

POLICY BRIEF

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SECURITY IN THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP REGION AND CIVIL SOCIETY'S ROLE

The Eastern Partnership region is now in the epicenter of the conflict that is already causing global changes in the world order. The chronic problems and challenges, which were resident in the agenda of the security sphere earlier, have been supplemented with new challenges that find no answers in the system of international law and institutions.

The contemporary system of European security happened to be unprepared for the fact that in the region of Eastern Europe there could be a full-scale open military conflict with Russia's participation. In the conditions of globalization and the aspiration for mutual cooperation, the containment of Russia is a heartrending experience as for the adherence to values and their primacy over separate influential actors' interests.

Solutions of security issues should have a system character with the involvement of many international organizations and the countries participating in the conflict. As a political-economic association, the European Union is not the institution that is ready to constrain when it comes to military-political questions. It is the function of NATO that is today seeking for its military-political identity as well.

The difficulties of the searching for adequate and sufficient tools of security at all levels can be explained by the fact that the European Union underestimated the imperial ambitions of the Russian authorities that developed a hybrid format of conducting war in the conditions when real containment is absent. Thus, military operations are not the main instrument and are applied in the peak situations of pressure or aggression upon the neighboring state. This pressure in the form of trade wars, energy blackmail, discreditable propaganda, diplomatic deceit, and coercion to launch alternative regional integration projects has been felt by almost all states of the Eastern Partnership.

With the incipency of the Eastern Partnership policy in 2008-2009, displays of Russia's more aggressive approach to the states of Eastern Europe and the Caucasus have become more obvious. The Russian-Georgian war in 2008 was already in some measure a reply to the nascence of the new initiative that was presented in June 2008 as a Polish-Swedish project. Despite the fact that the Eastern Partnership was initially designed to get Russia included in the cooperation, Moscow rejected this offer at once. Although the initiatives within the framework of the Eastern neighborhood policy did not concern security issues in the region and had a transparent contractual character, they faced ironclad resistance at the level of the negotiations and signing of the EU Association Agreements with Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. In September 2013, being pressurized by Russia, the Armenian authorities were the first to change the direction of their foreign policy orientation. In November 2013, the Ukrainian authorities followed the same scenario, which caused the numerous pro-European protests that resulted in the difficult political crisis. The sharp change of political elites in Ukraine compelled Russia to apply once again its military force starting from February 2014, but already in a much more vast and cynical format.

The expert poll carried out among representatives of the EaP countries demonstrates that at this stage among the most significant threats for the states in this region there are: military intervention, the presence of frozen conflicts, and threats of energy security. Among the states that pose a security threat, 90% of the polled experts name Russia¹.

Russia is committing open military aggression upon one of the states of the Eastern Partnership. In 5 out of 6 partner countries, zones of frozen or active conflicts are created directly by Russia or with its support; their solution is also blocked by influencing the international organizations (OSCE), which perform their mediatorial functions.

An additional difficulty in the political-military measurement of the generality of the region is the fact that two states (Georgia, Ukraine) want to connect their security with the membership in NATO, while other two states (Armenia, Belarus) are members of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, the military-political association controlled by Russia.

In this context, within the pale of the Eastern Partnership as part of the European neighborhood policy, the European Union cannot provide Ukraine and other countries of the region with "solid" tools of security despite the expectations of these partner countries. However, the aggravated conflicts to the south and the east of the EU's borders mean that official Brussels has failed to reach at least one of the purposes of the neighborhood policy - stability.

In order to make the neighborhood policy more successful, it has to be reconsidered seriously - ambitious aims must be set; it should have the tools that correspond to the geopolitical realities in the region. Understanding all restrictions of this program from the point of view of decision-making in the "hard" force sphere, the Eastern Partnership can find its place in the securitization of the region. The "soft" force level, which can be generated together within the bounds of the reformed neighborhood policy, can increase considerably the security level in the economic, energy, and information spheres of the EaP countries. The role of civil society and the Forum as its representative can become crucial.

The independent expert community of the EaP countries can offer the following recommendations aimed at strengthening the Eastern Partnership policy and separate directions of its implementation:

IN THE POLITICAL SPHERE

- Today's main element of influencing the Kremlin for the purpose of de-escalation in the region is the policy of sanctions. The EU has to be consistent and to continue this practice until Ukraine's territorial integrity, including the liberation of the annexed Crimea, is restored. The EU's and the USA's actions should be coordinated so as to achieve the maximum pressure.
- Taking into account the increasing differentiation of the EaP policy in the future period, in order to strengthen the European choice of elites of the EaP countries, which demonstrate progress on the way to European integration, EU countries need to make a political decision concerning the prospect of membership of such partners, without specifying the accurate time of this prospect. Such a decision can be accepted, for example, after 5 years of the successful implementation of the Association Agreements by the partner countries. The membership prospect can become a considerable added value of the EaP policy, including from the point of view of the securitization of the region.
- Considering the decisions to deepen coordination between the EU and NATO in the questions of reacting to the new challenges faced by the Union, it is expedient in the short-term prospect to find a format of cooperation with the partner countries, which stay in the so-called «vacuum of security» because of NATO's unwillingness to pursue the policy of its expansion.
- Nowadays, at the level of EU institutions, the priorities of the European neighborhood policy are being revised in order to find adequate tools so as to strengthen this program. At the level of the Civil Society Forum, it is necessary to create a special working group in order to develop recommendations to strengthen the policy and to format its separate directions, taking into account the events in the east and the south of the EU's borders;
- Throughout 2015, the topic of strengthening the security of the region should be the most important one on the agenda of the Civil Society Forum. In this regard, it is necessary to strengthen the work of the security subgroup within the framework of Working Group №1, to strengthen its resource potential and direct contacts with representatives of the European Service. To draw additional attention to the problem of security, the members of the group should have a detailed discussion of formats of the Forum's participation in the formation of the EU's agenda concerning the foreign policy and security. Special attention must be paid to the questions of strengthening the EU's general security policy and defense, creation of the Energy Union, cooperation in crisis situations, fight against information wars, and strengthening of the EU's role in the solution of frozen conflicts in the EaP countries.

¹ The expert poll was carried out from 15 October to 5 November 2014. 41 experts in the foreign policy and security sphere from Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, and EU countries have been polled. The questions concerned peculiarities of perceiving security in the region of Eastern Europe.

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- As a result of involving experts in the working-out of questions of providing security in the region, it is necessary to prepare at a high level experts' discussion of security issues in the Eastern Partnership with the participation of representatives of EU institutions, Member States, and partners.
- At the level of the countries that have signed the Association Agreements, delegates of the Forum, as well as members of national platforms and civil society platforms, which are being created within the scope of the Agreements, have to do their best to render their expert support and to monitor the process of the implementation of the Agreements. The reforming of the security sector of the EaP countries should become one of joint priorities, including with the attraction of experience of civil experts from the EU Advisory Mission for Civilian Security Sector Reform, a civilian mission under the EU's Common Security and Defense Policy.

IN THE INFORMATION SECURITY SPHERE

- At the EU level, it is expedient to accept an information security strategy offering a possible reaction to an actively carried out information war in the EU Member States and the partner countries.
- Separate attention must be paid to the revision of the current approach to the construction of the image of the European Union in the Eastern Partnership countries, the expansion of tools of involving various target groups of society, and the strengthening of the information presence as a form of popularizing the values and ideas of the European community. Despite the increase of EU supporters in the EaP countries as a result of the latest developments in the region, the majority of citizens are insufficiently aware of the EU's activity and its separate directions of cooperation with the partner countries.
- While Russia is using propaganda and discredit to the full extent, the EU and the EaP countries have not created yet any distinct system strategy of counterstrokes. Although the symmetry of the EU's reaction as for the form and contents is a priori impossible, the strengthening of the influence on the Eastern Partnership region by creating new Russian-language television channels is topical. There have been discussions in European capitals for more half a year now. It is necessary to accept a political decision at the EU level in the near future.
- In the conditions when Russia is committing aggression upon Ukraine, civil society is compelled to react to the appeared new threats in the information sphere. The public resource "Stop Fake" developed to verify the information and to provide objective data on the events in Ukraine has become one of the answers. This experience is a very important stage in the construction of an inner system of struggling against the tools of the Kremlin's information war.
- In the conditions when Russia continues discreditable measures in the information sphere, it is expedient to initiate the creation of similar information initiatives in other countries of the Eastern Partnership and to accurately coordinate their activity so as to develop a system approach to counterstrokes.
- There is a need to activate the platforms that provide the information on the EaP countries for the European consumer and to offer a spectrum of media products on the political, economic, and social situation in the partner countries. A certain place in this direction can be occupied by the Secretariat of the Civil Society Forum of the Eastern Partnership if the information component is strengthened by resources.
- Taking into account various mechanisms of Russia's hybrid war and its active influence on the EU and the EaP countries, at the level of civil society, it is expedient to initiate the creation of a group of experts who would be able to periodically carry out journalistic investigations in order to demonstrate the level of the presence of the Russian "soft" force in the EU and the EaP countries.

