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Interests and preferences and their constitutive role in the EaP: regional, national and local actors vis-à-vis the ENP's goals and objectives*

Abstract: From its onset, the ENP was marred by a diversity of irreconcilable interests and preferences of actors (regional, national and local) directly and indirectly involved in that policy-strategy. That variability of interests and preferences has become particularly apparent in the Eastern Partnership (EaP), a fundamental component of the ENP. The objective of this paper is to examine the complex web of interests and preferences that have shaped the EaP over the past years. To this end the ENP's objectives are outlined and its complexity highlighted. In what follows the interests and preferences of the plethora of actors involved in the ENP are discussed. It is stressed that the EU's primary objective associated with the ENP, including the EaP, has been to establish peaceful and cooperative relations with its neighbours. However, as following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Russia has always aimed at restoring its sphere of influence, the ENP's efficiency remains a function of interests and preferences shaping the region.

Keywords: European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), Eastern Partnership (EaP), Russia, interests, preferences

Introduction

From its onset, the ENP was marred by a diversity of irreconcilable interests and preferences of actors (regional, national and local) directly

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and indirectly involved in that policy-strategy. That variability of interests and preferences has become particularly apparent in the Eastern Partnership (EaP). The objective of this paper is to examine the complex web of interests and preferences that have shaped the EaP over the past years. To this end the ENP's objectives are outlined and its complexity highlighted. In what follows the empirical search-light is directed at interests and preferences of the plethora of actors involved in the ENP. Conclusions ensue. It is argued that the EU's primary objective associated with the ENP has been to establish peaceful and cooperative relations with its neighbours. This stands in stark contrast to Russia that, following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, has always aimed at restoring its sphere of influence thus affecting the ENP's efficiency in its regional context.

1 The ENP's goals and objectives

1. In order to understand the rationale behind the ENP, it is necessary to reflect on the specific political circumstances that had triggered the launch of the ENP. In the early 2000s, negotiations that eventually led to the 2004 'big bang' EU enlargement continued. Simultaneously, the global public opinion was shocked by the 9/11 attacks that highlighted the vulnerability of the West to new security threats. In this context, it has become apparent that the EU's prosperity and stability, more than ever before, has become a function of the developments in the EU's imminent neighbourhood and the EU's ability to secure friendly relations with its neighbours. In this view, it became necessary to stabilise the EU's neighbourhood by promoting development in respective areas¹ rather than run "the risk of seeing the periphery destabilise the EU."² Drawing the inspiration from the EU enlargement policy, perceived as "the EU's most successful foreign policy instrument,"³

1 Of course, the maintenance of stability in the EU's imminent neighbourhood and the promotion of development have always been of concern for the EU. The Barcelona Process launched in 1995 serves as a good case in point.

2 D. Cadier, *Is the European Neighbourhood Policy a Substitute for Enlargement?*, p. 53, www.lse.ac.uk/IDEAS/publications/.../Cadier_D.pdf

3 European Commission, *Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament, Wider Europe – Neighbourhood: A New Framework For Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours*, COM (2003) 104, Brussels, 11.3.2003, p. 5.

in 2003 the European Commission proposed a new framework⁴ for the European periphery. The ENP was launched a year later.⁵ Its goal was to create a “ring of friends” around the EU and foster peaceful and cooperative relations.⁶ In this vein, the European Commission offered the countries included in the ENP the possibility to increase cooperation with the EU in economic, political, cultural and security matters.⁷ The cooperation was to be based on shared values, incl. democracy, the rule of law, and respect for human rights.⁸

