



European Neighbourhood Watch

THE FIFTH EASTERN PARTNERSHIP SUMMIT: BETWEEN HYPERBOLE AND UNDERSTATEMENT

Editorial | Hrant Kostanyan

Summits are glitzy events that bring together the highest level of officials – the heads of state and government. These occasions naturally attract the interest of both the media and the public, raise expectations, increase tensions, create drama and heighten the rhetoric – but sometimes they end in disappointment. And this is exactly what the EU would like to avoid in the upcoming 5th Eastern Partnership (EaP) summit, which will bring together most of the leaders of the EU and its Eastern partners – namely Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine – on November 24th in Brussels. The summit will be essentially a stocktaking exercise in which its principals reflect on the difficulties that the Partnership has encountered and the reforms it has undertaken to meet and mitigate the growing challenges. But more importantly, in the midst of the political hyperbole, the summit will aim to chart a pragmatic way forward to bring about tangible and positive results for citizens in a host of sectors ranging from energy efficiency and transport to youth employment and SMEs.

A turbulent path to the Brussels summit

The path to the Brussels summit has taken the Eastern Partners on a rather bumpy ride. Initiated by Poland and Sweden in 2009, the Eastern Partnership was the product of a delicate balancing act between the interests of the EU member states, some of which had prioritised the Southern Mediterranean and others Eastern Europe.

The Eastern Partnership has had serious implications for domestic change in the Eastern neighbourhood countries. For the first time since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the EU's relationship with its Eastern neighbours has moved from a less intrusive legal order of Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs) to

the sphere of an extensive hard law. Being modelled on the EU enlargement policy, the Eastern Partnership brought an extensive EU acquis with the aim of deepening the political and economic ties, and fostering people-to-people contacts between the EU and its Eastern neighbours. It offered the possibility for visa-free travel to the Schengen Area, and the deepest and most comprehensive contractual relations that the EU has ever extended to third countries through the Association Agreements, including the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (DCFTA).

Yet three major shortcomings illustrate the challenge of the Eastern Partnership to deliver on its promise to serve “the shared commitment to stability, security and prosperity of the European Union, the partner countries and indeed the entire European continent” (Prague Summit Declaration, 2009).

First, despite generally following the logic of accession, the EU’s offer has been limited and did not explicitly include a membership perspective. However, the preamble of the Association Agreements alludes to the aspirations of the Eastern Partnership countries to join the EU and any of them could theoretically meet the conditions of the EU membership clause enshrined in Art. 49 TEU. Nevertheless, after the Dutch referendum on the Association Agreement with Ukraine on 6 April 2016, the Netherlands insisted on a language of the European Council of 15 December 2016 that waters down existing theoretical prospect of accession. At 5th Eastern Partnership Summit the EU is as divided as ever with the Netherlands, France, Italy, Spain and Germany vehemently opposing membership, while the Baltic and the Visegrad Four states are arguing on behalf of creating a membership path precisely for the Eastern neighbours.

Second, despite the rhetorical commitments by the leadership of the Eastern Partnership countries, the progress achieved in domestic political and economic reforms has been uneven and slow. The lack of checks and balances among three branches of government (namely, executive, legislative and judiciary), weak and dependent judiciaries, oligarchism and endemic corruption remain grave obstacles even for countries that have concluded an Association Agreement and a DCFTA with the EU.

Third, Russia is challenging the EU’s role in the Eastern neighbourhood through more aggressive stands vis-à-vis the countries of the EaP. Russia views the Eastern Partnership as a threat that inspired the various ‘colour revolutions’, which convulsed the countries located in its ‘near abroad’ in the common Russia-EU neighbourhood. Furthermore, the Kremlin has demonstrated that it is willing to use any means, including military intervention, to disrupt the integration of the Eastern Partnership countries into the EU. The Brussels summit declaration will not have any innovative language on Russia. It is likely to repeat reference to the EU’s openness to cooperate with 3rd countries on case-by-case basis. This is a repetition of what has already been written in the Vilnius summit declaration.

