

Sixth EPP Eastern Partnership Leaders Meeting

EPP Declaration for the EU's EaP Brussels Summit, Thursday, 23 November 2017



Based on a shared community of values and a joint commitment to international law and fundamental values, and based on the principles upon which the EU was founded, notably those of peace, friendship, solidarity, responsibility, prosperity, freedom, democracy, non-discrimination of persons belonging to minorities, respect for diversity, rule of law and human dignity,

the EPP EU and EaP leaders met in Brussels on 23 November 2017 and agreed on the following statement:

Achievements and ambitions

We underline that through better-developed, individual engagement for each country, the reinforcement of European security, stability and prosperity must be sought, as well as the consolidation of European values and principles in the region; we need to further enrich EaP in line with the principles of differentiation, strict conditionality, joint ownership, joint responsibility and solidarity, “more for more” and “less for less”.

We welcome the entry into force of the Association Agreements including a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine; the signing of the new Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement between the European Union and Armenia; the ongoing negotiations between the European Union and Azerbaijan for a new framework agreement; and the creation of the EU-Belarus Coordination Group and the Human Rights Dialogue. We underline that the rule of law, democratisation and reforms should remain a key precondition for the EU's deeper engagement with all EaP partners.

We propose to initiate a dialogue format for EU-Belarus relations with the participation of representatives from democratic organisations and the political opposition in Belarus. The introduction of a moratorium on the death penalty, ending the persecution of journalists, the freeing of political prisoners, the registration of public associations and political parties, the reform of the judicial system, the holding of free and fair elections and the admission of the opposition to state media: all these would be important elements for the development of further cooperation with official Belarus.

We welcome the establishment, and effective implementation, of visa free regimes with Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine, and we support the continued implementation of the Visa Liberalisation Action Plans to improve people-to-people contacts — notably through strengthened and close cooperation, in particular in the areas of police and customs — to safeguard against security threats and migration risks. We support the launching of a visa liberalisation dialogue with Armenia.

We acknowledge the European aspirations and European choice of the partners concerned, as stated in the Association Agreements.

We stress that a European perspective constitutes a driving force for reforms and further strengthens their commitment to shared values and principles, such as democracy, the rule of law, the fight against corruption, strong and independent justice systems, respect for human rights and good governance. The depth and scope of relations with each partner country should

reflect that country's own European integration ambition, its commitment to shared values and its progress in reforms, based on EU legislation with each country, being assessed on its own merits and on the basis of clear benchmarks.

We support closer cooperation with the associated countries (the 'EaP+' model), which have made substantial progress in implementing AA/DCFTA-related reforms, that could eventually lead to countries' joining the customs union, Energy Union and Digital Single Market, or to their benefiting from further EU internal market access, greater integration into EU transport networks, industrial partnerships, increased participation in other EU programmes and agencies or further cooperation in the field of the CSDP; we support in this regard more immediate measures, such as additional unilateral tariff preferences, the reduction of roaming tariffs between partners and the EU and the development of high-capacity broadband. Finally, **we state** that the 'EaP+' model should be open to other Eastern Partnership countries once they are ready for such enhanced commitments and have made significant progress towards implementing mutually agreed reforms.

Security cooperation

We reiterate the EU's and its Member States' firm support for the principle of territorial integrity within internationally recognised borders and a commitment to peaceful conflict resolution.

We underline full respect for, and adherence to, the principles and commitments enshrined in the UN Charter, the 1975 Helsinki Final Act and the 1990 OSCE Charter of Paris are fundamental to our shared vision for a peaceful and undivided Europe, that was undermined by Russia as a result of its ongoing aggression towards Ukraine, the illegal annexation of the Crimean peninsula and the continued occupation of two Georgian regions, as well as Russian hybrid threats, disinformation, including destabilising activities and propaganda which threaten European security as a whole. We strongly support a strengthened EU and international engagement in the peaceful settlement of the situation in Donbas, launch of an appropriately mandated UN peacekeeping operation on the whole territory of Donbas, and re-establishing the full sovereignty of Ukraine in Crimea, of Georgia in its occupied territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and of Moldova in Transnistria. We are alarmed at the continuous violation of human rights in Transnistria and urge all sides to make efforts to alleviate the situation.

We call on Russia to free and release without further delay all illegally detained Ukrainian citizens, both in Russia and in the illegally occupied territories of Ukraine.

We welcome the unity of action among EU Member States towards Russia — whose military presence in the region has nevertheless grown in recent years, in particular through strengthened, and targeted, restrictive measures — with a view towards settling the conflict in Donbas through full and genuine implementation of the Minsk agreements. We call on Member States to consider strengthening individual restrictive measures with regard to those responsible for the severe deterioration in the protection of human rights in the occupied territory of Crimea. We regret that Russia is refusing to fully implement the Six-Point Seize-Fire Agreement between Russia and Georgia, negotiated by the EU presidency in 2008. We support the EU's active involvement as a co-chair in Geneva International Discussions addressing the consequences of the 2008 conflict.

We reaffirm our full support for the efforts of the co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group regarding the peaceful settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, based on the norms and principles of international law, in particular those concerning the non-use of force or threat of force, territorial integrity and the equal rights and self-determination of peoples; we call on all sides of the conflict to adhere to the ceasefire regime with full respect to the 1994-1995 ceasefire agreements, to implement

confidence-building measures and to reduce tensions on the Line of Contact, including those measures agreed to during the Summits in Vienna, St. Petersburg and Geneva.

We support the need of more strengthened role for the EU in solving the conflicts in the Eastern Neighborhood, including the actions aimed at enhancing security and stability, supporting partners in strengthening their resilience, fighting cyber warfare, disinformation and other types of destabilization.

