



## Between Europe and Russia: what future for the Eastern Partnership?

Earth Thought Notebooks

Commandant Laurent GRARD

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**The Eastern Partnership is a relevant element of the European Union's strategic vision, contributing to the coherence of its Black Sea Neighbourhood Policy. In spite of the criticisms that are sometimes levelled at it, it pursues a logic of stabilisation through the sharing of standards and values with its partners, and develops a framework that is evolving and adapted to take account of the structural issues at stake on Europe's markets.**

The Eastern Partnership (EaP) is a policy of the European Union (EU), stemming from the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), which focuses on six states in its eastern markets: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. Initiated in 2009 at the Prague Summit, this partnership was set up to support the political, social and economic transitions of these countries, with a view to stabilising the neighbourhood through democratisation, energy security and economic and social development.

While five of the six OP signatory countries are facing territorial conflicts involving the Russian Federation and the Russian Federation is entering an active phase in the establishment of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) in its "...". The difficulties in implementing the OP might suggest that, having failed to achieve the expected stabilisation, the OP would lack consistency in the face of Russia's strengthening in its traditional geopolitical space.

In this context, the Riga summit in 2015 was a real test of the strength of the OP. Indeed, in the absence of an effective and sufficiently clear tool, would Europeans be condemned to see the centrifugal forces at work in the post-Soviet space provoke a fracture in the countries concerned and weaken the European balance?

The Riga Summit held in May 2015 demonstrates that the Eastern Partnership is still a relevant element of the EU's strategic vision because it contributes to the coherence of

the concept of the EU's Black Sea Neighbourhood Policy. Indeed, seeking to stabilise its neighbourhood by intensifying relations with its partners through a liberal approach to international relations based on the sharing of standards and values, it is developing an evolving and adapted framework that takes account of the structural challenges on Europe's markets.

In order to be convinced of this, it will first be necessary to specify the nature of the objectives that have been pursued by this partnership since its creation, and then to assess the extent to which the results obtained on the eve of the Vilnius summit have been able to. Finally, it will also be necessary to assess how the Riga Summit in 2015 has helped to clarify how the EU intends to pursue its objectives in this area, thereby strengthening the relevance of the Eastern Partnership.

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### **Ambitious goals**

The OP, a Swedish-Polish initiative initiated in 2009 at the Prague Summit, has been developed for Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, to increase the number of countries that have signed up to the OP. It was developed for Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, with a view to increasing political and economic association, initiating a convergence of social and political models and leading to the creation of a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA)[1] but without the prospect of accession[2].

As such, the aim was to promote political stabilisation by supporting the partner countries' political and socio-economic reforms aimed at

- . liberalise trade and investment through convergence with EU legislation, regulations and standards;
- . create a climate of multilateral confidence through peaceful settlement of these conflicts;
- . promote citizens' mobility through gradual visa liberalisation;
- . enhancing energy security through cooperation on stability and security of energy supply and transit[3].

- Strengthening the state structures and predictability of its neighbours:

The OP pursues, in the first instance, the liberal approach to international relations led by the EU, contributing to stabilising its neighbourhood through shared norms and values.

Indeed, the EU's security apparatus maintains, through the export of norms and regulations, a form of socialisation in which its values constitute criteria for convergence and thus predictability for its neighbours.

As such, the OP constitutes a channel for exchanges and the definition of political guidelines. In addition, it is implemented through multilateral or bilateral cooperation mechanisms dedicated to strengthening institutions, good governance and political association.

- Strengthening economic cooperation

Considering that the political stabilisation of its partners will be reinforced by the sustainable development of their economies, the OP seeks the opening of markets and economic integration[4].

Within this framework, the partnership, through the preparation of Association Agreements, envisages a strengthening of cooperation in terms of economic policies in order to achieve normative convergences allowing the establishment of enhanced and comprehensive free trade areas allowing to benefit from the positive effects of trade and investment liberalisation.

In the long term, economic cooperation under the OP could lead to the establishment of a network of enhanced and comprehensive free trade areas.

- Strengthening security and defence co-operation

In this unstable post-Soviet space, marked as much by the problems of controlling migration flows and the proliferation of criminal networks as by the permanence of frozen conflicts, the OP is seeking to strengthen security mechanisms with the aim of stabilising its markets.

In the field of security, the OP can be characterised by a strengthening of bilateral dialogue in the fields of coordination of migration policies and justice and security services through an intensification of exchanges within Europol, Eurojust and Frontex. In the field of defence, it seeks to develop operational cooperation in the framework of EU missions, in particular through the observer mission in Georgia or the European Union Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM)[5] in Moldova and Ukraine.

