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Questions of (the modes of) governance in the Eastern Dimension of the ENP: structures and actors*

Abstract: By exploring the modes of cooperation specific to the Eastern Dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy, the objective of this paper is to highlight that the ENP is *de facto* based on the multi-level governance (MLG) model. To this end, the key existing structures and actors involved in the implementation of the Eastern Dimension of the ENP are outlined. Moreover, the most important problems and challenges facing the present multi-level governance model of cooperation under the Eastern Dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy are discussed.

Keywords: Modes of governance, Eastern Dimension, European Neighbourhood Policy

Introduction

The overriding goal of cooperation under the Eastern Dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) is political rapprochement and economic integration between the European Union (EU) and the Eastern Dimension countries (hereafter: EDCs), i.e. Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine.¹ Yet, achieving that

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¹ *Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit*, Council of the European Union, Brussels, 7 May 2009, 8435/09 (Presse 78). See also: K. Falkowski, *Poland's Role in Shaping the Eastern Dimension of the European Union's Cooperation as Part of the Eastern Partnership Initiative*, [in:] M. A. Weresa (ed.), *Poland. Competitiveness Report 2014. A Decade in the European Union*, Warsaw School of Economics Press, Warsaw 2014, p. 343-346.

goal has never been - and will certainly never be - easy, given the diverging interests of the 28 EU Member States on the one hand and the lack of determination to get closer to the EU structures in the EDCs on the other hand. Nevertheless, to this end special structures and decision-making mechanisms have been put in place, the discussion of which shall be the subject matter of this paper. This topic has become even more relevant as, due to the relatively limited successes of the EU's cooperation with the EDCs achieved so far, within the EU increasingly – and ever more openly – voices can be heard calling for a new form of cooperation with the EDCs to be developed.

The paper puts forward the thesis that the EU's governance system of political and economic cooperation with the EDCs is in fact based on the model of multi-level governance widely adopted by the EU² (the MLG model³). It should be noted, however, that this system is subject to a number of factors, both within the EU and in the EDCs, as well as originating in the broader context of the dynamically changing international environment, which significantly lowers the effectiveness of its operation.

To support the thesis put forth above, the complexity of the multi-level governance model of cooperation between the European Union and the Eastern Dimension countries is synthetically discussed. In particular, the highly-diversified nature of this cooperation is elaborated by outlining the key existing structures and actors involved in it both on the EU side as well as on the side of its Eastern Partners. Furthermore, the most important problems and challenges facing the existing multi-level governance model of cooperation under the Eastern Dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy are highlighted.

- 2 For more on general rules of multi-level governance in the European Union, see: G. Marks, L. Hooghe, *Multi-Level Governance and European Integration*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Maryland-Oxford 2001; E. Krahmman, *Multilevel Networks in European Foreign Policy*, Ashgate, Hampshire & Burlington 2003; I. Bache, M. Flinders (eds.), *Multi-Level Governance*, Oxford University Press, New York 2005.
- 3 According to P. Schmitter, multi-level governance "can be defined as an arrangement for making binding decisions that engages a multiplicity of politically independent but otherwise interdependent actors – private and public – at different levels of territorial aggregation in more-or-less continuous negotiation/deliberation/implementation, and that does not assign exclusive policy competence or assert a stable hierarchy of political authority to any of these levels". See: P. Schmitter, *Neo-functionalism*, [in:] A. Wiener, T. Diez (eds.), *European Integration Theory*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2004, p. 49.

1. Description of the multi-level governance model (of cooperation) under the Eastern Dimension of the ENP – key structures and actors

The cooperation of the EU with the EDCs has been conducted by a range of different actors on both sides (national or community, government or non-government) on two fundamental levels – bilateral and multilateral. The main long-term goal of bilateral cooperation between the EU and the individual Partner States is political association between these States and the EU as well as establishment of Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (DCFTA), gradual liberalisation of visa regimes towards reaching full visa liberalisation, and deeper energy cooperation.

