

EU External Policy at a Crossroads: Facing New Challenges from the East

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EU external policy: general characteristic (1)

The European Union created a series of rules and principles, established specific institutions and introduced procedures, which all make up a complex category:

EU external policy

Components of the EU's external policy:

- **an economic one:** foreign economic relations in the form of the Common Commercial Policy along with development assistance and humanitarian aid;
- **a political/military one:** foreign/security policy in the form of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP).

The EU's external policy resembles **the classical foreign policy conducted by states**, but at the same time it exhibits its **own special characteristics**.

EU external policy: general characteristic (2)

This policy has incoherent internal structure:

- economic component falls mainly within the competences of EU institutions

(community method);

- foreign/security policy falls mainly within the competences of the Member States

(intergovernmental cooperation).

Main weaknesses of the EU's external policy

(especially the foreign/security policy):

- lack of an efficient **decision-making centre on the EU level**, inconsistently formulated **main goals and tasks**, the lack of **consistency**, inadequate **financing**, the lack of **autonomous military capacity**, etc.

- lack of **political will** of European decision-makers (especially Member State governments) to introduce the necessary reforms.

Eastern policy as an instrument of EU - Eastern Europe relations (1)

In historical terms:

- European Communities always tried to maintain **proper relations** with Eastern Europe;
- European Union tried to develop **integration ties** with the Eastern European democracies after 1989, leading to **the accession of 11 of them to the EU**, which means that **Eastward enlargement** was an important turning point in the history of the EU.

Eastern Europe is much rather a geo-political than just a geographical notion.

The most important instrument of the EU toward Eastern Europe: so-called Eastern policy.

The EU Eastern policy stands for:

common formulation of certain principles, development of institutional solutions, execution of specific undertakings and actions by EU bodies and institutions or the Member States under their relations with selected countries of Eastern Europe.

Eastern policy as an instrument of EU - Eastern Europe relations (2)

The EU Eastern policy is the eastern component of the **European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)** established in 2004 and addressed to **two groups of states**:

- (1) Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia;
- (2) 10 participants of the Barcelona Process in the Mediterranean Region.

The principal aim of the ENP: to support cooperation between the EU and its neighbours.

Deficiencies:

- ENP was too broadly defined;
- some alarming developments in Eastern Europe.

Main components the EU Eastern policy:

- Eastern Partnership;
- strategic partnership with Russia.

Challenge no. 1: The shortcomings of the Eastern Partnership (1)

The Eastern Partnership (EaP), established in 2009, covers six countries:

Ukraine, Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Belarus.

Principal aims of the EaP:

- to support democratic system transformation in recipient countries;
- to help them develop close political and economic ties with the EU.

EaP: part of the ENP, but a new quality within the framework of the EU Eastern policy.

EaP partners:

- are situated in a **key geopolitical region of broadly understood Eastern Europe;**
- have been chosen accordingly to **the main criterion:** their readiness to engage in closer integration with the EU.

Challenge no. 1: The shortcomings of the Eastern Partnership (2)

Main problems:

- **lack of official prospects of the EU membership** for the EaP countries;
- **authoritarian tendencies**, often combined with **political instability**;
- **insufficient funding** of the EaP by EU institutions;
- **relative inefficiency** of the EaP in the sphere of **economy**.
- impact of **the crisis in Ukraine** on the future development of the entire EaP;
- evolution of the policies of the other EaP countries: **Armenia, Belarus, Moldova, Georgia**.

Conclusions:

- all these problems weaken the motivation of the EaP countries to make the adjustments to EU standards, and reduce the EU's ability to influence policies of the EaP partners;
- some positive effects, however, have been achieved (for example change of foreign and domestic policy of Ukraine).

Challenge no. 2: The failure of the strategic partnership with Russia (1)

The European Union signed **special agreements** with Russia, which were the basis for establishing **relevant institutions** and for **developing cooperation** in spheres of economy, trade and even foreign/security policy.

Main obstacles:

- **evolution of Russia's foreign and domestic policy** (since rise to power of President Putin) openly gaining dangerous neo-imperial and antidemocratic tendencies,
- **Putin's desire to change the balance of power** in Europe and in the world;
- **Russia's aggressions** against Georgia in 2008 and against Ukraine in 2014.

Ukrainian crisis caused by Russian aggression is currently the most essential challenge for the whole EU Eastern policy.

Challenge no. 2: The failure of the strategic partnership with Russia (2)

Strategic partnership between the EU and Russia has not been successful

Main problems:

- **partners represent fundamentally different, incompatible political and economic systems;**
- **Russian leadership does not desire a real rapprochement** with the EU.

The EU is able, however, to react more decisively imposing political and economic sanctions:

- **fortunately:** the EU finally understood that Russia is a revisionist power;
- **unfortunately:** there is insufficient political will to draw the right conclusions.

Conclusions:

- European Union still has no strategy of holding Russia off;
- nevertheless the EU needs to develop a new effective strategic partnership with its largest eastern neighbour.

Effectiveness of the EU Eastern policy (1)

Ability of the European Union to address challenges originating in Eastern Europe depends primarily on **the overall effectiveness of the EU external policy** which, in turn, impact **the effectiveness of the EU Eastern policy**.

Current outcome of the EU Eastern policy is not impressive

The EU has not achieved the main goals of its Eastern policy which were:

- (1)** to help the Eastern European countries build a more democratic political life and thus to create beyond the EU eastern border a reliable group of friendly liberal democracies which could be valuable political or even military allies;
- (2)** to create a stable market economy and thus to create in the region a system of free market economies which could constitute valuable economic and trade partners.

Effectiveness of the EU Eastern policy (2)

Effectiveness of the EU Eastern policy depends on **a whole range of different factors.**

Factors influenced by the recipient countries:

- lack of the willingness of the Eastern European countries to adopt European standards;
- their geopolitical position which largely shapes their domestic and foreign policies due to 'Russian factor' (apparently underappreciated by the EU).

Factors influenced by the EU:

- absence of the prospect of the EU membership for the EaP countries;
- naive assumption that current Eastern policy would lead to the same positive results as the last Eastern enlargement did.

Conclusions:

- the EU underestimated changes of the overall geopolitical situation due to 'Russian factor',
- partners proved to be more difficult

Final remarks (1)

In addressing challenges coming from Eastern Europe the EU is hindered by the repercussions of **the deep crisis** the EU itself is clearly experiencing, which stems from **fundamental unresolved dilemma: the undetermined future of European integration.**

The EU is facing the need to make an important **historical choice** whether:

- to **strengthen community competences** in all spheres, which implies the adoption of the community model;
- to **retain the present mixed model**, largely dependent on intergovernmental cooperation;
- to **develop more flexible dimension**, based on ‘differentiated integration’, which implies the creation of different ‘circles’ or ‘cores’ within the framework of the EU.

The future of the UE, including its ability to perform effective external policy and thus Eastern policy, depends on this very choice.

Final remarks (2)

The European Union currently **is not able to take binding decisions** on the scale and nature of further integration with the Eastern European countries as the EU itself does not know:

- **what the EU will be like in the future:** more open and flexible or more focused on itself and on the interests of its members;
- **what the EU external policy will be in the future:** more effective and coherent, taking into account the interest of the entire EU, or it will remain the domain of the Member States placing their own interests above all else.

Future development of the EU Eastern policy depends on
two main factors related to each other:

- future shape of the European Union as an integration project;
- effectiveness of the EU external policy.

Thank you for your attention!