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**JOINT COMMUNICATION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE
EUROPEAN COUNCIL, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND
SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020

Reinforcing Resilience - an Eastern Partnership that delivers for all

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Eastern Partnership (EaP) is a joint initiative of the European Union, its Member States and Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova¹, and Ukraine ('the partner countries'). Launched in 2009, the EaP is a strategic and ambitious partnership based on common values and rules, mutual interests and commitments as well as shared ownership and responsibility. It aims to strengthen and deepen the political and economic relations between the EU, its Member States and the partner countries and helps them in achieving the twin ecological and digital transformation. It supports the delivery of many global policy objectives, including the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the UN 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals. It contributes to the overall goal of increasing the stability, prosperity, and resilience of the EU's neighbours as set out in the **Global Strategy** for the foreign and security policy of the European Union² and the 2015 **European neighbourhood policy review**. It is fully aligned with the European Commission's **Political Guidelines 2019-2024**³. Finally, it reflects all relevant flagship strategies adopted by the Commission⁴.

Over the years, the EaP has been instrumental in **bringing the EU and the partner countries closer together**. The EaP Summit of November 2017 in Brussels marked a new approach with the adoption of the common reform agenda titled '**20 Deliverables for 2020**'. This ambitious work plan focused on delivering tangible results on the ground and **improving the lives of people** in four main policy areas: (1) stronger economy; (2) stronger governance; (3) stronger connectivity; and (4) stronger society, together with targets for the cross-cutting issues of gender, civil society, media and strategic communication.

The EaP will continue to aim to build an area of democracy, prosperity, stability and increased cooperation based on common values. The EU has a strategic interest in advancing its global leadership on human rights and democracy in external action, including in relation to the EaP. Respect for human rights is an essential element of resilient, inclusive and democratic societies. Focus will therefore continue to be on outstanding issues from the current objectives, notably the rule of law, protection of human rights, the fight against corruption and discrimination, the role of an independent media and civil society and promotion of gender equality. The EU's incentive-based approach ('more for more' and 'less for less') will continue to benefit those partner countries most engaged in reforms. The future policy approach for the EaP should be built upon the already agreed tasks, aims, objectives, principles and areas of cooperation.

Continued engagement with the EaP countries will remain among the key priorities for the EU. The renewed dynamics of the EaP policy will enhance this engagement by emphasising the significance of this mutually beneficial cooperation. It will translate into further development of political relations with all Eastern partners in both bilateral and multilateral formats. Furthermore, due to its geographical location between the European Union, Asia and the wider neighbourhood, the EaP region brings increased value for EU foreign policy engagement, notably due to the varying degrees of economic, societal and strategic connections with its neighbours. The presence and interests of other regional and global powers as well as the cultural and geographical links with Central Asia represent additional

¹ Hereinafter 'Moldova'

² https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/eugs_review_web_0.pdf

³ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/political-guidelines-next-commission_en.pdf

⁴ These include the Communications 'The European Green Deal' (COM(2019) 640), 'Shaping Europe's digital future' (COM(2020) 67), 'A New Industrial Strategy for Europe' (COM(2020) 102) and 'A Union of Equality: Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 (COM(2020) 152).

opportunities to develop mutually beneficial links with the broader neighbourhood. The EU's activities in the region are complemented by other policies and initiatives such as the Northern Dimension and the Black Sea synergy.

In May 2019, the European Commission launched a consultation on the future of the EaP. The European Council endorsed this approach in June 2019.

The consultation ran until the end of October 2019. It was broad and inclusive, gathering over 200 written contributions including through the EaP structured consultation webpage. Nearly all EU Member States and all partner countries submitted opinions, as did the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee, and the Committee of the Regions. Other contributors included the European Investment Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and other international financial institutions, and a wide variety of stakeholders such as civil society organisations (including the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum), think tanks, academic institutions, and business organisations. Recommendations from the Eastern Partnership Youth Forum and the Young European Ambassadors were taken into account.

This joint communication also draws on feedback received during **consultations in each of the six partner countries** and many EU Member States. Discussions within the platforms and panels of the current EaP architecture and related meetings were also considered.

Overall, there is a broad consensus that the **current EaP policy framework is robust and delivers tangible results for people**. The joint communication outlines how to address **common challenges** and how the EU will work together with the partner countries in different policy areas in the future. Based on the results of the consultation, this document outlines the new **long-term policy objectives for the Eastern Partnership beyond 2020** and sets out the measures that aim to **strengthen resilience, foster sustainable development and deliver tangible results for society**.

2. KEY ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP

In 2015, EU Member States and the partner countries welcomed the revision of the **European neighbourhood** policy in the context of the EU Global Strategy. They called for increased **differentiation**, greater **ownership**, enhanced **focus** and greater **flexibility**. The consultation showed that the EaP has broadly delivered on these objectives.

In terms of **differentiation**, the partnership has developed according to the interests, ambitions and progress of each partner. There are new, far-reaching political and economic bilateral agreements between the EU and individual partner countries. Relations with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine are guided by association agreements and deep and comprehensive free trade areas (DCFTAs). To ensure these ambitious agreements are fully implemented, these three countries agreed to set the 'association agendas' around short- and medium-term cooperation priorities. Visa-free arrangements have been put in place between the EU and these countries, to facilitate people's movement across borders. All three countries have fully implemented readmission agreements.

A comprehensive and enhanced partnership agreement frames EU relations with Armenia, and negotiations on a new agreement are under way with Azerbaijan. Cooperation with these two countries is based on agreed partnership priorities. Sectoral dialogues foster relations with Belarus while negotiations on partnership priorities are under way. Visa facilitation and readmission agreements concluded with Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus have been key in facilitating travel for people in these countries.

To encourage greater **ownership** by partner countries, the EU has **transformed** the way it engages with them. To increase impact, EU support has shifted away from project-based

financial assistance towards support for genuinely transformational **reform policies**. This new approach has delivered tangible benefits to people, for example supporting decentralisation in Ukraine and high-level energy efficiency initiatives in Armenia, Georgia and Ukraine.

