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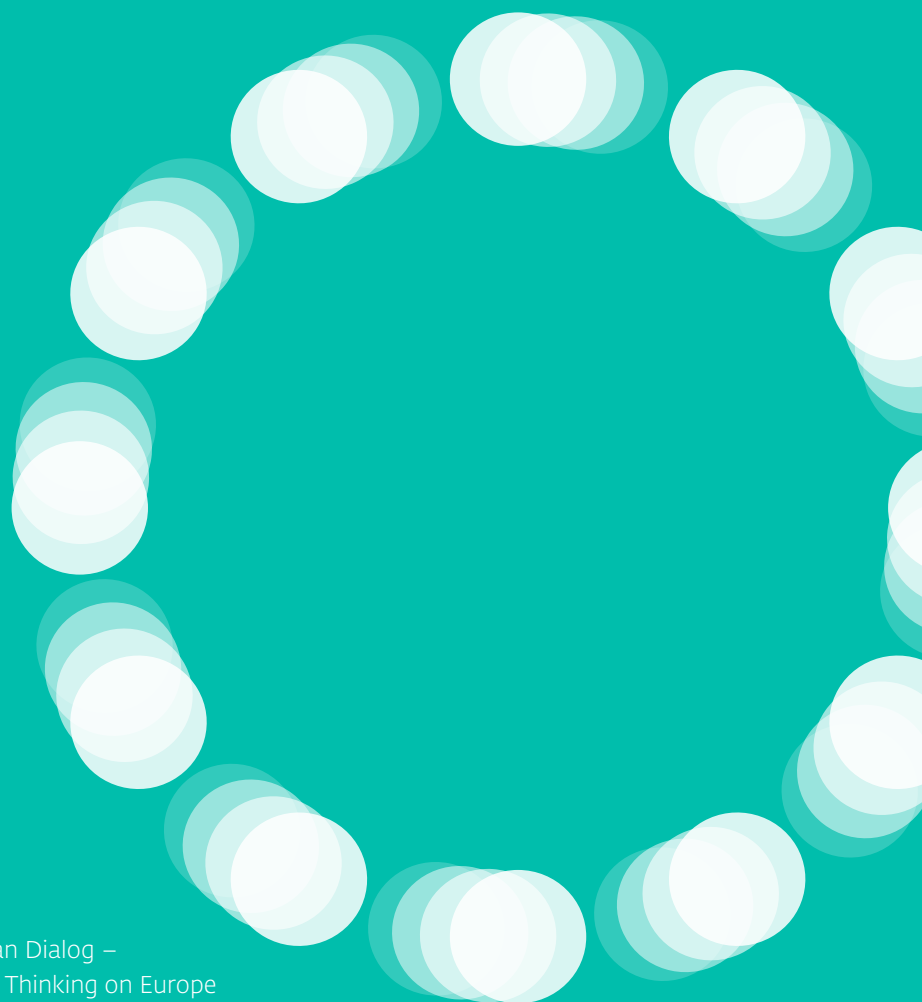
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## **(Re-)Engaging our Partners to the East**

What the Weimar Triangle  
should do for the Eastern  
Partnership





# Table of contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>(Re-)Engaging our Partners to the East</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>What the Weimar Triangle should do for the Eastern Partnership</b>	
1. A shift from a government-centred policy to a citizens-centred policy	<b>4</b>
2. A shift from a technical to a broader political understanding of reforms	<b>5</b>
3. A shift in the perception of security issues where eastern neighbours must be seen more as partners rather than as sources of instability	<b>6</b>
4. Focus on lighthouses	<b>7</b>
<b>About the authors</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Genshagen Foundation</b>	<b>10</b>

# Introduction

Against the backdrop of the need for deep reflection on how the European Union should engage its Partners to the East, the Genshagen Foundation established a trilateral working group of experts in 2017. The purpose of the project was to stimulate the exchange within the Weimar Triangle on the Eastern Partnership with a view to the 5<sup>th</sup> Eastern Partnership summit scheduled to take place in Brussels on 24 November 2017. The underlying idea was to bring together and reconcile three national perspectives on the European Neighbourhood with their divergent priorities, interests, perceptions and concepts. We considered this approach to be a promising way to elaborate ideas that could help to formulate future EU actions. In addition, the working group has explored the role that the Weimar Triangle could play in supporting and improving the European Union's common stance.

