ISSN 2228-0391

No. 1
October 2011

Eastern Partnership Review

The Institutional Functioning of the Eastern Partnership: An Early Assessment

Dr. Laure Delcour

Eesti Idapartnerluse Keskus
Estonian Center of Eastern Partnership

Laure Delcour
PhD in Political Science, Sciences-Po Paris

Biographical note:

Laure Delcour (PhD in Political Science, Sciences-Po Paris) has been a Senior Research Fellow, IRIS, Paris, since 2007 (associate since 2009). In 2009 she joined the Directorate of European Affairs of the French School of Administration (ENA). She was previously a Deputy Director of the French-Russian Centre in Social Sciences in Moscow (French Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Research, 2002-2003). Since 2003 she has also participated in a number of studies and assignments for the European Commission, the European Parliament and the French Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defence.

Laure Delcour lectures at the College of Europe (Bruges) and at the Institute of Political Studies (Strasbourg) on the ENP and the Eastern Partnership as well as on EU enlargement (2011-2012). She has previously lectured on EU institutions and decision-making, the European Neighbourhood Policy and Russia's foreign policy at Sciences-Po Paris (2001-2009).

Laure Delcour's research interests focus on (i) the European Neighbourhood Policy, more specifically on reception and implementation by partner countries as well as on region-building aspects; and (ii) on the EU-Russia partnership. She coordinates with Dr. Kataryna Wolczuk a research project to assess the EU's impact in the Eastern neighbourhood (http://euimpacteast.org)

Latest publications: "Bringing South Caucasus Closer to Europe: Challenges and Achievements in ENP Implementation", with H. Duhot, *College of Europe Natolin Working Papers n°3*, 2011; *"Shaping the Post-Soviet Space? EU Strategies and Approaches to Region-Building* (London, Ashgate, 2011); "The European Union's Security Approaches in its Eastern Neighbourhood", *European Security,* vol. 4, 2010; "Towards a Global Europe?", in G. Lawson, C. Armbruster and M. Cox (eds.), *The Global 1989: Continuity and Change in World Politics 1989-2009* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010); "Pioneer Europe? The European Neighbourhood Policy as a Test Case for EU's Foreign Policy", with E.Tulmets, *European Foreign Affairs Review,* No..14, 2009.

Contents

Abstract 4

Abbreviations used 5

Introduction 6

How has the multilateral dimension developed so far under the Eastern Partnership? 6

To what extent and how has this unprecedented multilateral track contributed to fulfilling the EaP's objectives towards a deeper relationship so far? 7

A multilayered institutional set-up still in the making 7

EaP operational structure (the 'governmental track') 9

Thematic platforms 9

Table 1. Overview of thematic platforms and current panels 10

Panels 11

Flagship initiatives 12

Participatory initiatives 13

Civil Society Forum 13

Number of current and planned projects by thematic area . . . 13

Euronest Parliamentary Assembly 14

Table 2. Composition of Euronest Parliamentary Assembly 15

Conference of Regional and Local Authorities of the Eastern Partnership (CORLEAP) 16

Table 3. Composition of the Eastern Partnership Assembly of Local and Regional Authorities 17

Eastern Partnership Business Forum 18

Conclusions and recommendations: turning the eastern partnership's multilateral track into an effective socialisation framework 18

References 20

Sources 20

Working papers and academic publications 20

Annex. List of interviews 22

Abstract

A new institutional framework was designed under the Eastern Partnership and it has been progressively established over the past two years to frame the increasingly close relationship between the EU and its Eastern neighbours. This working paper provides an early assessment of the Eastern Partnership's institutional functioning. It focuses on the multilateral track (thematic platforms and panels, participatory initiatives, flagship initiatives) which for the first time gathers all six Eastern partners and the EU at various levels of representation and in different arenas. The EaP's multilateral track is thus an attempt to develop a multilayered and participative institutional framework based upon a logic of socialisation.

An examination of the 'governmental track' highlights however a discrepancy between levels of cooperation. While panels are assessed very positively and foster links both among Eastern partners and with the EU, other formats, including platform meetings, do not appear to favour joint ownership of the policy process. Another weakness is the current lack of synergies between various institutional formats under the multilateral track. Overall the paper identifies three potential sources of tensions in the EaP functioning:

- EU member states' uneven engagement in the policy process: while Western European member states' participation in the multilateral track is weak, their involvement is needed to turn the Eastern Partnership into a EU-wide foreign policy;
- Partner countries' different level of involvement in the multilateral track, which is perceived by some of them as a 'one-size-fits-all'exercise;
- The combination, in the multilateral track, of a logic based upon joint ownership, inclusiveness and socialisation with some elements reflecting a more hierarchical approach and limiting participation.

Abbreviations used

AA	Association Agreement
CORLEAP	Conference of Regional and Local Authorities of the Eastern Partnership
CSF	Civil Society Forum
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DCFTA	Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area
EaP	Eastern Partnership
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EEAS	European External Action Service
EESC	European Economic and Social Committee
EIB	European Investment Bank
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
EP	European Parliament
Euronest	EU-Neighbourhood East Parliamentary Assembly
PCA	Partnership and Cooperation Agreement

Introduction

Launched in 2009, the Eastern Partnership was designed to step up the European Union's relations with its Eastern neighbours 'without prejudice to [their] aspirations for their future relationship with the EU' (European Commission 2008a: 2). In other words, the Eastern Partnership is about 'accelerating political association and further economic integration' between the EU and its neighbours (Council of the European Union 2009: 6) while the issue of accession is left open.

The establishment of a new institutional set-up to manage the enhanced relationship between the EU and its Eastern neighbours has been a substantial task under the new initiative over the past two years. It is also a major **turning point** in the Union's policy vis-à-vis its Eastern neighbourhood. Indeed, the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) launched in 2004 to foster stability, security and prosperity at the enlarged EU's borders had not introduced any new institutional scheme to sustain these objectives. As a result, from 2004 until the creation of the Eastern Partnership, bilateral cooperation between the EU and its new Eastern neighbours, (considered as the ENP's cornerstone) exclusively developed under the existing contractual framework (i.e. Partnership and Cooperation Councils and Committees) and following the political guidance provided by the ENP Action Plans.

