

An updated assessment of the relative strength of pro-Eurasian parties in the Eastern Partnership states

Mădălin BLIDARU *

Abstract

The Eastern Partnership is a key instrument of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) towards the Eastern partners of the European Union. Through the Eastern Partnership, the European Union aims at building not only the stability and resilience of EU' s Eastern neighbours, but also contributing to stronger governance, stronger economy, better connectivity and a stronger society. Nevertheless, the European Union is a disputed actor in the region, with alternative regional economic orders available for states and societies.

The aim of the paper is to assess the relative strength of the pro-EAEU parties in the national parliaments of the EaP both up-to-date and in a comparative perspective across the EaP space and across time in the past decade. Thus, the author provides an analysis of the positioning of the political parties in EaP states towards the Eurasian Economic Union. The analysis is centered on the political parties with parliamentary representation in EaP, either in power or in opposition.

Three objectives are followed based on a quantitative methodology. Firstly, by analysing the statutes and political programmes of the selected parties, a matrix of pro-Eurasian representation in EaP parliaments is generated. Additionally, the paper looks into the results of the elections in the past decade (2010-2019) and highlights whether the representation of political parties with a pro-Eurasian foreign policy increased or decreased, according to each country. The third question addressed by this analysis is if the relative strength of pro-European political parties increased or decreased during this time.

Keywords: Eastern Partnership, political parties, European Union, Eurasian Economic Union, foreign policy

*Mădălin BLIDARU, PhD student at the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Bucharest, Romania; e-mail: contact@madalinblidaru.ro.

Introduction

The Eastern Partnership (EaP) was established in 2009 by the European Union (EU) as a multilateral track diplomacy in relation with its Eastern neighbours. Part of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), it gathers six states: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. It features distinct collaboration paths with each of these partner countries, given their own particularities.

The Eurasian Economic Union is a regional economic integration process in the post-Soviet space, developed after the establishment of a custom union and a single economic space in the area, gathering around 184 million citizens and over 20 million square kilometers, having five member states: Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic and the Russian Federation. The Treaty on Eurasian Economic Union was signed in 2014 and entered into force in 2015.

It has three objectives: „to create proper conditions for sustainable economic development of the Member States in order to improve the living standards of their population”, „to seek the creation of a common market for goods, services, capital and labour within the Union”, and „to ensure comprehensive modernisation, cooperation and competitiveness of national economies within the global economy” (EAEU, 2014). The treaty establishes the main provisions on customs, a regulation on the circulation of medicines and medical products, a foreign trade policy, technical regulation, sanitary, veterinary-sanitary and phytosanitary quarantine measures, consumer protection, as well in relation to the common economic space; it established the basis for the coordination of macroeconomic policy, monetary cooperation, investments and trade in services, competition, financial market regulations, energy, procurement, and others, relatively the usual policies regulated in an attempt to create a common economic space.

Armenia and Belarus are members of the Eurasian Economic Union. In the past, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine received invitations, at least as political declarations, to join the Union. However, the states preferred the association with the European Union. Before the Euromaidan, Ukraine was involved in negotiations to join the Customs Union. Since 2017, Moldova has been an observer to the Eurasian Economic Union. All three states have secessionist regions favoring closer relations with Russia and the Eurasian economic space. Belarus was a founding member of the Eurasian Economic Union, while Armenia joined later. Azerbaijan follows a rather skeptical approach to the EAEU.

While on the long-term there are perspectives of cooperation between the two economic unions, given the overcoming of the current divergences, a deepened integration of the six economies in one of the two political and economic unions will come with limited options of cooperation with the other ones.

None of the Eastern Partnership countries is a member of the European Union. Some are part of the Eurasian Economic Union; others are in partnership agreements with the European Union.

The Eastern Partnership is described by the European External Action Service as a strategic partnership aimed to deepen economic and political relations, and to support reform processes in the partner countries. It has two tracks, a bilateral one consisting in bilateral agreements between the EU and the EaP countries, and the multilateral one, built upon four thematic platforms. As mentioned before, the differentiation matters, the EaP following a tailored approach following the 2015 review of the European Neighbourhood Policy.

In the EaP bilateral track, the relations are described as follows:

- Ukraine: an Association Agreement (AA) including a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA), signed in 2014, that entered into force in 2017; Ukraine is described as a priority partner (EEAS, 2020).
- Moldova: an Association Agreement including a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, signed in 2014, that entered into force in 2016;
- Georgia: an Association Agreement including a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA), signed in 2014, that entered into force in 2016;
- Armenia: a Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA), signed in 2017, and provisionally applied since 2018;
- Azerbaijan: a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement in force since 1999, and negotiations for a new framework agreement started in 2017;
- Belarus: no formalised partnership and cooperation agreement, based on some sectoral cooperation agreements in specific matters; EU-Belarus Partnership Priorities were negotiated, however the dynamics around the presidential elections brings additional challenges for further progress.

