

SUMMING UP THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP

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Abstract:

The paper offers an overview of the evolution of the Eastern-Partnership, viewed from the main conclusions of each Summit dedicated to the EaP. I tried to analyse separately each summit, and the evolution of political discourse is significant. If in 2009 they spoke in Prague about an ambitious project, which encouraged good governance and development of new economic partnerships, the last summit at Riga in 2015, drew a real alarm on the worrying developments around Romania. The Eastern Partnership was intended to provide within the EU a tangible support and comprehensive democratic transformation, and an oriented market.

Keywords: Eastern Partnership, summit, Romania, EU

Introduction

The Eastern Partnership (EaP) is a joint initiative involving the EU, its member states and 6 eastern European partners: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

The Russian-Georgian conflict in August 2008 showed the vulnerability of these countries and the lack of readiness of the international community to take a coherent position for similar situations.

Therefore, the EU policy had to be stronger, proactive and coherent. The Eastern Partnership was intended to provide within the EU a tangible support and comprehensive democratic transformation, and an oriented

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market. The base of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) is a Polish-Swedish proposal¹ that aimed to balance the position in the East, as the French counterpart to the development proposal on the Union for the Mediterranean.

On 7th May 2009 in Prague, the European Union summit was held which officially launched the Partnership Eastern in order to "deepen political cooperation and economic integration" without offering however, certain perspectives on the integration of these countries into the EU.²

The Prague Summit showed that EaP aimed to have an architecture with four thematic platforms on multilateral cooperation - democracy, good governance and stability; economic integration and Convergence with EU Policies; security energy; human contact - that are open to Member States concerned and for the six partner states. Also, this formula allowed flexible launch of six flagships under the Eastern Partnership: initiative for SMEs; initiative energy; initiative prevention, preparedness and response natural or caused by human factors.³ This mechanism, once triggered, trained on the one hand, substantial expectations and negotiations related to EU from the partner countries (and Companies in these countries) who set ambitious targets on their relations with the European Union, but on the other hand, generated opposition from the Russian Federation, that considered that its interests were threatened in the region.

The third Eastern Partnership Summit, held in autumn 2013 in Vilnius⁴, Lithuania, has highlighted the extreme tension gained in the Eastern Europe and in some of the states in this region. The option, in fact the non-option, of the politicians in Kiev, on signing the Association Agreement with the European Union, was a result of the pressures from the Russian Federation. Rejecting the agreement and joining the Russian initiative, the Eurasiatic Union, triggered a spiral of clashes which has ended with a

¹ *The Polish-Swedish proposal*, [<http://www.msz.gov.pl/Polish-Swedish.proposal.19911.html>], accessed on 20.03.2017.

² *Parteneriatul Estic: bilanț de etapă*, [<http://www.idr.ro/publicatii/Policy%20Paper%206.pdf>], accessed on 20.03.2017.

³ *Eastern Partnership*, [https://eeas.europa.eu/topics/eastern-partnership_en], accessed on 20.03.2017.

⁴ *Joint Declaration of Eastern Partnership Summit*, Vilnius, 28-29 November 2013, Press Releases, [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/139765.pdf], accessed on 20.03.2017.

political catastrophe in Ukraine and a geo-political cataclysm at the European geopolitical scale.⁵

The Eastern Partnership made significant progress in 2014. The new Association Agreements signed with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine were already being provisionally applied. For Georgia and Moldova, provisional application already included the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA), while for Ukraine provisional application of this part of the agreement has been postponed until the end of 2015. The AA/DCFTAs involved ambitious political, economic and social reform agendas, drawing the eastern partner countries concerned closer to the EU.⁶ Against the background of the Ukrainian political crisis, the EU launched an unprecedented programme of support to help Ukraine stabilise its economy, assist with transition, encourage political, judicial and economic reforms and support inclusive development. The EU has also offered various forms of support to Moldova and Georgia, to help these countries cope with the pressure that has been exerted on them following their decision to sign the Association Agreements. Further progress has been made towards visa liberalisation for short-term travel.⁷ The aim was for citizens in Eastern partner countries to benefit from mobility within a secure, well-managed environment. Visa-free travel to the EU has been possible from Moldova since the end of April 2014, and Georgia and Ukraine were working to implement their Visa Liberalisation Action Plans.