While an abundant literature has developed around the neighbourhood policy, its institutional functioning has received less attention from scholars, principally because the ENP was initially not associated with a new institutional design, but rather relied upon existing bilateral arrangements with partner countries. However, following its mixed assessment of ENP implementation in 2006, the European Commission suggested to introduce a multilateral dimension in the ENP with a view to tackling the weaknesses noted thus far in the policy(European Commission 2006). The belief that bilateral relations with partner countries need to be complemented by a regional or multilateral dimension is at the roots of several EU policy initiatives launched in the end of the 2000's, e.g. the Eastern Partnership and the Union for the Mediterranean but also, outside the ENP framework, the Partnership with Central Asia. While all these initiatives aim at fostering links between partner countries and with the EU, they are based upon different logics: e whereas the Union for the Mediterranean (like the Black Sea Synergy) follows a project-based, neo-functional approach, the Eastern Partnership is focused on the EU *acquis* as the main referential for multilateral discussions. These initiatives introducing (in the case of the East) or reshaping (in the case of the South) a multilateral/regional dimension have attracted a new academic interest (see e.g. Bechev and Nicolaïdis 2008; Hillion and Mayhew 2009: 11-16; Weber 2010: 84-90) with a view to analyzing "horizontal governance structures" (Weber 2010) launched by the EU. However, owing to the fact that these initiatives are recent and, to some extent, still under construction, there has been no detailed assessment of their institutional functioning to date.

How has the multilateral dimension developed so far under the Eastern Partnership?

The Eastern Partnership provides for a **dual policy framework** which combines a bilateral and a multilateral track. So far, developments under the **bilateral track** have not significantly altered the institutional scheme of relations between the EU and its neighbours in that these relations are still contractually based on existing PCAs. This will change, however, once Association Agreements currently under negotiation are in force; these are indeed expected to significantly strengthen economic integration and political dialogue between the EU and partner countries, therefore calling for renewing the institutional framework in place between the EU and associated countries[1] While the institutional framework governing bilateral relations between the EU and its neighbours is currently unchanged, the bilateral track is the main instrument to frame the closer relationship between the EU and its Eastern neighbours. In other words, the EU's Eastern policy continues to be governed by the **principle of differentiation.** The bilateral track includes the most important objectives and incentives in EU-partner countries' enhanced cooperation, i.e.:

- the upgrading of contractual relations towards association agreements,
- the prospect of negotiations for deep and comprehensive free trade areas,
- capacity-building support to meet the requirements stemming from these agreements,

1 As indicated in: European External Action Service, 3rd Joint Progress Report, Negotiations on the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, 26 November 2009, http://www.eeas.europa.eu/ukraine/docs/assoc_agreement_3rd_joint_progress_report.pdf

- progressive visa liberalisation in a secure environment,
- deeper co operation to enhance energy security,
- support for economic and social policies designed to reduce disparities.

Whereas it is envisioned as 'an additional instrument' and as a framework 'supporting progress in partners' bilateral relations with the EU' (European Commission 2008a: 8), the **multilateral track represents a real innovation** in the institutional format of cooperation. For the first time, it gathers all six Eastern partners and the EU at various levels of representation and in different arenas. This stands in sharp contrast to the EU's previous policies in the region which, taking into account the disintegration dynamics prevailing in the post-Soviet space, were predominantly (if not exclusively) based upon bilateral ties (Delcour 2011). The objectives pursued by the EaP's multilateral track are as follows (European Commission 2008a):

- provide a forum to share information and experience on partners' steps towards transition, reform and modernisation,
- facilitate the development of common positions and joint activities,
- foster links among the partners themselves,
- through the presentation and explanation of relevant EU legislation, contribute to initiating a structured approximation process.

To what extent and how has this unprecedented multilateral track contributed to fulfilling the EaP's objectives towards a deeper relationship so far?

The present paper will provide a tentative assessment of the Eastern Partnership's institutional functioning focusing on its innovative component, i.e. the multilateral track. Such assessment is subject to two major limitations. First, it is necessarily provisional, taking into account the fact that some parts of the EaP's institutional framework are still under construction. Second, given the scattered and sometimes outdated information available, it does not pretend to be a fully-fledged evaluation. This paper is based upon an analysis of various EaP sources and the nascent academic literature on the EaP, as well as upon a series of interviews conducted in Brussels with EaP stakeholders in July 2011 (see list in annex) . Drawing upon these sources, it intends to shed light on the EaP's current functioning and on perspectives for its development.

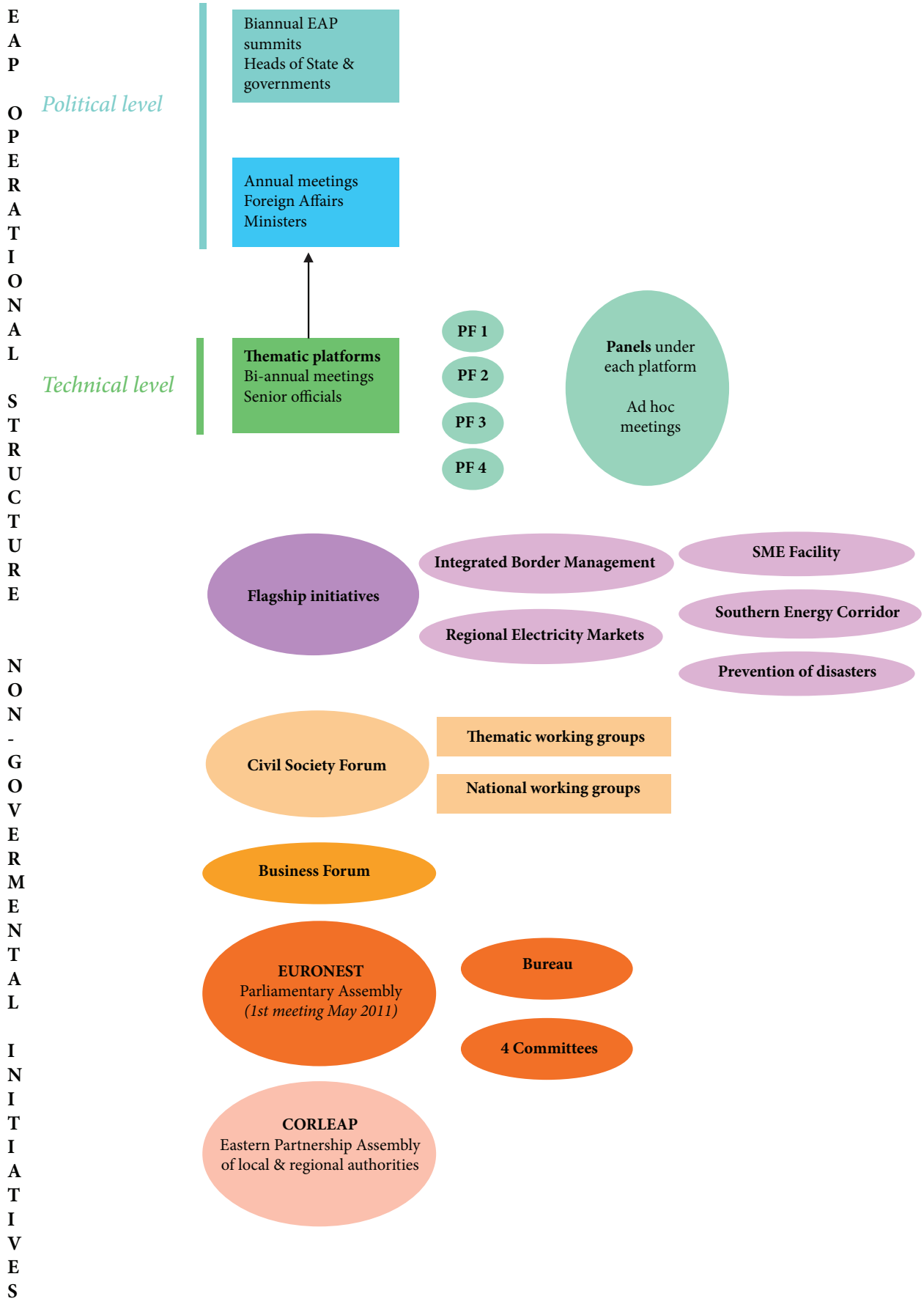
A multilayered institutional set-up still in the making

