

Issue Brief No. 120**America and the Eastern Partnership Initiative:
From Friend to Meaningful Contributor****By Dr. Katarzyna Pisarska****Executive Summary**

The evolution of the Eastern Partnership Initiative is the result of a Central European push for greater EU engagement in the post-Soviet space. The United States has a strategic interest in providing tangible support for such efforts — the success of the initiative would strengthen the position of strategic U.S. allies in the region and could secure regional leadership for the democracy promotion effort in the East.

With the gradual attenuation of American global power and the gravitational pull of the European Union (EU), the focus in Central European foreign policy is shifting. The new EU member states are paying more attention to developments in Brussels than to those in Washington. They influence their security environment using tools offered by the EU, not by NATO. And as recent initiates, they are the staunchest supporters of EU enlargement and a greater role for the Union as a leader in both regional and global affairs. These developments should not go unnoticed in the United States. They should also not be perceived as a threat to America's position in the region.

The United States should view these changes positively, as an opportunity to encourage regional leadership in the promotion of freedom, democracy and prosperity in Central and Eastern Europe. By offering tangible support to Central European regional efforts such as the Eastern Partnership Initiative (EaP), the United States stands to benefit. It can strengthen the position

of its Central European allies, while obtaining effective support for the promotion of peace and security in the region. The time for action could not be better. This is a year of back-to-back Hungarian and Polish Presidencies of the EU Council and of two major events for the Eastern Partnership Initiative: the Governmental Summit in September and the Civil Society Forum in November. The United States needs to be at the forefront of third states that are strategically involved in this initiative. The aim of this issue brief is to examine the concrete projects where joint U.S.-EU engagement in the six EaP states can make a real difference — both within the institutional framework of the Eastern Partnership and outside of it.

The origin and goals of the Eastern Partnership Initiative

The accession of the ten Central European member states¹ to the European Union has

¹ When defining Central Europe, the author goes beyond the traditional geographical approach and looks through

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brought new priorities and a strong demand for greater European involvement in the post-Soviet space. It has also provided the newcomers with the necessary tools to exercise leadership in the promotion of democratic practices and institutions in Eastern Europe and the Southern Caucasus. The visible shift in EU's Eastern policy from 2004 to 2011, characterized by a change in the perception of the region (differentiation vs. a "Russia First" policy) and the evolution of the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP),² can be largely attributed to the activities of the new member states at the European forum. The Eastern Partnership Initiative stands out as one of the most tangible successes of Central Europe's influence on the EU's foreign policy agenda. A joint Polish-Swedish project, the EaP aims to establish an advanced institutional dialogue with six post-Soviet states of strategic importance, the so-called "EaP Partner States:" Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. It offers a more ambitious approach within the European Neighborhood Policy, stemming from the realization that the European course of these nations should not be taken for granted.

The Eastern Partnership's main aim is to create a specific regional dimension focusing on multilateral aspects of cooperation. Under the supervision of the European Commission, flagship initiatives have been developed for the partner

the lens of a larger geopolitical process: the 2004 and 2007 EU enlargements eastward. Thus, when speaking about Central Europe, we refer to the ten new EU member states (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia), which emerged from the collapse of communism and in only two decades became full-fledged members of the transatlantic community.

² To read more on the factors influencing EU's Eastern agenda in the years 2004-2007 see: Katarzyna Pisarska, "The Role of the New Member States in the Developing of the EU's Eastern Agenda in the Years 2004-2007 – Perceptions of EU Officials," Pulaski Report, *Casimir Pulaski Foundation*, Warsaw, 2008.

countries in five areas: border management, small and medium enterprise growth, energy cooperation, civil protection and environmental governance. The focal points of the EaP, however, are people-to-people contacts (including visa facilitation) and the consolidation of the role of civil society. By promoting human rights and the rule of law, the EaP indirectly addresses the main security concern in the region: potential setbacks in the process of democratization.

The importance of joint U.S.–EU engagement in the East

The United States is not a novice in providing democracy and development assistance to the post-Soviet space countries. On the contrary, in the last two decades it has been a leader in supporting the transition of Central and Eastern Europe and the Southern Caucasus to liberal democracy and a market economy. It is estimated that as early as the mid-1990s, through a network of donor organizations and government agencies, the United States had disbursed nearly \$40 billion in aid funds to former socialist states in the region.³ Despite a general decrease of U.S. State Department funding over the years, in 2010 foreign assistance for the six Eastern Partnership states reached \$310 million.⁴ Although this sum cannot match the four billion Euros the European Commission allocated to the region for the 2007-2013 period,⁵ the United States has established

³ For more on the U.S. Department of State assistance to and cooperative activities in Eurasia click [here](#).

