**EMI Background Briefing**

**Eastern Partnership: road to Riga**

Over the past year, is has not been quiet in the Eastern Partnership region. The last Eastern Partnership Summit, held in Vilnius in November 2013, marked the beginning of the Ukraine crisis. Since then, much has changed in relation to the Eastern Partnership countries. Closer ties have been established with Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, and a growing realisation that the Eastern Partnership framework as it stood was not adequately equipped for diversified relations with Azerbaijan and Armenia resulted in the a review of the European Neighbourhood Policy. Surprisingly, the Ukraine crisis even caused a slight thaw in the relation between the EU and Belarus. 2015 will also be an important year for the Eastern Partnership with the Riga Summit on 21-22 May, and a review of the European Neighbourhood Policy.

Content

**1. 2014: General developments**

In the area of **visa facilitation** the readmission agreements and agreements on the facilitation of the issuance of visas between the EU and Armenia and the EU and Azerbaijan went into force, on respectively the first of January and September 2014. In April, visa-free travel was granted to Moldova. Georgia and Ukraine are working to implement their Visa Liberalisation Action Plans and Visa Facilitation and Readmission Agreements are being negotiated with Belarus.

On 27 June 2014, three **Association Agreements** (AA) including Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (DCFTA) were signed between the EU and Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine.[1] The Association Agreements with Georgia and Moldova provisionally entered into force on 1 September 2014. The Association Agreement with Ukraine is being provisionally applied as well, but the provisional implementation of the Deep and Comprehensive Trade Agreement with Ukraine was however postponed until 31 December 2015 after trilateral talks between the European Commission, Ukraine and Russia. Ukraine does benefit from autonomous trade preferences – the removal of customs duties on Ukrainian export to the EU – until 31 December 2015.

In September 2014, the European Commission (High Representative Catherine Ashton and Commissioner Štefan Füle, Commission Barroso II) released **new cooperation priorities**, related to the allocation of funds for the period 2014-2017, of which the total amount is over €5,5 billion. The new **European Neighbourhood Instrument** for the period 2014-2020 will provide the bulk of the funding

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[1] Association Agreements of Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia.

to the countries covered by the European Neighbourhood Policy. Regarding the Eastern Neighbourhood, the majority of the funding is directed to Eastern Partnership Flagship Initiatives, and funds are also allocated to regional cooperation, energy and transport initiatives as well as horizontal and sectoral support for multilateral cooperation.

Furthermore, funding is foreseen for **different priority sectors** in the Eastern Partnership countries:
- Armenia: private sector development, public administration reform and justice sector reform.
- Azerbaijan: regional and rural development, justice sector reform, and education and skills development.
- Belarus: social inclusion, environment, and local and regional economic development.
- Moldova: public administration reform, agriculture and rural development, and policy reform and border management.
- Georgia: public administration reform; agriculture and rural development; and justice sector reform.
- Ukraine: education; transportation; border assistance. Ukraine also receives money through a separate 'Special Measure' including a State Building Contract and funding for civil society.

Also in September 2014, an **informal partnership dialogue** took place in Baku between the Foreign Ministers of the Eastern Partnership, which revealed, according to Commissioner Štefan Füle, a sense of solidarity between the Eastern Partners and the EU and among themselves.[2] Differentiation and inclusiveness were stressed as key features of the Eastern Partnership, and furthermore the integrity, sovereignty and independence of the six partners were underlined.

In September 2014 EuropeAid released its report '**European Neighbourhood Instrument 2007-2013 – Overview of Activities and Results**'.[3] The report outlines the achievements of the past seven years. Overall, the report notes, the mix of available tools and modalities for aid delivery in the Neighbourhood became richer, which translated into more opportunities for adapting the ENPI response to different needs and changing situations.

The **Committee of the Regions** also worked on the Eastern Partnership. Through its joint assembly CORLEAP, established in 2011, it works together with regional and local elected representatives from the Eastern partner countries. In the **CORLEAP** session on 29 September 2014, members agreed that decentralisation and cross-border cooperation are key for a successful Eastern Partnership. A special taskforce was also set up to assist the decentralisation reform in Ukraine. In December, the CoR adopted a resolution on the implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy, making recommendations for its successful implementation, such as involving the local and regional level more. Furthermore, they recommended more flexible and customised action[4].