The ENP’s focus is on economic and trade reforms, institutional reforms, migration policies, as well as collaboration in research and higher education.⁹ It has frequently been argued in the literature that the ENP constitutes in fact an alternative to EU membership. Indeed, the ENP’s power of attraction is softer than that related to the prospect of a full membership in the EU. The ENP has offered a prospect of cooperation with the EU, whereas that prospect depended on a form of light conditionality and resulted in vague and non-committal relationships between the EU and its partner-countries.¹⁰ Paradoxically, the lack of hard conditionality in the ENP framework, as in the case of the ‘big bang’ enlargement, was expected to increase the efficiency of other mechanisms employed by the EU that were aimed at promotion of national reforms, e.g. socialisation of elites.¹¹ However, since the EU’s financial resources are limited and the existing EU regulatory framework constrains the EU’s ability to create valid incentives, the efficiency of the ENP has remained limited. For instance, visa liberalisation could serve as a powerful incentive for several of the ENP countries to endorse conditionality. However, due to migration-related concerns, it was impossible to reach a consensus with regard to the visa-regime among the EU member-states.

4 Ibidem.

5 Ibidem.

6 European Commission, Communication from the Commission, European Neighbourhood Policy Strategy Paper, COM (2004) 373, p. 3.

7 Ibidem.

8 European Commission, Communication on Wider Europe – Neighbourhood, p. 4.

9 European Commission, Communication from the Commission. Paving the way for a New Neighbourhood Instrument, COM (2003), 393, p. 3.

10 G. Sasse, *The European Neighbourhood Policy: Conditionality Revised for the EU's Eastern Neighbours*, “Europe-Asia Studies”, vol. 60, 2008, issue 2, p. 295-316.

11 Ibidem.

2. The ENP's tools

The ENP employs two sets of tools designed to foster the implementation of the ENP's goals and objectives. The one set of tools foresees financial and technical assistance, the development of infrastructure, preferential trade agreements as well as the perspective of participating in the EU internal market, actions aimed at increasing the convergence of the legal systems, trade facilitation, etc. These instruments were designed to alleviate the cost of economic transformation that respective countries included in the ENP were undergoing. In December 2006, the European Commission decided to extend the toolkit of the ENP by introducing the Association Agreement (AA). An important component of the AA was the prospect of a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (AA/DCFTA) as well as visa facilitation, readmission agreements and the development of initiatives aimed at promoting student exchanges.¹² As of 2014, only Moldova and Georgia have made progress in reforms preparing them for the implementation of the AA/DCFTA.¹³ Armenia, which has continued democratic reforms, in 2013 decided not to initiate the AA/DCFTA negotiations announcing its intention to join Belarus in the Eurasian Customs Union,¹⁴ which finally took place in January 2015.¹⁵

The second type of tools that the ENP employs consists of a wide range of policy tools. Apart from typical instruments, such as common strategies, joint actions or positions in the ENP framework, the EU can impose sanctions and restrictions, including arms embargo, visa restrictions, the freezing of funds, and flight bans. Furthermore, several diplomatic instruments are used in the context of the ENP, including demarché, public statements, and visits at the highest level as well as the appeal of ambassadors, political consultations, support for other international organisations' activities, and elections' obser-

12 European Commission, Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on Strengthening the European Neighbourhood Policy, COM (2006) 726, Brussels, 4 December 2006.

13 Moldova and Georgia signed the Association Agreements, including the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, in the margins of the EU summit held on 27 June 2014. Moldova promptly ratified the Agreement on 2 July. Official website of the EEAS: http://eeas.europa.eu/index_en.htm as of 27.09.2015.

14 Members: Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Armenia. Acceding country: Kyrgyzstan.

15 Official website of the EEAS: http://eeas.europa.eu/index_en.htm as of 27.09.2015.

uations. It needs to be stressed that there were only several cases when these tools were actually employed. These few instances include: asset freezes and travel bans for Belarusian leaders as well as travel ban for Transnistrian leaders.¹⁶ Last but not least, the EU has at its disposal the instruments in the field of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) for civilian and military management of conflicts.¹⁷

A few years of the ENP's functioning brought about the problem of an imbalance between the regional and bilateral approach that the EU has employed towards its partner-countries. The bilateral instruments led to a diversification of the relationship between the EU and specific partner-countries. To counterbalance those developments, emphasis was placed in the ENP on developing regional initiatives for the countries in the region.¹⁸ As far as the process of regional integration of the Eastern neighbourhood countries, i.e. including Russia, Ukraine and the South Caucasus countries, is concerned, it was not easy to bring them to one regional table and discuss the prospect of collaboration. Ultimately, Russia, despite the fact that it lies in the immediate neighbourhood of the EU, was not covered by the ENP. The EU-Russia relations are based on a strategic partnership.¹⁹ The problem did not consist in the definition of the 'region' but in the overlapping zones of interests that the diverse players represented, in particular the EU and Russia.²⁰ The following section dwells on this issue.