⁴ This sum has been distributed in the Eastern Partnership countries as follows: Armenia - \$45.6 million; Azerbaijan - \$28.15 million; Belarus - \$15 million; Georgia - \$78.95 million; Moldova - \$21.42 million; and Ukraine - \$123.08 million. For more see Office of the Coordination of U.S. Assistance to Europe and Eurasia, "Country Assistance Fact Sheets," U.S. Department of State, October 2010. Available [here](#).

⁵ The sum of four billion Euros is being distributed by the

itself as one of the most visible donors in the area. Its greatest success stories come from the ability to reach out to civil society and support grass-root initiatives through a number of flexible instruments of assistance distribution.

THE ACCESSION OF THE TEN CENTRAL EUROPEAN MEMBER STATES TO THE EU HAS BROUGHT NEW PRIORITIES AND A STRONG DEMAND FOR GREATER EUROPEAN INVOLVEMENT IN THE POST-SOVIET SPACE.

Despite their similar objectives in the eastern periphery, the different assistance priorities for the region and the driver's *modus operandi* on the ground have largely discouraged broader donor cooperation between the United States and the EU. While until recently the EU focused mainly on providing complex technical support to the governments of its neighbors, the United States has come to be known for its democracy assistance with distribution channels even in the most authoritarian states. Today the situation is changing. With democracy setbacks across the post-Soviet space and increased Russian influence in the region, the need to establish common priorities between the EU and the United States has become more urgent. The 2011 Strategic Review of the European Neighborhood Policy, which now places promotion of human rights and support for democracy at the top of the EU

European Neighborhood and Partnership Instrument and comes directly from the EU budget. Additionally, each of the 27 EU member states is obliged to annually donate 0.7 percent of Gross National Income (GNI) for development assistance. Some of this is, of course, also directed to Eastern Europe and the Southern Caucasus.

agenda,⁶ has brought about a convergence of U.S. and EU assistance rhetoric in the region. The Eastern Partnership Initiative forms an excellent platform for joint ventures. From the American point of view, working under the EaP umbrella has a number of advantages. First, given its innovative “democracy and civil society” pillar and the Central European footprint, the EaP is more synchronized with U.S. foreign assistance priorities than with the foreign policy priorities of some individual member states such as France or Germany. Second, as part of a broader EU initiative, the Eastern Partnership has a set of “carrots” that the United States would not be able to

offer alone. Among the strongest incentives for advancing the reform agenda for EaP partner states is the promise of close integration with the European internal market, including the free movement of goods, capital, services and workers. Last but not least, the success of the Eastern Partnership can boost the confidence of the traditional U.S. allies in Europe, the Central Europeans, who have always been proponents of a more integrated Western involvement in the post-Soviet space.

The Eastern Partnership umbrella – how can the United States cooperate?

The United States has been participating in the Eastern Partnership Information and Co-

⁶ Although the direct cause of this review was the need to respond to the Arab Spring revolutions, it is also worth noting that it was the Eastern Partnership Initiative, with its innovative “democracy and civil society” pillar, that partly inspired the 2011 Strategic Review of the European Neighborhood Policy. To support progress toward “deep democracy” is the first principle that underpins the new ENP, as envisioned in the May 25th, 2011 European Commission Communication “A new response to a changing Neighborhood.” Full text available [here](#).

ordination Group (also known as the “EaP Group of Friends”) since 2010.⁷ This group offers non-EaP countries an opportunity to contribute to and co-finance the various projects of the initiative on an *ad hoc* basis. The United States can support the Eastern Partnership in two ways: by participating in the existing EaP programs and platforms and by coordinating its activities with the EU on the ground in Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova and the Southern Caucasus.

I. Working within the Eastern Partnership Framework

As the EaP’s activities begin to coalesce, it is time to establish an operational U.S.-EaP framework centered around tangible initiatives that are already on the table. The upcoming September 2011 Eastern Partnership Governmental Summit in Warsaw and the subsequent Civil Society Forum in Poznań are excellent starting points. While preparing for these meetings, the U.S. Administration should consider offering additional resources and support for some of the projects within the four Eastern Partnership platforms: democracy and good governance, economic integration, energy security and people-to-people contacts.

