of external factors that may affect implementation, in particular, the role of Russia and its ability to deploy a set of varied tools, such as influence derived from economic interdependences, identity politics or open coercion. We argue that Russia's role is less likely to impede the implementation of specific items of the *acquis*, but remains strong in relation to affecting the capacity and long-term commitment to implementation of the AAs. The empirical analysis reveals significant variations in the three associated countries, with Moldova demonstrating the highest levels of vulnerability.

Overall, our findings lead to the conclusion that supporting the successful implementation of the AAs requires the EU to develop a strategic but also a dynamic approach, characterized by sensitivity to the complexity and fluidity of various local contexts. While some significant innovations to respond to this need have already been put in place, such as the Support Group for Ukraine, the challenge remains and should be addressed.

Scientific cooperation

By Ina Ramasheuskaya (School of Young Managers in Public Administration)

In our research group, we focused on the impact of international scientific cooperation on the EaP countries. To do this, we took stock of the EU's existing programmes of scientific cooperation and investigated their effects on Moldova, Belarus and Ukraine. We analysed the changes in the overall size of the scientific output in all three EaP countries, compared the share of publications that have received funding from various countries, programmes, and agencies, and looked into the co-authorship networks and thematic distribution of publications. Altogether, the analysis concluded that international collaboration has provided a lifeline to science in the EaP region after 2000.

We also interviewed scholars from EU member states and EaP countries on the impact of EU-supported cooperation programmes on scientific communities in Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine as well as on wider society and public policies. On the one hand, the interviewees from the EaP countries were overall quite positive about the cooperation and indicated that the collaboration did have a positive impact on their institutions in terms of access to funding, participation in networks, advancement in research methodology, opportunities for the mobility of researchers, as well as some transfer of technologies and (administrative) know-how.

The interviewees from the EU were also positive about the cooperation and noted the expertise of the EaP partners despite limited resources and capacity. However, they also indicated that continued cooperation with only select institutions may create 'islands of excellence', which could exclude other institutions with lesser experience. On the other hand, the broader impact on the society and policy-making was less visible and the interviewees struggled with providing concrete examples. Still, witnessing the broader impact of scientific projects, including collaborative ones, might be a matter of time.

Our subsequent research developed theoretical ideas about the ways in which the ruling elites of LAOs might constrain science policy and scientific cooperation. These ideas were explored empirically on the basis of sets of interviews with scientists and policy experts in Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine. The results of the analysis show that LAOs have difficulties in committing focus and resources to scientific development. While they tolerate and even seek international cooperation in order to compensate for weak internal capacity for innovation, they also try to limit the broader impact of international scientific cooperation and control the mobility and independence of researchers, especially in LAOs that remain closed in the political domain.

Finally, our team evaluated the policy options for the further development of these programmes given the results of the impact assessment. Based on previous research, we concluded that the EU should continue to offer opportunities for the EaP countries to participate in its programmes for scientific cooperation and exchange. It should pay particular attention to the increased participation of institutions from the EaP countries in scientific cooperation in the social sciences in order to boost the broader societal impact of cooperation.

The EU should also make efforts to ensure that the participation of the EaP countries is not limited to a small number of select institutes. Attention should be paid to the inclusion of university departments in scientific cooperation programmes, rather than limiting to institutes of the national academies of sciences. It is also important that participating institutions from EaP countries are integrated into the research process when taking part in project consortia. Finally, the EU should consider how to assist the dissemination of relevant research findings to the policy-making authorities and to the general public in the EaP countries, especially in the social sciences.

Change of power in Moldova: A surprising alliance

By Kamil Calus (Centre for Eastern Studies)

Unexpectedly, on 8 June 2019, the pro-Russian Party of Socialists (PSRM), associated with President Igor Dodon, signed a temporary cooperation agreement for creation of a joint government with the pro-European anti-oligarchical bloc ACUM.

This agreement came as a long-awaited result of the parliamentary elections in Moldova at the end of February 2019. The PSRM received the most votes (35 seats out of 101), while the nominally pro-European Democratic Party (PDM) led by Vlad Plahotniuc came in second with 30 seats. The ACUM bloc, which consists of the Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS) led by Maia Sandu and the Dignity and Truth Party (DA) chaired by Andrei Năstase, was the third major force, with 26 seats.

Although PSRM and PDM waged a bitter campaign on the public stage, in practice they have cooperated for at least the last four years to preserve the existing oligarchic model of power. The dominant role has been played by the powerful Plahotniuc-controlled government and parliamentary majority. Plahotniuc, an oligarch and politician, has been de facto ruling the country since 2015. Thus, it was expected that PSRM and PDM would establish a joint government, but three months of coalition negotiations recently ended in failure. This was primarily due to Moscow's opposition to the socialists forming a coalition with Plahotniuc as well as the socialists' heightened ambitions after their high election results.

The resulting alliance between PSRM and ACUM nevertheless appeared to be an unlikely one due to their pro-Russian vs. pro-European leanings. So how did this unlikely partnership come to be and what are its prospects?

An unexpected agreement

The creation of the PSRM-ACUM coalition was made possible due to unexpected encouragement received by both groups from the European

Union (EU), the United States (US), and Russia, simultaneously.