We call for the strengthening of cooperation between the partner states and the EU in tackling challenges such as illegal migration, terrorism, cybercrime, money laundering, human trafficking, smuggling and illicit trade, and for the participation, where appropriate, of partner states in EU initiatives relevant to these challenges. We call for intensified interaction of the partner states with relevant EU agencies — in particular, Europol, Eurojust and Frontex — on the basis of bilateral agreements, in order to confront common challenges in the field of security.

We invite the EU to further explore in its dialogue with interested EaP partner countries opportunities to strengthen the EU's and these partner countries' security and defence architecture within the CSDP framework. In this respect we would like to note the role played by the EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia and consider the continued support for the EUMM vital for preventing further deterioration of security in the region.

EaP deliverables, citizens and civil space

We welcome “20 Deliverables for 2020”, which presented a concrete roadmap towards delivering practical results to the citizens.

We insist that the EaP should deliver tangible results for the citizens in all partner countries in terms of reforms, education, employment, mobility and people-to people contact.

We call on the EaP governments to respond to the high expectations of the citizens towards eradicating corruption, bolstering the rule of law and good governance, adopting and implementing reforms, supporting democracy, independent media and strong civil society.

We welcome the EU's macro-financial assistance suggested and already provided to the Eastern Partnership countries. We urge them to fulfil the conditions necessary for the disbursement of the assistance in their entirety.

We stress that if domestic political elites do not accelerate the pace of reforms and implement strong anti-corruption measures, no amount of Western assistance will suffice to pull any country out of crisis; the EU's macro-financial and technical assistance should be delivered on terms of strict conditionality. Moreover, shortcomings in domestic reform, systemic corruption and weak state institutions have made Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova less resilient to hybrid challenges and Russian propaganda.

We call on all EaP countries to abide by the Council of Europe electoral standards and the Venice Commission recommendations with regards to electoral laws and constitutional changes. In the case of Moldova, we strongly condemn the change of electoral system by the political elite aimed at preserving political control and eliminate the opposition.

We encourage the work of the EU towards the successful implementation of the External Investment Plan which provides new funding opportunities, in particular through the establishment of the European Fund for Sustainable Development, expected to mobilise significant amounts of investments.

We welcome that Lithuania has presented a proposal on a «European Plan for Ukraine» as a possible first step towards implementation of the EPP Congress Emergency Resolution of 30 March 2017.

We encourage, further, the regional cooperation of Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine in aspiring towards their European agendas and in taking advantage of the synergy of such cooperation.

We emphasise the important role of civil society in EaP countries as an integral element of a well-functioning democracy. Initiatives such as the Civil Society Forum, Civil Society Dialogue and Eastern Partnership Youth Forum are important tools in the structural engagement of civil society in the process of European integration.

We call for continued respect for rights of persons, belonging to national minorities, as enshrined in UN and Council of Europe Conventions and related protocols, non-discrimination and respect for diversity and fully taking into account the expertise of Council of Europe bodies and to address concerns raised about the potential adverse impact on the rights of persons belonging to national minorities in education and the use of their languages.

We call for particular attention to be paid to instruments, which protect the civil society space in EaP countries: this entails supporting the development of early-warning tools to discourage pressure on NGOs, reviewing the cooperation environment with civil society organisations, giving these organisations a more active role in monitoring both the implementation of the reform agenda in EaP countries as well as any legislation aimed at curtailing their legitimate activities.

We encourage the EU to increase its visibility in EaP countries and to further promote its programmes, projects and activities and provide support for independent media.

We call for improving both energy independence and efficiency through specific investments, strengthened cooperation in all priority areas covered by the EU Energy Union and closer integration of the various partners' energy markets with the European energy market. In this context, we consider it crucial to ensure that onshore and offshore sections of new pipeline infrastructure within the region, including the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, be fully in line with EU legislation and with the Energy Union strategy, and that this new infrastructure does not undermine regional energy security.

We underline that better transport links provide new opportunities for development and enable closer communication and exchanges between the citizens of the European Union and the Eastern partners. In this regard conclusion of Common Aviation Area Agreements with Ukraine, as well as with Armenia and Azerbaijan, extension of the TEN-t network, including to inland waterways as well as opening of road transport markets are of utmost importance.

We call on the EU and on EaP countries to make regional infrastructure projects more inclusive and open, for the sake of the welfare and prosperity of all our citizens.

We acknowledge the untapped potential of cooperation between the EU and Eastern Partners in the area of the digital economy and society; we encourage the acceleration of the digitalisation of partner states' economies and societies, notably via

investments in broadband infrastructure and by harmonising legislation with EU norms — including with regard to the reduction of roaming tariffs — in order to reap the benefits of integration into the EU's Digital Single Market.

We emphasise the importance of stimulating economic growth by creating jobs and business opportunities, particularly the support for Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs) as well improving environment for their functioning in the EaP countries. We welcome the results of 4th Eastern Partnership Business Forum, with focus on digital economy and innovations as well as strengthening direct business-to-business relations between the SMEs.

We underline the importance of further support, exchange and cooperation amongst academics, students and researchers, as this plays an important role in furthering people-to-people contacts, in the framework or beyond the existing programs like Erasmus, H2020, Jean Monnet; and we underline the importance of providing more targeted support to EaP universities and think tanks to better enable them to interact and compete with their EU counterparts.

We address hybrid threats in the presence of a free, open and independent media environment. EaP governments need to support a free and pluralistic media environment and address the issue of media concentration and transparent ownership. The EU should increase the capacities of the East Stratcom Task Force through additional financial support.

* The Armenian delegation approved this Declaration with reservations.

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**If you have any question
you would like to ask
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