Visa Facilitation and Readmission Agreements were being negotiated with Belarus. Over the past year, EU institutions, EU Member States, the Eastern partner countries and other parties involved have continued to work to increase the visibility of the Eastern Partnership and to make individuals, businesses and society as a whole more aware of the benefits it can bring. Eastern partner countries have been pursuing the agreed reforms in preparation

⁵ *Parteneriatul Estic al Uniunii Europene și limitele procesului de „europenizare” a Estului*, (Eastern Partnership of European Union and the limits of the Europeanization of the East) [[http://revistapolis.ro/documente/revista/2015/Numarul_4\(10\)2015/editorial/7.%20Gheorghe%20Ciascai.pdf](http://revistapolis.ro/documente/revista/2015/Numarul_4(10)2015/editorial/7.%20Gheorghe%20Ciascai.pdf)], accessed on 20.03.2017.

⁶ *Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy Eastern Partnership Implementation Report* [https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/enp-regional-report-eastern_partnership_en.pdf], accessed on 20.03.2017.

⁷ *Ibidem*.

for the 2015 EaP Summit in Riga, which reviewed the implementation of the countries' commitments and the progress they have achieved.⁸

The Summit in Prague, 2009

The final document stated that the EU needs *a more ambitious partnership* between the European Union and the partner countries. The participants of the Prague Summit agreed that the Eastern Partnership will be based on commitments to the principles of international law and to fundamental values, including democracy, the rule of law and the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as to, market economy, sustainable development and good governance. The Eastern Partnership was meant to be developed in parallel with the bilateral cooperation between the EU and third states. The main goal of the Eastern Partnership was to *create the necessary conditions to accelerate political association and further economic integration between the European Union and interested partner countries. The significant strengthening of EU policy with regard to the partner countries will be brought about through the development of a specific Eastern dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy.* The idea was to have a more stable, secure and prosper Europe, securing the region that needed it the most. In this regard, The Eastern Partnership carried a clear political message, about the need *to maintain and bolster the course towards reforms.*

The final statement from Prague revealed the need for Association Agreements between the EU and the partner countries. Open markets and economic integration were essential to the sustainable economic development of the partner countries and to underpin political stabilisation.

Other main subjects that came up at the Summit were to support the mobility of citizens and visa liberalisation in a secure environment, and energy security.

Four thematic platforms currently organised by the European Commission were launched for target-oriented sessions and serve for open and free discussions, on the basis of the main areas of cooperation, namely Democracy, good governance and stability; Economic integration and

⁸ *Ibidem.*

convergence with EU sectoral policies; Energy security; and Contacts between people.⁹

The Summit in Warsaw, 2011

The participants renewed their commitment to the objectives from Prague. The agenda agreed in Prague contained the guiding principles of the Eastern Partnership, and the participants of the Warsaw Summit reaffirmed their commitment to implement them fully.

After two years, it was highlighted the particular role for the Eastern Partnership *to support those who seek an ever closer relationship with the EU*. The final statement included the subject of *political and economic reforms that have been implemented in partner countries and relations between the EU and its Eastern European partners have deepened significantly*. The trade and economic interaction between the EU and its Eastern European partners increased, and, in order to consolidate this trend, the EU and most of its partners were engaged in negotiations on Association Agreements which also lead to Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas.

The EaP launched dialogues on visa-free regimes with Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova. Visa-facilitation and readmission agreements were being implemented with Georgia.

Due to the recent economic crisis, back in 2009, EU provided within EaP, the Macro-Financial Assistance to some partner countries. The EU macro-financial assistance instrument was meant to be mobilised in the future to assist partner countries to address short-term balance-of-payments difficulties when the pre-conditions were met and when the programmes were linked to a meaningful reform agenda.

EaP encouraged also the participation of partner countries in EU programmes and agencies. Therefore, it was highlighted at the Summit the *signature of a Memorandum of Understanding on the association of the Republic of Moldova to the 7th Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development*. Also, the participants of the Warsaw Summit welcomed the

⁹ *Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit*, Prague, 7 May 2009 [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/er/107589.pdf], accessed on 22.03.2017.

entry into force of a protocol enabling the participation of the Republic of Moldova in EU programmes and the recent signature by Ukraine of a similar protocol.

Another important point on the agenda was to further strengthen long term energy security, including through cooperation on stable and secure energy supply and transit, nuclear safety, competitive energy markets, and through enhancement of physical infrastructure. The EU always tried to find new routes of supply of energy to the European market from the Caspian Sea, that's why they came up with the project of the Southern Corridor.

