

Study

**The Development
Dimension of the
Eastern Partnership
following the 2015 EaP
Review: Successes,
Challenges and
Prospects**

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Summary

The EU Eastern Partnership (EaP) initiative was launched in 2009, to intensify the cooperation between the EU and its Member States, of the one hand, and six Eastern Partners in Europe and South Caucasus, namely Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Belarus, Armenia and Azerbaijan. The EaP is most commonly discussed from the solely (geo)political, security or economic perspectives.

This study seeks to make a difference by zooming in on the development dimension of the EaP with a focus on Ukraine as a case study. Such an insight is of special relevance, since both the EU and its Member States, on the one hand, and the EaP countries declared their commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals – an ambitious consensus global framework for sustainable development. The study shows that the EaP already has a considerable development dimension and the prospects to develop it further. Converting the EaP into a fully-fledged successful development initiative requires three basic steps. Firstly, a stronger focus needs to be made on the policy's cohesion, local ownership and effectiveness aspects, with a thorough account of each EaP country's development needs and strategies. Secondly, the policy needs a qualitatively new social dimension to engage with stakeholders, currently left behind. Thirdly, much is about plainer and more inclusive communication, and being speedy and persuasive, when reacting to fake news.

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Introduction

The Eastern Partnership (EaP) initiative was launched by the EU in 2009 on the basis of the Eastern dimension of the 2004 European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). Originally, the EaP sought to fulfill three equally important and closely intertwined objectives:

- To bring “a lasting political message of EU solidarity” to Eastern Partners;
- To provide Eastern Neighbours with “tangible support for their democratic and market-oriented reforms and the consolidation of their statehood and territorial integrity”
- To increase stability, security and prosperity in both the EU, partner countries and the entire continent.

As in 2014-2016 the EaP started turning from the “ring of friends” to the “ring of fire”, the 2016 EU Global Strategy and the 2015 ENP Review strengthened the security, stability and resilience dimension of the policy. Amid this (still ongoing) paradigmatic change, the policy aspect that remained unchanged has been the EU’s contribution to various aspects of development in the EaP region. In simple terms, this means multitude of initiatives in various spheres, ranging from infrastructural improvements and new cross-border tourist routes to the digitalization of public services and education. Nevertheless, scholars, students and civil society agents predominantly speak about the EaP from the solely political, security and economic perspectives.

This study seeks to make a difference and zoom in on the EaP’s development dimension. It both traces the successes and challenges of the EaP as a development initiative (based on the case of Ukraine), and presents a methodology to assess the development performance of the EU in other country contexts. Moreover, the study offers policy recommendations as to maximizing the potential of the EaP as a development policy for European policy-makers.

10 Reasons to Care about the EaP's Development Dimension

Why should European and Ukrainian policy-makers care about the development dimension of the EaP? Here are ten reasons to consider:

1. Since 2015, the world moves towards the common Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and achieving the SDGs is a team sport

The 2015 United Nations Agenda 2030, including 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), “provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, and now into the future”. Hence, the SDGs are consonant with the original idea behind the EaP: to share peace, security and prosperity with others. The SDGs encompass numerous spheres, such as poverty reduction, economic development and decent jobs, environmental protection, gender quality, quality education, peace, justice and the rule of law, and offer much room for cooperation between the EU, its Member States and Eastern Neighbours.

2. The Agenda 2030 consolidates the three-dimensional concept of sustainable development as the common “terms of reference”

The Agenda 2030 is the first consensual action-oriented global document to offer the common terms of reference as to what we mean by “sustainable development”. According to the Agenda 2030, sustainable development encompasses three tightly intertwined aspects: economic growth, environmental protection and social sustainability, including better social protection. An account of sustainable development requires policies to consider the connections between these aspects, maximize synergies and decide on trade-offs, if necessary. Peace, justice and strong institutions constitute the foundation for sustainable development.

3. The Agenda 2030 is not just about the goals. It is about the cross-cutting means of implementation

Alongside setting 17 ambitious goals and, hence, highlighting 17 key domains for international cooperation, the Agenda 2030 offers novel and beneficial means of SDGs’ implementation. They include finance, trade, capacity-building, as well as the focus on science, technology and innovation. While these domains represent crucial foci of the EaP activities, they are not yet made cross-cutting, and there is no strategy to utilize them to achieve other goals.

4. The EaP already contains a valuable development dimension, yet it lacks the conceptual premises.

In its 2016 Staff Working Document (SWD) [“Key European action supporting the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals”](#), the Commission repeatedly referred to the EaP as contributing to the SDGs’ implementation. As we show later, the EaP in fact already comprises numerous sub-initiatives, oriented on the implementation of various SDGs (e.g. transport dialogue within the EaP, aimed to improve the Trans-European Transport Networks infrastructure; Erasmus+ programmes for quality education; various bilateral justice sector support projects, such as the PRAVO-JUSTICE project in Ukraine). The challenge is, however, that **these sub-initiatives are not conceptualized as the ones, oriented on sustainable development**. Subsequently, there is **no common framework to assess the EU, Member States and partner countries’ performance** in the domains related to development.

5. Point 4 is especially relevant for the recent “20 Deliverables for 2020” – the EU’s initiative to deliver tangible results for citizens.

The “20 Deliverables for 2020” initiative, launched amid the lack of the political progress in the EU-Eastern Neighbourhood relations, has focused on specific deliverables in four domains, and several cross-cutting deliverables. The former included stronger economy (consonant with Goal 8, Goal 9), stronger governance (Goal 16), connectivity, energy efficiency and climate change (Goal 7, Goal 9, Goal 14, Goal 15) and stronger society (Goal 4). The latter were about civil society, gender equality and non-discrimination (Goal 5), as well as strategic communications and the media. Despite such a strong sustainable development focus,

there have been no assessments of the “20 Deliverables for 2020” from the development studies standpoint.

6. **Development studies, as well as public administration, management and public policy literature offer a number of useful concepts to assess the design and implementation of policies pertaining to development.** Such concepts include, for instance, **relevance** (for different categories of stakeholders), **cohesion, local ownership, (aid) effectiveness, efficiency** (the ratio between effects and the use of resources) and **resilience** (the policy’s flexibility and forward-looking quality).
7. **The EU needs more coherent policies in the EaP region.** The lack of an overarching conceptual framework for the EaP’s development may represent an obstacle to two types of coherence: between various EU initiatives and programmes, and between the activities of the EU and other donors. Furthermore, the EaP is still absent from the EU’s Policy Coherence for Development (PCD) assessments that help to avoid contradictions and promote the pro-development synergies among an array of EU policy priority areas, such as food security and nutrition, migration and mobility, and health.
8. **The demand for a stronger social aspect of development in the EaP region.** The adoption of the sustainable development as one of the EaP conceptual frameworks will let the policy become more oriented on addressing the social challenges in the region. Unemployment, an insufficient quality of social security, weaknesses of the health systems – all these challenges are high on the agenda among multiple stakeholders in the EaP region who are “left behind” by the policy and most prone to criticize the EU engagement in the region and specific countries.
9. **The EaP countries have considerably suffered from the socio-economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and need a new impetus for development.** In this vein, strengthening the EaP’s development dimension can help Eastern partners recover from the socio-economic consequences of the pandemic quicker and more efficiently.
10. **Last but not least, the future of the EaP remains uncertain, and the EU needs inspiring incentives to preserve its influence on continuing transformation in the region.**
The EU is currently not ready to offer associated neighbors, such as Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia new political incentives. In the case of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus, the deepening of the political ties with the EU is currently hardly possible due to the geopolitical and political reasons. Therefore, the focus on economic cooperation and development efforts offers the pathway for the EU to intensify its presence in the region and, where possibly, sustain and/or develop leverage over reforms in the region.

In sum, the Agenda 2030 and the EU’s commitment to be a frontrunner in its implementation offer the EU, Member States and partner countries a crucial chance to strengthen the EaP’s development dimension, social relevance and broaden its appeal in the region.

Methodology and the Framework for Assessment

The study aims to assess the development dimension of the EaP, using the case study of Ukraine, and develop recommendations as to its strengthening.