The EaP's multilateral track is an attempt to develop **a multilayered** and, to some extent, a **pluricentric and participative institutional framework.** As shown in the graph next page, it is a complex setting involving different levels of representation. The institutional framework is organised around several formats which all act as forums of discussion and contribute towards fulfilling the EaP's objectives.

The EaP multilateral track thus relies upon a **networked form of interaction** between the EU and its partners, reflecting 'horizontal, participatory, flexible, and inclusive structure of governance often referred to as 'network governance' (Lavenex and Schimmelfennig 2009: 796). In other words, it draws upon a logic privileging **socialisation and joint ownership** whereas the bilateral track implies, in principle, a more hierarchical policy transfer through conditionality.

An insight into the operational structure and participatory initiatives highlights different levels of development among policy formats and across policy sectors resulting in uneven inputs into the policy process. To analyse the current state of play in the various EaP formats, specific attention will be paid to the following cross-cutting issues which are critical to ensure an effective functioning of network governance:

- **inclusiveness,** i.e. representation and participation of all relevant stakeholders in the policy process,
- **interactions and synergies** between various formats,
- **joint ownership** of the policy process by the EU and partner countries.


EAP OPERATIONAL STRUCTURE
NON-GOVERMENTAL INITIATIVES
Political level
Biannual EAP summits
Heads of State & governments
Annual meetings
Foreign Affairs Ministers
Technical level
Thematic platforms
Bi-annual meetings
Senior officials
PF 1
PF 2
PF 3
PF 4
Panels under each platform
Ad hoc meetings
Flagship initiatives
Integrated Border Management
SME Facility
Southern Energy Corridor
Regional Electricity Markets
Prevention of disasters
Civil Society Forum
Thematic working groups
National working groups
Business Forum
EURONEST
Parliamentary Assembly
(1st meeting May 2011)
Bureau
4 Committees
CORLEAP
Eastern Partnership Assembly
of local & regional authorities

EaP operational structure (the 'governmental track')

According to the European Commission (2008), the EaP's operational structure consists of four levels:

- At the *highest political level,* **EaP Heads of State and Governement** meet every two years. The Prague Summit in May 2009 officially launched the Eastern Partnership and the second summit was scheduled in September 2011 in Warsaw.
- Between these summits, policy guidance and monitoring are ensured through **annual meetings of the ministries of Foreign Affairs.** Both Head of State and MFA meetings are thus expected to 'move and shape the Eastern Partnership further' (Council of the European Union 2009: 8). The EU and its partners can also meet in various ministerial formats.[2]
- At the *technical level,* four thematic platforms (coordinated by the European External Action Service and the European Commission) serve as multilateral forums for discussion and exchange of experience. These platforms, the topics of which correspond to the main areas of EU-Eastern neighbours cooperation, are presented by the European External Action Service **as the backbone of EaP multilateral track.**[3] In each thematic area, they meet at least twice a year at the level of senior officials and report to the EaP Foreign Ministers.
- The fourth institutional level is formed by thematic panels which can be established under each platform to support their work. These panels gather officials engaged in specific policy areas and meeting on an ad-hoc basis.

Thematic platforms

Table 1 below provides an overview of the four thematic platforms and of existing panels. It highlights a **differential dynamism** across thematic platforms. All four platforms initially met in 2009 and since then have held biannual meetings. However, so far panels have been created only under the first and second platforms. This reflects the core importance of these platforms' topics in connection to the EaP's bilateral track. Democracy, good governance and stability, as well as economic integration and convergence with EU policies are indeed cornerstones in EU-Eastern neighbours cooperation, especially so at a time when partner countries are negotiating association agreements and preparing or conducting talks for deep and comprehensive free trade areas.

The major issue identified in the functioning of the EaP's operational structure, however, is not so much a gap between thematic platforms' levels of development, but rather **a discrepancy between levels of cooperation.** The way in which the structure was designed reflects mainly a top-down approach with political guidance and follow-upbeing provided at high-level meetings, on the basis of information reported by thematic platforms coordinators. Interviews held in Brussels suggest that the three highest levels of cooperation (i.e. political meetings but also platforms meetings) either display shortcomings linked to the setting up of new institutions or reproduce long-standing flaws identified in EU-Eastern neighbours relations. More specifically, this assessment applies to the thematic platforms which are presented as the main policy tool of the multilateral track:

- Platform meetings are **in principle relatively inclusive** and open to a wide range of EaP stakeholders. However, even though they are permanent members[4] in their own right, representatives from the European Parliament and the Committee of Regions have not actively participated in discussions so far; they have attended platform meetings but have not taken the floor yet. Moreover, access is de facto restricted for other stakeholders, principally civil society. As an ad hoc participant, the Civil Society Forum is only eligible to participate on a case-by-case basis; for instance, CSF representatives presented their recommendations during the 2010 platform meetings (spring round). However, even though the Commission and EEAS favour its involvement, some Eastern partners delegations (e.g. Azerbaijan and Belarus) have objected to CSF's attending platform meetings or taking the floor during meetings. This has been the case especially in those thematic platforms covering issues which

2 E.g. the ministers of Economy met in Krynica, Poland, in September 2011

3 'Platforms are the main tool of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) multilateral track'. http://www.eeas.europa.eu/eastern/platforms/index_en.htm

4 Full members in all platforms include EU member states, partner countries and the European Commission. Permanent participants include the General Secretariat of the EU Council and the European Parliament as well as the EESC (platforms 1, 2 and 4), the CoR (platforms 3 and 4), the EIB and the EBRD (platforms 2 and 3 for both).