Relevant developments took place also outside the EU and Eastern Partnership framework. On 10 October 2014, Armenia followed Belarus with its accession to the **Eurasian Economic Union**, which also includes Russia and Kazakhstan and was launched on 1 January 2015. The accession of Armenia to the Union raised still unanswered questions about the compatibility of the Eurasian Economic Union with European (economic) integration.

The past year also saw **a change in leadership**. With Johannes Hahn appointed as the new Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations and Federica

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[2] http://www.enpi-info.eu/maineast.php?id=38330&id_type=1&lang_id=450
[3] http://www.enpi-info.eu/mainmed.php?id=726&id_type=9&lang_id=450
[4] http://www.enpi-info.eu/maineast.php?id=39345&id_type=1&lang_id=450

Mogherini as the new European High Representative, a new EU team leading the Eastern Partnership took office on 1 November 2014. Furthermore, since Radosław Sikorski and Carl Bildt left their respective posts as foreign ministers of Poland and Sweden, the 'fathers' of the Eastern Partnership left the scene.

The **Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum** held its annual meeting in November 2014 in Batumi, Georgia. The forum brought together civil society representatives from the Eastern Partnership countries and the EU, and adopted resolutions[5] on, amongst others, the establishment of civil society platforms between the EU and Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia. The three Association Agreements lack clarity concerning the establishment of bilateral civil society platforms. The CSF proposes that the bilateral civil society platforms should follow a uniform model; members should be selected in a transparent way on the basis of individual merits; and it should be co-chaired by the EESC and CSF.

In December 2014, the European Commission signed a new **cooperation agreement with the Council of Europe** to promote human rights, democracy and the rule of law in the Eastern Partnership countries. The agreement will fund joint programmes in the Eastern Partnership countries in the period 2015-2017. It is part of a new strategic framework for cooperation between the Council of Europe and the European Commission in the EU Enlargement and Neighbourhood Regions for the period 2015-2020, agreed in April 2014 between former Enlargement Commissioner Štefan Füle and Secretary General of the Council of Europe Thorbjørn Jagland.

**2. 2014: Reports and Index results on the Eastern Partnership countries**

The main sources on progress of the Eastern Partnership countries in various areas that are addressed within the European Neighbourhood Policy are the **annual progress reports**. On 25 March 2015, the Eastern Partnership **progress reports on 2014**[6] were presented, including separate reports on all countries except Belarus, which remained outside of most of the Eastern Partnership structure. The progress reports show the developments in 2014 in terms of democratic transition, human rights and fundamental freedoms, their economic development and the countries' cooperation with the EU in areas such as migration and mobility, energy and transport. The report concludes that whereas the ENP forms part of the EU's effort to support successful transitions, these processes vary widely due to historical and societal circumstances specific to each country. It states that inclusiveness and active cooperation between government, civil society, and economic actors is very important for successful democratisation efforts. The role of civil society was – with mixed results - addressed through the EU country roadmaps for a strategic framework for engagement with civil society.

In short, the **country assessments** are the following: for Ukraine, the report refers to a very difficult economic, social and military context, additional EU funding, and little improvement regarding the economic climate and reform. Regarding Moldova, the report speaks of general political stability and positively assesses the November 2014 elections. Georgia is considered to have made some progress on reforms regarding democracy and human rights and the fight against corruption. For Azerbaijan, the report criticises the democratic and human right environment, but is positive about the building of the Southern Gas Corridor and economic development. For Armenia, limited progress in reforms regarding democracy and human rights is noted, and it is stated that the discussions on a continuation of the Association process, compatible with its

