

# ENACTED POLICY PAPER

The role of CBC in enhancing the EU's actorness in the borderland regions



European Union and its neighbourhood.  
Network for enhancing EU's actorness  
in the eastern borderlands

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## ***Summary***

The Policy Paper “**The role of CBC in enhancing the EU's actorness in the borderland regions**” compiles an inventory of the level of awareness about the EU's instruments, alongside the difficulties affecting the Eastern border of European Union and, subsequently, propose a series of measures in order to improve CBC and the economic development of the regions. The scientific goal has been to assess the implications of the EU's neighbourhood instruments and policies in the border regions and beyond in the wider eastern neighbourhood and whether the CBC/EaP projects bring added value. To this end, we have developed a database which seeks to show, first, what the population's perception of the EU's actorness is in the border areas of the countries from our network, and, second, assess if the ENP, EaP and CBC instruments have had a positive impact on the regions situated at the Eastern border of the EU: border regions between Romania and Moldova, Romania and Ukraine and between Poland and Belarus. The main forms of data collection for developing the aforementioned database have been questionnaire-based surveys in Moldova, Ukraine and Belarus in the border region area, thus seeking to capture local/regional dynamics.

## ***Introduction***

According to many studies, since its inception the neighbourhood strategy of the EU has hardly been able to alleviate the difficulties post-Soviet Eastern Europe faces. Our research endeavours seek to understand whether the reviewed neighbourhood instruments are able to bring added value and enhance regional cooperation. While the ENP/EaP instruments are vital tools to promote a sustainable democracy in neighbouring countries and new market economies with high potential trade and economic integration with the European internal market, the CBC's role is to diminish the border effects at the eastern frontier of the EU is also salient.

Borderland regions positioned on the eastern EU border have been perceived as increasingly vulnerable in the past few years, particularly since the commencement of the Ukrainian crisis, which exacerbated the tensions between the Euro-Atlantic community and Russia in the broader eastern neighbourhood area. Thus, in line with the European Neighbourhood Policy Review and the subsequent Global Strategy for the EU's Foreign and Security Policy, which both emphasized the urgent need for reconsideration of the EU's neighbourhood and external instruments, the role of borderland regions has been seen as prominent for enhancing cooperation between Eastern European EU and non-EU members and for strengthening regional stability and security.

Within this context, some specific patterns have been generated within border regions which include the EU and non-EU areas where border effect creates visible economic and social asymmetries and make the EU vs. non-EU discrepancies more visible. In general, the literature on development patterns of border regions highlight some particular associated challenges since such border regions are characterised by lower accessibility and connectivity, institutional weaknesses, poor quality of social capital in order to generate economies of scale or economic agglomerations as sources of competitiveness. Additionally, political borders limit factors mobility, increase transaction costs, reduce opportunities to diversify trade flows, amplify business risks, limit the size of local markets. However, the border regions analysed in this paper have additional patterns that make them distance themselves from the classical core-periphery model; due to their proximity to EU borders, these regions also benefit from various opportunities in terms of accessibility, cross-border cooperation projects or similar initiatives. Thus, in order to stay on a development pattern, these regions should take advantage of the opportunities of the Europeanisation processes so that they can better overcome the challenges specific to border regions. In this regard to ensure that local-based policies are better suited to their particularities, both in terms of challenges and opportunities, enhancement of the EU's effectiveness in the border regions requires a bottom-up approach. To this end, an essential role belongs to the way in which the population of border regions perceives the EU actions and the effectiveness of the support measures within the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), related to societal expectations and visions on specific economic, social, and political issues.

Against this backdrop, this paper aims at analysing how the EU actorness is being perceived at the societal level in the regions situated at the immediate borders with the EU. The main assumption is that for the EU to enhance its actorness in its eastern vicinity, to ensure transformations via reforms and European values, the perceptions 'on the ground' need also to be taken into consideration.