Table 1. Overview of thematic platforms and current panels

Thematic Platforms	Coordination	Key areas of cooperation	Existing panels
Democracy, good governance and stability	EEAS	**Elections** (legislation, code of practice, media, voters' participation), **Judiciary** (effectiveness and respect of human rights in the delivery of criminal justice) **Fight against international crime** (cyber crime, corruption)	**Integrated Border Management Fight against Corruption** **Public Administration Reform Improved Functioning of the Judiciary**
Economic integration and convergence with EU policies	DG TRADE (with other line DGs)	**Regulatory convergence with the EU DCFTAs Environment policy and climate change** Interconnection of partners' **transport and telecommunications** networks	**Small and Medium Enterprises (SME)** Trade and Trade Related Regulatory Approximation, **Environment and Climate Change**
Energy security	DG TREN	Mutual energy support and **security mechanisms Harmonisation of partners' energy policies and legislation** with EU practice and acquis Market interconnection **Diversification of supply and transit routes**	----
Contacts between people	DG Education & Culture	**Cultural cooperation Education** Cooperation on **information society Role of the media**	----

are considered sensitive by partner countries (e.g. platform 1). To take one example, CSF representatives were invited as EEAS guest in a meeting under platform 1 in May 2011where they could take the floor to present their activities and reports, but then could not attend all sessions Under platform 4 (people-to-people contacts), CSF representatives were able to attend all sessions during the 2011 meeting but could not take the floor. In other words, CSF's inclusion depends on the good will of platforms' permanent members, and therefore considerably varies.

- Given the limited participation oftheir representatives in the platform meetings, **synergies** with EaP participatory initiatives are insufficient. While they crucially hinge on stakeholders' effective engagement, interactions and synergies also depend upon the circulation of information. In this respect, EEAS' difficult birth, and more specifically the workload of EaP units[5] as a consequence of staff redeployment/ recruiting processes, have negatively impacted on the Eastern Partnership's institutional functioning. The EaP's multilateral track was previously handled by the Eastern Partnership Task Force set up under DG Relex of the European Commission. Following the creation of EEAS, this Task Force was dissolved. EEAS unit dealing with the multilateral track is currently staffed with 3 people, while the corresponding assistance projects and financial instruments (e.g. the flagship initiatives, the pilot regional programmes) are managed by DG DEVCO. EEAS' units being currently understaffed hampers the functioning of the multilateral track when it comes, for instance, to the dissemination of information.[6] **Joint ownership** of the policy process is critical for the EaP's multilateral track, which is underpinned by a logic of socialisation. However, the extent to which this track is jointly owned is questionable as the whole process appears to be framed principally by the EU. s a general rule, platforms are chaired by the Commission and the EEAS, which places the EU at the centre of what currently resembles a hub-and-spoke rather than a cobweb model of relations (to paraphrase Emerson 2004). The EU side is responsible for convening meetings, setting a provisional agenda, presiding meetings, managing information flows including meeting reports[7] and it also plays a predominant role when it comes to setting objectives and reviewing progress. Such role can first be explained by organisational factors. As put by an interviewee, 'someone has to take the lead and chair meetings'; and many EU member states have so far been reluctant to invest time and resources in the multilateral track. Moreover, in light of tensions or even antagonism between some partner countries the EU appears as a potential honest broker. An additional argument is that the EU's being at the core of the process enhances policy effectiveness and impact on partner countries. Platform meetings were indeed conceived as 'dedicated sessions devoted to the presentation and explanation by the European Union of EU legislation and standards, as well as its comparison with national policy and legislation' (Council of the European Union 2009). Following this approach, the EU, then, seems better placed to structure the socialisation process and to 'name and shame' 'bad pupils' in each issue area. However, those partner countries lagging behind in the convergence process with the EU may find little added value to a multilateral track reproducing the asymmetry they denounce in the bilateral track; several interviewees indeed strongly criticised the 'teacher-to-pupil tone'[8] employed by the EU during platform meetings. Even though the multilateral track formally engages five partner countries, the central role played by the EU in platform meetings thus raises major questions as to their actual capacity to stimulate 'reluctant neighbours'.

Panels

Panels, on the contrary, are assessed very positively by all stakeholders.

- Because they are less politicised, panels are *de facto* **more inclusive.** There is less reluctance to involve CSF representatives. For instance, CSF attended panels on anti-corruption in Warsaw in 2010 and in Tbilisi in 2011. In addition,

5 Interview, EEAS official, Brussels, July 2011.

6 This point was raised by several interviewees.

7 Eastern Partnership Multilateral Platforms, General Guidelines and Rules of Procedures, http://eeas.europa.eu/eastern/platforms/rules_procedure_en.pdf

8 Interview, mission of a EaP partner country to the EU, Brussels, July 2011. This expression was also used by some EU interviewees.

other EU stakeholders are keen to be involved in panels discussing their areas of interest, as it is the case for instance the Committee of Regions with local democracy issues under the panel on administrative reform. As a consequence, panels may foster **synergies and interactions** between various EaP stakeholders.

- Furthermore, according to interviewees panels allow for open discussions and effective exchange of experience between all participants on an equal footing, thereby contributing to fostering **joint ownership** of the policy process and links among EaP partners. This is also linked to the fact that panels' organisation is much more flexible than platforms' meetings and the role of the EU is less important in their functioning. Overall, partner countries are actively involved in panel meetings, including with a view to presenting their own experience of reform to their counterparts (as did Georgia under the anti-corruption panel). This format seems also more suited to Eastern partners' expectations in that it is tailor-made to their needs and situation. In other words, panels' added value stems primarily from their being circumscribed to a specific issue and therefore more concrete. Interviewees also pointed out their role as confidence-building tools among Eastern partners: unlike political formats, panel meetings do not seem affected by existing disputes or tensions between post-Soviet countries.

Even though some of them are still in the making, panels, therefore, appear as the most promising tool to reach the multilateral track's objectives. Two issues seem critical for their further development. First, panels should become more visible in order to foster a bottom-up policy process. In other words, outputs and information on progress achieved should be more broadly disseminated to other EaP stakeholders. Second, panels should seek to ensure the representation of a larger number of EU member states. Currently, interviews held in Brussels suggest that most of them are composed of (and supported by) Central Eastern European representatives. This composition is highly relevant in light of both these countries' reform experience and foreign policy priorities and it also secures a high level of commitment on the EU side. At the same time, panels could take advantage from their relative flexibility as compared to other policy formats to involve Western European member states' participants, be they officials or civil society representatives. Such participation would not only broaden the scope of experiences discussed with EaP partner countries. Itt could also contribute to a better understanding and to a gradual ownership of the EaP by Western European member states by initiating a bottom-up process. Nevertheless, given that most of these states (with the exception of Sweden and Germany) have been passive so far, strengthening their participation would also entail lobbying them.

Flagship initiatives

Flagship initiatives have a specific position under the EaP's multilateral track. Like other formats, they engage all Eastern partners with a view to providing visibility and focus to multilateral cooperation (European Commission 2008: 13). Unlike other tools, they are, however, managed solely by the European Commission (DG DEVCO) and mobilise multi-donor support. The implementation of the five initiatives highlights uneven progress so far.

