

EASTERN PARTNERSHIP INDEX

LINKAGE 2018-19

CHARTING TRANSNATIONAL LINKAGES
BETWEEN BUSINESS, CIVIL SOCIETY,
CITIZENS AND GOVERNMENTS IN EAP
COUNTRIES AND EU COUNTRIES





Eastern Partnership Index 2018-19.
Charting Progress in European Integration, Democratic Reforms, and Sustainable Development

© Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum

December 2020

This publication was produced with the support of the European Union.
The content of this publication does not reflect the official opinion of the European Union.
Responsibility for the information and views expressed therein lies entirely with the authors.

EASTERN PARTNERSHIP INDEX LINKAGE 2018-19

**CHARTING TRANSNATIONAL LINKAGES
BETWEEN BUSINESS, CIVIL SOCIETY,
CITIZENS AND GOVERNMENTS IN EAP
COUNTRIES AND EU COUNTRIES**

Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Linkages between EU and EaP – time to strengthen partnerships with civil society to underpin COVID-19 recovery, democratic resilience and peace-building processes	6
What is the Eastern Partnership Index?	12
The Linkage dimension of the Index	16
EaP Index Linkage 2018-19 – Key Results at a Glance	18
LINKAGE	20
1. International Security, Political Dialogue and Co-operation	23
2. Sectoral Co-operation and Trade Flows	29
3. Citizens in Europe	35
The Methodology of the Index	40
Donors	44

LINKAGES BETWEEN EU AND EAP – TIME TO STRENGTHEN PARTNERSHIPS WITH CIVIL SOCIETY TO UNDERPIN COVID-19 RECOVERY, DEMOCRATIC RESILIENCE AND PEACE-BUILDING PROCESSES

TOP CHALLENGES FOR 2021

- LINKAGE 2018-19 RESULTS SHOW INCREASED TIES BETWEEN THE EU AND ALL EASTERN PARTNERSHIP (EAP) COUNTRIES. THAT MEANS THE DIRECTION IS RIGHT, BUT MORE NEEDS TO BE DONE.** While the results highlight increased linkages between all EaP countries and the European Union (EU), they also point to a sustained divide between the three Association Agreement (AA) signatories and the other three Eastern Partnership countries – Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Belarus – which register weaker political, sectoral and people-to-people contacts, and participate in fewer political fora and cooperation schemes. Going forward, this divide may be expected to deepen further, as the Associated trio has been asking for deeper sectoral cooperation, including at the institutional level. In the case of Belarus, after the EU's decision to scale down bilateral cooperation with the incumbent Belarusian authorities while increasing support for the Belarusian people and civil society, linkages between Belarus and the EU should be expected to decrease at the political level and increase at the societal one. The next EaP Summit, scheduled to take place in the second half of 2021, should deliver a coherent vision for the future of the EaP policy, which integrates and caters to the renewed ambitions of the Associated trio while maintaining the regional perspective and the complementarity of its instruments.
- AS 2021 TOO WILL BE MARKED BY THE CONTINUING SPREAD AND SOCIETAL AND ECONOMIC FALLOUT FROM THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, THE EU SHOULD REMAIN READY TO SUPPORT EAP COUNTRIES AND SOCIETIES, NOT LEAST BY ASSISTING EAP COUNTRIES' VACCINATION EFFORTS.** With the COVID-19 pandemic set to continue to negatively impact the democratic governance, the economy, mobility, people-to-people-contacts including dialogue at the highest political level during 2021, measures should be adopted to ensure that relations at all levels of society and the economy remain strong and that attention to the political processes in the region and reaction to democratic backsliding remain consistent. COVID-19-induced restricted mobility is a concern for all EaP countries, but particularly crucial for Belarus, where it further limits the possibilities to escape the intensified repressions against numerous groups including students and young people who have, in many cases being stripped of their right to education among many others by the regime. The practice of simplifying visa procedures for Belarusian citizens on humanitarian grounds adopted by some EU member states should be maintained and expanded. Moreover, with the EaP region struggling to access vaccines, helping to secure a prompt supply of COVID-19 vaccines for the region would be crucial and offers the EU and its member states an opportunity to convey a friendly, committed, visible presence to EaP citizens. EU support to the EaP region has been substantial so far, and remains essential to sustain the countries' economies and the civil society sector and enable its work in support of the most vulnerable segments of society and in holding governments to account.

- **CONTINUED PRESSURE MUST BE EXERTED ON BELARUSIAN AUTHORITIES, UPHOLDING AND EXPANDING THE SANCTIONS REGIME WHILE SUPPORTING CIVIL SOCIETY ACTIVISTS, JOURNALISTS, HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS, STUDENTS, TEACHERS AND OTHER GROUPS.** The severe assault of Aliaksandr Lukashenka's regime on fundamental rights and freedoms in Belarus has been ravaging the country and its people for the last six months with no signs of stopping. Pressure on authorities should be maintained and increased, with the release of political prisoners remaining as a prerequisite for negotiations. Attention and support to and solidarity with the Belarusian population should be continued and strengthened.
- **SUPPORT FOR TRUST BUILDING EFFORTS BETWEEN THE PEOPLE OF ARMENIA AND AZERBAIJAN AFTER THE RECENT WAR IN NAGORNO KARABAKH.** The six-weeks war in autumn 2020 resulted in enormous suffering and human casualties. The situation between Armenia and Azerbaijan remains tense, with populations scarred by war trauma and ethnic tensions. Trust -building efforts are important and should be considered a key pre condition for the way forward. The EU should support civil society groups that are promoting peace and reconciliation of the conflict and use its soft power toolkit to facilitate dialogue reconciliation efforts along with providing more funds for humanitarian assistance and reconstruction. Moreover, beyond affecting the stability of the South Caucasus region, the conflict and its aftermath also threaten the architecture of the EaP values, policies and strategies. Having been side-lined by Russia until now, the EU should insist on having access to the region, and take part in peace keeping efforts on the ground to act as a balance vis-à-vis Moscow.

THE EU SHOULD NOT LOWER THE BAR IN ITS SUPPORT COVID-19 MANAGEMENT AND RECOVERY EFFORTS TO EAP COUNTRIES AND SOCIETIES

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to pose an all-encompassing challenge to EaP countries' societies, democracies and economies. After one year of a full-scale pandemic, further declines in democratic governance, and linkages between EU and EaP businesses and people are to be expected. Measures should be adopted to ensure that linkages between all levels of society and the economy remain strong and that attention to the political processes in the region and reaction to democratic backsliding remains consistent. The process of European integration should be seen as a non-hierarchical, networked process where citizens, civil society organisations and business organisations play important roles. The interplay of these actors is a driving force that can induce and push national political elites to take legal and institutional steps

towards stronger democracies and closer integration. Especially during this protracted time of pandemic-induced isolation, the fostering of ties between societies, peoples and economies should be considered at least as important as the policy agendas of national governments and European Commission officials when it comes to the continued fostering of European integration and democratic reform.

Particular attention should also continue to be paid to the civil society sector. Since the beginning of the pandemic, CSOs in all 6 EaP countries have been active in holding their governments to account, raising concerns about respect for fundamental rights during the crisis, when freedom of expression, access to information, personal privacy and the rule of law have been challenged by public health arguments. EaP civil society organisations have also been at the forefront of COVID-19 mitigation efforts, tending to the needs of vulnerable groups and supporting health professionals in their daily work by supplying equipment and providing various support services, as well as advocating on their behalf.¹

Even in optimistic scenarios, much of 2021 will still see sustained disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, and with one pandemic year behind us, it is clear that the handling of COVID-19 and its consequences is not a sprint, but a marathon that calls for long-term management. The economic structure of the EaP region is already fragile; with the activities of the business sector limited by the restrictive measures adopted to tackle the spread of the virus, the risk of economic disruption is high. Exacerbation of social inequalities and negative effects on vulnerable parts of society and categories in the economic sector, such as small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and low-wage workers, is to be expected. That will likely result in a sharp increase in the demand for the services provided by CSOs, increasing the size and changing the needs of the vulnerable groups they assist, and requiring the CSOs to adapt their modus operandi. CSOs will have to continue stepping up to the challenge, although their capacities have already been pushed to the limit by one year of fighting the consequences of the ongoing sanitary and economic emergency – often exacerbated by already restrictive CSO legislation with regards to grants from foreign donors in countries like Azerbaijan and Belarus. To do so, they will continue to need support. Moreover, existing restrictions to international travel are particularly concerning and consequential for CSO workers in Belarus and Azerbaijan, who used to travel cross-border to access their organisations' bank accounts, and for protestors and activists in Belarus, as they further limit the possibilities to escape the intensified repressions against activists. The practice of simplifying visa procedures for Belarusian citizens and CSO workers on humanitarian grounds adopted by some EU member states should be maintained and expanded.

Civil society organisations will continue to be essential in mitigating the effects of the pandemic in the long run and will require support to ensure the continuity of the key support activities they have been providing. Policies aimed at strengthening the resilience of the EaP societies in the post-crisis era must focus systematically on the most vulnerable groups and support those tending to them, while also strengthening those countries' healthcare systems and public

health policies and procedures. While EaP governments have already implemented measures to mitigate the economic impact of the crisis – allocating resources and funds to help vulnerable categories in the economic sector, such as small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and low-wage workers – civil society's support for such measures and advocacy on behalf of risk-exposed categories has proved to be and will continue to be essential in the strategy for economic recovery. Similarly, the European Union should continue taking active steps to maintain its support for civil society organisations in their role as watchdogs over respect for fundamental rights and freedoms in order to prevent the current restrictions from becoming the 'new normal', and to ensure the longer-term viability of such organisations in the post-crisis era.

The EU has been by far the biggest donor to the region, using various mechanisms to redirect over 1 billion Euro towards health systems and support for the short and medium-term social and economic recovery of the region and 58 million euros for immediate needs.²

This support is and will remain crucial. However, this massive help has at times been overshadowed by the more effective information campaigns waged by Russia and China, which were arguably more successful in winning heart and minds by making big shows of providing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and doctors; while of infinitesimal value compared to the EU financial support, it was more concrete and tangible in the eyes of the local population. Looking ahead, the EU must learn the lesson, step up its communication game and avoid a repetition of the same with the provision of vaccines. The EU and the World Health Organisation's plan to launch a new regional programme worth over €40 million to strengthen EaP countries' preparedness and readiness for vaccination efforts³ is commendable and needed, especially because delays in mass vaccination will threaten not only the prevention and containment of COVID-19, but also economic recovery. However, there is a risk that this crucial support will remain invisible in light of vaccines doses provided by other foreign donors to the region. The supply of

¹ For an in-depth analysis of how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected EaP countries, please consult the EaP CSF #PrepareEaP4Health campaign and related resources and publications: <https://eap-csf.eu/campaigns/prepare-eap-for-health-covid-response/>

² EAP CSF monitoring, *Financial Aid to EaP countries*, <https://eap-csf.eu/campaigns/prepare-eap-for-health-covid-response/>, and the EU's response to the coronavirus pandemic in the Eastern Partnership, https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/coronavirus_support_eap.pdf, January 2021

³ European Commissions, *New EU programme to support readiness for vaccination efforts in Eastern Partnership countries with WHO*, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_21_522, February 11, 2020

COVID-19 vaccines offers the European Union – and its member states – the opportunity to convey a friendly, committed, visible presence to EaP citizens. Failure to do so could further alienate public opinion and segments of EaP societies, leaving a gap for other actors that may be offering vaccines in exchange for influence to step in. As pointed out in the Citizens in Europe Affinity with the EU indicator, the EU has all but won the battle for hearts and minds in the EaP countries. According to the data published by EU Neighbours' Annual Survey Report "OPEN Neighbourhood",⁴ in 2020, only in Georgia and Ukraine did over half of respondents state that they believed Russia provided less financial support to their country than the European Union. In Armenia, a combined 61% of respondents believed that the Russian Federation provided more support than (41%) or the same support (20%) to their country as the EU. According to the report, only half of the population of the six EaP countries (49%, down 3% from 2019) has a positive image of the EU and around one third has a neutral stance (36%, up 2%). While overall the EU continues to conjure up a positive – or at least neutral – image in the six EaP countries surveyed, more efforts should be devoted to communicating the sizeable support it is providing.

