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12 The EU's role in Eastern Europe/The EU and its [post-communist] neighbours

- EU enlargement and the European Neighbourhood Policy

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Relations with the countries of former communist Eastern Europe have been a very important aspect of the European Union's external relations and, according to many, are one of the most successful products of its common foreign policy over the last two decades, especially regarding the outcomes of the policy and process of the EU's eastern enlargement. However, the EU's policy towards and established relations with the countries of the former communist bloc have not been uniform and are not the result of a carefully prepared, well-designed and long-term strategy. In many aspects, they are direct and to some extent unavoidable outcomes of developments that followed the sudden collapse of the communist bloc in Eastern Europe and the transformation of the European Community into the more integrated European Union and its expected "common foreign policy" (European Council, 1991) in the western part of the **European continent**.

Introduction

When the people and their political leaders overthrew communist party rule in the countries of East Central and Eastern Europe in the late 1980s and early 1990s, they were led by a strong desire to replace the communist political dictatorships and inefficient command economy with a functioning liberal democracy and market economy primarily following existing patterns in the West, specifically along the lines of neighbouring Western European countries instead of the more liberal and decentralised US variant. In addition to this desire for regime change, the ex-communist European nations also shared a common lack of local knowledge for modelling the necessary reforms, especially in the economic sphere, and even more so a lack of necessary resources for financing these reforms (Petrovic, 2013, ch. 1). Thus, from the very beginning the political and economic transformation of the countries of former communist Eastern Europe must have relied on foreign assistance. This assistance was naturally expected to come foremost from the Western European states and their political, military and economic integrations (such as the Council of Europe, NATO and the European Community) as the closest normative and financial power(s) whose values and norms had largely inspired the emergence of a desire for regime change across communist Europe during the 1980s (Crampton, ch. 22). Although surprised by the speed and radicalism of changes in its Eastern neighbourhood, the EU's predecessor, the European Community (EC), and its member states relatively quickly decided to positively respond to these demands.

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Soon after introducing the PHARE programme for economic assistance in 1989, the EC offered a broader level of economic cooperation through beneficial association treaties to effectively all European countries of the former Soviet bloc and had already signed them with three ECE post-communist states (Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia) by December 1991. Moreover, under pressure by these three recipients and an important part of their domestic public and intellectual and political elites, who felt “obliged” and/or “responsible” for assisting their Eastern neighbours with “shared values” and the same “collective identity” (Sedelmeier 2005; Schimmelfennig et al. 2006; Schimmelfennig 2001 and 2002)¹, and led by a strong rationale to extend “the zone of peace, stability and prosperity in [its] Europe[an neighbourhood]” (European Commission, 2000: 1; see also Nugent, 2004 and Zielonka, 2006), the members of the newly-founded European Union (EU)² did not wait long to offer even more assistance. This happened at the European Council meeting in Copenhagen in June 1993, less than four years after the communist regimes and bloc had started to collapse in East Central Europe, when the leaders of the 12 EU member states decided to open the possibility of full integration and membership in the Union to post-communist European states expressing the wish and having the ability to meet conditions for accession defined at that same meeting. However, while the results of the process launched at the Copenhagen meeting have met (and sometimes even exaggerated) the positive expectations of both sides of the former Iron Curtain regarding developments in the post-communist states of East Central Europe (ECE) and the Baltics, which were assessed as “fit to join” the EU in 2004, they were less convincing in other regions of post-communist Europe. While the EU has successfully promoted and supported peaceful development, democratisation and market economic reforms in the ECE and Baltic states, the remaining post-communist European states have received much less external assistance for reform and consequently have had many more problems in introducing necessary reforms (Petrovic, 2013). The only partial exceptions in this regard are the three latest entrants into the EU from the Balkans: Bulgaria and Romania, which joined the EU in 2007, and Croatia, the most recent EU member as of 2013, all of which strongly confirm the remarkable correlation between progress in accession into the EU and success in post-communist political and economic transition. While Romania and Bulgaria have considerably accelerated reform processes since pro-European and pro-reformist parties came to power in 1996 and 1997 respectively, Croatia joined them after its nationalist authoritarian leader Tudjman died in 1999 and it succeeded in subsequently improving its political and economic ties with the West and opened the process of accession to the EU.