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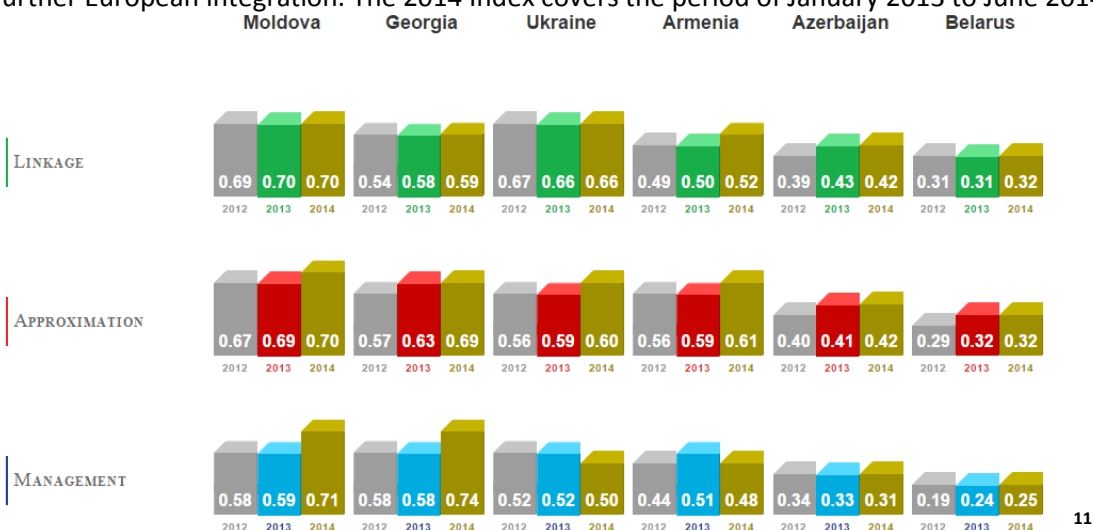[5] http://eap-csf.eu/en/news-events/news/resolutions-and-statement-adopted-at-the-forum1/
[6] http://eeas.europa.eu/enp/documents/progress-reports/index_en.htm

accession to the Eurasian Economic Union, is ongoing. More elaborate country-specific conclusions can be found in the different country reports.[7]

The 2014 edition of the **Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI)**[8] analyses and evaluates the transformation processes toward democracy and a market economy. At the beginning of 2014, its conclusions were sobering: not one country in post-Soviet Eurasia (including all the Eastern Partnership countries) had made appreciable progress in transforming to democracy and a market economy vis-à-vis the 2012 BTI. Georgia is however seen as an exception in political transformation with its first democratic transfer of power after the October 2012 elections. The BTI recognizes a backwards trend in Ukraine both in democratic development and its market economy status, but due to its presentation in January 2014 has not yet taken into account the most recent developments in the region.

The **EU Neighbourhood Barometer**[9] sixth wave (Autumn 2014, presented January 2015) found that citizens of the Eastern Partnership countries are more satisfied with their lives (46%, opposed to 43% in Spring 2014), but pessimistic about the economy (79%) and dissatisfied with the way democracy works (two-thirds). Furthermore, respondents have a more positive image of the EU, and name peace and security as the most important area of cooperation. Areas where respondents called for greater EU involvement where trade (76%), economic development (74%) and human rights (64%).

The **Eastern Partnership Index 2014**[10] charts the progress made by the Eastern Partnership countries towards integration with the EU, focussing on two separate, yet interdependent processes: increased linkages between each of the EaP countries and the EU, and greater approximation between each EaP country's institutions, legislation and practices, and those of the EU. As the processes are interdependent, the dynamics of integration depends on enabling political decisions and structures. Thus, three dimensions are evaluated: **linkage**, the growing political, economic and social ties between each of the six EaP countries and the EU; **approximation**, the legislation, practices and institutions in the EaP countries converging towards EU standards and in line with EU requirements; and **management,** the evolving management structures and policies in the EaP countries that aim at further European integration. The 2014 Index covers the period of January 2013 to June 2014:



