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# Political and Legal Perspectives of the EU Eastern Partnership Policy

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# The Ukrainian Crisis as a Challenge for the Eastern Partnership

Evhen Tsybulenko and Sergey Pakhomenko

**Abstract** The chapter is devoted to the study of the Ukrainian crisis as a challenge for the EU Eastern Partnership. The hybrid war waged by Russia against Ukraine in Donbass, as well as the occupation and illegal annexation of Crimean peninsula by the Russian Federation, has led to a situation in which the traditional EU intentions toward the EaP came into dissonance with the new realities. These new challenges for the EaP require a proper response from the EU. Actually, this response could have been gleaned on the eve of the Riga Summit. Significant attention is paid to Ukraine's expectations, the Russian factor, and the prospects of reforming the Eastern Partnership. The necessity of further differentiation of groups of countries according to the goals of their cooperation with the EU and for a clearer definition of their membership prospects that within such a differentiation becomes more appropriate is put forward in the chapter.

## 1 Introduction

“The Ukrainian Crisis” has become an established term for the events and processes that have been happening in Ukraine since the winter of 2013/14 till present. It encompasses three separate components that differ chronologically and qualitatively:

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- (1) civil protests against President Yanukovich's regime that resulted in its demise and the change of government;<sup>1</sup>
- (2) the occupation and illegal annexation of Crimean peninsula by the Russian Federation;<sup>2</sup>
- (3) the hybrid war waged by Russia against Ukraine in Donbass.

The Russian aggression in Ukraine directly threatens European security as it violates the existing principles of international law, destabilizes the system of international relations, sets a precedent for the use of force in the realization of geopolitical interests, opens the possibility of not complying with "the rules of the game" for individual subjects of international relations.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the possible destructive effects of the Ukrainian crisis are clearly superior to the past conflicts in Europe of the second half of the twentieth century, including the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia. According to the experts at the Information Analysis Center of the Faculty of International Relations of the Ivan Franko National University of Lviv, the Ukrainian crisis has become and continues to be an important factor in the transformation of the international order (which is in a constant flux of deconstructurization and transformation) in the sense that it played the role of a "catalyst" in the international confrontation of the global players (US, EU, Russia, China) and regions (Middle East, Latin America, East Asia) on the design and interpretation of the new international order (Rogovik and Nabi 2015).

In addressing the conflict, Ukraine hopes for the support and help of the West, especially the EU, and in order to facilitate that it intends to utilize all the instruments and mechanisms upon which their relationship is based. A prominent place among these mechanisms is taken by the "Eastern Partnership" initiative as a part of the European Neighbourhood Policy. But is it capable of providing the partnering countries with the tools necessary to ensure their security? Is it capable of offering real prospects for the implementation of Europeanization as a process of formation, distribution, and institutionalization of formal and informal EU rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, and modes of action? And ultimately, is the Eastern Partnership able to answer the main question: what are the European perspectives for the states that have signed the Association Agreement and announced their European aspirations?

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., PACE, 30.01.2014: Resolution 1974 The functioning of democratic institutions in Ukraine (2014).

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., United Nations, 27.03.14: General Assembly Resolution A/RES/68/262 *Territorial integrity of Ukraine* (2014) and PACE, 10.04.2014: Resolution 1990 *Reconsideration on substantive grounds of the previously ratified credentials of the Russian delegation* (2014).

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, 08.07.15: *Resolution on The Continuation of Clear, Gross and Uncorrected Violations of OSCE Commitments and International Norms by the Russian Federation* (Helsinki, 5–9 July 2015), and PACE, 24.06.2015: Resolution 2063 *Consideration of the annulment of the previously ratified credentials of the delegation of the Russian Federation (follow-up to paragraph 16 of Resolution 2034 (2015))* (2015).

## 2 The EU's Motivations in the Creation and Development of the Eastern Partnership

Among the factors for initiating the EaP, usually the following are encountered:

- (1) The reaction to the EU enlargement (2004 and 2007) when not only the number of EU members increased significantly but also the number of the countries with which the Union now had a common border – the EU needed to establish a system of neighborly and mutually beneficial relations with a number of very different states. It was the awareness of this need that was embodied in the establishment of the European Neighbourhood Policy of which the EaP was a part (Lustigova 2014).
- (2) An important role in defining the eastern vector of the Neighbourhood Policy was the development of its southern direction initiated by France, which launched the Barcelona Process, which covered the countries of the Mediterranean. In this situation, the diversification of the ENP and the clear definition of its eastern direction seemed logical. It also provided additional opportunities for a regional impact for those EU states that are situated on the eastern border or have their own interests in that direction. Not coincidentally, the EaP was initiated by Poland and Sweden (Svoboda 2014).
- (3) The Russian–Georgian war of August 2008, which revealed the inability of European institutions to deal effectively with a real aggression and the final stages of secession of an individual territory of a sovereign country – in these circumstances, the EU had to offer its Eastern neighbors a program that had to somehow compensate for the absence of other more effective actions in support of their security (Sherr 2015).