RENEWED SUPPORT IS NEEDED TO SUSTAIN BELARUSIANS CITIZENS AND CIVIL SOCIETY'S FIGHT FOR DEMOCRATIC AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Since August 2020, the regime of Aliaksandr Lukashenka has launched a sustained assault on fundamental rights and freedoms in Belarus, starting with the shameless falsification of the Presidential elections results and continuing with the active repression of peaceful protesters, journalists, human rights defenders, civil society activists and many other groups. The scale of the crackdown on independent media, human rights defenders, civil society representatives, independent trade unions, students and teachers, medical and cultural workers, factory workers among others has been unprecedented, with many individuals imprisoned, tortured, fined or

forced to flee the country as a result.

Civil society organisations have been and continue to be harassed and hounded with; their headquarters stormed by the police. The de facto suspension of the rule of law currently witnessed in the country reiterates once more the need to centre the EaP around stronger democratic resilience. As Belarusian state institutions have been actively enforcing persecution against their own citizens, the country has seen the perpetration of human rights abuses at the hands of authorities on a previously unseen and horrifying scale. Belarusian state media has lied to viewers, not showing or significantly downplaying government-sanctioned violence, while the Belarusian Association of Journalists has documented cases of over 450 journalists having been arrested and often beaten for continuing doing their job with conscience⁵. With many journalists currently detained, cases of deportation of foreign reporters, and the blocking of opposition media websites, the already fragile media freedom situation in Belarus continues to deteriorate. As the situation remains highly volatile and unpredictable, attention must continue to be paid to developments on the ground.

EU sanctions as well as the decision to scale down bilateral cooperation with the Belarusian authorities at central level while increasing EU's support for the Belarusian people and civil society are steps in the right direction and ones the EaP CSF had been advocating for. However, as Linkage results place Belarus second-to-last in people-to-people contacts, with low scores in the indicators on *Cultural Exchange and Co-operation*, *Co-operation in Science and Education and Mobility (including Academic and Student Mobility)*, a lot more attention will have to be devoted to strengthening links with the Belarusian people and civil society. Particular and urgent attention should be paid to students and teachers. Indeed, the situation for university students and academic staff remains critical and has only worsened in light of the current assault on fundamental rights and freedoms in the context of the country's post-election protests. Students and teachers have been a main target of state repression in the country. According to data collected by the Belarusian Students' Association (BSA or ZBS), at least 135 students have been expelled

⁴ EU Neighbours, *Annual Survey Report "OPEN Neighbourhood" 2020*, https://www.euneighbours.eu/sites/default/files/publications/2020-06/EUNEIGHBOURS_east_AS2020report_EaP_OVERVIEW.pdf, June 2020

⁵ Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ), *Repression of media and journalists in Belarus in 2020*, <https://baj.by/en/analytics/figures-year-repression-media-and-journalists-belarus-2020>, 13 January 2021

from the universities for their civil position, at least 415 students have been detained since September, with 80 sentenced to a total of 953 days of administrative arrest, and 54 fined an average of 120 EUR each – almost five times the monthly value of an academic scholarship in the country.⁶ Following the example set by the University of Vilnius,⁷ European higher education institutions should offer free studies and scholarships to Belarusian Students, ensuring that the rights to education of young Belarusians are still guaranteed, while favouring opportunities for mobility and people-to-people contacts. The results of Linkage give Belarus a meagre 0.38 in the Citizens in Europe category, putting it second to last in the ranking. This is due not only to the country's limited adherence to a number of schemes, which prevents it from taking advantage of opportunities within Creative Europe, COSME, and Horizon 2020, but also to the limited availability of Erasmus+ grants (12 per million people in Belarus versus 110 per million people in Georgia). In this context, and given current developments, tailored opportunities for Belarusian students and their participation in dedicated mobility and cultural programmes are all the more relevant.

National and institutional representatives within the European University Association and the European Commission DG EAC, DG NEAR and EEAS should continue to engage and put pressure on Belarusian institutions. With respect to ensuring academic freedom and holding Belarus authorities to account, alongside other organisations, the EaP CSF has repeatedly raised concerns about the Belarusian authorities' limited adherence to the values of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in its Bologna monitoring reports. At the latest EHEA meeting in Rome, which took place on 19 November 2020, all 49 of the EHEA member states' ministers – including Belarus – signed a communique recognising that there should be structures for scrutiny and holding governments to account, but did not condemn the repressions against students and teachers in Belarus and the violation of academic freedoms by the regime. Looking forward, EHEA member states should create an ad hoc working group to monitor the situation in Belarusian higher education and review its report on the Belarus Follow-Up Group meetings, and

actively consider suspending Belarus from the EHEA if no discernible improvements to the situation are made.

THE EU STILL HAS A ROLE TO PLAY IN OPENING UP DIALOGUE AND TRUST-BUILDING EFFORTS IN NAGORNO KARABAKH, AND IN DE-ESCALATING REGIONAL TENSIONS

September 2020 saw the resumption of hostilities between Azerbaijan and Armenia in Nagorno Karabakh, leading to a six-week war resulting in great humanitarian losses and culminating in the capture of the strategically important town of Shusha by Azerbaijani forces, which prompted the two sides to agree to a ceasefire deal on 9 November 2020. The pressure on hospitals already struggling due to the COVID-19 pandemic and civil society organisations at the forefront of human rights protection increased enormously due to mounting war casualties and humanitarian needs.

While the signing of the ceasefire marked the end of active hostilities, the populations remain scarred by recent and generational trauma, which will take years and efforts to heal. EU and international actors should step up their support to those civil society groups that are promoting peace and reconciliation of the conflict and facilitate opportunities for trust building and inter-cultural dialogue between the two communities.

Beyond affecting the stability of the South Caucasus region, the war and its aftermath threaten the entire architecture of the EaP values, policies and strategies built up over the years. Unfortunately, faced with a major conflict in its Eastern Partnership region, the EU was able to exert little to no influence, other than issue statements of concern. Its public image declined in both countries: in Armenia, the EU was condemned for its passivity and in Azerbaijan, for pro-Armenian bias. Russia's involvement in the conflict has overshadowed the EU and the work of the OSCE Minsk group, the multilateral body

⁶ Belarusian Students' Association, *6th month of the Semester: Repressions against students, report and statistics on repressions against student society in Belarus in 2020-2021*, https://zbsunion.by/en/news/pressure_on_students, accessed on 9 February 2020

⁷ Vilnius University, *Vilnius University to Offer Free Studies and Scholarships to Belarusian Students*, <https://www.vu.lt/en/news/8203-vilnius-university-to-offer-free-studies-and-scholarships-to-belarusian-students>, accessed on 14 January 2020

co-chaired by the US, France and Russia that has been working to find a peaceful solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict since 1994. The first occasion in which the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan met with each other since the conflict was a trilateral meeting held in Moscow on January 11, 2021. Looking forward, the EU, OSCE, and the international community should make every possible effort to ensure respect for ceasefire agreements and ensure demilitarisation of the region by initiating discussions with external actors to stop them from contributing and selling potentially offensive military equipment to any of the two parties to the conflict. The EU should look into improving its standing, firstly, by seeing its requests to get access to the ground granted by both parties, and secondly, by providing economic assistance for humanitarian purposes and reconstruction. The European Commission already announced €3 million in humanitarian aid to assist the populations affected by the war in and around Nagorno-Karabakh, including displaced people. This sum comes on top of €3.9 million already mobilised since the beginning of the hostilities,⁸ but more needs to be done to address the immediate and still urgent consequences of the conflict. Such economic assistance should be ideally integrated in a forward-looking political strategy aimed at laying the grounds for a sustainable peace between the two countries and in the wider region.

⁸ European Commission, *Nagorno-Karabakh: EU allocates additional €3 million in humanitarian aid for conflict-affected civilians*, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_665, 18 February 2021

WHAT IS THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP INDEX?

The Eastern Partnership Index charts the progress made by the six Eastern Partnership countries towards sustainable democratic development and European integration. The Index measures steps taken on the path towards good governance, including the observance and protection of democracy and human rights, sustainable development, and integration with the European Union.

The EU's Eastern Partnership initiative, launched in 2009, signalled the commitment of the governments of the six Eastern European partner countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine) to respect the values of democracy and human rights, and to align with EU standards of good governance and the rule of law. From the beginning of the Eastern Partnership initiative, the respective national governments in the Eastern Partnership countries expressed clear differences in aspirations concerning closer integration with the EU. While some had aspirations of membership, others saw a turn to the west as a challenge to long-lasting ties with Russia, and others wanted to pursue a more multipolar approach.

The period covered by the EaP Index Linkage 2018-19 edition marks the first full years of visa-free travel agreements between the EU and respectively Ukraine and Georgia, and continued implementation of the Association Agreements between the EU and respectively Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine, including the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area agreements; the first year of CEPA implementation for Armenia, gradual progress emerged towards more co-operation between the EU and Belarus, and continue negotiations between the EU and Azerbaijan towards a "strategic modernisation partnership agreement". The Index charts progress and reverses in reforms, but also generates recommendations to guide countries along the reform process and to signal concerns when progress is flagging or even reversed. The Index is also intended to serve as an important

monitoring tool for policymakers, independent researchers, think-tanks and civil society actors.

CHARTING THE PATH TOWARDS EUROPEAN INTEGRATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT

The Eastern Partnership Index is a set of individual and composite indicators which measure the extent to which the six Eastern European neighbour countries of the EU have established sustainable democratic institutions and practices, and the level of their integration with the EU. "Integration" is conceived here as a core and multi-dimensional concept that consists of converging norms, growing economic exchange, deeper transnational networks linking up societies, and more frequent contacts between people. This broad notion of integration implies that EU membership or association may be aims, stages or final states of the integration process.

It is not limited to a normative approach, or a measure of harmonisation with EU norms and standards, but also reflects actual societal, economic and political change. The levels of contractual relations between the Eastern Partnership (EaP) states and the EU are viewed as elements of a much broader process that is, as a whole, not driven or controlled solely by governments and intergovernmental negotiations.¹

¹ The Index does not cover the situation in the separatist-held territories of eastern Ukraine, Russia-occupied Crimea, Nagorno-Karabakh, or the breakaway regions of Transnistria, South Ossetia, and Abkhazia.

Rather, European integration is seen as a non-hierarchical, networked process where citizens, civic associations and business organisations play important roles. The interplay of these actors has been crucial for the historical development of the EU itself, as it induced and supported national political elites to take legal and institutional steps towards closer integration. Drawing on this experience, the Index is built on the premise that the ties between societies, peoples and economies form dimensions of European integration that are at least as important as the policy agendas of national governments and European Commission officials.

It is further assumed that transnational linkages contribute to the emergence and spread of common European and international norms which, in turn, facilitate closer linkages with the EU. For example, increasing trade is likely to strengthen domestic companies that benefit from foreign investment and are likely to become more aware of the importance of courts that protect investors' rights. A judicial system based on fair procedures and professionalism will then contribute to attracting more foreign investors.

An analogous reinforcing dynamic derives from a commitment to international norms and universal values. By incorporating democratic values, the protection of human rights and the rule of law in their constitutions, EaP states have adopted universal norms that have formed the basis of co-operation and integration among West European states since the end of the Second World War.