In the area of social environment, the EU underlined at the Warsaw Summit the important role of civil society in pursuing the goals of the Eastern Partnership, which promoted democracy, sustainable socio-economic development, good governance and the rule of law. The Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum and its National Platforms were essential to promote democratic values on which the Eastern Partnership is based.

At the political level, the Summit in Warsaw emphasised *the EU's strengthened role in conflict resolution and confidence building efforts in the framework or in support of existing agreed formats and processes, including through field presence when appropriate*. The participants welcomed the appointment of the new EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus and the crisis in Georgia. They stressed the importance of the presence on the ground of the EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia. They also supported the decision to resume official negotiations in the "5+2" format aiming at a viable and comprehensive political settlement of the Transnistrian conflict.¹⁰

The Summit in Vilnius, 2013

The Summit participants welcomed the steps taken since the Warsaw Summit to strengthen the Eastern Partnership with the objective of building a common area of shared democracy, prosperity, stability and increased interactions and exchanges. New steps were made, the EU-Republic of Moldova and EU-Georgia Association Agreements including DCFTAs have been initialled. On the other hand, the conflict in Ukraine grew stronger, also the pressure from Russia. That's why, at the Summit in

¹⁰ *Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit, Warsaw, 29-30 September 2011*, [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_PRES-11-341_en.htm], accessed on 22.03.2017.

Vilnius, the participants were officially informed of the decision by the Ukrainian Government to suspend temporarily the process of preparations for signature of the Association Agreement and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area between the EU and Ukraine.

Seen this as a failure, progress was also made. The summit participants welcomed the launching of the informal Eastern Partnership dialogues and the three rounds successfully held to date (Chisinau, July 2012; Tbilisi, February 2013 and Yerevan, September 2013). *This format has promoted regular, informal exchanges between Foreign Ministers both on the Eastern Partnership agenda and foreign policy issues of common concern and has advanced Eastern Partnership cooperation in key sectors through the engagement of the Ministers concerned from partner countries.* The idea was to deepen the political association and increase political and security policy convergence and effectiveness in the field of foreign policy. In the field of energy, there were highlighted the key developments towards the opening of the Southern Gas Corridor, including the planned modernisation of the South Caucasus Pipeline (SCP), the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP) and the development of other gas transport infrastructures directly linking the Caspian Region with the EU.

It was noted *Azerbaijan's strategic role in diversifying Europe's energy supplies.* Also, the participants looked forward to continued EU support for the modernization of the Ukrainian Gas Transmission System as a key part of the European grid network, to continued efforts by Ukraine to undertake the further necessary reforms in the gas sector and to the finalization of the dialogue with the International Financial Institutions in order to disburse the first loan for the emergency gas transit project. They noted *the strong energy provisions of the DCFTAs, Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova's work to comply with their obligations under the Energy Community, the on-going work with Ukraine on ensuring bi-directional gas flows, the development of the "Adriatic Gas Corridor" connecting Croatia, Hungary and Ukraine, the steps towards the preparation of the Azerbaijan-Georgia-Romania interconnector (AGRI LNG) project, the progress in determining priority gas and electricity interconnection projects between the Republic of Moldova and the EU.* They also noted Georgia's application to become a member of the Energy Community and Armenia's active observership in the Energy Community.

Discussions have demonstrated that *there were real opportunities for Ukraine to position itself as an Eastern European gas hub after an effective long-term strategy for the use of its gas transmission and storage assets in line with Ukraine's Energy Community obligations*. As in Prague and Warsaw Summit, EU stressed the important role played by civil society, through the Civil Society Forum and its national platforms, in partners' reform processes in encouraging dialogue between civil society and partner countries' authorities on achieving the goals of the Eastern Partnership. They emphasized *the importance of continuing to make available adequate resources as appropriate to support the capacity development and further involvement of civil society in national reform processes*. The Summit also encouraged enhanced inter-parliamentary cooperation within the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly.

The participants invited EU institutions, EU Member States, Eastern European partners and other stakeholders to contribute to the Eastern Partnership visibility Strategy implementation by further informing society in partner countries and the EU of benefits derived from the Partnership, the implementation of the Agreements concluded in the framework of the Partnership for citizens, businesses and the society as a whole.¹¹

The Summit in Riga, 2015

The participants of the Riga summit reconfirmed the high importance they attach to the Eastern Partnership as a specific dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy.