In the case of bilateral relations between the EU and each Partner State separately on the level of government institutions, the key instruments aimed to deepen these relations (and, as a consequence, to bring about a gradual integration of the Partner States with the European Union) are as follows:

- Association Agreements – which are ultimately to replace the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements concluded earlier.⁴ Their main objective is enhanced political association and economic integration (including the establishment of a free trade area), deeper cooperation on justice and security issues, as well as new institutional structures for the cooperation of the Eastern Dimension countries with the EU. What needs to be highlighted here, however, is that the objective of the Association Agreements currently under negotiation with the Eastern Dimension countries is not their future membership in the European Union.⁵
- Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (DCFTAs) – the most crucial element of Association Agreements based on

4 All countries covered by the Eastern Dimension of the ENP signed Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs) with the European Union (Armenia – on 22 April 1996, Azerbaijan – on 22 April 1996, Belarus – on 6 March 1995, Georgia – on 22 April 1996, Moldova – on 28 November 1994, Ukraine – on 14 June 1994, respectively). These agreements came into effect for all Eastern Partner States except for Belarus (in that case, the agreement was suspended in September 1997 since it had not been ratified by the EU).

5 *Association Agreements*, <http://eas.europa.eu/association/>, accessed 28.03.2015.

which free trade areas extending to almost all goods and services (*comprehensive*) shall be established whereas the Partner States should adjust most of their regulations regarding trade and conducting business activity on their territories so that they comply with the EU standards (*deep*).⁶

- Mobility Partnerships, Visa Facilitation and Readmission Agreements – in line with the Global Approach to Migration and Mobility, enabling citizens to move around Europe securely is a vital element of the Eastern Partnership Initiative, therefore the European Union fosters the mobility of the citizens of the Partner States through visa facilitation and liberalisation, and establishes rules for managing the return of irregular migrants through readmission agreements.⁷
- Comprehensive Institution Building (CIB) Programmes – whose objective is to foster enhanced relations between the EU and the Partner States under the Eastern Partnership Initiative, i.e. by helping the EDCs to meet the preconditions for signing an Association Agreement and to start and conclude negotiations on establishing a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area. The CIB Programmes are to ensure effective institution-building for institutions that are key to preparing the ground for enhanced relations as described above.⁸

A special purpose-built system of permanent multilateral structures, i.e. Multilateral Thematic Platforms and Flagship Initiatives, has been put in place under the multilateral cooperation which ultimately provides for taking common activities aimed to strengthen political and economic transition in the Partner States by creating special forums for sharing information and experience on the level of heads of state and government, ministers of foreign affairs, higher executive officers and experts. Under the thematic platforms, the following four

6 W. Koeth, *The 'Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements': an Appropriate Response by the EU to the Challenges in its Neighbourhood?*, EIPA, Maastricht 2014.

7 *Mobility partnerships, visa facilitation and readmission agreements*, http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/international-affairs/eastern-partnership/mobility-partnerships-visa-facilitation-and-readmission-agreements/index_en.htm, accessed 28.03.2015.

8 *Comprehensive Institution Building Programme 2011-2013*, European Commission, External Relations Directorate General, p. 1.

main areas (platforms) of cooperation between the EU and the Partner States have been identified:

- Democracy, good governance and stability (platform 1);
- Economic integration and convergence with UE policies (platform 2);
- Energy security (platform 3);
- Contacts between people (platform 4).⁹

Meetings of each platform are held at least twice a year at the level of higher officials engaged in the reform work in the relevant policy areas. The general idea behind the platforms and their functioning is to plan, agree on and coordinate activities aimed to support the development of multilateral cooperation. Within each platform, a special set of priorities, accompanied by an applicable action plan, has been adopted and efforts are made at carrying out an ongoing assessment of progress towards achieving them. The work reports of each platform are presented to the annual meetings of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the EU and of the Partner States. Each thematic platform is supported by expert panels appointed to conduct reviews and to analyse the situation in individual Partner States with view to the issues covered by the respective platform and then to provide their recommendations for actions taken and planned. Among the additional forms of multilateral cooperation are also training courses, seminars and workshops organised for the purposes of thematic platforms and expert panels.

The second permanent multilateral cooperation structure under the Eastern Dimension of the ENP are the so-called Flagship Initiatives. Their main objective is to promote the Eastern Partnership Initiative by giving it additional momentum, concrete substance and more visibility, as well as to attract multi-donor support, financing from different international financial institutions and private sector investment. The Flagships Initiatives currently include:

- Integrated Border Management Programme;
- Small and Medium-size Enterprise (SME) Flagship Initiative;

⁹ *Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit*, Council of the European Union, Brussels, 7 May 2009, 8435/09 (Presse 78); http://eeas.europa.eu/eastern/platforms/index_en.htm, accessed 22.03.2015.