The following recommendations present the results of four working meetings that took place at the Genshagen Foundation on 30–31 March, 20–21 April, 8–9 June and 24–25 July 2017. The analysis and proposals for political action are based on the substantial contributions of experts from France, Germany and Poland. We are delighted to have had the opportunity to host Laure Delcour, Paweł Kowal, Barbara Kunz, Kai-Olaf Lang, Florent Parmentier, Daniel Szeligowski and Elsa Tulumets in Genshagen. I would like to express our sincere gratitude to all members of the expert group for their committed input.

Finally, the project would not have been possible without the funding of the German Federal Foreign Office, whom I would like to thank for its ongoing support of the Genshagen Foundation.

Martin Koopmann  
Board Member and Executive Director  
Genshagen Foundation

# **(Re-)Engaging our Partners to the East**

## **What the Weimar Triangle should do for the Eastern Partnership**

### *Recommendations of the Working Group of Experts from France, Germany and Poland*

The EU's engagement in the eastern neighbourhood entails much more than just normative transformation. It is a forward-looking investment in Europe's security and prosperity: in a world where internal and external developments are becoming increasingly intertwined, the security and the modernisation of our six eastern neighbours also have a bearing on us.

In the run-up to the 5<sup>th</sup> Eastern Partnership (EaP) Summit in Brussels on 24 November 2017, the EU can take credit for significant progress in its eastern policy. The Association Agreements/DCFTA signed with Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia are in force and provide a clear agenda for reforms in all three countries. Three years after a visa-free regime was set up with Moldova, the EU has delivered on its promise to eliminate obligatory Schengen visas for citizens from Georgia and Ukraine who hold biometric passports. This is despite the fact that the refugee crisis has only exacerbated member states' sensitivity to migration. In addition, the initialling of the Comprehensive Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with Armenia, progress in negotiations for a new agreement with Azerbaijan and enhanced contacts with Belarus are clear signals of the EaP's ability to adjust to changing circumstances and tailor the EU's offer to the needs of the partner countries.

However, the challenges ahead are substantial. The six EaP countries still face (albeit to varying degrees) pervasive corruption, state capture and pressure from Russia, to name but a few. Five of the six eastern partners are involved in unresolved conflicts, with hostilities ongoing in Ukraine and the risk of yet another flare-up of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which would have major implications for regional security. The EaP is therefore at a critical crossroads. While the implementation of EU-EaP country agreements is a long-term process, the question arises as to how to anchor reforms in a difficult external and internal environment.

The Weimar Triangle can be the driving force behind a stronger Europe – one that makes full use of its potential and acts as security provider, starting in its neighbourhood. Back in 2009, Poland was the leading country behind the launch of the Eastern Partnership (EaP). Germany is a major player in the region, first and foremost economically. Last but not least, after Brexit, France will be the single major security actor within the European Union. Greater coordination among French, German and Polish foreign policies is increasingly needed as the EU faces new challenges in its surroundings. This can lead to increased coherence in the EU's policy vis-à-vis its eastern neighbours. In order to secure further progress for the Eastern Partnership, the Weimar Triangle could push forward the following recommendations at the EU level:

## 1. A shift from a government-centred policy to a citizens-centred policy

Since the Eastern Partnership was launched, the EU has prioritised a dialogue with governments and technical discussions with groups of experts, especially during the negotiations for AA/DCFTAs, visa liberalisation and the CEPA. There is still limited awareness of the Eastern Partnership's concrete implications among the general public, especially outside capital cities. In fact, the lack of tangible benefits may undermine support for integration with the EU in EaP countries. In order to gain broad societal support for its policies, the EU must deliver practical results that would improve the lives of citizens of partner countries.

The EU has already taken a significant step in granting visa-free travel to Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. The time is now ripe to go further. **Increased support for the business sector**, especially small and medium-sized enterprises that are a key driver of change in EaP countries, would enable a strong middle class to grow. In this context, **the modernisation and development of cross-border infrastructure and transport corridors** will be an important contribution to boosting trade and mobility in the region. **Abolishing roaming fees for the EaP** countries would be a major boost to bringing people from the EU and the EaP area closer

together, which is why the Weimar Triangle should actively support such a proposal. The possibility of **connecting the EaP countries to the EU Single Euro Payment Area**, which would foster business contacts across the EU's eastern border, might also be explored in this regard.