In the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership, *the Summit participants reaffirmed 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*. *The acts against Ukraine and the events in Georgia since 2014 have shown that the fundamental principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity within internationally recognised borders cannot be taken for granted in the 21st century on the European continent*. *The EU remains committed in its support to the territorial integrity, independence and sovereignty of all its partners*. *Full adherence to all the principles and commitments enshrined in the 1975 Helsinki Final Act and 1990 Charter of Paris by all OSCE Participating*

¹¹ *The third Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius*, [<http://www.eu2013.lt/en/vilnius-summit>], accessed on 22.03.2017.

States, as well as full respect for the principles and provisions of the UN Charter, is critical to our vision of a free, democratic, peaceful and undivided Europe. The participants of the Summit stressed that the Eastern Partnership aims at building a common area of shared democracy, prosperity, stability and increased cooperation and is not directed against anyone. As we can see, the final statement of this summit is very different from the first one. Here, the political level is raised, due to the conflict in Ukraine. The Summit participants talk about rebuilding trust and confidence on Europe, they strongly support all efforts aimed at de-escalation and a political solution based on respect for Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, they call on all parties to swiftly and fully implement the Minsk Agreements of September 2014 and the package of measures for their implementation of February 2015 and they express their full support for the OSCE and its efforts through the Special Monitoring Mission and the Trilateral Contact Group. They will also continue to support all diplomatic efforts within the Normandy format and appreciate the contribution of Belarus in facilitating negotiations.

The Summit participants called upon all parties to fully cooperate with the international investigations and criminal proceedings to hold to account those who were responsible for the downing of MH17. The EU reaffirmed its positions taken in the Joint Statement made at the EU-Ukraine Summit on 27 April, including on the illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol. The Summit participants reaffirmed their positions in relation to "UN General Assembly Resolution 68/262 on the territorial integrity of Ukraine".

In the Republic of Moldova, they highlighted the importance of advancing the negotiations in the 5+2 format on a comprehensive political settlement of the Transnistrian conflict, also having in mind what happened in Ukraine and welcomed intensified Chisinau-Tiraspol dialogue in all formats.

They reiterated their full support to the mediation efforts by the co-chairs of the Minsk Group on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, including at the level of Presidents and their statements since 2009. Recalling the need to fully implement the 12 August 2008 Ceasefire Agreement, the Summit participants reiterated their commitment to conflict resolution efforts in Georgia, including through the co-chairmanship of the Geneva International Discussions by the EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus and

the crisis in Georgia and the full implementation of the mandate of the EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia. Participants stress the specific role of the OSCE, as an inclusive organisation, in conflict resolution in the region.

On a light manner, the participants of the Summit *reviewed and welcomed the significant achievements in the Eastern Partnership since the Vilnius Summit in 2013, notably the signing and provisional application of the Association Agreements (AA) with Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, which constitute a major step in accelerating these partners' political association and economic integration with the EU* and also underlined the important role that media plays in a democratic society and welcomed the outcome of the Media Conference held in Riga on 20 May and confirmed their continued support for media freedom.

Also, the fact that the visa free regime for citizens from the Republic of Moldova holding a biometric passport, in place since April 2014, has been operating effectively facilitating travel, business and people to people contacts, was seen as a progress. Progress was made also by Georgia and Ukraine in the implementation of their Visa Liberalisation Action Plans as described in the latest Progress Reports by the European Commission.

They also welcomed the launch in 2014 of the first call of Erasmus+ programme fully open to students, young people and universities from the Eastern European partners offering enhanced opportunities for cooperation and mobility. The Summit participants highlighted the accession of Belarus to the European Higher Education Area and looked forward to the report on its progress in implementing the road map of reforms to its higher education system necessary to meet the requirements of the Bologna Process.

As in the previous summits, the energy security was one of the main issues. It was underlined the contribution that energy efficiency and renewable energy can make to increased security of supply, and encouraged practical cooperation between the EU and Eastern European partners in this respect. Progress was made on major energy infrastructure projects and interconnectivity enhancements put in place since the last summit, *including opening natural gas reverse flow capacities to Ukraine from Hungary, Poland and Slovakia, the particular role played by Azerbaijan as well as the contribution by others, including Georgia, in the realisation of the Southern Gas Corridor and the ongoing work on the expansion of the South Caucasus Pipeline, and the Trans-Anatolian Pipeline and the Trans Adriatic Pipeline, the inauguration of the Iasi-*