The EU has strengthened collaboration with those responsible for reforms in partner countries. Together with national authorities, the EU and its Member States have taken key steps to ensure **joint programming** where possible. This guarantees a more effective collective response to partner countries' needs, making cooperation less fragmented and therefore more coherent and impactful. Successful joint responses include Ukraine and Moldova.

The EU has stepped up its strategic collaboration with **international financial institutions** (IFIs). Through country, regional and sectoral dialogues, the EU and IFIs have brought about substantial support for small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) and 'green' investments for energy efficiency and municipal infrastructure, thereby decreasing energy consumption, pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, and strengthening environmental and climate resilience across the region.

Engaging with civil society has been critical in ensuring effective reforms, as it has increased public accountability, advanced human rights and local development, and ensured service delivery to the whole population, including vulnerable groups. The EU has played a key role in supporting the contribution of civil society, which has in turn driven social innovation and helped build reform coalitions at national, regional and local level.

Responses to the consultation emphasise the value of building a greater **focus** within a common policy. The '20 deliverables for 2020', endorsed by EU Member States and partner countries at the November 2017 EaP Summit, set out a common results-oriented agenda in order to focus cooperation.

The new European neighbourhood policy underlined the need for greater **flexibility** to enable the EU and the partner countries to respond to ever-changing needs and circumstances. To increase support and impact, the EU has: (i) strengthened cooperation with IFIs through the external investment plan and structural reform facility; (ii) modernised and strategically aligned its technical assistance instruments (TAIEX and Twinning) for tailor-made support; and (iii) adapted its institutional structures to respond to new challenges. For example, the 'Support Group for Ukraine' is a unique structure that brings together expertise from across the European Commission and EU Member States to tackle the country's key challenges. The 'EEAS East StratCom taskforce' created following the European Council Conclusions of March 2015 on tackling disinformation, has also been instrumental in making the EU's communication and branding in the region strategic and impactful.

3. FUTURE POLICY APPROACH FOR THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP

According to the consultation, there is a strong consensus that '20 deliverables for 2020' is producing tangible results for society. It has made a difference in 3 out of 4 priority areas, namely **stronger economy, stronger connectivity and stronger society**. On **stronger governance**, initial achievements include 'one-stop-shops' delivering efficient and accessible public services, and e-assets declarations systems in most partner countries.

EU Member States, most partner countries and civil society stress the **need to significantly improve results in the governance area, notably rule of law, the fight against corruption and organised crime, and the role of an independent media and civil society**. Progress in governance is directly linked to sustainable economic development. **Legal certainty and functioning democratic institutions are key to attracting investment, supporting political stability and rule of law reforms, and fostering socioeconomic integration**. The results-oriented agenda, supported by professionally independent, good quality **official statistics** for

monitoring progress and in support of evidence-based decision-making, will therefore be reinforced in the future policy.

The **incentive-based approach** needs clearer guidance on specific reform priorities, with objective, precise, detailed and verifiable benchmarks. Reform progress should lead to increased funding and investment. Serious or prolonged stagnation or even backsliding in reform implementation should lead to EU funding being adjusted downward, with the exception of support to civil society.

The consultation demonstrated a keen desire by all the partner countries to **further tailor the partnership to the interests, ambitions and progress of each partner country**. Associated countries have strong expectations of participating in common initiatives on issues covered by the association agreements and deep and comprehensive free trade areas in order to reach their full potential.

Bilateral cooperation remains **the main way to ensure a tailor-made approach**. The implementation of bilateral agreements will be sped up and complemented with **deeper sectoral cooperation and exchange between interested partner countries**. The EU will continue to provide support in bilateral, regional and multi-country fora, including targeted sectoral assistance, in line with the principles of inclusiveness and differentiation. In addition, the EaP will continue to be **flexible and inclusive**, allowing countries to **tackle common and global challenges jointly** in a wide range of areas, fostering **regional integration**.

Building on the Partnership's key achievements, and recognising that **strengthening resilience is an overriding policy framework**, as outlined in the Strategic Approach to Resilience in the EU's external action⁵, the EU, its Member States and the partner countries will **work together on the following long-term Eastern Partnership policy objectives beyond 2020**:

- together for resilient, sustainable and integrated economies;
- together for accountable institutions, the rule of law and security;
- together towards environmental and climate resilience;
- together for a resilient digital transformation; and
- together for resilient, fair and inclusive societies.

The European Commission has called for the EU and its partners, in particular from across the European continent, to address common challenges and to work hand in hand on new policy priorities in the future to support the ecological transformation, the digital transformation and to deliver on economies that work for all, in particular more job opportunities for youth and to promote gender equality. These issues will be mainstreamed into all policy objectives.

4. MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES OF THE FUTURE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP

4.1 Together for resilient, sustainable and integrated economies

Strengthening the economy is key to meeting citizens' expectations, reducing inequality, and making partner countries places where people want to build their futures. Better-integrated economies that are inclusive, sustainable and fair, deliver for all. The aim is to create decent jobs and economic opportunities, ensuring prosperity for people living in the partner countries.

⁵https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/join_2017_21_fl_communication_from_commission_to_inst_en_v7_p1_916039.pdf

This will entail **increased trade and further regional and bilateral integration of the economies of partner countries and the EU, together with cooperation for progressive decarbonisation towards climate neutrality, embracing the opportunities from the twin ecological and digital transformation.** Building on the existing Association Agreements, and DCFTAs and other trade agreements, the EU, jointly with partner countries, will focus on supporting their full implementation for maximum benefits. In line with the EU new growth strategy, the European Green Deal and the Digital Strategy, the EU and partner countries will further support the modernisation of EaP economies, making them more competitive and innovative. In addition, the EU and the partner countries will invest in physical connectivity and infrastructure (in transport, energy and digital) as underpinning conditions for economic development. In cases of economic crisis, the EU stands ready to help partner countries safeguard macroeconomic stability and incentivise structural reforms through EU Macro-Financial Assistance. Supporting structural reforms, improving access to finance, and supporting SMEs will foster growth and investment. Investing in people, particularly the young, and better connecting education, research and innovation with private sector needs will prepare the partner countries to face tomorrow's challenges.

