



Q&A: The Eastern Partnership post 2020 priorities

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Why is the EU presenting new priorities for the Eastern Partnership beyond 2020?

The Eastern Partnership aims to strengthen and deepen political and economic relations between the European Union, its Member States and the Eastern partner countries and remains a cornerstone of EU's foreign policy.

As the '[20 deliverables for 2020](#)' agenda adopted at the 2017 Summit was running its course, in June 2019 the European Council tasked the European Commission and the High Representative to present a further set of long-term policy objectives beyond 2020.

The work on the future agenda started with a **broad and inclusive consultation** conducted in 2019, which concluded with the adoption of the [Joint Communication: Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020: Reinforcing Resilience – an Eastern Partnership that delivers for all](#) in March 2020, followed by the [Council Conclusions on the Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020](#) in May.

The Joint Communication identified **strengthening resilience** as an overarching policy framework, with five long-term policy objectives: i) together for resilient, sustainable and integrated economies; ii) together for accountable institutions, the rule of law and security; iii) together towards environmental and climate resilience; iv) together for a resilient digital transformation; and v) together for resilient, fair and inclusive societies.

At their videoconference in June 2020, the EaP Leaders stated that the proposed framework should form the basis of a new set of **post 2020 priorities** to be endorsed at the coming Eastern Partnership summit. The shaping of this new agenda took place in an inclusive dialogues with partner countries, Member States and other stakeholders.

What is in the proposal? What is different/new?

Since its launch in 2009, the Eastern Partnership has delivered concrete, positive results for the partner countries and the EU. Based on these achievements and the results of the broad and extensive consultation conducted in 2019 and 2020, the future priorities for cooperation continue aiming at bringing **tangible benefits for people**. This will be done through increasing trade, growth and jobs, investing in connectivity, **strengthening democratic institutions and the rule of law**, supporting the green and digital transitions, and promoting fair, gender-equal and inclusive societies.

A regional **economic and investment plan** will support post-COVID socio-economic recovery and long-term resilience, taking into account the 'build back better' agenda.

Why have you highlighted/selected top ten targets? Are they more important than the other priorities?

The comprehensive agenda includes a number of priorities structured around five long-term objectives, all of them equally important to strengthen the cooperation between the EU, its Member States and the partner countries.

In order to maximise impact and visibility on the ground, and taking into account the results of the consultation, a selection of **top ten targets** has been providing concrete examples of actions within the wider framework of cooperation. The targets range from additional support to SMEs, to the reduction of energy consumption, from increased access to high speed internet to the support to health workers, from additional support to civil society to better tackling hybrid and cyber threats.

What do you mean by strengthening resilience? How does it link with recovery and reform?

Resilience is multi-dimensional and contributes towards stability, security and prosperity. The EaP policy beyond 2020 focuses on the modernisation and implementation of sustainable reforms, which are key for investing in a resilient economy, democracy, environment and climate, and society. Continued delivery on the **reform** agenda, alongside the respect for fundamental and shared values,

are and will remain the foundations of our partnership.

In light of the COVID 19 pandemic and its socio-economic fallout, the new agenda aims for increased investment and proposes an economic and investment plan to support a sustainable socio-economic **recovery**. The investment pillar is grounded in a dedicated pillar on good governance, rule of law, security, and resilient societies, leaving no one behind. These two pillars will enhance the **resilience of all partners**.

How will the EU help create jobs and opportunities in EaP countries?

To support the creation of job and economic opportunities in partner countries, the EU is proposing to further deepen the economic integration with and among partner countries, and to increase trade, which has nearly doubled between the EU and partners in the last decade. The EU will support the full implementation of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (DCFTAs) with Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova, and also encourage enhanced cooperation with non- DCFTA countries, for example through sectoral trade facilitation arrangements of common interest involving all partners.

How will the new EaP policy address issues of climate change and environmental protection?

Joint work on combating climate change, ensuring more opportunities for greening societies and economies and fostering a circular economy is an integral part of the Eastern Partnership policy framework beyond 2020. The EU will help partner countries to fulfil their nationally determined contributions to the Paris Agreement and modernise their economies, reducing their carbon footprint and moving towards climate neutrality by 2050, while acknowledging the investment challenges and leaving no one behind. This takes even more relevance in the context of the post COVID 19 recovery efforts, as recently acknowledged by EU and EaP Ministers at the [3rd EaP ministerial meeting on environment and climate change](#) held on 22 June 2021.

How will the new EaP policy address digital transformation?

As indicated in the [Strategy on Shaping Europe's digital future](#), the digital transformation can enable growth and drive sustainable development for both the EU and partner countries. This is why the EU will invest in the digital transformation of the partner countries, in line with EU legislation and best practice, and aim to extend the benefits of the Digital Single market to them. This will allow for better access to digital infrastructure and services, better public services and administration for citizens, the extension of broadband infrastructures especially in regions and local areas, and a strengthened e-Governance.

How will the new EaP policy address challenges to governance, rule of law and the fight against corruption?

Good governance, democracy, the rule of law and human rights are fundamental values that lie at the heart of the EU's relationship with partner countries and of the Eastern Partnership itself. They are also preconditions for a functioning market economy and for sustainable growth. In particular, the rule of law is a key factor in ensuring an effective business environment and an important consideration in attracting foreign direct investment.

The EU will keep working together with the governments of partner countries to strengthen the rule of law and anti-corruption mechanisms, as well as the independence, impartiality, efficiency and accountability of justice systems, and to reinforce public administration. The EU remains committed to promote and defend human rights in the region, including through its support to civil society and media.

There needs to be a renewed commitment to the fundamentals of the partnership and better measure the impact of judicial reforms. In this context, the EU will consider progress in rule of law reforms when deciding on assistance.

How is the EU responding to requests for more security cooperation and overall a more geopolitical approach to the Eastern Partnership?

We have reaffirmed the strategic importance of the Eastern Partnership, as a specific regional dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), supporting sustainable reform processes and offering close political association as well as economic integration with the EU and tangible impact on people's lives. The Council in its [Conclusions](#) has reaffirmed the joint commitment to building a common area of shared democracy, prosperity and stability.

As outlined in the March 2020 [Joint Communication on the EaP future](#), strengthening resilience will be the key overriding policy framework. It's not hard security, which does not fall under EU competence, but strengthening joint governance, economic, environmental, energy and societal

resilience, cyber security, fighting crime, reinforcing strategic communications, which all comes into the security envelope.

We will continue working closely with our Eastern neighbours (in bilateral and regional format – e.g. we hold informal strategic security dialogues with Georgia and Azerbaijan) on tackling terrorism and preventing radicalisation, enhancing cooperation on Security Sector Reform, disrupting organised crime, enhancing cybersecurity and fighting cybercrime, Tackling Chemical, Biological radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) threats.

The proposed priorities for future cooperation include strengthening security cooperation by working jointly on issues such as hybrid and cyber threats, participation in EU missions within CSDP, and European Peace Facility assistance measures.

What is the EU doing to counter instability and unresolved conflicts in the region?

The Eastern Partnership is not a conflict resolution mechanism. Nevertheless, unresolved conflicts continue to hamper development in the region. Under the agreed negotiating formats and processes, the EU is committed to promote the peaceful settlement of these conflicts. In particular, the EU will pursue efforts to support conflict prevention, confidence building and the facilitation of negotiated peaceful conflict settlements.

What has the EU done to help EaP countries tackle the COVID 19 pandemic?

As part of the “**Team Europe**” approach, the EU has delivered a robust response to support partner countries' efforts in tackling the pandemic, including €1 billion to address immediate short-term needs, boost the resilience of healthcare systems, and support the socio-economic recovery process. In addition, a macro-financial assistance package was adopted for Ukraine, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova in the form of loans on highly favourable terms to help these countries cover their immediate and urgent financing needs. The Commission has allocated substantial resources for key protective equipment and means of treatment.

Team Europe has mobilised close to €3 billion in support of the **COVAX Facility**, which remains the priority instrument to ensure equitable and fair access to safe and effective vaccines. All partner countries (except Belarus) participate in the Facility and have received several batches of deliveries. In addition, the Commission is facilitating, through an EU sharing mechanism, the sharing of vaccines purchased by the Member States under the EU Advanced Purchase Agreements with third countries, directly or through COVAX.. Several Member States have announced direct sharing targeting Eastern partner countries.

To **support the roll-out of vaccines**, the EU, through a regional programme in cooperation with the World Health Organisation launched on 11 February 2020 and worth €40 million, is providing technical and logistical assistance to the vaccination process in the six partner countries. The programme will also facilitate the access to vaccines.

How will the EU help the EaP countries to respond to potential future pandemics?

The concept of resilience is even more important against the background of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The EU's programme on vaccine preparedness implemented by the WHO also has a longer term component to strengthen national immunisation systems and improve capacities of the health workforce in the partner countries in vaccine preventable diseases and communication. Beyond this ongoing support, the EU is ready to strengthen health resilience and systems in the partner countries by taking concerted actions to provide affordable medical care and promoting life style changes (healthy living) to reduce the incidence of non-communicable diseases.

How much money will the EU invest?

The implementation of future priorities will be supported through the various EU tools and modalities, including the new '**Global Europe / NDICI**' instrument and the Team Europe initiatives bringing together resources and expertise from the EU and its Member States, through the cross-border cooperation programmes and through the partners' own investments. Ongoing programming under the new 'Global Europe' instrument is in full alignment with the post 2020 EaP policy framework.

The key new element of the Joint Staff Working Document is the **economic and investment plan** for the Eastern Partnership. By using all available NDICI tools, including the European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus, backed by its External Action Guarantee, it will foster sustainable development and leverage public and private investment. The Economic and Investment Plan will mobilise up to €2,3 billion from the EU budget in grants, blending and guarantees, to stimulate jobs and growth, support connectivity and the green and digital transition. This is expected to leverage potential investments of up the €17 billion to support the post-pandemic recovery and to transform

the economies of the Eastern Partnership to make them more sustainable, resilient and integrated.

What is in the Economic and Investment Plan?

The economic and investment plan for the Eastern Partnership supports the investment pillar presented in the joint staff working document. Transforming the EaP economies to make them more resilient and integrated has become even more urgent in the context of the **post-COVID socio-economic recovery**.

Investments focus on enhanced transport connectivity; access to finance for SMEs; investments in equity to strengthen competitiveness and integration into EU value chains; support to the digital transition; investment in environment and climate resilience, including energy efficiency; health resilience and human capital development.

EU support under the economic and investment plan should facilitate and leverage public and private investments, by joining the forces of the EU, the European Investment Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, other IFIs; the EU Member States' development finance institutions (continuing the Team Europe approach); the partner countries' national, regional and local governments, municipalities where relevant; and private investors.

The [European Fund for Sustainable Development](#) will play a critical role in scaling up and leveraging significant volumes of investments. Synergies can also be sought with other financial tools offered by Member States, such as export credits, investment guarantees, etc. The plan will combine actions to be implemented at local, national and regional level, and will be adapted to the specific needs of each partner country (like the economic recovery plan for Moldova, which identifies priority areas for investment). To ensure sustainable impact, the plan also includes investments in innovation and human capital.

Improving the policy and regulatory environment is essential if the investment in the infrastructure is to be effective and to foster sustainable economic and social development.

Why do we have separate country specific flagships? Which flagships are envisaged for each country

The Economic Investment Plan proposes concrete country flagship initiatives for each of the partner countries. These will contribute to maximise impact and visibility on the ground and concentrate efforts on concrete priority projects that can make a difference to people and businesses in the Eastern Partnership.

EIP: Flagship Initiatives for Armenia

Flagship 1: Supporting an innovative and competitive economy: direct support to 30 000 SMEs

Flagship 2: Boosting connectivity & socio-economic development: the North-South Corridor

Flagship 3: Investing in digital transformation, innovation, science and technology

Flagship 4: Building resilience of the Southern regions

Flagship 5: Investing in a green Yerevan: energy efficiency and green buses

EIP: Flagship Initiatives for Azerbaijan

Flagship 1: Green connectivity: supporting the green port of Baku

Flagship 2: Digital connectivity: supporting the digital transport corridor

Flagship 3: Supporting an innovative and competitive economy – direct support to 25 000 SMEs

Flagship 4: Innovative Rural Development

Flagship 5: Smarter and greener cities

EIP: Flagship Initiatives for democratic Belarus

(Proposals are indicative and subject to a democratic transition)

Flagship 1: Supporting an innovative and competitive economy – direct support to 20 000 SMEs

Flagship 2: Improving transport connectivity and facilitating EU-Belarus trade

Flagship 3: Boosting innovation and the digital transformation

Flagship 4: Supporting a green Belarus – energy efficiency, waste management and infrastructure

Flagship 5: Investing in a democratic, transparent and accountable Belarus

EIP: Flagship Initiatives for Georgia

Flagship 1: Black Sea Connectivity – Deploying a submarine electricity cable and fibre optic cable

Flagship 2: Transport across the Black Sea – Improving physical connections between Georgia and the EU

Flagship 3: Economic Recovery – Supporting 80,000 SMEs to reap the full benefits of the DCFTA

Flagship 4: Digital Connectivity for Citizens – Developing high-speed broadband infrastructure for 1,000 rural settlements

Flagship 5: Improved Air Quality – Helping over 1 million people in Tbilisi breathe cleaner air

EIP: Flagship Initiatives for the Republic of Moldova

Flagship 1: Supporting an innovative and competitive economy – direct support to 50,000 Moldovan SMEs

Flagship 2: Boosting EU-Moldova trade - construction of an Inland Freight Terminal in Chisinau

Flagship 3: Increasing energy efficiency – expanding the refurbishment of district heating systems in residential buildings (condominiums) in Chisinau and Balti

Flagship 4: Improving connectivity – anchoring Moldova in the Trans-European Network for Transport

Flagship 5: Investing in Moldova's human capital and preventing “brain drain” – modernisation of school infrastructure and implementation of the National Education Strategy

EIP: Flagship Initiatives for Ukraine

Flagship 1: Supporting an innovative and competitive economy – direct support to 100 000 SMEs

Flagship 2: Economic transition for rural areas – assistance to more than 10 000 small farms

Flagship 3: Improving connectivity by upgrading border crossing points

Flagship 4: Boosting the digital transformation – modernising public IT infrastructure

Flagship 5: Increasing energy efficiency – and support for renewable hydrogen

What is in there for Belarus? How does it link with the Plan for a democratic Belarus presented a few days ago?

The EU regrets the decision of the Lukashenko regime to suspend its participation in the Eastern Partnership framework. The Eastern Partnership aims to deepen and strengthen relations between the European Union, its Member States and partner countries, with the overall objective of bringing concrete benefits to the citizens of our respective countries. This decision serves only to further isolate Belarus and is yet another demonstration of the regime's disregard for the Belarusian people, who benefit from the cooperation and various programmes as part of the Eastern Partnership.

The EU remains open to continue working with Belarusian people also within the Eastern Partnership framework and will continue to support the Belarusian people and civil society, as well as their democratic aspirations.

The country flagships for Belarus included in the Economic Investment Plan are fully aligned with the €3 billion comprehensive plan for a democratic Belarus announced in May. The EU offer is conditional to a democratic transition.

How will the new EaP policy address challenges civil society faces?

The Eastern Partnership goes beyond relations with governments. Partnerships with other key stakeholders, such as civil society organisations are equally important. Working with civil society has become an indispensable element of the Eastern Partnership and plays a vital role in promoting democracy, the rule of law and advancing key reforms.

In this regard, the [EaP Civil Society Forum](#) is a unique, multilateral platform for experience-sharing, mutual learning, support and partnership building. The EU will also further develop strategic partnerships with key civil society organisations to strengthen cooperation, build up the leadership skills of civil society activists, and engage with social partners such as trade unions and employers' organisations. Finally, it will continue to measure CSO space by using the dedicated tool prepared for the Eastern Partnership (CSO meter) and use this as a basis for policy dialogue with the partner countries

Will the EU continue to tackle fake news and disinformation from Russia?

In the wake of growing disinformation against EU values in recent years, the EU has worked to put in place a stronger and more strategic approach to communication. We have strengthened the EU's communication in partner countries through clear, tailor-made messaging and raising awareness of the positive impact of EU policies and actions to people across the region. Under the new Eastern Partnership framework, there will be a renewed focus on outreach to youth. Strategic communication is crucial for building resilience and is a core duty for policy-makers at the service of citizens.

The EU will also provide training opportunities and capacity building to the partner countries, including on countering **hybrid and cyber threats**, where appropriate.

What has the EaP delivered in the past 11 years?

Over the past 11 years, the Eastern Partnership has progressed based on common values

mutual interests and commitments, as well as on shared ownership and responsibility. This strategic partnership has matured and evolved with achievements such as Association Agreements (including Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas), a Comprehensive Enhanced Partnership Agreement, Visa Facilitation and Readmission Agreements, visa liberalisations and Partnership priorities, which are today the cornerstones of our relations and cooperation.

Trade between the EU and Eastern partner countries has nearly doubled in the last decade. The EU is the first trading partner for Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine and second biggest for Armenia and Belarus. In the period between 2016 and 2019, trade volumes between the EU and Armenia went up by 27%, by 55% with Azerbaijan, by 40% with Belarus, by 7% with Georgia, by 42% with Moldova and by 50% with Ukraine. Furthermore, over 185,000 **small- and medium-sized companies** in the Eastern partners have benefitted from EU funding, creating or sustaining 1.65 million jobs.

In the area of **transport connectivity**, a €20 million technical assistance facility to help implementation of the extension of the Trans-European Transport Network has been set up. The EU's TENT-T extension foresees 4,800 km of new and rehabilitated roads and railways by 2030, which will open new opportunities for economic development and exchanges between the EU and Eastern partner countries and amongst themselves.

In terms of investments to **reduce greenhouse gas emissions**, the fund of the Energy Efficiency Partnership (E5P) now covers all partner countries. It has provided over €164 million in investment grants to 40 projects benefiting 11.7 million people and leveraging a total investment of almost €1.2 billion. Investments include all six countries and range from the provision of energy efficient trolley buses in Tbilisi and Batumi to municipal investments in district heating in Lviv or investments to enhance energy efficiency in public buildings in Yerevan.

The Eastern Partnership is also delivering for the **youth and researchers**. The EU has supported 100 projects supporting civic engagement and entrepreneurship amongst the young people and 25,000 young people in the region have benefitted from EU4Youth grants to support six large-scale projects to boost youth employment, their employability and transition to work and 1,100 researchers from the region benefit from the Marie Curie scheme. Since 2016, 43,000 students and academic staff from the Eastern partner countries have participated in academic exchanges thanks to Erasmus+ and over 54,000 young people were involved in other exchanges, including volunteering. The **European School** in Tbilisi is in place since September 2018 allowing students across all partner countries to

graduate on European studies; a fully-fledged European School should be established by 2023.

The structured consultation in 2019 confirmed that the Eastern Partnership is robust and delivering concrete benefits to citizens. The results-oriented approach "20 deliverables for 2020" has delivered notably on stronger economy, stronger connectivity and stronger society. However, **challenges remain**, particularly when it comes to judicial reform, fighting corruption and organised crime. In addition, issues relating to media independence, civil society space, gender equality and non-discrimination, continue to pose serious concerns. Equally, climate mitigation and environment need to be addressed further. The future agenda will continue to prioritise these jointly agreed key reforms.

What will happen next? When will the implementation start?

The proposed future agenda will be discussed with Member States, partner countries and other stakeholders in view of its endorsement at the 6th Eastern Partnership summit in December 2021.

The preparatory work for the implementation of the future agenda has already started and it will continue in the coming months, including on securing the funds to implement the ambitious agenda.

Why are you proposing to change the EaP multilateral architecture?

The current multilateral architecture was revised and officially adopted at the 2017 EaP Summit (along with the '20 deliverables for 2020'), and it has been operational since 2018.

The 2019 consultation on the future of the EaP showed a clear consensus that the current structures were functional and fit for purpose, as well as the importance of the multilateral dimension of the EaP cooperation. However, the architecture would benefit from: (i) further streamlining; (ii) better operational arrangements (e.g. as regards the preparation and follow-up of meetings); and (iii) more flexibility. Some adjustments are required to accommodate the new priorities.

The underlying principle for the proposed revision is to maintain elements that work and make suggestions to address shortcomings. It is expected that this will be further discussed with EU Member States and partner countries in view of its validation at the EaP Summit in 2021.

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