



# Final Conference Report

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## 1. Introduction

The EU-STRAT Final Conference took place 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 two-day conference started with an opening keynote speech and continued with six panels presenting findings and discussions on the different topics addressed by EU-STRAT, as well as a final roundtable looking to the future. This report provides a summary of the presentations and discussions that took place during these sessions.

## 2. Keynote speech: Ten years Eastern Partnership - overcoming challenges with innovation

The conference opened with a keynote speech by Peter Wagner, Head of the Support Group for Ukraine (SGUA) at the European Commission. The SGUA, created five years ago, has had to deal with the puzzle of how to organize and implement reforms in a country that was both suffering economically and with on-going conflict in the East of the country. Peter Wagner noted that the broad scope of the Association Agreement, while providing ample opportunities for the country, also presented significant challenges to implementing the reforms. In this way, it could be compared to selling the construction kit for a Ferrari to someone who does not have all the tools to build it and the infrastructure to use it, and while there is a neighbour that is doing all it can to prevent it from being built. Despite all these challenges, the EU has promoted major reforms by supporting the efforts of reform-oriented members in the Ukrainian government. Regarding the necessary profound reform of the public sector, support from the beginning has included the involvement of senior experts from EU member states who have undertaken similar reforms during the transition from communism. The broad EU support includes a budget support programme, which contributes partially to the additional fiscal space the government requires to implement the administrative reforms, including increases in salaries. With newly created and better paid positions to implement reforms, filled via new, transparent recruitment procedures and computer-based testing, a new era in Ukrainian civil service has started, according to Peter Wagner. The Reform Delivery Office working with the Prime Minister's Office and Reform Support Teams embedded in Ukrainian ministries are providing the necessary guidance and implementation capacity to the government at the central level. In addition, high-level advice is provided by the Strategic Advisory Group of Support for Ukrainian Reforms. More broadly, 22 regional offices are supporting decentralization working with and helping local authorities in the context of the EU project.

Wagner concluded that reforms in Ukraine might not yet have reached the point of irreversibility – but with sufficient time, continued political will from Ukraine and international support, he believes things will work out. Coordination with international partners, such as the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank is crucial in this process. However, when it comes to public administration reform, the SGUA is very much leading the way and the EU is the most important partner of Ukraine in 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 the ambitious objective of substantial and comprehensive change in Ukraine. He further 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.

The discussion continued in the Q&A session. Questions asked about the SGUA were related to the role of the Strategic Advisory Group of Support for Ukrainian Reforms, which is addressing reforms more broadly and from an external perspective, according to the speaker. Another question was about possible opportunities for the transfer of knowledge between the EU officials providing support for implementing reforms in Greece to those in Ukraine, which did not merit further discussion due to lack of time. Finally, the speaker was asked about the extent to which the EU is involved in social reform innovations, responding with an emphasis on the leading role of the *acquis* in guiding EU assistance and effort.

### 3. Limited Access Orders, statehood and state capacity

Esther Ademmer (Kiel University and Kiel Institute for the World Economy (IfW)) opened the first panel with a presentation on “Varieties of Limited Access Orders: The Nexus between Politics and Economics in Hybrid Regimes”. Building on North, Wallis, and Weingast’s framework providing a theoretical and empirical basis for defining limited and open access orders, the paper defined different varieties of limited access orders (LAO)<sup>1</sup>, characterized by limited competition for political and economic resources and dominant elites controlling access to those resources. Ademmer presented a framework that identified four different types of LAOs in post-Soviet states. The analysis was based on a measurement of political and economic freedom that combined multiple indicators from the Bertelsmann Transformation Index, V-Dem, and Freedom House using a principal component analysis to determine which components were most relevant in the EaP countries. After establishing the relevant economic and political indicators, a typology of LAOs was created. Cases of particular interest presented by Ademmer 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 moving towards ‘balanced openness’ later on.