The methodology behind the study includes two components:

- **Desk research** that helped us map the contents of the EaP through the lens of the SDGs and their targets, and constructively assess the successes and challenges pertaining to the EaP's development dimension.
- **18 semi-structured in-depth interviews with Ukrainian stakeholders** (the list of interviewees attached), used to get an insight into how different groups subjectively perceive and assess the development aspects of the EaP. Due to the COVID-19 restrictions, the interviews were conducted online (via Zoom or Skype, dependent on the interviewees' preferences). The interviewees' recruiting was performed with the help of the 'snowball sampling' method, i.e. interviewees were asked to recommend their acquaintances and colleagues as respondents. The European Commission's ethical guidelines as to the conduct of interviews in social sciences were observed. The interviewees belong to the following groups.
 - The representatives of the EU Delegation in Ukraine and several EU projects, dealing with the civilian sector reform, justice sector reform and anti-corruption issues, respectively
 - The government officials, involved in the implementation of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement and fostering the EU-Ukraine bilateral relations
 - The representatives of Ukrainian civil society, active in the EU affairs domain and participating in the EU-Ukraine Civil Society Forum.

To make the assessment in a constructive manner, we applied six criteria, used in development studies, as well as the studies of public administration, management and public policy to conduct policy assessments. The criteria were selected to address different dimensions of the EU's performance in the region: input (relevance; coherence/cohesion; local ownership); output (effectiveness, impact) and the relationship to the external environment, incl. the aspect of competition with other stakeholders.

Table 1. Criteria to conduct policy assessment

Criterion	Dimension of Performance	Meaning	Literature
Relevance	Input	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An extent to which the policy is capable of (i) meeting the requirements and needs of its stakeholder and clients and (ii) getting continuous support from their side. • Stakeholders and clients are the individuals and groups, most involved in the policy and interested in its outcome or contribution. • The assessment of relevance includes insights into the clients/stakeholders' levels of satisfaction, views and expectations as to the policy and its future. 	Baltag and Romanyshyn (2018); Lusthaus (2002).
Cohesion (coherence)	Input	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "The policy's ability to articulate consistently policy preferences" (Baltag/Romanyshyn, 2018) and the coordination between different stakeholders. • In the EaP terms, cohesion includes the coordination between the EU and Member States' 	Baltag and Romanyshyn (2018); Bossuyt, et al. (2020).

Criterion	Dimension of Performance	Meaning	Literature
		policies, and between the policies and activities of the EU and other donors.	
Local ownership	Input	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The foundational idea of donor support for domestic initiatives and not vice versa; The involvement of national elites ('minimalist' approach), as well as civil society and citizens ('maximalist' approach) in shaping the donors' aid agenda. 	Petrova and Delcour (2020); Korosteleva and Flockhart (2020).
(Aid) Effectiveness	Output	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The policy's ability to achieve its initial objectives; The policy's ability to achieve specific development targets. A broader understanding of aid effectiveness suggests looking at ownership, alignment and harmonization of aid policies, results and mutual accountability (2005 Paris Declaration). 	Lusthaus (2002); Baltag and Romanyshyn (2018); Paris Declaration and Accra Agenda for Action (2005).
Impact	Output	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The policy's ability to produce change in a long-term perspective; Structural effects: the policy's ability to shape political, socio-economic and legal structures. 	Baltag and Romanyshyn (2018); Keukeleire and Delreux (2014)
Resilience	Relation to the external environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flexibility, the policy's ability to react to the changes in external environment, including rapid external shocks; Innovation and adaptation; Competitiveness, clear competitive advantage vis-à-vis other actors; The policy's forward-looking nature, i.e. the presence of viable pathways for the policy development. 	Baltag and Romanyshyn (2018); Verslius, et. al. (2019).

Mapping the EaP's Development Dimension

This part of the study seeks to show how the EaP already aligns with the SDGs, thus, offering the mapping of the EaP's development dimension. A more profound insight into the nexuses between the SDGs in the Eastern Partnership region, SDGs clusters and the ideas for the EaP region-specific means of implementation is available at the 2019 UN Development Programme report "[The Eastern Partnership and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Pathways towards Transformation](#)".



SDG Goal 1 "End Poverty in All Its Forms Everywhere"

The Eastern Partnership is not immediately oriented on reducing poverty in the region. However, it exerts indirect an indirect influence on the reduction of poverty through the following activities (the list below is not comprehensive, and only contains the recent examples of the EaP's contribution to poverty reduction)

- The support for small and medium-size enterprises (SMEs) in the region through the improvement of their access to market and finance, including the provision of loans, as well as technical assistance (trainings and consulting)

Table 2. EU4 Business Statistics

EU4Business Statistics (2009-2017)*

Country	EU Support, in EUR	Supplementary funds attracted, EUR	Number of SMEs supported	Number of jobs created
Ukraine	156 million	189 million	1700	5900
Moldova	47 million	194 million	4600	2600
Georgia	69 million	882 million	37800	10300
Belarus	24 million	71 million	900	3900
Armenia	37 million	417 million	13300	2500
Azerbaijan	14 million	207 million	11300	3000

* The figures were retrieved from the official website of the EU4Business programme, <https://eu4business.eu/>.

- **EU macro-financial assistance to associated neighbors** amid the COVID-19 pandemic: 1.2 billion for Ukraine, 150 million for Georgia and 100 million for Moldova



SDG Goal 2 "End Hunger, Achieve Food Security and Improved Nutrition, and Promote Sustainable Agriculture"

The EaP serves as a framework for food security and agriculture projects in the region, such as

- The [European Neighbourhood Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development \(ENPARD\)](#), implemented in Georgia since 2013 that includes:

Support for the development of a Government Strategy on Rural Development, as well as the support for diversifying economic activities in the rural areas	The promotion of European food safety and quality standards, and the relevant inspection and control procedures	Direct support to pilot rural development measures in the areas of Adjara and Abkhazia
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SDG Goal 3 “Ensure Healthy Lifestyle and Promote Well-Being at All Ages”

Health was hardly present among the ENP/EaP priorities before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. The recent example of the EU’s health-related initiatives in the region is the [EU Solidarity for Health Initiative](#) (2020-2022, budget: EUR 35 million, EU contribution: EUR 30 million), aimed to (i) ensure the effective, rapid and well-coordinated EaP countries’ response to the pandemic and (ii) strengthen the partner countries’ national capacity to cope with the public health emergencies.



SDG Goal 4 “Ensure Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education and Promote Lifelong Learning Opportunities for All”

The EU flagship initiatives to support quality education in the EaP region include:

- The [Eastern Partnership European School](#) in Tbilisi that offers scholarships to students from the EaP region to obtain the International Baccalaureate diploma;
- Various [Erasmus+](#) initiatives, allowing for both building the capacity of higher educational institutions in Ukraine, and students’ and researchers in- and outgoing mobility;
- The novel [EaP Connect](#) (2020-2025) initiative that works to reduce the digital divide in education and science and strengthen the national educational and research networks.



SDG Goal 5 “Achieve Gender Equality and Empower Women and Girls”

In 2020, the EU launched its first ever regional programme to promote gender equality in EaP countries, titled [“EU 4 Gender Equality: Together Against Gender Stereotypes and Gender-Based Violence”](#) (budget: 7 875 000 EUR). The programme seeks to challenge structural gender barriers and norms, increase men’s participation in the exercise of domestic and parental responsibilities and conduct preventive work with the potential perpetrators of gender-based violence.



SDG Goal 6. “Ensure Availability and Sustainable Management of Water and Sanitation for All”

The [EU Water Initiative Plus \(EUWI+\)](#) aims at improving the water resources management at the EaP countries amid the focus on Neighbours’ environmental and climate resilience in the EaP “20 Deliverables for 2020”. The key support instruments, utilized by the project, include regulations, dialogue

(i.e. with the involvement of citizens and civil society organizations), knowledge improvement, raising awareness and novel technical solutions.



SDG Goal 7.
“Ensure Access to Affordable, Reliable, Sustainable, and Modern Energy for All”

The implementation of the Goal 7 in the EaP region is being supported via the [EU4Energy initiative](#) (2016-2021). The initiative succeeds the successful [INOGATE](#) (1996-2016) energy cooperation programme that covered the EU and the countries of the Baltic and Black Seas. The EU4Energy initiative promotes the attainment of Goal in three ways:

The enhancement of energy data capabilities and energy data collection and monitoring	Assisting in the evidence-based policy-making	Technical assistance in the domain of energy infrastructure investments
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SDG Goal 8.
“Promote Sustained, Inclusive and Sustainable Economic Growth, Full and Productive Employment and Decent Work For All”

For the examples of the EaP’s contribution to the attainment of Goal 8, see: Goal 1.



