

SECURITY IN CENTRAL EASTERN EUROPE: EASTERN PARTNERSHIP LOOKING TOWARDS RIGA SUMMIT

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Abstract

The aftermath of the Vilnius Summit raised many questions regarding the effectiveness of the European foreign policy in the Eastern partnership countries. The previous incidents show the imperious need of a security dimension for the Eastern Partnership. A new European security system is required to offer better solutions to a region that struggles with the annexation of Crimea, violent conflicts in the Donbas area in Eastern Ukraine, the 2008 Georgian-Russian war and the five frozen conflicts at the Eastern frontier of the EU.

In this paper, I will present from a macro-level analysis the main transformations and challenges of the Eastern Partnership after the Vilnius Summit until the Riga Summit², elaborate on the expectations from the upcoming Riga Summit and its importance in the actual context and offer some insights in the main reasons why controlling the Eastern neighbourhood is important for both European and Russian security.

Keywords

Eastern Partnership; European Neighbourhood Policy; European Union-Russia relations; Security

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² The time frame of this paper is set between the Vilnius Summit until the period before the Riga Summit. Therefore, an analysis of the results of the EaP Summit in Riga were not included in this article and will be examined in depth in a future paper that the author is working on.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Black Sea region has become increasingly insecure space where the EU's ideas and norms collide with Russia's perspectives. The European foreign policy in the region and its soft power are questioned by the Russian realism, as the events in Ukraine have shown. These days, the countries of the Eastern neighbourhood face a revisionist Russian state which tries to contest the current status-quo and all the values, principles, ideas, policies and institutions that the European Union has promoted in this region through instruments like the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), the Eastern Partnership (EaP) and the Black Sea Synergy

Russia's annexation of Crimea plus the new treaty with Abkhazia that enhances the military and economic cooperation are changing the regional security context in Eastern Europe. The strategic implications of these actions are boosting Russia's ability to project power in the Balkans, Mediterranean area and Middle East with huge consequences for the European security. As a result, the Black Sea is becoming a contested area between NATO/EU Member States and Russia. Moreover, the Russian state plans to increase its Black Sea Fleet capacities and install A2/AD capabilities in Crimea are dramatically changing the balance of power in the region (Daly 2014). The annexation of Crimea freed Russia from its former obligations and limitations towards Ukraine regarding its Black Sea Fleet and can now engage in a modernization and expansion of its naval power; however, NATO's intervention in the region (through US warships) is still governed by the Montreux Convention. Little can be said about the EU's capabilities to project power since it relies almost entirely on NATO for the military aspects.

The past events have transformed the Eastern Partnership from a European technocratic initiative into a geopolitical demarcation between the European/Western and Russian ideas. Along with the leadership change in the EU, the relevance of the European Neighbourhood Policy and Eastern Partnership were among the most discussed themes. The European Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS) have started a review procedure to upgrade the European foreign policy in the unsettled Eastern border area (Hug 2015).

In this paper, I will present from a macro-level analysis the main transformations and challenges of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) after the

Vilnius Summit until the Riga Summit, elaborate on the expectations for the Riga Summit and its importance in the actual context and offer some insights in the main reasons why controlling the Eastern neighbourhood is important for both European and Russian security. As for the last part, I will briefly depict the options that the European Union has in its relation with the Eastern Partnership countries and Russia, finalizing with the question: “Will the EaP Riga Summit be the make or break of the European Neighbourhood Policy on its Eastern frontier?”

2. THE ROAD TO VILNIUS

With the Eastern wave of enlargement, the European Union has acknowledged the need to have stability, economic development and improved governance at its eastern borders. In opposition with the other EU frontiers, the eastern one is the only territorial border making it vital in terms of security, such as defending and governing it from various asymmetrical problems such as illegal immigration, organized crime, illicit arms trade and drug smuggling. In this context and taking into consideration the European political will that formed around this idea after the Russian-Georgian war in 2008, the EU set out proposals for an Eastern Partnership that will “bring a lasting political message of EU solidarity, alongside additional, tangible support for their [partner countries, *author’s note*] democratic and market-oriented reforms and the consolidation of their statehood and territorial integrity. This serves the stability, security and prosperity of the EU, partners and indeed the entire continent” (European Commission 2008).