Honorata Mazepus (Leiden University) and Tatsiana Chulitskaya (School of Young Managers in Public Administration (SYMPA) and European Humanities University) continued the panel with a presentation on “State Capacity and Limited Access Orders: Belarus and Ukraine”. Mazepus identified the different dimensions of state capacity: capacity to administer, capacity to extract, capacity to deliver basic infrastructure and capacity to deliver basic goods and services. She proposed that state capacity could be divided into two aspects: universalizing and stabilizing. The former – implying universal, impartial and impersonal procedures and rules – was linked to the capacity to administer and had the potential to support change towards a more Open Access Order (OAO). The other three dimensions of state capacity could be stabilizing, both for LAOs and OAOs. Chulitskaya presented empirical findings suggesting that Belarus has not seen reforms that universalize state capacity and politicization still prevails in public administration. Instead, the LAO had been stabilized by a focus on extraction and service provision. In Ukraine, there have been reforms universalizing state capacity, but the country has also seen a drop in some services provision. This destabilization of the LAO in Ukraine could mean a move towards an OAO, but reforms could still be reversed by opposition from the dominant political and economic elites or social upheaval from below, should social service provision decline.

The floor was then given to the discussant, Iryna Solonenko (European University Viadrina and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Auswärtige Politik). She noted the great contribution that the findings brought to the academic

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<sup>1</sup> North, D. C., Wallis, J. J. and Weingast, B. R. (2009) *Violence and Social Orders: A Conceptual Framework for Interpreting Recorded Human History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

debate, and ways in which the papers in the panel complimented each other. The discussant suggested looking at further conceptual links between the papers, especially in terms of the role of state capacity for LAOs.

The Q&A discussion focused on questions related to policy recommendations that could emerge from the findings. Responding to the question regarding the effects of the engagement of external actors in administrative reform, the panellists suggested that it varies considerably per country, so the EU and other external actors need to differentiate their approach if they are to be more successful. Other comments asked for clarification of the assumption that state capture was coexisting with strong states, which, according to one participant, contradicts some of the literature. In response, there was a fruitful discussion of the different types of state weakness in theoretical and empirical terms.

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

The panel began with a presentation on “How International Regimes Shape Interdependencies” by Rilka Dragneva (University of Birmingham) and Laure Delcour (Fondation Maison des Sciences de l’homme, FMSH). Dragneva noted a tendency to either underestimate or overreact to interdependencies. She 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 in their research. They also looked at vertical overlaps (bilateral, regional, multilateral) and horizontal overlaps (issue linkage). Dragneva and Delcour outlined their findings on the different trajectories followed by Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova, focussing on trade and migration in particular with this paper. They concluded that overall, legal and governance features of the established regime between Russia and members of the Eurasian Economic Union make it a challenge for the EU to support reforms. Specifically, 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, add difficulty.

The panel continued with Laure Delcour (FMSH) and Marta Jaroszewicz (Centre for Eastern Studies, OSW) discussing “The Role of Bilateral Relations between the EaP Countries”. Jaroszewicz 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. She noted that their research found that Ukraine’s policy goals used to be to hedge through empowering and engrafting to minimize the consequences of asymmetric interdependencies *vis-à-vis* Russia. Neighbouring Belarus focused on engrafting as a means to redress political problems with Russia, without actually reducing asymmetric interdependencies. Delcour presented research analysing bilateral relations between Ukraine and Moldova, focusing on structural factors, different security situations, relations with Russia, and the competition between the two countries *vis-à-vis* visa liberalization. She concluded that while Ukraine and Moldova are ideally placed to cooperate on curtailing Russia’s influence and reducing their vulnerability to it, the potential is not necessarily realized yet, nor sought out as a strategic priority.

In “How Linkages Relate to Regime (In)stability”, Katharina Hoffman (University of St. Gallen) and Esther Ademmer (Kiel University 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. Ademmer introduced four

different mechanisms drawing on existing literature: patronage ties, sanctions, crisis support, and elite-learning. Hoffman presented the main results for cases in the EaP countries. There are strong linkages to both the EU and Russia in different sectors, but the degree to which either the EU or Russia can actually inflict costs depends on the sensitivity and vulnerability of countries to these linkages. In regimes that are sensitive to certain linkages, such as Azerbaijan, elite learning appears to be the most effective mechanism to exploit those linkages. In other regimes that are more vulnerable, such as Armenia, patronage and sanctions may be more effective mechanisms to exploit linkages.

The discussant, Tetiana Kostiuchenko (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. The following Q&A session focused on two main questions: how can countries reduce their vulnerability to Russia and to what extent does a change in the regime structure affect linkages? The authors agreed that further exploration of the connection between linkages and regime structure could be a promising avenue for their future research.