Moreover, this European initiative is constantly seeking to increase the security of EU energy supplies by developing multilateral or bilateral cooperation, in particular through transport infrastructure projects or the provision of reverse gas flows[6].

## **A partnership with mixed results**

Even if it is difficult to analyse a process initiated less than ten years ago, it nevertheless seems that this partnership, despite clearly defined objectives, has not been fully satisfactory. Indeed, it has been a source of tension, given the excessive confidence in the normative force of European democracy in the initiating countries, particularly Scandinavian ones. The latter have maintained or nurtured inaccuracies about the real purpose of this partnership by hinting at prospects for integration.

- 2013: a deadlock?

After the progress attested by the integration of Moldova and Ukraine into the European Energy Community in 2010 and 2011, Baku's lack of interest and Yerevan's refusal to sign the cooperation agreement between the two countries, which was not yet signed, has led to a situation of deadlock. The integration of Moldova and Ukraine into the European Energy Community in 2010 and 2011, Baku's lack of interest and Yerevan's refusal to sign the cooperation agreement in 2013, and then the Ukrainian crisis, could be interpreted, on the eve of the Riga summit, as a weakening of European policy in the face of pressure from Russia in the context of the establishment of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU)[7] .

7] As such, Armenia, which was the most advanced country in the association process, backed down in September 2013 after the Kremlin convinced Yerevan to join the Customs Union. The country, which was at war with Azerbaijan at the time, had then declared that it wished, in the first place, to preserve its links with Moscow[8].

Moreover, Azerbaijan, concentrating its cooperation on the energy issue, is lagging behind in engaging in an increase in political reforms and human rights.

Moreover, faced with the loss of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Georgia, although engaged in structural reforms and having initialled the Association Agreement in Vilnius, has since the last elections been changing its policy towards Moscow.

Belarus, faced with Russian protectionism accompanied by retaliatory measures on its energy imports, continues to face insufficient judicial, political and economic reforms and remains on the sidelines of the process.

Ukraine managed to sign the DCFTA agreements, which entered into force on 1 January<sup>2016</sup>, only after a long process that led to a major political crisis, as evidenced by the events in Maidan and the conflict in Donbass.

In this context, the EU partners have found it difficult to position themselves in their relations between the EU and Russia in view of a distortion between the actual and the hoped-for objectives of this Eastern Partnership.

- Divergences within the European Union:

Despite the clearly stated objectives, it is important to point out that the context and the strong divergences that prevailed when the partnership was defined may have been a source of incomprehension among the partner countries.

Indeed, the Polish initiative, supported by newly integrated countries with difficult relations with Russia and wishing not to remain alone at the forefront of the EU, was introduced to insert the neighbourhood policy into the EU agenda in order to accelerate the accession process of their neighbours[9].

9] This process was thus approached as a form of pre-accession because it made use of the EU's traditional normative transition mechanisms[10] put in place in previous enlargement processes.

However, while Poland, the Baltic States, Romania and the Czech Republic saw this partnership as a continuation of the historic mission of peaceful unification[11], other EU countries, notably France, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, have also been involved. 11], other EU countries, notably France, Spain and Austria, insisted on its character as an alternative project to enlargement, in line with the principle set out by



Dominique de Villepin, as early as 2006: "There is no natural right, no historical right to enter the Union. The promise of enlargement must not be the only instrument for stabilising Europe's neighbouring regions" [12].

- Diversity of partner countries:

As a result, these elements have had a significant influence in the way the process has been received within the countries of this "shared neighbourhood" with Russia, generating a heterogeneity in the association process of the partner countries.

As such, the influence of the Russian EEU project involving Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan should not be underestimated[13]. Indeed, while this project is officially described by the Kremlin as intended to build with the EU a bipolar "greater Europe", the OP is viewed with suspicion by Moscow insofar as this "close neighborhood" largely coincides with its "near abroad".

Thus, the opposition between the Ukrainian, Georgian or Moldovan infatuation and the reserved positions of Belarus, Armenia and Azerbaijan highlights more clearly the need for the OP to be seen as a "close neighbour". The opposition between the Ukrainian, Georgian or Moldovan craze and the reserved positions of Belarus, Armenia and Azerbaijan highlights more clearly the desire to distance oneself from Russia with a view to integration than a move towards an internal democratic transformation. Thus, in 2013, the Moldovan Prime Minister stated unambiguously in the newspaper *Le Monde*: "Moldova has made its choice, it is European integration".

In view of the difficulties encountered in Vilnius in 2013, characterised by the setbacks of Armenia and Azerbaijan and in a context in which the Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia were asking for recognition of their vocation to join the EU, the Riga summit could be considered crucial for the future of the OP.