4.1.1 Trade and economic integration

During the last decade, EU-EaP **trade has nearly doubled** turning the partner countries into the EU's 10th largest trading partner. The **EU is the first trading block for four partner countries** (Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine), while for Armenia and Belarus the EU is the second biggest trading partner. These trade relations have also led to diversification in exports of goods from partner countries, and to their better integration in global value chains. Furthermore, the number of companies exporting to the EU from Georgia has increased by 46%, from Moldova by 48% and from Ukraine by 24%. This clearly reflects the mutual benefits of EaP.

The EU proposes to further **deepen the economic integration with and among the partner countries**, particularly that of the three associated countries through continued support for the full implementation of the current DCFTAs. Bilateral agreements, in particular DCFTAs, offer growth opportunities for the private sector, as well as higher levels of labour protection, better working conditions and citizens' access to compliant and safe products. These benefits remain to be fully reaped pending the on-going and future reforms resulting from DCFTAs commitments. This process entails bringing legislation in line with EU rules, building the capacity to implement the agreed reforms and facilitating trade. The EU will also encourage enhanced cooperation with non-DCFTA countries. Sectoral trade facilitation arrangements of common interest should take economic integration a step further, by involving all partner countries. In this regard, as one example, the EU will continue to work with the partner countries, where possible, towards agreements on mutual recognition of Authorised Economic Operators.

The EU will also seek to **collaborate and build alliances with the partner countries** on pertinent wider, global economic issues in various multilateral fora including supporting the accession to the World Trade Organisation for current non-members.

The EU will support the green transition in the region. It will aim at rules based, undistorted and fair trade and investment in clean technologies, green goods and services and related strategic raw materials. The EU will work with the partner countries to ensure resource security and to deliver simultaneously on the Paris Agreement and on the Sustainable Development Goals.

For associated countries, phased market access liberalisation continues. In addition, selective and gradual **economic integration** of these countries into the EU's internal market is envisaged in the DCFTAs. This is conditional on regulatory convergence with, and effective

implementation by these countries of, the EU *acquis* in specified areas (public procurement, technical barriers to trade, market surveillance, sanitary and phytosanitary measures, customs services, and tax good governance standards).

4.1.2 Investment and access to finance

During the last decade, over **125,000 SMEs** directly benefited from EU funding (mostly in local currencies) creating or sustaining **more than 250,000 jobs**. Better use of blending and guarantees has maximised the impact, **leveraging 11 billion euros in investment since 2009**.

Structural reforms are key to supporting economic development, improving economic governance, attracting foreign direct investment and increasing economic resilience. Trade and investment need favourable conditions for sustainable economic development. The business and investment environment must be simple, transparent and reliable. This requires efforts to ensure a level playing field, improve the labour market and reduce informal work, improve economic governance, and build on rule of law reforms, including prevention of corruption. Economic operators must be given a clear perspective of the ecological transition underway. The EU will continue to strengthen the partner countries' key reforms, including through the **External Investment Plan**⁶ and notably the **Structural Reform Facility**.

SMEs are the top employers in most of the partner countries and a key driver of shared growth and innovation. The EU will continue to support **access to finance** through guarantee schemes, interest rate subsidies and investment incentives. It will also expand this support through its stronger partnership with IFIs, as well as the European Fund for Sustainable Development (EFSD+) within the proposed Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) and the External Action Guarantee. Sustainable finance and microfinance will be integral to the EU's intervention, including in the rural areas where the access to finance is particularly difficult. To maximise the effectiveness of support, the EU will analyse with IFIs the key areas where investment will have impact (including through the development of an 'impact investment matrix').

Considering the urgent need to scale up sustainable investments, the EU will further strengthen its cooperation with the partner countries to set up a financial system that supports sustainable growth, notably through international fora such as the **International Platform on Sustainable Finance** (IPSF). The EU and partner countries can share best practices and coordinate efforts on environmentally sustainable investment such as green taxonomies, environmental and climate disclosures, and standards and labels for green financial products.

Given the growing economic and trade relations of the Eastern partner countries with the EU, **stronger use of the euro** in their foreign commercial dealings would further strengthen economic relations with the EU and help to **ensure the economic and financial stability** of these countries. It will further reduce foreign exchange risk faced by the partner countries, including by ensuring that the foreign currency mix in external borrowings, reserve management and international dealings are better correlated with the currencies of their main trading and investment partners, while supporting a stronger **international role of the euro**. The EU will also continue to support partner countries' efforts to meet the criteria to join the **Single Euro Payment Area** (SEPA).

To respond to the need of start-ups, the EU together with IFIs will develop an innovative and smart financing programme (including equity, venture capital, business angel and crowd funding). EU assistance will further strengthen business support organisations, support SME internationalisation, and facilitate public-private dialogue while addressing the need for

⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/eu-external-investment-plan_en

knowledge and skills to foster innovation, entrepreneurship and creativity that match future market needs. The EU will continue to support business, particularly women-led initiatives, and encourage more young people to become entrepreneurs.

To move towards an **inclusive and fair economy that delivers for all**, the EU will help partner countries unleash the economic potential of their rural areas, including by supporting farmers and the setting up of modern cooperatives and producers groups. The EU will strengthen engagement outside capital cities and create links between local urban centres and rural areas. This builds on the European Commission's methodology for smart specialisation as applied in the EU.

4.1.3 Strengthened interconnectivity

Strong interconnections between the EU and the EaP as well as among the partner countries are important drivers for economic development, regional integration, trade and mobility. Sustainable, rules-based and secure connectivity is **key for both the EU and partner countries**.

On **transport**, the EU focus will be on the long-term **priority investments** outlined in the **Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T)** indicative investment action plan⁷. This includes upgrading key physical infrastructure in road, rail, port, inland waterway and airport facilities, and logistics centres in order to further strengthening connectivity between the EU and the partner countries and among the partner countries themselves. It will be supported through blending and guarantees under the Neighbourhood Investment Platform. The EU will also increase the use of EU and international transport standards including in the area of road safety in line with the 2018 Eastern Partnership Declaration on Road Safety⁸. It will also step up work on the common aviation area agreements and aviation safety. Recognising the importance of Eastern partner countries in connectivity between Europe and Asia, the EU will promote and support the engagement of the partner countries in the implementation of the strategy on connecting Europe and Asia⁹.