Further absorption of the core principles of the EU, laid down as a threshold for membership (Copenhagen criteria), gives a further indication of alignment with the EU member states and the capacity for the EaP countries to transform their economies and societies. The more these norms are implemented and respected in EaP states, facilitating sustainable democratic development, the more co-operation with the EU will ensue because these states and the EU will increasingly recognise each other as partners sharing common norms and underlying values.

Furthermore, harmonisation with the norms of sustainable democratic development stretches beyond the European integration agenda. Just as observance of the rule of law, and its application in a non-arbitrary fashion, and the existence of freedom of expression and a competitive party political system, are measured in line with

international norms and good practice, so the protection and observance of human rights is a universal norm.

Just as the elements of “deep and sustainable democracy” are set out in the Index, so are measures of sustainable development, including attainment of the UN sustainable development goals. Sustainable development in terms of key indicators such as health, poverty, and education, as well as environmental protection, are therefore given a central place in the Index, given their relevance to social and economic development and the fostering of a sustainable democratic society.

This fundamental idea of sustainable democratic development leading towards European integration and its driving forces is reflected in the conceptual design of the Eastern Partnership Index.

LINKAGE IS ONE OF TWO KEY DIMENSIONS OF EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

The Index 2015-2016, 2017 and the current edition EaP Index Linkage 2018-19 are the continuation of what was formerly known as the *European Integration Index for Eastern Partnership Countries*, building on the strong focus on the European integration process, and updating the index to reflect the current medium- and long-term challenges of sustainable development, human rights and democracy, and security and international co-operation in a tense political region. The earlier Index had three dimensions: *Approximation*, *Linkage*, and *Management* (of the EU integration process). To strengthen the focus of the Index and to emphasize that the Index is of direct relevance also to the countries whose governments have not expressed clear-cut aspirations towards closer European integration, *Management* was folded into the other dimensions.

The present edition of the EaP Linkage 2018-19 covers the Linkage questionnaire of the EaP Index, analysing data covering the period January-December 2017, and reflecting most recent developments in the textual analysis. It combines independent analysis with annual quantitative data to provide a snapshot of progress in the attainment and ongoing

implementation of internationally recognised democratic standards and practice.

Two dimensions of European integration are distinguished in the construction of the Index: *Approximation* and *Linkage*. The **Linkage** dimension, covered in this report, encompasses the transnational linkages between business, civil society, citizens and governments in EaP countries and EU countries. This dimension consists of three sections.

The section on **International Security, Political Dialogue and Co-operation** examines how EaP and EU governments coalesce in crucial areas of international security, defence, border management and development. Intergovernmental contacts are conceptualised as a part of an emerging “European society”, not as a (facilitating or constraining) framework for societal linkages. This section also considers the extent to which the EaP states control their own security as sovereign actors.

The section on **Sectoral Co-operation and Trade Flows** measures the extent to which trade and investment integrate the EaP countries with the EU. In addition, the integration of energy supplies/markets and the density of transport links are assessed separately, since these two sectors constitute crucial infrastructures for economic integration.

The section on **Citizens in Europe** measures the extent of mobility, migration and communication flows of citizens between EaP countries and the EU. Societal linkages are conceived not only as a set of bilateral EU-EaP relations following a hub-and-spokes or centre-periphery model. Rather, intra-EaP linkages are also taken into account. The Index focuses on migration as a process leading to deeper European integration and, ultimately, the full freedom of movement. Migration is not understood here as a threat to the EU’s internal security or as an EU policy to prevent illegal migration with the help of EaP states.

THE INDEX GOES BEYOND EUROPEAN INTEGRATION, LOOKING AT REFORMS FOR THEIR INTRINSIC MERITS

This structure does not attempt to mirror the items on the EU’s Eastern Partnership agenda because, firstly, this agenda will be increasingly differentiated and tailored to match the varying aspirations and priorities of the individual EaP states. Thus, comparison of the EaP countries’ compliance with diverging official agendas will become increasingly difficult, if not impossible.

Secondly, since the Index is developed in the context of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, the Index aims to represent the views of civil society rather than only the positions and priorities of the European Commission and national governments. Rather than tracing the implementation of governmental and Commission-level policy agendas down to every technical detail, the Index focuses on outcomes that matter most for people and society.

Adopting the perspective of civil society has manifest advantages. It is a step towards more “ownership” on the part of civic associations and society within the Eastern Partnership, contributing to “societal resilience”. In addition, this inclusive comparative perspective provides space and a voice for the citizens of EaP countries whose governments are not currently interested in further European integration.

Reflecting the underlying perspective of civil society, the Index places particular emphasis on people-to-people contacts and transnational linkages among civil society organisations. In contrast, the governmental agenda of sectoral regulatory alignment is less extensively covered.

Taken together, the Index has four important provides a cross-country and cross-sector picture that is both nuanced and comparative. The six countries are assessed across a common set of questions and indicators. It Index offers independent analysis provided by experts in the partner countries.

The full breakdown, and the questionnaire and sources underpinning the EaP Index Linkage in 2018-19 - are available at <http://eap-csf.eu/eastern-partnership-index/>.

The methodology of the Index is further explained in the chapter, **Methodology of the Index** (page 40-42).

The Index was developed by a group of more than 50 civil society experts from EaP and EU countries. Many more contributed comments at various stages. The Eastern Partnership Index was initiated and launched in 2011 by the International Renaissance Foundation (IRF), Ukraine, and Open Society Foundations. The Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum took over as leader of the project in 2014 and has subsequently produced the Index.

The project is funded by the European Union. In the past, the project has benefited from the support of Open Society Foundations, individual foundations of Open Society Foundations in Eastern Partnership countries, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, and the Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency (SIDA).

THE LINKAGE DIMENSION OF THE INDEX

** Sections marked with an asterisk are not counted towards the scores in the Index*

LINKAGE DIMENSION	2	SECTORAL CO-OPERATION AND TRADE FLOWS
1	2.1	INTERNATIONAL SECURITY, POLITICAL DIALOGUE AND CO-OPERATION
1.1	2.2	Trade with the EU: Commodities
1.2	2.3	Investment and Loans from the EU
1.3	2.4	Trade with the EU: Services
1.3.1	2.5	Trade Defence Instruments
1.3.2	2.6	Energy Interdependence
1.3.3	2.7	Transport: Integration with Trans-European Networks
1.3.4	2.7	Environment Legislation and Co-operation
1.4	3	CITIZENS IN EUROPE
1.5	3.1	Cultural Exchange and Co-operation
1.6	3.2	Affinity with the European Union*
1.6.1	3.3	Co-operation in Science and Education
1.6.1.1	3.4	Mobility, including Academic and Student Mobility
1.6.1.2		
1.6.1.3		

EAP INDEX LINKAGE IN 2018-19 - KEY RESULTS AT A GLANCE

ASSOCIATION AGREEMENT SIGNATORIES CONTINUE TO LEAD THE LINKAGE DIMENSION OF THE INDEX

The results of the the Eastern Partnership Index – Linkage Dimension 2018-2019¹ - show increased linkages between all EaP countries and the EU, as well as a continued, sustained divide between the three AA signatories and the other three Eastern Partnership countries – Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Belarus. However, with 2018 marking the first full year of CEPA implementation, Armenia recorded significant improvements in a number of areas, most markedly in the *Political Dialogue with the EU* indicator – with its score jumping by 0.20; in trade with the EU in services; and increased cooperation in science and education thanks to its participation in the EU Eastern Partnership Culture and Creativity Programme under Creative Europe. The effects of Armenia's Velvet Revolution of May 2018 – although not directly captured by Linkage – may be indirectly reflected in the country's increased political dialogue with the EU.

Georgia led overall in Linkage, improving its scores in all sections. Ranking second, Moldova maintained a higher position – mainly thanks to an increase in its people-to-people connections with the EU – but continued slipping behind in the *International Security, Political Dialogue And Cooperation* section, due to decreased political dialogue with the EU and a reduction in the financial assistance received by the EU and EU member states, following the European Commission's decision to cut its financial assistance to Moldova by 20 million euros per year for both 2017 and 2018. This was due to concerns over the erosion of the rule of law and the weakening of democracy in the country.

Moldova and Ukraine continue to lead in the *Sectoral Cooperation and Trade Flows* section, enjoying strong trade relations with the EU. While the EU is the largest trade partner of both countries, and Moldova and Ukraine have by far the largest share of EU imports, the three South Caucasus countries and Belarus all have a significantly more favourable business environment than Moldova and Ukraine.

Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine remain leaders in the *Citizens in Europe* section, enjoying higher levels of people-to-people contacts, not least thanks to having visa liberalisation regimes in place.

The weakest performers in all sections continued to be Azerbaijan and Belarus, not least due to the two countries' lack of cooperation frameworks comparable in ambition and depth to the Association Agreements or CEPA, and reduced participation in EU programmes facilitating people-to-people contacts (although Belarus remained engaged in negotiations on visa facilitation and readmission with the EU, which led to a conclusion of the Agreement in May 2020). Azerbaijan continued negotiations on a new framework agreement designed to enhance political dialogue, trade, and mutually beneficial cooperation.

HIGHLIGHTS

Georgia scored highest in Linkage overall, remaining the frontrunner in *International Security, Political Dialogue and Co-operation*, but failing to match Ukraine and Moldova in *Sectoral Co-operation and Trade Flows*. In *Citizens in Europe*, Georgia remained the frontrunner, continuing to score highest for *Cultural Exchange and Co-operation*, where it recorded a strong score increase versus previous years.

¹ data covering January-December 2018.

Moldova placed second in 2018, re-ranked from being in first place with Georgia in 2017. Its fall is mostly related to significant decreases in International Security, Political Dialogue and Co-operation, due to the continued deterioration of the rule of law and democracy in the country. Moldova led, together with Ukraine, in Sectoral Co-operation and Trade Flows, and ranked second to Georgia in Citizens in Europe.

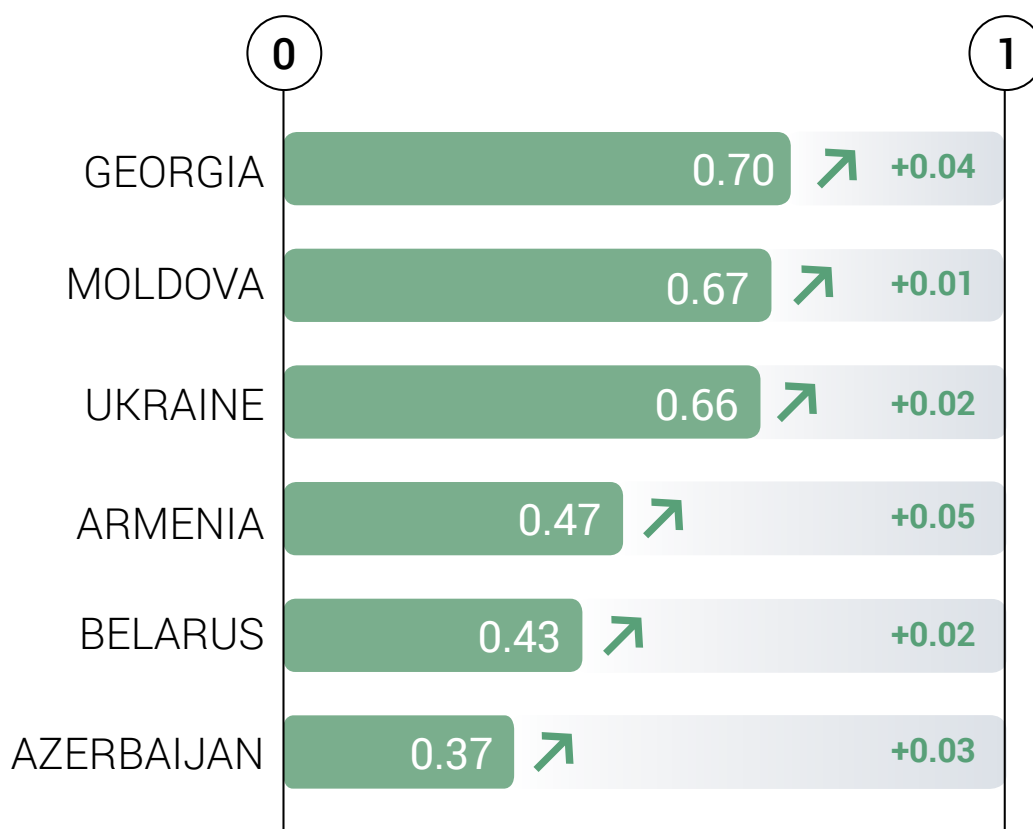
Ukraine remained in third position overall, but scored second in both International Security, Political Dialogue and Co-operation, and Sectoral Co-operation and Trade Flows. The country's overall score remains affected by a relatively poor performance in the Citizens in Europe dimension, which shows that, although Ukraine's participation in projects is at the level of other countries in absolute numbers, it continues to remain very small on a per capita basis, pointing to the need for an increase in the number of opportunities offered and resources allocated. Ukraine did retain its strong leadership in Political Dialogue with the EU and Border Security, and regained the ground lost to Moldova in the previous edition in Sectoral Co-operation and Trade Flows. Although still behind Georgia, Moldova, and Armenia, Ukraine improved in Citizens in Europe, mainly thanks to increased Cultural Exchange and Co-operation.