- Regional energy markets and energy efficiency;
- Diversification of energy supply: the Southern Energy Corridor;
- Prevention of, preparedness for, and response to natural and man-made disasters;
- Flagship initiative to promote good environmental governance.¹⁰

When discussing the instruments of multilateral cooperation under the Eastern Dimension of the ENP, special meetings of the leaders of the European Union and the Eastern Partnership Initiative states also deserve a mention. Officially called Eastern Partnership Summits, these meetings are held every two years in the capital of the EU Member State currently presiding over the Council of the European Union. To date, four such summits have been held: in Prague (2009), Warsaw (2011), Vilnius (2013) and the most recent one in Riga (May 2015).

While all forms of cooperation under the Eastern Dimension of the ENP discussed so far are implemented and coordinated on the government level, another important dimension of cooperation within the Eastern Partnership Initiative is conducted by non-government institutions. The most important non-government initiatives under the Eastern Dimension are as follows:

- Civil Society Forum – launched in 2009, it brings together representatives of civil society organisations from the EU and the Partner States. The CSF acts to promote the development of civil society in the Eastern Partnership States, to strengthen the position of non-government organisations in their dialogue with public authorities and to intensify the cooperation between civil society organisations in the EU and in the Partner States.
- EURONEST Parliamentary Assembly – established in May 2011, it consists of 60 delegates of the European Parliament and 10 delegates of the parliament of each Partner State (except for Belarus). The EURONEST Parliamentary Assembly meets once a year for a plenary session and includes four standing committees: Committee on Political Affairs, Human Rights and Democracy; Committee on Economic Integration, Legal Approximation and Convergence with EU Policies; Commit-

¹⁰ http://eeas.europa.eu/eastern/initiatives/index_en.htm, accessed 22.03.2015.

tee on Energy Security; and Committee on Social Affairs, Education, Culture and Civil Society. The mission of EURONEST is to deepen the cooperation within the Eastern Partnership, e.g. by contributing to the creation of conditions necessary for speeding up the political association and further economic integration between the EU and the Partner States.

- Eastern Partnership Business Forum – inaugurated in 2011 in Sopot, its objective is to intensify the cooperation between business entities from the EU and the Partner States by providing a platform for exchanging experiences, business networking and discussing possibilities of shared investment projects.
- Conference of Regional and Local Authorities for the Eastern Partnership (CORLEAP) – established in 2011 by the EU Committee of the Regions, its members are 36 regional and local politicians, half from the EU's Committee of the Regions and the other half from the six Partner States. CORLEAP is a permanent political forum for cooperation between local governments from the European Union and local and regional authorities from Eastern Partnership countries. The Conference seeks to foster relations between regional authorities, to conduct a dialogue on reforms aimed at decentralising governance, and to facilitate cross-border and regional cooperation between countries engaged in the Eastern Partnership Initiative.¹¹

From the point of view of achieving the objectives set for both the bilateral and multilateral cooperation, relevant financial instruments providing the necessary support for taking appropriate actions are a crucial element of the governance system of cooperation under the Eastern Dimension of the ENP. Among them are:

- European Neighbourhood Instrument (which has replaced the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument) – providing financial support for areas considered priorities, i.e. promoting small businesses, civil-society engagement, climate change action, easier mobility of people, energy coopera-

11 http://www.ms.gov.pl/pl/polityka_zagraniczna/partnerstwo_wschodnie/wymiar_pozarządowy/, accessed 22.03.2015.

tion, gender equality promotion, gradual economic integration, people-to-people contacts, transport connections, youth and employment. The instrument provides financing for bilateral programmes covering support to individual Partner States; multi-country programmes addressing challenges shared by all or a few of the Partner States, and regional and sub-regional cooperation between two or more Partner States; and Cross-Border Cooperation programmes between EU Member States and Eastern Partner States which are implemented along their shared part of the external border of the EU (including Russia).¹²