The multilateral component of cooperation within the EaP included four thematic platforms. These platforms were the democracy of appropriate governance and stability, economic integration and convergence with the EU, energy security, and interpersonal contacts. These were the flagship initiatives where the resources were actually focused. Particular attention was given to preparing association agreements and creation of deep and comprehensive free trade areas (FTA).

At the official level, the EaP was positioned as a technological toolbox to provide the technical assistance and to deepen the economic integration with the EU's Eastern neighbors without promising a prospect of the European Union membership for them (see also Kerikmäe and Roots 2013). The main incentives for the partner states were the access to the European markets as a result of signing of the Association Agreements, as well as the prospect of a visa-free travel regime. At the same time, it was emphasized that the participation in the Eastern Partnership does not entail membership and that initiative is not directed against Russia. Thus, the EU has chosen a collective, multilateral, and to some extent unified format of cooperation, considering it more appropriate and perhaps more convenient. It was supposed to realize its goals by developing a common approach for the whole region and not addressing each country separately (Samadashvili 2014).

Despite the official rhetoric, from the very beginning some experts have recognized a certain geopolitical content to the EaP. Thus, G. Perepelitsa, the Director of the Foreign Policy Research Institute of the Diplomatic Academy of Ukraine at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, believed that by establishing the “Eastern Partnership” the EU wanted to create a kind of safety belt for itself on its eastern borders and to foster a democratic and pro-European trend in the development of these neighboring countries (Perepelitsa 2015). The talks about the geopolitical meaning of the “Eastern Partnership” became especially active and open before the Vilnius Summit. In particular, the representatives from the initiators of the “Eastern Partnership”, the heads of the Foreign Ministries of Poland and Sweden Radoslaw Sikorski and Carl Bildt expressed the hope that the Vilnius Summit of the Partnership should “become the summit of achievements” while symbolically naming their article “Uniting Europe” (Sikorski and Bildt 2013), (Gasparyan 2014). According to A. Umland, “a Europeanized Ukraine would give an impetus to the gradual implementation of European values in other post-Soviet countries, including the Asian part of the former USSR” (Umland 2013). Obviously, such rhetoric invariably affected the expectations of the European-oriented part of Ukrainian political spectrum and society.

The Ukrainian crisis has led to a situation in which the traditional EU intentions toward the EaP came into dissonance with the new realities. Firstly, the possibility of the signing of the Association Agreement with the EU has been perceived by the Ukrainian society not just as a technological instrument for intensification of trade relations but also as the acceptance of European civilization values, as the final choice of the foreign policy orientation, and as a step in the immediate run-up to the EU accession. Not least, the aforementioned rhetoric of the European partners has also contributed to this understanding. An important role was played by propaganda by the supporters as well as the opponents of the European Association whose efforts made the agreement the paramount current dilemma in the minds of the public, a historical and vital choice of the Ukrainian people. As a result, there was an absolutization of acceptance or rejection of the Association Agreement, the sharp polarization of positions which can be described metaphorically as a confrontation between “Euro-Romanticism” and “Euro-Demonism”. That is why the turmoil with the Agreement the peak of which coincided with the Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius became the starting point for the revitalization of public activity in Ukraine in the form of “Euromaidan”, which later developed into a large-scale uprising against the ruling regime. Russian aggression against Ukraine only encouraged the three partner countries—Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia—to restore their rhetoric about the prospect of membership apparently against the wishes and aspirations of the EU.

Secondly, the Eastern Partnership which previously did not look very expensive financially gradually turned into a costly project for the EU. Thus, the total aid for the six neighboring countries covered by this program gradually grew from €450 million in 2008 to €785 million in 2013. In 2013, the implementation of the Eastern Partnership programs has attracted €250 million, which were previously planned for the other programs under the European Neighbourhood Policy (Ukrstat 2014).

But since the Riga Summit, Ukraine alone has received €1.8 billion, and the country continues to need constant financial injections.

