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The Eastern Partnership and the Convergence with the Romanian European Policies

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Abstract: The Eastern Partnership (EaP) is a regional political, economic and security project of the European Union and represents a top strategic interest for Brussels. Created in 2009 with: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine reveals a bold initiative for sharing the European values in the former Soviet Union space. As main objective the Partnership is centered on increasing the quality of research in security for the people with great international visibility. The aim of this study is to present the importance of Eastern Partnership for the stability of the international relations and to define the Romanian relations with those states in the context of Security Strategy of the European Union.

Keywords: European Union; Eastern Partnership; Romania; cooperation; policies

1. The EaP– a Perspective for European Collaboration

The Eastern Partnership (EaP) was created on the necessity of developing a political and economic collaboration between the European Union (EU) and six independent nations having as goal the facilitation of regional cooperation and a better border management. Through this agreement the former Soviet States: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine are strengthening the possibility of improving the political meritocracy, the market freedom and are having the opportunity to reduce the economic imbalances in order to increase stability and regional socialization.

The EaP is a cooperation-based initiative of the European External Service in partnership with Member States of the EU and six states from the East (former Soviet Union Members): Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. The main objective of this initiative is to strengthen the cooperation in the next strategic fields: economic development, democracy, travel agreements and regional stability. Poland initiated the project and Sweden showed also a great contribution in supporting this integrated border management cooperation. Presented in Brussels on 26 May 2008 by foreign ministers of Poland and Sweden, the EaP was officially launched in Prague on 7 May 2009 (European Commission, 2019).

The aim of EaP is to deliver performance-oriented results for the people across this region in accordance with European Commission and European External Action Service. This political initiative is a base for

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regional stabilization and for a better cooperation between the partners and European External Service identified 20 key deliverables for 2020 with four major areas:

- Stronger economy based on increasing the economic performance and the openness for new market opportunities;
- Stronger governance under the consolidation of democracy in public institutions;
- Stronger connectivity with supporting the environment through energy efficiency;
- Stronger society by promoting the mobility of the people and new contacts (European Neighbourhood Policy, 2019).

In support for this future development and with the aim to bring the partners close to communitarian values, the European institutions offered through European Neighborhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) important funds for: supporting the democracy, the decreasing of social disparities, economic integration. With high importance is the establishment of Eastern Partnership Assistance Trust Funds (EPTATF) in 2010, as promoting educational grants for the students who are nationals from: Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Moldova or Ukraine (EPTATF, 2018).

There is a positive, but fragile perception of the EU in the six states, the level of trust in European Institutions is higher than ever, and the Union it is considered by 61% of the citizens the most trustworthy foreign institution (Europa.eu, 2018).

The new Association Agreements replaced the basic elaborated Partnership and Cooperation Agreements and are in present more normative in security policy or trade regulations. Since the beginning of this dialogue it was considered as priority the process of full visa liberalization in long term for the citizens of Eastern partners (Boonstra & Shaplova, 2010).

One important challenge it is to develop a stronger economy by sustaining the business of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) as transformational actors in supporting the traditional job sectors with a practical access to new markets. More than 50% of the European loans for the SMEs in the six countries are in the national currency, and this practical solution generated the increase of trade with the EU since 2016: by 24% with Ukraine, 20% with Moldova, 19% with Belarus, 17% with Azerbaijan, 15% with Armenia and 6% with Georgia (DG Trade Statistical Guide, 2019).

One focus it is addressed for the strengthening of good governance by improving the rule of law and the fight against corruption as preconditions for a collective long-term stability. The EU is demanding to a depoliticized civil service with paramount importance in the implementation of the real judicial reforms, regional conflict resolutions and protection against old and new threats: organized crime and cybersecurity.

The investments in transport infrastructure, in renewable energy and in controlling the greenhouse emissions are recommended as concrete benefits for the life of the citizens in an open future. The investments in energy efficiency will help the civil population and the SMEs in improving the standards of life and full accessibility to energetical projects as form of civilizational autonomy. According to the TEN-T Investment Action Plan until 2020 it is foreseen the improvement of 5,500 kilometers of railways and roads in the region and the development of an extra 4,600 kilometers by 2030. The role of transportation in EU it is crucial in exploring the free movement of goods, people, capital and services (Kiriazids, 2018) and the international cooperation with the Eastern Partners and a common approach in question of finance could better manage the existing transport system.

EU has a strong commitment in promoting the entrepreneurship by increasing the employability through transformational education policies with no political subjectivities. Following the tradition of Erasmus and The EU4Youth programmes in Tbilisi was launched the first Eastern Partnership European School which is supporting the employability and entrepreneurship among the Eastern partners. “All the countries are having full access to Horizon 2020 which is one of the European Union’s major instruments for steering economic development” (Pollex & Lenschow, 2018) with high importance for an emancipatory regional prosperity.