Launched at the Prague Summit, in May 2009, EaP is a joint initiative within the European Neighbourhood Policy between the EU, EU member states and six partner countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine) to commit to bilateral and multilateral cooperation in order for them to develop the necessary conditions to bolster political association and deeper economical integration between the EU and its partner countries. The EaP committed to respect the principles of international law, the European values, democracy, market economy, good governance, sustainable development and abide by human rights and fundamental freedoms (Prague 2009).

The Joint Communication of the High Representative and the European Commission 'A New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood' from 25 May 2011, which presented the revised Neighbourhood policy, has brought the principle of "more for more" in the negotiations between the European institutions and Eastern partner countries. Therefore, the pace of reforms will establish the degree of cooperation and the countries more involved in reforms will have more benefits from their cooperation with the EU, closer political association and deeper gradual economic integration in the EU Internal Market, as well as larger EU support (European Commission and High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy 2012b).

Since the major goal of the EaP is to create the favourable context and criteria for accelerating the political association and deepen the economical integration between Eastern partner countries and the EU, new Association Agreements including Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (DCFTAs), visa facilitations and readmission agreements to enhance people's mobility and security plus engagement in sector cooperation are considered vital steps in the EaP cooperation (European Commission and High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy 2012a).

The Vilnius Summit in 2013 has represented an important landmark in the process of the Eastern Partnership because it differentiated between two categories of countries: the EU-orientated states (Georgia, Moldova) and non-EU orientated states (Armenia, Azerbaijan) plus Ukraine, which failed to take a clear stance in its relations with the EU (but joined the EU-orientated group of states in 2014). This was the moment when Moldova and Georgia signed the EU Association Agreements including DCFTAs and Ukraine temporarily suspended the negotiations for the signing of the Association Agreement and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Arrangements, plus other important achievements were made by Moldova and Georgia in fulfilling the benchmarks of the Visa Liberalization Action Plan (Vilnius 2013).

After the Vilnius Summit, because the Ukrainian leaders abandoned their negotiations with the EU and the signing of the Association Agreement in favour of strengthening the country's relations with Russia, an outburst of anti-governmental protests started in Kiev showing the large support of the population towards a European path and a continuation in the Ukraine-EU cooperation (Ciascai 2014). The crisis and the events that followed in Ukraine

represent an important change in the European and global politics. The Annexation of Crimea in the spring of 2014 by the Russian Federation alters the *red lines* created by the Euro-Atlantic organizations or Russia regarding their sphere of interference in Eastern Europe. Even though, the European Union was cautious in its relations with the Eastern partner countries regarding the subject of a potential EU membership and accepted the red lines imposed in the past by the Russian Federation on the management of security matters in Eastern Europe, Russia didn't stop fearing the European influence in the former Soviet Bloc countries and tried to alter these countries' foreign policy by putting pressure on them to renounce their European path (Ciascai 2014).

3. FROM VILNIUS TO RIGA, WHAT SHOULD BE CHANGED?

The EaP failed to establish a differentiation between the internal and geopolitical situations of the six countries and the EU approach towards an association agreement fostered the already politically impaired economies, as in the Ukrainian example. Moreover, the European Union neglected to use its Common Foreign and Security Policy as a way to engage in security topics with its six Eastern partner countries (Schwarzer and Stelzemuller 2014).

