

EU Global Strategy: Role and Engagement of Eastern Partners in European Security

***Conference Report
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The International Security Experts Conference “EU Global Strategy: Role and Engagement of Eastern Partners in European Security” was held on March 2-4, 2016 in Vilnius, Lithuania. The event was co-organised by the Lithuanian Ministry of National Defence and the Eastern Europe Studies Centre (Lithuania), in close cooperation with the Lithuanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the European Union Institute for Security Studies, the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, and the National Centre for Strategic Studies (Poland). It was held in the framework of the Panel on Co-operation in the Area of Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) within the Eastern Partnership (EaP) Platform on Democracy, Good Governance and Stability, and was co-funded by the European Commission. This conference as a CSDP outreach activity was second of a kind, the previous conference "Partners in European Security: Search for Greater Synergy between EU CSDP and EaP Policy" was held in Vilnius in June 2014.

The Conference gathered together government officials, members of civil society and security experts from six EaP countries, EU Member States, and representatives of the EU institutions. Conference discussions focused on security environment in and around Europe, as well on possible ways for greater EU engagement with Eastern Partners in security and defence. The main aim was to provide a platform for the EaP countries to voice their security concerns and share ideas on the future of CSDP. During the Conference, the EaP countries were given an opportunity to make their contribution to the ongoing debate on the new EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy.

Overview

The new EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy (the EU Global Strategy) is being prepared in times when European security environment is shaken by Paris and Brussels terror attacks, uncontrollable refugee flows from civil war in Syria and other unstable countries. Furthermore, the war in Ukraine's East continues pointing out Europe's weaknesses to counter Russian 'hybrid tactics' and propaganda. The new EU Global Strategy will not be limited to the threats and risks coming from the Russian Federation, nor only to external challenges and responses, such as strengthening EU's conflict prevention and crisis response measures, peace and post-conflict capacity building, but will also have to incorporate and address internal threats. In order to succeed, the EU has to resume the first-move advantage and possess a pre-emptive advantage over adversaries.

Democratic, whole and free Europe is an idea, which is not yet fully realised. Furthermore, it is constantly being challenged. The new EU Global Strategy will have to protect and promote European values, and to strengthen EU interests in the world. Hence, the EU Global Strategy has also to reflect multiple security challenges faced by the Eastern Partners: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine. All these countries to a smaller or greater degree, but especially Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine face threats from the Russian Federation. There is a risk that the Kremlin may choose to further escalate the unresolved conflicts or exacerbate societal divides in order to block their move towards European integration. Hence, the EU needs to reaffirm that instabilities in its neighbourhood affect the whole Europe and to proactively take the leadership in solving current conflicts, as well as to prevent the new ones in accordance with the international law.

Recommendations for the EU Global Strategy

- **The EU Global Strategy** should encompass the following: 1) physical security of the EU territory and citizens ('safer Europe'); 2) protection of freedom, human rights, democratic values, and rule of law within and beyond Europe; 3) close cooperation with strategic partners, especially retaining transatlantic dimension as a core principle for the European security; and 4) pragmatic idealism, in terms of relationship with partner countries having a different set of values.
- The EU is weak, when it is divided, therefore the threat of fragmentation must be explicitly emphasized. Current levels of integration and interdependence mean that **a problem for one EU country**, whether it is of economic, political or security nature, **is a problem for all**. It should be named as the Strategy's core principle.
- In face of a growing number of threats for the Western principles, the EU must seek even **closer transatlantic link** with the United States, both in terms of defence, by fostering cooperation between NATO and the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy, and economic-political issues via Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership Agreement.
- The EU Global Strategy should focus on operational, rather than descriptive dimension: **'operational hooks'** are needed in order to transform the EU Global Strategy into concrete policies, programmes, resources and working methods. When implementing the Strategy a bigger role should be given to the EEAS and the European Commission, also active involvement of EU Member States is vital.
- The EU should pursue interests globally and, at the same time, have a clear **geographic focus**. Partnerships with closest regions, having a direct impact on the EU's security, should be prioritised; focus is to be given to Eastern and Southern neighbouring regions. On the one hand, the EU's neighbourhood is a source of problems, on the other – neighbour countries are willing and ready to be providers of security. The EU needs to support and empower them to be owners of their own security. Also it is important to engage and consult with partners who are neighbouring the crisis areas (e.g. Middle-East, Iran, Syria) and certainly have an expertise and understanding to share with the EU.
- In terms of the EU's view of Russia, it must be emphasized that at the moment **Russia poses one of the biggest security challenges for Eastern Partners and for the European security architecture as a whole**. Russia's revisionist policy is shaking fundamentals of international rules-based order, thus, significantly threatens European and global security. EU documents do not qualify Russia as a threat to European security, however in its Global Strategy the EU should clearly state that relations with Russia have been damaged by its illegal military actions in common neighbourhood that pose a threat to the European security system. The change of such a status of partnership depends entirely on Russia and its readiness to cooperate with the EU in the framework of the rules-based international agreements.
- There is a need to recognise that **current levels of defence expenditure in the EU's Member States are not adequate to the current security environment**. In 2015, EU countries spent 0.4 percent less on defence compared to the previous year, with current levels of spending corresponding to a mere 85.5 percent of pre-crisis levels of 2007. While the decline slowed down recently, it is still on a negative trend, especially in comparison to Russia or Asian countries, which are putting defence spending on top of their priorities. It is not about arms race, it is about being strong and ready to ensure security of territory and people of the EU and enhance resilience of democracies.