- 16 E. Gnedina, N. Popescu, *The European Neighbourhood Policy's First Decade in the Eastern Neighbourhood*, Neighbourhood Policy Paper, no. 3, Center for International and European Studies, July 2012, p. 3.
- 17 S. Gstohl, *The EU as a Norm Exporter?*, [in:] D. Mahncke, S. Gstohl (ed.), *Europe's Near Abroad. Promises and Prospects of the EU's Neighbourhood Policy*, P.I.E. Peter Lang S.A., Brussels 2008, p. 282-283.
- 18 The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, replaced by the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) in 2008, was a raw model of a multilateral forum for dialogue in many areas between the countries of a region. The initiative is to boost the partnership and raise the political level of strategic relations between the EU and its Southern partners. On the basis of the *acquis* of the Barcelona Process, the UfM offers a more balanced system of administration and greater transparency for citizens. More important changes introduced by the UfM are: a rotating presidency of the EU representative and a representative of the Mediterranean countries, establishment of the Secretariat in Barcelona, which is responsible for identifying and promoting projects of regional, sub-regional and transnational meaning in different sectors (e.g. sea and road transport, alternative energy sources, MSP). Official EC website: ec.europa.eu.
- 19 European Communities, *European Neighbourhood Policy – overview of recent economic developments – a comparison with the EU 2009 edition*, Eurostat compact guide, 2009, p. 2.
- 20 F. Tassinari, *A Synergy for Black Sea Regional Cooperation. Guidelines for an EU Initiative*, "CEPS Policy Brief", July 2006, no. 105, p. 1; S. A. Andreev, *The Future of European Neighbourhood Policy and*

3. Overlapping and conflicting interests in the ENP

The first unsuccessful attempt to include the states of a wider Black Sea region²¹ in the framework of a common regional platform of cooperation was the establishment of the multilateral forum for cooperation in the form of Black Sea Synergy²² (BSS)²³ in 2007.²⁴ However, it was the 2008 war in Georgia that served as a trigger to tighten the European two-tier partnership (regional and bilateral) in the Eastern neighbourhood and as an intermediate factor to establish the Eastern Partnership (EaP) in 2009.²⁵ The EaP²⁶ builds on the values that the EU seeks to foster when developing cooperation with its neighbours, including human rights, the market economy, sustainable development, good governance, energy security and many more. Increased involvement of the EU in cooperation with each partner-country depends on their individual progress in achieving the objectives of the EaP.

The EaP has proved to be more of a discussion forum, where the partner-countries can present their achievements and exchange views. The EaP's instruments of cooperation and integration are technical in nature and cannot compete with stronger factors like the geopolitical situation. The enormous divergence of the Eastern partner-countries' interests could not have been concealed and af-

the Role of Regional Cooperation in the Black Sea area, "Southeast European and Black Sea Studies", vol. 8, 2008, issue 2, p. 101; A. Konarzewska, Strategia Unii Europejskiej wobec regionu Morza Czarnego, "Bezpieczeństwo Narodowe", III-IV, 2007, no. 5-6; I. Ban, The Black Sea Region and the European Neighbourhood Policy, Budapest 2006, p. 9; B. Piskorska, „Synergia czarnomorska”: zблиżenie państw regionu Morza Czarnego do UE, [in:] M. Pietraś, K. Stachurska-Szczesiak, J. Misiągiewicz (eds.), Europejska Polityka Sąsiedztwa Unii Europejskiej. Unia i jej bliscy sąsiedzi, Wydawnictwo UMCS, Lublin 2012, p. 175-192.

