

EaP Monthly Bulletin

#3
May 2020

<https://centreforpolycystudies.org/EaP-Bulletin>

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The EaP Monthly Bulletin is the initiative of the Centre for Policy Studies. Its purpose is to exchange information about the Eastern Partnership countries, to facilitate cooperation between experts and civil society institutions interested in the region, and to provide analytical products for different stakeholders.

The Bulletin's content is the sole responsibility of the authors. The opinions expressed in external contributors' articles do not necessarily coincide with the opinions of our editorial board, or with the position of any public or private institution.

Editor's note

Dear readers,

The COVID-19 pandemic remains an issue of immediate concern. Therefore, we have covered it in the editorial this time.

We are also pleased to share an article by the Kyiv-based Foreign Policy Research Institute covering some aspects of Ukraine's cooperation with European and Euro-Atlantic institutions; a summary of the European Council conclusions on Eastern Partnership policy, which define some of the conditions for the future cooperation between the EU and EaP countries; and a new project announcement.

Needless to say, we are very much looking to possible cooperation with many of you. Your contributions will be much appreciated.

Armen Grigoryan



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Contents

Some Georgian lessons might be useful3

Ukraine: Cooperation with NATO, protection of the Black Sea
Region and reconsideration of conditions of the Association
Agreement with the EU 5

Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020: European Council
conclusions 7

Project announcement: Advancing reforms in Armenia with
Visegrad Four’s know-how 8

Editorial

Some Georgian lessons might be useful

In the last decade of May, Armenian Health Minister Arsen Torosyan's **remark** that the COVID-19 statistics in Georgia might be inaccurate caused a diplomatic scandal. The number of confirmed cases in Armenia was at that time about 10 times larger than in Georgia. The Health Ministry eventually apologised on the minister's behalf, expressing regret that 'the minister's words led to a misunderstanding and political speculation'. Georgian Health Minister Ekaterine Tikaradze then followed up to call the incident a misunderstanding.

The number of active cases and mortality rate in Georgia have been among the lowest in Europe, so Georgia is already among the countries **planning** to restart their tourism industries, while the situation in Armenia is still far from stabilising – in fact, it is getting worse. While Armenia's **initial response** seemed to be quite sufficient, and the infection spread was contained relatively well in March and early April, the sharp growth of the number of active cases which began in the last few days of April has not been stopped yet; by the end of May, the country's healthcare system is on the verge of collapse.

The Armenian government's policy response regarding the epidemic situation could be far from ideal. It is possible to argue that cancelling the flights to Bergamo in mid-March – about two weeks later than Georgia – was a miscalculation; that not imposing a curfew, or not announcing a nationwide **ban** on driving personal cars, as Georgia did, was yet another miscalculation; or that the **decision** to end the lockdown rather early, driven by concerns about the economic situation, was premature; and so forth. However, paying attention only to immediate policy response measures, without considering other factors in the larger context, would be a self-deception.



Armenian Health Minister Arsen Torosyan.
Photo source: Ministry of Health of Armenia via eurasianet.org

Probably, Torosyan could have acted more effectively within his sphere of authority. Perhaps, in addition to closing the educational institutions, suspending public transportation, banning gatherings of over 20 people (including religious ceremonies), and the requirement to carry IDs and written statements justifying the need to visit a medical institution, a bank, a pharmacy, or a supermarket or another shop selling food, some stricter measures could be applied as well. However, the Health Ministry alone could not solve the problem of the lack of social responsibility and discipline, while enforcement was totally insufficient: there were funerals sometimes attended by hundreds of people, birthday parties and other events, queues at banks disbursing pensions and pandemic-related financial support, shop attendants and buyers did not wear masks, etc.

Not reformed, unmotivated police units often were not enforcing the requirements consistently, but even when they did, most of the fines for violations of the quarantine requirements were subsequently cancelled – these were problems caused partially by the government's approach giving preference to 'slow reforms' (to be fair, though, in late May a decision to launch an EU-supported police

reform, including creation of patrol police, was announced) and partially by a rather easygoing attitude resulting from unwillingness to adopt zero tolerance policies – this may be yet another comparison in Georgia’s favour.