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[7] http://eeas.europa.eu/enp/documents/progress-reports/index_en.htm
[8] http://www.bti-project.org/bti-home/
[9] http://euneighbourhood.eu/
[10] http://www.eap-index.eu/sites/default/files/EaP%20Index%202014.pdf
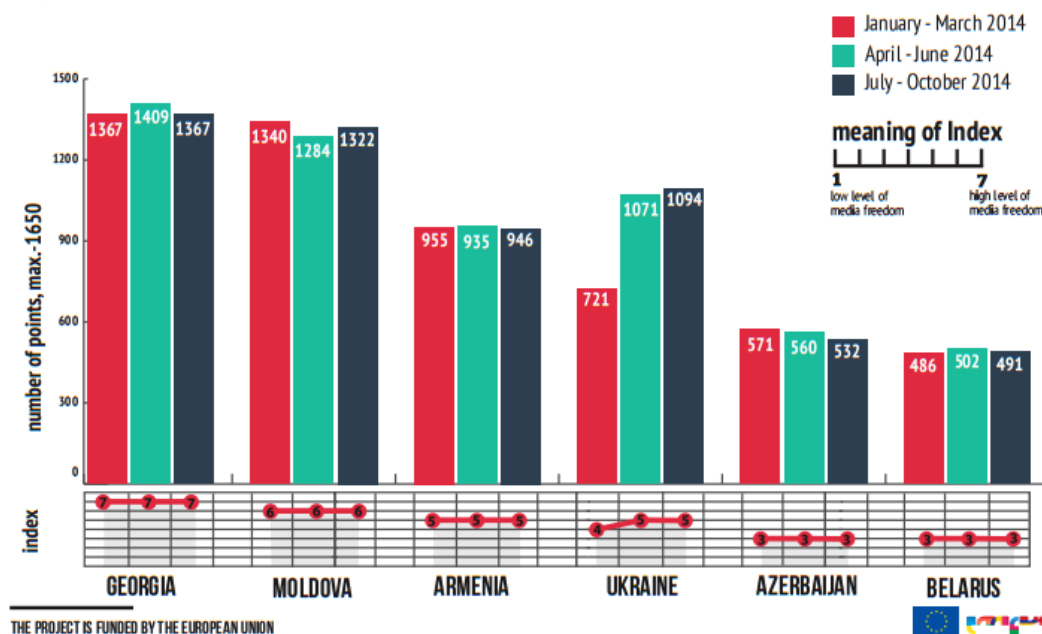[11] http://www.eap-index.eu/index2 - compare all scores

**Summarizing, the report states:** the 2014 Index shows a mixed set of results for the six Eastern partner countries in the period covered. On the one hand, Moldova and to an even greater degree Georgia continued steady progress in integration with the EU. On the other hand, Armenia and Ukraine experienced a stop-and start trajectory, and a range of internal and external challenges. Ukraine, alongside Georgia and Moldova, proceeded to sign and ratify an Association Agreement with the EU, while Armenia instead abandoned the agreement and prepared to join the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) with Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan. While Belarus engaged in more dialogue with the EU, including starting negotiations on visa facilitation and readmission agreements, it remained the weakest performer in all three dimensions of the Index. Azerbaijan remained in fifth place in all dimensions, with little impetus towards closer EU integration and a worsening record on human rights. The different starting points, varying political orientation towards Russia or the EU, and speed of reforms all shaped the countries' scores.
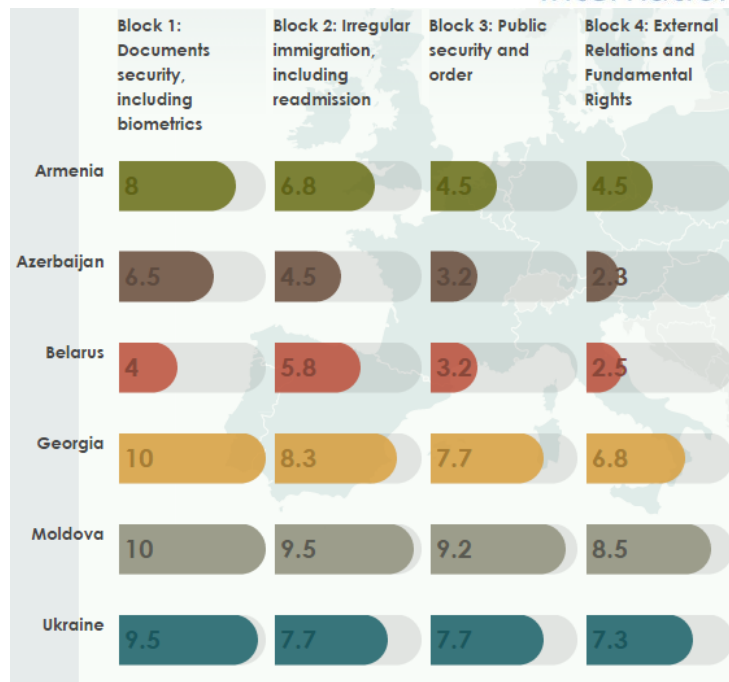
The most recent **Eastern Partnership Media Freedom Index** (July – October 2014) is included in the report 'Eastern Partnership Media Freedom Landscape 2014'. The report contains a detailed analysis of the situation concerning media freedom in all six countries of the Eastern Partnership: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, as well as a prognosis of future developments. The Index shows that Georgia remains leading in the Eastern Partnership Media Freedom Index, and Moldova second. Armenia and Ukraine cover the middle ground and Azerbaijan and Belarus follow at the end of the ranking. The index is calculated by adding the points obtained in four sections – Politics (the level of rights and freedoms granted by the Constitution and laws of the country to the media and journalist); Practice (role of the state in ensuring rights and freedoms of media and journalists, the reaction of authorities to cases of unlawful restrictions); Broadcasting (level of freedom of broadcasting companies); and Internet and new media (the level of freedom of the internet and access to it). The scores are as follows:



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12 EASTERN PARTNERSHIP MEDIA FREEDOM LANDSCAPE 2014 http://mediafreedomwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/EaP-MFW-Final-Publication-2015-EN.pdf

The **Eastern Partnership Visa Liberalisation Index**[13] gathers the progress made of the Eastern Partnership countries in the area of visa liberalization, looking at progress in four areas: Documents security, including biometrics; Irregular immigration, including readmission; Public security and order; and External Relations and Fundamental Rights. It gives not only an overview of what has been achieved, but also on what is on the agenda in 2015. The most recent scores are:[14]

| | Block 1: Documents security, including biometrics | Block 2: Irregular immigration, including readmission | Block 3: Public security and order | Block 4: External Relations and Fundamental Rights |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Armenia | 8 | 6.8 | 4.5 | 4.5 |
| Azerbaijan | 6.5 | 4.5 | 3.2 | 2.3 |
| Belarus | 4 | 5.8 | 3.2 | 2.5 |
| Georgia | 10 | 8.3 | 7.7 | 6.8 |
| Moldova | 10 | 9.5 | 9.2 | 8.5 |
| Ukraine | 9.5 | 7.7 | 7.7 | 7.3 |

## 3. 2015: New priorities and Riga Summit

2015 will also be an important year for the Eastern Partnership. Firstly, the new European Commission has set the goal to **review the European Neighbourhood Policy**. As Commissioner Hahn stated in January 2015 visiting Poland: 'Due to the crises and conflicts in our neighbourhood, the ENP has moved right to the centre of the EU's Foreign and Security Policy […] As for the ENP review, we will build on principles which will also be valid for the Eastern Partnership: Differentiation, Inclusiveness, Flexibility, better use of Financial Instruments and increased visibility and ownership. A major challenge for the Eastern Partnership will be to maintain its political attractiveness in view of other concepts promoted and pressured by Russia'.[15] From March to June, all interested stakeholders have the option to join the consultation on the new European Neighbourhood Policy.[16] Together with the review, a joint consultation paper[17] was presented, setting out the questions to address in the consultation. The Eastern Partnership **progress reports**[18] presented in March 2015 will provide necessary input for the review of the European Neighbourhood Policy.

On 21-22 May 2015, the **Riga Summit** will take place. In anticipation of this summit, many stakeholders are developing and presenting their positions on what they expect both from the Riga Summit and the ENP review. The Riga Summit will indeed provide input for the ENP review from the perspective of the Eastern Partners. The Eastern Partnership **Foreign Ministers** will meet in Luxembourg on 20 April in preparation of the Riga Summit.