¹ This type of motivation in the existing (or “old”) EU member states has been highlighted in constructivist and functionalist explanations of the factors that were behind the EU’s eastern enlargement (Sedelmeier, 2005; Schimmelfennig et al. 2006; Schimmelfennig, 2001 and 2002).

² The EU was created with the Maastricht Treaty which was signed on 7 February 1992 as an umbrella organisation that incorporated the Community ‘pillar’ (the old EC), the Common Foreign and Security Policy ‘pillar’ and the Justice and Home Affairs ‘pillar’. The EC retained the legal personality until 2009 when it was transferred to the EU by virtue of the Lisbon Treaty.

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The following text examines EU relations with those Eastern neighbours which stayed out of the process of the 2004/2007 enlargement(s). The chapter surveys two different approaches and policies that the EU adopted towards the remaining non-EU post-communist European states. The first approach has been adopted towards the small group of countries in the so-called Western Balkans, which received a relatively “strong promise” during the early 2000s that they could count on following the pathway of their Central European, Baltic and (east) Balkan counterparts and join the EU once they had made “solid progress in economic and political reform and [fulfilled] the necessary conditions and requirements” (European Council, 2008, point 52). The second approach is more ambiguous and has been adopted towards the six post-Soviet states of the so-called “Eastern neighbourhood” (Ukraine, Moldova Belarus, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan), which were firstly included in the EU’s European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and after the Lisbon Treaty in 2009 in the so-called “Eastern Partnership” (EP) but which never got a promise of potential or possible EU membership.

1. EU enlargement and democracy building in post-communist Europe

Since the time when it was officially defined as a constitutive element of European integration and one of the three “pillars” of the newly founded European Union in the Maastricht Treaty, the most effective instrument of the EU’s common foreign policy has been the promise of membership. Relying largely on undisputed universal values and its superior normative basis (Manners, 2002), which have been incorporated as normative principles into the Copenhagen accession conditions, the EU’s conditional promise of membership worked extremely well in the countries of ECE and the Baltics. Trying to meet required criteria such as the “stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities [as well as] the existence of a functioning market economy” (European Council, 1993, 7.A. iii), five East Central European and three Baltic post-communist states progressed fairly well with post-communist reforms and were thus awarded European Union membership in May 2004. In fact, the quarter of a century of post-communist history to date has so far shown that, apart from the abovementioned three Balkan states which joined them with a considerable delay, these eight have been the only post-communist states able to successfully (or at least satisfactory) accomplish the transformation of their ex-communist political dictatorships and command economies into the functioning systems of liberal democracy and a market economy.

The positive impact of the eastern enlargement of the European Union on the success of post-communist political and economic transition is a historical fact that has been recognised in a large body of literature for some time (Grabbe, 2006; Pridham, 2005; Schimmelfennig,

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2008; Vachudova, 2005). This impact occurred not only because of the amount of financial and economic assistance which the official candidates for EU membership received from the EU in the form of trade concessions, donations and specially created funds for supporting development and transition in the candidate countries (see e.g. EU Commission, 2007c) but was primarily due to the invaluable guidelines and assistance in expertise that they received from the EU through the process of accession negotiations for modelling necessary reforms. The comparative data provided by international organisations specialising in measuring success in post-communist democratisation and economic transition, such as Freedom House (FH), the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and Transparency International, unequivocally confirm a remarkably strong correlation between the levels of progress in accession into the EU and success in post-communist reforms. As the table below shows, those countries of East Central Europe and the Baltics which were the first to apply