Some improvement has been achieved in the Integrated Border Management initiative which was launched in October 2009 during the first meeting of the Integrated Border Management panel, and which started effectively in 2010, *inter alia* through the signature of a contract with the International Centre for Migration Policy Development for training activities. The Environmental Governance Initiative started in March 2010 with the collection of environmental data; the priorities and specific contributions of partners are currently being defined. Two other initiatives (Small and Medium Entreprises, which mobilises the EBRD and the EIB; and Prevention, Preparedness and Response to man-made and natural Disasters) are well on track. Under the SME Flagship Initiative, a programme supporting business associations, the East-Invest Programme, was launched in November 2010 with a budget of €8.75 million.

However, the Diversification of Energy Supplies (Southern Corridor) initiative is stagnating as a result of the competition between Russian and EU energy corridors projects. Overall, regional tensions and more specifically the role played by Russia in the Eastern neighbourhood may undermine flagship initiatives' implementation, especially in those issue areas which are highly politicised like energy.

Participatory initiatives

Civil Society Forum

The Civil Society Forum's organisation is complex. It partially copies the EaP operational structures in that it is organised in four working groups corresponding to the four thematic platforms. Each group is coordinated jointly by an EU and a EAP representative and includes a number of EU and EaP CSOs. The largest working group, Democracy, Good Governance, Human Rights and Stability, includes over 100 CSOs and is divided in 6 subgroups, each of them dealing with specific topics such as public administration, judiciary, independent media and visa liberalisation.9 In addition to these working groups, the CSF includes national platforms headed by country facilitators; these coordinate activities related to a specific partner country and cooperate between themselves. On top of these structures, the CSF Steering Committee is composed of the 8 working group coordinators, the 6 country facilitators and 3 EU coordinators. Members are appointed for one year out of the CSOs participating in the forum ; the mandate is renewable once. Likewise, the Forum's participants are selected through a system of rotation, which ensures openness to new organisations but also eliminates the most active members (Kaca et alii 2011: 4).

The Civil Society Forum has been extremely active since the Eastern Partnership was launched with a view to developing links between EU and partner countries civil societies, promoting participation of partner countries' CSOs in their countries' public life and strengthening the role of CSOs in the framework of the EaP.. This is reflected in the number of projects currently being developed by the Forum:

Number of current and planned projects by thematic area [10]

Platform 1 Democracy, good governance and stability	35
Platform 2 Economic integration and Convergence with EU Policies	20
Platform 3 Energy, climate change, environment	15
Platform 4 Contacts between people	26

As also indicated by Lada et alii (2011), its impact can be assessed as positive as far as **networking** is concerned, yet limited when it comes to **influencing the policy process.** Undoubtedly, the Forum has acted as a catalysor in the dialogue between EU and partner countries CSOs, by fostering dialogue, exchange of information and work towards common positions. Besides providing a platform facilitating CSO cooperation, it also contributes to EaP implementation by drafting reports and opinions, such as those issued on human rights or corruption. CSF's contribution is constrained, to some extent, by its own structure (e.g. disproportion of working groups, uneven engagement of participants, frequent change in participants, see Lada et alii 2011: 26). In addition, the delivery of projects or policy papers impinges on the lack of financial resources. CSF got funding for specific projects from national governements and development agencies, yet as a forum it does not benefit from a sustainable financial mechanism for the time being.

The biggest obstacle to CSF's influence, however, is its limited access to the policy process, for the reasons explained above. Only on a few occasions has the Forum been able to present its outputs and recommendations before governmental structures. In the future, the CSF may be able to increase its role in the policy processby searching additional support from the EU side (from bodies which will become increasingly involved in the EaP, e.g. the EP, EESC, CoR), especially with a view to gaining a permanent

9 Interview with a member of the Civil Society Forum steering committee and working group coordinator, Brussels, July 2011.

10 As of 20 May 2011. Some projects overlap. Source: Civil Society Forum, Survey of current and planned projects focusing on Eastern Partnership issues, Summary prepared by EaP CSF Steering Committee, updated 20 May 2011

participant status in thematic platforms,[11] and by-securing funding with a view to becoming a sustainable mechanism and to developing advocacy projects. This is also critical in view of the persisting gap between EU CSOs and their counterparts in the Eastern neighbourhood which are confronted to a lack of capacities and a lack of experience in the policy dialogue. In spite of the Forum's positive record when it comes to networking, the Eastern Partnership has so far not significantly contributed to narrowing down this gap; building a partnership with societies is nonetheless one of the major objectives for the EU in its neighbourhood, as indicated in the EEAS/Commission 2011 Communication.

Euronest Parliamentary Assembly

While the European Parliament is also involved in the EaP through its committees and through bilateral delegations, Euronest is an unprecented attempt to develop parliamentary cooperation with Eastern partners at a multilateral level. The idea of setting up an assembly gathering EU and Eastern partner countries was initially discussed as early as 2007 and thus preceded the creation of the Eastern Partnership. It originates in the EP's experience and practice of such assemblies with other regions, e.g. EUROMED, EUROLAT and EU-ACP assemblies. The enlargement process prompted the replication of this mechanism for the Eastern neighbourhood[12]. The formal decision of creating an assembly with Eastern partners was however taken later, in June 2009, and from its beginning the initiative was thus embedded in the EaP framework. The effective setting-up of Euronest, nevertheless, was further blocked by the issue of Belarus' representation, with several options (including inviting representatives of the opposition) being discussed in 2009-2010. The massive repression which followed the presidential election of December 2010 prompted MEPs not to invite any Belarus delegation to the inaugural session which took place in May 2011. Euronest's first ordinary session was then organised in Strasbourg mid-September 2011; the assembly prepared recommendations for the 2011 Eastern Partnership summit in Poland which reflected the European Parliament's policy priorities and ambitious stance on the ENP, yet these were finally not adopted owing to divergences between South Caucasus partners [13] The next Euronest session is planned in May 2012 in Baku.

11 The CSF has lobbied for such permanent seat enabling participation in all meetings and access to information ever since it was created. Interview with a CSF representative, July 2011.