## **5. 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**

In the paper entitled "Dual Agent of Transition: How Turkey Perpetuates and Undermines Neo-patrimonial Patterns in the Post-Soviet Neighbourhood", Katharina Hoffmann (University of St. Gallen) and Ole Frahm (University of St. Gallen) outlined their research on the external diffusion of regime-related principles by Turkey in four cases from the region: Azerbaijan, Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia. In the economic sphere, they argued that Turkey targets many actors in the neighbouring countries through official state representatives, Turkish business associations loosely tied to Turkey's dominant coalition, large businesses and also small and medium sized enterprises (SME) from Turkey. On the one hand, some business actors perpetuate neo-patrimonial patterns by participating in shadow economy, and taking or giving bribes in the countries in which they operate. On the other hand, some other business actors also lobby for certain reforms or improving standards in these countries. They suggested that there are implications for democracy promoters like the EU: certain actors from hybrid regimes with regional influence may serve as partners in the promotion of economic openness in third countries.

The panel continued with a presentation entitled "China's Strategies towards Eastern Partnership Countries" by Jakub Jakóbowski (OSW). The initial hypothesis was that China could pull Belarus and Ukraine towards an unbalanced closure LAO, similar to China. Jakóbowski explained that China's policy towards EaP countries is a mix of general and region-specific foreign-policy tools such as: facilitating trade and investment, acknowledging Russia's alleged interests in the EaP region, supporting the balancing strategies of the EaP countries themselves, and promoting China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). In practice, the paper found that the Revolution of Dignity has meant that China views Ukraine as a risky and unstable partner. Ukraine has been excluded from the BRI since 2014. China's engagement with Belarus has been more ambitious, but due to diverging interests, Belarus is increasingly disillusioned with China's offer. For example, China's Great Stone industrial park near Minsk has been underdeveloped and the Belarusian authorities have started to invite Western companies to be based there

as well. In conclusion, the speaker noted that China is currently limiting its engagement in Ukraine so it has little impact on the political and economic order there, while in Belarus it has facilitated moderate economic opening, potentially contributing to a more unbalanced LAO.

Marta Jaroszewicz (OSW) and Elyssa Shea (Freie Universität Berlin) presented “Strategies of Security Actors towards Eastern Partnership Countries”, looking at security assistance, including security sector reform, in the context of post-Soviet patterns of rent-seeking elites and high corruption in LAOs. Focusing on Ukraine, the research considered NATO, the OSCE and the EU, which have provided assistance to Ukraine through security sector reform (NATO, EU, OSCE) and limited stabilization measures to the conflict (OSCE). All external actors have been limited in their approach by geopolitical and internal political considerations. Overall, there is significant coordination on security sector reform between the EU and NATO through the international advisory group, which helps develop and deliver joint positions to Ukrainian counterparts. While the conflict raises some direct and indirect threats to the state’s monopoly on violence, it has also motivated domestic elites to pursue closer cooperation with NATO and the EU and implement reforms in targeted areas, such as civilian control. The authors concluded that the different approaches could facilitate opening, but only over time.

The final contribution to this panel was on “Susceptibility of Domestic Actors in Belarus and Ukraine towards External Actors’ Approaches: Puzzling Patterns of Transition Facilitation” presented by Laurynas Jonavičius (Vilnius University) and Dovile Jakniūnaite (Vilnius University). The strategies and interests of the EU and Russia were seen as very divergent, while China’s role remained marginal. The paper suggested that in Belarus, the goal of the EU is institutional and normative transformation, although the country is not a strategic priority. For Russia, however, Belarus is of strategic importance in terms of security and identity. Which external actors will prevail depends on interdependencies. The paper suggested that Russia is able to play a dominant role in the 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 can be considered a ‘barred’ window of opportunity for the EU, as the paper suggested, due to lasting factors shaping Russian-Belarusian relations, such as sectoral interdependencies.

The panel’s discussant, Steven Blockmans (Centre for European Policy Studies), argued that the EU transposes its own model on the EaP countries and that it is interesting to see how China has been forcing the EU to rethink its own approach. He noted how the methodological deficiencies of North et al. were complemented by the research of the project and how the majority of papers have sought their own way of expanding upon the framework. He highlighted the potential for further research on Russia-Turkey relations and Russia-China relations, which EU-STRAT researchers agreed were interesting fields to explore. Blockmans pondered whether there was a way for the EU to work with China to contain Russia in the EaP countries. Concerning security in Ukraine, he wondered to what extent the EU, OSCE and NATO are conflict-sensitive and equipped enough to conduct their activities in Ukraine, and whether there was competition with local partners.