In 2017, 20 deliverables for 2020 were agreed at the highest political level to foster cooperation between the European Union and the Eastern Partnership aimed at areas such as economic development and market opportunities, strengthening institutions and good governance, connectivity, energy efficiency, environment and climate change, mobility and people-to-people contacts, civil society organisations, gender equality and non-discrimination, strategic communications and independence of media.

A new set of objectives were proposed by the European side in March 2020 for the Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020. This includes five long-term objectives focused on „*resilient, sustainable and integrated economies*”, „*accountable institutions, rule of law and security*”, „*environmental and climate resilience*”, „*resilient digital transformation*” and „*resilient, fair and inclusive societies*” (EC & HR/VP, 2020). The communication presents the main areas of cooperation for each of these objectives.

Under the Eastern Partnership, all six countries are partner countries, yet the level of partnership depends on the particularities of each of them. The Eastern Partnership process is not an EU accession process, yet it encourages a mutually beneficial relation between the parties.

The paper provides an analysis of the foreign policy option of the political parties taking part in the parliamentary elections in the six Eastern Partnership countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine). Based on the electoral results in general elections organised since the establishment of the EaP policy track, the paper provides an updated assessment of the pro-European (pro-European Union) and the pro-Eurasian (pro-Eurasian Economic Union) foreign policy option in the national parliaments, the evolution of the representation based on the parties, and the relative strength of the pro-European parties.

Methodology and assumptions

The first step consisted in the creation of a timeline database for the six countries from the Eastern Partnership (Blidaru, 2020b). It aimed to gather information related to the electoral rounds in the indicated period, the results of the main parties in these general elections, and the calculation of the distribution of parliamentary representation of pro-European and pro-Eurasian. Data from the Inter-Parliamentary Union *Parline* global data on national parliaments is used, as well as other sources, particularly related to election results.

To identify the distribution of parliamentary representation of each party that entered the parliament or had a considerable score in the general elections, and their foreign policy options, a second database was created (Blidaru, 2020a). Based on the analysis of official party documents (political programs, political manifests, electoral programs, websites, leaders' declarations, secondary sources in limited cases), the database was filled with the original reference that indicate the position, the positioning of the party in the pro-European/pro-Eurasian cleavage and few more information.

The distribution of parliamentary representation of pro-European and pro-Eurasian parties in time was used to create the matrix and to assess the relative strength of pro-European and pro-Eurasian parties for all six member states.

Few assumptions need to be presented before presenting the results of this study. Firstly, it is not a geopolitical study. The passionate readers of geopolitics may find some arguments in favour of their understanding of the dynamics of the region. However, the author disagrees that the study of geopolitics can be done based on scientific methods. The dynamics in the region shows that there are complex relationships that do not necessarily depend on geography. But one of the foremost

arguments is the fact that countries condemned by geography to some positions are examples of cooperation with other actors to the disadvantage of the predetermined position. Indeed, geography matters. At the same time, everything matters more or less.

Secondly, while the analysed political phenomenon is the distribution of parliamentary representation of the pro-Eurasian/European orientations, the studied units are the political parties. The author's assumption has been that the political parties are rather monoliths, acting as unitary actors. This may be true in the case of authoritarian regimes, favoring the state direction, or in the cases where the former party-state still exercises important influence in the governing/pro-governing parties. However, among the six states that were analysed, at least two of them have a recognised democratic advancement in the past decade, including in terms of political pluralism. Ukraine is considered a hybrid regime, yet it has a considerably higher score for electoral process and pluralism, corresponding to a flawed democracy (EIU, 2019).

Similarly, Moldova, Armenia and Georgia. On the other end, there are Azerbaijan and Belarus, recognized as authoritarian regimes, in which we cannot discuss pluralism. However, given a six-country analysis, the cases of authoritarian regimes were kept in the study, despite the irrelevance of an analysis based on party dynamics. The main consequence of considering political parties as monoliths is that different factions within the same party could not be assessed in detail. Additionally, based on various reasons, the positioning can change in time or during different electoral events. The references used were related to the actual positioning. A particular case is the one of political or electoral alliances, where the entity was disunited.