Expectations of neighbours vs. the EU’s offer

The Brussels summit will not upgrade the EU’s relations with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. The milestones in the EU’s relations with the DCFTA states such as

enactment of the Association Agreements and granting visa-free travel to the EU took place in between summits. Moreover, if the latest EU-Ukraine summit is any indication, the EU will struggle to sustain what it has already offered. In particular, it has been challenging to continue to acknowledge the European aspirations of Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. After some negotiations the EU member states agreed to acknowledge the membership aspiration of Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine similar to Riga declaration. However, this was balanced with the reference to the European Council of 15 December 2016.

This comes as a disappointment to the three DCFTA countries as they would like to see at least some steps taken that would put them between what they have, namely the Association Agreements and the DCFTAs, and what they aspire to have, i.e. the EU membership perspective. Ukrainian government and its lobbyists for example has lobbied for the EU-Ukraine customs union. Although this might be an attractive proposition for the Ukrainian government from a political point of view, it is likely be damaging to Ukraine's interests. Not only will the country lose its autonomy to negotiate free trade deals, it will also experience 'Turkey's dilemma' of having to accept the results of the EU's international free trade agreements without having a say in their content.

Whereas Ukraine sees an upgrade in the relationship as an impetus for reform, including in the customs administration, many in the EU institutions and the member states view the implementation of the Association Agreement as a sufficient blueprint to generate change – at least initially. The EU's message to associated countries is expected to be clear: implement the existing agreements before asking for new offers.

The 2015 ENP review pushed the policy to one with a more pragmatic direction. In particular, by incorporating differentiation, the revised ENP aimed to bring a new impetus to the EU's relations with Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus. As far as non-associated countries are concerned, the Brussels summit would be a significant moment for EU-Armenian relations, as the parties might sign a new Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement. The deal that was negotiated after the failure of the Association Agreement, including the DCFTA, will chart a new course for EU-Armenian relations. Concluding the ambitious bilateral agreement has been a challenging process. Yet, the implementation of the agreement promises to be an even more daunting task and one requiring ever-tighter monitoring by the EU. Pointing to its positive record in implementing visa facilitation and readmission agreements, Armenia agitates for but is unlikely to get the visa liberalisation action plan (VLAP) during the summit.

The ambitious nature of CEPA demonstrates that the existing narrative since 2013 that groups Armenia with Belarus and Azerbaijan does not take into account Armenia's receptiveness of the EU's template. More nuanced approach would differentiate not only between the DCFTA and non-DCFTA countries but also between the non-DCFTA states. In fact, Armenia is interested but not able to conclude a DCFTA with the EU because of its membership to the Eurasian Economic Union. Under certain conditions (e.g. WTO membership), Azerbaijan is able but not interested in the DCFTA. Belarus is neither interested nor able to conclude a DCFTA with the EU. The differentiated ENP provided for 3rd-way agreements in which the partners are invited to enhance their contractual

relations with the EU according to their ability and desire, thus doing away with the one-size-fits-all approach that characterised the Association Agreements and the DCFTAs.

The deliverables for Belarus and Azerbaijan are expected to be rather modest. Belarus might showcase some progress achieved since the lifting of most EU sanctions and reinvigoration of bilateral relations. In particular, the EU-Belarus partnership priorities are likely to be ready for the summit. Although advocated by Belarus, the negotiations for bilateral agreement are not likely to start before the summit takes place. Nor is the agreement that is under negotiation between the EU and Azerbaijan likely to be concluded before the summit.

Therefore, as far as Azerbaijan and Belarus are concerned, the bar set for the summit is not very high. Simply having their Presidents present at the Summit would constitute an achievement. The President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, skipped the latest Eastern Partnership summit in Riga in 2015, citing his disagreement with the language of the Summit Declaration on Nagorno-Karabakh. The EU has delicate a balancing act to perform. If the wording of declaration is too favorable to Azerbaijan, the President Sargsyan might skip the summit this time around. Moreover, the fact that the President of Armenia, Serzh Sargsyan, might sign an ambitious agreement with the EU in the margin of the Brussels summit makes Aliyev uneasy.