EaP is still representing an opportunity in stopping the economic pressures, the migration flows, the security threats and regarding this aspect “EU policies in neighborhood has been essentially depoliticized” (Korosteleva, 2018) focusing more on promoting a good governance in the zone as a new opportunity for dialogue and cooperation among equal partners.

2. Political and Economic Considerations about the EaP Countries

Regarding the economic and political partnership with the Eastern Neighbors, the intention of the Union was clearly expressed on the fourth EaP Summit hold in Riga on May 2015 where have been presented the principles of differentiation and inclusivity regarding the economic cooperation. In the common declaration was presented 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” (EU Council, 2015). This means that the EU will have a pragmatic economic relation with the six states with a valence for the partners with common industrial principles and political dialogism.

All the Eastern partners are republics with different languages and variations of the GDP, with the declared intention to strengthen the democratic institutions in the diversity of the former Soviet space (Table 1).

Table 1. General Presentation of EU and Eastern Partnership nations

Country	EU	Armenia	Azerbaijan	Belarus	Georgia	Moldova	Ukraine
Capital	Brussels	Yerevan	Baku	Minsk	Tbilisi	Chisinau	Kiev
Official languages	24 languages	Armenian	Azerbaijani	Belarusian	Georgian	Romanian	Ukrainian
Government	Supranational	Parliamentary Republic	Unitary dominant party Republic	Unitary presidential Republic	Unitary parliamentary constitutional Republic	Unitary parliamentary Republic	Unitary semi-presidential constitutional Republic
Area	4,475,757 km ²	29,743 km ²	86,600 km ²	207,595 km ²	69,700 km ²	33,846 km ²	603,628 km ²
Population	513,481,691	2,924,816	10,000,000	9,491,800	3,723,500	2,681,735	42,030,832
GDP/total (\$)	18.8 trillion	32.893 billion	189.050 billion	195 billion	46.055 billion	27.271 billion	408.040 billion
GDP/per capita (\$)	36,580	4,446	18,793	20,820	12,409	7,700	9,743
Currency	Euro(eurozone)	Dram	Manat	Belarusian ruble	Lari	Leu	Ukrainian hryvnia

Source: adapted from: Europa.EU, Eurostat, EU Council, CIA World Factbook, International Monetary Fund

The EaP nations are developing the capacity to create a positive political and economic climate as base for a decent standard of living in a new market-friendly environment. Armenia is having European aspirations and in its political agenda we can notice the intention to strengthen the rule of law and combat corruption as top priority for the success of future reforms. The economy of Armenia has an excellent well-educated human capital, the business climate presents in the same time opportunities and challenges, and there is no legal discrimination between domestic and international firms.

The European support for this state is realized through the mechanism of EU Advisory Group who worked on reforms related to the low justice, the right to liberty for persons and gender equality. Armenia is having some advantages in consolidating the European partnership because the state is having a good public finance management and the human rights acceptance is an indicator of the national commitment to the democratic process (Pădureanu, 2013).

The relation between Azerbaijan and the EU is based on the respect for the national sovereignty and the Eastern state must respect the European principles related to cross-border cooperation and regional conflict resolution. The high-level corruption, the electoral reforms and the freedom of expression are priority areas for the democratic development of the state.

Even this state is having important problems as institutional corruption, bureaucracy and property rights, the economy of the state is functional due to the energy resources as oil, natural gas and mining products. The national Government seems to be interested in conserving the actual monopoly of power with no interest in sustaining the economic diversification. Russia it is considered an important strategic partner, but the country has a good partnership with the EU and is receiving technical assistance in order to facilitate its membership in World Trade Organization (Popescu, 2016).

The Republic of Belarus is internationally perceived as an authoritarian state with low democratic standards for the civilian society. The necessary reforms and a viable plan for the modernization of the nation are required by the European officials because the Government from Minsk is constantly failing in human right protection, the freedom of media and the respect for the political opposition. After the fall of communism, the country is still having an important industrial sector, a broad economy and a competitive economic management. The investment and financial activity are limited by the official institutions, but the nation is exporting chemical and industrial products, metals, machinery and textiles (Gramada, 2016).