- 21 Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkey, Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, Moldova, Ukraine and Russia.
- 22 The main areas of cooperation were supposed to be: energy, environment, telecommunications, transport, science and technology, democracy, freedom, justice, security and human rights.
- 23 The idea for the BSS recalls, in terms of practical cooperation and common interests (e.g. transport, environment, energy, combating organised crime) cooperation in the framework of the EU's Northern Dimension. Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on Black Sea Synergy – A New Regional Cooperation Initiative, Brussels, 11.04.2007, COM (2007) 160 final.
- 24 However officially, the BSS was launched in Kiev in February 2008.
- 25 European Commission, Communication from the Commission, Eastern Partnership, COM (2008) 823 final, confirmed by the Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit, Prague, 7 May 2009; H. De Waele, *Layered Global Player. Legal Dynamics of EU External Relations*, Springer, London-New York 2011, p. 133.
- 26 The six countries that signed the Eastern Partnership summit declaration in Prague on 7 May 2009 were: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine.

ter a few years resulted in the development of bilateral relations with the EU. Furthermore, the EaP's support for the process of democratic changes in the partner-countries is hindered by inefficient political tools as well as lack of a coherent stance of the EU member states (often resulting from the dependence on Russian energy supplies).

The developments associated with the so called Arab Spring and the Ukrainian crisis have had a significant impact on the landscape of interests and preferences advanced by the diverse actors involved in the implementation of the ENP. As the protests in Tunisia broke out in December 2010, a review of the ENP had already been underway since March 2010. The imminent reaction of the EU to the developments in the Southern Mediterranean in early 2011 was the announcement of a new approach to the region, i.e. a strategy referred to as 'three Ms' and including mobility, market access, and money to support the aspirations to change respective societies.²⁷ The three Ms could have served as a truly transformative strategy since it offered specific means that the respective countries needed. Unfortunately, the three Ms were not efficiently implemented; the project proved to be untested and too large for the EU.

More importantly, the results of the strategic review of the ENP that started in 2010 and its results were announced on 25 May 2011 had marks of influence on the developments unfolding beyond the EU borders. Firstly, the allocation of financial aid was conditioned more tightly in that the 'more for more' approach was introduced, i.e. more funds for more action directed at the implementation of democratising reforms. Secondly, a greater emphasis was put on the differentiation between ENP countries with reference to the reform progress.²⁸

Similarly as the Arab Spring, also the developments in Ukraine forced the EU to revisit its policy towards the countries included in the EaP. By separating the signing of the economic and political part of the Associa-

27 J. Techau, *Europe's Neighbourhood Policy is in Trouble, but Not Beyond Saving*, 7 April 2014, http://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/jan-techau_1368.html

28 European Commission and External Action Service, *A New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood: A review of European Neighbourhood Policy*, Joint Communication by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the European Commission, Brussels, 25 May 2011.

tion Agreement (AA) with Ukraine,²⁹ the EU had manifested a degree of flexibility with regard to Ukraine's ability to fulfil the requirements related to that (AA); a flexibility that passed largely unnoticed by the press. Moreover, in response to the developments beyond the EU's Southern and Eastern borders, the process of refining the ENP continued. Specifically, in the March 2014 Weimar statement³⁰ a point was made that the ENP would no longer be conducted without political guidance. It was also emphasised that apart from political changes, some serious reforms on the technical side of the ENP were needed, including more effective and targeted policies that would turn the ENP into a more efficient tool for the EU to address its neighbourhood. Clearly, the possibility of making the ENP an efficient policy tool is to a large extent determined by the ability to balance the interests and preferences that the EU and Russia seek to attain in the region of Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus. The following section deals with this issue.

4. The EU and Russia on the ENP's chessboard

On the regional level, the EU and Russia act as regional players in partner-countries participating in the ENP. Both the EU and Russia translate their interests in attempts at preserving their spheres of influence. Furthermore, national actors may have a certain significant impact upon the geopolitical configurations when making their external political decisions. The EU and Russia play a determining role on a regional level in the area often regarded as a *grey area* (the South Caucasus countries and Ukraine),³¹ which has been a subject of economic and diplomatic disputes.