Ungheni gas interconnector, and the preliminary work on Isaccea-Vulcanesti electricity interconnection between Romania and the Republic of Moldova. Participants concerned reaffirmed their commitment to facilitate the development, in a result-oriented way, of strategic infrastructure, notably in relation to the Southern Gas Corridor. The Summit participants also encouraged and supported *the continuation of gas and electricity interconnections both inside the EU and between the EU and its Eastern European partners, including through standard Interconnection Agreements between Transmission System Operators. They look forward to continued EU support for the modernisation of the Ukrainian Gas Transmission System as a key part of the European grid network.*¹²

The next Eastern Partnership Summit will take place in Brussels in November 2017, according to a draft report prepared by EU member states. The draft paper says the next Eastern Partnership Summit “will review the results” since the last summit held in Riga in 2015 and “discuss the way forward in further strengthening cooperation between the partner countries and the EU as well as among the partners.”¹³

The Romanian approach

After 12 years since joining the EU, Romania will take over from January 1, 2019, for six months, the presidency of one of the most important institutions - the Council of the European Union. Preparing and carrying out this mandate is a national priority. Romania will be therefore, in the centre of European decision, having an important role in facilitating the process of reflection on how to develop and strengthen the European project, the negotiation process for the development of the *acquis communautaire* and thus to strengthening the cooperation between the Member States. *Due to its strategic position to promote regional cooperation and policy support for Moldovan Republic throughout Europe, Romania is directly interested in creating a zone of stability and security in its neighbourhood. The EU Council Presidency 2019 is an*

¹² *Eastern Partnership Summit, Riga, 21-22/05/2015*, [<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/international-summit/2015/05/21-22/>], accessed on 23.03.2017.

¹³ *Report: Eastern Partnership Summit Scheduled for Brussels in November 2017*, [<http://www.rferl.org/a/eu-eastern-partnership-summit-november-2017/28110604.html>], accessed on 23.03.2017.

*opportunity that Romania must take, as a moment to promote a stable and dynamic foreign policy of the EU. Romania can play an active role promoting policies to reform the public administration to uphold the rule of law and protection of fundamental rights. Moreover, if Romania would take as a priority during the presidency, the stability and security of the EU borders, our country would have the interest to host the Eastern Partnership Summit 2019, thereby reinforcing EU geopolitical interests and may give new impetus to the European path for Moldova and Ukraine.*¹⁴

The recent history in supporting the EaP in Romania is strong. All the ministers of foreign affairs in our country, since 2009, supported this ambitious project.

In April 2015, the Minister of Foreign Affairs at that time, Bogdan Aurescu, spoke about the EaP within the event "*The contribution to the modernization of the European Neighborhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership the EU approach*" Dialogues@MAE. The Romanian official stated that *EaP was intended as a preventive European policy and commitment (to prevent developments leading to antagonism at the European level and to prevent the emergence of competitive models, which are mutually exclusive).*¹⁵

Its main element of orientation was preservation and going on with a construction based on the trend of convergence between the European and the neighbourhood, including the relation with Russia.

On the other hand, the crisis in Ukraine changed all that and the Summit in Riga confirmed the evolutions. That is why the Riga Summit was of particular significance, also for Romania. The expectations were associated with ensuring the continuity of one of the most important features of European Union policies. The stake was to maintain the level of ambition of the EaP in the current regional circumstances. The difference can be seen in the final statement of the Summit, which has the highest political position, compared with the previous statements of the past EaP summits.

¹⁴ *Parteneriatul Estic ca prioritate a Președinției Române a Consiliului UE din 2019*, [<http://www.europuls.ro/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Policy-Brief-Parteneriatul-Estic-ca-Prioritate-a-Pre%C8%99edin%C8%9Biei-Rom%C3%A2ne-a-Consiliului-UE-din-2019.pdf>], accessed on 24.03.2017.

¹⁵ *Discursul ministrului Bogdan Aurescu la cea de a doua sesiune a platformei de dezbatere "Dialoguri@MAE"*, [<http://www.mae.ro/node/31971>], accessed on 24.03.2017.