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[13] http://monitoring.visa-free-europe.eu/
[14] http://monitoring.visa-free-europe.eu/ (average scores)
[15] http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_STATEMENT-15-3204_en.htm?locale=en
[16] http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/neighbourhood/consultation/index_en.htm#
[17] http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/neighbourhood/consultation/consultation.pdf
[18] http://eeas.europa.eu/enp/documents/progress-reports/index_en.htm

A calendar[19] of main Eastern Partnership events in the first semester of 2015 includes also three **meetings in the margins of the Riga Summit:** the EaP 2nd Civil Society Conference; the EaP Media Conference, and the EaP Business Forum. Furthermore, the **four multilateral platforms** of the Eastern Partnership will meet: Platform 2 on Economic Integration and Platform 3 on Energy Security in April; Platform 4 on Contacts between People in June; and Platform 1 on Democracy, Good Governance and Stability in July.

Also, in **September a continuation of a dialogue between the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict** is foreseen in the margins of the United Nations General Assembly in New York. This meeting follows on an Armenia-Azerbaijan summit over Nagorno-Karabakh hosted in France in October 2014. At the meeting, Armenian and Azeri leaders agreed to pursue talks about Nagorno-Karabakh.

### 4. Road to Riga: Input from stakeholders

The Eastern Partnership progress reports[20] by the **European Commission** presented in March 2015 also include some country specific recommendations for 2015, yet refrain from general conclusions on the future of the policy. Country-specific recommendations include: for Armenia, to focus on human rights and fundamental freedoms, including electoral reform, judicial reform and the fight against corruption, and improve the business environment. Azerbaijan needs to improve human rights, democracy and be less restrictive towards civil society, and reinvigorate its partnership with the EU. Georgia needs to focus on the separation of powers and political climate, judicial reform and freedom of expression and media. Moldova should revise its constitution, improve media freedom, and integrate national minorities. The focus for Ukraine is, apart from expected reforms on governance and the economy also on consequences of the annexation of Crimea and conflicts in Eastern Ukraine, including lustration processes and police reform.

**CORLEAP** adopted at its 2014 meeting recommendations to the Heads of State and Government for the 2015 Riga Summit including: political, financial and technical support for EaP countries with a differentiated approach to those who signed an Association Agreement; autonomy and self-government and the implementation of decentralisation reforms; and an increased role for local and regional authorities in the Eastern Partnership policies and strategies.[21]

The **Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum** met in October 2014 to discuss the objectives and deliverables for the Riga Summit.[22] It was discussed how the EU can strengthen its role as a security actor and its position in terms of democracy promotion in the region. The National Platforms of the CSF presented their objectives for Riga. Ukraine will be preoccupied with coordinating the reforms of the administrative system connected to the Association agreement, as well as a clearer strategy on energy security. Challenges identified by Georgia include the tug-of-war between the executive and legislative branches of the country and broad security challenges related to Russia's occupation of Georgian territory, stating that the EU should be more attentive to its soft power. Moldova hopes to follow the path of the Baltic States and expects the EU to address the issue of state-sponsored Russian propaganda in the region, raise awareness of EU policies, including minority rights policy, and broaden the EU's security approach. Armenia offered the perspective of non-signatory country, hoping the EU

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[19] http://eeas.europa.eu/eastern/platforms/200115_calendar_multilateral_events_eap_2015_en.pdf
[20] http://eeas.europa.eu/enp/documents/progress-reports/index_en.htm
[21] http://cor.europa.eu/en/news/Pages/decentralisation-cooperation-key.aspx
[22] http://eap-csf.eu/en/news-events/news/eap-csf-participates-in-joint-roundtable-with-pism-on-the-deliverables-for-the-eastern-partnership-summit-in-2015/

continues supporting Armenia with strict conditionality in place, work with alternative partners who support European integration, and raise awareness of the benefits of EU integration.

The **Latvian Presidency** hosts the Eastern Partnership Summit. Minister of Foreign Affairs of Latvia Edgars Rinkēvičs called the summit 'a survival summit'[23]. He furthermore stated that there were 'more open issues than ever', and that the EU needs to respond to the question as to what the end goal of the Eastern Partnership initiative is, as it is divided on the issue of offering membership perspective. He favoured clear deliverables from the summit in the form of visa liberalisation to Ukraine and Georgia and the support of media freedom. Furthermore, the minister said there was a need to develop more individual approaches toward each of the partners, especially with regard to Azerbaijan and Armenia. Regarding Belarus, the hosting of the Minsk summits has given it some leverage for openings in its relations with the EU, which might mean it will also attend the Riga Summit.