Another important factor not paid enough attention is the Armenian public’s excessive exposure to disinformation, fake news and outright propaganda. Little, if any, practical steps have been made towards improving media literacy or public communication, while the government’s approach has been reactive, rather than proactive. This has already been an issue for rather long time, but may have increased the risks in the course of the pandemic.

Near one-third of the Russians **believe** that there is no pandemic as such or that its dangerousness is exaggerated. The proportion of ‘sceptics’ in Armenia may be about the same or even smaller – more or less accurate estimates are still to be made, and of course, not only the Russian media are to blame, but nevertheless their influence should not be neglected. Besides, even mainstream Russian media admitting the dangerousness of COVID-19 contribute to promotion of conspiracy theories about the origins of the virus, generally blaming the US.

Yet, domestic media and other entities **associated** with two ex-presidents – Robert Kocharyan and Serzh Sargsyan, acting as an elaborate **network**, as well as Russian media converging with them and specifically targeting Armenia – Sputnik Armenia, EADaily and a number of others – are even more dangerous, as they have been incessantly promoting disinformation, destructive behaviour, libel, tense public mood and expectations of violence. Some of their activities during May have been **reviewed** by the Media Initiatives Centre.

As OpenDemocracy recently **showed**, some entities involved in the network, which have been calling COVID-19 a ‘fake pandemic’ and opposing vaccinations, had even managed in 2019 to get funding from the US Democracy Commission Small Grants programme, as well



Screenshot of Medmedia.am’s most popular anti-vaccination piece which had 131,000 views. Image source: [openDemocracy](#)

as from an EU-funded project which aimed to enhance Armenian civil society organisations’ capacity and influence over the public policy. Apparently, there were insufficient background checks: the grantee organisation’s leader had used hate speech and incited violence at least since 2014. In this context, it is also worth mentioning that ***The Eastern Partnership Vision after 2020*** report published by the Polish Institute of International Affairs in 2019 had already noted ‘numerous problems in the system of allocating grants’, particularly that funds sometimes had been granted to Eurasian organisations and anti-European ones.

On 3 June, shortly before this article was published, over two dozens of organisations and individuals – just a part of those involved in the network, as well as a couple of connected Russian pages, were **promoted** by means of paid Facebook ads within a few hours. Such activities, being a part of the ongoing attempt to pressure Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan into resignation or dismissing some key members of his cabinet, also indicates that promoted Facebook pages, formally representing different individuals or media outlets, could be managed from a single point. Georgian non-governmental organisations’ **experience** in exposing inauthentic pages and ultimately removing them from Facebook could provide valuable know-how in this regard.

It could be recommended to pay more attention to Georgia’s experience, either in the

case of systemic, longer-term reforms, or in the case of shorter-term policy responses, including public communication, combating disinformation and, of course, anti-epidemic measures as such. Georgian authorities' offer of medical assistance was timely, and it should be fine to accept such help. In the recent decades, examples of mutual assistance have varied from Georgia's massive help to Armenia immediately after the disastrous

earthquake in 1988, when Georgian medical personnel, ambulances and supplies including fresh water helped to save a number of survivors and to prevent an epidemic outbreak, to 30,000 doses of measles vaccine sent in early 2019 as support to Georgia's effort against a measles outbreak. In bad times we need friends more than ever, don't we?



Ukraine: Cooperation with NATO, protection of the Black Sea Region and reconsideration of conditions of the Association Agreement with the EU

This article was originally published in the [International Weekly](#) № 8. We would like to thank the [Foreign Policy Research Institute](#) and personally its director, Dr Grigoriy Perepelytsia, for the kind permission to quote their work.

On May 5, 2020, a large-scale international high-level videoconference was held to discuss the European and Euro-Atlantic integration issues of Ukraine. The event, which was attended by 39 participants, was jointly organized by the NATO Representation to Ukraine, as well as Canadian and British Embassies in Ukraine, as contact embassies of the North Atlantic Alliance. The importance of the event was highlighted by the participation of Vice Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic integration of Ukraine, Vadym Prystaiko and representatives of the diplomatic corps of NATO member-states accredited in Ukraine. The event allowed for live web communication between representatives of the government of Ukraine and heads and representatives of the diplomatic corps in our state. The fact of holding such a conference was another evidence of the effective adaptation of the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine to the current restrictions caused by the pandemic and the

maintenance of a proper military-political dialogue at a high level.