The President of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko, has never participated in an Eastern Partnership summit. The EU extended an invitation to him this time around if there are no major negative developments in Belarus between now and the summit. Extending an invitation to the President Lukashenko will rectify the longstanding double standard that the EU has practised by inviting Aliyev but not Lukashenko. However, even if the EU does invite Lukashenko, his presence at the summit is not guaranteed.

Looking ahead

The Brussels summit will pose a break from the tradition of constantly updating the language and upgrading the EU's offer in the framework of the ENP and the Eastern Partnership. There will be no grandiose announcements. The EU will aim to avoid the drama of the last two Eastern Partnership summits in Vilnius and Riga. And beyond the glitz and glamour of the summit, the event will offer an opportunity to showcase the achievements since Riga. And when all the fuss about the summit is over, the Eastern Partnership will be able to refocus on more practical gains. These include a whole host of sectoral cooperation from facilitating access to finance for SMEs in local currency to an extension of the Ten-T transport investment plan to the Eastern partners and creation of Think Tanks Forum. Energy efficiency will remain an important component of cooperation. A large youth package and more support to civil society should also be announced at the Brussels summit, while the start of negotiations on eliminating roaming tariffs and enormous banking fees should not have to wait too long.

Moving forward, the relationship between the EU and its Eastern partners is likely to be focused on bridging the gap between the rhetoric of the European



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Remarks by HR/VP Federica Mogherini upon arrival at the Foreign Affairs Council, Luxembourg, 16 October 2017. [Link](#)

Foreign Affairs Council, Luxembourg, 17 October 2017. [Link](#)

Remarks by Federica Mogherini at the press conference following the Foreign Affairs Council, Luxembourg, 16 October 2017. [Link](#)



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EaP Factsheet : EU Develops Digital Economies and Societies in Eastern Partner Countries, 04 October 2017. [Link](#)

ew polls highlight EU perception in the Eastern Partner countries, 05 October 2017. [Link](#)

Foreign Affairs Committee MEPs advocate trust fund for Eastern partners, 10 October 2017. [Link](#)

EU is the main donor for the Civil Society in the eastern partner countries, 25 October 2017. [Link](#)

Eastern Partnership Business Forum promotes digital economies and innovation, Brussels, 26 October 2017. [Link](#)

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Commissioner Hahn in Armenia to prepare for the Eastern Partnership Summit, 03 October 2017. [Link](#)

EU and Armenia: a partnership for youth, Yerevan, 18 October

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Azerbaijan

2017 Public Opinion Poll about the European Union in Azerbaijan, Baku, 06 October 2017. [Link](#)

EU-Azerbaijan Subcommittee on Justice, Freedom, Security and Human Rights and Democracy meets, 17 October 2017. [Link](#)

EU Statement on opening of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, Brussels, 30 October 2017. [Link](#)

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Political and Security Committee to visit Georgia, 05 October 2017. [Link](#)

Statement on the Constitution of Georgia, Tbilisi, 10 October 2017. [Link](#)

EU Addresses Six Months of Visa Liberalisation and Presents 2017 EU OPEN Survey, Tbilisi, 26 October 2017. [Link](#)

First Georgian Business Cluster Established under EU4Business Initiative, Tbilisi, 27 October 2017. [Link](#)

Moldova

Speech by Commissioner Stylianides delivered on behalf of High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini at the European Parliament Plenary debate on the situation in the Republic of Moldova, Strasbourg, 03 October 2017. [Link](#)

The EU-funded 'EU NEIGHBOURS east' project has conducted an opinion survey in the Republic of Moldova, based upon face-to-face interviews among a representative sample of 1,000 people, Brussels, 05 October 2017. [Link](#)