- Neighbourhood Investment Facility (NIF) – financial instrument whose objective is to provide additional funding to meet the investment needs of the EU neighbouring countries (including also the Eastern Partnership countries) with regard to infrastructure projects in sectors such as transport, energy, the natural environment and social issues (e.g. building hospitals or schools). Also the private sector is supported by the NIF, in particular through risk capital operations aimed at SMEs.¹³
- Eastern Partnership Technical Assistance Trust Fund – securing funding for: pre-feasibility, feasibility and other studies for the preparation of investment projects; institutional and legal assessments; environmental and social impact assessments; project management and/or promoter support throughout the process of project implementation; upstream studies identifying investment needs and priorities as well as horizontal activities addressing institutional issues and capacity building.¹⁴
- Eastern Partners Facility – financial instrument provided by the European Investment Bank which supports the EU European Neighbourhood Policy in the Eastern Partner States by providing financing for projects of significant EU interest. The EPF supports the resumption of FDI in Eastern Partnership coun-

12 *The European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI)*, <http://www.enpi-info.eu/ENI>, accessed 29.03.2015.

13 *EU Neighbourhood & Russia – Neighbourhood Investment Facility*, http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/regions/eu-neighbourhood-region-and-russia/interregional-cooperation/neighbourhood-investment_en, accessed 29.03.2015.

14 *Eastern Partnership Technical Assistance Trust Fund (EPTATF)*, <http://www.eib.org/projects/regions/eastern-neighbours/instruments/technical-assistance/index.htm>, accessed 29.03.2015.

tries, and contributes to the modernisation of their economies and to their integration with the EU economy.

- Neighbourhood Civil Society Facility – provides financial support for projects run by civil society that are relevant to the EU European Neighbourhood Policy. Its objective is also to foster capacity building in civil society organisations in the EU neighbouring regions in order to enhance their role in promoting reform and increasing public accountability in their countries and to increase civil society involvement in sector policy dialogues and implementation of EU cooperation in respective fields.¹⁵
- European Endowment for Democracy – aimed at supporting political parties, non-registered NGOs, trade unions and other social partners in an effort to promote deep and sustainable democracy as well as respect for human rights and the rule of law in a coherent and concerted manner.¹⁶

All the above shows that in order to achieve the basic objectives of the Eastern Partnership Initiative the European Union has created a highly diversified system of mutual cooperation with the Eastern Partners in the form of institutions and platforms to foster the cooperation on the one hand, and financial instruments providing funds on the other. However, it needs to be stressed that this multi-level structure of cooperation and the multitude of actors of different kinds and forms whose interests are very often *de facto* contradictory, which all translate into a multi-level governance model of cooperation under the Eastern Dimension of the ENP, give rise to very serious problems with decision-making processes or simply just with the coordination of actions taken, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

15 *Neighbourhood Civil Society Facility*, http://www.enpi-info.eu/mainmed.php?id=393&id_type=10, accessed 29.03.2015.

16 *The European Endowment for Democracy – Support for the unsupported*, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-12-1199_en.htm, accessed 29.03.2015.

2. The main problems and challenges facing the multi-level governance model of cooperation under the Eastern Dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy

As the examination of the system of cooperation under the Eastern Dimension of the ENP presented above has shown, this system is very complex and diverse. On the one hand, it can prove to be an advantage as it enables a parallel development of the cooperation on many important levels. On the other hand, however, it poses a serious challenge to the coordination and governance of all actions taken under the mutual cooperation.

Definitely, the coordination of cooperation between the EU and the Partner States, and in the process also the effective governance thereof, is not helped by the multitude of actors involved in it as – on different levels of the bilateral and multilateral cooperation under the Eastern Dimension – representatives of different levels of state institutions (ranging from leaders and heads of states to heads of government, relevant ministers, higher officials, representatives of parliaments, local government bodies and financial institutions up to experts representing individual countries) as well as a number of non-government organisations (both business and social) take part in it.

Another important challenge to effective multi-level cooperation under the Eastern Dimension of the ENP is the existing consultation and decision-taking process within the European Union.¹⁷ Its complexity, and often the necessity to reach a compromise amid huge divergence in national interests between the EU Member States, makes the decision-taking on “eastern issues” all the more difficult and complicated. It is definitely not made any easier by the fact that some EU Member States tend to focus more on pursuing their own independent eastern policies rather than to support common initiatives aimed at enhancing the integration of the Partner States with the EU under the Eastern Partnership Initiative (e.g. Germany and France). Obviously, one should not forget the position and role of Russia in this as well

¹⁷ For more information about this subject see: H. Wallace, M. A. Pollack, A. R. Young (eds.), *Policy-Making in the European Union*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2010.