The Ukrainian crisis has clearly identified two groups of partner countries, and the EU can no longer ignore the differences between them. The first group of countries is Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova. They have signed the Association Agreement, and Moldova has received a visa-free regime with the EU. Another trend is demonstrated by Belarus, Armenia, and Azerbaijan with their colder view of the EU and their foreign policy oriented toward Russia. Azerbaijan is more interested in contacts with Brussels in the economic sphere and in the transportation of its energy resources to Europe. Armenia, given the difficult geopolitical situation, was forced to abandon economic integration with the EU in favor of joining the Russia-initiated Customs Union. The authoritarian style of government of the perennial leader of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, and his recent attempts to balance between Brussels and Moscow rather suggest that the European Commission needs to develop an individual approach regarding Minsk (Madoyan 2015). These three countries, despite the individual characteristics of their political regimes, are clearly unenthusiastic about the democratic initiatives offered by the Eastern Partnership.

Finally, contrary to the repeated claims that the EaP is not aimed against Russia, Russia has painfully and aggressively seen the initiative primarily as a threat to its interests in the post-Soviet space. And it was precisely Russia's intervention that has deepened, sharpened, and stretched in time the so-called Ukrainian crisis.

These new challenges for the EaP require a proper response from the EU. Actually, this response could have been gleaned on the eve of the Riga Summit. Once again, it was stated that the Eastern Partnership should not be seen as a stage for the full membership in the Union. The meeting in Riga was dubbed the "Survival Summit", and its results were diplomatically summarized by the Foreign Minister of Lithuania Linas Linkevičius: "The summit in Riga is not the last one, let us leave something for another time." (Taradai 2015). However, the fact that the three states have clearly outlined their European aspirations confirms that they still consider EaP as a springboard on the difficult path of European integration. As the columnist for "ZN" Alyona Getmanchuk notes: "the prospect of membership theme may be muffled in the official rhetoric, but it becomes an integral part of the academic and public discourse not only in the Eastern Partnership countries but also in the EU. The initiative of Ukrainian civil activists to submit a symbolic bid for the EU membership at the forum in Riga was welcomed very warmly. In particular, so did the European Commissioner Hahn who has asked permission to take with him the posters with signatures for this initiative to decorate the bare walls in his office. He also noted how important it is not to lose naivete because it allows one to believe in change. This was said in the context of the EU membership prospects for Ukraine." (Getmanchuk 2015).

Despite the continuation of the traditional rhetoric about the compatibility of the Eastern Partnership and the close cooperation of partners with Russia, the EU could not ignore the Russian aggression in Ukraine. The final declaration of the summit in Riga condemns the annexation of Crimea. But the refusal of Belarus and Armenia

to sign this version of the text again demonstrated the difference between the partners. We now witness not only the difference in the desired level of closeness and in the ultimate objective of cooperation with the EU exhibited by the two groups of countries. What surfaced now is the sharp difference of positions on the territorial integrity of a partner, and in fact on the questions of European security. The reluctance of Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Belarus to include the words recognizing the illegality of the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation and later to sign the declaration is another sign of a lack of solidarity within the Partnership and of the difference of approaches to the interpretation of the international law and European values. So far, diplomatically, neither Ukraine nor the European partners accentuate attention on this, but apparently the unified policy for the Eastern Partnership toward countries neighboring the EU comes to an end. In its place, the EU officials plan to create two different forms of cooperation: one for Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova, which signed the association with the EU, and another for the rest—Belarus, Armenia, and Azerbaijan oriented in their policy on Russia. According to Diana Potemkina of the Latvian Institute of International Affairs, right now the EU is trying to reform the Eastern Partnership according to the differentiation that was just reflected in the final declaration of the Riga Summit. “As for the countries that do not want to join the European Union with them we can still maintain relationships based on a somewhat different model, with somewhat different issues.” (Taradai 2015).

Obviously, it is why for the first time the EU recognized that each partner country should have an individual plan of the integration process. Their desire to build relations with the European Union without the agreement is embodied in part by the members of the Riga Summit’s reaffirmation of “the sovereign right of each partner freely to choose the level of ambition and the goals to which it aspires in its relations with the European Union”.<sup>4</sup>

### 3 Ukraine’s Expectations

In large parts of the Ukrainian political spectrum, the Eastern Partnership initially caused moderate skepticism. First of all, the criticism was directed at the lack of a clearly fixed goal—the EU membership or at least a hint at the prospect of the membership. The Association Agreement and visa liberalization, which were seen by Ukraine as primary objectives and the necessary steps toward EU membership, seemed more suitably solved bilaterally and not in the format of the Eastern Partnership. Not the least reason for a rather cool attitude toward the initiative was the difference among the partner states, and in 2009 under President Yushchenko, it seemed that by unifying the Ukrainian integration efforts with not