***Some key findings:***

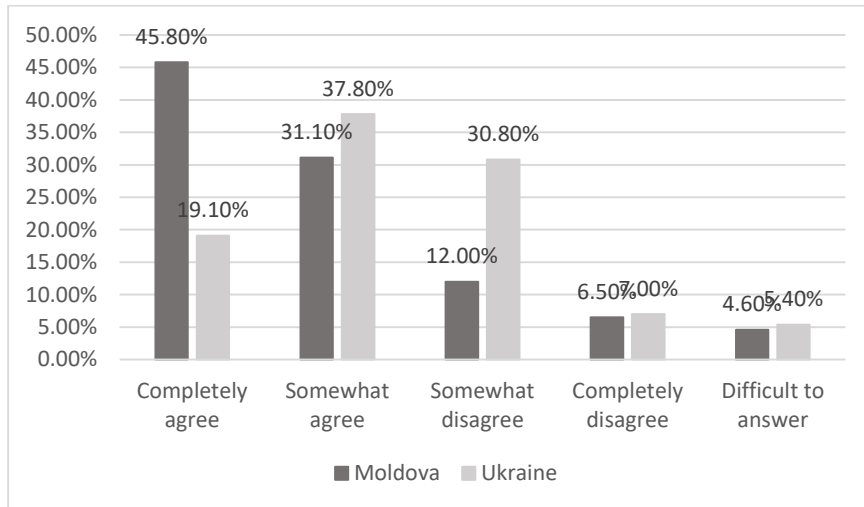
In the border regions of both Ukraine and Republic of Moldova, all respondents confirmed that they had heard about the European Union<sup>1</sup>. 89.4% of respondents from Ukraine and 88.9% of respondents from Republic of Moldova are interested in receiving updates on the relations their country has with the EU and the way how these relations are evolving. However, the general level of awareness of the EU is reported as generally low. Accordingly, 56.9% of respondents from Ukraine and 76.9% of respondents from Republic of Moldova agree and somewhat agree that people in their countries have limited information about the EU (figure 2). This could be partially be explained by the fact that people from both countries do not often have first-hand information of what the EU stands for since they still rarely visit the EU states or did not have the chance to visit them at all. For instance, 56.5% of respondents from Ukraine and 37.1% of respondents from Republic of Moldova have never visited any of the EU member states during the last ten years. 33.1% respondents from Ukraine and 41.7% respondents from Republic of Moldova have visited the EU only up to 5 times during the last ten years, usually travelling to the bordering EU state, situated closest to the place of their own residence. Hence, personal reflections and general attitudinal trends concerning the EU appear to be mostly determined by media. In both countries, television has been reported as the main source of information about political, economic, cultural or ecological developments in the EU. The second most used source of information about the EU is the online media in the case of Ukraine and social networks in the case of Republic of Moldova.

While being asked how many member-states the EU has, only 33.4% of respondents from Ukraine and 24.1% from Republic of Moldova knew the answer with no significant gap observed across different age groups. However, in Ukraine the younger generations (age groups 18-29 and 30-39) appeared more knowledgeable about the EU compared to older citizens, whereas in Republic of Moldova the most knowledgeable segment of population is the age group 40-49 (figure 3).