as geostrategic reasons which play a part in it. In other EU Member States, mostly from Southern Europe and the Iberian Peninsula, the development of the Eastern Dimension of the ENP is not and has in fact never been considered a priority. For them, and it is not surprising, the Mediterranean Dimension of the ENP is much more important. Among the countries that are undoubtedly vitally interested in intensifying the cooperation with the Eastern Partner States are, apart from Scandinavian countries, Poland and Baltic states (Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia). The ongoing conflict in Ukraine and Russian involvement in it has managed to unite, albeit only for the time being, the European community in the belief that the cooperation under the Eastern Partnership as a whole (not just with Ukraine) needs to be intensified; however, quite quickly voices could be heard, e.g. in Greece and in Hungary, calling for keeping both the structures of cooperation put in place so far as well as the pace of taking actions unchanged. Moreover, the attitude of EDCs themselves towards accelerating and expanding the range of integration processes with the EU remains a pivotal factor. All these reasons altogether do not facilitate the governance of cooperation under the Eastern Partnership Initiative.

Another frailty of the multi-level governance model of cooperation under the Eastern Dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy on the EU side is the low efficiency of spending the financial means allotted for performing activities thereunder. For instance, in the case of Moldavia and Georgia, the European Union has so far managed to use just about half of the funds it originally planned to spend there. This is mostly caused by the complicated and long procedures of applying for and spending EU funds, especially for non-government institutions in third countries. Another problem faced by the EU, in particular in cooperation with Armenia, Azerbaijan and also with Ukraine, is the lack of transparency in how public finances, and consequently the EU funds, are managed. Moreover, yet another important issue in this context is a lack of mechanisms controlling how such funds are spent in the Partner States, which understandably leads to concerns about transferring money to them and dampens the EU's willingness to do that, due to the risk of misappropriation and embezzlement.

Still, factors that hinder both the cooperation with the EU, and the coordination and governance thereof are present also in the EDCs themselves.

First, these countries need to state explicitly and unequivocally what their goal for enhancing relations with the EU is. So far, they have very often acted in a very “mercenary” manner whereby their engagement in the cooperation with the EU has depended on their current political and economic situation and the short-sighted vested interests of their governing elites. The European integration as such has not at all been treated as a civilisational choice to be made. In effect, such an approach has weakened their actual position in negotiations with the EU and does not allow to intensify the real integration and to implement the necessary structural reforms required of them by the European Union.¹⁸

The lack of an unequivocal pro-European stance among the Eastern Partnership countries is clearly evidenced by the fact that at present only half of the six Partner States, i.e. Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, declare their will to further intensify the cooperation with the EU. Armenia, in turn, is becoming more and more strongly integrated with Russia, especially on the economic level under the Eurasian Economic Union, whereas Azerbaijan is not really interested in establishing a free trade zone with the EU or in further democratisation of the country.¹⁹ Belarus is a separate case for that matter as, due to the long and strong economic integration with Russia and the authoritarian character of A. Lukashenko’s regime, in fact it does not get involved in any political and economic cooperation with the European Union at all.

Another, equally vital problem for the efficient multi-level cooperation between the Eastern Partner States and the EU, the measurable outcome of which is the maximal possible integration of the EDCs with the European Union as quickly as possible, is Russia and the policy it pursues in the post-Soviet area.²⁰ Since the very inception of the Eastern Partnership Initiative in May 2009 at the EU Summit in Prague,

18 R. Sadowski, *Partnerstwo Wschodnie – w którym miejscu jesteśmy?*, http://ec.europa.eu/polska/news/opinie/111007_partnerstwo_wschodnie_pl.htm, accessed 10.04.2015.

19 A. Hug, *Challenges for the EU’s Eastern Partnership*, [in:] A. Hug (ed.), *Trouble in the Neighbourhood? The Future of the EU’s Eastern Partnership*, The Foreign Policy Centre, London 2015, p. 8-20.

20 I. Gretskiy, E. Treshchenkov, K. Golubev, *Russia’s Perceptions and Misperceptions of the EU Eastern Partnership*, “Communist and Post-Communist Studies”, vol. 47, September-December 2014, issues 3-4, p. 375-383.