Strengthening good governance

In order to strengthen the Eastern Partnership’s “good governance” pillar, it is vital for the United States to share its experiences in providing foreign assistance to the former Soviet republics. Especially important is the know-how accumulated by such American agencies as USAID (the Democracy and Governance Division) or particular executive departments within the

American government (Department of State, Department of Homeland Security). This could be done by assembling a group of five to ten U.S. government and non-government experts who specialize in institution-building and policy reform in the post-Soviet space. This group could advise EaP members on technical assistance programs within the EU framework as well as offer training on good governance and institution building. In some areas, such as the fight against corruption, joint administrative internships within the EU and the U.S. Administration and judicial exchanges could be offered to civil servants from Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia or Armenia. American know-how is particularly welcome in two areas which have not yet been included in this Eastern Partnership pillar: support for democratic local governance and decentralization. Overall, the cooperation of EU and U.S. experts could take place within the framework of the following Eastern Partnership initiatives:

- **Comprehensive Institution Building.** Although the main goal of the program is to assist EaP partners with institution building in preparation for the implementation of a future Association Agreement with the EU, it also contributes to enhancing respect for the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms. Under the EaP, a team of U.S. experts could offer a set of training modules and workshops for the six partner states on issues ranging from law programming to legal empowerment. The United States could also share its know-how and experience in setting up a network of Advocacy and Assistance Centers to help promote good governance in Armenia and Ukraine.
- **Integrated Border Management Program.** The main objective of this program is to secure the adoption of modern border management

⁷ Currently the following third countries have expressed interest in participating in the Eastern Partnership Group of Friends: Canada, Japan, Norway, Russia, Switzerland, Turkey and the United States.

methods in the Eastern Partnership states. Attaining this aim is particularly important for Ukraine and Moldova, which share a common border with the EU and are striving to fulfill the conditions of a visa facilitation and liberalization program. A group of American experts could help with tasks such as demarcation on the Ukrainian-Russian and Ukrainian-Belarusian borders, developing customs systems as well as securing the Armenian-Georgian and Ukrainian-Moldovan borders. The recent U.S. experience in improving the capacity of the Georgian Border Police and Customs Service could be shared as an example of effective assistance in the field.

- **Fight against Corruption.** In 2010, a panel devoted to anti-corruption was established by the European Commission with the aim to review the state of play in EaP partner countries. Once their needs were determined, workshops were held in cooperation with national anti-corruption authorities and civil society. In hopes of building transparent and democratic governments in these partner countries, it would be beneficial for the United States to take an active part in the deliberations of this panel. With a number of U.S. government agencies involved in fighting corruption around the globe (the Departments of State, Treasury, Commerce and Justice as well as USAID) and with significant experience in undertaking an innovative approach to the issue (through the USAID Anti-Corruption Strategy), the United States could be a major contributor to the discussion. Among others, the U.S. experience in Armenia could be presented when implementing an anti-corruption curriculum in schools.

Bolstering the economy and energy security

The current efforts undertaken within the Eastern Partnership in supporting partner countries' economies and enhancing energy security in the region could certainly benefit from stronger American support. Specifically, EaP efforts would be boosted immeasurably from concrete financial contributions by the United States to existing components and flagship initiatives, such as:

- **Small and Medium-Size Enterprise (SME) Facility.** The initiative aims at improving the business climate in EaP partner countries, providing expertise to their small and medium-size enterprises and, most importantly, improving their access to funding. The financial instrument of the SME Facility was established together with the European Investment Bank, which since 2009 services SMEs throughout Eastern Europe and the Caucasus. The funding for investment, as well as energy and environmental projects, is distributed through local partner banks. A U.S. financial contribution to the Facility could significantly increase its ability to reach out to SMEs. Such a contribution could be mobilized through the Eastern Partnership Technical Assistance Fund, which is a multi-sector funding facility for technical assistance established by the European Investment Bank.⁸ The Fund is governed by its contributors, which would allow the United States to exercise control over how the money is spent. In addition to financial assistance, the United States could contribute its know-how to the regulatory framework and the advisory services components of the Facility. In Moldova and Ukraine, for example, the U.S. Department of State has focused on programs

⁸ For more see the European Investment Bank website. Available [here](#).

providing business leaders with a better understanding of the market economy and how to improve the business climate.

- **The Eastern European Energy Efficiency and Environment Partnership (E5P).** This initiative was proposed to help Ukraine reduce its energy consumption. Its multi-donor fund, managed by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, began to operate in March 2011, allocating 90 million Euros to such priority areas as district heating. Now, in addition to funding ventures in Ukraine, the initiative has been expanded to projects in other EaP countries.⁹ It is worth acknowledging that at the pledging conference, the United States confirmed its intentions to donate to the fund. So have Denmark, Estonia, the European Commission, Finland, Latvia, Norway, Poland, Sweden and Ukraine.

Promoting democracy and strengthening civil society

Given the United States' impressive track record in promoting democracy and supporting civil society around the world, its contribution to the "democracy and civil society" pillar of the Eastern Partnership could be fundamental for the success of the entire initiative. In this area a combination of both innovative ideas and U.S. expertise, accumulated by USAID and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and other governmental and non-governmental institutions, would be welcomed. In particular, there are two Eastern Partnership frameworks within which the U.S. experience would be valuable:

- **Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum.** The Forum's main goal is to promote contacts among civil society organizations of EaP and EU countries, as well as to facilitate dialogue with those countries' public authorities. The participants discuss a number of priorities in the context of civil society activities. During the first two meetings (in Brussels, 2009 and Berlin, 2010) only one or two U.S. organizations were represented. In order to broaden the impact of the Forum and facilitate the dissemination of ideas across the Atlantic, it is essential that an increased number of civil society organizations from the United States participate in the November 2011 Forum in Poznań, Poland. It is also advisable to organize a separate panel or working group on how the United States and other third countries can contribute to the Eastern Partnership in the future.
- **European Endowment for Democracy (EED).** The establishment of the fund was announced in the European Commission Communication "A new response to the changing neighborhood" on May 25th, 2011. The creation of a new EU democracy promotion instrument was inspired by the success of the U.S. National Endowment for Democracy and will address the need for a more flexible approach in funding NGOs that deal with authoritarian or semi-authoritarian regimes. It also shows that the existing European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) has failed to fulfill its goals, mainly due to slow decision-making, excessive bureaucracy and inflexibility. At this initial stage of the creation of the EED, the U.S. Administration could prepare recommendations on how to optimize the organization's operation through input from NED and other American NGOs.

⁹ For more see the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, [here](#).

Building on its experience in the field of civil society and democracy support, the United States can bring a number of innovative ideas to the table. These, in turn, can become part of the Eastern Partnership package:

BUILDING ON ITS EXPERIENCE IN THE FIELD OF CIVIL SOCIETY AND DEMOCRACY SUPPORT, THE UNITED STATES CAN BRING A NUMBER OF INNOVATIVE IDEAS TO THE TABLE.

- Founding a European Peace Corps to operate in the EaP partner countries;
- Creating an all-European leaders exchange program, which would bring the best and the brightest from EaP partner countries into the EU institutions for varying periods of time;
- Sharing concrete regional success stories from USAID, NED and others in the areas of traditional U.S. expertise such as strengthening independent media (Ukraine); forming civil society and political coalitions (Moldova); promoting civil society watch-dog groups (Moldova); and encouraging the use of electronic communication.

Finally, U.S. governmental representatives could participate as third state observers in all major institutional frameworks of the Eastern Partnership. These include summits (such as the one planned for September 2011 in Warsaw), annual meetings of foreign affairs ministers and the EuroNest Parliamentary Assembly, where interested members of the U.S. Congress could meet with members of the European Parliament and their counterparts from Eastern Partnership countries.

II. Working with the EU in the EaP Partner States

In addition to supporting initiatives within the Eastern Partnership institutional framework, it is crucial for the United States to strengthen cooperation with the European Union on the ground in Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. Under the EaP umbrella, joint U.S.–EU needs-assessment teams could be established in each of the six countries, with the purpose of identifying the gaps in assistance provided to the region. The EU

Representations, along with the U.S. Embassies, in these states could then prepare general recommendations, indicating where cooperation must be strengthened and where division of labor between the EU and the United States is advisable. Such assessments would allow for joint planning of activities and potentially, for the establishment of a joint strategy that would set common U.S.–EU priorities for the region. Among these should be dealing with the authoritarian regime in Belarus; assisting Ukraine and Moldova in their transition to democracy and market economy; and containing and resolving the “frozen conflicts” in the Southern Caucasus.

Belarus – dealing with an authoritarian regime

The situation in Belarus is probably the most urgent issue on the joint U.S.–EU regional agenda. In the wake of December’s brutal crack-down by the Belarusian KGB and police on thousands of protesters following the fraudulent presidential election, the country experienced a couple of relatively quiet months. The last ten weeks, however, suggest that the general political atmosphere is heating up. With a 20 percent increase in the price of food and commodities and

a severe currency crisis, the traditional base of the regime — the public sector workers and rural Belarusians — seem to be breaking ranks with President Alyaksandr Lukashenka. Although the hand-clapping anti-government manifestations are still predominantly youth-organized, the first blue-collar protests against the rise in fuel prices have also taken place.¹⁰ Their surprising success — President Lukashenka did cut a steep rise in fuel prices a day after it was announced — may prove to be a welcome precedent.¹¹ With growing public discontent and the new wave of repression against civil society, it is all the more important for the EU and the United States to strengthen coordination on the ground. This should include:

- **Strategizing and sharing of information.** A close working relationship between the U.S. Embassy, the EU Delegation and individual EU member states' embassies (for instance Sweden, Germany) in Belarus is essential. It would allow for the exercise of maximum leverage on the regime and assure that the actions of these actors are coordinated. This is critical for the West's efforts to secure the release of all political prisoners. Developing a cohesive strategy would also inhibit the regime's attempts to divide the democratic diplomatic community.¹²
- **Intensifying donor coordination.** Today U.S. and EU donor meetings take place roughly every two months, usually in Brussels. They are low-profile, attracting the same group of

freedom fighters and international donors. In order to built momentum in assisting Belarusian civil society it is necessary to organize a series of high-profile donor conferences, such as the "Solidarity with Belarus" conference held in Warsaw on February 2, 2011.¹³ Their aim should be to raise money for the most ambitious projects supporting Belarus' civil society, such as independent media broadcasting into Belarus (including by Belsat TV and Racja Radio); youth and student exchanges; and the European Humanities University in Vilnius and the Riga Business School.

- **Providing coordinated legal and humanitarian aid** to those repressed and imprisoned and their families. So far this has been done by the United States and EU member states independently. In 2010, for example, the U.S. Department of State provided direct aid to over 3,000 individuals whose rights had been violated as a result of public activism.¹⁴ In February 2011, the EU offered 1.7 million Euros (\$2.4 million) to provide urgent support to victims of repression. Such actions and funding need to be more closely coordinated in order to ensure those in need are reached.
- **Offering support for the opposition.** Given the changing situation in Belarus, a renewed pledge of support for the democratic movement in Belarus is necessary. An urgent task for the United States and the EU is to find ways to facilitate cooperation between the deeply-divided opposition forces in

¹⁰ For more on current developments see *The Economist*, "Protest in Belarus: Clapping bout a revolution." Available [here](#).

¹¹ Reuters, "Belarus slashes fuel price rise after protests," June 8, 2011. Available [here](#).

¹² "Belarus: Europe's Last Dictator?," in *A Diplomatic Handbook for Democracy Development Support*, Community of Democracies, 2nd edition, 2010, pp. 155-168.

¹³ Judy Dempsey, "U.S. and EU Join to Show Support for Belarus Opposition," *The New York Times*, February 2, 2011.

¹⁴ Office of the Coordinator of U.S. Assistance to Europe and Eurasia, "Country Assistance: Belarus," U.S. Department of State, 2010.

the country. If the opposition cannot find a modicum of common ground, the regime will likely prevail.

Ukraine and Moldova: assisting the transition to democracy and market economy

The joint U.S.-EU strategy for Ukraine and Moldova under the Eastern Partnership framework should focus on supporting the transition of these states to democratic governance and market liberalization. The two countries have much in common. Unlike other EaP states, they have thus far escaped an authoritarian fate and have the best chance of joining NATO and the EU in the future. The Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004 and the 2010 parliamentary elections in Moldova demonstrated that both states have clear European aspirations and are well aware of the need to eliminate the post-Soviet syndrome of “managed democracies.” Unfortunately, their non-transparent political and economic *modus operandi* suggests that they have a long way to go in order to reach Western standards. The last two years have been particularly unrewarding in Ukraine. Since Viktor Yanukovich’s victory in the 2010 presidential election, Ukraine has experienced major setbacks in the democratization process. As a result of the deterioration in freedom of the press and intimidation of NGOs, the country has fallen in its 2011 Freedom House ranking from “Free” to “Partly Free.”¹⁵ In another report prepared by Forbes Magazine, Ukraine is ranked as the 4th worst managed economy in the world.¹⁶

¹⁵ Freedom House, “Freedom in the World 2011: The authoritarian challenge to democracy,” Full text available [here](#).