On **energy connectivity**, the EU will continue to work with the partner countries to reinforce cross-border and inter-regional interconnections. The **Southern Gas Corridor** is nearing completion and is expected to bring the first gas from Azerbaijan to the EU in 2020. Evidence-based energy policy and collection, use and management of data will be further supported through the 'EU4Energy' initiative and the energy policy dialogue. The ongoing amendment of the Energy Community treaty, of which three partner countries are part, will aim at making the Energy Community more efficient and fit for a sustainable energy future. The EU will also help the partner countries to increase **energy security** by diversifying from oil or gas imports **through investments in renewable energy** and **enhanced energy efficiency** and by encouraging energy market integration based on sound legislation.

Satellite-based connectivity contributes to smart and safe transport, greener cities and enables the digitalisation and modernisation of the economy. In this context, cooperation with the partner countries with regard to extending the coverage of the European Geostationary Navigation Overlay Service will contribute to safer aviation, in line with EU legislation, to cost-effective maritime and rail transport and help boost high-precision agriculture.

⁷https://ec.europa.eu/transport/themes/international/european_neighbourhood_policy/eastern_partnership/ten-t-maps_en

⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/eap_declaration_finalversion2604.pdf

⁹ https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/50699/connecting-europe-asia-eu-strategy_en

Strong **policy dialogue** and developing a single pipeline of infrastructure projects is key to optimising the **portfolio of investments**. Sound macroeconomic policies and public financial management, creating fiscal space for public investments, ensuring a level playing field to engage with private sector, including through public-private partnerships, are necessary conditions to ensure the sustainability of infrastructure in all areas.

4.1.4 Investing in people

Investing in people is key to preparing for the future and fostering societal and economic resilience. Building on achievements for young people, the EU proposes a **new deal for youth**, which will include the following elements: (i) bridging the gap between the labour market and the education sector; (ii) increasing support for the **employability of youth** and for **youth entrepreneurship**; (iii) active labour market measures, such as the Youth Guarantee, to be adapted to the partner countries' labour markets; and (iv) building on a pilot young EaP civil servants job-shadowing scheme, setting up a **mobility and exchange programme for the EaP directed at young professionals**.

Education reform will be a strategic priority. This will cover inter alia (i) governance and capacity building; (ii) modernisation and innovation at all levels of education and training; (iii) aligning of legislation and policies with the European developments, including the European Higher Education area (Bologna process) or Torino process for vocational education and training; and (iv) strengthening **teacher training**, exchanging best practice and support the introduction of modern curricula and teaching and learning practices. The **Erasmus+ programme**, as a key component of EU support to the modernisation and internationalisation of education and training systems, will provide greater mobility and capacity building opportunities in formal and non-formal education. Participation in the **European Solidarity Corps** will allow young people to volunteer or work in projects that benefit communities and people around Europe. The flagship **European School in Georgia** will become a full secondary school in new premises.

Research and innovation are crucial for creating decent and sustainable jobs. The EU will continue to support and strengthen the **smart specialisation, technology transfer and innovative capacities** of the partner countries as well as their increased participation in EU programmes such as Horizon Europe and COSME. National public research and innovation systems need to improve in performance and competitiveness, including by continuing **reforms**. The development of a **common knowledge and innovation space** between the EU and the partner countries should be fostered, using scientific evidence to create knowledge-based jobs and attract investors to innovative businesses in the EU and the neighbourhood. Research, innovation and transfer of knowledge are also key to modernisation of agriculture, a vital sector for a large part of the population in the EaP. As one of the EU's main priorities for the future is to deliver under the **European Green Deal**, notably to become the world's first climate-neutral continent, the partner countries are encouraged to identify R&I priorities linked to climate change mitigation and adaptation, and build new innovative and sustainable value chains. Joint commitments to address these priorities will be encouraged, along with definition of a strategy to make solutions available for rapid deployment.

Furthermore, the EU will support countries maximise the potential of their **culture and creative industries**, as engines for sustainable social and economic development. The EU will promote the key role of culture to build openness and promote European values, and to foster intercultural dialogue for peaceful inter-community relations, and will reinforce cooperation in cultural heritage and creative industries including the audio-visual sector.

4.2 Together for accountable institutions, the rule of law, and security

Good governance and democratic institutions, rule of law, successful anti-corruption policies, fight against organised crime, respect of human rights and security, including

support to populations affected by conflict, are the **backbone of strong and resilient states and societies**. They are also significant **preconditions for a functioning market economy** and for **sustainable growth**. In particular, rule of law is a key factor in ensuring an effective business climate and an important consideration in attracting foreign direct investment.

Looking ahead, there needs to be a renewed commitment to the fundamentals of the partnership in order to build on the achievements to date. In particular, the EU's support for resilient institutions, rule of law and security will include: (i) proposing ways to better measure the impact of judicial reforms; (ii) consider progress in rule of law reforms when deciding on assistance; (iii) reinvigorating EU support for fighting corruption and economic crime; (iv) improving cross-border cooperation to better protect people against organised crime; and (v) stepping up support for security dialogues and cooperation.

4.2.1 Judicial reforms

Future reforms should be based on alignment with **European standards**. There should be a **holistic approach** that covers prosecution and law enforcement services. The **independence and accountability** of the judiciary and prosecution are essential, in a system of checks and balances, to ensure that all state institutions abide by the law and that citizens have access to justice and can exercise their rights fully.

The EU will encourage the **active role of international institutions and experts** to support and legitimise reform processes and will look to its own expertise on rule of law issues. Reforms should be based on **high quality reform strategies** that are based on first-rate diagnostics of the issues that need be addressed. There is a need for **better measurement of the real results/impacts** of reforms and their perceptions by citizens. The EU will support increase the capacity of the relevant national institutions to deliver **judicial training** on the values and rules that justice practitioners, such as judges and prosecutors, need to adhere to in their work.

