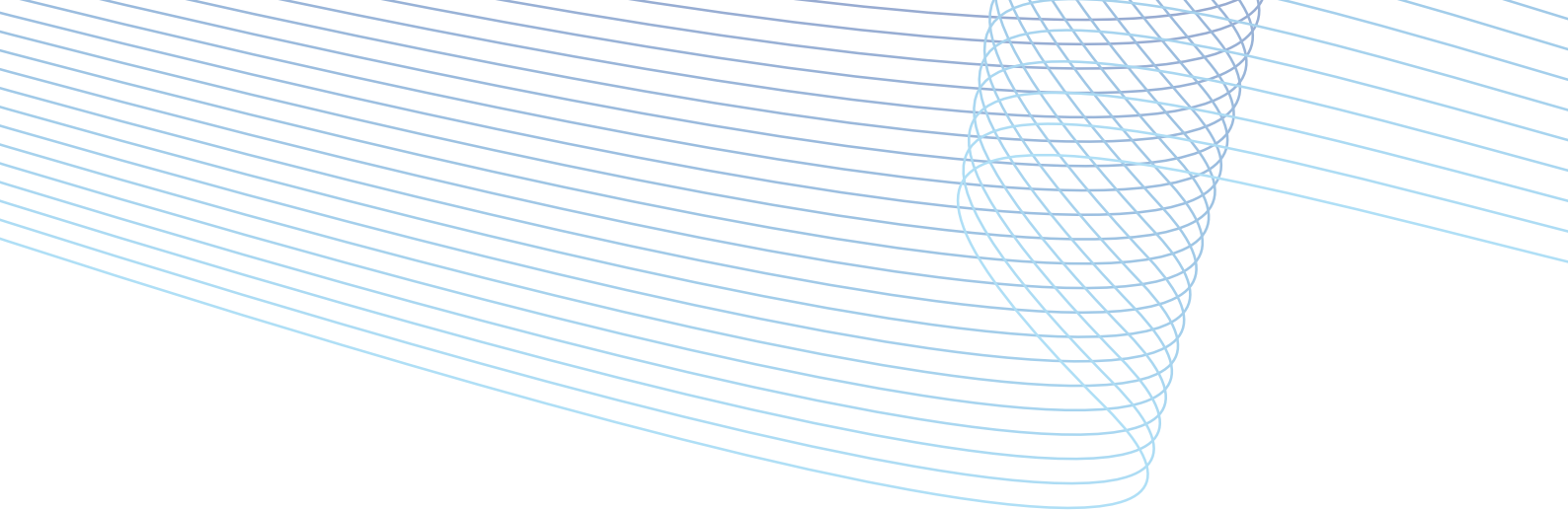




**European  
Movement  
International**

## **Policy Position**

### The EU and the Eastern Partnership: a clearer citizens-perspective



Europe's neighbourhood is central in achieving the European Union's key objectives to promote peace, its values and the well-being of its peoples. The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) is designed to help the EU support and foster stability, security and prosperity in the countries closest to its borders.

The 2015 review of the European Neighbourhood Policy introduced a focus on individual partnership priorities for a greater sense of ownership. But short-term developments in need of urgent responses – such as security concerns and refugee flows – have dominated EU relations with the region in the past years and weighed on the implementation of the reviewed ENP.

Ahead of the 2017 Eastern Partnership Summit in Brussels, the European Movement International takes the opportunity to renew its position on the European Neighbourhood Policy, to assess the implementation of the ENP review, and to highlight the key elements for the EU's relation with its Eastern and Southern partners. In this exercise, the debate on the Future of the European Union takes centre stage. Europe's Eastern and Southern partners need to be taken into account when discussing Europe's future, especially in terms of geopolitics, (energy) security and climate change.

## 2017 Eastern Partnership Summit

The Eastern Neighbourhood has seen its own conflicts and turbulence in the past years. However, contrary to the Southern Neighbourhood, the European Neighbourhood Policy has taken centre stage in the relation of the EU with its Eastern partners. After a series of eventful Eastern Partnership Summits, the 2017 summit will outline the priorities of the EU and its Eastern partners over the next two years.

The ENP review has introduced a clear differentiation in the approach towards the different Eastern Partnership countries, which include Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. This reflects better the different aspirations of the respective countries and the past years have seen many positive developments including the implementation of Association Agreements, the introduction of visa-free travel, and new partnership agreements.