Table 1

Political and Economic Transition in post-communist Europe

	Democracy Score*			Economic Transition*		
	1999	2005	2012	1999	2005	2012
EU-8 (2004)**	<i>2.12</i>	<i>2.03</i>	<i>2.45</i>	<i>3.4</i>	<i>3.7</i>	<i>3.7¹</i>
<i>Romania</i>	<i>3.54</i>	<i>3.39</i>	<i>3.43</i>	<i>2.8</i>	<i>3.2</i>	<i>3.5</i>
<i>Bulgaria</i>	<i>3.58</i>	<i>3.18</i>	<i>3.07</i>	<i>2.8</i>	<i>3.4</i>	<i>3.5</i>
<i>Croatia</i>	<i>4.46</i>	<i>3.75</i>	<i>3.61</i>	<i>3.0</i>	<i>3.4</i>	<i>3.5</i>
Macedonia FYR	3.83	3.89	3.89	2.7	3.0	3.3
Albania	4.75	4.04	4.14	2.6	2.9	3.1
Bosnia-Herzeg.	5.42	4.18	4.36	2.0	2.6	2.9
Montenegro	5.50	3.79	3.82	1.6	2.5	3.0
Serbia	5.50	3.75	3.64	1.4	2.6	3.0
Armenia	4.79	5.18	5.39	2.7	3.1	3.0
Azerbaijan	5.58	5.86	6.57	2.2	2.6	2.4
Belarus	6.25	6.64	6.68	1.5	1.8	1.9
Georgia	4.17	4.96	4.82	2.7	3.0	3.0
Moldova	4.25	5.07	4.89	2.7	2.9	2.9
Ukraine	4.63	4.50	4.82	2.5	3.0	2.8

* Freedom House Nations in Transit “Democracy score” (1 being the highest; 7 being the lowest), and the simple average of EBRD transition indicators (4+ or 4.3 denotes a standard and performance comparable to advanced industrial economies; 1 denotes little or no change from a “rigid centrally planned economy”).

** Five East central European and three Baltic states which joined the EU in 2004.

***Belarus, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine (average score).

¹ Seven countries only (from 2008, the EBRD no longer provides a country assessment for the Czech Republic).

Sources: Freedom House *Nations in Transit*, various years; EBRD *Transition Report*, various years.

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and accede to the EU had far better Freedom House “Nations in Transit” democracy scores and EBRD economic transition indicators³ immediately after their accession to the EU in 2004 than any other post-communist state or group of states. This comparative data further shows a significant improvement in the democratisation and marketisation of the Balkan states in the mid-2000s, when these states started to close the gap with the “earlier reformers” from Central and Northern Europe as well as overtake and leave behind the non-Baltic post-Soviet states. Needless to say, this happened only after the civil wars in Croatia and Bosnia were terminated in the mid-1990s; the Balkan states had significantly improved and intensified their relations with the EU by the late 1990s and early 2000s (for more details, see Petrovic 2013, 15–17).

By contrast, the FH democracy scores and EBRD indicators of the progress in economic transition of non-Baltic post-Soviet states, which never got an enlargement promise from the EU, have not only remained far behind those achieved in the ECE and the Baltic states but had even started to head in the opposite direction by the mid-2000s (see the table above). Instead of moving towards more democracy and more stable socio-economic conditions, all non-Baltic post-Soviet states (with the only partial exception being Ukraine, whose future at present looks very uncertain) have become stuck with highly corrupt authoritarian regimes with anti-reform agendas.

Despite its undisputable benefits for post-communist states and the obvious benefits that the “old” EU member states have also had from enlargement to the East, particularly from the strengthened prospects for stable and peaceful developments on the continent as a whole, the spread of peace, democracy and prosperity on other post-communist states via EU enlargement is speedily approaching its limits. While the political leaders and people of Croatia have been celebrating the accession of their country as the 28th member of the EU on 1 July 2013, the prospects for further EU enlargements for the current candidates and potential candidates for EU membership (with the exception of Iceland, whose accession prospects have stalled significantly due to internal pressures)⁴ presently look more uncertain than they were when the EU offered them association with the prospect of accession in the early 2000s. Pressured by the extending duration of the global economic crisis and their own internal financial and economic imbalances, the EU and its member states’ leading politicians and officials have (despite optimistic “pro-enlargement” rhetoric) continued to discourage new and potential applicants for EU membership with a range of varying active and passive

³ Freedom House’s “Nations in Transit” democracy scores for a particular year (i.e. 2005) show the data collected throughout the previous calendar year (2004 in this case), whereas the EBRD economic transition indicators show the data collected from October of the previous year (2004) to October of the year of publication (2005).

⁴ Currently there are four official candidates (excluding Iceland, whose government has recently suspended its application) and three potential candidates for EU membership. The three official candidates (Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia) and all three potential candidates (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo*) are from the Western Balkans. Turkey has been an official candidate since ...