The **EURONEST** Parliamentary Assembly in March 2015 adopted resolutions on various issues linked to the Riga Summit.[24] One resolution urges the Riga summit to deliver more cooperation between the EU and the Eastern partners to strengthen mutual energy security, focusing on renewable energy production and energy effectiveness. Another calls for more effort to make the two economic areas – the EU and the Eurasian Economic Union – compatible, as it is important for the Eastern Partnership countries to have access both the EU and Russian market.

Furthermore, members of the **European Parliament** express their ideas on the Eastern Partnership via Parliamentary delegations and personal statements. Thus, the delegation to the EU-Ukraine Parliamentary Cooperation Committee called in its latest statement (February 2015)[25] for a unified EU approach towards Russia; urges the EU to step up support for civil society and regional self-government; and emphasises the need for support to the Ukrainian parliament as a key contributor to Ukraine's European integration process. MEP Jacek Saryusz-Wolski (EPP, Poland) stated, regarding the Eastern Partnership, that it should move from the current state-centric approach to a citizen-centric approach, and involve the European public by encouraging interaction between EU civil society and civil society in the Eastern neighbourhood.

The **European Council** in March 2015 stated that "The EU is fully committed to the Eastern Partnership. It will strengthen, in a differentiated way, relations with each of its six partners. Particular efforts should be devoted to advance cooperation in state building, mobility and people-to-people contacts, market opportunities and interconnections. The European Council looks forward to the earliest possible ratification by all Member States of the Association Agreements/Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (AAs/DCFTAs) with Georgia, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine." President of the European Council Donald Tusk added that "Leaders agreed a priority area is to help build up state institutions and strengthen the rule of law, based on each country's needs and preferences. In other words, the next phase will be about strengthening the democratic institutions to the east."

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[23] http://www.euractiv.com/sections/europes-east/riga-host-eastern-partnership-survival-summit-312466
[24] http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/news-room/content/20150316IPR34737/html/View-from-Armenia-MEPs-and-east-European-MPs-to-survey-new-political-landscape
[25] https://polcms.secure.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/upload/0362441a-816f-490e-b36e-8857721c369b/Final%20Statement%20and%20Recommendations.pdf

**5. Road to Riga: Input from think-tanks**

For the **European Union Institute for Security Studies** (October 2014), Nicu Popescu discusses some initial lessons from the Ukrainian crisis for European security and trade policies[26]. Regarding security, the Eastern Partnership lacked a security dimension from the outset, he writes, and was based on over-optimistic assumptions about, for example, border management reform to a EU-style border management. Hence, the biggest lesson is that the Ukrainian eastern frontier needs military elements. The EU needs a stronger security element in its policies: it need to make sure that there are proper state structures – law enforcement, intelligence, defence sectors – before focussing on other areas of reform. Regarding trade, a multilateral dialogue on the European Union, Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas and the Eurasian Economic Union must replace trilateral dialogue.

The **Martens Centre** presented a study with recommendations for the Eastern Partnership written by Salome Samadashvili (October 2014)[27], recommending the EU, firstly, to continue its attempts to involve Russia in its policy towards Eastern Partnership countries and involve Germany in this exercise. Secondly, the EU should focus on civil society more, with flexible funding for grass-root movements and improved communication. Thirdly, concrete steps can be taken regarding visa liberalisation, high profile visits to Eastern Partnership countries (message of commitment) and reinforced CSDP missions. Fourth, the new Eastern Partnership should be a loose umbrella policy that focusses on bilateral tracks responding to different needs. Last, the Riga Summit should have concrete deliverables for all partners and promise further European integration with membership as a long-term prospect.

