Euronest 2018

Way forward after the Eastern Partnership summit

SUMMARY

The European Parliament regularly hosts the Euronest parliamentary assembly of the Eastern Partnership (EaP). Launched in 2011, the EaP is composed of the EU and its Member States, together with six of their eastern European neighbours: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

During their Riga summit in 2015, the partners in the EaP decided to focus on four areas: economic development and market opportunities; institutional capacity and good governance; connectivity, energy efficiency, environment and climate change; mobility and people-to-people contacts.

Before the EaP’s 2017 Brussels summit, the European Commission and the European External Action Service published ‘20 deliverables for 2020’, a series of specific objectives that are being piloted by various partners and have to be achieved by the EaP countries by 2020. To facilitate this task, the two institutions also proposed to streamline the structure of the EaP, which the Brussels summit endorsed.

In June 2018, the Euronest meeting in Brussels adopted a number of resolutions on the EU’s mediation in frozen conflicts, on foreign direct investment and on undeclared labour. It also called for the release of Ukrainian political prisoners in Russia.
The Eastern Partnership: resilient despite the obstacles?

A specific policy for the Eastern neighbourhood

In 2009, the EU and its Member States, together with their eastern neighbours, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, decided to launch the Eastern Partnership (EaP) as a special dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). The partnership aims to create a common area of shared democracy, well-being, stability and increased cooperation, and to demonstrate that the EU has a balanced approach both towards its southern neighbours (the countries from the Union for the Mediterranean) and its eastern ones.

The partners meet regularly at ministerial or technical level to advance projects in a number of fields. They also hold high-level summits every two years, the latest having been in 2017 in Brussels. The EaP has also developed a parliamentary component, the Euronest assembly, comprising Members of the European Parliament and of the parliaments of five EaP partners. Belarus has not yet been invited to join, due to the European Parliament's concerns over the fairness of elections to its national parliament.

Obstacles and resilience

When in 2008 Sweden and Poland launched the first discussions within the EU about the launch of a future partnership with the region to the east of the Union, this region was already facing a number of challenges, among which the August 2008 war between Russia and Georgia, the conflicts persisting in all of the countries except Belarus and Ukraine, the countries' difficult relationship with Russia and the endemic corruption affecting all of them. In 2014, the situation worsened even more with the illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia and the escalation of the conflict in Donbas.

Despite the above challenges, since the EaP was created in 2009, none of the partners has disengaged from the common dynamic, with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine going a step further and implementing both a deep and comprehensive free trade agreement (DCFTA) and a visa-free regime with the EU after 2014.

In 2015, in the shadow of the illegal annexation of Crimea and the ongoing war in eastern Ukraine, the EaP held its Riga summit. The following four areas of cooperation were agreed upon:

- economic development and market opportunities;
- institutional capacity and good governance;
- connectivity, energy efficiency, environment and climate change;
- mobility and people-to-people contacts.

Today, almost a decade after its launch, the EaP has proved its usefulness as a mechanism for streamlining the EU's activities in the region and adjusting them to the priorities of its partners, but also for creating a unique platform for cooperation among the partners. For instance, even though Armenia and Azerbaijan remain in conflict over the Nagorno Karabakh region, the EaP provides incentives for them to meet regularly.

In its 2017 resolution on the EaP, the Parliament called for a new impetus, including the delivery of tangible results for citizens, notably in terms of creating employment, reducing socio-economic disparities and improving transport, connectivity, energy independence, mobility and education.
The Parliament also recommended increasing mobility between the EU and the EaP countries, and called on the EU and its Member States to maintain pressure on Russia.

The 2017 Brussels summit: 20 deliverables for 2020

Territorial integrity and European aspirations

The 2017 Brussels summit reaffirmed the EU’s support for the territorial integrity, independence and sovereignty of all EaP countries, but also committed all of the members of the EaP to reinforce cooperation in areas such as SMEs, digital economy, infrastructure, transport and energy.