¹⁶ The magazine has analyzed the macro-economic indicators of 177 countries and regions over the past three years. According to Forbes, in 2011 the world’s five worst economies

The promising and hopeful days that followed the Orange Revolution seem to be long gone, with corruption, bribery and embezzlement dominating Ukrainian society. But the situation in Moldova is improving. The same 2011 Freedom House report speaks about a “more diverse media environment and a reduction in government hostility toward civil society groups.” The improvements are a consequence of the November 2010 victory of a pro-democratic, pro-European coalition, which is giving new impetus to the breakthrough associated with the 2009 defeat of Europe’s last governing communist party. However, with the breakaway region of Transnistria on the agenda, Moldova requires enhanced Western assistance so that the government of Prime Minister Vlad Filat can pursue the promised reforms. The coordinated activities of the United States and the EU in Ukraine and Moldova need to include:

- **Comprehensive assistance in the fight against corruption.** This issue is the largest impediment to economic growth and democratic reform in Moldova and Ukraine. The culture of corruption at all levels of society inhibits public confidence in government institutions and discourages individual initiatives as well as foreign investment. A number of U.S. and EU actors could be involved in drafting an anti-corruption strategy for both countries and assisting in its implementation.
- **Ending the stalemate in Transnistria.** Both the EU and the United States need to step up pressure and offer practical assistance to end the “frozen conflict” in the separatist Moldovan region of Transnistria. The most

are Madagascar, Armenia, Guinea, Ukraine and Jamaica. For more click [here](#).

promising area for focused efforts is the economy. The EU and the United States should pursue a double-track approach. On the one hand, initiatives to boost the Moldovan economy should be undertaken (commitment of cohesion funds, encouraging foreign direct investment). On the other hand, efforts should be made to halt smuggling and the flow of the shadow economy in Transnistria. Limiting the “self-sufficiency” of the government in Tiraspol would force it to reconsider reintegration with Chisinau. Changing the status of the United States and the EU from observers to full mediators of the conflict (as are Russia, Ukraine and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) is a prerequisite for further involvement.

THE PROSPECT OF EURO-ATLANTIC INTEGRATION REMAINS THE MOST EFFECTIVE POLICY TOOL FOR FOSTERING GREATER STABILITY AND PROSPERITY IN UKRAINE AND MOLDOVA.

- **Strengthening the role of civil society and independent media.** One of the major challenges for the West in both Ukraine and Moldova is fostering civil society and assuring the presence of an independent media. As events from the last few years have shown, both civil society and free media can significantly contribute to the democratization of the countries. Funding provided by the EU and the United States does not only need to be coordinated, but more importantly, it has to be widely accessible and flexible. With the creation of the European Endowment for Democracy one should consider forming a

joint U.S.-EU program supporting the media in these states (journalists, media organizations and NGOs’ media-related projects).

- **Fostering a pro-Western orientation of societies and elites.** Apart from well thought-through public diplomacy initiatives, the EU and the United States should commit to an open-door policy for both NATO and the EU. The prospect of Euro-Atlantic integration remains the most effective policy tool for fostering greater stability and prosperity in these two states.

