European Parliament

EU-Eastern Partnership people-to-people contacts

In 2009, the EU launched its Eastern Partnership (EaP) initiative with the ambition to promote closer cooperation with six of its eastern neighbours: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. Support for people-to-people contacts is a key element of the EU's EaP strategy, and is extended through programmes in the areas of movement of persons, education and peace-building.

Laying the foundation for relations with the Eastern Partnership countries

Developing cooperation

Since the launch of the European neighbourhood policy in 2004 and the Eastern Partnership (EaP) in 2009, the European Union has developed a number of specific policies towards the EaP countries, and concluded a number of agreements with them, among which association agreements (AA), a comprehensive and enhanced partnership agreement (CEPA) with Armenia, deep and comprehensive free trade agreements (DCFTA) and visa-free regimes. The AAs with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine also established civil society platforms, tasked with promoting regular meetings of representatives from both parties. In these platforms, the European Economic and Social Committee represents EU civil society. Another format, for sub-national cooperation, is the Conference of the Regional and Local Authorities for the Eastern Partnership (CORLEAP), set up by the Committee of the Regions, which aims at advancing EaP objectives at the level of governance closest to the citizens.

Table 1 – Agreements between the EU and the Eastern Partnership countries, 2014-2018

	Armenia	Azerbaijan	Belarus	Georgia	Moldova	Ukraine
Specific agreement (i.e. AA or CEPA)	(provisionally applied since June 2018)	(launched February 2017)	None	In force since July 2016	In force since July 2016	In force since September 2017
DCFTA	None	None	None	Yes	Yes	Yes
Visa-free regime	None	None	None	March 2017	April 2014	June 2017

Multilateral dimension

Establishing people-to-people contacts (relations between ordinary citizens at various levels without any official interference and guidance) with the EaP countries is a very strong aspect of the EU's policy towards them. Such contacts have developed on a bilateral or a multilateral basis, and a specific platform (panel) on 'mobility and people-to-people contacts' has been created to discuss progress in this area. In addition, the EU supports the EaP civil society forum, which seeks to make the voice of EaP civil societies heard.

Twenty deliverables for 2020

In 2016, the EU and its EaP partners agreed on 20 deliverables for 2020 (20D2020), with a strong emphasis on civil society. In 2018, they worked on easing travel, investing in people's skills, entrepreneurship and employability, and integrating the EaP countries in EU research and innovation systems and programmes. Another aim of the 20D2020 is to invest €340 million in youth and education and to make sure that at least 80 000 young people, youth workers, students and academic staff can benefit from Erasmus+.

This 'at a glance' note is one in a series produced at the request of a member of the European Committee of the Regions, in the framework of the Cooperation Agreement between the Parliament and the Committee.

EN

Public perceptions

In 2018, the public [perception](#) of the EU in the Eastern Partnership region was rather positive, with 46 % of respondents having a positive image, 37 % a neutral image and only 13 % a negative image. Only 4 % of respondents were 'not aware' of or had 'never heard about' the EU. The EU was the most trusted international organisation (61 %, up 4 % in one year), followed by the United Nations (50 %).

A role for civil society

As part of its efforts to promote the role of civil societies as the main beneficiaries of and partners in reforms, the EU supports civil society organisations (CSOs) on the ground. Space for CSO action [differs](#) from one country to another, with [Ukraine](#) and [Georgia](#) having very active CSOs operating in a fairly open environment, and Belarus and Azerbaijan exerting [tight control](#) over CSOs and restricting their access to foreign support.

Promoting the movement of persons

An important part of the promotion of people-to-people contacts is the possibility of easy travel. Thanks to their visa-free regime with the EU, [Ukrainians](#) made 25.9 million trips to the EU from June 2017 to August 2018. From 2014 to 2018, [1.5 million](#) Moldovans travelled to the EU, and from March 2017 to September 2018, around 300 000 Georgian citizens [enjoyed](#) short-term visa-free travel to the Schengen area.

Education and academic exchanges

Since 2014, [10 400 students](#) from the EaP countries have studied in universities in the EU or in an EaP country other than their own. The EU has also set up a young European ambassadors' [network](#) composed of close to 500 young people from the EU and its Eastern Partners. These ambassadors regularly organise local community events in their countries, and participate in international fora to spread the word about the initiative.

The [EaP European School](#) in Tbilisi opened its doors in September 2018 for its first 30 students from six Eastern Partnership countries. As one of the EaP's 20D2020, it will provide students from the EaP countries with an innovative academic programme, while also fostering multicultural exchanges and cooperation.
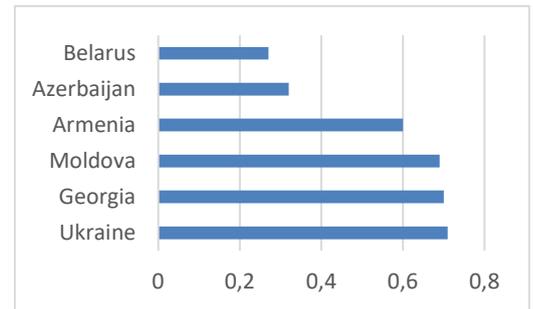
Working on peace building

The EU has also been helping local communities in Transnistria (Moldova), Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Georgia), eastern Ukraine and Nagorno-Karabakh, which have been affected by conflicts, by supporting displaced people or investing in skills- and job-creation. One such example is the EU-funded [€17 million project](#) launched in September 2014 in Ukraine, which covers 17 local initiatives targeting various groups of internally displaced people. The EU is also fostering the cooperation of Armenian and Azerbaijani CSOs through its European Partnership for the Peaceful Resolution of the Conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh ([EPNK](#)).

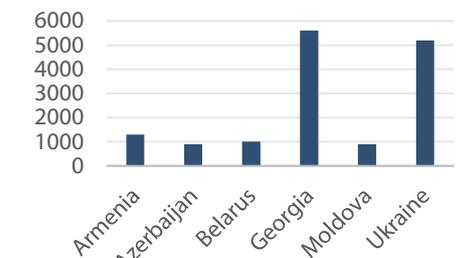## Committee of the Regions and European Parliament positions

CORLEAP has issued [reports](#) with recommendations on municipal cooperation and on strengthening civic participation, and is preparing a report on people-to-people contact in the Eastern Partnership. The European Parliament also promotes people-to-people contacts with the EaP, in particular through the young political leaders programme; a specific project in this programme focuses on young Armenian and Azerbaijani [leaders](#). At the [November 2017 EaP summit](#), the Parliament recalled the vital role played by civil society in the EaP, while cautioning against action to 'curtail its legitimate activities' and 'encouraging its deeper involvement in drawing up, scrutinising and monitoring the implementation of reforms related to the Partnership'.

Figure 1 – Deep and sustainable democracy, 2017

Source: [Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum](#), EaP Index, 2018. 1 = maximum.

Figure 2 – Number of Erasmus exchanges to the EU in 2015-2017

Source: [European Commission](#), 2019.