

## 1.2. Eastern Partnership Countries

### 1.2.1. *The Eastern Partnership Countries as partners of the EU*

The Eastern Partnership (EaP), launched at the Prague Summit of 7 May 2009, is a joint initiative of the EU and six Eastern European partner countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Republic of Moldova<sup>4</sup> and Ukraine) that aims to bring Eastern European countries closer to the EU. At bilateral level, the EU is committed to building strong and mutually beneficial relations with all six partners, irrespective of their individual level of ambition in their relations with the EU. The Association Agreements/Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (AA/DCFTAs), concluded in 2014, have brought the relations between the EU and Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine to a new level. These agreements aim at strengthened political association and economic integration. They constitute a plan of reforms that will bring the partner countries closer to the EU by aligning their legislation and standards to those of the EU, and improve peoples' lives in a tangible way.

A more tailored approach to relations with Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus will help ensure the inclusive nature of the Eastern Partnership. A new agreement is being negotiated with Armenia, whose political and economic cooperation with the EU will take account of Armenia's other international commitments. The EU is also considering entering into a closer relationship with Azerbaijan, to better reflect our respective interests and values. For Belarus, the EU is deepening its critical engagement in carefully calibrated mutual steps.

The Eastern Partnership Riga Summit held in 2015 identified four main areas of cooperation between the EU and its partners, namely: strengthening of institutions and good governance; mobility and people to people contacts; taking advantage of market opportunities; and enhancing interconnections, notably in the areas of transport and energy.

In November 2015 the review of the European Neighbourhood Policy responded to changes and challenges in the neighbourhood, identified enhanced differentiation between and greater ownership by partner countries as key principles for future cooperation including in the context of the Eastern Partnership. This approach has overall been welcomed by all partners.

Besides the continuous bilateral and multilateral political dialogue, technical work is structured on four thematic platforms, whose work programmes 2014-2017 were revised in the beginning of 2016 to better reflect the current needs and priorities of the partners.

### 1.2.2. *Priorities for S&T cooperation*

Two fields of intervention have been identified as priority areas for cooperation in research and innovation with EaP countries: common societal challenges to focus on, and cross-cutting issues to address as priorities in order to improve the cooperation framework conditions. This priority setting was based on contributions received from EU Member States and EaP countries that were consolidated by an expert group mandated by the EaP Panel on Research and Innovation<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Hereafter referred to as Moldova.

<sup>5</sup> The EaP panel on research and innovation gathers senior officials from both EU and EaP countries and is attached to the EaP platform 4 "contacts between people" addressing bi-regional cooperation in the fields of education, youth, culture, ICT, research and innovation.

Collaborative research and innovation activities should concentrate on health, demographic change and well-being (e.g. through multilateral cooperation such as the Global Collaboration for Infectious Disease Preparedness), climate action and environment, and secure, clean and efficient energy.

Although a challenge-based approach is proposed, particular attention should also be given to cooperation activities on key enabling technologies listed in Horizon 2020 with particular focus on ICT, nanotechnologies, new materials, and space.

In order to identify more precisely the topics of mutual interest in the three societal challenges prioritised by the EaP Panel, a series of thematic policy stakeholders conferences and brokerage events have been organised<sup>6</sup>. In parallel, a number of ongoing regional FP7 projects<sup>7</sup> are currently assessing framework conditions for cooperation in the field of innovation and analysing opportunities and challenges for research-industry partnerships across the two regions. The status of these projects was presented during the last EaP Panel meeting in March 2015, and working on the challenges ahead was identified as a priority, notably related to technology transfer issues.

Awareness raising and training events on smart specialisation can pave the way for better streamlined collaboration in the priority areas of research and innovation.

### *1.2.3. Framework conditions*

Three out of the six EaP countries – Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia – are already associated to Horizon 2020. The association of Armenia is expected to become effective soon.

These associations are major steps forward in the improvement of framework conditions for cooperation with the EU. As an example, Moldova and Ukraine requested support from the Policy Support Facility in order to review and increase the competitiveness of their national research and innovation system and make them further compatible with the EU. A peer review of the Moldovan national research and innovation system was launched in November 2015 through the Policy Support Facility. The same exercise was launched for Ukraine during March-September 2016.

In order to further improve framework conditions, the cross-cutting priorities on which the efforts should be concentrated include sharing best practice between EU Member States and EaP countries in research and innovation management and establishing a regional evaluation platform, providing technical assistance and training to support EaP countries in improving their national research and innovation systems, promoting researcher mobility and common use of research infrastructures, notably through the creation of a regional network of Centres of Excellence (a new initiative, EaPConnect, to develop a regional EaP Research and Education Network and its interconnection to GEANT was launched in June 2015), and promoting the link between EU research-intensive clusters and technology platforms with similar structures in EaP countries, in order to enhance the participation of EaP countries' private companies in these structures.

Smart specialisation can serve as a horizontal topic for capacity building actions, improving prioritisation, stakeholder involvement, governance, and outwards dimension of R&I strategies. A Smart Specialisation Strategies Design & Learning Workshop was organised in Chisinau, Moldova, in February 2016, and similar awareness raising events will take place in Kiev, Ukraine and Belgrade, Serbia. These events will be followed up with tailor-made capacity-building trainings.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.inco-eap.net>

<sup>7</sup> [https://ener2i.eu/related\\_projects/r2i\\_cluster\\_east](https://ener2i.eu/related_projects/r2i_cluster_east)

As far as broader framework conditions for cooperation are concerned, these are mostly relevant to bilateral relations with EaP countries rather than at a regional level. Issues such as the protection of intellectual property rights, competition rules or the liberalisation of public procurement are indeed addressed in bilateral association or cooperation agreements that the EU has established individually.