Thirdly, the exploration is limited to the post-EaP period. Since the EaP was formed in 2009, the elections following that period were included in the analysis. In most cases, there are between three and five rounds of general elections, understood as parliamentary elections. In some cases, there is available information of prior elections that were organised in 2007 or 2008. For the completeness and accuracy of the study, these were included. In cases where those prior elections took place in 2005, generally in authoritarian countries, being considered less recent, these were not included. The matrix provides a better picture of the result. Furthermore, a neutral label is used for the situation where the direction could not have been determined.

Additionally, the use of pro-European/pro-Eurasian labels needs further explanation. The author has used pro-Eurasian in the matrix when it also refers strictly to pro-Russian attitudes. There are some arguments in favor of the use of this approach, including the dominance by the Russian economy of the Eurasian economic union, the regional hegemony exerted over the post-Soviet space, the correlation between pro-Russian political programs and pro-Eurasian political programs. Similarly, in the case of pro-European, this should be understood largely

as referring in the present analysis to pro-European Union, pro-European, pro-Euro-Atlantic, pro-Western directions indicated in the programs. The list of references from the programs and other sources is available in the reference list.

1. The matrix of pro-Eurasian representation in EaP parliaments

Armenia, general elections result %, 2018			Azerbaijan¹, general elections result %, 2020		
My Step Alliance	70	pro-EAEU ²	YAP	56	neutral
BHK	8	pro-EAEU	VHP	2	neutral
LHK	6	pro-EU	BAXCP	1	pro-EU
HHK (extra-parliamentary)	4	pro-EAEU	BQP	1	pro-Turkey
ARF (extra-parliamentary)	3	pro-EU	AVP	1	pro-Iran
Belarus³, general elections result %, 2019			Georgia, general elections result %, 2016		
KPB	10	pro-EAEU	GD	48	pro-EU
RPTS	6	pro-EAEU	ENM	27	pro-EU
LDPB	5	pro-EAEU	APG	5	neutral
SDPB	1	pro-EU	Free Democrats	4	pro-EU
BPF	1	pro-EU	Democratic Movement - United Georgia	3	neutral
Moldova, general elections result %, 2019			Ukraine⁴, general elections result %, 2019		
PSRM	31	pro-EAEU	Servant of the People	43	pro-EU

¹ Few other parties won seats in the National Assembly (1 seat/party). A third of the National Assembly is formed by independents.

² It also favors strong ties with the European Union; important factors have been pro-European while in opposition.

³ Around 4/5 of the members are represented by „non-partisans”

⁴ Few other minor parties with single seats.

ACUM (DA-PAS)	26	pro-EU	Opposition Party - For Life	13	neutral ⁵
PDM	23	pro-EU	Fatherland	8	pro-EU
Sor	8	neutral	European Solidarity	8	pro-EU
PCRM (extra-parliamentary)	3	neutral	Voice (Holos)	5	pro-EU
PN (extra-parliamentary)	3	neutral	Radical Party	4	pro-EU

A case by case discussion is necessary when analysing the pro-Eurasian representation in the Eastern Partnership countries. The above matrix presents the situation based on the latest elections until September 2020, based on the electoral results.

While in Georgia and in Ukraine there are pro-European majorities, in Armenia and Belarus there are largely pro-Eurasian majorities. Azerbaijan maintains a neutral stance towards both projects, while in Moldova the situation is divisive, with almost half of the representation being pro-European.

Armenia presents a particular situation. The parliamentary majority resulting from the 2018 general elections positioned itself in favor of stronger relations with Russia, maintaining in the same time the links to the EU side and willing to develop pragmatically this relation. Before elections, the political alliance was rather pro-EU, changing its option when it became a player in power.

In Azerbaijan, there is a long list of parties, coalition and independents winning seats during the 2020 general elections, however almost all with only one seat. The legislative is dominated by a pro-governmental party (state-party), keeping a rather neutral stance in the region, given the complex regional environment. Thus, the discussion about the pro-Eurasian stance in the Azerbaijani legislative is rather irrelevant, being a matter of state policy, with a majority party mentioning a neutral, national option.

Similarly, Belarus, however with a pronounced pro-Eurasian majority. The Belarusian parliament is dominated by pro-governmental independents, followed by a strong group of pro-governmental and pro-Russian parties.

After the demise of the Party of Regions, the illegal annexation of Crimea and the start of the war in Eastern Ukraine, Ukraine remained with a largely pro-European foreign policy option within the parliamentary parties. This is accompanied by some voices in favour of neutrality.