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<sup>4</sup>European Council, 22.05.15: *Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit* (Riga, 21–22 May 2015).



pro-Western Belarus, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, the EU lowered the “status” of Ukraine not noticing or, possibly, ignoring its Europe-oriented foreign policy. Thus, the EaP project seemed if not futile, to have no breakthrough. It only meant to complement the range of existing EU instruments in relation to third countries: Agreement on Partnership and Cooperation, action plans under the European Neighbourhood Policy and the various sectoral agreements on visa facilitation.

On the other hand, there were those who saw the EaP as an opportunity for the regional leadership for Ukraine, a chance to become a “locomotive” in the development of the “pro-European space” given its greater advancement in the desire to integrate. Paweł Wołowski, an expert at the Center for Eastern Studies in Warsaw, believed that “this initiative is considered regional and it will allow Ukraine to become the leader of the six countries that are the recipients of the Eastern Partnership” (Perepelitsa 2015).

While these expectations proved to be in vain, still in the days of Viktor Yanukovich the EaP allowed to preserve contacts and to continue the promotion of specific issues—visa liberalization and preparation of the Association Agreement. It seems unlikely that under the pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovich a proper level of bilateral relations could have been maintained without the EaP initiative. And who knows how the situation would have developed if Viktor Yanukovich had signed the Association Agreement at the Vilnius Summit?

The events of 2014–2015 in Ukraine affected the Ukrainian position on the EaP. The Association Agreement (including the FTA provisions), which has become almost a national idea, was nevertheless signed. Ukraine declared aloud that not only its intention remains to become a full member of the EU but also that it is with this perspective in mind that it considers its participation in the Eastern Partnership. At the political and expert level, the idea that the membership prospect should be an incentive to reform the country becomes increasingly common and the lack of clarity on the EU long-term expansion plans only increases instability in the region, undermining the proreform efforts in the states that have chosen a course of rapprochement with the EU (Gaidai 2015).

But now, under the ongoing Russian aggression, the question of security comes to the forefront. According to the survey of the estimates and expectations of Ukrainian opinion leaders on the Eastern Partnership which was conducted under the project with the eloquent title “Important, forgotten or unnecessary?”, almost half of respondents (47.7 %) mentioned “strengthening security” as one of the main areas that should be the focus of the Eastern Partnership in the next 5 years. For Ukrainian respondents, the dramatic events of 2014 revealed an unacceptable weakness of a security component of the Eastern Partnership manifested in a complete failure by the EU to counter threats in the region. Respondents were asked to rate the progress on the nine objectives set out in the Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit of May 7, 2009. The goal of “maintaining security and extending stability between the EU and the Eastern Partnership” received the lowest rating. Sixty percent of respondents said that the situation in this regard not only has not improved but even worsened; 43.5 % of them identified it as being much worse. Indicative in this context were also the answers to the

question, “Integration with which structure will be most beneficial to your country?” Half of the respondents (51 %) chose NATO, while 45.5 % chose the EU (Gaidai 2015).

There is another even more clearly pronounced priority of Ukraine’s participation in the initiative—mobility and freedom of movement within the EU. Increasing the mobility of citizens of the Eastern Partnership countries through the implementation of various exchange programs and the elimination of visa barriers is a powerful tool in the hands of the EU to spread European values and practices, to enhance the attractiveness of the European integration for Ukraine. In some ways, this can be called an instrument of “soft power” by which the EU can clearly demonstrate to ordinary citizens the benefits of the European lifestyle. But despite government promises to implement the Visa Liberalisation Action Plan in 2015, Ukraine has not fulfilled the vast majority of the EU requirements. So far, the only ones accepted by the European Commission as completely implemented are the items on judicial cooperation in criminal matters and the production of biometric passports. The almost implemented items include the document security, counter-narcotics, and human rights. The items of border management and migration are only partially implemented, obviously, because even by the official figures Ukraine does not control more than 400 km of the eastern border in the Donetsk and Lugansk regions. However, Oleksandr Sushko, Scientific Director at the Institute for Euro-Atlantic Cooperation, believes that “the EU’s attitude toward visa prospects has changed radically. Now the EU understands the inevitability of granting a visa-free regime simultaneously to both Ukraine and Georgia. But the EU does not give any guarantee for it is being cautious and not only about the failure of the Visa Liberalisation Action Plan but also about escalation in the east. Although no one will mention the second factor out loud.” (Sidorenko 2015). Therefore, the current military threat remains the main danger for the abolition of visas.