SDG Goal 9.
“Build Resilient Infrastructure, Promote Inclusive and Sustainable Industrialization and Foster Innovation”

The relevant examples of the EaP Goal 9-oriented action include:

The previously mentioned [EaP Connect initiative](#) (2020-2025) that fosters industrialization and innovation through the elimination of the digital divide and better logistics for educational and research networks.

The EaP countries’ involvement in the [Horizon 2020 programme](#), facilitating the cooperation on research and innovation throughout the world. The declared substantive priorities for research and innovation include health, demographic change and wellbeing, environment and climate, clean and efficient energy.



SDG Goal 10.
“To Reduce Inequality Within and Among Countries”

The EaP does not provide for specific action, oriented on reducing socio-economic inequality. Yet, it can foster the reduction of inequality through the contribution to other SDGs (e.g. Goal 1- “Poverty Reduction”, Goal 4 – “Quality Education”, Goal 5 – “Gender Equality” and Goal 8 “Economic Growth and Decent Jobs”).



SDG Goal 11.
“Make Cities and Human Settlements Inclusive, Safe, Resilient and Sustainable”

There is no region-wide urban development EU project in the EaP, yet such a component is salient in various EU's bilateral initiatives (e.g. the [Georgia Urban Development and Reconstruction Fund](#) (2016-ongoing, EU contribution – EUR 100 million).



SDG Goal 12.
“Ensure Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns”

The support for green practices in the EaP is part to the EU-Neighbours cooperation in terms of the [EU4Environment](#) programme, aiming, inter alia, at facilitating greener decision-making and the development of circular economy and new green growth opportunities.



SDG Goal 13
“Take Urgent Action to Combat Climate Change and its Impacts”

The [EU4Climate](#) programme (2018-2022) seeks to contribute to the mitigation of climate change in the EaP region. The programme supports partner countries' capacity to implement the Paris Agreement (within the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), enhance the transparency of climate action and emissions and mainstream climate considerations in various sectors, such as trade, transport, energy and agriculture.



SDG Goal 14
“Conserve and Sustainably Use the Oceans, Seas and Marine Resources for Sustainable Development”

While there is currently no umbrella project on marine resources in the EaP, the Goal 14 is being addressed through the [EU4Climate](#) programme. In information terms, the attainment of the Goal 14 is supported via the implementation of the [Shared Environmental Information System \(SEIS\)](#) in the EaP region.



SDG Goal 15.
“Protect, Restore and Promote Sustainable Use Terrestrial Ecosystems, Sustainably Manage Forests, Combat Desertification, and Halt and Reverse Land Degradation and Biodiversity Loss”

The attainment of the Goal 15 is facilitated through the EU's support to the EaP countries' participation in the [Emerald Network of Nature Protection Sites](#) under the Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats and, as in the case of the water resources – via the implementation of the [Shared Environmental Information System \(SEIS\)](#) in the EaP region.



SDG Goal 16.

“Promote Peaceful and Inclusive Societies for Sustainable Development, Provide Access to Justice for All and Build Effective, Accountable and Inclusive Institutions at All Levels”

The EU actively engages in building institutions and promoting justice in the EaP region via the financial and technical assistance projects, such as, for instance:

The [PRAVO-JUSTICE](#) project in Ukraine that seeks to develop the “joint vision of justice as a chain”, support the bottom-up approach to the judicial reform, promote leadership and integrity within the High Council of Justice and ensure a stronger property rights protection system.

The [EU4Justice](#) programme in Georgia, including, amongst others, the revision of the internal processes and regulations at the High Council of Justice and the approximation of the judicial decisions with respect to the EU acquis.

The [“Consolidation of the Justice System in Armenia”](#) scheme, offering grants to projects that aim at strengthening the independence, efficiency, quality and public accountability of the judicial system in Armenia.

The noteworthy example of the EU’s broader institution-building activities in the region are its public administration support projects, such as:

The [Support to Public Administration Reform Process in Moldova](#), aimed strengthening its institutional and human resources capacity, as well as improve public administration’s overall effectiveness, efficiency and accountability.

The [Support to Comprehensive Reform of Public Administration in Ukraine](#) (EU4Par) project has similar objectives, and functions based on the Ukrainian government’s PAR Strategy and Implementation Plan for 2016-2020.



SDG Goal 17. “Strengthen the Means of Implementation and Revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development”

The EaP’s contribution to various aspects of the Goal 17 can be presented in the following table:

Table 3. EaP’s Contribution to Various Aspects of the Goal 17

Aspect of the Goal 17	EaP
Multi-stakeholder partnerships for sustainable development	Embracing both the multilateral and bilateral tracks and engaging various actors (parliaments, business, civil society), the EaP itself can be regarded as a multi-stakeholder partnership for sustainable development, with four key semi-institutionalized thematic platforms: Democracy, good governance and stability (Goal 16) Economic integration and convergence with EU sectoral policy (Goal 1, Goal 8) Energy security (Goal 7) and Contacts between people (support for various Goals, e.g. Goal 4)
Capacity development	The EU’s unilateral support for numerous capacity-building measures in terms of the above programmes and projects, e.g. for scientists and education professionals, civil servants, judges and the law enforcement agencies’ staff
Trade and Finance	The facilitation of trade and the movement of capital via the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (DCFTAs) with Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia

Aspect of the Goal 17	EaP
Science and Technology	The Eastern partners' engagement in Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020 initiatives, as well as the support for the EaP Connect.

In a nutshell, the EaP (to a different extent) contributes to all the SDGs. Based on the mapping above, the next section presents the assessment of the EaP as a development policy initiative, with a focus on the views and perceptions of Ukrainian stakeholders.

EaP Assessment: Ukrainian Stakeholders' Perspectives

a) Relevance (Input)

The first step towards the analysis of policy relevance is the mapping of the policy's stakeholders and clients (beneficiaries). On the most general level, the EaP stakeholders include the EU and its Member States, and EaP countries, namely, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Belarus, Armenia and Azerbaijan. The perspectives from stakeholders within the Member States and the EaP countries are to be also taken into account to ensure the high quality and sufficiently detailed nature of the analysis. The stakeholders from Member States and the EaP countries, involved in the EaP implementation and (to a limited extent) to its making are:

- Parliamentarians;
- Civil society;
- Business representatives

Business representatives and civil society also often act as policy's beneficiaries. Besides, the beneficiaries include youth (predominantly, from the EaP countries) and the general public.

Countries as Stakeholders

Assessing the EaP relevance, the interviewees, coming from the EU, first of all, underlined **the historically-driven differentiation in the ENP's relevance to EU countries (regardless of whether we speak about the policy as a whole or its development dimension)**. While France, Italy, Spain and Portugal are more active in the EU's Southern Neighbourhood, the EaP is reported to be more relevant for Poland, the Baltic countries, Germany and Sweden (Interviewees 1 and 3). Moreover, while the EU Member States' concerns are to a great extent similar in relation to both the Eastern and Southern Neighbourhoods, a noteworthy difference concerns the EU future enlargement and the perspective on the ENP's development dimension. The Member States, concentrating on the Southern Neighbourhood mostly view the ENP as a means to develop the EU's stronger relations to the Mediterranean and be able to counterbalance the influence of Arab countries (Interviewee 3). In contrast, the EaP proponents have long been regarding the initiative as a means to "stretch" EU integration further to the East (Interviewee 3; see also Baltag and Romanyshyn, 2018). Therefore, since the launch of the initiative, Poland, Sweden and the Baltic countries have been more in favour of supplementing the EaP with a membership perspective, compared to the 'Southern bloc', and invested more in the bilateral development cooperation initiatives in the East. Hence, as argued by Baltag and Romanyshyn (2018), the ENP/EaP relevance for the EU Member States has been long marked by the dichotomy between the objectives/ envisaged contribution to stabilization (Southern Neighbourhood, as emphasized by France, Spain, Italy and Portugal) and democratization (in the East).

The crisis in and around Ukraine, including the annexation of Crimea has significantly changed this situation, as both the Eastern and Southern dimensions of the policy started to be viewed as stability-oriented (Interviewee 1). The focus on security and stability, and the security-development nexus is especially pronounced in the [2015 ENP Review](#) that is regarded by interviewees as having increased the EaP relevance for EU Member States in three aspects:

- The evolution of the ENP/EaP as a stability-oriented initiative, whereby the measures to foster political and economic development are inextricably linked to the objectives of security, stability and preventing radicalization;
- The introduction of the security measures to be supported both in the South and the East (e.g. security sector reforms, measures to tackle terrorism and organized crime, measures against cybercrime);
- An immediate recognition of the need for stronger policy relevance for both the Member States and ENP/EaP countries and the suggestions as to how to achieve it (e.g. greater flexibility to enable

the EU and partners to address changing needs; stronger differentiation according to partners' priorities and facilitating ownership) (Interviewees 1-3).

The EU representatives in Ukraine agree that, while the 2015 ENP Review increased the ENP/EaP relevance for EU countries, it produced much policy inertia as to the evolution of the ENP/EaP political dimension (this finding is in line with Crombois, 2019). The objectives of compensating for policy inertia and increasing the initiative's relevance for EaP countries and their citizens underlie the focus on specific development initiatives under the [EaP 20 Deliverables for 2020](#). Such initiatives encompassed, for instance, new means to support SMEs, connectivity initiatives (e.g. the extension of the Trans-European Transport Networks), support to the environmental protection and adaptation to climate change and new youth programmes (Interviewees 1-5). The focus on specific development initiatives and delivering tangible benefits for citizens is sustained in the [2020 Joint Communication "Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020: Reinforcing Resilience – an Eastern Partnership that delivers for all"](#).

Hence, on the country level, we witness the parallel movement towards the strengthening of the EaP's development dimension and the initiative's relevance for EU Member States, as subjectively assessed by the EU representatives in Ukraine. Besides, a crucial trend that shapes the EaP evolution has been the tightening of the security-development nexus and the aspiration to deliver specific benefits for citizens.

The situation, however, looks differently, if we consider it from the standpoint of Ukrainian stakeholders (the findings below shall not be extrapolated to the cases of other EaP countries). When discussing the EaP relevance, they, first of all, emphasize the political and integration dimensions of the initiative, hardly regarding it as a development-oriented one (Interviewees 6, 8 and 9). In this vein, the interviewees report the lowering of the EaP's political ambitions and point to the EU's increasing caution about the deepening of the political ties to the region (Interviewees 6-8). The interviewees' opinions as to the relevance of the EaP's development dimension and its linkage to the political one considerably vary. Some of the respondents agreed that, amid the geopolitical challenges, development cooperation with the EU, oriented on the strengthening of Ukraine's political system and economy, shall be prioritized. This group of the respondents believes that development cooperation with the EU is relevant, as it delivers benefits in both the short-term and long-term perspectives. The latter's benefits, such as an increase in the competitiveness of Ukraine's economy, are, in turn, viewed as conducive to Ukraine's European integration in the future (Interviewees 5, 9, 10, 11). Others, however, argued that development cooperation shall not be used to camouflage the lack of political progress (Interviewees 6, 7, 8, 12). In the opinion of this group, the EaP's focus on development cooperation bears not only opportunities but noteworthy threats for Ukraine. Such threats include, *inter alia*, losing the momentum for strengthening the EU-Ukraine integrative ties beyond the AA and giving an impetus to the 'disillusionment with European integration' discourse, promoted by the pro-Russian forces in Ukraine (Interviewees 6, 7, 8, 12).

Therefore, while the EaP is perceived as having become more relevant in the Member States, the Ukrainian country perspective, as articulated by different groups' representatives (government officials, civil society activists and academics), is marked by the divergence of perspective. This prevents us from unambiguously assessing the EaP's development dimension as relevant in the eyes of Ukrainian stakeholders.

Stakeholders' and Beneficiaries' Perspectives

Due to the time and capacity constraints, the respondents did not include Members of Parliament (MPs) and business representatives from EU countries, as well as the general public from the EU and Ukraine. Hence, the analysis below is to a significant extent based on the perceptions, voiced by the respondents, and secondary sources.

The inter-parliamentary cooperation, exercised in terms of the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly (established in 2011 in Brussels), primarily aims to accelerate the EU-EaP political association. Besides, its objectives deal with facilitating further economic integration between the EU and Eastern European Neighbours and strengthening the region-to-region cooperation (European Parliament, n.d). As noted by EU-affiliated respondents in Ukraine, the EaP is regarded as a solid and relevant foundation for the EU-

Neighbourhood inter-parliamentary cooperation and the facilitation of the AA's implementation by the parliaments (Interviewees 1-3). Members of EU countries' parliaments are reported to consider that there are still many cooperation opportunities between the EU and EaP countries, even if no significant steps are taken to upgrade the ENP/EaP political dimension (Interviewees 1-3). Hence, the primary focus on development and stabilization is accepted and regarded as relevant among the EU MPs. Ukrainian MPs, involved in the inter-parliamentary cooperation with the EU, are, however, dissatisfied with such a focus and point to the need for a stronger ENP/EaP political dimension (Interviewees 7-8). When asked about the relevance of the EU development initiatives in the region, the MPs assess it as insufficient due to two reasons: (i) the initiatives' lacking linkage to the EaP political dimension (no clear criteria for obtaining a membership perspective) and (ii) the lack of impact on social/living standards – one of the strongest concerns for the region in general and Ukraine in particular.

In contrast to the parliamentarians, Ukrainian civil society (that benefits much from the EU support), subjectively assesses the EaP's current stabilization and development focus as relevant (Interviewees 10, 14, 18). The respondents acknowledge the threat of disillusionment, stemming from the lack of political progress in the EU-EaP relations. They, nonetheless, believe that the step-by-step EU-EaP rapprochement in terms of development cooperation is the best solution amid the current geopolitical situation (Interviewees 10, 14, 18). Besides, the Ukrainian civil society respondents report the improved connections to and cooperation with EU civil society and the latter's steady interest in the EaP and Ukrainian affairs (Interviewees 10, 14, 18).

Both the EU and Ukrainian business representatives are satisfied with the opportunities, provided for by the AA/DCFTA, and agree that the DCFTA is a powerful engine for Ukraine's development (Interviewees 1-3, 13 and 15). In this vein, the respondents underlined the particular value of the EU sectoral approach to reforms in unveiling the DCFTA's potential, in general, and its potential for SMEs' development, in particular. This view corresponds to the recent scholarly insights into the best practices of the EU's assistance to Ukraine after the Euromaidan (e.g. Wolczuk/Žeruolis, 2018; Rabinovych, 2019). Though regarding the EaP development dimension as relevant, the EU and Ukrainian business representatives point to the challenge of quickly re-orienting Ukrainian exports to the EU market and stress ambitious further perspectives of the AA/DCFTA to be unveiled (Interviewees 1-3, 13 and 15).

Divergent views as to the relevance of the EaP development dimension are traceable among the general public. In Ukraine, the general public is reported to link the EaP, in general, and its development dimension to immediate benefits in terms of the quality of life (Interviewees 1-3; 10; 14). Consequently, the toughening macroeconomic situation nurtures skepticism as to the European vector, thus, decreasing the relevance of any EU-led initiatives for Ukrainians. According to the [recent surveys by the "New Europe" think tank in Kyiv that polled over 4000 EU citizens in Poland, France, Germany and Italy](#), 55 percent of respondents support Ukraine's EU membership. It can be assumed that the membership proponents would most likely support the EaP development, stabilization and integration agenda in Ukraine.

In a nutshell, the relevance of the EaP development dimension is marked by mixed accounts. The EU representatives report the growing intra-EU consensus as to the EaP design, while the policy itself becomes increasingly stability-oriented and geopolitically constrained. For Ukrainian stakeholders, the EaP is a political, rather than a development initiative. Therefore, the lack of significant political progress in the EU-Ukraine relations significantly decreases the relevance of the EaP as such. Business and civil society both in the EU and in Ukraine are the key supporters of the EaP development agenda, while Ukrainian general public can be regarded as the strongest skeptic.

b) Cohesion

Existing scholarly works on ENP/EaP performance demonstrate that cohesion has long been the policy's weak point, especially when it comes to Member States' security and foreign policy interests (e.g. Baltag and Romanyshyn, 2018). The lack of vertical coherence was immediately linked to the policy's ineffectiveness (e.g. Kostanyan, et al., 2013; Parkes/Sobjak, 2014). Besides, the existing works pointed to the insufficient "in and between the different ENP policy objectives, instruments and methodologies"

(Kostanyan, et al., 2013, p.119). As Kostanyan, et al. (2013) pointed out, “different ENP instruments do not mutually reinforce the various ENP objectives” (p.119).