In this critical area the EU will promote a **rule of law culture** through close involvement of civil society and business community, as well as strengthened cooperation with EU stakeholders.

4.2.2 Tackling corruption and economic crime

Corruption undermines the rule of law and the sustainable development of societies. New **anti-corruption digital tools** help to **prevent and detect** irregularities better, and several specialised bodies have been set up in recent years to tackle corruption¹⁰. Despite this, a new level of rigorousness is needed to **improve investigation, prosecution and sanction of economic crime**, thereby demonstrating that the anti-corruption and law enforcement bodies are independent and **deliver results**. The EU will support a results-driven legislative and institutional framework, with a focus on **high-level corruption**, and will pay particular attention to the area of **public procurement**. In this respect, the potential of digital solutions for improving the traceability and transparency of public procurement systems will be explored to the full. The EU will also help the partner countries integrate integrity and accountability in all levels of public administration,

Corruption is one of the many aspects of a broader criminal phenomenon, namely **economic crime**. Partner countries need to step up their efforts to establish a solid and effective framework to fight economic crimes. In this regard, registries of beneficial ownership are essential to **fight money laundering**. It is important for the Eastern partners to put in place

¹⁰ All the partner countries have ratified the United Nations Convention against Corruption.

robust asset recovery frameworks, including by setting up functioning **asset recovery offices** that are in a position to trace and identify criminal wealth. This is crucial in view of freezing and confiscating illicit assets, and for the recovery of criminal proceeds as an important instrument in the fight against organised crime.

4.2.3 Combating organised crime and strengthening security

One shared challenge in the broad area of security is **organised crime**. Here, the EU will continue support: (i) increased **cooperation with EU justice and home affairs agencies**; (ii) **security sector reform**; (iii) the **fight against trafficking** of human beings and illicit goods (notably drugs and firearms); and (iv) **integrated border management** to improve partner countries' ability to withstand the pressures they face and step up their resilience. The EU will continue cooperation on **cyber resilience** with the partner countries. Moreover, a functional and enforceable framework to fight cybercrime, with the Council of Europe's Budapest Convention as a baseline, is fundamental.

Continued cooperation between the partner countries and the **EU Civil Protection Mechanism**, as well as among partner countries, will be key to enhance prevention of, preparedness for, and response to natural and man-made disasters. Moreover, unresolved conflicts continue to hamper development in the region. Under the agreed negotiating formats and processes, the EU is committed to promote the peaceful settlement of these **conflicts**. Being conscious of the impact this can have on economic and social developments, the role of women and young people in peacebuilding will be strengthened through joint actions to further the EU's political commitment for the implementation of the Women Peace and Security agenda¹¹ at regional and international levels. In particular, the EU will pursue efforts to support conflict prevention, confidence building and the facilitation of negotiated peaceful conflict settlements. The EU will also continue providing assistance to populations affected by conflicts to enhance their resilience. **Security dialogues and practical Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) cooperation** will also be strengthened to support contributions by partner countries to the European civil and military missions and operations. The EU will consider providing training opportunities and capacity building to the partner countries, including on countering hybrid threats, where appropriate.

4.3 Together towards environmental and climate resilience

The European Green Deal makes it clear that environmental and climate challenges require urgent action by the EU and the partner countries. Modernising economies and trade patterns will help reducing the risk of carbon leakage. This is also necessary given the achievements in economic integration and changing consumer preferences in the EU and the EaP. The EU will continue to link the partner countries to the increasingly complex and high-end economic value-chains as it transforms its own economy. The EU will also help partner countries fulfil their nationally determined contributions to the Paris Agreement and modernise their economies, reducing their carbon footprint and moving towards climate neutrality, while acknowledging the investment challenges. In this respect, the partner countries have expressed in various fora their support to the comprehensive approach for change presented in the European Green Deal. It is equally important to implement the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and increase efforts in climate change adaptation.

The EU will work together with the partner countries to transform the region into fair and prosperous societies, with modern, resource-efficient, clean, circular and competitive economies, while increasing their **environmental and climate resilience**, including through more sustainable use of natural resources. The prominence of the environmental and climate agenda is increasing in the region. Public demands are growing to: (i) improve air and water

¹¹ <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N00/720/18/PDF/N0072018.pdf?OpenElement>

quality; (ii) manage effectively waste, land, and water resources; and (iii) respond to extreme weather events and illegal logging and deforestation. This is also a significant opportunity to boost activity in innovative sectors. Several partner countries have adopted green economy action plans and long-term strategies, which they wish to speed up. Similarly, private sector partners are increasingly considering the opportunities of a greener, circular economy and wish to address the risks caused by climate change. The partner countries can already benefit from Copernicus data and services, which are freely and openly available to support informed decision making in the region.

The EaP will therefore need to: (i) scale up action in areas that are critical for people's health and wellbeing; (ii) increase the resource-efficiency of economies; (iii) develop new green jobs and economic opportunities linked to the green transition; (iv) develop local and renewable sources of energy; and (v) manage natural assets to maximise sustainability. **The EU will support this transition, giving due respect to global challenges and environmental and climate realities in the partner countries focusing first on the low-hanging fruit.**

4.3.1 Benefits for people's health and wellbeing

For environment-related quality of life, increased effort is needed to make urban development more sustainable and further improve the delivery of **environmental services**, such as water supply and sanitation, waste management, green areas and urban mobility. The EU will support actions and policy development aiming at preventing and reducing pollution and thereby decreasing the negative health impacts of in particular air, water and soil pollution and toxic chemicals, taking the EU's zero pollution ambition as a guideline. The EU will scale up support for increasing the **energy efficiency** of buildings, which is essential to address energy poverty and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Innovative financing instruments (such as energy performance contracts, on-tax and on-bill financing) could be used to achieve higher building renovation rates through attracting private finance. The EU will support the development of **renewable energy** sources, notably as a way to accelerate the reduction of coal use, which is essential to reduce air pollution. The EU will continue to roll out tools and implement the high-level energy efficiency initiative together with IFIs to modernise energy legislation and put in place a smart regulatory framework that promotes energy efficiency and renewable energy, through green finance schemes and by involving the private sector. Measures to reconvert those cities or regions that suffer most from pollution will be identified.

