One partnership – Three trajectories?

28 MAY 2026
Youri De Brabander

The Eastern Partnership (EaP), launched in 2009, aimed to strengthen relations between the European Union and six post-Soviet countries. Among them, Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus share geographic proximity and intertwined historical legacies, yet their political trajectories diverged significantly.

The time frame of this article will focus on the decade and a half from 2007 till 2022. 2007 was chosen as a starting point for the article since in this year, Vladimir Putin for the first time publicly distanced himself from the west, which would be succeeded by kinetic action against the Republic of Georgia in the following year. 2022 was chosen as the end point of the study, since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia gave a different dynamic to the geopolitical situation in the region. At this point the trajectories of the three countries in question had split completely. Moldova had managed to become an albeit weak, but still democratic country leaning to west, while autocracy was consolidated in Belarus.

This article will try to zoom in on only three of the six Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries. They can be seen as a geographical unity, while the three Transcaucasian EaP countries will be left out of the scope of this article. These countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia) will be discussed in another article of this magazine.

Zbigniew Sikorski and Carl Bild

Urkraine2014: negotiations with the EU, Maidan, annexation of Crimea, War in the Donbass

unresolved Transnistria conflict

Pro-Western Turn & EU Path of Moldova:2009: protest and ousting of the communist party after rigged elections2014: Moldova signed an Association Agreement with the EU, prompting Russian trade restrictions2020: Pro-European Maia Sandu was elected president.2021 Elections: Sandu's PAS party won a parliamentary majority, solidifying the pro-EU direction.

The Lukashenko regime balancing between east and west

2020 => falsified election, protests and crackdown in Belarus2021 => Belarus formally leaves the EaP2022 => Belarus allegiance to the Russian Federation is perpetuated by the full-scale invasion of Ukraine

research question: Why were the protests in Moldova (2009) and Ukraine (2014) successful, while they were suppressed in Belarus (2020)?A possible answer could be the geographical proximity of Moldova to Romania, from which it receives a lot of support and its geographical distance from Russia. It made it more difficult for Russia to get the country completely under its control. Russia is restrained to the breakaway republic of Transnistria.

A possible explanation for the different trajectories between Belarus and Ukraine could be the figure of Lukashenko. He had the country firmly under control from the nineties onwards, whereas Ukraine had a more unstable trajectory switching between pro-western and pro-Russian government. Lukashenko also decided to strike back against the protesters in 2020 and did not flee as Janukovich had done in 2014 in Kyiv.

An explanation for the different trajectories between Ukraine and Belarus could also be the timing. Russian security and intelligence agencies were much more prepared to counteract in 2020 in Belarus than in 2014 in Ukraine.

Franke (Benedikt) (Ed.). *Munich Security Conference 2007: Speech by Vladimir Putin and Selected Reactions, Vol. 3*. Hamburg: Koehler Mittler, 2026, 282 p.

Sakwa (Richard). *Frontline Ukraine: crisis in the borderlands*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2015, xiv + 297 p.

Snyder (Timothy). *The reconstruction of nations : Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569-1999*. New Haven (Connecticut): Yale university press, 2003, xv + 367 p.

Visuals: Timeline and map

Timeline: