



EURONEST PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY
ASSEMBLÉE PARLEMENTAIRE EURONEST
PARLAMENTARISCHE VERSAMMLUNG EURONEST
ПАРЛАМЕНТСКАЯ АССАМБЛЕЯ ЕВРОНЕСТ

Plenary session

21.2.2023

RESOLUTION

on capital cities: economic development and challenges in the post COVID-19 reality

Resolution by the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly on capital cities: economic development and challenges in the post COVID-19 reality

The Euronest Parliamentary Assembly,

- having regard to Articles 5 and 6 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, as well as to Articles 145 to 149 (Title IX – Employment) and Articles 165 and 166 (Title XII – Education, vocational training, youth and sport) thereof,
- having regard to the development of the Eastern Neighbourhood policy since 2004 and its Eastern Partnership component since 2009 and in particular to the Commission’s progress reports on its implementation,
- having regard to the Association Agreements between the EU and Georgia¹, the EU and Moldova² and the EU and Ukraine³, which set the objective of Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas, as well as to the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement between the EU and Armenia⁴ and the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the EU and Azerbaijan⁵,
- having regard to the decision by the European Council to grant EU candidate status to Ukraine and Moldova and to recognise the European perspective of Georgia,
- having regard to the Constituent Act of the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly of 3 May 2011 (last amended on 26 June 2018)⁶,
- having regard to the Commission and European External Action Service joint staff working document of 9 June 2017 entitled ‘Eastern Partnership – 20 Deliverables for 2020: focusing on key priorities and tangible results’ (SWD(2017)0300),
- having regard to the joint communication of the Commission and the Vice-President / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy of 18 March 2020 entitled ‘Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020: Reinforcing Resilience – an Eastern Partnership that delivers for all’ (JOIN(2020)0007) and to the Council conclusions of 11 May 2020 on Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020,
- having regard to the message of the Bureau of the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly of 12 June 2020 on the occasion of the video conference of the leaders of the Eastern Partnership of 18 June 2020,
- having regard to the joint declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit held in Brussels on 15 December 2021;
- having regard to the European Parliament recommendation of 19 June 2020 to the

¹ OJ L 261, 30.8.2014, p. 4.

² OJ L 260, 30.8.2014, p. 4.

³ OJ L 161, 29.5.2014, p. 3.

⁴ OJ L 23, 26.1.2018, p. 4.

⁵ OJ L 246, 17.9.1999, p. 3.

⁶ OJ C 198, 6.7.2011, p. 4.

Council, the Commission and the Vice-President / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on the Eastern Partnership, in the run-up to the June 2020 Summit⁷,

- having regard to the remarks made by European Council President Charles Michel after the Eastern Partnership leaders’ video conference of 18 June 2020,
- having regard to the 2018-2020 action plan of the Conference of the Regional and Local Authorities for the Eastern Partnership,
- having regard to the resolution by the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly of 9 December 2019 on innovation in education and education reforms in the EU and Eastern partners’ countries: challenges and opportunities⁸,
- having regard to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda) adopted at the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit on 25 September 2015 and in particular to Sustainable Development Goal 4 on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all,
- having regard to the European Pillar of Social Rights proclaimed by the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission at the Social Summit for Fair Jobs and Growth in Gothenburg on 17 November 2017 and in particular to Pillar 1 on the right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning for everyone in order to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to participate fully in society and manage successfully transitions in the labour market,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) 2021/817 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 May 2021 establishing Erasmus+: the Union Programme for education and training, youth and sport and repealing Regulation (EU) No 1288/2013⁹,
- having regard to the resolution by the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly of 22 March 2016 on the mutual recognition of professional qualifications, work experience and university diplomas within the Bologna process¹⁰,
- having regard to the Commission staff working document of 10 June 2016 entitled ‘Analytical underpinning for a New Skills Agenda for Europe’ (SWD(2016)0195),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 10 June 2016 entitled ‘A New Skills Agenda for Europe: working together to strengthen human capital, employability and competitiveness’ (COM(2016)0381),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 7 December 2016 on improving and modernising education (COM(2016)0941),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 17 January 2018 on the Digital

⁷ OJ C 362, 8.9.2021, p. 114.

⁸ OJ C 134, 24.4.2020, p. 16.

⁹ OJ L 189, 28.5.2021, p. 1.

¹⁰ OJ C 193, 31.5.2016, p. 17.

Education Action Plan (COM(2018)0022),

- having regard to the Commission proposal of 17 January 2018 for a Council recommendation on promoting common values, inclusive education and the European dimension of teaching (COM(2018)0023),
- having regard to the Commission proposal of 17 January 2018 for a Council recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning (COM(2018)0024),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 22 May 2018 entitled ‘Building a strong Europe: the role of youth, education and culture policies’ (COM(2018)0268),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 30 September 2020 on achieving the European Education Area by 2025 (COM(2020)0625),
- having regard to the Council recommendation of 26 November 2018 on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education and upper secondary education and training qualifications and the outcomes of learning periods abroad¹¹,
- having regard to the Rome Ministerial Communiqué of 19 November 2020 following the ministerial meeting of the European Higher Education Area,
- having regard to the European Parliament resolution of 11 December 2018 on education in the digital era: challenges, opportunities and lessons for EU policy design¹²,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 3 March 2020 entitled ‘EUROPE 2020: A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth’ (COM(2010)2020),
- having regard to the European Economic and Social Committee opinion of 5 May 2020 on the proposal for a Council decision on guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States’,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 30 September 2020 entitled ‘Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027: Resetting education and training for the digital age’ (COM(2020)0624), which builds on the 2018-2020 Digital Action Plan,
- having regard to the International Labour Organization (ILO) Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention (No 111) of 25 June 1958,
- having regard to the ILO Human Resources Development Convention (No 142) of 23 June 1975,
- having regard to the Commission proposal of 26 February 2020 for a Council decision on guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States (COM(2020)0070) and to the European Economic and Social Committee opinion of 5 May 2020 and the European Parliament legislative resolution of 10 July 2020 on the proposal for a

¹¹ OJ C 444, 10.12.2018, p. 1.

¹² OJ C 388, 13.11.2020, p. 2.

- Council decision on guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States¹³,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 10 March 2020 on a New Industrial Strategy for Europe (COM(2020)0102),
 - having regard to the Commission communication of 27 May 2020 entitled ‘Europe’s moment: Repair and Prepare for the Next Generation’ (COM(2020)0456),
 - having regard to the European Council conclusions of 21 July 2020, to Parliament’s resolution of 23 July 2020 on the conclusions of the extraordinary European Council meeting of 17-21 July 2020¹⁴ and to the European Council conclusions of 10 and 11 December 2020,
 - having regard to the Commission report on the implementation of macro-financial assistance to third countries in 2019 (COM(2020)0296),
 - having regard to the European Investment Bank Annual Report 2018 on the Eastern Partnership Technical Assistance Trust Fund,
 - having regard to the Commission proposal of 6 July 2018 to establish the ‘Digital Europe Programme 2021-2027’ (COM(2018)0434),
 - having regard to the Commission communication of 11 December 2019 to set out ‘The European Green Deal’, in particular its emphasis on strong environment, energy and climate partnerships with the Eastern Partnership states (COM(2019)0640),
 - having regard to Regulation (EU) 2017/1601 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 26 September 2017 establishing the European Fund for Sustainable Development (EFSD), the EFSD Guarantee and the EFSD Guarantee Fund¹⁵,
 - having regard to the Commission proposal of 28 May 2020 for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a Recovery and Resilience Facility (COM(2020)0408),
 - having regard to the UN Paris Climate Convention of 12 December 2015,
 - having regard to the Commission communication of 19 January 2021 to the European Parliament, the European Council and the Council entitled ‘A united front to beat COVID-19’, in particular its call to ensure access for the Eastern Partnership countries to some of the 2.3 billion doses of COVID-19 vaccine secured by the EU (COM(2021)0035),
 - having regard to the Commission communication of 10 March 2020 entitled ‘An SME Strategy for a sustainable and digital Europe’ (COM(2020)0103),
 - having regard to the European Parliament resolution of 10 October 2019 on foreign electoral interference and disinformation in national and European democratic

¹³ OJ C 371, 15.9.2021, p. 134.

¹⁴ OJ C 371, 15.9.2021, p. 110.

¹⁵ OJ L 249, 27.9.2017, p. 1.

processes¹⁶,

- having regard to the European Parliament resolution of 19 September 2019 on the importance of European remembrance for the future of Europe¹⁷,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 11 March 2020 entitled ‘A new Circular Economy Action Plan: For a cleaner and more competitive Europe’ (COM(2020)0098),
- having regard to the Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (‘ET 2020’)¹⁸,
- having regard to the proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of a Programme for the Union’s action in the field of health – for the period 2021-2027 and repealing Regulation (EU) No 282/2014 (‘EU4Health Programme’) (COM(2020)0405),
- having regard to the European Partnership Foreign Ministers meeting of 12 December 2022 under the chairmanship of the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell,
- having regard to the joint staff working document entitled ‘Recovery, resilience and reform: post 2020 Eastern Partnership priorities’,
- having regard to the European Parliament resolution of 8 June 2022 on security in the Eastern Partnership area and the role of the common security and defence policy¹⁹,
- having regard to the European Investment Bank Evaluation of the Eastern Partnership Technical Assistance Trust Fund (2010-2019),
- having regard to the proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directive 2003/87/EC establishing a system for greenhouse gas emission allowance trading within the Union, Decision (EU) 2015/1814 concerning the establishment and operation of a market stability reserve for the Union greenhouse gas emission trading scheme and Regulation (EU) 2015/757 (revision of the EU emissions trading system),
- having regard to the European Court of Auditors special report 09/2021 entitled ‘Disinformation affecting the EU: tackled but not tamed’,
- having regard to the European Parliament recommendation of 23 November 2022 to the Council, the Commission and the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy concerning the new EU strategy for enlargement²⁰,

¹⁶ OJ C 202, 28.5.2021, p. 25.

¹⁷ OJ C 171, 6.5.2021, p. 25.

¹⁸ OJ C 119, 28.5.2009, p. 2.

¹⁹ OJ C 493, 27.12.2022, p. 70.

²⁰ Texts adopted, P9_TA(2022)0406.

- having regard to the European Council conclusions of 24 and 25 March 2022,
- A. whereas the economic consequences and other repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic have had a significant impact on Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries through their effect on trade and remittances; whereas governments responded to the pandemic and Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia introduced immediate prohibitions and restrictions in a number of areas;
- B. whereas the European Union mobilised over EUR 2.5 billion to support Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine in tackling COVID-19; whereas it also supported the deployment of COVID-19 vaccines and vaccination in the EaP (EUR 40 million) and the sharing by Member States of vaccines approved by the European Medicines Agency with EaP countries, facilitated through a Team Europe approach mechanism coordinated by Poland (EUR 35 million);
- C. whereas Georgia was hit harder by the slowdown in tourism than any other EaP country and the impact on the Azerbaijani tourism sector was also devastating;
- D. whereas restrictions for containing the further spread of the virus had a negative impact on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs); whereas in Armenia's case, an outbreak in Yerevan meant SMEs there suffered a more destructive impact than in other communities; whereas SMEs in Azerbaijan's major cities and in the cities of other EaP countries reported problems caused by a drop in demand, supply chain disruption and falling sales and profits;
- E. whereas a drastic drop in foreign direct investment in the EaP region is affecting the region's post-crisis recovery;
- F. whereas EUR 100 million was provided through the Team Europe support programme to help SMEs, self-employed people and others to easily access credit and boost their businesses after the crisis; whereas over EUR 200 million from existing credit lines and grants was provided to SMEs in local currencies through the EU4Business Initiative;
- G. whereas the educational system was severely affected during the pandemic due to an immediate transition from traditional learning approaches to online education;
- H. whereas the level of digital services development differs between EaP countries and discrepancies can be observed between their internet penetration rates;
- I. whereas the services sector was hit the hardest in the EaP countries due to lower internet penetration and a lack of cyber-commerce development;
- J. whereas an overall assessment of the EaP countries reveals that cities suffered the worst and deepest economic recession, in particular those with a high concentration of population, economic activity and cases of COVID-19, while they were also worse affected by the lack of communication, closer proximity and supply chain disruptions;
- K. whereas the measures adopted by the EaP countries were aligned with those taken

across the EU to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on SMEs;

- L. whereas measures adopted by governments to mitigate the health crisis led to the full or partial closure and suspension of many businesses, which drove up unemployment;
 - M. whereas high unemployment and low savings rates in the EaP region might lead to a prolonged economic downturn and poverty;
 - N. whereas economic recovery in the EaP region is expected to be a long and complex process;
 - O. whereas large-scale liquidations and bankruptcies have been mitigated in the EaP countries through the provision of loans and short-term financing to assist SMEs during the COVID-19 pandemic;
 - P. whereas economic difficulties that were caused or exacerbated by the pandemic could further increase the unemployment rate and create additional obstacles for employability;
 - Q. whereas a lack of investment in digital technology is widening the inequalities between companies, people and places;
 - R. whereas a significant drop in consumer demand across the EaP countries, including in their capital cities, can be perceived as a long-term consequence of COVID-19;
 - S. whereas the EaP countries should place a firm emphasis on the role of education in social and economic development;
 - T. whereas the unprovoked Russian war of aggression has had a devastating effect not only on Ukraine but on the EaP region as a whole, affecting all areas of public life, including an unforeseen impact on healthcare and societal wellbeing;
 - U. whereas the European Union has reaffirmed its commitment to the EaP and its willingness to make the EaP more flexible and tailored to the needs of partner countries;
1. Underlines that COVID-19 had a powerful, negative impact on the capital cities of the EaP countries, affecting central and local authorities, as well as business and society;
 2. Notes that the authorities had to find alternatives and look for solutions to minimise the widespread economic damage caused by the pandemic in EaP capital cities;
 3. Notes that COVID-19 is one of the main factors impacting labour migration dynamics in the region; notes, in this regard, that the pandemic significantly decreased people's mobility, which pushed up unemployment in the capital cities;
 4. Highlights that the COVID-19 crisis led to a severe economic recession affecting economies and societies alike; notes at the same time that it represents an opportunity to rethink existing models of cooperation between different domestic and international stakeholders;

5. Highlights the importance of promoting multilateralism, strategic priorities and the achievement of key international commitments and objectives for education and innovation in the capital cities, including the Sustainable Development Goals, the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement;
6. Notes that digital technologies for education and training will generally enhance the synergies between the economy and education and that investments in information and communication technologies (ICTs) by education and training institutions, especially those which participate in EU programmes, will bear fruit in the capital cities;
7. Stresses that the EU's approach must be oriented towards supporting democratic and economic reforms and strengthening institutional and societal resilience;
8. Underlines the need to integrate ICTs in teaching and learning processes and to redesign education in order to move away from a model of knowledge transmission to one of knowledge co-creation in the capital cities;
9. Stresses that by re-training teachers and by modernising the education system to make it fit for the digital age, countries can improve the quality of their education systems;
10. Notes that the EaP countries can take this opportunity to accelerate their strategies and step up their investments in education and training systems in order to provide high-performance, accessible and inclusive education, including vocational education and training, lifelong learning, upskilling and reskilling;
11. Advocates strengthening contacts and exchanges with the EaP countries through joint projects developed at civil society level, including by providing support for young students and professionals for participating in EU education and training programmes such as Erasmus+;
12. Highlights the importance of the EaP countries pursuing these objectives by providing better infrastructure, connectivity and digital equipment and by training teachers to embrace technology and apply digital methodologies;
13. Notes that the EaP countries can enhance mobility through education and learning to foster the acquisition of key competences and experience that are crucial for active participation in the labour market and in society in general;
14. Stresses that educational reforms should be carefully promoted through the implementation of key programmes such as Erasmus+, Creative Europe and Horizon Europe, while the capital cities' accumulated experience would benefit the development of peripheral regions;
15. Recalls that targeted financial incentives and modular learning opportunities can encourage participation in training in the EaP countries in order to boost their efforts to help low-skilled adults acquire a minimum level of literacy, numeracy and digital skills;
16. Highlights the need to support centres of academic and research excellence in the region by strengthening academic and educational cooperation between the EaP

countries while easing the administrative burden;

17. Stresses that in order to prevent the detrimental effect on economic growth and development caused by younger and better-educated segments of the workforce leaving their countries of origin, the EaP countries should analyse how to manage the international mobility of highly skilled and qualified workers and share best practices;
18. Underlines the need to use existing online distance learning courses whenever possible, encourage education technology companies to make their resources more accessible, diversify teaching modes depending on age and capacity and encourage teacher collaboration;
19. Stresses that in order to produce more digital specialists, the EaP countries should strengthen the teaching of basic digital skills and competences from an early age and develop attractive higher education curricula, while improving the younger generation's employment prospects;
20. Notes that special attention should be paid to ensuring equal access for children in remote areas who experience exclusion;
21. Stresses that in order to promote a workplace culture of gender equality and help combat all forms of discrimination, including gender stereotyping, the EaP countries need to close their gender gaps and promote more gender-sensitive teaching in schools;
22. Highlights the need to pay additional attention to children with disabilities by ensuring the availability of online education and educational resources;
23. Stresses the need for civil society actors, employer associations, social partners, academic institutions, training centres and employment agencies to identify and close the gaps between the needs of the EaP countries' labour markets and the academic qualifications and vocational skills offered by their education and training systems;
24. Points out the need to equip young people with the tools and knowledge to enable them to engage in civic activism, play an active role in society and build a better future for themselves;
25. Stresses the need to increase assistance to the citizens of Ukraine, who are currently suffering due to the unjustified and unprovoked Russian military aggression against Ukraine; notes that, according to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, between February 2022 and 20 December 2022 more than 16.6 million refugees fled Ukraine for other countries; notes also that, according to the Prosecutor General's Office of Ukraine, between the beginning of the war and 24 December 2022 450 children were killed and 867 wounded; observes that these data do not include data from areas where there are active hostilities; notes further that by 23 December 2022, 2 619 educational institutions in Ukraine had been damaged by bombing and shelling and another 406 had been completely destroyed;
26. Recalls the need for strong engagement by businesses and higher education institutions to adapt curricula and provide internships through close cooperation

between education and training providers and the business sector;

27. Stresses the need for second-chance policies for vulnerable businesses through the establishment of a brief debt-discharge period, which would eliminate discriminatory laws against re-starters, and through the creation of dedicated guidelines and training courses;
28. Stresses that the modernisation of the EaP countries' education and training systems can undoubtedly bring tangible benefits to their own citizens;
29. Highlights the importance of continuous financial support from EU programmes and funds with an emphasis on modern infrastructure development in order to prepare the EaP countries for future membership of the European Union;
30. Stresses the important role that the EU can play in supporting the EaP countries' endeavours; commends the Eastern Partnership European School in Tbilisi, Georgia, as an important mark of the EU's influence in the region, which provides a unique opportunity for students from the six EaP countries to achieve personal, social and professional success, based on shared core European values;
31. Stresses that civil society should continue to focus on targeted measures to support local civil society in its fundamental role of monitoring governments' actions, especially their post-COVID-19 recovery policies;
32. Highlights that the capital cities of the EaP countries can remove barriers to learning and promote innovative and inclusive education and training for all, thereby making the European Higher Education Area a reality;
33. Underlines the need to reduce the administrative burden by accelerating the implementation of e-government initiatives while providing opportunities for citizens to have access to all necessary public services;
34. Notes the need to create conditions for young people to study, train, work and engage in society and calls for the EU to further step up its support in this respect;
35. Stresses the need for investments to strengthen competitiveness and integration into EU value chains;
36. Highlights the creation of initiatives on cultural and democratic education with a view to boosting mobility and people-to-people contacts and achieving stronger societies through sustainable social and economic development;
37. Highlights the importance of improving capacity to forecast, address and respond to disinformation activities related to COVID-19 and of addressing societal resilience to the threats of propaganda, fake news and hate speech, without limiting the media's freedom of speech;
38. Stresses the importance of creating more quality jobs for young people, which is particularly challenging given the structural drivers of change such as technological innovations and globalisation, in order to prevent any socio-economic consequences of

a 'brain drain' in EaP countries;

39. Notes that during the COVID-19 pandemic, all EaP countries' healthcare systems were quickly overwhelmed and therefore policymakers should increase reciprocity and the financing of public healthcare in order to increase preparedness;
40. Notes that the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the digital transition and that the EaP countries should rethink the sustainability and efficiency of current educational models;
41. Stresses that the EaP countries should cooperate on sharing experiences in post-pandemic recovery policies in order to reinforce preparedness and reciprocity in the face of similar challenges in the future;
42. Underlines the need for a clear framework for jobs to drive the twin transition, to ensure a recovery from the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, to strengthen sustainable competitiveness in capital cities, to ensure decent jobs and equal opportunities and to increase stability and prosperity in the region.
43. Underlines the need to bolster strategic investment for sustainable, green and circular economy growth, while improving food security in the EaP region;
44. Stresses the importance of boosting economic development through measures such as increased connectivity and regional development, intra-regional trade, agriculture and rural development with a strong policy emphasis on environmental protection, so as to reinforce resilience to climate change, accelerate the shift towards a low-carbon circular economy and develop the digital economy;
45. Notes the importance of enhancing technical expertise and capacity in order to introduce domestic emissions monitoring, reporting and verification frameworks in accordance with the new Enhanced Transparency Framework under the Paris Agreement;
46. Welcomes the EaP Economic and Investment Plan, which is set to mobilise EUR 2.3 billion from the EU budget in grants, blending and guarantees in order to support the post-pandemic recovery and to sustainably transform the economies of the EaP countries in order to make them more resilient and integrated; notes that the plan could leverage up to EUR 17 billion in public and private investments;
47. Calls on all stakeholders in the EU and the EaP countries to step up efforts to implement high-profile flagship initiatives, including projects which are intended to develop connectivity in the Black Sea, such as the Black Sea underwater electricity transmission cable and fibre-optic cable and direct ferry and feeder services between Georgia and EU Member States (Romania and Bulgaria), which would decrease transit and turnover time and make these regions more accessible;
48. Recalls that the European Union will continue to support those EaP countries wishing to build their resilience and stability in the region by providing various types of cooperation and engagement, including through cyber, hybrid and other non-military means.