Russia

Statement by the Spokesperson on the release of Crimean Tatars and Deputy Chairs of the Mejlis Ilmi Umerov and Akhtem Chyigoz, Brussels, 25 October 2017. [Link](#)

Ukraine

Euronest: MEPs and East European counterparts to meet in Ukraine, Brussels, 27 October 2017. [Link](#)



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Egypt

Statement by the Spokesperson on the attack against police forces in Egypt, Brussels, 21 October 2017. [Link](#)

EU and Egypt further strengthen partnership and boost strategic investment projects, Cairo, 29 October 2017. [Link](#)

EU and Egypt cooperation: towards a stronger partnership, 30 October 2017. [Link](#)

Israel

Statement on recent Israeli decisions to promote thousands of settlement units, Brussels, 18 October 2017. [Link](#)

Jordan

EU approves €100 million in financial assistance for Jordan, Brussels, 17 October 2017. [Link](#)

Lebanon

The European Union supports Lebanon in its quest for a cleaner air, 24 October 2017. [Link](#)

Morocco

Gestion des Tribunaux - Formation de chefs de juridiction et responsables judiciaires marocains, 13 October 2017. [Link](#)

Meeting between HR/VP Federica Mogherini and H.E. Mr Nasser Bourita, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Morocco, Brussels, 23 October 2017. [Link](#)

Palestine

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Syria

Joint Statement by High Representative/Vice President Federica Mogherini and Commissioner Christos Stylianides on the recent attacks in Syria, Brussels, 03 October 2017. [Link](#)

"Supporting the Future of Syria and the Region" Brussels conference: post-conference financial tracking report published, 18 October 2017. [Link](#)

Statement of the High Representative/ Vice-President Federica Mogherini on the liberation of Raqqa, Brussels, 20 October 2017. [Link](#)

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EU approves €200 million disbursement in Macro-Financial Assistance to Tunisia, Brussels, 09 October 2017. [Link](#)



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EU – Western Balkans Justice and Home Affairs ministerial forum - joint press statement, 27 October 2017. [Link](#)

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Director-General Christian Danielsson visits Tirana, 09 October 2017. [Link](#)

EU-Albania Subcommittee on Internal Market and Competition met in Brussels, 17 October 2017. [Link](#)

Bosnia and Herzegovina

EU Ambassador Lars-Gunnar Wigemark and US Ambassador Maureen Cormack meet with BiH Presidency Member Bakir Izetbegovic, 05 October 2017. [Link](#)

Bosnia and Herzegovina: Council adopts conclusions and confirm continued presence of Operation Althea, 16 October 2017. [Link](#)

Council conclusions on Bosnia and Herzegovina, 16 October 2017. [Link](#)

Federica Mogherini meets with the Chairman of BiH Presidency, Dragan ÄoviÄ, Brussels, 24 October 2017. [Link](#)

Statement by EU Ambassador Lars-Gunnar Wigemark, following the HJPC conclusions of 26 October 2017 on the dismissal of judges and prosecutors, 27 October 2017. [Link](#)

Kosovo

Statement by the Spokesperson on the implementation of the justice agreement in the context of the EU-facilitated Dialogue, Brussels, 24 October 2017. [Link](#)

Macedonia

EU Delegation in Skopje on the municipal elections, Skopje, 17 October 2017. [Link](#)

Statement by the Spokesperson on the municipal elections in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, 30 October 2017. [Link](#)

Serbia

EU announces additional emergency aid to help refugees in Serbia, Brussels, 08 October 2017. [Link](#)

Debate on EU-Serbia ties with Prime Minister BrnabiÄ, 09 October 2017. [Link](#)

Remarks by EU HR/VP Federica Mogherini following meeting with Ms Ana BrnabiÄ, 11 October 2017. [Link](#)