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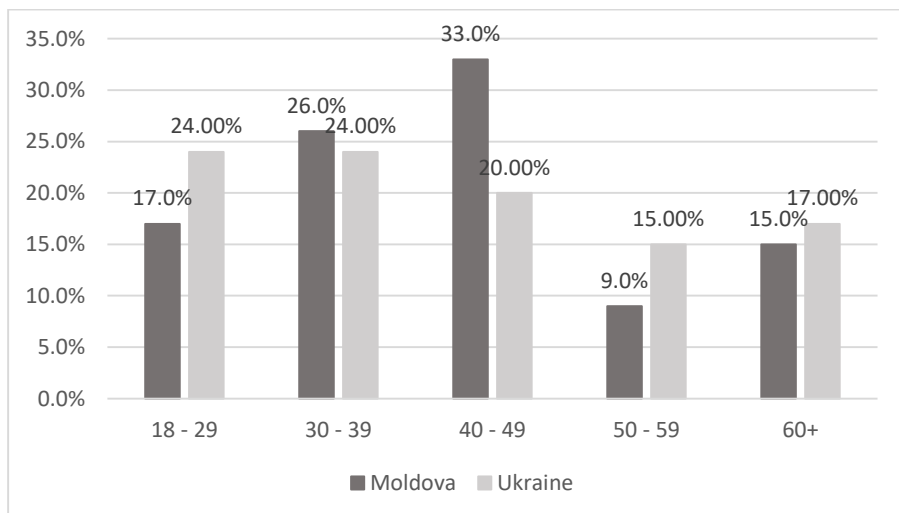
<sup>1</sup> Hereinafter, referring to Ukraine/Republic of Moldova we mean only those regions of both countries, which border with the EU.

Figure 2. To which extent do you agree that people in your country have limited information about the EU



Source: the author's representation based on the survey data

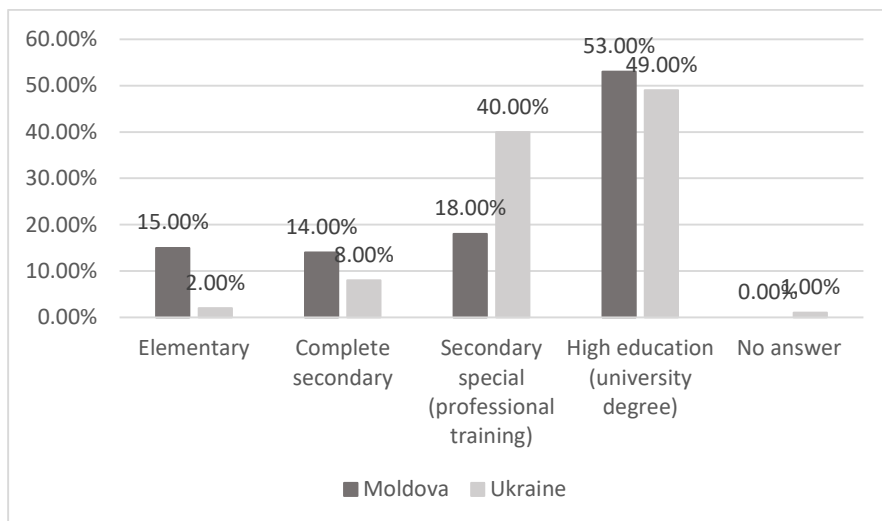
Figure 3. Do you know how many countries are there in the European Union?  
– Yes: age distribution



Source: the author's representation based on the survey data

In both countries there is a direct correlation between knowledge of the EU and the level of respondents' education – the higher educational level a respondent has, the more knowledgeable he/she is about the EU (figure 4).

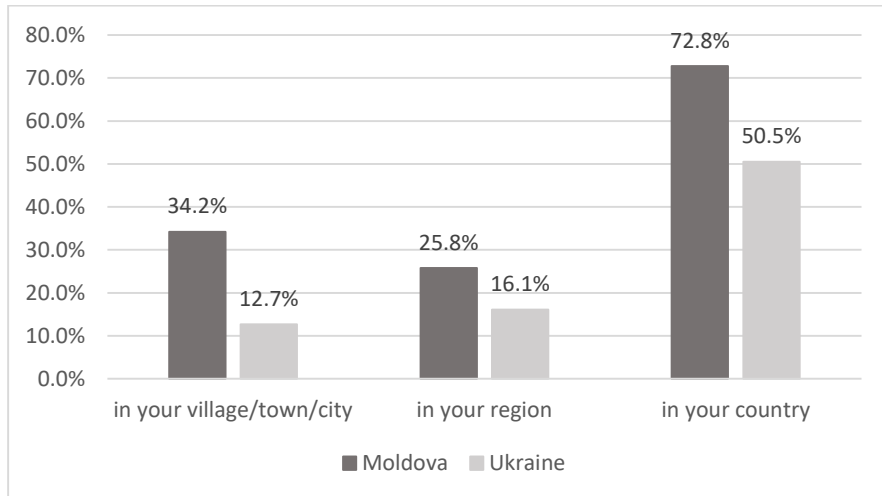
Figure 4. Do you know how many countries are there in the European Union?  
– Yes: level of education distribution