12 Interview with a European Parliament official, Brussels, July 2011.

13 These divergences pertained to the principles to be included in the final text in connection to the unresolved conflicts, with Armenia sticking to self-determination and Azerbaijan to territorial integrity. Another resolution on Belarus was also not adopted owing to the disagreement of Azerbaijan, Moldova and Ukraine. Source: http://www.easternpartnership.org/community/events/first-turbulent-session-Euronest

Table 2. Composition of Euronest Parliamentary Assembly

Country/organisation	Number of Euronest Representatives
Armenia	10
Azerbaijan	10
(Belarus)[14]	10)
Georgia	10
Moldova	10
Ukraine	10
European Union	60
TOTAL	120

It is much too early to assess Euronest's potential impact. However, several major issues emerged after the inaugural session:

- **Eastern partners' representation:** Taking into account the discrepancies between the EU and Eastern partners' political regimes, a major issue for Euronest is to ensure that, beyond the case of Belarus, opposition forces are represented in the delegations appointed by neighbouring countries; this is the case for Ukraine and Moldova, less so for South Caucasus (with the exception of Armenia). Moreover, the equal number of seats attributed to Eastern partners is questionable, as far as it does not take into account differences in the countries' size. The assembly's composition, therefore, should be carefully monitored and regularly reviewed.
- **EU representation:** Western member states (both large - UK, France, Spain, Italy- and of course to a lesser extent smaller ones - Ireland, Portugal, Belgium, Luxembourg) are clearly underepresented in the EP delegation to Euronest while Central Eastern EU members are overrepresented (with Poland, Lithuania and Romania having the largest delegations). To take a concrete example, the UK and France both have one delegate while Lithuania has eight. While such national imbalances reflect national foreign policy priorities and as such exist in all EP delegations to other regional assemblies, in the Eastern partnership they are even more important as they are replicated in all institutional formats.
- **Interaction with other EaP actors/formats/ initiatives:** Four committees (Political Affairs, Human Rights and Democracy; Economic Affairs, legal approximation and convergence with EU policies; Energy Security; Culture, Education and Civil Society) have been established within Euronest,[15] reflecting the four thematic platforms in which the European Parliament is a permanent participant.. However, so far the EP's involvement in the platforms has remained formal.The assembly's representatives have not adopted a proactive stance in all platformmeetings they attended, since they did not take the floor on these occasions.[16] Interaction with the Civil Society Forum has also been limited. Moreover, Euronest's participation in other EaP activities is circumscribed to the technical level. At the EaP's current stage of development, both the political input of Euronest and its role in shaping and monitoring the policy process are therefore limited.
- **Joint ownership:** Euronest is co-chaired by a EaP representative (Boris Tarasyuk, Ukrainian former Minister of Foreign Affairs).[17] Out

14 Belarus' representatives do not currently take part in Euronest meetings.

15 There are also two working groups, one on and the second on rules of procedures

16 Interview with European Parliament officials, Brussels, July 2011.

17 Co-chair for the EU is Bulgarian MEP Kristian Vigenin.

of its 8 vice-presidents, four are members of the European Parliament and four come from partner countries.. However, while the EU/ partner countries' equilibrium in the assembly's bureau is respected, it seems that the EU imposed its vision on Eastern partners during the first session.[18] This is also linked to the fact that neighbouring countries do not have a similar level of interest in Euronest, in connection either to their general stance on the EaP multilateral track or to their specific position on the parliamentary assembly.

Overall, the European Parliament certainly intends to play a prominent role in the ENP and in the EaP,as reflected both in the resolution adopted in April 2011 and in the draft recommendations it intended to deliver to the EaP summit. Its role in the foreign policy process is however still limited, and this is especially the case under a complex initiative like the EaP in which the EEAS and member states are pivotal.

There are nevertheless specific expectations vis-à-vis the European Parliament, especially when it comes to defending the EU's political values and to supporting the role of civil society organisations in the Eastern neighbourhood. The EP should therefore seek to develop synergies with the Civil Society Forum and other participatory initiatives to push its own priorities forward in the policy process. However, this will be a difficult task in light of the disagreements and divergences between partner countries which have already hampered the effectiveness of Euronest, as it was obvious during the first ordinary session in Strasbourg. Overall, Euronest's very political nature and to a lesser extent the limited role played by the EP in the EU foreign policy process are important obstacles to the assembly's influence in the multilateral track.

Conference of Regional and Local Authorities of the Eastern Partnership (CORLEAP)

In its 2008 communication on the Eastern Partnership, the Commission invited the Committee of the Regions to establish an Eastern Europe and South Caucasus Local and Regional Assembly. However, like its Euronest counterpart the setting-up of this assembly has been delayed, although for different reasons. Administrative factors (mainly insufficient human resources dedicated to this task within the Committee of Regions) account for the late gathering of the CORLEAP assembly. This was combined with the fact that external relations are not the Committee's core business. Over the past three years, when it comes to external action the CoR has mainly been involved with the organisation of CORLEAP's counterpart for the Mediterraean partners, ARLEM (Regional and Local Euro-Mediterranean Assembly).[19] As a result, the inauguration of the Conference of Regional and Local Authorities of the Eastern Partnership (CORLEAP) took place in Poznań inSeptember 2011. The statement adopted at the Conference calls for a greater involvement of local and regional authorities in the Eastern Partnership, including through increased funding for projects strengthening local democracy and through specific sections in the agreements currently being negotiated with partner countries.[20] In the future, CORLEAP is expected to meet on an annual basis.

18 Interview, European Parliament official, Brussels, July 2011.

19 Interview, Committee of Regions official, Brussels, July 2011.

20 Committee of Regions, Press Release, COR/11/42, 9 September 2011.

Table 3. Composition of the Eastern Partnership Assembly of Local and Regional Authorities

Country/organisation	Number of CORLEAP Representatives
Armenia	3
Azerbaijan	3
Belarus	3
Georgia	3
Moldova	3
Ukraine	3
European Union	18
TOTAL	**36**

When it comes to **representation** of partner countries, CORLEAP has not been confronted to the problems described above for Euronest. Eastern partners' members of the Conference have been appointed following a bottom-up process. The prerequisite for being appointed was to be a locally elected politician, in order to establish a peer-to-peer assembly. In each partner country the Committee of Regions contacted associations of local/regional authorities and merely informed central authorities of the appointment process. As far as the EU membership of CORLEAP is concerned, national imbalances are similar to those existing in other EaP formats, since the bulk of EU members comes from Central Eastern member states (mainly Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary). On top of the 36 members, three permanent observers are part of CORLEAP: Euronest, the Civil Society Forum and the Council of Europe's Congress of Local Authorities.

Overall, given the delay in setting the assembly, it is still too early to say whether the 'long-awaited CORLEAP will become a thriving centre of cooperation between regional and local authorities from the EU and Eastern Partnership countries', as hoped by Commissionner Stefan Füle.[21] The inaugural session this year is expected to serve as a first step towards establishing a regular forum for cooperation; the main objective, however, was also to issue recommendations to the EaP Head of States 2011 summit in Poland, which the President of the CoR will attend.

Besides CORLEAP, it should be pointed out that the Committee of Regions is involved in other EaP formats and activities. It issues opinions on EaP bilateral developments (one per partner country in 2010). As far as the multilateral track is concerned, it is a permanent member of thematic platforms 1 and 4 and intends to apply for platforms 2 and 3. It pays specific attention to platform 1, especially to issues pertaining to local administration.