Armenia ranked fourth in Linkage, well behind the three AA signatory countries. It slightly improved its score in International Security, Political Dialogue and Co-operation, mainly thanks to increased political dialogue with the EU. Much like in the past, it remained the worst performer in Sectoral Co-operation and Trade Flows, most notably being last on Energy Interdependence, a reflection of the country's energy dependence on Russia. In Citizens in Europe, Armenia ranked third, considerably improving its overall score in this category thanks to higher scores for Cultural Engagement and Co-operation.

Belarus ranked fifth, but slightly improved its scores in all categories. It remained fifth for International Security, Political Dialogue and Co-operation. Within this section, Belarus maintained a far lower level of Political Dialogue with the EU than any other EaP country, although the score increased from the previous edition. Belarus was also fifth in Sectoral Co-operation and Trade Flows, seeing an increase in investment and loans from the EU and trade with the EU in services. Despite the high number of students in the EU, Belarus placed fifth in Citizens in Europe.

Azerbaijan ranked lowest among EaP countries, scoring the worst in both International Security, Political Dialogue and Co-operation, and Citizens in Europe. At the same time, in the latter category, it improved its score, mainly thanks to its increased cooperation with the European Cultural Foundation, in both the number of projects per capita and in the amount of funds disbursed. Azerbaijan scored better in the Sectoral Co-operation and Trade Flows section, thanks to its particular status of net exporter of energy products to the EU – with energy products remaining ca. 99% of the country's total exports to the EU – and increased trade in services.

LINKAGE DIMENSION



Linkage encompasses the international linkages between business, civil society, citizens, and governments in EaP countries and EU countries. This dimension consists of three sections:

INTERNATIONAL SECURITY, POLITICAL DIALOGUE AND CO-OPERATION measures how EaP and EU governments coalesce in crucial areas of international security, defence, border management, and development. Intergovernmental contacts are conceptualised as part of an emerging "European society", not as a (facilitating or constraining) framework for societal linkages. This section also considers the extent to which the EaP states control their own security as sovereign actors.

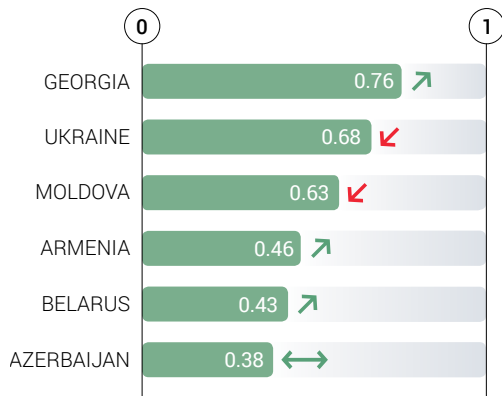
SECTORAL CO-OPERATION AND TRADE FLOWS measures the extent to which trade and investment integrate EaP countries with the EU. The integration of energy supplies/markets and the density of transport links are assessed separately, since these two sectors constitute crucial infrastructures for economic integration.

CITIZENS IN EUROPE measures the extent of mobility, migration, and communication flows of citizens between EaP countries and the EU. Societal linkages are not only conceived as a set of bilateral EU-EaP relations following a hub-and-spokes or centre-periphery model. Rather, intra-EaP linkages are also taken into account. The Index focuses on migration as a process leading to deeper European integration and, ultimately, full freedom of movement. Migration is not understood here as a threat to the EU's internal security or as an EU policy to prevent illegal migration with the help of EaP states.

LINKAGE SECTIONS



International Security, Political Dialogue and Co-operation

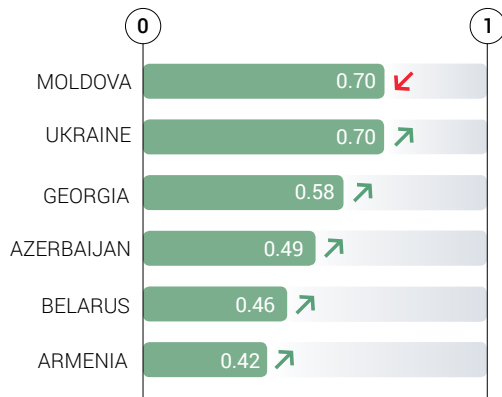


International Security, Political Dialogue and Co-operation measures how EaP and EU governments coalesce in crucial areas of international security, defence, border management, and development. Intergovernmental contacts are conceptualised as a part of an emerging "European society", not as a (facilitating or constraining) framework for societal linkages. This section also considers the extent to which the EaP states control their own security as sovereign actors. The indicators contributing to the scores of this section are:

- Political Dialogue with the EU
- Intergovernmental Co-operation and Engagement in EaP Multilateral Events/Panels
- International Security Co-operation
- Border Security
- EU Funding of Security Projects
- Development Assistance from the EU and EU Member States



Sectoral Co-operation and Trade Flows

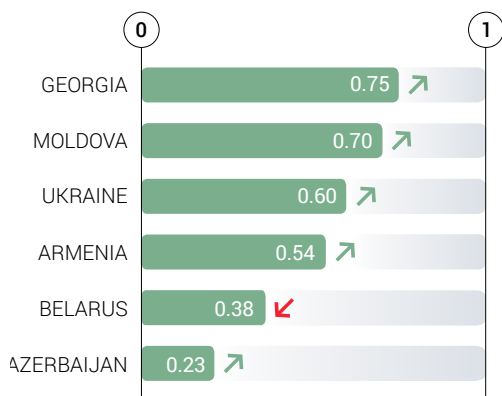


Sectoral Co-operation and Trade Flows measures the extent to which trade and investment integrate EaP countries with the EU. The integration of energy supplies/markets and the density of transport links are assessed separately, since these two sectors constitute crucial infrastructures for economic integration. The indicators contributing to the scores of this section are:

- Trade with the EU: Commodities
- Investment and Loans from the EU
- Trade with the EU: Services
- Trade Defence Instruments
- Energy Interdependence
- Transport: Integration with Trans-European Networks
- Environmental Legislation and Co-operation



Citizens in Europe



Citizens in Europe measures the extent of mobility, migration, and communication flows of citizens between EaP countries and the EU. Intra-EaP linkages are also taken into account. The Index focuses on migration as a process leading to deeper European integration and, ultimately, full freedom of movement. Migration is not understood here as a threat to the EU's internal security or as an EU policy to prevent illegal migration with the help of EaP states. The indicators contributing to the scores of this section are:

- Cultural Exchange and Co-operation
- Co-operation in Science and Education
- Mobility, including Academic and Student Mobility
- Affinity with the European Union²

² Not counted for the purposes of the scoring but included in the narrative. The scores of Citizens in Europe 2017 have been retroactively fitted to adapt to a new methodology included in the 2018-19 edition.



INTERNATIONAL SECURITY, POLITICAL DIALOGUE AND CO-OPERATION



International Security, Political Dialogue and Co-operation measures how EaP and EU governments coalesce in crucial areas of international security, defence, border management, and development. Intergovernmental contacts are conceptualised as part of an emerging "European society", not as a (facilitating or constraining) framework for societal linkages. This section also considers the extent to which EaP states control their own security as sovereign actors. The indicators contributing to the scores of this section are:

- Political Dialogue with the EU
- Intergovernmental Co-operation and Engagement in EaP Multilateral Events/Panels
- International Security Co-operation
- Border Security
- EU Funding of Security Projects
- Development Assistance from the EU and EU Member States

EaP Index scores for 2018 in the International Security, Political Dialogue and Cooperation domain show minor variations for EaP countries, with the ranking remaining unchanged except for Moldova, which slips back one place in third position, with a significant decrease in its score. The continued deterioration of the rule of law and democracy in Moldova, which started in 2017 and was already recorded by the 2017 Index, brought the country further into the International Security, Political Dialogue and Cooperation Category, with its scores decreasing in almost all indicators and most notably in the indicators covering Political Dialogue with the EU and Development Assistance from EU and EU Member states.

Despite Moldova's backsliding, the results continue to show that the most intense co-operation between the EU and individual EaP countries can be recorded with the three countries that have signed Association Agreements (AAs) with the EU – Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. Armenia remains closer to the lowest placed, Belarus and Azerbaijan, than to the three AA countries, but in 2018 it registered a strong increase in cooperation as recorded by the Political Dialogue with the EU indicator, where Armenia recorded a 0.20 increase. It should be noted that 2017 saw the finalisation of the negotiations between Armenia and the EU on the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA), which was completed in September 2017, and 2018 was the first full year of EU-Armenia cooperation covered by CEPA. While the Political Dialogue with the EU indicator marks an increase for Belarus in 2018, the current situation in EU-Belarus relations points to a stark decrease in this indicator, given the EU's decision of December 2020 to scale down political contacts and sectoral dialogues with Belarusian authorities, suspending or stopping financial support to central authorities.

Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia continued with the implementation of their AAs with the EU, and Georgia and Ukraine enjoyed their first full year of enjoying visa-free travel to Schengen countries (from March and June 2017 respectively).

Azerbaijan's relations with the EU remain governed by the 1999 Partnership and Co-operation Agreement as the main framework agreement between Baku and Brussels, while Belarus continues to lack any framework agreement with the EU.

POLITICAL DIALOGUE WITH THE EU

POLITICAL DIALOGUE WITH THE EU					
RANK	2018		2017	2015-16	
UKRAINE	0.77	↘	0.84	↙	0.91
GEORGIA	0.64	↘	0.60	↙	0.76
MOLDOVA	0.60	↘	0.67	↙	0.76
ARMENIA	0.54	↘	0.34	↙	0.48
AZERBAIJAN	0.38	↘	0.42	↙	0.51
BELARUS	0.34	↗	0.13	↗	0.12

Ukraine remains for the third year in a row the frontrunner in political dialogue with the EU, followed by Georgia and Moldova. Among the non-AA countries, Armenia scored the highest, followed by Azerbaijan, while Belarus lagged further behind. Ukraine remains the only country to hold an annual summit with the EU and therefore the country with the highest level of cooperation. Ukraine is also the leading EaP country in terms of high-level visits by Ukraine's officials to Brussels and the third highest in terms of visits to Ukraine by top EU officials, following, in this case, visits to Georgia and Belarus. Ukraine was the focus of 23 European External Action Service statements in 2018, followed by second-placed Belarus with 18 (including some statements criticising the government's human rights record).