Our analysis shows that the Ukraine crisis and the need for a strong response to it from the EU considerably reinforced the cohesion of the EaP, in general, and its development dimension, in particular, due to four key factors.

Firstly, the EU and Member States’ response to the Ukraine crisis has been marked by both the Union’s and Member States’ effort to bring together all available joint instruments and capacities and build synergies between them. The interviewees, representing EU missions and projects in Ukraine, agreed that the establishment of the **Support Group for Ukraine (SGUA) by the President of the European Commission** in April 2014 has promoted the cohesion between the different aspects of the EU and Member States’ crisis response. This response has included the sanctions against Russia in connection to its annexation of Crimea and aggression in Eastern Ukraine, sectoral support to the implementation of the EU-Ukraine AA and extensive state-building measures in Ukraine (Rabinovych, 2019). Thereby the SGUA has been playing a prominent role in coordinating the EU’s and Member States’ policies and development cooperation efforts vis-à-vis Ukraine, representing the EU and Member States in the relations with other donors (e.g. the UN, USA, Canada, Japan) (Interviewees 1-3).

Vertical coordination between the EU and Member States as well as with other donors has also improved due to the introduction of the new Ukrainian-government-led donor coordination structures (Interviewees 1-3, 7-8). It has been only in 2020 when the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine opted for the establishment of the Directorate for the Coordination of International Technical Assistance within the structure of its Secretary. The Directorate serves as a key support unit for the three-level coordination system, aiming to bring together all donor institutions in Ukraine, including the EU and Member States. The system is comprised of:

- The **High-Level Forum “Partnership for Development”**, chaired by the Prime Minister of Ukraine and aimed at discussing the reforms’ path and defining reform strategies. The Forum’s participants include the international financial institutions (e.g. the World Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD)), international organizations (the UN, the Council of Europe); the EU and bilateral donors, incl. EU Member States (e.g. Denmark, Lithuania, Germany, Poland, Finland) and the non-Member States (e.g. the USA, Canada, Turkey, Japan, Switzerland).
- The **Strategic Platform**, co-chaired by the authorized representative of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, the UN System Coordinator and the Head of the EU Delegation of Ukraine. The Platform exercises the strategic coordination of international technical assistance based on the national reform priorities.
- **Sectoral working groups**, aimed at the regular and dialogue and coordination between the executive and international partners.

Alongside this, both the EU Member States’ vertical coordination and the coordination with international donors has been reinforced by the **creation of reform-specific advisory groups**. This statement can be exemplified by the Donor Board On Decentralization Reform in Ukraine. The Board is the coordination platform, enabling the Ministry for Communities and Territories, the donor agencies’ and international organizations’ representatives to build synergies through regular dialogue and coordination. The Board’s activities are strategized via a Common Results Framework (CRF) that sets specific targets for various working groups (e.g. on administrative-territorial reform and decentralization legal framework; local self-government finances and budgeting; local democracy and the development of direct democracy).

In turn, the interviewees attribute stronger horizontal coherence of the EaP to the confluence of three factors:

- The EU's commitment to the SDGs and the 'internal restructuring' of the EaP goals, priorities and instruments in line with the Agenda 2030 and the SDGs (this finding can be indirectly confirmed by the mapping of the EaP development dimension based on the SDGs);
- The orientation on stabilization in line with the 2015 ENP Review and
- The application of the sectoral approach to reform support in terms of the EU response to the Ukraine crisis (Interviewees 1-3, 10, 14 and 18).

There are, however, several limitations that still require the EU and Eastern Partners' attention and some political creativity. Firstly, although the EU is committed to the SDGs, the ENP/EaP lacks structuring and reporting in line with the SDGs (in contrast to the EU development policy and the 2019 [EU report on Policy Coherence for Development](#)). Secondly, the ENP/EaP orientation on stabilization is not in any case a panacea against the 'stability dilemma', often referred to in literature as a challenge to horizontal coherence in the ENP/EaP context (Nilsson and Silander, 2016; Wolfschwenger, 2019). Thirdly, innovative 'early warning' mechanisms are needed to ensure the sustainability of donor engagement and prevent reforms' backsliding.

Ultimately, the Ukraine crisis gave a strong impetus to a more cohesive EU and Member States' action in the Eastern Neighbourhood. Horizontal coherence was additionally reinforced by the EU's commitment to be a frontrunner in the SDGs' implementation. The cohesion of the EaP development dimension can be further improved by the stronger alignment with the SDGs, an account of the democracy-stability dilemma amid the strive for stabilization and concrete action against reforms' backsliding.

c) Local Ownership

Local ownership of development efforts is a debated issue in many contexts worldwide, and the EaP countries are hardly an exception. In this vein, Petrova and Delcour (2020) argue that, despite the EU's recent discursive turn to local ownership, the ENP/EaP dynamics is characterized by strong path dependency and, therefore, an emphasis on approximation to the EU policies. Subsequently, the authors find 'the local' to be under strain in the ENP/EaP context and call for a stronger role for partners in the agenda-setting (Petrova/Delcour, 2020). The interviewees generally agreed with these findings, yet pointed to several peculiarities and developments in the EaP context, illustrative of the policy's potential to bring about stronger ownership (Interviewees 1-3, 10, 14 and 18).

First of all, the EaP has initially had the institutional structure, conducive to the inclusion of various stakeholders. This can be illustrated by the EaP's initial combination of the bilateral and multilateral policy tracks. The latter is specifically designated to facilitate cooperation between the EaP countries and promote the exchange of experience and the elaboration of innovative approaches to development and reforms. Moreover, the EaP's institutional structure encompasses several *fora* for the engagement of policy stakeholders and clients, such as the Euronest (bringing together the MPs from the European Parliament, the Member States' national parliaments and the EaP countries' parliaments); the EaP Civil Society Forum and the EaP Business Forum. The interviewees reported positive experiences about the participation in the former two structures, i.e. the Euronest and the EaP Civil Society Forum (Interviewees 7-8, 10, 14 and 18). Another argument, speaking in favour of the stronger local ownership in terms of the EaP, is the initiative's in-depth thematic focus, requiring the partner countries to present national priorities in a highly detailed manner and be able to defend them appropriately (Interviewees 7-8, 10, 14 and 18). For instance, the EaP Civil Society Forum includes four thematic platforms ("Strengthening Institutions and Good Governance", "Economic Development and Market Opportunities", "Connectivity, Energy Efficiency, Environment and Climate Change" and "Mobility and People-to-People Contacts"). Each platform encompasses three panels, concentrating on more specific issues, such as the Panel on the Rule of Law (Platform 1 "Strengthening Institutions and Good Governance") or the Panel on Research and Innovation (Platform 4 "Mobility and People-to-People Contacts"). As indicated above, the thematic platforms' and panels' narrow focus gives stakeholders (in our case, the civil society) an impetus to keep themselves informed about the status-quo

and newest developments in specific, narrowly-formulated fields and develop respective positions (Interviewees 10, 14 and 18).

Secondly, the respondents noted that the EaP also fosters stakeholders' engagement via the institutional mechanisms, provided for in the AAs/DCFTAs. Under the EU-Ukraine AA/DCFTA, one can mention the Parliamentary Association Committee (PAC), bringing together the members of the European Parliament and the Verkhovna Rada (Parliament) of Ukraine, and the EU-Ukraine Civil Society Forum. Moreover, while the EU's trade policy becomes increasingly politicized, a stronger role in formulating and presenting national priorities starts to be attributed to the Domestic Advisory Groups (DAGs) (Interviewee 10). DAGs also serve as a means "to connect citizens to trade issues". Notably, the DAGs are presented in literature as deeply contested by the civil society members in various contexts (Potjomkina, et al., 2020). Nonetheless, the Ukrainian civil society representatives point to their potentially stronger role in promoting local ownership, provided the participating NGOs acquire additional support (so that not only the pro-EU NGOs can participate in the DAGs) (Interviewees 10, 14).

Thirdly, an important institutional driver of local ownership of the EaP has been the SGUA that, *inter alia*, focuses on gathering and systemizing the local knowledge on Ukraine. This SGUA's function responds to the widely spread previous concern as to the EU's failure to consider local needs and conditions in the ENP/EaP (Kostanyan, et al., 2013).