The current events are changing the Eastern Partnership policy. Through propaganda, military intervention, economic and political pressure, Russia is pursuing to limit the six countries right to choose freely their foreign policy position in addition to modify their relations with the EU. Thus, Russia is trying to impose the idea that it has a right to decide upon the fate of its former Soviet bloc states because they are in its sphere of influence. In this context, the Riga Summit is of most importance in terms of reaffirming EU's leaders' engagement in the EaP initiative and objectives. The European Union should be prepared to deny Russia's desire to have a voice in the matter of Association Agreements (including DCFTAs) negotiations' as well as to support the three countries (Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova) in their reforms and transformations (Linkevičius 2014).

Regardless of the Russian actions, in June 2014, the European Union made a historical movement by signing the Free Trade and Association Agreements with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. Georgia and Moldova has

ratified the accord and have started implementing it. On the other side, due to pressures coming from Moscow, the implementation of the agreement with Ukraine was postponed until January 2016 (European Commission/Trade 2014). Russia's will to become a part in the AA negotiations represents a threat to the future of the Eastern Partnership and EU's foreign policy in the area. Under the pretence of economic causes, Russia is trying to stop the implementation of Free Trade and Association Agreement mainly for geopolitical arguments: securing its sphere of influence in Ukraine and hindering the distribution of Western values and ideas to the Eastern neighbourhood (Kasčiūnas *et al.* 2014).

One of the fundamental problems of the EaP and the ENP is that the EU tries to apply the same pattern regarding democratization, stability, integrity and economic growth used in the 2004 and 2007 enlargement cycles and requests the same reform implementations in its partner countries without offering the same financial support, political commitment or the possibility to become a part of the Union. In more than one occasion, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine stated their desire to integrate in the European Union and the pro-Western public view has increased in the past year (Hug 2015).

The results of the Eastern partnership, after almost six years since its launch, are mixed. Some of the partner countries have implemented more and better the European requests than others. The future of the ENP in Eastern neighbourhood and security in the region depends on the European Union's capabilities to set a clearer agenda concerning its Eastern border states, offer more economical and political assistance to the countries which are committed to their democratic and modernization reforms but also to have a firm stand about Russia's actions (Paul 2014).

A lesson that the EU should learn from past interactions in the Eastern Partnership is that a differentiation is needed in the European cooperation with its partner countries. As Commissioner Füle suggests, "Differentiation has always been a key feature of the Eastern Partnership. Its importance will only increase, requiring our approach to be tailored and adapted to correspond to our partners' needs, their ambitions and the realities on the ground" (European Commission 2014). Keeping this in mind, the Riga Summit will need to establish a roadmap of reforms distinct for each state, having as an ultimate result the EU membership option.

The future Summit from Riga, in May 2015, is expected by Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine to shed some lights on a clearer, longer prospect about the future of the three states within the European context. Apart from an assessment regarding the current state of implementation of the association agreements, the next EaP Summit should provide a forthcoming agenda and some concrete benefits such as visa liberalization to Georgia and Ukraine (Paul 2014).

4. THE BATTLEFIELD OF GIANTS: EASTERN PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN EU'S SOFT POWER AND RUSSIA'S HARD POWER

To understand the importance of the area of the EaP, we should understand the way security is perceived by both international actors (EU, Russia). If European Union perception of security is based more on the threat of asymmetrical risks while depending on NATO in a case of a conventional war, for Russia the military power and nuclear capabilities remain main pillars for assuring its security. In addition to this, in the Russian mentality, security is in direct correlation with the amount of external controlled territory. Therefore, to feel secure Moscow considers that it should dominate larger terrain outside its borders (Cumpanasu 2014).

Some voices are claiming that the Russian actions are an outcome of the humiliation and isolation of Russia in the international community. For example, John Mearsheimer suggests that the Ukrainian crisis is the West's fault because of the European Union enlargement towards East and the promotion of democratic and modernization ideas in Russia's backyard. He says that this is the normal response of a state due to the fact that "great powers are always sensitive to potential threats near their home territory... No Russian leader would tolerate a military alliance that was Moscow's mortal enemy until recently moving into Ukraine. Nor would any Russian leader stand idly by while the West helped install a government there that was determined to integrate Ukraine into the West" (Mearsheimer 2014).