At the same time, the Eastern Partnership (EaP) also focuses on cooperation to tackle common challenges. The 2017 Summit is meant to



take forward cooperation mainly in the areas of economic development and connectivity, which are also well represented in the “20 Deliverables for 2020: Focusing on key priorities and tangible results” (June 2017). However, the European Movement International believes concrete progress should also be made in the following areas:

### Political dimension of the Eastern Partnership

The Eastern Partnership would benefit from a **stronger mandate** of the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy with backing from the Member States, to put an end to any discord between the national policies of individual Member States and the official policy of the European Union. Furthermore, the High Representative should reiterate the **principled approach** that once the Eastern Partnership countries meet the Copenhagen criteria, they are eligible for EU membership in accordance with Article 49 of the Lisbon Treaty. Finally, the EU approach towards individual countries should retain its focus on **conditionality** in terms of EU support, which also emphasises responsibility of each individual partner. This ‘more for more’ approach should be linked to financial support, progress in trade relations, as well as participation in existing EU financial instruments or for example certain aspects of the single market as an incentive for reforms. This should be proportional to what

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is offered to other partner countries of the EU.

**Democracy, human rights and the rule of law** should be a focus point for cooperation under the Eastern Partnership banner and determine the conditionality strategy and the level of progress in economic and connectivity priorities. Furthermore, support for independent media and investigative journalism in local languages should take a more prominent role in the Eastern Partnership, for a positive impact on the quality and independence of journalism and freedom of expression in the Eastern Partnership countries.

### Financial dimension of the Eastern Partnership

The **conditionality approach** should thus also persist in financial support, with more support in case of tangible progress but also a reduction of support in case of a reversion of reforms. Furthermore, to make EU financial support for the Eastern Partnership countries more transparent, accessible and inclusive, a **'one stop shop'** could be designed where individual citizens, civil society, institutions of local govern-

ments and businesses can find out for which programs they are eligible. This should be coupled with simplified administrative requirements for financial support, to ensure outreach to a wide range of NGOs and civil society initiatives. In the case of failing to address urgent problems of corruption, organised crime and state capture, the freeze of support should be an option.

### Citizen dimension of the Eastern Partnership

The Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum aims to strengthen civil society in the Eastern Partnership countries and foster cooperation, also with their EU counterparts. However, its setup, focussed mainly on position-taking, does not offer a **structural civil society input** in meetings and programmes of the Eastern Partnership. For a more inclusive policy, that engages and positively affects citizens as much as possible, it is important that **all stakeholders, including organised civil society and institutions of local governments**, are structurally involved in agenda-setting processes and meetings in the context of the EaP.



At the same time, **civil society exchange and cooperation** is vital, and more effort should be put in facilitating common projects, building networks, and providing capacity-building support. This should be directed both at established NGOs and grassroots initiatives, with a particular emphasis on youth organisations. Initiatives from other regions, such as the Citizens' Pact for South Eastern Europe or the Serbian 'National Convention on the EU', could inspire existing or new platforms for structured civil society inclusion and civil society exchange in the Eastern Partnership. The European chapter on local self-governments could serve as a guideline to support municipalities and the participation of citizens in local democracy.

On an individual level, **personal contact and mobility** are imperative to develop mutual understanding. The EU should therefore put great emphasis on, and provide adequate financial support for: people-to-people contacts; cross-border and cross-community projects; youth



exchanges; mobility in education and traineeships; collaborative research and innovation activities; twinning projects; and the participation of civil society from the partner countries in European platforms. In this regard, Europeans with a background in the Eastern Partnership countries could be involved as well in the design and implementation of such programmes, as experts and ambassadors.

In this light, **visa regimes** have a great potential in fostering civil society exchange and cooperation, mobility and people-to-people contacts in half of the Eastern Partnership countries. Pursuant to the countries' positive track record in the area of fundamental rights, and adherence to common values and precise con-

ditions defined in visa liberalisation action plans, the EU should open visa dialogue with Armenia; encourage the implementation of Visa Facilitation and Readmission Agreements (VFA/RA) by Azerbaijan with a prospect of opening a visa dialogue in the future; and conclude negotiations on VFA/RA with Belarus that would foster individual citizens' mobility.

### **The European Movement**

seeks to provide a platform to encourage and facilitate the active participation of citizens and stakeholders in the development of European solutions to our common challenges. We offer thought leadership on the issues that affect Europe and we give the opportunity to representatives from European associations, political parties, enterprises, trade unions, NGOs and other stakeholders, through our 39 National Councils and 34 International Associations, to work together, towards improving the way that Europe works.

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