Fourthly, apart from the available institutional pathways for strengthening the local ownership, the interviewees pointed to the stakeholders' increasing interest and engagement in the strategy-building activities at the national level. A noteworthy example, in this vein, is the development of the National Economic Strategy 2030 that brings together civil society, business representatives and government officials (Interviewee 17). The Strategy is based on the multi-stakeholder audit of Ukraine's economic policy over the period of almost 30 years. It highlights the challenges, the ways to address them and the vision for numerous economic sectors in Ukraine, such as agriculture, industry, energy, transport, services, as well as the rule of law and regulatory environment. The key challenge the interviewees point to with respect to the National Economic Strategy 2030 and other recent development strategies is the lack of alignment with the development strategies, produced by international donors, and the analysis of the donors' potential role and coordination in strategy implementation (Interviewees 10, 17-18)

Alongside this challenge pertaining to both the cohesion and local ownership criteria, the interviewees pointed to several further obstacles to local ownership. Foremost, Ukraine' civil society, working on European integration issues, got highly professionalized and it is challenging for newly established NGOs or the grassroots movement to contribute to the shaping of the EaP development dimension. Although the European integration in the regions has been recently determined as the Government's top priority, regional NGOs are reported to lack the capacity needed to effectively participate in the EaP-related agenda-setting, communication and advocacy activities (Interviewees 10, 17-18). Another capacity-related obstacle to local ownership deals with funding and aid dependence: donor funding remains central to ensure pro-reform government officials', civil society activists' and academics' contribution to the EaP agenda, including the development-related aspect.

In sum, although the EaP offers an array of pathways to foster stakeholder participation in the EaP "making" and implementation, the challenges pertaining to inclusiveness, capacity and funding prevent one from assessing local ownership in the EaP context as high.

d) (Aid) Effectiveness

Similar to the local ownership case, the effectiveness of the ENP has been constantly assessed in the literature as low, virtually regardless of the applied indicators (e.g. Kostanyan, et. al., 2013; Koenig, 2016). The key argument, shared by scholars, is that, following the decade of the ENP implementation, the Neighbourhood turned from the 'ring of friends' to the 'ring of fire' (Koenig, 2016; Kouli, 2019). This means that the EU failed to spread the security and prosperity benefits, brought about by the 2004 enlargement, to the Eastern (as well as Southern) Neighbourhood and, hence, did not fulfill the ENP's initial policy goals (as set by the 2004 ENP Strategy Paper).

The EaP's initial policy goals, formulated in the [2008 Commission's Communication "Eastern Partnership"](#) are close to the ones stipulated in the 2004 ENP Strategy Paper. Yet a more thorough analysis enables a researcher to distinguish several discursive differences in the policy goals' formulation that may impact the analysis of the EaP effectiveness. Firstly, the EaP has initially been not only about "the stability, security and prosperity of the EU, partners and indeed the entire continent". It should have also brought ["a lasting political message of EU solidarity"](#), alongside additional, tangible support for their [Eastern Neighbours'] democratic and market-oriented reforms and the consolidation of their statehood and territorial integrity". In bilateral terms, the key EaP goals in bilateral terms have been the development of new contractual relations through the conclusion of the AAs, gradual integration in the EU economy based on the DCFTAs, stronger citizens' mobility (visa-free regime), energy security, as well as the support to socio-economic transformation in the Neighbourhood. Although the majority of the EaP objectives are formulated as the political or economic ones, virtually all the above objectives pertain to various SDGs, ranging from the Goal 8 "Decent Work and Economic Growth" to the Goal 16 "Promote Peaceful and Inclusive Societies for Sustainable Development, Provide Access to Justice for All and Build Effective, Accountable and Inclusive Institutions at All Levels".

An insight into the EaP's ability to achieve its initial objectives demonstrates partial effectiveness.

The initiative failed to deliver more in security and stability terms, compared to the end of the last decade (2008-2009, start of the policy implementation). The Eastern Neighbourhood suffers from the Russia-supported protracted conflicts and the challenge of reintegrating de-facto states, such as the Donetsk and Luhansk "People's Republics" ("DPR" and "LPR") in Ukraine, Transnistria in Moldova and Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia. Among the proponents of offensive realism, the Ukraine conflict is even considered as having been provoked by the EU's intensified engagement with the region in EaP terms (e.g. Mearsheimer, 2014). Clearly, the lasting conflicts and de-facto states' existence exert a negative influence on economic development and prosperity in partner countries. Such an influence is, for instance, underlined in [Ukraine's 2020 Voluntary National Review of progress towards the achievement of the SDGs](#). Although [Ukraine's GDP per capita demonstrated the steady growth tendency in 2016-2019](#), it did not achieve the pre-conflict rate in 2019, and a decrease is expected in 2020 due to the corona-crisis. It is, however, noteworthy that, discussing the economic and environmental aspects of sustainable development in Ukraine, the 2020 [Voluntary National Review](#) links many of the successes with the AA/DCFTA implementation. In view of our respondents, representing both the EU and Ukraine, the EaP did not result in a considerable increase in Ukrainians' prosperity, in general, while benefiting specific groups (e.g. businesses that export to the EU, pro-EU civil society groups, academics, engaged in the EU-funded projects) (Interviewees 1-6; Interviewees 17-18). The perceived reasons behind the EaP's failure to contribute to the prosperity dimension of development are three-fold. Firstly, as noted above, the conflict and related losses /missed opportunities definitely slowed down Ukraine's economic growth. Secondly, an increase in the volumes of Ukraine's exports to the EU shall not itself be equated to an increase in prosperity, as Ukraine's market reorientation from the one of Russia and other former Soviet countries to the EU market is being associated with considerable costs. Thirdly, despite encompassing many themes, the EaP does not have a pronounced social dimension and, hence, hardly brings new opportunities to the poor (Interviewees 1-6; Interviewees 17-18). Thus, prosperity and the support to socio-economic transformation in Ukraine and other partner countries shall remain the pivotal EaP focus.

When it comes to the "lasting political message of EU solidarity" and tangible support for reforms, the situation looks much more optimistic.

The scale and complexity of the EU response to the Ukraine crisis brightly exemplifies the EU's political solidarity with Ukraine, despite the ["integration without membership"](#) framework of relations. A particular challenge for the EU, in this vein, has been to sustain the Member States' consensus as to the sanctions against the Russian Federation and the continuity of the EU's sanctions policy is regarded as a remarkable example of the EU foreign policy integration (e.g. Portela, et al., 2020). The EU is also the largest reform-supporting donor in the associated neighborhood, with the reform agenda combining the support to the AAs/DCFTAs' implementation, state-building reforms and multilateral cooperation under the EaP umbrella (Interviewees 1-3). Besides, the EU managed to fulfill the whole spectrum of bilateral cooperation objectives in relation to the associated neighbors. The AAs were successfully concluded with Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia and are being implemented for already three years. The gradual economic integration of the EU's neighborhood is taking place within the framework of the DCFTAs. Energy security has been a crucial focus of the association relations of neighboring states of the EU. Despite the Ukraine crisis-related shocks of 2014 and 2015, [Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia have](#)

demonstrated steady progress towards energy security, linked to the AAs' implementation. Last but not least, the EU launched visa-free regime with associated neighbors to strengthen the mobility dimension of the EaP.

The literature and policy papers offer numerous understandings and operationalizations of aid effectiveness. Applying some of the suggested approaches is hardly possible in terms of this analysis, given the lack of access to the economic data. Therefore, the analysis below will focus on the (sub-)concepts of aid effectiveness, as suggested by the 2005 Paris Declaration, namely ownership, alignment and harmonization of aid policies, results and mutual accountability. According to the findings under the previous section, the EaP offers an array of institutional and substantial pathways to promote stakeholder participation, yet the ownership remains insufficient due to the inclusiveness-, capacity- and funding-related challenges. The alignment (with national reform strategies) is being also subjectively assessed as low, given the reported gap between the newly presented sustainable development strategies in Ukraine and the EaP (Interviewees 1-3). Moreover, the weakness of the EaP-national development strategies nexus can be substantiated by the lack of referrals to the EaP in the national development strategies (e.g. the National Economic Strategy 2030). The EaP becomes increasingly harmonized in both vertical and horizontal terms, as well as with respect to coordinating the EU's development efforts with further donors. As demonstrated above, the policy demonstrated partial effectiveness, with strongest challenges related to fostering security, stability and prosperity and a better account on political engagement, reforms' support, new contractual relations, energy security and mobility. Partners' mutual accountability can be assessed as growing (medium) amid the strengthening of Ukraine's aid coordination system but the persisting capacity challenges at the all-Ukrainian and ministry-specific levels (Interviewees 1-3)

In sum, the EaP can be assessed as partially effective, with the policy's initial security, stability and prosperity agenda being faced with the most severe challenges (additionally aggravated by the ongoing conflict and the socio-economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic). Conceptualized in terms of the 2005 Paris Declaration, the effectiveness of the EaP-related aid can be also assessed as partial, due to the deficiencies concerning ownership, alignment, policy's results and accountability. Promising trends were, however, revealed as to the harmonization and mutual accountability dimensions of aid effectiveness.

e) Impact

The implementation of the EaP, in general, and its development dimension, in particular, has impacted partner countries, including Ukraine, in multiple ways. It is worth noting once more that impact does not equate to effectiveness: the former analyzed various policy effects, including the unintended ones, while effectiveness signifies the attainment of policy goals. The analysis will include the trade and economic, sustainable development-related, political and legal effects of the EaP development initiatives.