### **Riga Summit: differentiation, relations with Russia and the role of civil societies**

By reaffirming that association in no way prejudices accession, the Riga Summit demonstrates the EU's recognition of the difficulties that have prevailed since its creation. Indeed, by introducing principles of differentiation and flexibility vis-à-vis its partners, by demonstrating that it takes account of the multipolar nature of the neighbourhood and by rooting its action in the societies of the countries concerned, the EU is taking account of the difficulties that have prevailed since its creation. By introducing principles of differentiation and flexibility vis-à-vis its partners, by demonstrating that it takes into account the multipolar nature of the neighbourhood and by rooting its action in the civil societies concerned, it is injecting a new dynamic and thus benefits from a reinforced legitimacy that will ensure the continuation of efforts to bring greater security to this region.

- Concepts of flexibility and differentiation:

Thus, while maintaining an objective of multilateral cooperation in the field of institutions, the Riga Summit introduces a principle of bilateral cooperation, no longer flexible and conditional, but flexible and differentiated. It then allows the maintenance of political cooperation with countries that have chosen to join the EEA and deeper cooperation for

signatory countries that are ready to do so.

Indeed, this differentiation allows the continuation of negotiations of deep and comprehensive free trade agreements or visa facilitation regimes on a bilateral basis. As such, while visas have been abolished for Moldovans, Brussels considers that the conditions are not yet in place for Ukraine and Georgia. In economic terms, this principle of differentiation has made it possible to create a free trade area with Ukraine from 1 January 2016.

These developments therefore constitute a favourable framework for deepening relations with Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, which show a strong desire for integration that cannot be met as it stands. In this regard, President Holland stated in Riga "We must ensure that this Eastern Partnership allows Ukraine to be fully associated, even if association does not in any way prejudge membership; I have been perfectly clear on this'.

- Duality Europe - Russia:

In addition, the Riga Summit introduces the capacity for the associated countries to develop, simultaneously, links with Europe and Russia. In a situation where Europe's Eastern neighbourhood appears more torn than shared [14], it is as much a question of setting the conditions for a *modus vivendi* with the EEU, President Putin's ambitious political project and a central element of his foreign policy [15], as it is of confirming the real stabilisation objectives.

Thus, the reaffirmation of the absence of a logic of enlargement spares both Moscow, which does not claim exclusivity in this shared neighbourhood but believes it has a preponderant place there, and the partner states torn between two poles of attraction in Europe. This is a long-term strategy aimed at countering Russia's realistic vision of international relations characterised by a zero-sum game. In this framework, while the annexation of the Crimea is a sign that Russia is not refraining from the use of force and is no longer perceived as a provider of security in the region[16], the Riga Summit is a sanctuary for the long-term stabilisation of this metamorphosis.border through bilaterally negotiated association agreements, while retaining a future possibility of anchoring Russia to European security.

This strategy can be illustrated by the statement made by the Dutch President at the summit: "We must not turn the Eastern Partnership into yet another conflict with Russia. This is why I am in favour of the European Union and Russia (...) having a discussion on the future". As such, this development could allow Armenia to sign an Association Agreement with the EU that would not be incompatible with its membership of the EEA, provided that it does not include an economic free trade component[17].

- Rooted in civil society:

Moreover, noting the difficulties encountered by some countries in pursuing their efforts to democratise public life and taking into account that the lack of prospects for accession could slow down the pace and commitment of reforms in developing countries, the Commission has decided to launch a study on the impact of the EU's accession on civil society.Given the vitality of the political dialogue, the OP stresses the need for action to strengthen political dialogue with a view to advancing human rights, the modernisation of

justice and the improvement of living conditions.

This involves setting up mechanisms acting in depth in the civil societies of the countries concerned in order to promote the participation of society as a whole. By relying not only on governments, but also on local authorities and economic actors through European programmes, this rooting aims to gain in efficiency by acting from the bottom up to improve the daily life of citizens, according to a long-term strategy[18].

As such, Vaira Vike-Freiberga, former President of Latvia, said ahead of the summit: "Regardless of the European Union, the light at the end of the tunnel should be what a country looks like and how it is doing, in our own interest. Europe can be the icing on the cake, but the cake is what you do yourselves".

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Against a background of increasing tensions arising from the implementation of a Russian policy designed to keep its "Near abroad" under its influence, the Riga Summit demonstrated that the Eastern Partnership is still a relevant element of the European Union's strategic vision. Through the establishment of a differentiated approach towards partner countries, the EaP retains its capacity to stabilise the EU's neighbourhood over the long term. Through the implementation of a differentiated approach towards partner countries, it retains its capacity to stabilise the EU's Black Sea neighbourhood over the long term, and contributes to the coherence of European foreign policy by relying on an evolving framework that takes account of the structural challenges on Europe's markets.