Russia has sought to discredit it.²¹ To that end, it has taken a number of steps to coerce the Eastern Partnership countries into cooperating more tightly with Russia – examples being its actions against Armenia, Belarus and also against Ukraine during the rule of W. Yanukovych. Even more so, Russia clearly seeks to destabilise the entire region with the aim to crush the pro-European aspirations of the Eastern Partnership countries as well as to discourage and scare off the EU countries. The best examples of such actions taken by the Russian Federation are its interference and continued fanning of the flames of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh, supporting Abkhazia and South Ossetia on the territory of Georgia and the anti-European opposition in Moldova (especially in Transnistria and Gagauzia), etc.

The analysis conducted above clearly shows that the existing multi-level governance model of cooperation under the Eastern Dimension of the ENP encounters a number of bottlenecks, both on the EU side and on the side of the Partner States, which make it considerably more difficult, reducing its positive results. However, it is in the interest of all those parties of the Eastern Partnership Initiative which are truly interested in further deepening of the European integration to increase the efficiency of this cooperation within the existing structures as well as to focus on developing new simplified mechanisms of the cooperation in future.

Also, given the different approaches represented by the Eastern Partner States towards gradual integration with the EU (albeit, without a possibility of future EU membership) as pointed out above, it seems very likely that new cooperation models based on the 'EU + 3-1-2' formula (whereby, 3 stands for Georgia, Moldavia and Ukraine, 1 for Azerbaijan and 2 for Armenia and Belarus) will be developed. Such a turn of events would even further complicate the governance model of cooperation under the entire Eastern Dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy; on the other hand, however, it might increase its actual efficacy and efficiency as measured by the progress

21 A. Zagorski, *Eastern Partnership from the Russian Perspective*, http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/ipgg/2011-3/05_zagorski.pdf, accessed 26.02.2015.

made in the integration processes of the Partner States with the European Union.

Conclusions

In practice, the cooperation under the Eastern Dimension of the ENP is conducted according to a multi-level governance model of cooperation. Its basic characteristics include:

- strong diversification of structures of the cooperation and actors involved in it (government and non-government, public and private, political, economic and social) which are independent in their decision-making processes;
- polycentric decision-making, the direct consequence of which is the hindering and delaying of decision-making processes in the areas covered by the mutual cooperation (which is especially visible on the EU side);
- the key role of negotiations of all kinds, which translates into the permanent dependence of the effects of the governance on skills of the parties involved and their willingness to reach compromises;
- lack of any actual formal instruments to enforce the decisions and actions taken;
- high dynamics in the wake of geopolitical changes (of political, economic and social character), both endogenous (within the existing structures of cooperation) and exogenous (the impact of external factors – third parties such as e.g. Russia), with regard to the course of the cooperation between the Partner States and the European Union and the progress made therein.

Although the main characteristics of the multi-level governance model of cooperation under the Eastern Dimension of the ENP listed above can be seen as frailties (problems) of that governance model affecting its efficiency, in this context the most important factor determining the results of that cooperation is the goodwill and determination of both sides as regards the consistent accomplishment of its strategic goal which is political rapprochement and economic integration between the European Union and the six countries of Eastern Europe and South Caucasus (EDCs). Yet, neither on the EU side nor

– all the more so as it may seem – on the side of its Eastern Partner States such determination exists.

In the case of the EU Member States, a shared consistent vision is missing which would determine the long-term direction of developing relations with countries covered by the Eastern Partnership Initiative as the current EU strategy focuses rather on short- or medium-term actions. At the same time, the EU strategy is the outcome of interests of all 28 Member States and one should not forget that the Eastern Partnership Initiative does not play any significant role for Western and Southern European countries and therefore these countries are not interested in enhancing the cooperation between the EU and its Eastern neighbours. Another important issue here is also the play of interests with Russia. Also, not all Eastern Dimension countries are willing to deepen their cooperation with the EU (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus).

All the above does not facilitate the governance of the cooperation based on the multi-level structures created so far under the Eastern Dimension of the ENP. Moreover, it puts in question the future of the entire initiative in its current shape. It seems that its future will depend not so much on further streamlining of the existing mechanisms of multi-level governance but on the EU's ability to effectively strengthen its political and economic position in this part of the world and on successfully persuading the Partner States that – from the point of view of their civilisational choice – further deepening of their integration with the EU will simply pay off for them. Also, changes to the current form of cooperation can be necessary due to the high dynamics of international relations in the post-Soviet area on the one hand, and the different interests as regards the deepening of the cooperation with the EU among the countries covered by the Eastern Partnership Initiative, on the other.

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