In the area of **public health**, the EU will support the partner countries in the modernisation of medical facilities, e-health, training of medical staff and providing affordable medical care and promoting access to people across society. This will include support in better addressing communicable and non-communicable diseases as in the case of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19).

4.3.2 Circular economy

Facilitating the transition to resource efficient and circular economies will be the principal goal of action. Reducing wasteful production is a key starting point to increase competitiveness at a relatively low cost. In terms of new economic opportunities and competitiveness, the EU will promote the green, circular economy based on the outcomes of the recent policy dialogue. The EU will support businesses and business-to-business contacts in this area. **Circular economy** field trips will take place upon countries' request. Work will continue on the promotion of sustainable product policies, eco-innovation, extended producer responsibility, other ways to prevent and reduce waste, waste management, green public procurement and better consumer information. The EU will engage with the partner countries towards reforming a number of resource-intensive sectors such as plastics, textiles or construction. Opportunities for green jobs will be carefully identified. Key sectors will benefit from an analysis of possible measures to boost jobs and competitiveness through a green, circular economy.

4.3.3 Economy's natural assets base

Halting the loss of **biodiversity** will be one of the main goals of cooperation. This includes tackling deforestation and desertification, introducing measures to protect specific species and extending and effectively managing protected areas. It also includes working together with other sectors on reducing the negative impact of human activities on biodiversity. To preserve natural resources, that form the basis of economies, the EU will further work with the partner countries to address water quality and availability and improve control and surveillance for fishing activities to tackle overexploitation. River-basin management planning will be extended to all river basins. We will continue cooperation on unlocking the potential of the **raw materials** sector to contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals, tackling deforestation and improving sustainable forest management including as long-term carbon storage and fossil substitutes. Efforts will be made to reduce illegal logging and make timber traceable. The EU will support **sustainable agriculture, fisheries, and food safety** through knowledge transfer and innovation, in particular in sectors with high benefit. It will also continue to strengthen the position of farmers and fishermen in the value chain while improving the quality of life in rural and marine coastal areas.

4.3.4 Policies and governance in support of greener growth

To succeed the partner countries will need to invest further in: (i) **environmental governance**; (ii) the sound planning of policies and investments; (iii) administrative capacity to implement and enforce legislation; (iv) enhanced public access to information, awareness, and participation; and (v) more adapted and effective financing mechanisms. This will require strong policy dialogue and improved outreach to all stakeholders, including the relevant parliamentary committees. **Raising awareness**, including by teaming up with civil society, will also be important. The EU better support issue-specific leadership roles of Member States and partner countries in specific areas to encourage faster implementation of modern policies and practices, and increase the countries' ownership. The **Common Maritime Agenda for the Black Sea**¹² will contribute as a regional governance framework.

4.3.5 Strengthening energy security and nuclear safety

To strengthen energy security, diversification of the energy mix is necessary, notably via renewable energy sources. Partner countries are competent in **deciding on their own energy mix** in view of achieving their respective climate targets. Some countries may choose nuclear as a low carbon energy source to play a role in meeting those targets. In this context, the EU will continue to contribute to **strengthening international nuclear safety**. The EU's forerunner role in binding nuclear legislation will be the basis of further bilateral exchanges. We will continue to organise nuclear stress test peer reviews and follow-up activities. The **EU will also share its experience** in the fields of decommissioning, radioactive waste management, and radiation protection. The participation of partner countries in the EU arrangements for environmental monitoring – EURDEP – and for exchanging information in case of radiological or nuclear emergencies – ECURIE – is also of key importance.

4.3.6. Accelerating the shift to sustainable and smart mobility

Transport has to become more sustainable and transport policies in the EaP should be revamped to ensure reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. Therefore the EU will increasingly work with partner countries on **green transport solutions**, by helping build future-oriented smart cities creating urban mobility plans to integrate transport modes in urban

¹² https://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/press/black-sea-ministers-endorse-common-maritime-agenda_en

areas. For the long haul this will include optimisation of transport including through **digitalisation**.

4.4 Together for a resilient digital transformation

As indicated in the **Strategy on Shaping Europe's digital future**¹³, a strong digital presence in the EU's neighbourhood will enable growth and drive sustainable development. In this respect, the EU will invest further in the **digital transformation** of the partner countries, in line with EU legislation and best practices. Work in this area beyond 2020 will aim to extend the benefits of the Digital Single Market to the partner countries and support the full implementation of the partner countries' commitments in the **Association Agreements and other bilateral agreements**. Work will build on the success of the policy initiative for the **Harmonisation of Digital Markets** in the EaP and the operational programmes launched under the **EU4Digital** brand.

4.4.1. Digital infrastructure

A modern economy based on data can only be fully realised if citizens and businesses have access to high quality electronic communications infrastructure and services at affordable prices. The EU will continue to support the strengthening of the independence of **regulatory authorities** where appropriate and the establishment of the necessary regulatory powers, to allow the proper functioning of the electronic communications markets in the partner countries. The EU will also continue to support, notably through technical assistance and exchange of best practices, the extension of **secure and very high capacity Gigabit broadband** infrastructures in partner countries, in particular in remote or less densely populated areas, and to foster its use. Ensuring services are available at affordable prices will be important to maximise impact for the EaP population. In this context, the EU will support the implementation of **roaming** and **spectrum** agreements among the partner countries and, where appropriate, with the EU.

4.4.2 eGovernance

The EU will support further the strengthening of **eGovernance** in the EaP region, in order to increase efficiency, transparency and accountability for public administrations and facilitate reforms. In this respect, the EU will support the adoption of legal frameworks for **electronic identification** schemes and **electronic trust** services in the EaP, in line with EU legislation and best practices, in order to pave the way for mutual recognition agreements among the partner countries and with the EU. Standardised interoperable **eServices platforms** will be supported.

