

Taking stock of 10 years of the EaP policy and strategizing for post-2020 - Trade, Digital Economy and Harmonization of Digital Markets

Public event report

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Summary

The fourth, and the last event of the EaP CSF public event series, dedicated to the 10-year anniversary of the Eastern Partnership, which was hosted by the Permanent Representation of Finland to the EU on 5 June 2019, served as an opportunity to analyze the current state of play in the EaP region – and look forward, beyond the 2020 Deliverables. It also offered a chance to discuss the challenges and common trends that remain at stake in terms of trade, economic development and harmonization of digital markets (HDM).

Following the welcome remarks by **Kaisa Honka-Hallila**, who presented an overview of the priorities of the Finnish Presidency of the Council with regards to Eastern Partnership, **Georgeta Mincu**, a Moldovan delegate of the Forum, briefly explored the possibilities of a close(r) regional cooperation on trade between Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine and the EU.

Thanks to the three Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area agreements (DCFTA agreements) concluded by the EU with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, and the most recent Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement signed with Armenia (CEPA), the trade between EaP and EU has exponentially increased.



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However, there is still a significant headway on access to finance and support to SMEs, digital agenda and harmonization of digital markets. Over ten years, the EaP has yielded numerous achievements – and its countries have progressed in many areas, sometimes on different roads that have not always been linear or smooth.

During the World Café debate, stakeholders and civil society representatives answered to a set of questions, regarding the EaP policy – and how it has delivered in fostering the harmonization of digital markets in the region.

WORLD CAFÉ DISCUSSION

Among the 2020 Deliverables, the harmonization of digital markets (HDM) has been of particular importance, extending the benefits of the European Digital Single Market Strategy to the 75 million consumers in the EaP region, contributing to economic growth, generating more jobs, improving people's lives and supporting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and businesses.



"Beyond sophisticated language used when discussing HDM, HDM is a day-to-day need that could improve the well-being of all those living in the EaP countries"

Olga Chyzhova, EaP CSF Working Group 2 Member

The civil society corner, represented by Olga Chyzhova (Digital Communication Network, Estonia) and Maksym Koriavets, (Polissya Foundation for International and Regional Studies, Ukraine), stressed that beyond sophisticated language used when discussing HDM, HDM is a day-to-day need that could improve the well-being of all those living in the EaP countries. One of the major achievement of the EaP policy on HDM is definitely the launch of **EU4Digital initiative**, that aims at introducing an HDM coordinating mechanism – and thus, contribute to the synchronization of e-solutions across the EaP countries. Nevertheless, achieving this goal requires **political will, transparency and efficient public awareness campaigns**, in both urban and rural areas.

The invited stakeholders, Vassilis Kopanas (Senior Expert and HDM Coordinator, DG CONNECT) and Juan Navas Sabater (Lead ICT Specialist Europe and Central Asia, World Bank), emphasized **the need for more coordination at both regional and national level in all EaP countries** – and asked the civil society to be proactive in raising awareness about the benefits of HDM, as well as leading communication campaigns and making policy recommendations.



"Close to 50% of the jobs that exist nowadays will not exist in 20 years. The impact of artificial intelligence will change our societies dramatically. The EaP region will need to keep up with those changes"

Juan Navas Sabater, Lead ICT Specialist Europe and Central Asia, World Bank

Juan Navas Sabater gave an overview of the current situation in the region, praising both the progress that he witnessed in the last couple of years in the region, particularly on telecommunications in Azerbaijan and Georgia and on broadband infrastructure in Moldova, advocating for a more **result-oriented development**.

Although significant milestones have been achieved when it comes to drawing national broadband strategies and improving the necessary broadband infrastructure in the EaP countries, certain common trends remain at stake: the urban bias in the fixed broadband market; the social and economic inequalities caused by the digital skills gap that pose a serious challenge for businesses, people and governments in the region; the need for more localized digital services and content providers.

On a similar note, **Vassilis Kopanas** briefly presented the evolution of the HDM policy led by the EU over the last six years, with a focus on three levels, namely the public administration (i.e. eTrade, eServices, eHealth), the political level (via the EaP Ministerial meetings on HDM) and the operational level (financing projects in the region).

"Starting in early 2020, an additional initiative will be launched as part of this three pillar approach: the Cyber-Resilience Programme, another priority for the EaP region"

Vassilis Kopanas, Senior Expert and HDM Coordinator, DG CONNECT



The harmonization of digital markets between EaP and EU requires both proper infrastructure and skilled human resources. Currently, the absence of national strategies and the lack of programs, aimed at fostering the acquisition of digital skills do not only slow down the HDM process, but have an important impact on each country's economy and business sector, and at a certain extent, on the well-being of every citizen.



"Although the need e-Competence Frameworks (e-CF) for basic economic and social spheres is already reflected in the Joint Staff working Document on 20 Key Deliverables and the HDM Action Plan, all EaP countries need to prioritize their implementation"

Maksym Koriavets, EaP CSF Working Group 2 Member

Taking into account the current digital trends and developments in the European Union and in the world, the stakeholders corner stressed that the harmonization and liberalization of telecom markets should continue in all EaP countries and more prominence should be given to infrastructure and cross-border cooperation projects (i.e. 5G corridors).

The framework under which the HDM policy developed in the Eastern Partnership is very solid, however the current level of digitalization of the EaP countries reflects, among other, the political will of the governments in the region. In this regard, the civil society would advocate for more transparency, more research-based initiatives and projects, more support for campaigns that would raise the awareness of the society on HDM-related topics, dedicated education and information campaigns to address the generational gap and rural-urban divide in terms of digital literacy, targeted policies to facilitate the access of more women to ICT.