To sum up, subject to sufficient administrative capacities the Committee of Regions is likely to get more involved in targeted EaP activities matching its areas of expertise in the future. Given that local and regional development and self-government are also important issues in partner countries, CORLEAP is unlikely to face the same problems as Euronest, even though the EU and its neighbours may have different approaches towards local democracy. In other words, common interests may be developed around concrete projects favouring regional and local development.

21 Statement of Commissioner Stefan Fule following his meeting with Ms Mercedes Bresso, President of the Committee of the Regions, http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/fule/headlines/news/2011/06/20110601_en.htm

Eastern Partnership Business Forum

Another example of participatory initiative is the first Eastern Partnership Business Forum, which will be held in Sopot on 30 September 2011, as an event accompanying the official Eastern Partnership Summit. The Forum's objective is to provide a platform for experience sharing, establishing business contacts and discussing investment opportunities and joint projects implemented by entrepreneurs and governments The Forum is thus another example of participatory initiative likely to increase interconnections between EU and partner countries societies.

Conclusions and recommendations: turning the eastern partnership's multilateral track into an effective socialisation framework

While the Eastern Partnership's institutional set-up is still under construction, some preliminary lessons can be drawn from its early functioning, which highlights tensions in the policy:

- **The EaP's multilateral track should seek to increasingly involve EU Western Member States in order to turn the EaP into a EU-wide foreign policy.** For obvious reasons, the EU's Eastern dimension was developed by Central and Eastern EU member states, i.e. by countries geographically, historically and culturally close to Eastern neighbours and whose reform experience was highly relevant to Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus and the South Caucasus. Owing to its foreign policy emphasis on political values, peace and stability, Sweden also played a role in this process. The strong engagement displayed by Central and Eastern European countries and a few others (e.g. Germany, Sweden), at all levels, in the institutional framework has been instrumental in boosting the EaP. At the same time, the Eastern Partnership is an ambitious policy which raises major questions about the whole EU's future and thus requires the participation from a wide range of member states. Therefore, it is now time to seek a greater involvement from those Western EU member states who, owing to the lack of traditional links with the Eastern neighbourhood initially displayed little interest for the EaP. Their participation, if existent, has so far been limited in many EaP events and formats. Nonetheless, their attitude may indeed change together with the policy's developing. For instance, the fact that two Western European member states, France and the Netherlands, recently appointed special representatives for the Eastern Partnership[22] is obviously an indicator of a new interest for the policy.
- **The EaP's multilateral formats gather neighbouring countries with various aspirations and thus a different level of involvement.** Now that with the Eastern Partnership the EU proposes a similar offer to all neighbours subject to their reform efforts, the discrepancy between 'frontrunners' and 'laggards' (Shapovalova 2009) has become less visible. Nevertheless, those countries considered as the most advanced in their relationship with the EU (i.e. Moldova, Ukraine, and to a lesser extent Georgia) favour bilateral links at the expenses of multilateral meetings which are perceived as **one-size-fits-all** exercises. In other words, important objectives assigned to the EaP's multilateral track (e.g. facilitate the development of common positions and joint activities, foster links among the partners themselves) **stumble against the gaps in partner countries's situations and membership aspirations.** The consensus needed under the highest political meetings and the platforms makes decisions very difficult to reach, given also existing tensions between some Eastern neighbours. This is not likely to improve in the near future, as the whole Eastern partnership (and not only its institutional set-up) is a moving target; differences will thus broaden with the conclusion of the first AAs/DCFTAs. To put things more bluntly, the 'Eastern neighbourhood' (and thus, the EaP's multilateral track) is a EU construction which gathers non-contiguous and very diverse countries; it is sustainable only because the ENP's *finalité* is not clearly defined. At the same time, there is no better policy alternative for the time being. To engage the most advanced countries, the multilateral track should therefore be combined with **stronger additional incentives under the bilateral track** for those countries aspiring to get closer to the EU.

22 The Czech Republic and Poland also have special representatives for the Eastern Partnership.

- The main source of tension in the EaP's multilateral track originates in the combination of **a logic based upon joint ownership, inclusiveness and socialisation** with some elements reflecting a **more hierarchical approach and limiting participation.** On the one hand, the multilateral track is open to the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders (including civil society) to develop the dialogue between the EU and its neighbours at all levels of governance; on the other hand, synergies between these levels are weak and the participation of civil society in the governmental track is de facto restricted. In a similar vein, as far as the governmental track is concerned the application of the joint ownership principle has been patchy so far, with the EU side taking the lead (also for organisation and coordination purposes). The multilateral track should stick to **its initial (and innovant) socialisation approach,** i.e. act as an inclusive forum of discussion where all stakeholders should have a say on an equal footing. In other words:
    - as a major actor in the EaP's functioning (see European Commission 2011) and an important driver for its visibility, civil society should systematically be invited in panels', and possibly also in platforms meetings ;
    - targeted and concrete meetings, e.g. in the panels' formats, should be encouraged with a view to reaching tangible and visible results and to developing bottom-up processes;
    - more synergies should be sought between various formats and initiatives

To sum up, the results of the discussions, exchanges of experience and networking undertaken under the EaP multilateral track are so far modest. However, foundations have been laid for a greater interconnection between the EU and its Eastern partners at all levels, in other words for a horizontal or network governance. The socialisation approach requires time in order to yield tangible results and this should be kept in mind when analysing the multilateral dimension of the Eastern partnership.

References

Sources

Council of the European Union 2009. *Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit*, 8435/09 (Presse 78) 7 May.

Euronest Parliamentary Assembly 2011. *Constituent Act of the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly,* Brussels, May.

European Commission 2008a. *Eastern Partnership.* Commission Staff Working Document, SEC(2008) 2974, 3 December.

European Commission 2008b. *Eastern Partnership.* Communication to the Council and to the European Parliament, COM (2008) 823 final, 3 December.

European Commission 2009a. *Civil Society Forum. Concept Paper,* DG Relex.

European Commission 2009b. *Implementation of the Eastern Partnership: Report to the Meeting of Foreign Affairs Ministers,* 8 December,

European Commission 2010a. *Taking stock of the European Neighbourhood Policy.* Communication to the Council and to the European Parliament, COM (2010)207, 12 May.

European Commission 2010b. *Implementation of the Eastern Partnership: Report to the Meeting of Foreign Affairs Ministers,* 13 December.

European Commission/High Representative of The Union For Foreign Affairs And Security Policy 2011. *A new Response to a Changing Neighbourhood.* Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions.. COM(2011) 303, 24 May.

European External Action Service (no date). *Eastern Partnership Multilateral Platforms. General Guidelines and Rules of Procedures.*

European Parliament 2011. *Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy. Eastern Dimension.* Resolution B7 0198/2011, 7 April.

Polish-Swedish Proposal. 2008. *Eastern Partnership,* 23 May.