Southern Caucasus – containing and resolving the “frozen conflicts”

The most pressing issue on a joint U.S.-EU Eastern Partnership agenda in the Southern Caucasus is finding a sustainable solution to the two major “frozen conflicts” in the area: the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh; and the future of the two Georgian break-away regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. In Armenia and Azerbaijan the number of forces genuinely interested in the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute has decreased, while defense spending in the two states has increased considerably.¹⁷ During the course of the Georgian-Russian war in August 2008, Georgia not only lost its two rebellious regions, but also much of the unequivocal U.S. and EU support it used to enjoy. Both conflicts undermine any serious progress in the democratic transition of the region and serve as a serious economic impediment. They also add to the

¹⁷ The share of defense spending in the 2011 Azerbaijani budget has almost doubled to 18.9 percent in comparison to 2010. For more click [here](#).

further destabilization of the Southern Caucasus, reinforcing the discrepancies in narratives of pro-Western Georgia, pro-Russian Armenia and pro-Turkish Azerbaijan. From the U.S. and EU perspective, a lack of progress on settling these conflicts presents serious limitations to accessing Caspian energy resources and regional markets. Most importantly, however, it minimizes the transatlantic community's impact on the process of democratization in the region.¹⁸ In order to avoid this, joint U.S.-EU actions under the Eastern Partnership umbrella should include:

- **Preparing a sustained and well-resourced U.S.-EU engagement strategy.** The weak and contradictory EU policy in the region has for years been a source of frustration for Southern Caucasus states. Moreover, this policy — still a work in progress — has not been coordinated with the actions pursued by the United States. The transatlantic community's lack of efficient policy tools has never been as obvious as during the 2008 Georgian-Russian conflict. The EU and the United States were not able to do much more than protest loudly. In order to exercise real influence in the Southern Caucasus, a U.S.-EU joint action plan should be drafted and concrete tools should be developed so that the transatlantic community is perceived as united in the region. This is particularly important given the significant influence of Russia and the growing importance of Turkey in this part of the world. The United States and the EU must put pressure on the Russian Federation to stop inhibiting progress and act as a true partner in the conflict resolution.
- **Engaging Turkey.** The Georgian-Russian war has significantly influenced the geopolitical

situation in the region, where all three South Caucasian states are now searching for alternative allies in order to limit their dependence on Russia. With close ties to the EU and the United States, an ambitious regional agenda (for instance, the Caucasus Cooperation and Stability Platform) and an underlying motivation to counterbalance the Russian influence, Turkey could be a reliable partner in developing a coordinated conflict resolution effort. This, of course, requires a Turkish-Armenian rapprochement, in which both the EU and the United States could potentially assist.

- **Placing democratic principles first.** U.S.-EU engagement in the region should not come at the expense of the declared common principles of the transatlantic community, such as the promotion of democracy and human rights. This is particularly important in dealing with Azerbaijan, an authoritarian regime with major oil resources. Adopting a so-called “pragmatic” approach and using double standards with regard to Baku's stance on human rights can only be counter-productive in the long run, undermining Western credibility in the eyes of Georgia and Armenia.

Conclusion

With the European Union reshaping its role as an effective actor in regional and global affairs, and with Central European member states playing a more pivotal role in the process, it is particularly important for the United States to support EU regional initiatives such as the Eastern Partnership. Entangled in numerous international commitments, from Iraq to Afghanistan, the United States should welcome the willingness of its regional, like-minded allies to share the burden

¹⁸ Stefan Meister, “Recalibrating Germany's and EU's Policy in the South Caucasus,” DGAP Analysis, July 2, 2010.

on behalf of peace and security in the world. U.S. engagement in the EaP should be viewed as a way to enhance the coordination of activities with the EU in Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. It should also provide impetus for joint planning in these countries. The end goal should be the establishment of a common strategy in order to truly maximize the impact of U.S. and EU resources spent on the democratization of the region.

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THE SUCCESS OF THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE COULD CONTRIBUTE TO CENTRAL EUROPE'S STRATEGIC AWAKENING.

The evolution of the Eastern Partnership is the result of a Central European push for strategic EU engagement in the post-Soviet space. The success of this initiative would boost the confidence of its initiators. In the long run, it can even contribute to a Central European “strategic awakening.”¹⁹ As was rightly said by U.S. Vice President Joseph Biden during his 2009 visit to Bucharest:

In Eastern Europe, countries still struggle to fulfill the promise of a strong democracy, or a vibrant market economy. [...] You [Central European countries] can help guide Moldova, Georgia, Ukraine along the path of lasting stability and prosperity. It's your time to lead. Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus can benefit from your personal experiences. The EU Eastern Partnership Initiative is a good example of how you can energize the effort. And we will partner with you in working to fulfill the promise of 1989.

¹⁹ A. Wess Mitchell, “The Mice that Roared. Central Europe Is Reshaping Global Politics,” in *Spiegel Online International*, February 26, 2009. Available [here](#).

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