On 3 June, Dmitry Kozak, Deputy Prime Minister and Special Representative of President Putin on Trade and Economic Relations with Moldova, visited Chişinău. On the same day, Johannes Hahn, the EU Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Accession Negotiations, and Bradley Freden, Director of the Eastern European Affairs Office at the US Department of State, also arrived in the Moldovan capital. All three of them held an independent series of meetings with representatives of PDM, PSRM and ACUM, yet with an aligned end goal.

It seems that the purpose of these visits was to persuade Dodon and PSRM to conclude a temporary coalition with ACUM in order to remove Plahotniuc from power. President Dodon was previously rumoured to be considering this scenario himself but sought to avoid conflict with the PDM leader. At the same time, ACUM declared a lack of confidence in Dodon (considered a puppet of the oligarch) and feared that forming a coalition with the socialists might affect their own bloc's image. Yet, ultimately, it appears that the foreign powers were able to convince their domestic counterparts of the importance of forming a coalition in order to oust Plahotniuc, as the agreement was signed.

In a rare moment of alignment, the removal of Plahotniuc was in the interest of the US, EU, and Russia. For the West, the oligarch has been the main obstacle to the process of state modernization in Moldova. He has also been discrediting the pro-Western narrative in the domestic discourse. Moscow's motivations seem to be the hope that the new situation will strengthen the position of Dodon and the socialists, which will open the way for the pro-Russian forces to increase control over Moldova. The Kremlin has also viewed Plahotniuc's cooperation with Transnistria unfavourably, as

it threatens to weaken Russian influence in this separatist republic. In working towards the same goal as the EU and US, Russia has also sought to present itself as a pragmatic and constructive partner who can – if it wants to – contribute to an immediate solution to the problems plaguing the post-Soviet region. Russia could then use this example to convince the West of its willingness to solve other crises in the region, such as the situation in Ukraine.

Political crisis

After initially not recognizing the new government, PDM finally resigned itself from the power struggle on 14 June and announced that it was going to the opposition. This decision came immediately after Plahotniuc's meeting with the US Ambassador to Moldova, Derek Hogan. It is possible that the oligarch received some guarantees for his freedom and safeguarding of at least some of his wealth in exchange for stepping down.

It appears that Plahotniuc's recent accusations that the new coalition usurped power were not so much aimed at keeping himself in power, as buying time to secure his assets and destroy incriminating evidence. The oligarch is accused of direct or indirect participation in numerous corruption scandals (including the embezzlement of 1 billion USD from the Moldovan banking sector in 2014) and was likely aware that the loss of political influence would endanger his property and expose him to potential prosecution. He has now left the country for an unknown destination, which PDM's management has declared a "temporary trip".

On 15 June, the Constitutional Court revoked its recent decisions delegitimizing the new government, averting further political conflict. The EU, US and Russia have issued statements welcoming the end of the crisis.

Perspectives

The PSRM-ACUM coalition has announced that its main task is to push through a package of laws enabling 'de-oligarchization' of the country. This means, first of all, cleaning up public institutions (including the Ministry of Justice and Ministry

of Interior) by removing people with ties to Plahotniuc. But the PSRM and ACUM coalition is only temporary and tactical.

After the adoption of de-oligarchization laws, we should expect resignation of the government and early parliamentary elections. The favourite of this vote will likely be PSRM, which should perform well after having ditched the stigma of the PDM satellite. President Dodon will also be able to present himself as a politician who led to the overthrow of one of the country's most hated oligarchs. This may result in a further increase of the socialists' popularity (over 40% of voters support them according to recent polls by the Institute for Public Policy in Moldova), which may allow them to take power themselves. It should not be ruled out that in the coming months, the weakened PDM may break down and some members of this group may move to PSRM. Any strengthening of PSRM will contribute to the growing tension with ACUM, especially in the context of local elections planned for this year.

The removal of Plahotniuc from the Moldovan political scene will undoubtedly have a positive impact on the reform process. In the last years, the oligarch stood in the way of reforms to key state institutions, such as the justice system. The new government headed by Maia Sandu will be interested in the deepest possible implementation of the Association Agreement with the EU. There is no doubt, however, that the effectiveness of these activities will be limited by cooperation with the Socialist Party, which is less interested in structural reconstruction of the country. Beyond that, the undoubtedly temporary nature of the new government will also not be conducive to deep and irreversible reforms, meaning that Moldova's struggle with corruption is far from over.

Nonetheless, the EU should seize the present opportunity and provide maximum assistance to the new authorities. Support from the EU and its member states will be crucial for Moldova in the coming months. In order to start real implementation of the Association Agreement provisions, the new government will need funds. The lack of progress in reforms – for which the prior Plahotniuc-controlled government is to

blame – has led to the freezing of a large part of the external financial aid. Therefore, it will be necessary to unfreeze the macro-financial assistance for Moldova that the EU blocked in 2018. The Western partners should also offer Moldova as much substantive and expert assistance as possible. At the same time, Western partners should maintain an active and intense dialogue with not only the pro-European part of the ruling coalition, but

also with the Socialist Party. Although it remains strongly influenced by Moscow, it is necessary to encourage this group to cooperate with the EU. This will not be impossible, as the vast majority of party members as well as President Dodon have pragmatic views and – despite declared pro-Russian views – understand the benefits of Moldova's close links with the EU.