In 2018, the EU Association Committees with Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine met once, as was the case in 2017. The equivalent Co-operation Committees in non-AA countries did meet in the case of Armenia, but not in the case of Azerbaijan or Belarus, whose Co-operation Committee did not meet in 2017 either. The AA countries' subcommittees met 12 times in the case of Moldova, 11 in the case of Ukraine, and seven in the case of Georgia.

Political parties' representation among the political groupings of the European Parliament were in place in all six countries and were largely the same as in 2017, ranging from nine affiliated parties in Moldova and eight in Georgia to seven in each of Ukraine (with the addition of the Syla Lyudei party that affiliated itself to the European People's Party in 2018 – the only change during 2018), six for Belarus and Armenia, and three in Azerbaijan. The European People's Party (EPP) records by far the highest number of affiliated parties from EaP countries, with twelve parties from five EaP countries (Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine) affiliated within its ranks.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL CO-OPERATION AND ENGAGEMENT IN EAP MULTILATERAL EVENTS/PANELS

In 2018, Georgia led among EaP countries in terms of intergovernmental cooperation and engagement in EaP multilateral events and panels, maintaining the same score as in 2017, and gaining its first place thanks to Moldova's slight backsliding.

During 2018, all six countries participated in the various different formats for co-operation and engagement in EaP multilateral events, with the exception of the Euronest meeting of EaP parliamentarians with MEPs, from which Belarus remains excluded since it does not meet the political requirements in the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly's Constituent Act.

All six countries' governments participated in the annual EaP-EU foreign ministers' meeting and in the twice-yearly EaP thematic platform meetings.

At the civil society level, all six countries continued to have National Platforms within the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum. The

INTERGOVERNMENTAL CO-OPERATION AND ENGAGEMENT IN EAP MULTILATERAL EVENTS/PANELS					
RANK	2018		2017		2015-16
GEORGIA	0.98	↔	0.98	↗	0.94
MOLDOVA	0.96	↘	0.99	↗	0.88
UKRAINE	0.93	↘	0.94	↗	0.90
AZERBAIJAN	0.92	↔	0.92	↗	0.73
ARMENIA	0.91	↘	0.96	↗	0.93
BELARUS	0.63	↘	0.76	↙	0.77

Georgian National Platform remained the most active in terms of the number of meetings and events it organised (with 28, closely followed by Moldova with 20 and Armenia with 16), while the Armenian National Platform published the most reports and statements during 2017 (seven, followed by Georgia with six and Moldova with five).

EaP countries continue their participation in multilateral formats of cooperation even beyond the Eastern partnership, such as BSEC, GUAM, TRACECA, EU Energy Community, INOGATE, SEECP, Energy Charter, EUSDR, Baku Initiative, E5P. The AA-trio appears to be the most networked, with Moldova leading the group, being a participant in all the above-mentioned multilateral formats, closely followed by Ukraine (not part of SEECP), and Georgia (not part of SEECP and EUSDR).

INTERNATIONAL SECURITY CO-OPERATION

The security situation remained tense throughout the EaP region with six low-intensity conflicts (Transnistria in Moldova, Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia, Nagorno Karabakh in Azerbaijan, and since 2014 Crimea and the secessionist-held territories of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblast in Ukraine). The 2018 scores do not cover the recent escalation of the conflict in Nagorno Karabakh that exploded in the autumn of 2020.

As in 2017, in the area of International Security Co-operation as a whole, Ukraine and Georgia continued to lead during 2018, followed by Armenia and Moldova.

When it comes to co-operation with the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP),

INTERNATIONAL SECURITY CO-OPERATION					
RANK	2018		2017		2015-16
UKRAINE	0.71	↗	0.64	↙	0.68
GEORGIA	0.66	↗	0.64	↗	0.57
ARMENIA	0.44	↘	0.48	↗	0.44
MOLDOVA	0.42	↘	0.46	↗	0.39
AZERBAIJAN	0.36	↗	0.32	↗	0.22
BELARUS	0.24	↗	0.17	↔	0.17

Ukraine remained the clear leader, followed by Georgia and to a lesser extent, Moldova. At the same time Moldova led on alignment with the EU's CFSP statements, expressing support for 68% of statements where it was invited to do so, followed by Georgia (53%). Unlike 2017, when it supported 89% of CFSP statements, Ukraine supported only 45% of CFSP statements in 2018.

In terms of participation in CSDP missions, Georgia led among the group, and participated

in EU training missions in Mali and the Central African Republic. October 2018 marked 10 years since the deployment of the EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM) in Georgia and in December the Council agreed to extend the mission until 14 December 2020 with a budget of €38.2 million from 15 December 2018 to 14 December 2020.¹ Moldova participated in one CSDP mission – EUTM Mali, while the remaining four EaP countries participated in none. Moreover, Georgia was the only EaP country to hold consultations with the EU Military Committee (EUMC) and Ukraine the only one to host a visit of the EU Political and Security Committee (PSC) in 2018.

Much like in 2017, in 2018 Ukraine continued to be the only EaP country with an Administrative Agreement with the European Defence Agency and the only one to have participated in the European Union Battlegroup. Georgia and Ukraine remain the only two EaP countries hosting a CSDP mission on their territory. Since

2014, Ukraine has been a host country for a CSDP mission, the EU Advisory Mission (EUAM) Ukraine, established after the onset of the conflict in Eastern Ukraine with the objective of strengthening Ukraine's civilian security sector. Since 2008, Georgia has hosted the European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM), an unarmed peacekeeping mission operated by the European Union, conceived in September 2008 following the EU-mediated ceasefire agreement ending the Russo-Georgian War.

The arms race in the region shifted gears a little, following a period of rising military spending. Between 2015-2019, Ukraine's military budget fell from 4% to 3.4% of GDP and in Azerbaijan from 5.6% to 4%. Military budgets went up in Armenia (4.2% to 4.9% increase) and Georgia (2.2% to 2.9% increase).

¹ Source: <https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/yes2019.pdf>

BORDER SECURITY

In 2018, Ukraine and Belarus continued to lead among EaP countries in terms of border security, maintaining the same score as in 2017. Ukraine has the closest linkages when it comes to border security, followed by Belarus and Moldova – not least because these three countries all have borders with the EU.

All six EaP countries have an agreement with FRONTEX, the EU's border and coastguard agency. Ukraine signed its agreement with Frontex in 2007, and further cooperation was defined by various Cooperation Plans, including the 2016-2018 Plan, which covers the reporting period. Cooperation includes information change, common risk analyses, and joint operations. Moldova started its cooperation with FRONTEX in 2008 and signed a new cooperation plan in March 2018 covering the period from 2018 to 2020. The new cooperation plan sets out to create improved exchange of information on migratory flows, the use of relevant data to combat cross border crime, and initiatives to support technical assistance to the Moldovan authorities.

The size of the territories outside government control, caused by the low-intensity conflicts present in the region, did not change in 2018 and ranged from 7% in Ukraine and 12% in Moldova to 14% in Azerbaijan and 18% in Georgia. Not

BORDER SECURITY					
RANK	2018		2017	2015-16	
UKRAINE	0.81	↔	0.81	↙	0.83
BELARUS	0.73	↔	0.73	↗	0.71
MOLDOVA	0.72	↘	0.74	↙	0.77
GEORGIA	0.52	↘	0.64	↗	0.58
AZERBAIJAN	0.50	↗	0.48	↗	0.31
ARMENIA	0.49	↗	0.37	↙	0.51

relevant changes were recorded in terms of the fact that Russian armed forces were present in the conflict zones in Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia. In the case of Belarus and Armenia, Russian armed forces continue to remain stationed on their territory with the government's consent. The borders of Armenia with Turkey and Iran remain controlled by Russian border troops – in line with a Russian-Armenian agreement in place since 1992. Armenian border guards controlled the Armenian-Georgian border, while the border with Azerbaijan remained closed owing to the ongoing military conflict over Nagorno Karabakh.

Of the three EaP countries with sea borders (Ukraine, Georgia, and Azerbaijan), only Azerbaijan had full control of its maritime boundaries. Although internationally recognised as part of Ukraine and Georgia, the sea borders of Crimea and Abkhazia respectively were not under the control of the Ukrainian and Georgian governments.

EU FUNDING OF SECURITY PROJECTS

The EU continues to provide security support to four EaP countries out of six: Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, and Belarus.

In 2018, in addition to the EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia, the EU continued to provide border security support to Ukraine and Moldova through the EU Border Assistance Mission to Moldova and Ukraine (EUBAM). The EU also funded a project aimed at increasing Polish-Belarusian Cross-Border Safety, strengthening fire and rescue service potential by developing a uniform mechanism of situation forecasting and monitoring, prompt information exchange, and the elaboration of solutions for mutual warnings and transboundary emergency management.

EU FUNDING OF SECURITY PROJECTS					
RANK	2018		2017		2015-16
GEORGIA	1	↔	1	↔	1
MOLDOVA	0.64	↘	0.72	↘	1
UKRAINE	0.52	↘	0.54	↘	1
BELARUS	0.51	↗	0.50	↘	1
ARMENIA	0	↔	0	↔	0
AZERBAIJAN	0	↔	0	↔	0

In 2018, much like in 2017, Georgia remained the leading recipient of EU funding related to security and became a pilot country as part of the EU strategy for Security Sector Reform. The EU-Georgia Informal Strategic Dialogue took place in October 2017, focusing on areas including hybrid threats.² The EU also supported modernisation of Georgia's border infrastructure with Azerbaijan.

² Source: https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/georgia/33774/european-union-and-georgia-hold-strategic-security-dialogue_en

DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE FROM EU AND EU MEMBER STATES

In 2018, Georgia remained the leading EaP country as a beneficiary of development assistance from multiple EU sources, seeing a further increase from 2017. Georgia remained closely followed by Moldova and Armenia, who, to the contrary, saw a decrease in the funding channelled to them from 2017. In terms of EU member states' financial assistance (either bilaterally or through contributions to non-EU multilateral assistance), the leading recipient was Georgia, followed by Belarus, Armenia, and Ukraine.

Under the EU's European Neighbourhood Instrument, Georgia was the main beneficiary, closely followed by Ukraine. Ukraine remained the leading recipient when it came to macroeconomic and TAIEX assistance from the EU.

DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE FROM EU AND EU MEMBER STATES					
RANK	2018		2017		2015-16
GEORGIA	0.75	↗	0.63	↘	0.69
MOLDOVA	0.41	↘	0.60	↗	0.55
ARMENIA	0.39	↘	0.60	↗	0.34
UKRAINE	0.32	↘	0.37	↗	0.34
AZERBAIJAN	0.15	↗	0.13	↗	0.09
BELARUS	0.14	↘	0.17	↗	0.09

Moldova's score in 2018 showing a strong decrease from 2017 (-0.19) is due to the European Commission's decision to cut its financial assistance to Moldova by 20 million euros per year for both 2017 and 2018 due to concerns over the erosion of the rule of law and the weakening of democracy. In practice this meant reduced funding in all categories, ranging from the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) regional and country-specific funding, and funding falling under thematic instruments and programmes, and special technical assistance. Similarly, the country saw a decrease in the funding received via official development assistance (ODA).