The geopolitical relation between the EU and Russia deserves special attention. On the one hand, the ENP is employed by the EU to protect the European nucleus (the EU member states) from the unrest

29 The political part of the association agreement was signed with the interim president and the economic one was postponed until the presidential election scheduled for late May. A. Gardner, *Ukraine Signs Landmark EU deal*, "European Voice", 3/21/14.

30 Joint statement of March 31 announced by the foreign ministers of the Weimar Triangle (Poland, France and Germany).

31 Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan.

originating outside the EU borders,³² and is supposed to create a sound relationship between the EU and its new neighbours. On the other hand, Russia seeks to restore its traditional sphere of influence and therefore seems to be rejecting any alternative concepts that – in Russia's view – disrupt its plans.³³

The ENP partner-countries cannot be perceived only from the standpoint of their geopolitical position, but also of their economic potential. The former Communist states represent a market potential that cannot be ignored. Moreover, some of these countries either possess rich natural resources (Azerbaijan) or represent vital energy transit routes (Belarus, Ukraine, Georgia). The problem of energy lies at the heart of the strategic games and rivalries in the region. While the EU, in an attempt to bypass Russia, seeks to build a new system of oil and gas pipelines from the Caspian Sea and Central Asia, Russia makes every effort to maintain its comparative advantage in the post-Soviet space. The Russian-Georgian conflict in 2008 was an example of regional frictions resulting from energy rivalry. Apart from Azerbaijan and Georgia, which is mainly supplied by the Azeri gas,³⁴ the other four states (Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus, Armenia) depend to an overwhelming extent on Russia as far as energy is concerned. This dependency also affects their foreign political decisions.

The tensions between regional players are intensified by the EU promises of financial support, technical assistance and a potential economic integration into the EU market, which would have obvious benefits for trade and investments. However, given the dependence on Russia's energy resources and also the cultural and historical affinities, the cooperation with Russia still stays in place. As far as the commercial field is concerned, the EU exercises more influence in the region than Russia does. The EU is the main trade partner for all the EaP countries excluding Belarus, which is loyal to Russia (table below).

32 According to W. Scott's *buffer-zone* and I. Wallerstein's concept of *semi-periphery*. J. Scott, *The EU and Wider Europe: Towards an Alternative Geopolitics of Regional Cooperation?*, "Geopolitics", vol. 10, 2005, no. 3, p. 434.

33 J. Gower, G. Timmins, *Introduction: The European Union, Russia and the Shared Neighbourhood*, "Europe-Asia Studies", vol. 61, 2009, no. 10, p. 1685.

34 The ten-year contract with Azerbaijan's national gas and oil company SOCAR concluded in 2010 on bulk supply of gas, secures due volumes of strategic gas till 2020.

Table 1. The EaP countries share of total trade with the EU and Russia in 2013

		Share of total trade					
		Armenia	Azerbaijan	Georgia	Moldova	Ukraine	Belarus
Trading partners	EU	27.9%	44.6%	27.5%	46%	31%	26%
	Russia	24%	7%	no data	21.9%	27 %	49.5%

Source: Based on Pasquale De Micco, *Study: When Choosing Means Losing. The Eastern Partners, The EU And The Eurasian Economic Union*, Policy Department Directorate-General for External Policies, European Parliament, March 2015, p. 20-28.