As part of the event, the Minister of Defense familiarized foreign representatives with the current state of implementation of the defense reform and outlined the main priorities of the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine and the development of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Special emphasis was placed on the urgent need to achieve comprehensive interoperability with the Alliance states and implement NATO standards in daily activities.¹

The information of Ukrainian officials was welcomed by foreign partners. The head of the NATO Representation to Ukraine and

¹ Міністр оборони взяв участь у міжнародній відеоконференції високого рівня, присвяченій обговоренню питань європейської та євроатлантичної інтеграції України: <https://www.mil.gov.ua/news/2020/05/06/ministr-oboroni-vzyav-uchast-u-mizhnarodnij-videokonferenczii-visokogo-rivnya-prisvyachenij-obgovorennyu-pitan-evropejskoi-ta-evroatlantichnoi-integraczii-ukraini/>

Director of the NATO Liaison Office in Ukraine, Alexander Vinnikov told the conference participants about the measures that NATO and its member-states are taking to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting Ukraine's role in helping NATO allies by providing air transport of large medical supplies. The event has shown a constructive attitude of its participants to further cooperation aimed at ensuring the European and Euro-Atlantic integration of Ukraine and strengthening the defense capability of our state.²

Subsequently, on May 7, 2020, Vice Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic integration of Ukraine, Vadym Prystaiko stated that Ukraine is ready to join NATO in developing joint measures to protect the Black Sea Region and combat the COVID-19 coronavirus disease. "Ukraine and NATO should develop a strategy to contain Russia in the Black Sea Region in information, economic, legal and military fields. In addition, Ukraine would like to see a greater presence of NATO and U.S. Naval Forces in the Black Sea".³ The Vice Prime Minister stressed that the **large-scale disinformation campaign conducted by the Russian Federation** poses a **separate threat** during the pandemic.

In this context, the new National Security Strategy of Poland, which was approved on May 12, 2020, by the President, Andrzej Duda deserves attention. Russia's aggressive policy is specified as the main threat in this Strategy. The document provides for the preparation and introduction of the Law on Governance and National Security, which will establish a hierarchy of strategic planning documents related to the national security. The document describes the security situation, threats and problems, as well as the desired actions. After the signing of this strategic document, A. Duda said that the strategy primarily reflects the changes that have occurred in Poland and in

the world over the past five years.⁴

Among the urgent problems that Ukraine faced in implementing the European integration course, Vice Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic integration of Ukraine, Vadym Prystaiko noted: "It's a right moment now, because we have just reached the ten-year period when we can reconsider the conditions, which our producers are waiting for. After all, most of the quotas provided for by the Agreement are no longer acceptable for us, we have passed the stage of first contacts with the European Union within the framework of the Tariff-Free Trade Agreement. I hope that we will reconsider the terms of the Agreement - ed.," Prystaiko said. According to the Vice Prime Minister, it is now extremely important to remove roaming restrictions, or "industrial visa-free regime", so that Ukrainian goods that come to European markets would not have to pass certification. Regarding the risk of non-compliance by Ukraine of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, Prystaiko noted: "There is no risk of non-compliance. There is a risk that we will not be able to achieve what we want, that is, we have much more ambition than reality".⁵

Thus, during these days, Ukraine paid attention to important issues of European and Euro-Atlantic integration. It should be noted that **the initiative to create deterrence strategy of the Black Sea Region will allow Ukraine not only to focus on creating and improving its own armed forces, but also to expand military cooperation with Poland, which has identified Russian aggression as the main threat in the new National Security Strategy.** Regarding the promotion of our European integration, an important improvement will be **reconsideration of conditions of the Association Agreement with the EU**, because Ukraine is concerned that today's conditions are written for it as for a state with a commodity economy.

² Ibid.