EU – EaP Engagement and Security Cooperation

In a situation of interconnected security, when internal and external threats are impossible to address without close partnerships and international cooperation, the line between security providers and consumers has also vanished. There is a need to revise the EU – EaP cooperation in security and defence and to **review prevailing perception of the EU being a security provider, while the EaP countries are only consumers**. The war in Ukraine's East is an example of Eastern Partners' contribution in protecting European ideas and values. Ukraine serves as a security buffer containing and revealing Russia's ambitions to jeopardise EU's Eastern neighbourhood policies. While the 2008 Russia – Georgia War was not enough to convince Western leaders about the true nature of Putin's Russia, the occupation of Crimea and camouflaged deployment of Russian soldiers to Donbas left no doubts about Russia's readiness to employ any measures, including use of military force, in order to prevent EaP countries from their pro-European course.

Russia attempts to jeopardise democratic transformation of the EaP countries, their economic and legal reforms. With increased Russian influence over the EaP countries, the question about the EU's ability to assist and support its Eastern neighbours remains open. One is clear that without solving the conflict in Ukraine's East and applying international norms, which are to be followed by all parties involved, Europe will not be secure; promotion of rules-based order is the key. For some EaP countries, such as Belarus, an approximation with the European security system could be initiated by offering trainings to state officials (majority of Belarus officials do not speak English), increasing opportunities for dialogue and providing development support for border regions.

Another perception to be redefined, when considering EU's role in its relations with the Eastern Partners is the notion of 'mentor' versus 'partner'. Because of initiated policies, including the Association Agreements, and financial development support, **the EU is perceived as a mentor in uneasy transformation processes, while, in order to succeed, it should portray itself as an equal partner**. Through forming mutual trust and partnership with the EU, the EaP countries would develop a feeling of ownership over its reform processes and would be able to tackle ill-based public perceptions that initiatives and requests for reform-related sacrifices come from Brussels, rather than, as it should be, from their national capitals.

The EU enlargement has been the most effective tool in securing Europe. By missing the last EU enlargement the EaP countries were left with the benefits of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) under which they compete for attention and support with the Southern Mediterranean countries. The latter receive two thirds of funds allocated for the Neighbourhood Programme, and with continuing refugee crisis no significant changes should be expected. Enhanced differentiation between and greater ownership by partner countries are key principles for the reviewed ENP, though the measures to reinforce partners' resilience, such as countering hybrid and terrorist threat and preventing radicalisation, also supporting Security Sector Reform, remain to be implemented. **The EU needs interests- and values-based approach with adequate degree of differentiation towards its six EaP countries, while the EaP countries themselves have to contribute to the ENP and get the most of it – win-win partnerships**.

The recent review process of the ENP by the European Commission and the European External Action Service has stressed upon the need to apply more tailor-made approach towards neighbours and is aimed to ensure that partner countries with higher motivation and association performance would be awarded on an individual basis. If implemented, this approach would allow the EU side to develop realistic policies towards 'difficult' or less engaged EaP countries and would prevent situations when due to one partner's ill-performance the shadow of the loss of interest and disappointment within the EU institutions and Member States falls on all six Eastern Partners. As a step towards ensuring the differentiated approach towards

those partners, who choose to pursue deeper relations with the EU through Association Agreements and DCFTAs, the revised ENP underlines the need to increase opportunities for political dialogue at ministerial level.