Others consider this statement weak and give the example of OSCE where the bureaucratic process is so burdensome because Moscow fears that the organization can spread democratic ideas and can interfere in the domestic affairs of other countries. The European security system will not be acceptable

for the Russian Federation until it will have an exclusive veto power and the right to opt out as it wishes (Techau 2014).

The Russian perception was that the EU is creating its “sphere of influence” that will undermine Russia’s interests (setting this way a zero-sum game). In this regard, Russia considered necessary to respond in the region by occupying and annexing Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Georgia’s breakaway province, in 2008, by continuing to instigate the frozen conflicts (in Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh) and sponsor their leadership, by creating protests against the pro-European leadership in Georgia and Moldova and applying gas embargos to pressure the countries to change their course in favour to the Eurasian Union instead (Schwarzer and Stelzemuller 2014).

The pro-European movement in Ukraine that followed the renunciation of the government to sign the AA/DCFTA, in 2013, is perceived by the Russian Federation as an infringement of the Eastern Europe’s balance of power. Hence, Moscow has intervened military by deploying troops in Crimea, and annexing the peninsula afterwards, and in Eastern Ukraine by destabilizing the area and creating a permanent conflict in the Donbas region (Kasčiūnas *et al.* 2014).

According to the Russian doctrine, Ukraine is a key element in their security and survival as an international power. The enhancement of the Eurasian Economic Union is perceived in a direct correlation with Ukraine’s membership. Without Ukraine, the Russian made organization is a failed one. Some authors consider that the current and past events in Ukraine are part of a “New Russia” concept, by crossing the *red lines* put in place by the West. Even though Russia has broken the 1994 Budapest Memorandum by using military force in Ukraine, the response of the international community was limited and without a specific result that would change the annexation (Kasčiūnas *et al.* 2014).

If Russia is using mainly hard power techniques to attract the EaP countries to its cause, the EU is using soft power concepts. Through the process of Europeanization, the EU has and it’s trying to create a wide positive sentiment regarding the European ideas, norms, values and policies in the neighbouring states. By adopting European values and standards and perceiving themselves as part of the European culture and civilization, the

countries have the tendency to follow the Western model of democratization and modernization (Cumpanasu 2014).

Until 2013, the European Union was perceived as a promoter of peace and stability in the Eastern Neighbourhood. In the public's opinion, security, peace and tackling poverty are of high importance in the collaboration between the EU and EaP states and most people believe that only the European institutions can provide them (Kuzņecova, Potjomkina and Vargulis 2013).

The Europeanization process had a real effect on Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia whom despite of the Russian pressures, threats and embargos have continued their relations with the EU. The best example in this case is Ukraine, whose population took to the streets in Kiev after the Vilnius Summit and protested against the government's decision to abandon the European path. Still now, after a year of conflicts in Eastern Ukraine, economic problems and constant Russian pressure, the majority of the Ukrainian public opinion favours the EU, its promoted ideas and norms and wants more close cooperation with Western states.

Using its multilateral platforms (democracy, good governance and stability; economic integration and convergence with EU policies; energy security; contacts between people) and flagship initiatives (support for small businesses, energy, border management and response to disasters), the European Union supports the partner country's improvement in specific areas, helping that state to upgrade its norms and technologies and become more inclusive in the European Internal Market. Moreover, the programs of the EaP put forward the civil society as a vital element in the EU- EaP countries negotiations by creating and supporting civil society initiatives and cross-border experiences.

The Ukraine crisis is extremely significant for the future of European security and foreign policy. The way things will turn around in the region will define Russia's future actions towards its neighbours and will show how committed the EU is in respecting its engagements with its Eastern partner countries (Bond *et al.* 2015). The fight is also fought for conquering the hearts and minds of the people in Eastern Europe and spreading each actor's ideas. In this regard, the EU should put more focus on offering educational exchanges, stimulating individual contacts and fighting the anti-Western and anti-Ukraine Russian propaganda (Bond, et al. 2015).