4.4.3. Digital economy and innovation

The EU will support EaP governments in developing digital innovations programmes and support the scaling up of highly innovative digital **start-ups** in the EaP region through the extension of the Digital Innovation and Scale-up Initiative to the partner countries. In particular, it will assist digital start-ups and SMEs to improve their access to finance, better reach into EU markets, and strengthen links with EU innovation ecosystems. EU space-based data and services of the flagship programmes Copernicus and Galileo are already available freely and openly. The EU will cooperate with Eastern Partnership countries to boost their uptake to enable innovative start-ups and SMEs and facilitate business cooperation across borders.

¹³ https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/communication-shaping-europes-digital-future-feb2020_en_4.pdf

The EU will further support the partner countries to address the **digital skills** gap with particular focus on gender equality and social inclusiveness.

4.4.4. Cyber resilience

The EU will further support and assist the **cyber resilience** of the partner countries. The development of robust legal, policy and operational cybersecurity frameworks in the partner countries will continue to be supported, based on EU legislation and best practices, including the EU's **cybersecurity certification** framework.

4.5 Together for resilient, fair and inclusive societies

Transparent, citizen-centred and accountable public administrations, and free and fair elections, are essential for democracy. Together with an engaged civil society, free, plural and independent media and the protection of citizens' rights, these are key ingredients for resilient, fair, inclusive, and democratic societies.

Cooperating with the partner countries in these areas will be a key priority for the EU. Access to evidence-based information supports democratic systems and empowers people to make informed choices. As addressing migration challenges is also a joint priority, the EU will continue to work with the partner countries to ensure mobility and people to people contacts in a secure and well-managed environment, as well as to ensure support to vulnerable migrants and refugees.

4.5.1 Public administration reform and civic engagement

For public administration reform, continued political will from partner countries is crucial to ensure that authorities **involve citizens in decision-making**. The EU will support inclusive and evidence-based policy development, as well as sound public financial management, with the aim of improving services to people and businesses. The partner countries need to **professionalise** their civil service and increase accountability at all levels of government. Public administration reform, including issues related to transparency, is also a key driver of economic growth and can reduce corruption risks, for example through e-government solutions. Furthermore, the EU and the partner countries will consider intensifying **peer-to-peer learning**, including through an EaP School of Public Administration. Monitoring the implementation of reforms remains crucial, and civil society should play a stronger role in it.

4.5.2 Civil society and youth participation

Building on innovative actions and engagement to date, the EU will further support the **capacity of civil society organisations**, particularly grass root organisations, to meaningfully engage in policy-making processes and policy dialogue, and promote reforms and public accountability. It will develop further strategic partnerships with key organisations to strengthen cooperation, build up the leadership skills of civil society activists, and engage with social partners (trades unions and employers' organisations). Social innovation and social entrepreneurship will also be supported. Working with the partner countries to promote an enabling environment for civil society will be key. The EaP Civil Society Forum will continue to be a key partner in advancing the role of civil society in policy dialogue.

The EU will also increasingly focus on **youth participation and leadership**. The **Erasmus+** and **European Solidarity Corps** programmes will empower the young generation by contributing to the establishment of inclusive and evidence-based youth policy, developing skills, supporting volunteering and cooperation projects. The **Civil Society Fellowships scheme** and the **Young European Ambassadors** initiative will be strengthened to better help young people to develop key competences and skills, including awareness on the need to

address gender inequalities and for their active participation in democratic life and fostering civic engagement. The **EaP Youth Forum** will play even greater role and become better integrated in structured youth policy dialogue within a network of EaP youth councils, modelled on the EU-internal youth structured dialogue.

4.5.3 Independent media and fact-based information

In a well-functioning **media environment**, independent journalists, civil society and individuals can provide checks and balances and hold governments accountable. Ensuring access to accurate and fact-based information for all, empowers people to make informed decisions and participate actively in the democratic process. The EU will support independent media outlets that produce high quality and diverse content. With the adoption of the **Action Plan against disinformation**¹⁴ in December 2018, the EU put in place a strong framework **to counter disinformation threats inside and outside the EU**. Looking ahead, all relevant actors, including EU institutions, EU Member States, partner countries, industry and civil society should continue to play a role in scaling up independent fact-checking services, and promoting media literacy. Strengthening work with civil society to tackle disinformation will be also key.

4.5.4 Protection of human rights

The EU will continue to support the partner countries in advancing human rights, including ensuring that everyone can fully enjoy civil and political, as well as economic, social and cultural rights. The EU will step up action to combat all forms of discrimination including on grounds of sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. The EU will support partner countries in their implementation of the **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with disabilities**, as well in the development of accessible products and services. The EU will also continue to support the partner countries in **ensuring respect for rights already exercised of persons belonging to minorities, conflict affected populations, and promoting gender equality**.

To ensure a high level of protection of the fundamental rights to privacy and **data protection**, the EU will continue to engage with Eastern partner countries to promote further converge with EU and international data protection standards, in order to facilitate commercial exchanges and law enforcement cooperation.

4.5.5 Mobility

To ensure mobility and people-to-people contacts in a secure and well-managed environment the successful implementation of existing agreements on **visa facilitation and readmission**, as well as the continuous fulfilment of relevant visa liberalisation benchmarks, are essential. The possibility to launch new visa liberalisation dialogues with the remaining countries, whose citizens require visas to travel to the EU, will be considered, provided that well-managed and secure mobility conditions are in place, including through the satisfactory implementation of the visa facilitation and readmission agreements. Complementing this, balanced and mutually beneficial **mobility partnerships** will ensure sustainable engagement. **Labour migration** initiatives amongst the partner countries as well as between EaP and EU countries will be considered which aim to establish partnerships to foster legal migration and mobility, enhancing cooperation and cross fertilisation of skills and competencies while taking account of the impact of brain drain on partner countries' human capital. To help people and goods move across borders, technical and administrative cooperation in **integrated border management** will be strengthened.