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policy measures and incentives which were introduced with the emergence of *enlargement fatigue* after the completion of the 2004/07 enlargement round (Phinnemore, 2006; Emerson et al, 2006). In addition to the increased toughness of the original Copenhagen accession criteria, these have included an increased number of conditions and a few more restrictive measures (Phinnemore, 2006; Emerson et al, 2006; Petrovic 2009).⁵ Moreover, some policy incentives (and the additional accession conditions) launched by the EU and its leading member states in recent years to assist the interested parties in solving their long lasting disputes about the statehood status of the multi-national states in the Western Balkans (most notably Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo-Serbia and to some extent Macedonia as well) have been more of an additional burden than constructive assistance on the way of these states to their “EU future” (see Petrovic 2013, for more details). As a consequence, only three of the several current official and potential candidates for EU membership who have opened negotiations for accession are from South-Eastern Europe. The most “advanced” is Turkey, which has been negotiating since October 2005, yet without any sign that these negotiations will be completed in the foreseeable future. Macedonia is the next oldest officially recognised candidate for EU accession (since 2005) after Turkey and is still waiting to open its accession negotiations. The previous “record holder” in the above regard was Croatia, which negotiated for six and a half years. By contrast, none of the countries which joined the EU in the 2004/07 enlargement round negotiated longer than five years.

Nevertheless, the EU seems to be (still) committed to continuing with the “enlargement promise” to the Western Balkan states, i.e. a conditional offer of membership once the accession conditions are satisfied (although the conditions for this group of states have become much tougher and more complicated to fulfil than they were for any of the countries of the 2004/2007 enlargement round). The fact that the EU has recently opened accession negotiations with two Western Balkans states, firstly with Montenegro in June 2012 and then with Serbia in January 2014, after almost seven years of “drought” in this regard (from October 2005), gives some more realistic hopes for all the Western Balkan states. At least it shows that the major EU member states are not so “sick” of enlargement fatigue anymore and that they still intend to “finish the job” and keep the more than decade-long promise⁶ that

The Western Balkans and support for preparation for future integration into European structures and ultimate membership into the Union is a high priority for the EU. The Balkans will be an integral part of a united Europe.

(EU General Affairs and External Relations Council, 2003, paragraph 2)

⁵ One of these new restrictions was the introduction of the clause in the Negotiation Framework with the new candidates that defined the accession negotiations as an “open-ended process whose outcome cannot be guaranteed beforehand” (European Commission 2005, point 2 and European Commission 2005a, point 1) which did not exist for the countries of the 2004/2007 enlargement.

⁶ The time that has passed since then is in fact longer than the whole period from defining accession conditions at the Copenhagen European Council in June 1993 to the accession of the first group of post-communist states to the EU on 1 May 2004.

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Eventually, after so many problems and delays, it can be expected that the EU's eastern enlargement "project" will be concluded by the accession of all the Western Balkan states (supposing, of course, that the current EU-28 will be able to successfully overcome all the internal challenges and weaknesses which the EU as an organisation and institution will face in the meantime) by the early 2020s. This will happen regardless of the current division of these states into those like Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia, which are very close to meeting the EU accession standards set during the previous enlargement rounds, and the remaining three (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo), who are still some way off meeting these standards (Petrovic, Smith 2013), and the opposition of some intellectual and political circles in the major EU member states who have not yet "recovered" from enlargement fatigue. The main reason to expect that EU enlargement to the east will eventually include all the Western Balkan states lies in the fact that the benefits for the EU of expanding into this small but geopolitically important region in the "heart of Europe" will arguably outweigh the costs of their accession, which will be fairly modest considering the very small size of this group of countries (ibid).⁷

This type of prediction can hardly be given for future relations between the EU and the six non-Baltic post-Soviet states of the Eastern neighbourhood, all of which are indisputably "European" and could also hope to join the EU one day according to the proposition of the Treaty of Rome (which has not been amended by subsequent treaties).⁸ Instead of a membership promise, which has never even been seriously considered for any of these states, the EU has offered cordial neighbourhood relations and partnership to this group of states.