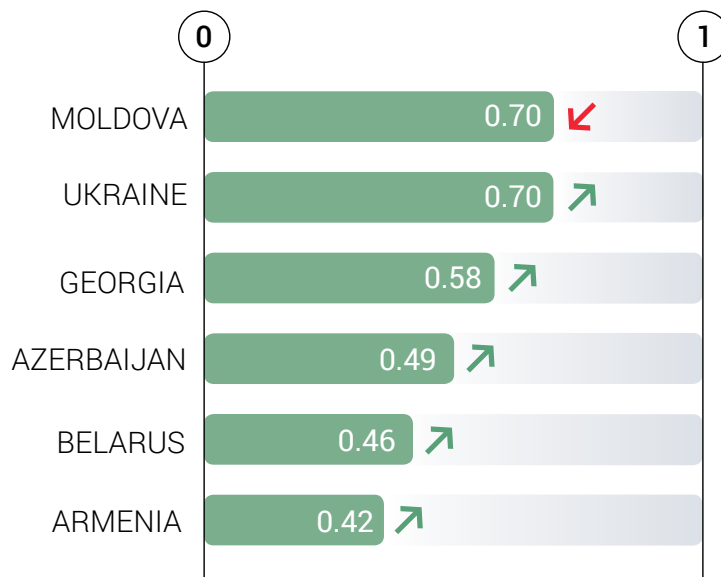


SECTORAL CO-OPERATION AND TRADE FLOWS

LINKAGE



Sectoral Co-operation and Trade Flows



Sectoral Co-operation and Trade Flows measures the extent to which trade and investment integrate EaP countries with the EU. The integration of energy supplies/markets and the density of transport links are assessed separately, since these two sectors constitute crucial infrastructures for economic integration. The indicators contributing to the scores of this section are:

- Trade with the EU: Commodities
- Investment and Loans from the EU
- Trade with the EU: Services
- Trade Defence Instruments
- Energy Interdependence
- Transport: Integration with Trans-European Networks
- Environment Legislation and Co-operation

TRADE WITH EU: COMMODITIES

In 2018, there were no breakthrough changes in the geography of goods trade in the EaP region. The EU has remained the key trade partner of EaP countries in trade in goods, being the number one trade partner for Azerbaijan, Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia and the number two – after Russia – for Belarus and Armenia. Russia, Turkey, and China have been the other most important trade partners, although each EaP country featured its unique geographical mix of trade linkages.

For the EU, the relative importance of the goods trade with EaP countries has remained low. The aggregate share of the ‘6’ was 1.7% in 2016-2018, with Ukraine accounting for more than half this share.

The trade regime between the EU and three countries that signed the Association Agreements (AA), embedding deep and comprehensive free trade areas (DCFTAs), has been defined by the implementation of the AA/DCFTA commitments. While in the case of Georgia-EU trade the partners removed import duties immediately after the launch of the DCFTA in 2014, Ukraine and Moldova envisaged gradual tariff liberalisation that continued in 2018. Three AA/DCFTA countries also progressed in harmonising their safety regulations with EU norms, thereby aiming to lower non-tariff barriers to trade.

Membership of the Regional Convention on pan-Euro-Mediterranean preferential rules of origin (PEM Convention) has provided another important dimension for regional

TRADE WITH EU: COMMODITIES				
RANK	2018		2017	2015-16
MOLDOVA	0.84	↗	0.83	↗ 0.71
UKRAINE	0.81	↘	0.84	↗ 0.74
GEORGIA	0.65	↘	0.72	↗ 0.61
AZERBAIJAN	0.53	↗	0.47	↘ 0.49
ARMENIA	0.29	↘	0.40	↗ 0.37
BELARUS	0.18	↘	0.19	↗ 0.18

integration within the EaP. Moldova joined the PEM Convention in 2017, Georgia in 2018, and Ukraine in 2019. The PEM Convention allows diagonal cumulation in trade among member states if they have mutual FTAs containing provisions allowing the use of the Convention. For instance, as of early 2021, Ukraine can use diagonal cumulation with the EU, EFTA, and Georgia, and is negotiating with Moldova the revision of the bilateral FTA to incorporate the PEM Convention.

In the analysed period, Armenia remained entitled to the GSP+ trade regime, but the country is expected to graduate from this preferential scheme in 2022. Since 2017, Armenia has been classified as an upper-middle income country and has thus become ineligible for the EU generalised system of preferences. In November 2017, Armenia and the EU signed the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA), but the agreement does not contain free trade provisions, as the country is a member of the Eurasian Economic Union. In trade with Azerbaijan and Belarus, the standard MFN regime is applied. These two countries remain outside the World Trade Organization (WTO). Both countries submitted their applications in the 1990s, but negotiations have been uneasy.

SHARE OF COUNTRY'S GOODS TRADE, % (2016-2018 AVERAGE)

TRADE PARTNER	UKRAINE	MOLDOVA	BELARUS	GEORGIA	ARMENIA	AZERBAIJAN
EU-28	40.9	55.0	22.7	27.6	24.0	42.4
RUSSIA	11.6	11.6	50.0	10.6	27.2	8.8
OTHER EAEU	5.8	3.3	1.3	6.4	0.9	1.3
TURKEY	11.6	5.5	1.5	14.8	3.5	11
CHINA	8.8	7.1	4.9	8.3	9.9	4.8
IRAN	0.7	0.3	0.1	1.7	4.7	1.2
OTHER COUNTRIES	20.6	17.2	19.5	30.6	29.8	30.5

Source: UN ComTrade

INVESTMENTS AND LOANS FROM THE EU

As before, the role of the European Union as a source of foreign direct investments (FDIs) in the EaP regions was uneven. It has remained the dominant investor for Ukraine and Moldova with a share of 60-70% of FDI inward stock, while for other EaP countries, the EU share varied in the 30-40% range. The EaP countries did not play a noticeable role as investors in the EU.

The inflow of loans from the EU has remained similarly uneven. In absolute terms, Ukraine has been the largest recipient of EIB loans, the stock of which reached EUR 5.9 bn by the end of 2018. Ukraine also featured 63 projects, the highest number among the EaP partners,

INVESTMENTS AND LOANS FROM THE EU					
RANK	2018		2017		2015-16
UKRAINE	0.57	↗	0.52	↘	0.58
MOLDOVA	0.51	↘	0.52	↗	0.28
GEORGIA	0.43	↗	0.39	↗	0.32
ARMENIA	0.25	↗	0.23	↗	0.22
AZERBAIJAN	0.24	↘	0.32	↘	0.44
BELARUS	0.13	↗	0.04	↗	0

although this still lagged behind the number of projects in e.g. Lithuania. At the same time, Georgia maintained its position as the major recipient of EIB loans per capita, both in value and in the number of projects. As of December 2018, Georgia attracted EUR 427 per capita of EIB loans compared to Moldova's EUR 227 and Ukraine's and Armenia's EUR 140.

TRADE WITH EU: SERVICES

By importance of the EU as a partner in trade in services, the EaP countries could tentatively be divided into two groups. For Ukraine, Moldova, and Belarus, sharing the common land border with the EU, service trade with the EU accounted for between 30% and 45% of the total. The role of the EU was especially high for imports of service for these countries. For South Caucasus countries, the share of the EU in their exports ranges between 11% and 16%, largely because they have developed exports of tourist services, aimed at their neighbours and less at the EU.

TRADE WITH EU: SERVICES					
RANK	2018		2017		2015-16
MOLDOVA	0.74	↘	0.75	↔	0.75
UKRAINE	0.62	↗	0.39	↘	0.43
BELARUS	0.54	↗	0.35	↘	0.41
GEORGIA	0.34	↗	0.22	↗	0.21
ARMENIA	0.26	↗	0.02	↘	0.03
AZERBAIJAN	0.26	↗	0.08	↗	0.06

Georgia is also the only Caucasus country that has a direct transport connection with the EU through the Black Sea.

TRADE DEFENCE INSTRUMENTS

Although the use of trade defence instruments between the EU and EaP countries has remained limited, there are some increasing trends. In 2018, the EU launched a safeguard investigation regarding selected steel products and applied provisional measures, affecting some but not all EaP countries (Georgia and Armenia were exempted). The EU also introduced new anti-dumping measures against Ukraine on steel. In 2018, Ukraine had continued applying the ban on exports of wood logs contested by the EU and launched several investigations affecting the EU.

TRADE DEFENCE INSTRUMENTS					
RANK	2018		2017		2015-16
GEORGIA	0.99	↗	1	↔	1
ARMENIA	0.99	↗	0.98	↔	0.98
MOLDOVA	0.98	↘	1	↔	1
AZERBAIJAN	0.98	↘	1	↔	1
UKRAINE	0.81	↘	0.93	↗	0.88
BELARUS	0.79	↔	0.79	↔	0.79

ENERGY INTERDEPENDENCE

EaP countries have gradually strengthened energy interdependence links with the EU, through international treaties, trade flows, and infrastructure interconnections. Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine are parties to the European Energy Community, while Armenia has observer status.

In 2018, Azerbaijan and Belarus remained net exporters of energy products to the EU. For Azerbaijan, energy products, primarily crude oil and natural gas, stayed at ca. 99% of the country's total exports to the EU. The energy exports of Belarus, primarily processed petroleum products, were ca. 56% of its total exports to the EU. Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia are net importers of energy products from the EU, although the share of the EU remained quite moderate at 14-18%. Armenia has very limited trade in energy products with the EU, relying on Russia instead.

ENERGY INTERDEPENDENCE				
RANK	2018	2017	2015-16	
AZERBAIJAN	0.88 ↓	0.89 ↗	0.87	
UKRAINE	0.81 ↓	0.84 ↗	0.77	
MOLDOVA	0.79 ↗	0.82 ↗	0.80	
BELARUS	0.78 ↓	0.73 ↗	0.70	
GEORGIA	0.75 ↓	0.82 ↘	0.89	
ARMENIA	0.42 ↗	0.35 ↗	0.30	

In terms of physical infrastructure, all EaP countries have developed interconnections in gas and electricity sectors with at least one other EaP country. Interconnections with the EU are established for Ukraine, Moldova, and Belarus, which have direct land borders with the EU, while the interconnections of South Caucasus countries are in the process of development, and they are not direct. Armenia, as a land-locked country with only two open borders – with Georgia and Iran – has the least developed infrastructural interconnections with the EU.

TRANSPORT: INTEGRATION WITH TRANS-EUROPEAN NETWORKS

The transport interconnections of EaP countries with the EU vary depending on the country and the type of transportation.

The multimodal transport corridors with the EU are most developed in Ukraine, and the least in Armenia (due to its land-locked geography and the closure of two out of four borders).

In 2018, only Georgia had a fully functional Common Aviation Area (CAA) with the EU. Several more EaP countries were at various stages of accession. Moldova applied the Agreement provisionally while the ratification procedures were completed only in 2020. Ukraine completed talks in 2013, but the signature of the agreement has been pending, largely due to the Gibraltar issue. After the completion of Brexit, the signature of the CAA between the EU and Ukraine is expected in 2021. Armenia completed talks regarding the CAA in 2017, but the agreement is still to go through internal procedures before signature. Azerbaijan is negotiating, while Belarus has not entered this process.

TRANSPORT: INTEGRATION WITH TRANS-EUROPEAN NETWORKS				
RANK	2018	2017	2015-16	
MOLDOVA	0.42 ↓	0.42 ↗	0.21	
UKRAINE	0.37 ↗	0.25 ↘	0.31	
GEORGIA	0.35 ↗	0.33 ↘	0.50	
ARMENIA	0.25 ↔	0.25 ↘	0.50	
AZERBAIJAN	0.25 ↗	0.17 ↘	0.25	
BELARUS	0 ↔	0 ↔	0	

All EaP countries suffer from deficiencies in their capacity to efficiently move goods and connect with international markets. The aggregated Logistic Performance Index, released by the World Bank based on 2012-2018 LPIs, placed Ukraine 66th out of 167 countries, thanks to developed tracking and tracing systems and timeliness of deliveries and relatively high logistic competences. The rest of the EaP rank from 110 to 124, suffering from the low quality of logistics services and underdeveloped tracking and tracing systems.