The European Union model is an attractive alternative to the Eastern neighbourhood because it is promoting the rule of law, freedom, democracy and international institutionalized collaboration that's the opposite of Russia's values. In this regard, Russia is not fighting the European Union only in Eastern Europe but tries to extend its influence in EU Member States too, through financial provisions given to Eurosceptic parties and groups (Gorodnichenko, Roland and Walker 2015).

In terms of foreign policy, when it comes to the EU-Russia relations, we can see two different opposing models of the Member States: "containment" and "engagement". The supporters of containment claim that the only future for the Eastern Partnership is if EU offers the partner countries the membership option. In addition, the EU should maintain a strict position towards Russia and "business like usual" should not be on the table until Russia will withdraw to the pre-conflict situation. In contradiction with these ideas, the engagement promoters have proposed the idea of a "common economic space from Lisbon to Vladivostok" and Russia's involvement in the Association Agreements negotiation as a third actor. In this way, the supporters of this paradigm suggest that the actual conflict from Ukraine will be resolved by a joint integration process between EU and Eurasian Union (Kasčiūnas *et al.* 2014).

After the Russian-Georgian war in 2008, when Western countries have return to "business as usual" with Moscow, the Russian government thought that the same situation will happen in the Ukraine's case too. In this case, a normalization of the Western-Russian relations will not mean just the lifting of sanctions, a return to economic cooperation, and instauration of the political discussions but also an admission of the veto right that Russia has upon the European security system (Kasčiūnas *et al.* 2014).

5. CONCLUSIONS

The future of EU security on the Eastern boarder will depend on the decisions of the European leaders and how the review process of the Eastern Partnership will conclude. In this regard, the Riga Summit should have been the keystone element in establishing the way how EU relations with the EaP countries and Russia should have been conducted in the future, but the

Summit did not live up to its expectations. The Summit adopted a cautious attitude and no substantial decisions were made.

Therefore, the three scenarios presented in the report “Eastern partnership in a changed security environment: new initiatives for reform” of the Eastern Europe Study Centre, regarding the manner how the EU will decide to proceed with its foreign policy in the Eastern Neighbourhood and the future will let us know how European leaders will decide upon the way to act in this region (Kasčiūnas *et al.* 2014):

1. The EU will avoid radical changes and will try to continue the same approach that governed its work until now. Hence, it will act cautiously about Ukraine and will try to satisfy all the parts at the negotiation table (including Russia). Changes will be made to alter the actual geopolitical environment but they will be slow and complicated. In this case, Russia will be given the veto power to decide upon the regional integration measures.
2. The EU will grant new incentives to its Eastern partner countries in form of presenting the possibility of EU membership to those countries whom accomplish all the reform’s targets. In this way, the European Union shows that it wants to become a normative power in the region and give the EaP states the card to act accordingly to their interests and agenda. Due to the fact that this initiative will create a negative reaction from Russia, the EU must propose also a project on free trade collaboration with Russia.
3. The EU will acknowledge the Russian influence upon the Eastern Neighbourhood and will adopt a *realpolitik* approach. This will be a return to the old system of balance of power where Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine will be left in Russia’s responsibility. More than that, the European Union will lose its capability to help these countries modernize and their relation with the EU will be handled through Russian lenses.

As briefly presented above, the scenarios for the future of the Eastern Partnership depend tremendously on how the EU will behave in the future and how the ENP revision programmed for this fall (2015) will be. Looking towards the way the policymakers and the European leaders acted during the Riga Summit, we can assume that the first scenario is the one taking shape. Of course, it requires more study and time to unfold but this is not the subject of

the present article as the author has opted to focus on researching the developments prior to EaP Summit in Riga.

For that reason, the question "Will the EaP Riga Summit be the make or break of the European Neighbourhood Policy on its Eastern frontier?" is more valid than ever.

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