2. The European Neighbourhood Policy and Eastern Partnership

On the eve of its "mega-enlargement" in 2004, the leaders of the EU and its member states tried to formulate a more conclusive policy approach towards the countries in their Eastern and Mediterranean neighbourhoods that would further "export" the EU's values and norms, i.e. encourage democratisation and support socio-economic development and prosperity in the related countries but without the "enlargement promise". The ENP was first outlined in a Commission Communication to the Council and the EP: "Wider Europe-Neighbourhood: a New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours", known as the Wider Europe Communication (2003). It was followed by a more developed Strategy Paper on the European Neighbourhood Policy of May 2004. The official discourse of the ENP emphasised the value-driven logic of the EU's attempt to export its democratic norms and governance standards to the wider neighbourhood. It was directed toward neighbours located

⁷ The combined population living in all the remaining non-EU Western Balkan states is some 18 million, which is 3 million less than the current population of Romania and almost four times less than that of Turkey.

⁸ "...any European state may apply to become a member of the Community [i.e. the EU]" (The Treaty establishing the European Economic Community, art. 237).

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on the southern and eastern fringe of the EU's borders. The ENP's main instrument was the 'action plan' (AP), which was to be agreed between the EU and the partner country. Its prime task was to identify priorities of cooperation between the two parties, particularly regarding the partner country's agenda for political and economic reforms, with short and medium-term priorities of 3 to 5 years (European Commission, ENP action Plan, available at: http://eeas.europa.eu/enp/documents/action-plans/index_en.htm)

Similarly to the EU's enlargement policy (yet with a much smaller reward) the basic idea behind the establishment of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) is characterised by political conditionality, whereby external factors try to influence a domestic agent's behaviour through the prospect of tangible rewards for offered assistance. Thus, the offered EU assistance for social and economic development to the countries included in the ENP is in the form of (relatively) comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) aimed not only at improving trade, the economic environment and the investment climate but also at incorporating expected political and system reforms.

The ENP has received a respectable amount of interest from the academic community, particularly in examining the effectiveness of the ENP in the democratisation process in the respective countries. Michael Emerson et al (2005, p.29) pointed very early out that the mere presence of the EU could be a driver of democracy if a strong desire for democracy exists in the societies included in the ENP framework. Emerson's approach is grounded in the belief that the EU derives its influence from being perceived as a peaceful and non-military actor and as an "island of peace" (Bretherton and Vogler, 1999, p.190). Indeed, closer ties with the EU and its member states' economic prosperity and socio-political stability may motivate the elites and society in the neighbouring partner countries to strive for change, but such a motivation does not last without additional incentives and some tangible achievements. Hence, the ENP has been widely criticised for adopting many of the pre-accession mechanisms without the "carrot" of prospective membership for participating states (Cremona and Hillion 2006, Schimmelfennig, F. and Lavenex S. 2006, Schimmelfennig, 2010).

The European Commission itself also realised very early on that some important weaknesses were present in the ENP. In its reports on the progress of the ENP in 2006, the commission noted the following problems: the lack of impact on regional conflicts; the modest amount of financial support – even under the new ENP Instrument (ENPI); the weakness of people-to-people exchanges and civil society participation in the ENP; the asymmetry between the partners countries' demands; and EU offers that did not immediately address their main concerns.

Due to their historical experiences and geopolitical location, the new EU members from East Central Europe and the Baltics were among the staunchest supporters of further strengthening the ENP with regard to the EU's Eastern neighbourhood. Poland, the Czech Republic and Lithuania adopted the position that the EU should pursue an "open door policy"

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and advocated to offer a “European perspective” to the countries that are willing to accede to the EU in the future and ready to accomplish the accession criteria (Wojna and Gniazdowski 2009). The ENP is perceived as an instrument reinforcing the reforms which would prepare the Eastern countries, such as Ukraine and Moldova, for EU membership. As pointed out by the Polish Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski “we all know the EU has enlargement fatigue. We have to use this time to prepare as much as possible so that when the fatigue passes, membership becomes something natural” (Godirova 2008).