Finally, the Weimar Triangle states should take the lead in promoting the use of **mobility partnerships** within the EU, including by signing relevant agreements with the EaP countries. These could have a strong impact in terms of societal rapprochement. Their potential has yet to be fully exploited, however.

## 2. A shift from a technical to a broader political understanding of reforms

In order to foster deep political transformations in Eastern Partnership countries, the EU must prioritise good governance and the rule of law in its dialogue with governments, to empower drivers of change in EaP societies and to advocate their inclusion in the policy process.

With negotiations for AA/DCFTAs, the EU has prioritised legal approximation with its trade-related acquis (regardless of its relevance, or lack thereof, in the absence of prospects of accession) and sector-specific conditionality. However, this focus has been at the expense of deeper political transformations leading to democratic, transparent and accountable policy-making. With the exception of Belarus and Ukraine in late 2012–2013, the EU has not applied political conditionality. The flaws of the EU's narrow understanding of transformation have been laid bare by the patchy application of EU demands in politically sensitive areas, such as the fight against corruption. The EU has supported governments for no other reason than their self-proclaimed pro-European orientation and compliance with EU legal approximation demands. However, it has overlooked, even if inadvertently, the fact that the ruling elites' pursuit of their political, business and personal interests overrode the overarching objective of EU integration.

Therefore, the EU needs to ensure that both the spirit and the letter of the rule of law and good governance reforms are properly understood and implemented.

First, the EU must acknowledge that these are prerequisites for adopting and enforcing the acquis. This entails closer monitoring of political developments in EaP countries (in close cooperation with other international organisations) and a **stricter application of political conditionality**.

Second, empowering those actors who may act as drivers of change is crucial. The EU must favour a closer **involvement of a broader range of civil society organisations** (including trade unions, consumers' associations and youth organisations), as well as small businesses in the policy process. This entails engaging with a wider range of CSOs beyond the narrow circle of those organisations already benefitting from EU funding, as well as supporting their capacity building.

Third, the EU could **foster the development of »civic tech« experiments** with a view to encouraging public debates and participation. This would contribute to promoting openness and transparency, notably through enhancing citizens' information on decision-making processes and improving the fight against corruption (for instance through developing e-public procurement, thereby eliminating opportunities for bribes).

### 3. A shift in the perception of security issues where eastern neighbours must be seen more as partners rather than as sources of instability

The EU's first Security Strategy identified the neighbourhood as a source of potential threats to the Union's security. Since 2003, the European security environment has become more complex and also more threatening, as highlighted in the 2016 EU Global Strategy. Security challenges related to instability as well as combating aspects of organised crime and terrorism are of relevance to both the EU and the EaP countries. Several related matters could play a more prominent role in joint action. At the same time, the Weimar states should promote close EU coordination and cooperation with other actors engaged in the same field, such as NATO, the OSCE and other relevant players. This especially applies to the various protracted conflicts in the region, which the EaP was not designed to resolve. Direct action can be taken in two fields in particular:

First, the EU should continue its efforts in the field of **Security Sector Reform** and pursue further cooperation with EaP countries, in particular with those that contribute to CSDP missions (currently Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine), as well as EU Battle Groups (Ukraine).

The second field is **the fight against small arms and light weapons** (SALW) proliferation. In 2005, the EU adopted a »Strategy to combat illicit accumulation and trafficking of SALW and their ammunition«, which calls for the Union to »foster effective multilateralism so as to forge mechanisms, whether international, regional or within the EU and its Member States« to that effect. Mainstreaming this strategy's requirements within the EaP would increase our security – along with steps undertaken to the same end within the OSCE.



## 4. Focus on lighthouses

The EU should follow an innovative path in focusing on flagship projects that are better adapted to the EaP context and more effective. The Weimar Triangle could therefore come up with new lighthouse projects offering citizens direct and palpable results:

### → The Eastern Partnership University

Few institutions are as suitable for carrying the European spirit as universities. In close dialogue with their counterparts from partner countries, and drawing on the experience of the College of Europe and bilateral cooperation (e.g. the French-German University and the Viadrina University with a German-Polish focus), the Weimar ministers responsible for higher education could take the initiative and develop a blueprint for establishing an EaP University that would bring together potential co-shapers of our common future. This would lead to the emergence of a new generation of civil servants and young leaders in those countries. The initiative may also be complemented by a horizontal programme dedicated to fighting corruption in higher education institutions in the EaP countries, as well as life-long learning programmes implemented under the auspices of the EU.