LOGISTICS PERFORMANCE INDEX, AGGREGATED INDEX FOR 2012-2018, RANK

TRADE PARTNER	LPI RANK	CUSTOMS	INFRASTRUCTURE	INTERNATIONAL SHIPMENTS	LOGISTICS COMPETENCE	TRACKING & TRACING	TIMELINESS
LITHUANIA	43	41	49	54	45	42	35
UKRAINE	69	95	105	81	70	54	55
BELARUS	110	126	103	124	102	124	87
MOLDOVA	113	122	131	90	123	133	90
ARMENIA	116	107	101	110	112	128	122
AZERBAIJAN	123	81	66	109	153	153	146
GEORGIA	124	109	108	132	139	130	114

Source: <https://lpi.worldbank.org/>

ENVIRONMENTAL LEGISLATION AND CO-OPERATION

The linkages of EaP countries with the EU in the sphere of the environment are quite complex. On the one hand, most EaP countries have joined key environment-related international conventions, as well as having signed multiple bilateral treaties with the EU. All six countries are parties to the Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making, and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters. The number of environmental bilateral agreements with the EU varies from 33 in the case of Azerbaijan to seven in the case of Armenia. On the other hand, the implementation of these agreements remains weak. Five EaP countries – the exception is Georgia – have joined the UNECE Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (ESPOO Convention). At the same time, it should be noted that in 2018-2019, Georgia took important steps towards the ESPOO Convention; its draft laws on EIA and SEA are compliant with the provisions of the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) in a Transboundary Context (Espoo Convention), and its Protocol on Strategic Impact Assessment (SEA). When it comes to EIA and SEA implementation, however, a persistent problem in all EaP countries is the weak integration of environmental policy and poor implementation of laws, even if adopted

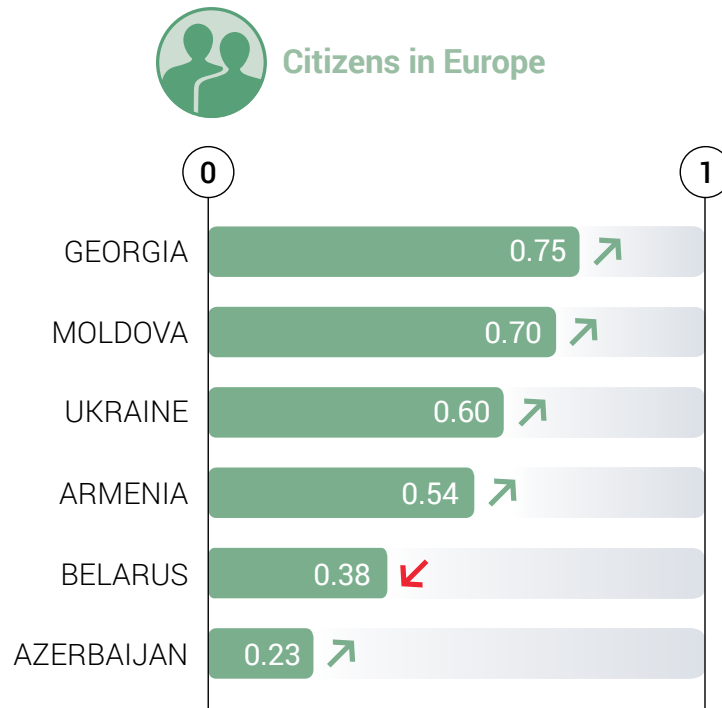
ENVIRONMENTAL LEGISLATION AND CO-OPERATION

RANK	2018	2017	2015-16
UKRAINE	0.90 ↔	0.90 ↗	0.74
BELARUS	0.83 ↗	0.71 ↗	0.37
MOLDOVA	0.60 ↗	0.53 ↘	0.54
GEORGIA	0.55 ↗	0.43 ↗	0.41
ARMENIA	0.45 ↗	0.33 ↘	0.35
AZERBAIJAN	0.31 ↔	0.31 ↘	0.36

in line with European and international standards. EIA and SEA laws require a cross-cutting approach in implementation, as they pertain to both environmental sectors – such as nature protection or water, air, waste, and chemicals management – and economic sectors – like energy, agriculture, transport, infrastructure, and tourism. However, their adoption often remains only nominal, due to inadequate institutional frameworks and persistent corruption. All EaP countries adopted new EIA and SEA legislation and the associated three started to implement the corresponding EU Directives. However, monitoring work done by civil society organisations shows that developers are attempting to ignore, or get around, the new assessment procedures. This is particularly visible in big projects, such as the E40 waterway affecting Poland, Belarus, and Ukraine, the Amulsar gold mine in Armenia, and the Svydovets ski resort in Ukraine (requiring an additional transboundary assessment), and big and small Hydropower Plants (HPPs).



CITIZENS IN EUROPE



Citizens in Europe measures the extent of mobility, migration and communication flows of citizens between EaP countries and the EU. Intra-EaP linkages are also taken into account. The Index focuses on migration as a process leading to deeper European integration and, ultimately, full freedom of movement. Migration is not understood here as a threat to the EU's internal security or as an EU policy designed to prevent illegal migration with the help of EaP states. The indicators contributing to the scores in this section are:

- Cultural Exchange and Co-operation
- Co-operation in Science and Education
- Mobility, including Academic and Student Mobility
- Affinity with the European Union¹

¹ Not counted for the purposes of the scoring but included in the narrative. The scores of Citizens in Europe 2017 have been retroactively fitted to adapt to a new methodology included in the 2018-19 edition.

The level of connectivity and people-to-people contacts between the EU and all its eastern neighbours increased in 2018, with the three AA countries leading in terms of exchanges and people-to-people contacts, closely followed by Armenia. The increase in the Index Citizens in Europe 2018 score over the previous Index scores mainly reflects intensified cultural exchange and mobility. 2018 was the first full year in which Ukrainians and Georgians enjoyed visa-free travel to the Schengen zone countries. Visa-free travel came into force for Georgians on 28 March 2017 and for Ukrainians on 11 June 2017. Moldovans have enjoyed visa-free travel to the EU since 28 April 2014. The increase in

the score is particularly marked for Moldova and Armenia, in both cases due to significantly stepped-up cultural exchange and cooperation.

Overall, the people-to-people indicators in the Index continued to reflect the countries' different levels of ambition in their relations with the EU, with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine leading in most indicators, but with Armenia remaining on an equal footing in the case of cultural exchange and co-operation, co-operation in science and education, and academic and student mobility.

CULTURAL EXCHANGE AND CO-OPERATION

In 2018, all EaP countries registered increased co-operation with the EU in the cultural sphere. Georgia continued to enjoy the highest rate of cultural exchange with the EU, and for the third year in a row remains the country implementing the highest number of bilateral and multilateral projects within the framework of the Culture and Creativity Programme. Ukraine remained among the worst performers. Although Ukraine's participation in projects is on a par with the other countries in absolute numbers, it continues to remain very low on a per-capita basis, pointing to the need for an increase in the number of opportunities offered to the country to reflect its population size.

Azerbaijan recorded a significant score increase thanks to its increased cooperation with the European Cultural Foundation, which saw both an increase in the number of projects per capita and in the amount of funds disbursed.

CULTURAL EXCHANGE AND CO-OPERATION			
RANK	2018		2017
GEORGIA	0.56	↗	0.32
MOLDOVA	0.45	↗	0.14
ARMENIA	0.32	↗	0.09
BELARUS	0.35	↗	0.24
AZERBAIJAN	0.22	↗	0.03
UKRAINE	0.26	↗	0.16

As forecast in the Index 2017, in 2018 Armenia clearly reaped the benefits of the signing (in March 2018) of the Memorandum of Understanding with the European Commission for Armenia's participation in Creative Europe. The country's participation in the Creative Europe programme contributed significantly to its increased score, as well as intensified cooperation with the European Training Foundation, represented by an increased number of projects and slightly higher disbursement per capita.

CO-OPERATION IN SCIENCE AND EDUCATION

In 2018, Georgia and Armenia recorded higher levels of co-operation in science and education with the EU. Confirming a trend already observed in 2017, Georgia, Moldova, Armenia and Ukraine registered an increase in the number of organisations participating in capacity-building projects under Erasmus+ and the number of youth mobility projects rose. Overall, this increase was slightly negatively offset by an overall decrease in the number of Horizon 2020 projects implemented.

Moldova and Georgia continued to score highest among the six EaP countries in this category. The 2018 results confirmed, for the fourth year in a row, Georgia, Armenia and Moldova as the countries with the highest participation in capacity-building projects under the Erasmus+ framework, and Armenia and Georgia as the

CO-OPERATION IN SCIENCE AND EDUCATION			
RANK	2018		2017
GEORGIA	0.69	↗	0.64
MOLDOVA	0.64	↗	0.67
ARMENIA	0.56	↗	0.49
UKRAINE	0.52	↘	0.53
AZERBAIJAN	0.24	↘	0.27
BELARUS	0.19	↘	0.40

countries with the highest number of student participants in the Erasmus Mundus programme and in Erasmus + youth mobility projects per capita. While these trends are positive, more needs to be done to ensure that Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Belarus can equally benefit from these programmes.

In 2018, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus did not have a single Jean Monnet Chair or Academic Module, unlike in previous years, when all six countries had at least one.

MOBILITY, INCLUDING ACADEMIC AND STUDENT MOBILITY

The liberalisation of the EU's visa regime with respect to Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia has been one of the main drivers behind increased mobility and people-to-people contacts between EaP and EU citizens. The 2018 introduction of the visa-free travel regime to the Schengen zone countries for Ukrainians and Georgians resulted in a significant decrease in the number of Schengen visas issued for citizens of these countries.

Across the three countries where visa requirements were still in place for travel to the EU in 2018, citizens of Belarus – as in previous years – were granted the highest number of Schengen visas per capita, although the number of visas granted to Belarusians decreased between 2017 and 2018. The conclusion of the agreements on visa facilitation and readmission between the EU and Belarus in May 2020 should bring the country in line with AA countries in this particular domain in the future. Azerbaijani citizens were granted the lowest

MOBILITY, INCLUDING ACADEMIC AND STUDENT MOBILITY			
RANK	2018		2017
GEORGIA	1	↔	1
MOLDOVA	1	↔	1
ARMENIA	1	↔	1
BELARUS	0.75	↔	0.75
AZERBAIJAN	0.60	↘	0.65
UKRAINE	0.24	↘	0.26

number of visas among the countries without visa liberalisation, but this reporting period saw a 12% increase in the number of visas issued (in contrast to the 20% decrease in the number of EU visas issued recorded between 2015-16 and 2017).

In terms of the regulatory framework for student mobility, Ukraine, Moldova Georgia and Armenia remain the countries where reforms have taken place in line with the Bologna process with the support of the Erasmus+ programme. In 2018, Belarus took some steps towards the adoption and implementation of a strategy for development of the education system in line with the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

	UKRAINE	MOLDOVA	BELARUS	GEORGIA	ARMENIA	AZERBAIJAN
2018 SCHENGEN VISA	191.725	2.615	681.106	2.927	59.012	59.325
2017 SCHENGEN VISA	694.349	1.479	710.504	19.141	57.601	52.165

Total uniform visas issued (including MEV) –

Source: <https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/borders-and-visas/visa-policy#stats>

AFFINITY WITH THE EU

According to the data published by EU Neighbours' Annual Survey Report 'OPEN Neighbourhood', in 2018, the EU continued to have a positive – or at least neutral – image in the six EaP countries surveyed. Nearly half of the population in Armenia (48%), Georgia (49%), Moldova (48%) and Ukraine (49%) have a positive perception of the EU, but the proportion of people with a positive image of the EU significantly decreased in Georgia (-10%), slightly improved in Moldova (+5%) and Ukraine (+6%), was unaltered in Armenia and further decreased in Belarus (-1%) and Azerbaijan (-8%).