Georgia it is the state with excellent relations with international partners and the cooperation with the EU is held under the principles of Partnership and Cooperation Agreement and European Neighborhood and Partnership Action Plan (2006). We can notice a real progress in facilitating the development of European standards of democracy, respect for human rights and close collaboration in the area of security, following the crisis management vision promoted by the European Security and Defense Policy. The legislation is protecting the foreign investors, the economic legislation is stable, and its labor force is among the best from the former Soviet Union. Georgia it is worldwide appreciated as a peaceful democracy, where the political transfer of power follows the democratic principles and the international commitment it is very close to the Western values. Even there is a strong gap between per capita GDP of Georgia and the countries of EU (Aslanishvili & Omadze, 2019), the constitutional reforms of the state, the Euro-Atlantic orientation, the implementation of freedom and rule of law are continuing to support Georgia's integration in EU and NATO.

Republic of Moldova is having a long-term relation with the EU supported by the Joint EU-Moldova Action Plan which is offering technical assistance for achieving the progress in: border management, human trafficking, migration and economical efficiency. Moldova achieved a significant progress in

the implementation of European norms and the European assistance had increased by 30% in 2012 making this state “the best financially supported neighbor with 41 Euro per capita, and increasing the stood to Moldovan financial support five times since 2006 when it was 25 million Euro” (Pădureanu, 2013). The economy is still having a low diversification relying especially on wine industry, but the foreign companies are enjoying equal treatment as the national firms and the European foreign direct investments could be excellent incentives for the economic competitiveness.

The collaboration between Ukraine and the EU started with the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement including the possibility for this state to participate progressively in key aspects of EU regional programmes. Like in Georgia, the public sector is having an important role in monitoring the officials initiating campaigns based on integrity of the candidates and human rights monitoring. Ukraine is making important steps toward the implementation of European values aiming to improve the civil security, the inefficient management and the lack of trust in the public institution honesty. Russia it is not seen a strategic partner and the new business elite is treating the public institutions and political parties as tools, having an important impact on Ukraine`s economic growth (Popescu, 2016).

The EaP can offer for the six nation the possibility for achieving stability and to consolidate the fragile democratic regimes by facilitating substantial investments as support for a competitive market economy in the region.

3. The Interest of Romania for EaP in the Context of European Neighborhood Policy

The Romanian Presidency of the Council of EU in 2019 was an opportunity to bring closer the European values with the ambitions and long-term objectives of: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Georgia. It is officially stated that the Romania is having a policy architecture linked effectively with the principles of European External Action Service and there is no compromise in negotiate separately with independent political actors as EaP nations. As all the member states, the external powers of Romania are delegated to the European action Service Agent who aims to: “enhancing the EU`s relations with Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine in both multilateral and bilateral frameworks” (Kostanyan, 2018).

In negotiations with the above-mentioned states there is no intention to question the transfer of competences from the national Government of Romania to the European Institutions. According to the Treaty of Lisbon the EU acquired a “single legal personality” (Article 24,1) and in Bucharest it is a strong commitment in supporting the unitarian European decision concerning the external action in Eastern neighborhood. Romania is pursuing the economic progress in the region and the political dialogue by strengthening the people to people contacts under the competence of Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement as norm generator for the sectorial cooperation. Only through regular negotiations the Romanian state is expressing its position concerning every detail related to EaP partnership agreement according to the constitutional requirement, but in the same time respecting the directives of European External Action Service.

For Romania, the regional cooperation is interconnected with EU strategy in providing continental and international security, respecting the national interest of the partners and the importance of equal treatment among the participating nations. Cooperation in order to enhance the regional complementarity is one of the European aspirations at eastern frontier and it is associated with financial support for the neighboring states in order to consolidate a long-lasting common confidence.

The interest of Romania for growing the collaboration with EaP is having as core the promotion of the political and security space on its border as well as the preservation of cultural identity for the Romanian natives who are living especially in Moldavia and Ukraine. The officials from Bucharest are centered on the policy of “shared values” and on the acceptance of a set of pre-determined rules as the respect for the regional cross-cultural values. The mutual commitments between the partners must be guided by the principle of sovereignty as vital norm for the regional transformative cooperation.

The coherent understanding of the EU partnership with the Eastern neighbors is having a strategic interest because it is the best way in the dissemination of shared values as: preserving the democracy, the consolidation for the market economy and the respect for the national autonomy. The Romanian state is willing to legitimize the European engagement with its neighbors thereby offering an attempt to become an example and a norm-maker for the cooperation with all the Eastern partners. In this endeavor, through the official foreign policy, Romania is intending to learn more about the EaP partners and to attend properly to the individual needs of each state.