Trade and Economic Effects

Amid the implementation of the DCFTA, the EU was Ukraine's largest trading partner in 2019; trade with the EU accounted for more than 40 percent of Ukraine's trade volume that year. Ukraine is ranked 19th among the EU's partners for exports, and 20th – for imports. The total EU-Ukraine trade reached the peak of EUR 43.3 bln in 2019; this figure is expected to become lower in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic challenge. In this vein, the EU representatives regard the average 20 percent increase of Ukraine's exports to the Union over the period from 2013 to 2018 as a success, given the numerousness and severity of challenges, faced by Ukraine (Interviewees 1-3). Among such challenges, the respondents, foremost, referred to the annexation of Crimea, the violent conflict and the loss of the government control over the Donbas basin (energy security challenge) (Interviewees 1-3). Additionally, the Interviewee 3 pointed to the negative global market trends, such as the decrease of commodity prices for goods Ukraine most commonly exports to the EU: metal, chemicals and grains. While Ukraine is progressing towards the fulfillment of its commitments under the DCFTA, the interviewees expect the revival of the EU-Ukraine trade after the pandemic is under control (Interviewees 1-3). Nevertheless, economic scholars warn both the EU and Ukraine about the potential overestimation of the welfare gains to be brought about by the DCFTA's implementation (e.g. Borowicz, 2017; Matuszak, 2018; Olekseyuk /Schürenberg-Frosch, 2019). The

empirical data analysis also enables us to distinguish several weaknesses and threats that prevent Ukraine from fully unveiling the DCFTA's potential as a development instrument:

- Low absolute rates and the ongoing decrease in Ukraine's exports of services, including the exports of computer, information and communication services (although Ukrainian cities are often referred to as "IT hubs");
- The shadow market challenge that makes it difficult to legalize the real volumes of services' exports;
- Investors' reluctance to enter the Ukrainian market due to the long-standing legacy of informality and the rule of law challenges (despite the EU rule of law promotion efforts, Ukraine's scores in the [World Justice Project \(WJP\)](#) and [Legatum Prosperity Indexes](#) have remained steadily low over the period from 2014 to 2020);
- Potential challenge to Ukraine's position at the gas transit market in case the Nord Stream 2 pipeline is finalized;
- The challenge to comply with the EU new environmental requirements to products in terms of the [European Green Deal](#) (the new EU strategy to achieve climate neutrality by 2050) (Interviewees 1, 3, 4, 17 and 18)

Sustainable Development

The [Agenda 2030](#) suggests conceptualizing sustainable development as comprising the economic, environmental and social dimensions. The vast majority of the respondents regard Ukraine's participation in the EaP and the AA/DCFTA implementation as a crucial vehicle of the SDGs' implementation in Ukraine. This view is shared in Ukraine's [2020 Voluntary National Review of progress towards the achievement of the SDGs](#). In particular the [Review](#) has linked Ukraine's focus on European integration and its reorientation from the Russian market to the EU one to several successes pertaining to the Goal 8 "Economic Growth and Decent Jobs":

- The 2.9 percent GDP increase over the period from 2016 to 2019;
- The 0.9 percent decrease of unemployment over the period from 2015 to 2019;
- An increase in the share of the value added against SMEs' production costs by 6.3 percent (from 58.1 percent in 2015 to 64.3 percent in 2019);
- An increase in the number of individuals, employed by SMEs, by half a million;
- The improvement of Ukraine's positions in the World Bank's Doing Business Rating and the Global Innovation Index.

Once again, the negative DCFTA's effect that needs to be mentioned deals with the losses from the reorientation of Ukraine's market to the Western ones. Moreover, some of the abovementioned successes (e.g. the tendency to the GDP growth and the reduction of unemployment) rates are expected to be "washed off" by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The EaP's and DCFTA's impact on business can, however, be considered as an achievement with long-term, structural effects, especially given the long history of command economy in Ukraine. The EaP's impact on the environmental and social aspects of sustainable development can be assessed as less salient. Although the DCFTA contains numerous commitments of Ukraine in the environmental domain and multiple environment- and climate-related projects are implemented in EaP terms, Ukraine's performance remains insufficient. As it can be seen in the "[Pulse of the Agreement](#)" system, the key challenges pertain to the domains of waste management, the protection of biodiversity, as well as the water resources and soil protection. Though touching upon some social issues (e.g. education, labour rights), the EaP's development dimension is not equipped to deal with the major social problems in Ukraine – low pensions, the insufficiently developed medical system and high housing prices (Interviewees 1-3; 10, 14 and 16).

Legal Effects

The EU emphasizes the legal dimension of strengthening its ties to associated neighborhood, based on its own "integration through law" path (Interviewee 1). The AA/DCFTA serves as the legal basis for the amendments to be made in the Ukrainian legislation and its approximation with the *acquis communautaire*. Various EaP programmes, in turn, provide the Ukrainian government and other involved stakeholders with technical assistance to implement the legislative changes. According to the data, available within the "[Pulse](#)

of the Agreement” system, Ukraine’s success as to legislative approximation can be summarized in the following table:

Table 4. Ukraine’s Progress towards the Implementation of the AA/DCFTA

Sector	Most successful	Least successful
Trade-related commitments	Technical barriers to trade (85%) Public procurement (83 %) Entrepreneurship (80%)	Transport, transport infrastructure, postal and courier services (34%) Financial sector (36%) Agriculture (38%)
Non-trade-related commitments	Political dialogue, national security and defense (87%) Justice, freedom and human rights (85%) Public finance management (68%)	Financial cooperation, countering fraud (24%) Science, technologies, innovation and space (43%)

In broader terms, the AA/DFTA implementation and Ukraine’s EaP participation inevitably promotes the convergence of the EU and Ukrainian legal spaces (Interviewees 1-3).

Political Effects

The EU’s efforts to strengthen the ties to the EaP countries have inevitably had profound political consequences for Ukraine and other countries in the region. Ukraine has economically and politically re-oriented from the Russian Federation and the CIS countries (Interviewees 1-3). In this vein, the ongoing crisis in and around Ukraine is referred to in literature as the culmination of the long-lasting geopolitical standoff over the “common neighborhood” of the EU and Russia (e.g. Casier, 2016; Raik, 2019). Furthermore, the EaP, in general, and its development dimension, in particular, inevitably influences Ukraine’s relations with further international partners, as the EU plays an active part in donor coordination in Ukraine. One particularly relevant example, in this respect, is Ukraine’s potential participation in the Chinese “One Belt, One Road” initiative, recently referred to as Ukraine’s foreign policy priority.

In a nutshell, the EaP, in general, and its development dimension have exerted a multi-aspect impact on Ukraine in trade and economic, sustainable development, legal and political terms. Although the EU-Ukraine AA/DCFTA has not yet generated considerable welfare gains, its implementation, coupled with development assistance under the EaP, has exerted a crucial, structural impact on business and innovation culture in Ukraine. Besides, the EaP implementation has led to the noticeable convergence between the EU and Ukrainian legal spaces – an inevitable process, accompanying Ukraine’s re-orientation from the Russian and CIS countries’ markets to the EU market. The re-orientation is traceable not only in trade and legal terms but also in the political domain. Ukraine’s participation in the EaP and EU assistance to Ukraine under this policy framework inevitably impacts Ukraine’s relations with other actual and potential donors, such as China.

f) Resilience

In policy analysis terms, resilience is predominantly associated with a policy’s flexibility, ability to effectively react or even transform itself in response to the changes in the external environment and its forward-looking quality.