For **CEPS** (October 2014), Laure Delcour and Hrant Kostanyan discuss the need for a more flexible and responsive EU.[28] They write that 'the EU's lack of sensitivity to domestic needs and contexts only makes it more difficult for partner countries in a complex regional environment […] Instead of imposing a one-size-fits-all conditionality that does not take into account partners' specificities, the EU should aim at a profound diversification of its relations with all the countries in its neighbourhood.' Regarding responsiveness, they state that the EU can only be influential in its neighbourhood if it can address short-term challenges in a timely manner, and not only sticks to its long-term approach. Furthermore, the neighbourhood policies, short-term crisis management and CSDP are not integrated, and EU policies are not sensitive enough towards the existing political, diplomatic, economic, energy and military ties between Russia and the countries in the common neighbourhood.

In a **European Policy Centre** Commentary (December 2014), Rosa Balfour presents some ideas to consider when reviewing the ENP, in order to break with old concepts and start anew.[29] First, she argues, there is no such thing as neighbourhood, as the concept is a self-referential and euro-centric definition, and there is great diversity between the 'neighbourhood' countries. Second, the ENP is a framework approach and a collection of tools, not a policy – as the political process needed for is lacking. Such a political process, bringing together member states, the EU and stakeholders, is needed to agree on a comprehensive policy. Third, the terminology about differentiation should be abandoned, forcing a different and better understood perspective on the countries. The same holds for the concepts ownership, partnership, and implementation – the first two never really applied to the ENP, and the last is misconception, a bureaucratisation of political choices and relationships.

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[26] http://www.iss.europa.eu/uploads/media/Alert_41_Ukraine_lessons.pdf
[27] http://martenscentre.eu/sites/default/files/publication-files/eastern_partnership_for_website.pdf
[28] http://www.ceps.eu/book/towards-fragmented-neighbourhood-policies-eu-and-russia-and-their-consequences-area-lies-betwee
[29] http://www.epc.eu/pub_details.php?cat_id=4&pub_id=5101

In a 2015 forecast of **CEPS** (January 2015), Steven Blockmans writes that the Riga Summit will –most likely- see the EU and the Eastern partners agreeing to the main principles underlying a new ENP Strategy, and deciding to reinforce the multilateral elements of the EaP to bridge the widening gap between the two groups of partner countries. 'This will be done by beefing up Euronest, holding meetings of officials at different levels, and promoting the exploitation of benefits of sub-regional cooperation through multilateral treaty frameworks and CBC programmes. An EU membership perspective for the EaP countries will remain off the table.' [30]

The **Eastern Partnership Index** (February 2015) also lays out the top challenges for 2015[31]: firstly, the EU should carefully differentiate between the six Eastern partner countries, and provide intense support to Ukraine to help it overhaul its system of governance against the backdrop of the war in Eastern Ukraine. Secondly, the European Council should approve visa-free travel for Georgia and Ukraine upon completion of the second phase of the Visa Liberalisation Action Plan. Thirdly, the Comprehensive Institution Building programme should be strengthened, building on the "more for more" approach of enhanced support, including political support, for those countries that achieve demonstrable reforms. Last, the EU should support civil society and expert monitoring of implementation of EU support. In Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus, the EU should consistently offer dialogue and support to civil society and reform-minded actors, and put in place a communications campaign to demonstrate the benefits of integration with the EU. The EU should balance offers of cooperation on "modernisation" with the governments with a robust programme providing stronger support to non-governmental actors working to promote freedom of expression, independent media, and human rights.

A study prepared for the European Parliament (February 2015)[32], written by Grzegorz Gromadzki of the **Polish Institute of Public Affairs**, concludes that in light of the altered the political and social landscape due to the continued Russian aggression, the original concept of the Eastern Partnership is not adequate to meet current and future challenges. Therefore, it is written, there is a need for the EU to rethink its policy and to focus its attention on relations with those Eastern Partner countries that are willing to cooperate more closely and who truly wish to integrate with the Union, politically, economically and socially. Ukraine, Republic of Moldova, and Georgia should be perceived as more than partners, and the 'more for more' approach should be strengthened. Such an approach would send a clear political signal to all parties involved, and make for a better use of limited resources.

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[30] Download - CEPS 2015 prediction
[31] http://www.eap-index.eu/sites/default/files/EaP%20Index%202014.pdf
[32] http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2015/536438/EXPO_STU(2015)536438_EN.pdf