

Eastern Partnership of Post-Soviet States Gives Members False Illusions of Joining the EU

Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

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Region: [Europe](#)

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The [Eastern Partnership](#) is a joint policy initiative created in 2009 which aims to deepen and strengthen relations between the European Union (EU), its Member States and its six eastern neighbors: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. Although many of the EU's eastern neighbors have aspirations to become EU Member States, for Brussels the Partnership is an opportunity to maintain some cohabitation relations with states directly on or near Russia's borders by giving them the illusive promise of so-called European integration. This promise of European integration is of course to also limit their economic and infrastructural integration with Russia.

Most curious though is the participation of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia in the Caucasus. With the current state of affairs in Ukraine and Turkey, it is unlikely that the EU will be engaging in any further expansions into the former Soviet bloc, especially ones in the Caucasus that border Turkey, and will focus primarily on the Balkans. With the coronavirus pandemic devastating the economies of Europe, the EU is not prepared to subsidize the economies of these particular post-Soviet states, especially as many are rampant with corruption and Brussels is unwilling to give the likes of autocrats, like Azerbaijan's Ilham Aliyev, the right to vote and veto.

The last wave of EU expansion into former Warsaw Pact countries in 2004 and 2007, specifically into Poland, Romania and Bulgaria, as well as others, led to a serious political and economic crisis in the EU as Brussels found it difficult to integrate the new members culturally and economically. Therefore, the issue of new members joining the EU has been sidelined, with the exception of Albania and North Macedonia in the Balkans.

However, the current impossibility for the post-Soviet states to join the EU at the moment, especially at a time when Russia wants greater influence in the region, means the Eastern Partnership was created to give a false illusion and a perpetual limbo for these countries. The EU has already said that the Eastern Partnership should not be considered a step towards Membership. However, the sublimation of European integration is in fact a surrogate of Membership, thus giving Eastern Partnership members contradictory messages. The Eastern Partnership is a process which allows these countries to be institutionally attached to the EU through free market philosophy guided by European advice, especially since they are allocated European-funded money for various programs to be further integrated into a European economic and social model.

After more than a decade of integration, some of these post-Soviet countries are increasingly proposing to legalize the relationship into the EU. Last week, Moldovan Prime

Minister Ion Chicu during the sixth summit of the Eastern Partnership that was teleconferenced due to the coronavirus pandemic, said “Even before the pandemic, the Eastern Partnership got closer to a ‘moment of truth.’ Now, after 10 years of cooperation, [the Eastern Partnership] either reinvents itself and we get ‘a new breath’ or it slowly but surely loses its political relevance. The pandemic accelerated this process.” He then called for the boosting of high-level strategic political dialogue and for more joint projects.



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Ukrainian President Vladimir Zelenski backed Chicu and said that the Eastern Partnership should “not limit the ambitions of the partners,” adding that “for some a political dialogue is enough.”

European Commission, Ursula von der Laïnen, is not committing to elevating the Eastern Partnership into a Membership path and rather spoke only about investments, as well as about setting so-called common goals. Effectively, the EU will continue to have some influence over these countries even though they have essentially blocked their paths towards full membership.

Not all post-Soviet states adhere to the demands of Europe, particularly Belarus and Azerbaijan. But some remain completely hopeful, such as Ukraine that is desperate to join any project or organization that can be perceived as anti-Russian or against Russian interests.

However, despite this, the majority of Eastern Partnership member countries accept the limitations and continue to participate in the project in its current form. Some to maintain a European face in the hope of joining the EU one day, and other just to simply maintain good relations with Brussels. Therefore, both the EU and Moscow will continue vying for influence in this region. This actually puts these particular countries in an advantageous position to leverage both Brussels and Moscow to their own advantages if they can maintain a balance, something we can argue only Belarus is doing to great effect.

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