Further participants from the conference joined into the discussion to comment on the variety of papers that were presented on external actors’ strategies. One participant followed-up on the topic of Chinese involvement in the EaP area by asking about the current investment by other external actors in the Belarus industrial park created by China. The speaker provided clarification on the companies that are interested in investing there, which come from Germany and the US. Two more questions centred on the paper on external security actors in



Ukraine. One participant asked for clarification on the conditions under which opening can be promoted during wartime, which was a central research question of the paper. A brief discussion ensued on the notion that it is hard to theorize about (security sector) reform implementation during wartime, as Ukraine is experiencing a rather unique situation without precedent. Nevertheless, the speakers contended that it is possible to push for reform during wartime as long as some flexibility is offered, and a joint approach from external actors was also identified as a key aspect of making progress. Another participant questioned the role of non-state actors in security sector reform, such as the influence of paramilitaries, and how this relates to opening. The speakers agreed that non-state security actors have played a role in the developments of Ukraine since 2014, but noted that this was outside the scope of their research. The topic could offer an interesting field of future research.

## **6. 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 Limited Access Orders on Science Policy and Scientific Cooperation” by Dimiter Toshkov (Leiden University, European University Institute), Ina Ramasheuskaya (SYMPA) and Natallia Rabava (SYMPA). In presenting their empirical findings, Ramasheuskaya and Rabava noted that the science policy process in Belarus is highly centralized and that there was an emphasis on commercializing science, in that it should be seen as making rather than costing the state money. This leads to a focus on the ‘hard sciences’, rather than the less profitable social sciences, which are also considered more ‘dangerous’ due to their potential to influence the state’s political ideology. By contrast, the LAOs in Ukraine and Moldova allow for more pluralism in science than in Belarus, and there have been attempts to reform science policies in those countries. However, the reforms are too recent to draw any clear conclusions yet. Toshkov then highlighted policy recommendations for the EU. It should pay attention to the fact that the EU is not the only actor in the region. Russia and individual EU member states, such as Germany, do a lot of work in terms of scientific cooperation with EaP countries. The EU could also focus more on the social sciences, where they could make a real difference and potentially influence policy-making. Furthermore, he noted that an effort needs to be made to ensure that the benefits of cooperation are spread across more institutions, to avoid exacerbating inequalities in the countries.

The discussant, 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, based on the similarity of some of the findings in all three countries. She also suggested that policy recommendations could address university administrators, not just scientists and researchers.

## **7. Implementing the Association Agreements**

Klaudijus Maniokas (European Social, Legal and Economic Projects, ESTEP) opened this panel with a paper on “The Political Economy of Legal Harmonization in the EaP countries”. He addressed the debates around the need for legal harmonization with the EU for countries without a membership perspectives, such those with Association Agreements (AA) in the EaP. The research presented an analysis of three case studies: the unbundling in the electricity sector in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, hydropower on the Dniester in Ukraine and Moldova, and road worthiness in Georgia. Maniokas concluded that the transposition and implementation of harmonization is patchy, but better than expected. This is mainly because there is an ongoing informal

adjustment to the AAs that reduces the scope of the commitments. However, AA-related rules are not at the core of government policy in any of these countries.

The panel continued with a presentation on “State Capacity, State Capture and their Effects on the Implementation of the Association Agreements” by Laure Delcour (FMSH). The focus was on to what extent independent regulatory bodies are affected by state capture. In line with the EU *acquis*, regulatory authorities need to be sufficiently independent and have sufficient competences. Delcour explained that in the cases of Moldovan and Ukrainian regulators, there are still entrenched vested interests, attempts at political interference, a lack of transparency, a lack of regulatory independence, and inadequate decision-making structures. Meanwhile, the case of Georgia has not seen as much state capture and the regulators have managed to build strong capacities within their areas of competence, even though these areas are limited. Because of the risk of rent-seeking by domestic elites in the context of the AAs, the EU needs to promote reform of regulatory bodies to help ensure the implementation of reforms.