As discussed in Section 1 and mentioned in the above quotation, these incentives of EU Eastern newcomers for “strengthening” the ENP by effectively transforming it in further EU enlargement to the east came at the “wrong time”, when the majority of “old” EU members felt enlargement fatigue and did not want new enlargements. However, when the “European perspective” for the Eastern neighbourhood was rejected by the EU leaders and leading (Western) member states,⁹ the ECE countries turned to other possible options that would intensify closer cooperation with the East. They advocated for more effective use of the existing instruments of regional co-operation and an intensification of relations with the Eastern neighbours in the Joint Political Statement on the Strengthening of the European Neighbourhood Policy during the meeting of the Visegrád Group (V4) countries: the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia and Hungary, in January 2007 (Visegrad Group 2007). The V4 strongly supported the recommendations contained in the Commission’s Communication on Strengthening the European Neighbourhood Policy as well as the conclusions of the European Council of December 2006, which served to strengthen the ENP. Unsurprisingly, a similar position was adopted by Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. In 2007, the Estonian Foreign Minister Urmas Paet emphasised that the neighbourhood policy was one of the strongest external instruments of the EU and should be developed further, focusing particularly on differentiation and individual approaches (Estonian Review 2007).

Eventually, the ECE and Baltic promoters of closer EU relations with the countries of the Eastern neighbourhood potentially leading towards a “membership offer” were able to persuade the other members of the EU to introduce changes to the ENP in 2009. **The Eastern Partnership (EaP)** project was first presented by Poland and Sweden (with the strong support of other ECE countries) at the General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC) meeting in Brussels on 26 May 2008. The principal aim of this initiative is to strengthen the EU’s impact on democratisation, socio-economic progress and peaceful developments in the six countries of its Eastern neighbourhood by increasing the EU’s economic ties with related countries and offering them more economic assistance than they had received within the previous ENP framework as well as indirect announcements¹⁰ of potential membership. The EaP was officially accepted at the European Council meeting in June 2008 and was included in the European Council Conclusions (11018/08 20 June 2008),

⁹ Solana’s quotation...

¹⁰ Primarily using terminological expressions such as “support aspirations for closer ties”, “closer relationship” and “deepen relations” rather than offering specific promises.

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which invited the European Commission to prepare the project in more detail. The Communication from the Commission to the EP and the Council (COM(2008) 823 final) was presented in December 2008. The EaP was officially endorsed by the adoption of the “Declaration by The European Council on the Eastern Partnership” at the Brussels Council meeting in March 2009 (European Council, 2009) and then officially launched during a special summit held during the Czech presidency in May 2009 (Council of the European Union 2009).

The Commission’s document stressed that the EaP “will be based on mutual commitments to the rule of law, good governance, respect for human rights, respect for and protection of minorities, and the principles of the market economy and ” and outlined five priority areas for reinforcing bilateral relations: a new form of agreement, the prospect of negotiations to put in place deep and comprehensive free trade areas (FTAs), progressive visa liberalisation, the enhancement of cooperation in the areas of security and energy security, and the EU’s support for social development (COM(2008) 823, p.3). A new contractual framework for cooperation was also proposed, superseding the current Partnership and Cooperation Agreements and introducing Association Agreements (AA). The establishment of a “deep and comprehensive free trade area (DCFTA) [which] will cover substantially all trade, including energy, and aim at the highest possible degree of liberalisation (with the asymmetry in the pace of liberalisation appropriate to the partners’ economies)” (ibid, 5) was announced as a particularly important element of the AA.

Although some analysts, and even more so political leaders, in the ECE and Baltic states who initiated the partnership incentive tend to argue that the notice of “association” brings a really new dimension in the relationship between the EU and the countries of its Eastern neighbourhood (see e.g. Hillion and Mayhew, 2009), it is hard to find any particularly new mechanisms incorporated in the EaP that would additionally stimulate the partner countries to comply with EU conditions (or wishes) regarding the directions of their political and economic developments. Apart from this call for “association” (primarily in terms of intensifying economic links through the establishment of the DCFTA) and the above-mentioned indirect announcements (see footnote 9) with no explicit notice of “accession” or “membership”, the EaP, similarly to the ENP, does not offer “the most attractive ‘carrot’ – EU membership... [but only] a [more] liberalised access of goods and persons to the EU” (Schimmelfennig, 2010).