#### 4 The Russian Factor

From the very beginning, Russia has been perceiving the Eastern Partnership as an initiative that impedes the economic and geopolitical interests of Russia in the post-Soviet space. The following explanation of Russia’s attitude toward the Eastern Partnership is dominant in the EU and among pro-European political forces and experts of the EaP partner countries. Moscow seeks to include its neighbors in its sphere of influence and to restore the Soviet-style domination over them through the integration within the Eurasian Economic Union. Actions of Kremlin in Ukraine speak strongly in favor of the fidelity of this assessment. But, in fairness, we have to recognize that Moscow’s motivation in countering the EaP has a more comprehensive and diversified nature than just implementation of imperial ambitions. Pointing to the economic component of the initiative, Russian expert Mikhail Troitsky and Senior Fellow for Russia and Eurasia at the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) S. Charap observe that the model of the free trade zones goes beyond

conventional free trade agreements; it requires from the participating countries the adoption of a substantial part of *acquis communautaires* (laws, rules, and regulations of the EU). Thus, there is an integration in the economic and legal space of united Europe which results in weakening of trade links with other partners, including Russia. The agreements on free trade areas make the markets of the countries-participants significantly more open to EU goods and services than that of Russia. Given that four EaP countries are already members of the Commonwealth of Independent States free trade agreement, which includes Russia, Moscow has cited the potential for domestic production to flow into the Russian market and for the illegal reexport of EU goods to Russia (Troitsky and Charap 2013). From the above, the authors conclude that Moscow is justified when it considers its neighbors' agreements on free trade as a threat to its own economic security.

Explaining Russia's position on the EaP (although writing at the time of the Vilnius Summit in November 2013, i.e., before the annexation of Crimea and the Donbass war), M. Troitsky and S. Charap try to relate it to the theoretical considerations of the American political scientist Robert Jervis, namely that a security threat occurs because "one state's gain in security often inadvertently threatens others". Jervis explains, "many of the steps pursued by states to bolster their security have the effect—often unintended and unforeseen—of making other states less secure". When the motives and plans of a state are unclear, increasing its capabilities can be viewed as a threat. And therefore, economic associations and military political alliances are bound to deal with one of the manifestations of the dilemma of security—integration security. It arises before a state that perceives the integration of its neighbors into economic organizations or military blocs inaccessible to that state itself as a threat to its safety or well-being. The integration dilemma occurs primarily due to limited membership of these associations. For states that are excluded from the integration initiatives open to their neighbors the integration is not a mutually beneficial process but a zero-sum game. As with the general security dilemma, the intentions of the neighbors or the supporters of their inclusion in a union do not necessarily have to be hostile to the state to cause the integration dilemma. To use moderation when choosing a response to the actions of other international actors is difficult because states usually assume the worst about the motives and goals of others. Such assumptions are often the cause of escalation of conflicts, especially when communications between the states are limited. Faced with the integration dilemma, the leaders of competing unions constantly raise the stakes to lure or force some country to join "their" association while sharply criticizing each other, thus undermining mutual trust. The negative consequences for everyone involved are increased at every step of growing competition (Troitsky and Charap 2013).

Thus, M. Troitsky and S. Charap support a rather widespread belief that it is the exclusion of Russia from the Eastern Partnership that led to its negative reaction to the initiative and the measures it requires. At the same time, we believe that in this case we are dealing with an excessively free interpretation of Jervis' thesis. Indeed, the EaP does not provide for any military or defense cooperation that could cause an appropriate response from Russia. The only appropriate response to possible threats

to its economic interests in the form of free trade zones has to be the relevant economic decisions, not a military aggression. All the more so since the EU understands Russia's economic concerns as evidenced by the final declaration of the Riga Summit, which stressed the importance of tripartite consultations on the implementation of the free trade area agreements. And in any case, no "safety" measures intended to ensure one's own security justify a military aggression violating the principles of international law and the territorial integrity of a sovereign state. In fairness, we repeat that as noted above the article of Messrs M. Troitsky and S. Charap was written at the time of the Vilnius Summit in November 2013, i.e., before the annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbass. And these authors warned about the inadmissibility of rigid and "abusive" rhetoric against Ukraine, as well as the inadmissibility of new trade wars. The possibility of a real war these experts (and not only them) just could not predict.