³ Україна готова разом із НАТО приєднатися до розробки спільних заходів щодо захисту Чорноморського регіону та боротьби з Covid-19: <https://ua.interfax.com.ua/news/political/660628.html>

⁴ Президент Польщі підписав стратегію нацбезпеки, де РФ названа головною загрозою: <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2020/05/12/7251306/>

⁵ Українські виробники чекають перегляду умов Угоди про асоціацію з ЄС — Пристайко: <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-economy/3023179-ukrainski-virobniki-cekaut-peregladu-umov-ugodi-pro-asociaciu-z-es-pristajko.html>

Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020: European Council conclusions



Logo source:
<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/>

In the **Conclusions** published on 11 May, the EU Council reaffirmed that the Eastern Partnership, as part of the European Neighbourhood Policy, has strategic importance for the EU.

The Council reiterates incentive- and conditionality-based approach of EaP, as a means to encourage partner countries to engage in reform in order to benefit from the support of the EU. The Council highlights the ownership of the reforms by the Eastern partner countries and the importance of establishing clearer guidance on specific reform priorities, with objective, precise, detailed, verifiable benchmarks, and joint monitoring of the reform progress. The EU remains committed to supporting all implementation efforts, including via adequate financial and expert assistance.

The Council welcomes the progress achieved and calls for the full implementation of the Association Agreements and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas with Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. In this context, the Council recalls the 2017 Eastern Partnership Summit declaration which acknowledges the European aspirations and European choice of the Eastern partners concerned, as stated in the Association Agreements.

The Council encourages the implementation of the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement between the EU and Armenia which is provisionally applied since 1 June 2018 and looks forward to its entry into force.

The Council welcomes the progress in the ongoing negotiations between the EU and Azerbaijan for a new framework agreement.

The Council appreciates that the EU's critical engagement with Belarus has become more comprehensive, as recently confirmed by the signing and ratification of visa facilitation and readmission agreements.

Some other highlights:

Commitment to rule-based international order, as well as to democratic fundamentals such as the rule of law, human rights and good governance is essential. The Council invites the EEAS and the Commission, in close coordination with Member States to better monitor reforms in strengthening the rule of law.

Strategic communication should remain a key task, in order to promote the visibility and benefits of the cooperation between the EU and the Eastern Partnership countries, not least in the wake of growing disinformation.

Resilience building will be strengthened through the implementation of practical activities for the benefit of the partner countries, their societies and the regional stability of the EU's neighbourhood, in order to foster sustainable development and deliver tangible results for people.

The Council stresses the importance that the Eastern Partnership remains ambitious, flexible and inclusive framework for cooperation, allowing Member States and Eastern partner countries to tackle common and global challenges jointly in a wide range of areas. This includes exchanges and alliance building in various multilateral fora, deeper sectoral cooperation and gradual economic integration in accordance with the level of commitment as enshrined in the bilateral agreements.

Project announcement



We are pleased to introduce the project *Advancing reforms in Armenia with Visegrad Four's know-how*. The project focuses on topics set among reform priorities by the Armenian government and the EU-Armenia Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement.

It will include five modules: in addition to providing a general perspective about the Central European countries' policies and support to reforms in the Eastern Partnership region, it will cover civilian security sector reform; healthcare reform and social policy; renewable energy sector development; and IT sector, e-governance and information society development.

The first, introductory module on the Central European states' policies will include 2-hour online seminars with experts from all V4 countries. Modules 2-5 will also include online seminars, followed by panel discussions with Armenian experts and officials. After each module, a policy paper with recommendations will be prepared by CPS staff and affiliated experts, and delivered to public officials, policy experts, civil society organisations, higher education institutions and other relevant audiences.

The project will take place between July 2020 and February 2021. The project webpage will remain active after the conclusion as an

online library containing experts' presentations, policy papers, as well as links to seminar and panel discussion videos.

Project partners from V4 are: EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy (Czechia), Budapest Institute for Policy Analysis Ltd. (Hungary), Res Publica Foundation (Poland), Jagiellonian Club (Poland) and EURACTIV Slovakia.

Additionally, some V4 experts not affiliated with the partner institutions will be involved, taking into account their outstanding region-specific experience.

For additional information, please visit the [project page](#), and also follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

The project is co-financed by the Governments of Czechia, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia through Visegrad Grants from International Visegrad Fund. The mission of the fund is to advance ideas for sustainable regional cooperation in Central Europe.

Grant #22010376

The EaP Monthly Bulletin is published by the Centre for Policy Studies, a Yerevan-based think tank.

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