The 2020 edition of the survey, further highlights that the EU has all but won the battle for hearts and minds in the EaP countries. According to the data published by EU Neighbours' Annual Survey Report "OPEN Neighbourhood", in 2020, only in Georgia and Ukraine over half of respondents stated that they believed Russia provided less financial support to their country than the European Union. In Armenia, a combined 61% of respondents believed that the Russian Federation provided more support than (41%) or the same support (20%) to their country as the EU. According to the report, only half of the population of the six EaP countries (49%, down 3% from 2019) has a positive image of the EU and around one third has a neutral stance (36%, up 2%). While overall the EU continues to conjure up a positive – or at least neutral – image in the six EaP countries surveyed, more efforts should be devoted to communicating the sizeable support it is providing.

THE METHODOLOGY OF THE INDEX

HOW IS THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP INDEX ASSEMBLED?

The Eastern Partnership Index combines indicators from existing sources with first-hand empirical information gathered by local country experts within the networks underpinning the EaP Civil Society Forum (CSF). This general design makes it possible to use the best existing knowledge and to improve this body of knowledge by focused, systematic data-collection that benefits from the CSF's unique in-country insights and access to local knowledge in the EaP countries.

However, expert surveys are prone to subjectivity. Many existing expert surveys are characterised by a mismatch between “soft”, potentially biased, expert opinions and “hard” coding and aggregation practices that suggest a degree of precision rarely matched by the more complex underlying reality and its narrative representation in country reports. The expert survey underlying the Eastern Partnership Index therefore avoids broad judgments, and instead consists of specific and detailed fact-based questions, following a methodological strategy pioneered by the World Bank's Doing Business surveys.

Most survey questions ask for a “Yes” or “No” response to induce experts to take a clear position and to minimise misclassification errors. All questions invite experts to explain and thus to contextualise their responses. In addition, experts are requested to substantiate their assessment by listing sources.

The survey is implemented by six country and six sectoral co-ordinators who supervise and assist the data collection and evaluation in the following sectors: deep and sustainable democracy (democracy and human rights); EU integration and convergence; sustainable development; international security, political dialogue and co-operation; sectoral co-operation and trade flows; citizens in Europe.

Firstly, the country co-ordinators ask local experts to evaluate the situation in their country on the basis of the questionnaire. These experts and the sectoral co-ordinators co-operate to ensure cross-country consistent assessments.

Secondly, the sectoral and country co-ordinators review the ratings and underlying rationales provided by the local experts. These reviews serve to clarify assessments where necessary, to compare the ratings across countries, and to revise ratings in consultation with local experts. This process facilitates a mutual understanding between experts and co-ordinators in order to improve the reliability and validity of the assessments.

Thirdly, sectoral and country co-ordinators draft narrative reports comparing the assessments for each country and (across all countries) sector. These drafts and the data scores are reviewed by a set of peer reviewers for each country. Finally, the data scores and narrative reports are reviewed and edited by the Index core team.

HOW ARE THE INDEX SCORES CALCULATED?

As a rule, all questions to be answered with yes or no by the country experts are coded 1 = yes or positive with regard, for example, to EU integration and convergence, and 0 = negative with regard to integration and convergence (labelled “1-0”). If the expert comments and consultations with experts suggest intermediate scores, such assessments are coded as 0.5. For items requiring numerical data (quantitative indicators), the figures are coded through a linear transformation, using the information they contain about distances between country scores. (The same approach is taken with regard to assessing the other sector categories, e.g. deep and sustainable democracy or sustainable development.) The transformation uses the following formula:

$$y = \frac{x - x_{\min}}{x_{\max} - x_{\min}}$$

where x refers to the value of the raw data; y is the corresponding score on the 0-1 scale; x_{\max} and x_{\min} are the endpoints of the original scale, also called “benchmarks”. We preferred this linear transformation over other possible standardisation techniques (e.g., z-transformation) since it is the simplest procedure.

For items scored with 0-1 or the intermediate 0.5, benchmarks are derived from the questions, assigning 1 and 0 to the best and worst possible performance. Since benchmarks for quantitative indicators often lack intuitive evidence, they have been defined by assigning the upper benchmark to a new EU member state.

HOW WERE THE BENCHMARKS CHOSEN?

Lithuania was chosen as the benchmark country because it shares a post-Soviet legacy with EaP countries and, as the largest Baltic state, resembles EaP countries most with regard to population size. In addition, the selection of Lithuania reflects the idea that the target level for EaP countries should neither be a top performer nor a laggard, but rather an average new EU member state with both strengths and weaknesses. Being the sixth among 13 new EU member states in terms of economic wealth (per capita GDP in purchasing power standards in 2015 according to Eurostat), Lithuania epitomises this idea relatively well. Moreover, considerations of data availability favoured the choice of a single country rather than determining median values for all new EU member states.

The lower benchmark is defined by the value of the worst-performing EaP country in 2014. To enable a tracking of developments over time, we chose 2014 as the base year for defining benchmark values. This year represents a critical juncture for the EaP countries because three countries signed Association Agreements with the EU, and Ukraine was fundamentally transformed by the Revolution of Dignity, the annexation of Crimea, and the war in its eastern parts. In those rare cases when the values of an EaP country exceeded the upper benchmark or fell below the lower benchmark, the upper and lower scores were set to 1 and 0 respectively. All benchmark values and standardisation procedures are documented in an excel file that is available on the EaP Index website.

HOW ARE THE DIFFERENT SUBCATEGORIES AGGREGATED?

The Eastern Partnership Index 2018 measures the situation of EaP countries as of December 2018, or the latest data available up until that point. Thus, the measurement is status-oriented, making it possible to identify the positions

of individual countries compared with other countries for the different sectors and questions.

Aggregating scores is necessary to arrive at an Index or composite indicator. However, aggregation implies decisions about the relative weight of subcategories that need to be explained. The Eastern Partnership Index consists of two dimensions, which are further disaggregated in sections, subsections, categories, subcategories and items. The different levels of disaggregation are designated by numbers such as 1.1, 1.1.1, etc.

This hierarchical structure reflects theoretical assumptions about the subcategories and boundaries of concepts. One could, for example, argue that free and fair elections constitute the core of democracy and should therefore be given a higher weight than the category of Freedom of Speech and Assembly. Conversely, one could also argue that democracy in most EaP countries is mainly impaired by unaccountable governments and the lack of independent media, while elections are more or less well organised.

For example, we define the section “International Security, Political Dialogue and Co-Operation” as consisting of six subcategories:

- 1.1 Political Dialogue with the EU
- 1.2 Intergovernmental Co-operation and Engagement in EAP Multilateral Events/Panels
- 1.3 International Security Co-operation
- 1.4 Border Security
- 1.5 EU Funding of Security Projects
- 1.6 Development Assistance from EU and EU Member states

The weights of the six subcategories should depend on the importance each subcategory has for the dimension of International Security, Political Dialogue and Co-Operation. One could, for example, argue that *Political Dialogue with the EU* constitutes the core of political dialogue and co-operation and therefore *Political Dialogue with the EU*, should be given a higher weight than the category of *Border Security*.

Since it would be difficult to establish a clear priority of one or several subcategories over others, we decided to assign equal weights

to all subcategories. Equal weighting of subcategories is also intuitively plausible since this method corresponds to the conceptual decision of conceiving, for example, the concept of democracy as composed of a variety of attributes placed on the same level. Equal weighting assumes that all subcategories of a concept possess equal conceptual status and that subcategories are partially substitutable by other subcategories.

An arithmetical aggregation of subcategories is, strictly speaking, possible only if subcategories are measured on an interval level, that is, we know that the scores of items, subcategories, categories, sections and dimensions contain information on distances. Most numerical data are measured at interval level: in these cases, we know, for example, that a share of EU exports amounting to 40% of GDP is twice a share of 20% and that this ratio is equal to the ratio between 60% and 30%. For the yes-no questions and items measured with other ordinal scales, we have information only about the ordering of scores, not about the distances between scores. For example, in the Approximation dimension – not included in this edition – we do not know the distance between a yes and a no for the question regarding parties' equitable access to state-owned media. Neither do we know whether the difference between yes and no for this question is equivalent with the difference between yes and no for the question asking whether political parties are provided with public funds to finance campaigns.

In principle, this uncertainty would limit us to determining aggregate scores by selecting the median rank out of the ranks a country has achieved for all subcategories (assuming equal weighting). This would, however, imply omitting the more detailed information contained by the numerical items. To use this information and to put more emphasis on big differences between countries, we have opted to construct quasi-interval level scores by adding the scores of items measured at ordinal level. This has been a standard practice in many indices and can also be justified by the rationale behind equal weighting.

Given the frequent uncertainty about the importance of subcategories for aggregate concepts, the safest strategy seems to be assigning equal status to all subcategories. Equal status suggests assuming that a score of 1 used to code a positive response for one

question equals a score of 1 for another positive response. Moreover, equal status means that all subcategories constituting a concept are partially substitutable. The most appropriate aggregation technique for partially substitutable subcategories is addition.

HOW ARE THE DIFFERENT QUESTIONS WEIGHTED?

Since the number of items differs from subcategory to subcategory, and since we want to apply equal weighting, we standardised the subcategory scores by dividing them through the number of items. Thus, the subcategory score ranges between 1 and 0 and expresses the share of yes-no questions answered positively in terms of the aggregate concept (and/or the extent to which numerical items or ordinal-level items are evaluated positively).

Quasi-interval level scores allow a range of aggregation techniques at higher levels of aggregation (subcategories, categories, sections and dimensions). The most important methods are multiplication and addition. Multiplication assigns more weight to individual subcategories, emphasising the necessity of subcategories for a concept; in contrast, addition facilitates the compensation of weaker scores on some subcategories by stronger scores on other subcategories, emphasising the substitutability of subcategories for a concept.

We apply an additive aggregation of subcategories, categories and sections because this approach fits to the method used on the item level, reflects the substitutability of subcategories, and is less sensitive with regard to deviating values on individual subcategories. To standardise the aggregate sums and ensure equal weighting, arithmetical means are calculated. An aggregate score is thereby calculated for the dimensions of **Linkage**.

Aggregation levels, aggregate scores, individual scores and the underlying raw data are documented in an excel file that can be downloaded from the Index website.



EASTERN PARTNERSHIP CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM

The Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF) is an umbrella organisation for more than 1200 civil society organisations from the six Eastern Partnership countries and the EU. Launched in 2009, the Forum provides a platform for interaction between the EU and EaP civil society organisations, and aims at facilitating reforms in the EU's Eastern partners and bringing them closer to the EU. The Forum operates as an independent, transparent, and inclusive actor to secure changes on key policy areas across the four EaP thematic platforms, in which the Forum has a permanent observer status. On the national level, the Forum aims to strengthen diversity and plurality of public discourse and policymaking by holding governments accountable and promoting fundamental freedoms, participatory democracy, and human rights.

www.eap-csf.eu



EUROPEAN UNION

The European Union is a unique economic and political union between 28 European countries. It is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and gender equality prevail. The Eastern Partnership (EaP) is a specific dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy involving the EU, its Member States and six Eastern European Partners: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. The EaP aims at building a common area of shared democracy, prosperity, stability, and increased co-operation. The bonds forged through the EaP help to strengthen state and societal resilience. In the period of 2014-2020, the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) is the key EU financial instrument for co-operation with the EaP countries.

www.europa.eu

This publication was produced with the support of the European Union. The content of this publication does not reflect the official opinion of the European Union. Responsibility for the information and views expressed therein lies entirely with the authors.



EASTERN PARTNERSHIP
Civil Society Forum



**Funded by the
European Union**