Another particularly interesting case is the Moldovan one. Moldova's biggest party is largely pro-Eurasian. It obtained the observer status within the Eurasian

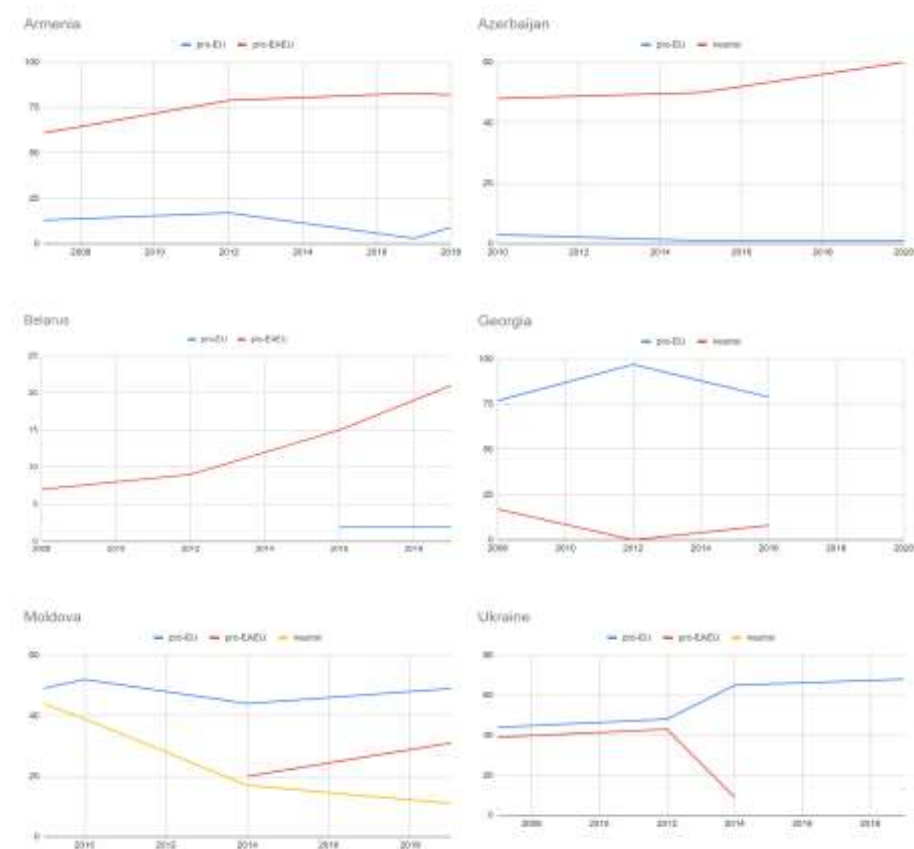
⁵ Neutral, plus a strong Eurasian direction.

Economic Union. There is a set of minor parties in favor of neutrality, however this includes a large cooperation with Russia. Together, the pro-Eurasian principal party and the party having the neutrality as options have almost half of representation. The link to the database containing the programs is available in the references section.

2. Elections results of the past decade (2010-2019). Foreign policy options

Has the European Union won supporters over the last decade or since the establishment of the Eastern Partnership? This was one of the questions guiding the study. The author identified the pro-European and pro-Eurasian dimension by watching the results of the general elections in EaP countries since 2009 and the foreign policy options of the parties winning seats.

Six charts present the country-by-country trend:



The trend charts are a result of program analysis for the parties gaining support during the general elections. Some parties disappeared, others emerged, with the pro-EU, pro-EAEU or neutral option in dynamism.

The following conclusions can be noticed for each EaP partner:

- Armenia: increased support for the pro-EAEU parties in the legislative, with difficulties for the pro-EU parties in keeping their share of the parliamentary distribution;
- Azerbaijan: no perceptible changes in the pro-EU foreign policy option; increased support for the dominant party, which favor rather a neutral, national-focused standing;
- Belarus: increased support for the pro-EAEU option, minor support for few one percent pro-EU parties;
- Georgia: the large pro-EU foreign policy option remains among the political parties, followed by the parties standing for neutrality;
- Moldova: constant results for the pro-EU political parties, decreasing support for the neutrality options and increasing importance for the pro-EAEU parties;
- Ukraine: increasing support for the pro-EU option after the 2014 events and decreasing to non-noticeable for pro-EAEU option; few minor parties in favor of neutrality.

Overall, there are three EaP partners (Armenia, Belarus, Moldova) that in the analysed time period have seen an increasing political representation in the national parliaments of the political parties with a pro-Eurasian foreign policy acknowledged in the party programme. One has seen rising support for the neutral stance (Azerbaijan). Two states have seen constant or increasing pro-EU options in the parliamentary distribution share (Georgia, Ukraine).

Concluding remarks

The Eastern Partnership survived more than a decade, with its partner countries passing through important internal and external struggles. For the Eastern Partnership states, the European option is not the single one and never has it been. But this time the structure of a competing regional integration process is set up and functioning.