Working papers and academic publications

Bechev Dimitar, Nicolaïdis Kalypso. 2008. 'The Union for the Mediterranean: A Genuine Breakthrough or More of the Same', *The International Spectator,* Vol. 43, No.3, p.13-20.

Boonstra Jos, Shapovalova Natalia. 2010. "The EU's Eastern Partnership. One Year Backwards", *FRIDE Working Paper* N°99.

Delcour Laure. 2011. *Shaping the Post-Soviet Space? EU Policies and Approaches to Region-Building,* Aldershot: Ashgate.

Delcour Laure. 2011. "The Eastern Partnership: Shifting EU Approaches to Region-Building?", paper presented at the BASEES conference, April, forthcoming publication.

Emerson Michael. 2004. "European Neighbourhood Policy: Strategy or Placebo?", *CEPS Working Document* No. 215, November.

Fischer Sabine, Lannon Erwan. 2011. "The ENP Strategic Review: The EU and its Neighbourhood at a Crossroads", *ISS Analysis.*

Hillion Christophe, Mayhew Alan. 2009. "The Eastern Partnership- something new or window-dressing", *Sussex European Institute Working Paper* No.109.

Kaca Elżbieta, Kucharczyk Jacek, Łada Agnieszka. 2011.*Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum & how to improve it*, Warsaw: Institute for Public Affairs, June.

Kratochvíl Petr. 2008. "Constructing the EU's external roles: Friend in the South, Teacher in the East?", in: Delcour Laure, Tulmets Elsa, *Pioneer Europe? Testing European Foreign Policy in the Neighbourhood,* Baden-Baden: Nomos, pp. 230-239.

Kochenov Dimitry. 2011. "ENP's New Developments: Imitating change – Ignoring the Problems", *Comparative European Politics* No.9.

Lavenex Sandra, Schimmelfennig Frank. 2009. "EU rules beyond EU borders: theorizing external governance in European politics", *Journal of European Public Policy,* (16) 6, pp.791–812.

Pelcynzska-Nalecz Kataryna. 2011. *Integration or Imitation? EU Policy Towards its Eastern Neighbours,* IFRI.

Shapovalova Natalia. 2009. "The EU's Eastern Partnership: Stillborn?", *FRIDE Policy Briefs* No.11, May.

Shapovalova Natalia, Kapuśnika Tomasz. 2011. "Is Poland still committed to the Eastern neighbourhood?", *FRIDE Policy Briefs* No91, August.

Solonenko Iryna. 2011. "Added value? The Eastern Partnership and EU-Ukraine Bilateral Relations*", Internationale Politik und Gesellschaft* No.3, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2011.

Weber Bernd. 2010. *Europe's neighborhood between conditionality, network governance and bargaining. Explaining the structures and issues and analyzing the coherence of the system of external governance established by the ENP,* Paris: CER

Annex. List of interviews

Institution	Function	Date & place
Civil Society Forum	Working Group Coordinator	Brussels, July 2011
Committee of Regions	Administrator, CIVEX Commission	Brussels, July 2011
European External Action Service	Policy officer, Eastern Partnership unit	Brussels, July 2011
European Parliament	Head of Unit for Euronest	Brussels, July 2011
European Parliament	Administrator, AFET Committee	Brussels, July 2011
Partner country's Mission to the EU	Minister plenipotentiary	Brussels, July 2011
Partner country's Mission to the EU	Secretary	Brussels, July 2011

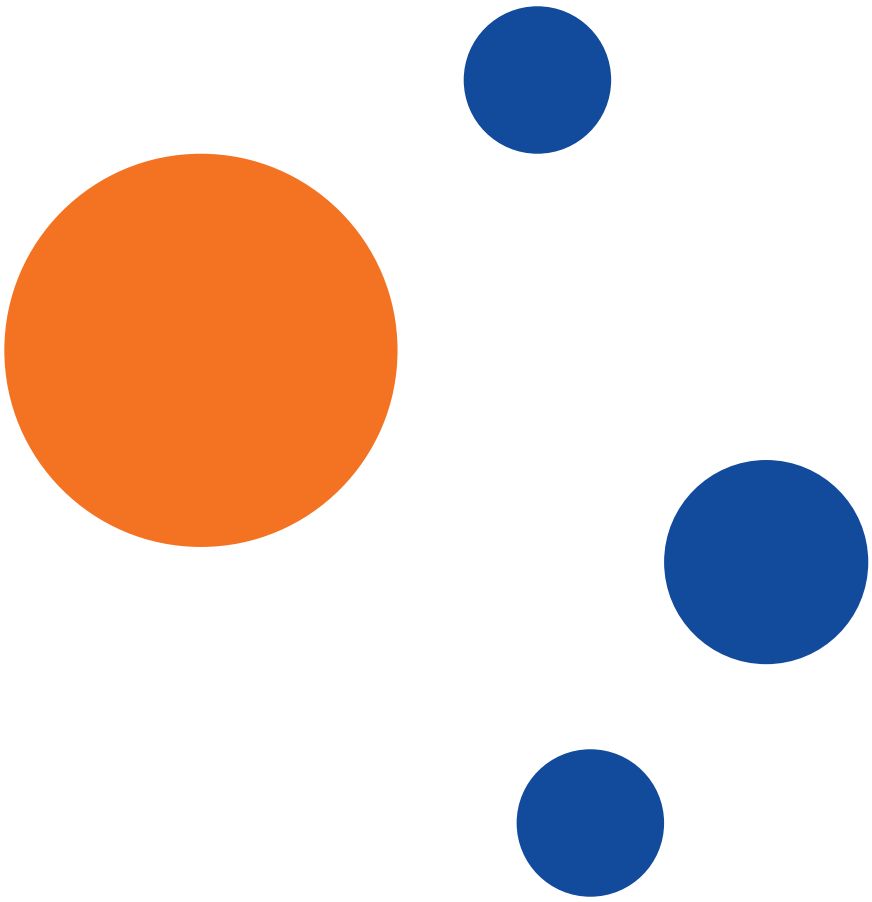
This document has been financed by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, Sida. Sida does not necessarily share the views expressed in this material. Responsibility for its contents rests entirely with the author.

Copyright notice:

© Text. Dr. Laure Delcour and ECEAP/ESD.

© Design and layout: Bloom OÜ.

All rights reserved. Through the ECEAP web site the publication can be accessed, downloaded, saved and printed free-of-charge for individual, educational and public use. Any commercial use of this publication, including distribution for commercial purposes, is prohibited. Non-commercial distribution without reference to the ECEAP web site is prohibited.



Estonian Center of Eastern Partnership (ECEAP)
Tõnismägi 2
10122 Tallinn
Estonia
Tel. +372 631 7951
E-mail: vahur.made@eceap.eu
Web site: http://www.eceap.eu

ECEAP is affiliated with the Estonian School of Diplomacy (ESD).