The strategy of Romania presented on the Eastern Partnership Anniversary Conference held in Luxembourg is not having a Eurocentric vision for this cooperation. For the consolidation of European role on the global arena there is a requirement for a stronger commitment between all the Member States in exporting stability and prosperity among all the regional partners. On April 2019 the Minister for European Affairs stated: The 10-year anniversary of the Eastern Partnership marked during the term of the Romanian Presidency of the Council of the EU is a good opportunity to boost the efforts to implement the material objectives set out for 2020. It is also a good opportunity to adequately reflect on the progress made, to communicate the benefits of this partnership and to set out objectives for our future cooperation” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019).

In our opinion the Romanian policy must differentiate every state in EaP according to its intentions and willingness to cooperate with the EU. For example, Belarus is engaging with EU only on equal terms and the perception in this state is based on the next principle: “the cooperation should be based on joint interests rather than political values” (Korosteleva, 2012). The Republic of Moldova is having a different approach regarding the European values and the relation with the EU is engaged in “a mutually beneficial exchange game... the EU wants stability on its external borders and consequently wishes to see Moldova among the ring of friends and in return for cooperation, Moldova desires the welfare that would stem, the Moldovan authorities believe, from an explicit membership perspective” (Danii & Mascauteanu, 2012).

According to the different above-mentioned approaches of Moldova and Belarus regarding the EaP, Romania must pursue balanced relations to promote general modernizations by acknowledging the differences in values and cultural heritage.

The security issues in the region (the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, the crisis from Crimea, the Transnistria uncertainty situation), are for Romania core problems in the foreign policy related to EaP. According to the EU draft Romania is trying to share the general values as human rights and democracy as base for sustainable development in the conflict regions. This zone is a strategic one for Europe and the proximity with Romania is assuming the possibility of developing in the future a free trade area encompassing the mentioned states in a stable and conflict free international region.

The policy of Romania is not having diverging preferences in limiting the power of European External Action Plan in security problems. One national objective is to successfully ensure the preferences of the population for supporting Republic of Moldova in the context the multilateral framework of EaP. The Romanian preferences are also in line with the consensus established by the European Parliament, but

we can also note a national preoccupation, both public and political, which include the intention to grant an EU membership perspective for: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine.

The Romanian officials are working with all the Eastern partners collectively and, in our opinion, it will be beneficial for a better cooperation the establishment of a platform for exchanges data and project proposals between the Member States of EU and the six partners. The highly sensitive questions as human rights, political freedom or economic strategies could be debated through this platform affecting a better achievement of this partnership achievements. Following the enactment of Treaty of Lisbon, the intention of Romania in its regional proximity is to enable a dialogue-based environment for the civil society and regarding this aspect, the recent political changes which occurred in Moldavia and Ukraine are supporting the pluralism and the non-discrimination. The agricultural potential (Ukraine, Moldavia), the soil riches (Azerbaijan), the political stability (Georgia) are excellent premises for strengthen the intra-regional trade between the EaP and EU, and Romania is capable harmonize the coordination of the projects and to reduce the technocratic tasks.

Due to different approaches between the EU policies and some political strategies of Eastern Partners, the EaP it is in danger to be transformed in an obsolete bureaucratic process. For Romania this cooperation it is an opportunity to promote the EU foreign policy in its geographic proximity and to materialize the constant progress of its national Diaspora in the area. As a final negative observation, in Romanian political society, as in the former Soviet states, there is a real problem in implementing key juridical reforms, with negative impact in the reinforcing the public administration in accordance with the European Acquis. The developing of common educational policies is the best incentive for enhancing the cooperation in cross-cutting issues and enabling a positive relation between the partners.

4. Conclusions

The EaP is a new paradigm shift in EU foreign policy aiming a greater cohesion with the six neighbors by increasing the performative actions of common creative new projects. Europe is having a transformative effect, but the official promotion policies should be managed by the acceptance of cross-cultural differences and not under the promotion of a Eurocentric view.

The European model of development may have political subjectivity but is mostly promoting a communicative interaction with the neighbors by moving forward to a pluralist cooperation in a context of a post-communist world. This partnership it is an opportunity for the substantial transformation of the international relation at the crossroad between Eastern Europe and Western Asia without monopolizing the political framework of the region. There are still political problems to solve in the region, but a depoliticized partnership will foster a dialogical relationship in which the EU members and the six states could be engaged in a performance-oriented relationship on the continent.

The Romanian external policy regarding the EaP is flexible, open to debate and is focusing to solve, at least in part, some challenges that EU faces regarding the foreign policy. The complex relation of Member States and Commission regarding the European External Action Service demands a political dialogue as base for the cross-border partnerships.

To close the article in a positive note, the most important strategy is to develop a non-bureaucratic political partnership characterized by continental development and a competitive neighborhood policy encompassing the sovereignties of all the nations.

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