The interviewees unanimously assessed the resilience of the EaP development dimension as high, substantiating the policy’s flexibility and adaptation ability by the following examples:

- Continued functioning of the EaP under strong differentiation, presupposing partner countries' divergent foreign policy interests and attitudes to the EU and EaP;
- The EU's ability to effectively respond to the Ukraine crisis and prevent further destabilization in the country following the annexation of Crimea and the outbreak of violent conflict in Ukraine:
 - Learning and the capability of combining and synergizing the integration and state-building aspects of the EU action in Ukraine;
 - The creation of the SGUA and taking the lead of the donor coalition in Ukraine
- The EU's application of unilateral trade concessions (autonomous trade measures) in 2014 and 2015 to help Ukraine sustain the shock of the change of government, the annexation of Crimea and Russian aggression in Eastern Ukraine. The EU's unilateral removal of 94.7% of tariffs on exports from Ukraine enabled Ukraine to increase its exports to the EU by 25% in the first half of 2014;
- The EaP's re-orientation on fostering stabilization, resilience and development amid the Ukraine crisis and the geopoliticization of the ENP/EaP;
- The EaP's self-transformation in response to the EU's commitment to be a frontrunner in the implementation of the SDGs;
- The gradual nature of processes under the EU-Ukraine AA/DCFTA:
 - Gradual tariff removal process under the DCFTA, with long transition periods, designed to help Ukrainian exporters adjust to changes;
 - Gradual legislative approximation, supported by numerous technical assistance projects;
 - The possibility of negotiations within the Association Council (Interviewees 1-18).

At the same time, the EaP may be challenged by the instances of inflexibility, stemming from the budgetary constraints, imperfect processes and lengthy bureaucratic procedures (Interviewees 1-3). The lack of local ownership and insufficient alignment with national strategies can also prevent the EaP from reacting to the partner countries' emerging needs accordingly (Interviewees 1-3).

The EaP's forward-looking nature is, in turn, being linked to:

- The EU-Ukraine joint path to the SDG's implementation, extensively supported by new EaP programmes, such as EU4Climate, EU4Environment and EU4Digital;
- The prospect of Ukraine's Single Market integration in three key domains: goods, services and capital;
- Digitalization and the prospect for developing the digital economy in Ukraine;
- The prospects to develop the circular economy in line with the EU Green Deal;
- The possibility to review the EU-Ukraine AA/DCFTA, deepen existing cooperation and add further disciplines;
- The EU's continuous capacity-building and civil society support efforts (Interviewees 1-18).

In turn, the respondents consider the EU's reluctance to deepen the political ties with associated neighbors, *inter alia*, grant them a membership perspective (e.g. Interviewees 7-8)

Concluding, the EaP is being regarded by both the EU and Ukrainian stakeholders as resilient, i.e. having demonstrated the ability to adapt to changes in the external environment, being continuously able to adapt/transform itself and marked by the forward-looking nature.

Discussion and Recommendations

The above analysis aimed at assessing the EaP as a development initiative, based on the example of Ukraine's participation in the EaP. The findings of the analysis can be presented in the tabular form:

Table 5. Stakeholders' Assessment of the EaP from a Development Standpoint in Ukraine

Criterion	Assessment	Commentaries
Relevance	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An increase in relevance for EU stakeholders with the initiative's focus on stabilization; A decrease in relevance for Ukrainian stakeholders, given their perceptions of the EaP as a political, rather than the development initiative.
Cohesion	Medium/high	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved vertical cohesion between the EU and Member States following the outbreak of the Ukraine crisis; Strong coordination with other international donors; Focus on SDGs' implementation; Sectoral approach to reform support; Limitations concerning horizontal coherence due to the lack of SDGs; operationalization; democracy-stability dilemma and the lack of action against reforms' backsliding.
Local ownership	Weak/medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Institutional pathways to foster inclusion and partner countries' stakeholders' participation; The challenges pertaining to inclusiveness, capacity and funding.
Effectiveness	Weak/medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reinforcing security, stability and prosperity in the EaP countries, including Ukraine, remains a challenge; Protracted conflicts in the Neighbourhood; The fulfillment of goals pertaining to the bilateral dimension of the EaP: new AAs/DCFTAs, reinforced energy security and stronger mobility.
Aid effectiveness	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Insufficient local ownership and alignment with national development strategies; Partial attainment of policy objectives; Mutual accountability reinforced by the new donor coordination system in Ukraine, yet challenged by the capacity constraints.
Impact	Medium/strong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No considerable welfare gains; The environmental and social aspects of sustainable development lagging behind; Strong impact on business and trade; Strong impact in political and legal terms.
Resilience	Strong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The policy's demonstrated ability to adapt to external shocks; The experience of policy transformation amid the ENP's new focus on stabilization and the EU's commitment to be a frontrunner in the SDGs' implementation; The policy's forward-looking nature.

Against this background, the following recommendations can be suggested to the Commission's Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR):

- **To make the EaP more cohesive in both horizontal and vertical terms:**
 - To use the SDGs and the existing Policy Coherence for Development (PCD) instrument to re-think the EaP as a development initiative, as well as avoid overlaps and promote synergies in policy design;

- To promote the creation and capacity-building of donor coordination institutions in further EaP countries, based on the experience of the SGUA and Ukrainian national donor coordination system.
- **To foster the local ownership of the EaP:**
 - To increase the number of NGOs participating in the “making” and implementation of the EaP;
 - To offer the participation opportunities for grassroots movements, newly established NGOs and civil society at the regional and local levels;
 - To join the strategy-making efforts with the relevant NGOs and clearly stipulate the role various forms of the EU assistance under the EaP and further instruments shall play in the exercise of these strategies;
 - To avoid the solely EU approximation-directed assistance programmes, so that varying country priorities and local strategies serve as the foundation for EU action.
- **To strengthen the local ownership-resilience nexus:**
 - To emphasize the linkage between strengthening the national, regional and local actors’ capacity to address development concerns and fostering the EaP countries’ self-reliance and the reduction in aid dependence;
 - To develop the Commission’s internal strategy, aimed at gradually reducing the EaP countries’ aid dependence, if/when such a dependence emerges.
- **To improve the effectiveness of the EaP development dimension:**
 - To set specific, tangible objectives in terms of the broader security, stability and prosperity goals;
 - To strengthen the EaP social dimension so that citizens can immediately feel the benefits of the EaP and EU integration.
- **To improve the communication of the EaP and its value for sustainable development:**
 - To make communication plainer and stronger oriented towards the needs of the general public;
 - To emphasize the EaP contribution to solving the pressing social issues (e.g. housing, access and quality of healthcare, primary and secondary education);
 - To strengthen the EU’s and local partners’ ability to counter fake news and anti-EU discourses, spread in the EaP countries.

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List of Interviewees

Interviewee 1	EU Delegation representative, Kyiv, Ukraine
Interviewee 2	EU mission/project representative, Kyiv, Ukraine
Interviewee 3	EU mission/project representative, Kyiv, Ukraine
Interviewee 4	EU mission/project representative, Kyiv, Ukraine
Interviewee 5	The Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine representative, Kyiv, Ukraine
Interviewee 6	The Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine representative, Kyiv, Ukraine
Interviewee 7	Member of the Ukrainian Parliament (Verkhovna Rada), Kyiv, Ukraine
Interviewee 8	Member of the Ukrainian Parliament (Verkhovna Rada), Kyiv, Ukraine
Interviewee 9	Advisor to the Member of the Ukrainian Parliament (Verkhovna Rada), Kyiv, Ukraine
Interviewee 10	Ukrainian civil society representative, Kyiv, Ukraine
Interviewee 11	The representative of academia, Kyiv, Ukraine
Interviewee 12	The representative of academia, Odesa/Kyiv, Ukraine
Interviewee 13	The representative of academia, L'viv, Ukraine
Interviewee 14	Ukrainian civil society representative, Kyiv, Ukraine
Interviewee 15	Ukrainian civil society representative, Kyiv, Ukraine
Interviewee 16	Ukrainian civil society representative, Kyiv, Ukraine
Interviewee 17	Ukrainian civil society representative, L'viv, Ukraine
Interviewee 18	Ukrainian civil society representative, L'viv, Ukraine

¹ All the interviews were conducted via Zoom/Skype in November-December 2020.