One interesting point is the Romanian proposal on *Dialogue platforms for building trust - Security Trusts*. Romania has already tabled for debate at EU level discussions on ENP modernization, a new concept: the proposal of creating "security platforms for dialogue" in a broad sense, the so-called Security Trust. It is about genuine political dialogue platforms, which would be designed to address both security challenges and objectives that take into account each of the actors involved. These Security Trusts can generate an environment of trust and then will increase security conditions and development in an area that goes beyond the immediate vicinity of the Union. As I said, reality shows that it is necessary to build a "belt" of prosperity and security around us through neighbors and neighbors' neighbors. Why? For behold, the problems that led to weakening the security around Europe from "the" neighbors of our neighbors.¹⁶

The minister Bogdan Aurescu explained which are the main objectives of these Security Trusts. *The main goal is improving the security environment in areas where the objectives of the EU in terms of political proximity (connection) or economic (integration) are not easily achieved. In Romania's view, these dialogue platforms can focus both on the immediate neighbourhood of the European Union and the neighbors adjacent segments, and there is potential involvement of other global players interested in supporting solutions to crises in the vicinity.*¹⁷

Later on, the Romanian minister of foreign affairs explained that in our country vision, there were three platforms of dialogue that can be considered: one on the Black Sea and the Caucasus, a platform for dialogue on security issues for the Gulf and Middle East, namely one for Sub-Saharan Africa.

These platforms for dialogue on security issues were not meant to include a military dimension, but were considering a number of multidimensional dialogue formats with stakeholders from the region, the main objective being that of bringing to the same table all the stakeholders (regional and global) in a transparent manner to address the issues of divergence of the convergence and achieve a common denominator in terms of areas of common interest in the region.

¹⁶ *Discursul ministrului Bogdan Aurescu la cea de a doua sesiune a platformei de dezbateri, "Dialoguri@MAE"* [<http://www.mae.ro/node/31971>], accessed on 24.03.2017.

¹⁷ *Ibidem.*

On May 14-15, 2015, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Bogdan Aurescu attended the meeting in Bratislava of the Visegrad Group, in V4-plus format, with the Eastern Partnership states. During the discussions, the Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs spoke of the need to strengthen the EaP, given the proven usefulness of this instrument and the difficult regional security context. EaP also contributes to maintaining the partner states' commitment to the reform agenda and provides stability in the immediate vicinity. Consequently, after the Summit the focus should go to specifically achieving the EaP's main goal – creating a space of stability and prosperity, peace and stability – mainly by continuing the reform process in the partner states: either by implementing the Association and Free Trade Agreements, in the case of the three states that signed them, or by other tailor-made avenues adapted to the needs and specifics of the other three. Minister Bogdan Aurescu also said that after the Summit a reflection process should start concerning the EaP's evolution in the wider context of revising and updating the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP).¹⁸

Supporting the EaP policy went on as a priority also in 2016. Then the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lazăr Comănescu, has participated on May 2016, in the ministerial reunion of the Eastern Partnership (EaP/the 28 EU Member States, six partner countries: Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus). The progresses achieved in EU' relation with the EaP partner countries were welcomed, including those concerning the temporary application of the AA/DCFTA provisions in the signatory countries: Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia, as well as having advanced the negotiations for new cooperation frameworks with Armenia and Azerbaijan and an enhanced dialogue with Belarus.

It was also underscored the importance of the measures taken for increasing the partners' resilience, for enhancing connectivity (energy and transports) and the people-to-people contacts and mobility, focusing on the liberalization of the visa regime for the citizens of Georgia and Ukraine.¹⁹

Not least, the current minister of foreign affairs, Teodor Meleşcanu, pleads for the need to maintain the strategic policy objectives of the EaP.

¹⁸ *Minister Bogdan Aurescu attends Meeting of Visegrad Group in V4 + format with Eastern Partners*, [<http://www.mae.ro/en/node/32090>], accessed on 24.03.2017.

¹⁹ *Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lazăr Comănescu, participates in the ministerial meeting of the Eastern Partnership*, [<http://www.mae.ro/en/node/37160>], accessed on 24.03.2017.

The minister Teodor Meleşcanu stressed many times that the relationship with the Republic of Moldova remains a priority of major importance to the foreign policy of Romania and confirmed the determination of Bucharest to continue to support the European course and the reform processes promoted by Chisinau under the Association Agreement and Agreement Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area between Moldova and the European Union, whose objective is to meet the aspirations of prosperity and security of all citizens of Moldova.²⁰

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²⁰ *Întâlnire Meleşcanu – Galbur: Republica Moldova rămâne prioritatea politicii externe românești*, [<https://deschide.md/ro/stiri/politic/6424/%C3%8Ent%C3%A2lnire-Mele%C8%99canu-%E2%80%93-Galbur-Republica-Moldova-r%C4%83m%C3%A2ne-prioritatea-politicii-externe-rom%C3%A2ne%C8%99ti.htm>], accessed on 24.03.2017.

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