**Thus, the OP, the main European tool for conflict resolution, will in all likelihood be strengthened in order, as stated by the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs, Federica Mogherini, to take into account global threats in an approach involving the international community as a whole.**

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A graduate of the École militaire interarmes 2002-2004, Captain GRARD joined the mountain troops in 2005 and spent the first part of his officer's career there. He is currently undergoing specialized training in Russian at the National Institute of Oriental Languages and Civilizations as part of the War School.

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1) It is a free trade agreement between these states and the European Union that includes a reduction in customs duties and non-tariff barriers.

2) Dominik Tolksdorf, "LePartenariat Oriental de l'Union Européenne", in Thierry de Montbrial and Philippe Moreau, Ramses 2015, Paris, Dunod , Ifri, 2014, p.214.

3) Text of the joint declaration adopted at the Eastern Partnership Summit - Prague, 7 May 2009. Website of the European Commission. [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_PRES-09-78\\_fr.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_PRES-09-78_fr.htm)

4) Ibid. ref 2

5] These are civilian advisory missions to assist local authorities in developing their capacity to improve the security of their land, sea and air borders and to develop an integrated border management strategy.

6] In 2014, the reverse flow with Slovakia is an EU response to the Russian decision to reduce gas supplies to Ukraine.

7] It is an economic integration project of Russia and the CIS countries aimed at ensuring the free movement of goods, capital and labour. The EEU now includes Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan.

8] Pierre Stroobants, "Partenariat oriental de l'UE, ce qui se joue au sommet de Vilnius", 2013/11/28, Le Monde, [online] [http://lemonde.fr/azerbaïdjan/article/2013/11/28/EU-Eastern-Partnership, ce qui se joue au sommet de Vilnius](http://lemonde.fr/azerbaïdjan/article/2013/11/28/EU-Eastern-Partnership-ce-qui-se-joue-au-sommet-de-Vilnius).

9] Laure Delcour, "Shaping the post-soviet space", Burlington, Ashgate, p.85.

10] Henri-François Caudrelier, "Le Sommet de Vilnius: vers un rapprochement des pays du Partenariat oriental avec le PE?", Nouvelle Europe, 2013, [online] <http://www.nouvelle-europe.eu/le-sommet-de-vilnius-vers-un-rapprochement-des-pays-du-partenariat-oriental-avec-l-ue>.

[11] Michel Foucher, "L'Obsession des frontières", Paris, Perrin, 2007.

12] Dominique de Villepin, speech at Humboldt University, 18/01/2006,

[http://archives.gouvernement.fr/villepin/acteurs/interventions\\_premier\\_ministre\\_9/discours\\_498/discours\\_universite\\_humboldt\\_berlin\\_55148.html](http://archives.gouvernement.fr/villepin/acteurs/interventions_premier_ministre_9/discours_498/discours_universite_humboldt_berlin_55148.html)

13] Philippe Migault, "Géopolitique de la Russie: Facteurs de puissance et de vulnérabilité", IRIS / Observatoire stratégique et économique de l'espace post-soviétique, September 2015, [online] <http://www.iris-france.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Obs-Russie-CEI-PMigault-septembre-2015.pdf>

[14] Yann Richard, "Eastern Europe: Shared Neighbourhood or Torn Neighbourhood", Paris-Sorbonne Conference, 2015, [online] [https://www.ac-paris.fr/portail/jcms/p1\\_1215190/l-europe-orientale-voisinage-partage-ou-dechire-2015](https://www.ac-paris.fr/portail/jcms/p1_1215190/l-europe-orientale-voisinage-partage-ou-dechire-2015)

[15] V. Putin, [New integration project for Eurasia - a future that begins today], Izvestia, 03/10/2011, [online] <http://izvestia.ru/news/502761>

16] Laure Delcour and Hrant Kostanyan, "Towards a Fragmented Neighbourhood: Policies of the EU and Russia and their consequences for the area that lies in between", CEPS Essay, N°17/ 17/10/2014, [online] [https://www.ceps.eu/system/files/CEPS\\_Essay\\_No\\_17\\_Fragmented\\_Neighbourhood-H\\_Kostanyan\\_L\\_Delcour.pdf](https://www.ceps.eu/system/files/CEPS_Essay_No_17_Fragmented_Neighbourhood-H_Kostanyan_L_Delcour.pdf)

17] Jean-Pierre Stroobants, "Face à la Russie, le Partenariat oriental avec les ex-pays du bloc de l'Est marque le pas", 20/05/2015, Le Monde, [online], <http://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2015/05/20>.

18] Official website of the Council of Europe, 2015, <http://consilium.europa.eu/fr/policies/eastern-partnership>.

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