The Russian approach of economic integration aims at taking control over the key energy, infrastructure and economic assets. That is why, the Eurasian Union is meant to counter any EU regional initiative. The aim of this union is not only economic, but mainly geopolitical. It is supposed to offset the DCFTAs, launched by the EU in association with almost all the EaP members excluding Belarus.³⁵ The Russian dominance in the energy sector of the region is uneasy, which is illustrated by the comparison with EU standards. Moldova and Ukraine's presence in the EU Energy Community as contracting parties implies stricter competition rules as well as more transparent regulations, which is at odds with Gazprom on the Moldavian energy market (MoldovaGaz), Ukrainian energy infrastructure (RosUkr-Energo) or Belarus (Russia fully supplies Belarus with gas and in 90% with oil).³⁶

It is plausible to argue that the EaP partner-countries are 'trapped' in a regional geopolitical bloc (the CIS) which was created by Russia mainly to maintain and handle the interdependencies left over after the Soviet Union's breakdown. Russia's involvement can interfere with the external governance of the EU and affect it in several ways: by bilateral arrangements or other official coordination mechanisms

³⁵ T. L. Moga, *Enhancing Regional Integration through Commercial Ties in the Eastern Neighbourhood of the EU*, "Centre of European Studies Working Papers", vol. 4, 2012, no. 1, p. 80.

³⁶ A. Wilson, N. Popescu, *The Limits of Enlargement-lite: European and Russian Power in the Troubled Neighbourhood*, The European Council on Foreign Affairs, London 2009, p. 32.

within the CIS, or by a policy of power in the domains where energy interdependence is high.³⁷

Russia 'warms up' the frozen conflicts like in Transnistria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and Crimea. Moreover, Russian military presence in the form of military bases or peace-keeping contingents concerns almost every EaP country except Azerbaijan. Russia tormented the EU itself using the energy as a weapon. During the winter of 2009, Slovakia and Bulgaria were cut off gas due to the Russian-Ukrainian price dispute and several times Russia threatened other EU countries to do the same, as it is the biggest importer of energy to the EU.

The above-mentioned facts denote that Russia seems to be unwilling to accept a strong involvement of the EU through the ENP in the common neighbourhood. Accordingly, Russia still prefers various games of geopolitical competition making use of its trump card (energy levers, military power etc.). In May 2009, when during the Prague Summit the EU launched the EaP, Russia did not hesitate to express its dissatisfaction, accusing the EU of trying to expand its sphere of influence in the region.

5. The national and local actors

The national and local actors seek to pursue their specific agendas through the EaP forum. Differences in the national interests and preferences have been observed since the EaP's inception. The EaP includes countries, which differ in economic and political potential and expectations with regard to the scope and nature of their cooperation with the EU. Depending on that, the EaP partner-countries can be divided into three groups.³⁸ First, Moldova and Georgia that earnestly believed that the EU membership was a question of time. In contrast, Belarus and Azerbaijan have never considered the possibility of becoming a member of the EU. Ukraine and Armenia, to a varying extent, have placed in the EaP some hopes for a possible future membership in the EU. Still, the impression has prevailed among the EaP partner-countries that it did

37 M. Emerson, *The Wider Europe Matrix*, Centre for European Policy Studies, Brussels 2004, p. 27.

38 See: J. Rupnik (ed.), *Les Banlieues de l'Europe*, Presses de Sciences Po, Paris 2007.

not deliver on the EU's promises and the EaP countries' expectations. It was seen as an 'elegant' way of substituting the perspective of the EU membership with vague promises of cooperation.³⁹

Generally speaking, apart from the ambiguity of the ENP's goals and objectives, which left space for various interpretations in the EU itself, as the time passed the perspective and prospect of the EU membership became more distant.⁴⁰ Several Russian-related reasons contributed to that: in Ukraine domestic politics, separatist conflicts in Moldova and Georgia, territorial disputes, e.g. between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and high level of corruption (most of them apart from Georgia).⁴¹ It became obvious that both the ruling "elites and majority of societies want the western welfare but not all the political and social solutions."⁴² In some way it is understandable, as the enhancement of the economic relations with the EU gives most tangible results. According to the Eurostat statistics, the EU-EaP trade exchange has tripled over the last ten years.

However, the conditionality principle, which is supposed to favour partner-countries that intensify the reforms, can drive away the ruling elites. The decision to conduct reforms depends on a cost-benefit calculation of the ruling elites. Usually, the burden of deep structural reforms complying with the *acquis communautaire* is gauged as too heavy in comparison with the benefits offered in return. For autocratic leaders, the implementation of democratising reforms may end with the loss of power. On the other hand, the gradual steps on the way to modernisation or democratisation of a country are not always rewarded with EU privileges, like access to common market, visa regime abolishment or youth exchange programmes, etc.