Ildar Gazizulin (Ukrainian Institute for Public Policy) then presented research on “Trade Liberalization under the Association Agreements and the Opening of Post-Soviet Limited Access Orders”. Focusing on Ukraine since 2008, he discussed whether trade liberalization had helped to consolidate the position of rent-seeking elites in four prominent sectors: metals, mineral products, agrifood, and machinery and electrical equipment. Trade liberalization between the EU and Ukraine has benefited big firms owned by members of both the dominant and rival elites. They can shape Ukrainian politics and policies for the sake of private gains. The agrifood sector however, which has benefited most from trade liberalization, is more diversified in terms of ownership structure than the other key sectors. Trade liberalization has made it more difficult to apply discriminatory measures against foreign agrifood firms. Gazizulin concluded that while trade liberalization with the EU has offset the effects of reduced trade with Russia, higher exports to the EU can also benefit some politically connected companies in their rent-seeking.

Addressing “Interdependence with Russia and its Impact on the Implementation of the Association Agreements”, Rilka Dragneva (University of Birmingham) presented findings from Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. Russia had been unsuccessful in its attempts to affect the design of the AAs, but this does not mean Moscow accepts the AAs as a ‘done deal’. Two important factors that the analysis highlighted for the AA countries were the embeddedness of their EU choice and their resilience to dependence on Russia. Russia directly or indirectly controls territory in all three countries, which allows it to exert pressure. In Georgia however, this issue has become decoupled from trade, and bilateral trade has actually increased. In Ukraine, Russian coercion has resulted in a backlash from some sections of society, but has also weakened state capacity when it comes to implementing the AA. Dragneva posited that Moldova is the most vulnerable to Russia’s attempts to affect its AA, in particular through influence and control over the media. She concluded that the EU cannot just think about AAs in a technocratic way, but needs to examine and understand their potential geopolitical consequences.

Wojciech Konończuk (OSW) was the discussant for this panel. He mentioned that capacity building and regulatory developments through the AAs had the potential to limit the ability of elites to extract rents, but the findings underlined that this has been very difficult. Limited conditionality can translate into limited implementation of the *acquis*. He wondered whether it was not Russia serving as the main threat to the AAs, but rather the low quality of the ruling elites in the AA countries. The Q&A session included questions about the EU’s own

commitments in the AA process, and to what extent AA rules were relevant or affordable for the societies in question. The panellists provided a nuanced answer to the last questions, suggesting that some reforms may benefit the EaP countries more than harmonization with the *acquis*, yet the EU's overall role for reform was crucial.

## 8. Developing EU engagement strategies in the EaP region

Kataryna Wolczuk (University of Birmingham) presented findings “Evaluating EU Assistance for the Implementation of the Association Agreements”. She highlighted that EU support in Georgia has mainly been focused on technical assistance, while in Moldova and Ukraine it has encompassed technical assistance and institution (re-)building. This reflects a dual track approach in Moldova and Ukraine. In addition to reforms around AA implementation, which are focused on technical issues and deadlines, there is also EU support for reforms supporting state capacity and the rule of law. Reforming state capacity will take time however, and Wolczuk argued that these two tracks are currently desynchronized. AA implementation is moving ahead, but 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, and would require better coordination of the AA process inside the EU as well.

The paper presented by Antoaneta Dimitrova (Leiden University) discussed “Lessons from Enlargement: Comparing EU Capacity Building and Monitoring under Enlargement with the Framework of the Association Agreements”. Lessons learned from the EU's Eastern enlargement include the importance of capacity building, central government coordination, political will, engagement with societal actors, and finally public support. One lesson learned too well by both the EU and Ukraine, Dimitrova suggested, is that conditionality works, especially with an accession perspective. However, this leads to an excessive focus on the accession perspective, at the expense of key reforms that could be supported instead, such as institution building for economic development or state capacity. In view of the fact that the AAs are very complex agreements, state capacity is crucial. Even more so than with enlargement, a key dilemma arises from the political resistance from the incumbent elites, particularly when it comes to universalizing state capacity and potentially limiting rent-seeking. There are still challenges regarding the sequencing of administrative reform, which can be a lengthy and difficult process. There is also a tension between the short-term effects of reforms and long-term benefits, and how public support can be maintained in this context. 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.