The fact that the EaP initiative was launched by Sweden and Poland already reveals that Europe's East is of bigger interest to the Nordic and Central Eastern European (CEE) countries. Therefore, **instead of allowing the lack of solidarity among the EU Member States to jeopardise the EaP initiative, a greater support and freedom of action should be given to those EU members who have expertise and motivation to assist the EU's Eastern Partners.** In the security area such initiatives as common military units of Poland, Lithuania and Ukraine (e.g. LITPOLUKRBRIG) or among Visegrad Group countries and Ukraine re-affirm CEE countries' commitment and should be taken as an example and joined by more EU and EaP states. The EaP Trust Fund established by five EU Member States in 2014 to support the participation of partner countries in CSDP activities is another good example of cooperation that inspires the most active partners to engage with the EU in the area of security and defence.

At the beginning of the crisis in Ukraine the poor state of Ukraine's military has reaffirmed the fact that in parallel to political, economic and social reforms, reforms in defence and security sectors have to follow hand-in-hand. Despite being a keystone of 'soft' power, the EU has a wide pool of instruments to be employed for strengthening Eastern Partners' security and defence. EU Advisory or Monitoring missions and Border Assistance programmes are already in place in the EaP countries. Also, such thematic formats, as the Panel on cooperation in the area of CSDP, which facilitates dialogue on political and practical aspects of participation by interested partner countries in EU CSDP missions and operations, provides experience sharing on engagement in international crisis management and peacekeeping activities and further develops national capabilities for these purposes.

The same applies to CSDP, which is a tool for crisis management outside the EU and a tool for capacity building (including military capacity) of the EaP countries, supporting their resilience, working with them in the area of Security Sector Reform (help to adjust national legislation, provide relevant expertise, support in areas of border and maritime security, assist and advise in military training). In the context of the Joint Communication "Capacity building in support of security and development – Enabling partners to prevent and manage crises" (28 April 2015), the EU and Member States are already looking into the possibilities of using different instruments for the capacity building projects in the area of security and defence in the neighbourhood countries. Hence, CSDP component should get more prominence in ENP security dimension and EaP.

The EU should be more actively involved in settlement of unresolved conflicts, by taking upon a role of a mediator and supporting trust-building projects. The necessity to counter aggressive propaganda from the Russian side should also be among key priorities. In particular, the EU has to improve its communication with the EaP public and in some cases, like in the Republic of Moldova, where the failure of pro-European parties is associated and blamed on the EU, even to defend its name. Main components to counter Russian propaganda include: 1) alternative media coverage of the same events; 2) deconstruction of Russian propaganda by applying such successful examples as *Stop Fake* initiative in Ukraine; and 3) isolation of journalists involved in aggressive propaganda.

Providing opportunities for advice and expertise sharing among partner countries themselves is a tool for addressing the lack of common identity between the EaP countries. Their weakness of not being able to outlast Russian incursion should be channelled into promoting joint initiatives – from mounting capacities to counter 'hybrid tactics' to developing regional energy security initiatives, and even to contributing to global security. Today's engagement with the EaP countries often underestimates their expertise and

contribution to broader security paradigm. For example, Georgia's, the Republic of Moldova's, and Ukraine's significant contributions to international missions and operations (e.g. under the EU's command in Somalia, Central African Republic, Mali and in Afghanistan and Kosovo in the framework of NATO or UN), as well as other EaP countries' geographical proximity and cultural awareness (Azerbaijan is the only Muslim country in the EaP initiative, both Armenia and Azerbaijan bordering with Iran) about the Middle East and the Caspian basin countries should be recognized and used in CSDP activities. Therefore, the role of EaP officials should not be limited to trainees, but also viewed as equal partners bringing unique know-how into CSDP missions and operations.

Civil society of Eastern Partners is yet another actor contributing to the EaP initiative's efficiency and success. Non-governmental actors are not only monitoring performance of decision makers but also filling in the cooperation gap in cases when engagement with official institutions is limited. Partnership with the civil actors needs to be further developed and, as mentioned in ENP Review, unique situations have to be addressed with creative solutions. For example, civil society in Armenia is as active as their Georgian, Moldovan and Ukrainian counterparts, therefore, EU's support for its activities should be adequate.

Active engagement with the EaP civil society, as in case of countering Russian propaganda, should be among EU's priorities. With Ukraine being the second largest recipient of Schengen visas and Belarus the fourth, EaP citizens' engagement is promising and expected to further increase with establishment of visa-free regime with Georgia and Ukraine. The EaP civil society should be loud on European values, as well as to declare support for continuous democratic reforms and, most importantly, to provide a long-term commitment. On its part the EU, in order to sustain Eastern Partners' motivation for reforms, needs to keep the doors open not only for the association, but also for the perspective of EU membership.