The empirical outcomes of the five-year-long implementation of the EaP correspond with the above assessment – they are not very promising. A brief look at the data presented in Table 1 shows that none of the countries included in the incentive have been able to improve their generally very high (i.e. negative – see the explanation of the scoring system given below the table) democracy scores in recent years. Even worse, Ukraine, which was after the 2004 Orange Revolution the most prosperous of the six countries with a democracy score at a level very close to those achieved in the Balkan states, has significantly worsened its score

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over the last few years, while the dictatorial grip on power in Belarus and Azerbaijan, two countries which ten years ago were assessed by Freedom House's Nations in Transit study as (or very close to) "Consolidated Authoritarian Regimes" (ratings between 6.00 and 7.00), have become more "consolidated". Clearly the idea of promoting democracy, the rule of law, respect of human rights and so on in the EU's eastern neighbourhood through the EaP has not "worked" thus far. Although the countries of the Eastern Partnership (excluding the two most authoritarian states mentioned above: Belarus and Azerbaijan) have achieved slightly better results in economic reforms (see columns 3 and 4 in Table 1), they remain behind those achieved in the other parts of post-communist Europe.

The above-mentioned weak results in the post-communist reforms of the countries of the Eastern Partnership as well as the fact that the EU does not allow these countries to continue to have close economic ties with Russia (and especially not join the Russian-led Custom Union)¹¹ if they want to use the offered possibility to sign an AA with the EU show that the key aims and objectives of the EaP are hardly achievable. In this light, it is not surprising that none of the six EaP countries has yet signed an Association Agreement with the EU (apart from Ukraine, which did this very recently in the midst of its political crisis and tensions with Russia in March 2014) despite the long-term negotiations that all of them, except Belarus, have had (Manoly, 2013). What is surprising, however, is the optimistic rhetoric present at the latest Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius and the fact that Moldova and Georgia succeeded in initiating their AA (including the DCFTA) with the EU at the summit with expectations that these will be officially signed by the end of 2014 (Council of the European Union 2013, p. 3). Even more surprising is the expressed "optimism" of the participants of the summit regarding future relations with Azerbaijan, according to the FH indicators, the fourth most authoritarian post-communist country in the world (after Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan or Belarus); they have welcomed "the progress made in the negotiations on an Association Agreement between the EU and the Republic of Azerbaijan, and, building on existing bilateral contractual relations, call for progress to continue" (Council, 2013, 3). Or maybe all this is not so surprising considering some purely political interests of some EU member states (especially the main promoters of the EaP from ECE and the Baltics) based on their memories of the Cold War division and their suffering under the Soviet hegemony.

Conclusion

The EU's policy towards and established relations with the countries of the former communist bloc are in many aspects direct and to some extent unavoidable outcomes of developments that followed the sudden collapse of the communist bloc in Eastern Europe and the transformation of the European Community into the more integrated European Union in

¹¹ Due to the different regulations and tariffs applied by these two organisations (for more details see Manoli, 2013)

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the early 1990s. While such a more integrated EU has successfully promoted and supported peaceful development, democratisation and market economic reforms in post-communist East Central Europe (ECE) and the Baltics primarily through its eastern enlargement process and largely relying on universal values and norms that have been incorporated as normative principles in the Copenhagen accession conditions, its impact on developments in the other parts of post-communist Europe has not produced such positive outcomes.

For those Eastern neighbours which stayed out of the 2004/2007 enlargement round, the EU adopted two different approaches and policies for spreading its influence and norms. While the countries of the Western Balkans received a relatively “strong promise” after their late democratisation at the end of the 1990s that they could count on following the pathway of their Central European, Baltic and Balkan counterparts and join the EU once they had completed the required conditions, the six post-Soviet states of the Eastern Neighbourhood never received such a promise. Instead, the EU firstly included them in its European Neighbourhood policy and after the Lisbon treaty in the Eastern Partnership incentive, neither of which could have significantly supported democratisation and market reforms in these states. However, the introduction of the ENP and particularly EaP has through the increased mutual contacts, economic cooperation and presence of the EU leaders and officials in the countries of the Eastern Neighbourhood contributed to strengthening national identity and weakening traditionally strong Russian influence in some of these countries.

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