The final presentation on this panel by Matthew Frear (Leiden University) was “Beyond the Association Agreements: The EU's Alternative and Complementary Strategies”. It focused on the recent ‘20 Deliverables for 2020’ initiative. These deliverables are often described as pragmatic and offering tangible benefits to EaP countries in the economy, governance, society and connectivity. However, they have also been criticized for being supply rather than demand-driven. Frear then presented the findings of research on perspectives from Belarus and Moldova on the initiative, highlighting that some of the issues which emerged were common to both. If the project is to succeed, the EU has to work with the incumbent authorities, but must engage with other actors as well. These included civil society and local or regional authorities, although engagement was difficult. While the authorities would welcome pragmatic technical assistance through deliverables linked to the economy

or society, the EU should not focus on these at the expense of talking about reforms and democratization regarding governance or the cross-cutting deliverables related to the media or civil society. The findings concluded that 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 regimes in Belarus and Moldova.

Margarita Balmaceda (Seton Hall and Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute), in her discussion, noted that the papers presented on the panel show that there is room for the EU to improve conditionality in terms of lessons learned from enlargement. She argued that reforms require political will on both sides. She found it refreshing that the papers highlighted how decisions and choices made by the EU could work in some cases, but not in others, and that some EU thinking could be better matched to recent developments. Questions during the Q&A focused on how young people and societal stakeholders could be involved in the reform processes, what comes next for the AAs in the future, and where the EU should draw the line if it chooses to focus on promoting changes that are acceptable to incumbent authorities. The panellists stressed that the EU cannot compromise its core values and that working to appease recalcitrant elites has limits, while they saw more hope in developing links with the young as the new generations have the potential to change politics and societies.

## **9. Roundtable: The future possibilities of EU – EaP cooperation and challenges for policy makers and researchers**

The two-day conference culminated with a roundtable on the future possibilities for the EU and EaP. Elyssa Shea (Freie Universität Berlin) began by explaining the method and approach to developing the various scenarios that were discussed during the roundtable. Scenarios were developed by examining how the EU's approach could facilitate opening, prevent closure, or even inadvertently lead to closure. The same background conditions were established for Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine: state capacity, interdependencies with the EU and Russia, and the strategies of other external actors, such as China or the US. The team also identified five key determinants of the EU's approach that could affect LAO opening or closure: conditionality, capacity building, coordination, sequencing, and the estimated cost-benefit analysis of domestic elites. 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. The latter might occur due to the influence of Russia as well as ineffective measures by the EU. Kamil Cafus (OSW) offered two possible scenarios for Moldova. Opening or the status quo were not seen as possible options, instead the scenarios foresaw either political or economic closure 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. He noted that the outlook for Ukraine was the only one containing a positive scenario for the future.

The discussion was then opened up to responses and statements from the participants in the roundtable. Wojciech Konończuk (OSW) disagreed that a *status quo* scenario was likely in Belarus. He argued instead that the EU might get an opening to promote reforms as economic and political differences between Minsk and Moscow have escalated in recent months. He further stressed that in the case of corrupt but formally pro-European elites, such as the ones in Moldova, the EU should be more openly critical. Further, he cautioned that while there might be 'Ukraine fatigue' in the EU, there is also a risk of 'EU fatigue' in Ukraine. 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. Taking a more positive view, she argued that if the current pace of reforms is maintained, the situation in Ukraine might improve soon. The 'sandwich effect' of external pressure from the EU and domestic grassroots pressure from civil society was highlighted as important for reform improvement and progress. She also noted that there are concerns that decentralization in Ukraine could be undermined at the local level through elite capture.

There were some different policy insights from Johanneke de Hoogh, the Special Representative for the Eastern Partnership of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands. She stated that the Netherlands is very much committed to EaP processes, but perhaps not as much as some other member states closer to Ukraine that see the situation as a matter of their national security. She stressed that some EU member states advocated employing more 'carrots', such as an actual EU membership perspective, while others believe that more 'sticks' are necessary. 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.

The conference concluded with responses by the authors of the country scenarios to the comments by the other participants. The Belarus team disagreed with the expectations that there will be more opening and reform in Belarus in the coming months. Some questioned the position of member states of the EU and the apparent reluctance for more active engagement with the EaP partners, while yet other comments suggested the scenarios were a valuable resource for policy-makers. At the end, EU-STRAT co-coordinator Antoaneta Dimitrova closed the conference by thanking all participants and acknowledging gratefully the organizational support provided by the student assistant members of the Leiden team.



## **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.

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