39 M. Gniazdowski, B. Wojna (eds.), *Partnerstwo Wschodnie – raport otwarcia*, Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych, Warszawa 2009.

40 V. Bilčík, *Foreign Policy in Post-Communist EU*, "International Issues & Slovak Foreign Policy Affairs", vol. 19, 2010, no. 4, p. 8.

41 In the Transparency International's 2012 Corruption Perceptions Index, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Belarus obtained the worst scores in continental Europe, respectively 144, 139 and 123 globally. Ranked 51 globally, Georgia stands out as an exception in the region and it should be noted that, in the 2012 edition, it obtained better scores than eight EU member states, including the Czech Republic (54), Italy (72), Bulgaria (75) or Greece (94). Moldova is ranked 94 and Armenia 105. See: <http://cpi.transparency.org/cpi2012>.

42 D. Szeligowski, *Analysis: Partnership – Tool for Democratisation and Modernisation of Eastern Europe?*, 27.01.2012.

Before the revision of the ENP in May 2011, the lack of interest in democratic reforms among the ruling elites could have been partially intensified by the existence of the stiff system of allocations, which did not correspond to the reform progress in the partner-countries. There were also voices that the EU might apply double standards against the EaP countries, for instance, the EU was more lenient with Azerbaijan, which supplies the EU with oil and gas and continuously violates human rights, than with Belarus and Ukraine. Statistics reflect a similar tendency: the reform-unfriendly Azerbaijan received 92 million Euro in 2007-2010, while Georgia, despite its reform efforts, got only slightly more – 120.4 million Euro.⁴³

Reviewing the ENP in May 2011, the EU addressed that problem by introducing the ‘more for more’ approach, whereby the best performing countries in making democratic reforms were to get additional aid. In other words, the EU did not cut off funding for the worst performers, but granted more money for those who took care to transform their countries. Finally, the EU’s commitment to the neighbourhood confronted the uneven readiness to change in the partner-countries. Amongst the Eastern neighbours, the highest absorption level of the EU funds devoted to the government reforms in 2007-2010 was demonstrated by Moldova (77%) and Georgia (74%), followed by Ukraine (67%), Armenia (47%), and reform-unfriendly Azerbaijan (27%) at the bottom of the list.⁴⁴

However, the picture of the democratic changes in the Eastern countries is, roughly speaking, rather poor.⁴⁵ There are countries like Moldova, Georgia, where governments are committed to the reform of political and judicial systems. The issue that mostly concerns the local actors (non-governmental organisations, entrepreneurs, society) are the changes in respect of fundamental rights, political polarity, freedom of press and assembly, etc. Azerbaijan has left these areas

43 E. Kaca, *Neighbourhood Policy: “More for More” Requires Stronger Union Diplomacy*, “Bulletin PISM”, no. 107 (440), 16 November 2012.

44 *Ibidem*.

45 European Commission, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. *Neighbourhood at the Crossroads: Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2013*, JOIN (2014) 12 final, Brussels, 27.3.2014, p. 7.

untouched despite the calls of the EU. No progress occurred in Belarus in the area of political reforms and the political repressions after the elections of December 2010. An important progress could be noticed in the mobility and migration, where almost all of the Eastern partner-countries have signed mobility partnerships. Still, there is some hope for the partner-countries of the EaP. The civil society proved its power more than once. After the unexpected Arab Spring of 2011, the most violent upheaval took place in Ukraine, where the abstention from signing the Association Agreement triggered massive protests among civilians (so-called 'Euromaidan'), which resulted in the transition of power and the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.⁴⁶