¹⁴ https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/action_plan_against_disinformation.pdf

5. STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION, GOVERNANCE AND IMPLEMENTATION

5.1 Strategic communication

Strategic communication is crucial for building resilience, and is a core duty for policy-makers at the service of citizens. In the EaP, a call for stronger and more strategic approach to communication has gained high political attention in recent years, also in the wake of growing disinformation against EU values. Joint work between the European Commission services and the European External Action Service therefore aims to strengthen the EU's communication in partner countries through clear, story-based, tailor-made messaging, and raising awareness of the **positive impact of EU policies** and actions to people across the region, with the overarching message 'Stronger Together'. The EU has also taken key steps in promoting better EU visibility by moving away from a project-based communication to national and more **thematic, campaign-based communication** to avoid fragmentation of branding. EU actions are systematically branded under the 'EU4' heading (e.g. EU4Energy, EU4Business, EU4Digital, and EU4Georgia). Brand development has also flexibly allowed for country-specific positioning (e.g. Moving Forward Together in Ukraine). Focus is on **outreach to key multipliers**, such as young people, to help promote EU values and actions in the partner countries. For instance through the Young European Ambassadors initiative involves 740 young people who spread positive messages about the EU in their local communities. This strengthened and coordinated approach has led to a better understanding of and **increased credibility** for the EU among citizens across the EaP¹⁵.

The structured consultation on the future of the EaP demonstrated the **broad consensus and expectation** of stakeholders and citizens to continue to work on and **reinforce successful initiatives** to make EU communication more strategic and impactful in the wake of **growing disinformation against EU values**.

Communication on the European Union and its relations with the partner countries should be carried out with **ownership** and with **joint responsibility**, to citizens of **both the EU Member States and the partner countries**. In this context, EU countries, partner country governments, local administrations, implementing partners of EU-funded projects, and EU institutions (including EU delegations), should **work together** to communicate the benefits of cooperation, based on joint policy priorities and overall promoting the EU in the region. This communication should be in the framework of a **common European narrative**, based on **shared values** and the benefits of cooperation to the lives of people.

Engagement with people at **local level** and in national and minority languages, as well as Russian, should be increased to improve the understanding of EU values, political priorities and actions. Outreach will **focus on key multipliers and opinion leaders** (including but not limited to local authorities, religious leaders, and teachers, through study visits, local discussion fora and trainings) to make the EU message heard in the regions.

Outreach to **young people** will increase, for example through the promotion of teaching and learning about the European Union in different levels of education. The inclusion of EU-related information into educational curricular in schools will be supported.

¹⁵ Annual Opinion polls carried out by European Commission's "EU Neighbours East" show a steady increase in the positive perception of the EU by citizens from across the partner countries, with 52% of citizens (up 7 percentage points since 2016) having a positive image of the EU in 2019. An overall 67% of the population (up 4%) believe that relations between their country and the EU are positive and the EU remains the most trusted foreign institution for 58% of citizens.

5.2 Governance and implementation

The **revised multilateral EaP architecture** adopted at the 2017 Summit is a useful framework for exchanges and cooperation, through regular meetings and exchanges. As confirmed by most stakeholders in the consultation, the **current framework is valid and should continue**, with the necessary adjustments to bring it in line with the main policy objectives post 2020 outlined in this joint communication. **The focus will be on making the existing structures more effective.** One of the first tasks of the platforms and panels under the EaP architecture will be to **shape the future deliverables based on the priorities set out in this joint communication.**

The priorities outlined in this joint communication will also underpin the **future programming of EU assistance for 2021-2027**, along with the joint documents between the EU and partner countries setting out common priorities (e.g. Partnership Priorities and Association Agendas). Under the renewed policy, the EU and the partner countries will continue working on joint endeavours and actions, and will receive support, capacity building and knowledge sharing on specific objectives and policies as necessary. Regional-wide programmes will be implemented in the field with financial and logistical support from IFIs. Coherence and complementarity between all EU interventions should be ensured, as well as a clear link between the policy and the programming, including future Interreg NEXT and other territorial cooperation programmes.

Civil society organisations are crucial for disseminating EU-positive messages outside of the capitals, and ensuring lasting results and better services for people on the ground. As part of its new approach to civil society in the partner countries, the EU has established framework partnership agreements with key civil society organisations to better channel support and increase impact. Increased re-granting through these key partners should further increase outreach in the East, including by smaller, local organisations that operate in the local languages.

The EU will engage more systematically with **think tanks covering the EaP**. This will support education and awareness-raising initiatives of these countries and ensure that people are better informed and therefore more likely to support development reforms.

The EU intends to further step up its **partnership with IFIs**, by making better use of the possibilities offered by the EFSD guarantees to strengthen resilience of our partner countries and boost the private sector, while upholding commitments stemming from the Association Agreements and other bilateral agreements.

The **EU will also strengthen joint ownership and partnership among EU countries** to better support the ambitious reform agenda. In this way, partner countries can benefit from EU expertise and experience.

6. CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

The recent structured consultation clearly underlined that the continued success of the Eastern Partnership will depend on strengthening joint **ownership**, reinforcing an **ambitious** reform agenda, and **tackling joint challenges**. EU Member States, partner countries and civil society have the joint responsibility to ensure a robust and relevant partnership that benefits the whole of society. The joint commitment to this new approach will benefit people in all partner countries, and will contribute to building a **stronger Europe in the world**.

This joint communication proposes strengthening **resilience** as an overriding objective, with the EU, its Member States and the partner countries working together towards the following long-term policy objectives for the EaP beyond 2020:

- together for resilient, sustainable and integrated economies;
- together for accountable institutions, the rule of law and security;
- together towards environmental and climate resilience;
- together for a resilient digital transformation
- together for resilient, fair and inclusive societies.

The European Council, the European Parliament and the Council are invited to endorse this joint communication that will also be presented to the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. It will also be discussed with partner countries in view of the EaP Summit in June 2020.

The **EaP Summit** will give a mandate to develop a new set of tangible deliverables building on the current agenda, with the aim to put the recommendations outlined in this document into practice. Shaping the future deliverables for beyond 2020 will therefore be a key task for the second half of 2020.