In their declaration, the leaders also acknowledged ‘the European aspirations and European choice of the partners concerned, as stated in the Association Agreements’. This recognition is significant for a number of reasons. First, it underlines that the EaP, like the European Neighbourhood Policy since 2015, acknowledges the differences among its members and maintains a tailor-made relationship with each one of them. For instance, in the past, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine had repeatedly voiced their interest in establishing long-term closer cooperation with the EU or even in acceding to it, whereas the other partners had not voiced such an interest.

Second, this declaration mirrors, albeit less affirmatively, the 2003 Thessaloniki declaration, which recognised a ‘European perspective’ for the Western Balkans. When most of the Member States and their citizens are hesitant about EU enlargement beyond the Western Balkans, recognising the European aspirations of the EaP countries serves as strong encouragement for reform, given that the European perspective has always proved the most powerful incentive for transformation.

20 deliverables for 2020

Over the years, the EaP countries have developed various levels of cooperation with the EU through the conclusion of association agreements, DCFTAs and visa-free regimes.

Different levels of cooperation with the EaP countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Armenia</th>
<th>Azerbaijan</th>
<th>Belarus</th>
<th>Georgia</th>
<th>Moldova</th>
<th>Ukraine</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Association agreement</strong></td>
<td>Armenia negotiated a specific agreement: Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) (Nov. 2017)</td>
<td>A specific agreement is being negotiated (launched Feb. 2017)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>In force since July 2016</td>
<td>In force since July 2016</td>
<td>In force since Sep. 2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DCFTA</strong></td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Visa-free regime</strong></td>
<td>March 2017</td>
<td>Apr. 2014</td>
<td>June 2017</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
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Despite these differences, the EU wants to engage its partners in specific projects as much as possible. That is why the summit welcomed the launch of the 20 deliverables for 2020 (20D2020), aimed at pushing cooperation in the direction of tangible results for both EU and EaP citizens.

In December 2016, the European Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS) published a first version of the 20D2020 and updated them in June 2017, ahead of the November 2017 summit. The 20D2020 are organised around the four priorities agreed upon at the Riga summit. These priorities are monitored by four platforms, which coordinate the work of 20 panels, give them guidance and report to the newly introduced senior officials’ meeting.
A first target date for achieving the 20 deliverables was set, by the 2017 EaP summit, and a second one, by 2020. In addition, the partners defined three cross-platform priorities, for which deliverables have also been defined:

- civil society;
- gender equality;
- strategic communication.

The 20D2020 are steering the partnership towards more focused, result-oriented cooperation. The EaP Civil Society Forum has recognised that the 87 milestones and targets, combined with 94 means of implementation and more than 70 different responsible actors’ can contribute to building an interlinkage between the EaP countries. Nevertheless, it points out that the main actors engaged in the processes are the Commission / EEAS and the EaP countries’ ministries, with a much more limited role for the EU Member States, even if their cooperation could ensure more cohesion and a stronger impact of the EU’s actions. The analysis of the 2020 deliverables also shows a limited role for civil society actors.

Euronest, a key component of the EaP

The Euronest assembly was established in 2011 as a part of the EaP. It is made up of 60 Members of the European Parliament and 50 members of the parliaments of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. The Euronest assembly meets once a year in plenary to evaluate the state of the EaP and to make proposals. It is a unique forum that not only provides opportunities for Armenian and Azerbaijani delegations to meet, but more generally enables MPs from the region to maintain closer ties with MEPs. According to research, Euronest is a very good example of the effect of the Parliament’s diplomacy, as MEPs and the political groups (at political level) and the Parliament’s secretariat (at a more technical level) do a lot to promote EaP values and practices.

Euronest 2018

During its June 2018 plenary session, Euronest called upon the EU to increase its mediation in the frozen conflicts, as they constitute a major challenge for democracy and security in the region. The members also adopted resolutions on direct foreign investment, energy efficiency and undeclared labour. They also called for the liberation of the Ukrainian political prisoners in Russia, notably Oleg Sentsov, and the acceleration of the ratification of the comprehensive and enhanced partnership agreement between the EU and Armenia in the EU national parliaments.