To conclude, the ENP has found fertile ground in those countries that have EU membership aspirations – i.e. in Ukraine and Moldova – and who want to become part of the EU in order to confirm their affiliation with the 'European family'. The societies of those countries have felt greater need of reform and change than any other ENP partner-country, which was reflected in the revolutions in Georgia in 2003 and Ukraine in 2004. That is why the EC supports the development of civil societies in those countries by stating that the "willingness to reform cannot be imposed from outside and the expectation for reform must come from societies. By engaging directly with people, opening travel and study opportunities for citizens (even unilaterally), and promoting networking between communities (business, research, universities, arts, culture, etc.), and supporting civil society, EU policy can act as a catalyst in this process."⁴⁷

The expectations and needs of the societies of partner-countries can be compared to expectations and needs of the Polish society after the fall of Communism that had to gain new work experience and get to know European culture. People are the key element of changes and that is why every effort should be made on liberating their potential for instance by the liberalisation of visa regime. In addition, the coop-

46 In this difficult situation, the EU supports Ukrainian struggle towards democratic changes not only in economic (assigning financial assistance of billions of Euros over many years) but also in political matters (signing of the political chapter of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement).

47 EU Commissioner Stefan Füle's statement while presenting the EU's annual report on the implementation of its Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) – Neighbourhood at the crossroads – taking stock of a year of challenges. European Commission, Brussels, 27 March 2014.

eration of non-governmental organisations and universities should be intensified, and the financial means for programmes of youth exchange increased. The EaP countries need to build their own human capital.

In the case of Ukraine, the oligarchs with their personal wealth and political influence, are an important element on the map of national interests and preferences. The Maidan revolution was directed against the Ukrainian system ruled by corrupted president Viktor Yanukovich and an influential oligarchic class. The parliamentary elections were supposed to change that and bring new idealistic figures, who promised not to run Ukraine in the interests of a few extremely rich. In fact, there might not be corruption in the government anymore and some legislative reforms were introduced, but the lack of strong political will suggests it will take several years to transform the Ukrainian system into a new one.⁴⁸ Furthermore, a new class of oligarchs has appeared that has survived the Yanukovich rules and now wants to act. Poroshenko's aim is the 'de-oligarchisation' of the state in order to avoid the inappropriate influences of the private interests, but it is hard to realise how they are entrenched in the system. The situation is even worse, as according to Irina Vereshchuk, the former mayor of Rava-Ruska, "the oligarchs are like the blood and organs of the system, and we have nothing yet to transplant them with."⁴⁹

Conclusions

A peaceful and economically developed neighbourhood – that is the goal of the ENP. The cooperation in economic, political, cultural and security matters was supposed to bring that about. However, the ENP's goals and objectives in combination with the interests and preferences of regional, national and local actors were difficult to achieve. The role of regional players, the EU and Russia, is decisive. Both of them translate their interests into spheres of influence, which often collide with each other affecting the national and local level. Both of them try to lure the neighbouring countries by economic, political,

48 S. Walker, *Oligarchs nouveaux? Why some say Ukraine is still in thrall to an elite*, "The Guardian", 21.07.2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/profile/shaun-walker>.

49 Ibidem.

and even military means. However, their aspirations and wishes are faced with national and local interests and preferences. On the one hand, there are the governments that want to integrate with the EU and step by step transform their countries (Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia). On the other hand, there are ruling elites that either pretend to do something, or do nothing, trying to keep open both paths – Western and Eastern, leaning towards the latter (Armenia, Azerbaijan).

Generally, the shortcomings in the ENP design (e.g. unclear objectives, inappropriate allocation of political and economic incentives), but mainly the lack of political will of the ruling elites in the EaP partner-countries to introduce reforms, seems to hinder the changes. The revisions of the ENP partially affected by the Arab Spring and the Ukrainian crisis were tailored to fit the needs not only of the countries, but especially societies. At the end of the day, the citizens are the key element of transformation. That is why every effort should be made on liberating the human and social potential. The interests and preferences of the civil society are those which should prevail, because they are the legitimate ones. Furthermore, in order to keep up the integration process with some EaP partner-countries, the EU should start to meet their expectations through their policy. To conclude, those who most need the EaP is the EU itself together with Eastern governments and citizens that desire the EU integration.

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