Source: the author's representation based on the survey data

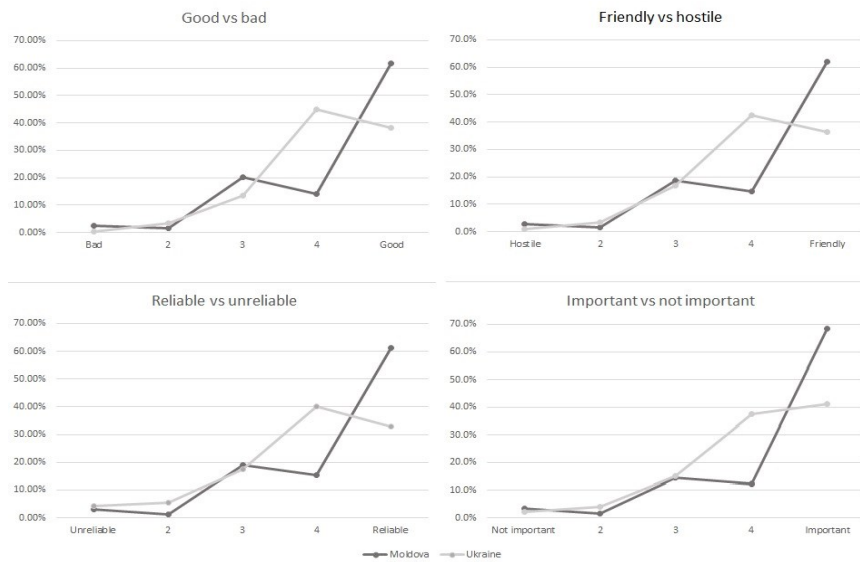
Furthermore, in Ukraine, there is limited knowledge about the projects supported and financed by the EU at the level of the locality (namely, village, town, city) and at the level of the region, despite the fact that the regions where the survey was conducted are subjects to cross-border cooperation projects. As such, only 12.7% and 16.1% have heard about the existence of such projects accordingly. In Republic of Moldova, the awareness of such initiatives implemented with the EU's support is somewhat higher, at 34.2% and 25.8%, respectively. The overall awareness is higher when it goes to the visibility of the nation-wide projects – in Ukraine, 50.5% of respondents know about the EU-funded projects in various domains. In Republic of Republic of Moldova, the level of awareness is even higher, at 72.8% (figure 5). Yet, the Eastern Partnership has registered a low level of visibility. Only 33.4% of respondents from Ukraine and 17.6% of respondents from Republic of Moldova know about the existence of this framework of cooperation between the EU and the eastern neighbouring countries. Subsequently, the majority of the population in both countries agrees or rather agrees that the EU has a limited presence in their country – 60.5% in Ukraine and 68.9% in Republic of Moldova.