The aim of this paper has been to provide an assessment of the relative strength of the pro-Eurasian parties in the Eastern Partnership states, using a comparative perspective across countries, and based on the political parties that animate the

political life in their countries and in the region. The tasks consisted in the provision of the positioning of the political parties in the EaP states in relation to the regional integration processes: pro-European or pro-Eurasian.

In this effort, it highlighted not only the orientation of the political parties participating in elections, but also checked, over the existence of the Eastern Partnership, how the pro-European and pro-Eurasian impetus evolved in the national parliaments, based on a party foreign policy option.

The paper provides a response to the question what the current state of the pro-European and pro-Eurasian support is. Additionally, it shows how the foreign policy option of the main political parties in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine evolved. It shows that the results are mixed, with three states where the pro-Eurasian option increased in its representation in the national parliaments (Armenia, Belarus and Moldova), another one keeping the neutral stance (Azerbaijan), and two others showing or maintaining a consistent pro-European options.

This study provides an input to the debate and the literature on the non-conventional role of political parties in the formulation of foreign policy options, as well as in the area of foreign policy analysis in Eastern Europe, particularly the Eastern Partnership states foreign policy.

References

- Blidaru, M. (2020a). *Foreign policy options of Eastern Partnership countries political parties*. <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1yA7SaVU-doiLUTeLyIJJaLE9iflkzueV3e2aAa2nNsA4/edit?usp=sharing>
- Blidaru, M. (2020b). *General elections' results in EaP countries and party stance towards European Union and Eurasian Economic Union (EU/EAEU)*. <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/18A063us2T2IZJwErdXvTU-gi30MslADJ2l0qN9XGBrQ/edit?usp=sharing>
- EAEU. (2014). *Treaty on the Eurasian Economic Union*. <https://docs.eaeunion.org/ru-ru/Pages/DisplayDocument.aspx?s=bef9c798-3978-42f3-9ef2-d0fb3d53b75f&w=632c7868-4ee2-4b21-bc64-1995328e6ef3&l=540294ae-c3c9-4511-9bf8-aaf5d6e0d169&EntityID=3610>
- EEAS. (2020a). *EU-Armenia relations—Factsheet* [Factsheet]. https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/4080/eu-armenia-relations-factsheet_en
- EEAS. (2020b). *EU-Azerbaijan relations—Factsheet* [Factsheet]. https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/4013/eu-azerbaijan-relations-factsheet_en
- EEAS. (2020c). *EU-Georgia relations—Factsheet* [Factsheet]. https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/23634/eu-georgia-relations-factsheet_en

- EEAS. (2020d). *EU-Moldova relations—Factsheet*.
https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/4011/eu-moldova-relations-factsheet_en
- EEAS. (2020e). *EU-Ukraine relations—Factsheet* [Factsheet].
https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/4081/eu-ukraine-relations-factsheet_en
- EEAS. (2020f). *Facts and figures about EU-Belarus relations*.
https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/35606/facts-and-figures-about-eu-belarus-relations_en
- EIU. (2020). *Democracy Index 2019*. Economist Intelligence Unit.
<http://www.eiu.com/Handlers/WhitepaperHandler.ashx?fi=Democracy-Index-2019.pdf&mode=wp&campaignid=democracyindex2019>
- European Commission, & HR/VP. (2020). *Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020. Reinforcing Resilience—An Eastern Partnership that delivers for all*.
https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/1_en_act_part1_v6.pdf
- IPU. (2020). *IPU Parline. Global data on national parliaments*. Inter-Parliamentary Union.
<https://data.ipu.org/content/parline-global-data-national-parliaments>

Annex: Evolution of pro-EU/pro-EAEU party support by EaP country

Armenia				
elections	2007	2012	2017	2018
pro-EU	13	17	3	9
pro-EAEU	61	79	83	82
neutral	-	-	-	-
Azerbaijan				
elections		2010	2015	2020
pro-EU		13	1	1
pro-EAEU		-	-	-
neutral		48	50	60
Belarus				

elections	2008	2012	2016	2019
pro-EU	3	-	2	2
pro-EAEU	7	9	15	21
neutral	-	-	-	-
Georgia				
elections	2008	2012	2016	2020
pro-EU	77	97	79	-
pro-EAEU	-	-	-	-
neutral	17	0	8	-
Moldova				
elections	2009	2010	2014	2019
pro-EU	49	52	44	49
pro-EAEU	-	-	20	31
neutral	44	39	17	11
Ukraine				
elections	2007	2012	2014	2019
pro-EU	44	48	65	68
pro-EAEU	39	43	9	-
neutral	3	-	-	13