## **5 Ukraine and the Prospects of Reforming the Eastern Partnership**

Despite the considerable number of pessimistic forecasts about the future of the Eastern Partnership, obviously, the initiative is already an established and active component of the Neighbourhood Policy and Brussels is unlikely to abandon it or to try to replace it with some other way of cooperation in the East. On the contrary, the Ukrainian crisis has increased the relevancy of this component of European policy as evidenced by the attention paid by the top officials of the leading EU countries to the EaP summits, while previously these summits were primarily subject to the care of European officials of second rank.

But the Ukrainian crisis has put reforming of the initiative on the agenda. Almost undoubtedly the future holds the differentiation of approaches for the countries that have signed and complied with the Association Agreements (Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia) and the ones that have not (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus). As noted in the working proposals of the Government Office for European Integration of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, the logic of the implementation of the new phase of the Eastern Partnership will, on one hand, not only intensify and deepen integration with the EU for Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia but will also keep the relations with the other group within the EaP, on the other, both in bilateral and multilateral dimensions. It acquires a particular importance in the light of the need to maintain close links with the civil societies of the second group (Sushko et al. 2015).

According to the Co-Chairman of the EU-Ukraine Civil Society Platform and research director at the Institute for Euro-Atlantic Cooperation Oleksandr Sushko, "the increased distance between partner countries creates a space for possibilities and even simplifies the task for a country that is willing and able to move from words to deeds, and to prove with its own results the possibility of European

modernization in adverse and dangerous but also motivating political conditions. Ukraine by its own example may prove the viability of the model of ‘political association and economic integration’ that is at the root of the Eastern Partnership, and thus save faces both its own and of the European Union, and show an effective alternative way for nations that are still living in the post-Soviet authoritarian kleptocracies. Also, the successful Europeanization of Ukraine achieved through the implementation of the Association Agreement may fill the shortage of practical leadership that causes the scepticism about the Eastern Partnership.” (CPSA experts 2015).

Thus, we see that as they did in the beginning of the Eastern Partnership initiative, optimistic Ukrainian experts continue to think of the prospect of Ukraine’s regional leadership. But for these forecasts once again have not gone in vain, Ukraine must make considerable efforts in the process of reform and Europeanization. First, we must focus primarily on small steps the successful implementation of which will provide the evidence for the real progress of the Eastern Partnership for Ukraine. The priority should be given to the implementation of the Visa Liberalisation Action Plan. It is important that the once again voiced date—the beginning in 2016—is postponed again, although the military conflict in Donbass complicates the task significantly and the transition to internal (not external as the work in that direction is already underway) biometric passports is extremely costly in financial and organizational terms.

Along with multilateral cooperation, the priority areas of bilateral cooperation should be emphasized and the continuing EU support in the constitutional reform, decentralization, fight against corruption, judicial reform, energy security, and business climate improvement should be maintained.

Ukrainian politicians must abandon loud promises of “breakthroughs” and tone down the political PR campaign for the Eastern Partnership so as to avoid giving rise to false expectations among the European-leaning part of Ukrainian society. When these expectations are not realized, the result is frustration and scepticism about the European prospects of the country.

Obviously, the time has come for the EU to put forth a clearer definition of prospects of membership for the group of countries that have expressed such a desire. This perspective should become a significant incentive for reform processes. In addition, some EU member states, especially the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the Baltic states, should increase their interest and their systemic participation in the EaP. These countries have the experience in a regulatory and economic convergence with the European Union that is also most suitable for Ukraine. Within the framework of the Eastern Partnership, there should be developed mechanisms for the systemic transfer of this experience and relevant management models.

## 6 Conclusions

- (1) The Ukrainian crisis has become the most significant challenge to the EaP, and it demonstrated that in Ukraine and Russia the initiative is evaluated primarily in geopolitical terms.
- (2) The Ukrainian crisis has revealed the inefficiency of the Eastern Partnership in terms of security and has illuminated the contradiction between the European bureaucracy's perception of the EaP as purely technological instrument of economic and trade cooperation and the global civilizational and geopolitical expectations of a number of partner countries.
- (3) In these circumstances, there arises an urgent need for a reform of the initiative in the direction of further differentiation of groups of countries according to the goals of their cooperation with the EU and for a clearer definition of their membership prospects that within such a differentiation becomes more appropriate.
- (4) Ukraine should abandon its unjustified expectations from the Eastern Partnership and start viewing the latter as an additional opportunity to enhance the process of internal reforms in line with Europeanization.

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