Tajani: Serbia is making progress in EU integration, should focus more on judiciary, 11 October 2017. [Link](#)

Remarks by EU HR/VP Federica Mogherini following meeting with Ms Ana BrnabiÄ, Prime Minister of Serbia, Brussels, 11 October 2017. [Link](#)

Commissioner Avramopoulos: ETIAS is not a visa, visa-free regime remains in force, 24 October 2017. [Link](#)

Fabrizi: Serbia should align progressively with the EU's common foreign and security policy, 25 October 2017. [Link](#)

Turkey

Support for Human Rights Defenders detained in Turkey, Brussels, 09 October 2017. [Link](#)

1 million refugees in Turkey reached by EU's Emergency Social Safety Net, Brussels, 17 October 2017. [Link](#)

Statement by the Spokesperson on ongoing human rights cases in Turkey, Brussels, 26 October 2017. [Link](#)

EEA/EFTA

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EFTA hosts the 38th meeting of the Advisory Board for European Accreditation, 12 October 2017. [Link](#)

Progress in EFTA-Ecuador negotiating round, 13 October 2017. [Link](#)

New College at EFTA Surveillance Authority, 25 October 2017. [Link](#)

EEA EFTA States submit five comments on EU proposals, 27 October 2017. [Link](#)

Save the date: Syria - Pathways to peace and reconstruction. A conversation with Andrew Tabler

Wednesday, 8 November 2017, 13:15-14:30, CEPS, Brussels

Andrew J. Tabler is the Martin J. Gross Fellow in the Program on Arab Politics at The Washington Institute, where he focuses on Syria and U.S. Middle East policy.

Mr. Tabler achieved unparalleled long-term access to Bashar al-Assad's Syria. During seven years residence in Damascus and Beirut, Mr. Tabler served as a consultant on U.S.-Syria relations for the International Crisis Group (2008); as a fellow of the Institute of Current World Affairs (2005-2007); and was co-founder and editor-in-chief of Syria Today, Syria's first private-sector English-language magazine. Mr. Tabler previously served as senior editor and director of editorial for the Oxford Business Group and Regional Editor of the Cairo-based Middle East Times, where he focused on Arab-Israeli peace negotiations. He has lived, worked and studied extensively in Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Tunisia, and

Turkey.

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Save the date: German 'Ostpolitik' in the European and the Transatlantic Context

Tuesday, 14 November 2017, 09:00-13:30, CEPS, Brussels

The German Institute for International and Security Affairs – Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP) and the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS) are holding a conference on German Ostpolitik in the European and the transatlantic context. The event is by invitation only.

In two panels, Sabine Fischer and Susan Stewart (SWP) will analyze Germany's approach to its Eastern partners with a focus on German-Russian relations after the German federal elections. Together with Steven Blockmans (CEPS), Laure Delcour (IRIS), Wojciech Kononczuk (OSW), Petteri Vuorimäki (EEAS) and further speakers, they will discuss implications for the EU as well as the transatlantic partners.

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Save the date: The 5th Eastern Partnership Summit: What to expect?

Wednesday, 15 November 2017, 13:15-14:30, CEPS, Brussels

The 5th Eastern Partnership (EaP) summit will take place in Brussels on November 24th. Launched in 2009, the EaP aims to promote political association and economic integration between the EU and six Eastern European partner countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine.

Thomas Mayr-Harting, Managing Director for Europe and Central Asia at the EEAS, and Susan Stewart, Senior Associate, Eastern Europe and Eurasia Division, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP), will take stock of the progress made since the last summit in Riga in 2015 and attempt to find a pragmatic way forward to deliver tangible results for their citizens. There are

several uncertainties surrounding the event. Will reference to 'membership aspiration' be retained in the text of the final declaration? Will the Comprehensive and Enhanced Cooperation Agreement (CEPA) recently negotiated with Armenia be ready for signature and become one of the Summit's main deliverables? Will all EaP leaders participate in the Summit?

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