### → The EU-EaP E-Democracy Centre of Excellence

Digitalisation has an unfulfilled potential for optimising public services for citizens, especially at the local level. It opens up new ways to renew the relationship between policy-makers and civil society (citizens, and also media, activists, CSOs, etc.) through e-government and empowerment. The

Weimar Triangle should promote e-democracy through the development of an e-democracy toolbox applicable to all of its dimensions: technology and infrastructure; the accompanying legal framework; and citizens' e-democracy literacy. An EU-EaP E-Democracy Centre of Excellence could serve as a facilitator to that effect, bringing together resources and knowledge, notably drawing on past experiences within the Weimar Triangle and extending existing cooperation. For example, local experiments of »civic tech« may be one way to foster e-democracy literacy.

### → The Post-Conflict Trauma Healing Centre

Five of the six EaP countries are grappling with unresolved conflicts on their territories, and several EU member states, including the Weimar countries, have long been engaged in their peaceful resolution. The problem of psychological effects stemming from these conflicts has not been given proper attention, however. The Weimar Triangle could fill this vacuum by elaborating a joint proposal to establish a Post-Conflict Trauma Healing Centre in one of the EaP countries. Such an institution would not only meet the increasing demand for professional healthcare in the region, but also allow the EU's eastern neighbours to develop their own distinctive specialisation and, consequently, to provide assistance in the region.

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## About the authors



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# The Genshagen Foundation

## Germany, France and Poland for Europe

### The Foundation

The Genshagen Foundation evolved from the Berlin-Brandenburg Institute for Franco-German Collaboration in Europe, which was founded in 1993 by historian Prof Rudolf von Thadden and Brigitte Sauzay, who later became an advisor to German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder. Since 2005, the Foundation has been run as a non-profit foundation under German civil law. Its founders and main sponsors are the German Federal Government, represented by the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media, and Land Brandenburg. The most important third-party donor is the Federal Foreign Office.

### Profil

The Genshagen Foundation aims to strengthen Europe's cultural diversity, political capacity to act, social coherence and economic dynamism. At the interface between civil society, the state and the business world, the foundation operates in two working sections: *Art and Cultural Mediation in Europe* and *European Dialogue – Political Thinking on Europe*. We focus on promoting and intensifying Franco-German and German-Polish relations, as well as facilitating the dialogue within the Weimar Triangle, which was founded in 1991 by the Foreign Ministers of Germany, France and Poland. As a forum for consultation and conversation, we seek to foster dialogue between the three countries as well as promote European integration as a whole.

The location of the Foundation, Genshagen Castle, offers a space for encounters and exchanges between actors from the worlds of art, culture, politics, business, science and the media. Through its varied events and publications, the Foundation helps to find new approaches and solutions to current and future challenges in society and politics – always within the context of Europe.

## **European Dialogue – Political Thinking on Europe**

Convinced that European integration must be preserved and deepened in order to secure peace, freedom, solidarity and wealth in Europe in a sustainable manner, the Genshagen Foundation is committed to the political dimension of Europe's future in the working section *European Dialogue – Political Thinking on Europe*. Its projects promote reflections on the internal cohesion of the European Union, its political capacity to act and its role in the world. A solution-based exchange takes place between experts and decision-makers from politics, diplomacy, business and society in public and closed formats. Furthermore, the Foundation is focused on civil society in order to give young people in particular an understanding of Europe and to offer them a platform where they can articulate their own ideas.

## **Genshagener Papiere**

The Genshagener Papiere is a paper series published by the Genshagen Foundation's European Dialogue – Political Thinking on Europe programme. It addresses general topics of European politics as well as bi- and trilateral cooperation between Germany, France and Poland. The series' objective is to make the results of the Foundation's work available for a broader public. Thanks to the format's flexibility, the series comprises both policy-oriented texts and more scholarly articles and essays. Its authors include both established and younger academics, as well as experts in European politics and journalists. The Genshagener Papiere are published several times a year. They are available online, and in some cases also in a printed version.

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