

Presentation: Resilience in the Eastern Partnership region

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In 2016 a new EU Global Security Strategy was issued, which also aims to enhance resilience in the Eastern Partnership region.

The new EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy states that for the EU, managing the relations with Russia represents a key strategic challenge. Peace and stability in Europe are no longer a given. Russia's violation of international law and the destabilization of Ukraine, on top of protracted conflicts in the wider Black Sea region, have challenged the European security order at its core. A consistent and united approach must remain the cornerstone of EU policy towards Russia.

On the other hand, Russia sees the EU as a serious geopolitical rival and has stood firmly against the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries' closer cooperation and integration with the West. From Russia's perspective, the EaP is viewed as being in direct competition with Russian interests in the post-Soviet space, which is perceived by Russia as its 'zone of influence'.

The Black Sea is a significant import-export gateway for the Russian Federation and Crimea has been the focus of a dramatic increase in Russian military build-up and capabilities since 2010. Rbs68bn (\$1bn) has been allocated to modernizing it by 2020, and since the illegal annexation of Crimea more than a dozen warships have been stationed there. The military build-up in the Black Sea is challenges both in terms of security and commerce the states that are bordering the Black Sea while it empowers Moscow with the capability to assert control over the region, including to deny freedom of movement at sea and in the air. By the access-denial actions to the port of Mariupol, in the pick of Western sanctions, Russia is announcing not only the military capabilities build-up, but its domination over strategic transport routes in the Black Sea.

The stability, security and prosperity of the Republic of Georgia Moldova, Ukraine and the entire Eastern region is essential for the EU and NATO security.

While Russia views the struggle over the EaP as one of the strategic interests to regain its influence, for the EU it is a matter not only of interests, but primarily of values and security at its borders. European Union in various occasions confirmed that it is not a policy that is directed against Russia. Moscow aims at weakening the EU leverage over the EaP region, undermining the basic pillars of the EaP and pushing especially the most advanced countries to embark on the alternative Russia-led Eurasian political and economic integration process.

Numerous tools and mechanisms are used by Russia in order to put pressure on the Associated countries by means of Association Agreement/DCFTA (Deep Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement – Georgia, Ukraine, Republic of Moldova) in order to hamper the reform process. Polarization of the society by using the geopolitical factor must be addressed by the EU.

At the last Eastern Partnership Summit in November 2017 all partners agreed to deliver tangible benefits to the daily lives of their citizens by focusing on achieving 20 Deliverables for 2020, but the Eastern Partnership should be adapted for the next decade.

There is a need to assess the state of the Eastern Partnership in order to contribute to the following objectives of the consistency of the EU policy in its neighborhood in the following decade:

- a. The reflection of the European aspirations of Republic of Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine with accent on the DCFTA implementation and the broad advantages of the European support and
- b. Dynamization of the Eastern Partnership for the next decade.

The EU should be more politically engaged in securing the track-record of reforms offering tools and instruments in this respect. Encouragement of the interaction between the public administrations of the EU states and the EaP states is needed along with creation of public platforms for dialogue for the experience of the CEE states that had undergone the process of the European Integration to be capitalized.

Creation of a more complex mechanism between the EaP countries (bilateral or multilateral) could be useful in order to solve some common problems. This mechanism could finally overcome the regional conferences in which the problems are only „mapped”. The mechanism could offer in the first stage instruments and resources for the states that signed the AA and DCFTA and in the second stage could offer regional solutions as for example South Caucasus and the regional approach of common problems which cannot be solved due to the existing conflicts.

Communication and media. Implementing new programs or capitalizing the potential of the existing media projects about the European Integration processes targeting the different groups from the EaP countries which are accessing expertise, funds and European instruments and trainings. The media projects could bring together expertise and its beneficiaries, can create valuable networks between experts and decision makers or stakeholders. Moreover, another goal could be also included here – encouraging programs or mechanisms within the EaP countries regarding the fight against internal propaganda as a method of prevention of external propaganda.

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