IN THE ECONOMIC SECURITY SPHERE

- Considering the use of the access to the market of Russia and the countries of the Customs Union as a tool of economic pressure upon the EaP countries, at the level of the European Commission and separate partner countries, it is necessary to develop mechanisms of preserving economic stability with possible temporary resource support of national governments or temporary concessionary terms of access of critical goods to the EU market.
- Under Russia's pressure, Ukraine was compelled to postpone the introduction of the Agreement regarding the creation of a free trade zone with Ukraine until January 2016. The EU should not allow any possibilities of Russia's further pressure for the purpose of revising the DCFTA norms or their further freezing. The free trade zone with Ukraine is to come into force on 1 January 2016.



- Additional information work with national exporters is needed in order to explain the conditions of work in the new economic realities; it is necessary to create constantly working communication platforms so as to communicate with European partners and to receive advisory help concerning the entry into industrial chains and to provide access to cheaper credit resources for small and middle businesses. In this direction, it is expedient to take measures for a faster introduction in action of the financial tool of the DCFTA Facility, which is now being developed by the European Commission together with the European Reconstruction and Development Bank;
- To include all countries of the Eastern Partnership region in joint infrastructural projects that make it possible to activate mutual trade cooperation in the region, the EU has to popularize the possibility of the partner countries' access to separate internal structural funds of the EU, e.g. to the Connecting Europe Facility program.
- Despite Russia's aggressive behavior in the region, it is very important in economic contacts to get rid of an emotional component. The main guarantee of success in the economic plan for the EaP countries is to preserve commercial relations with Russian enterprises that have nothing to do with representatives of the Russian authorities and that are not under sanctions. An active continuation of cooperation with Russian businesses can play a critically important role in the finding of ways for reconciliation and further peaceful co-existence, including in the economic sphere.
- Separate attention must be paid to the creation of negotiation platforms concerning economic cooperation between the partner countries, which have signed the free trade zone agreements, and the countries, which have already joined or are going to join the Customs Union and the Eurasian Economic Union. Such a format can have an additional political and economic base so as to strengthen contacts in the Eastern Partnership region. A negotiation platform can be Minsk, which seems to be interested to broaden economic contacts within the frame of the Eastern Partnership policy. For example, in May 2014, the Belarusian delegation initiated the harmonization of the legal systems of the EU and the Eurasian Economic Union and now actively promotes this initiative during multilateral meetings.

IN THE ENERGY SPHERE

- While working out the bases of the EU's Energy Union, a priority of the European Commission for the following 5 years, it is very important to pay separate attention to the possibilities of cooperation within the context of this initiative with the EaP countries; the creation of a crucial infrastructure;
- In the context of strengthening the energy security of the countries of the region, the recognition of Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine as a part of the general energy market with the spread of the corresponding European energy legislation is able to reduce considerably the possibility of using energy resources as a tool of Russia's pressure;
- A part of this energy security system can also be the creation of a "hot line" between the EaP countries and the European Commission so as to operatively inform on the situation in the energy sphere - first of all, in the sphere of natural gas deliveries;
- As an element of energy security, a multilateral mechanism of early notification in the line of the EU – the EaP countries with the telemetric control of the basic streams of energy resources (first of all, oil and gas) and that of coordination of the mutual aid procedure in case of the termination of deliveries can be created;
- The EU should not make concessions to Russia in the question of creating exceptions from the Third Energy Package for the creation of ways of transportation of Russian energy carriers to the EU countries, which are able to create additional risks of energy security for the partner countries.
- Energy saving and energy efficiency, as well as the market regulation in the energy sphere, are crucially important for the countries of the Eastern Partnership. Representatives of civil society should take active part in the monitoring of the activity of the governments of the partner countries and their obligations within the limits of joining the energy community treaty.

IN THE SPHERE OF CONTACTS BETWEEN PEOPLE

- The processes of visa liberalization and visa facilitation are a very important mechanism of motivating the governments of the EaP countries to launch inner political transformations. The concrete reached steps in this direction can become a real catalyst of opening society and gradual democratic transformations. At the same time, the real progress in the performance of negotiated obligations and the orientation to observe human rights in the partner countries should be a basis for the EU's principled position.
- Additional efforts are to be made to form a network of non-governmental organizations in the EU Member States, which are ready to take part in the initiatives aimed at strengthening the information security of their countries and to become a part of the Civil Society Forum of the Eastern Partnership. In this case, it is crucial to invite civil society institutions from the EU countries, which do not border on the EaP countries, to participate and to increase the EU "old" members' interest in the events in the region.
- It is necessary to launch additional initiatives to build a dialogue with Russia's civil society and to look for ideas to decrease the level of mutual animosity among the population of the EaP countries and Russia. It is the active part of society that should help it. To do so, it is possible to create an independent platform aimed at discussing and searching for mechanisms of civil reconciliation; a special subgroup can be created within the framework of the Forum.