Figure 5. Have you ever heard of any project funded by the EU in your locality, region, country: positive answers



Source: the author's representation based on the survey data

Figure 6. Societal attitudinal trends towards the EU

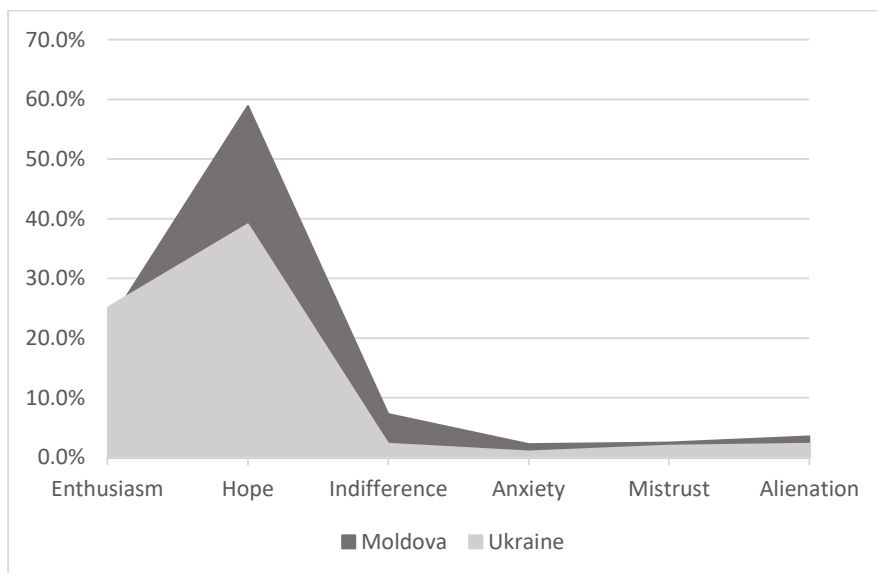


Source: the author's representation based on the survey data

In spite of the rather modest awareness of the EU-driven initiatives in the region indicated by the population from both Ukraine and Republic of Moldova, positive attitudinal trends vis-à-vis the EU prevail. Thus, the EU's image is generally being associated with positive narratives of being 'good' and 'friendly' as well as 'reliable' and 'important' partner (fig. 6).

In particular, references to the EU generate in both countries enthusiasm and hope rather than indifference, anxiety, mistrust or alienation (fig. 7).

Figure 7. Overall feelings concerning the EU



Source: the author's representation based on the survey data

### ***Perceptions and expectations of the EU's actorness***

In the analysed regions of both Ukraine and Republic of Moldova, the EU is mostly associated with democracy (66.6% in Ukraine and 71.6% in Republic of Moldova) and market economy (56.2% in Ukraine and 68.4% in Republic of Moldova). For Republic of Moldova, the other important values linked to the EU's image are solidarity (68.2%), security (68%), human rights (67.7%), health and social protection (67.7%). In Ukraine, the respondents ranked the following EU-driven values as important: human rights (55.5%), economic prosperity (53.2%), health and social protection (50.8%), whereas the percentages for solidarity (38.5%) and security (35.5%) are slightly lacking behind the ones indicated in Republic of Moldova. This might be explained by



the EU's modest role and limited actions to contribute more efficiently to the current security crisis in Ukraine.

In both countries the majority of respondents believes or somewhat believes that the EU is positively perceived by their people (83.9% in Ukraine and 78.3% in Republic of Moldova), that both Ukraine and Republic of Moldova share many common values with the EU (74.2% in Ukraine and 72.3% in Republic of Moldova) and, moreover, have the EU as a model for further development (79% in Ukraine and 87.9% in Republic of Moldova). Particularly, Ukrainians and Moldovans from the border regions see the EU as a positive example of economic development, human rights and freedom of speech. Furthermore, in both Ukraine and Republic of Moldova the EU is perceived as a model for development (table 2), whereas 83.9% of respondents from Ukraine and 88% of respondents from Republic of Moldova find the EU's support very important for advancing reforms in their countries. This shows the attractiveness of the EU's model as it is perceived by the respondents. The majority of respondents have emphasized the important or somewhat important role the EU plays to support the economic development of Ukraine and Republic of Moldova (87% of respondents from Ukraine and 87.7% of respondents from Republic of Moldova) and the significance of the EU's investments (86% of respondents from Ukraine and 83.1% of respondents from Republic of Moldova).

Table 2. The perception of the EU as a model to your country in various domains, %

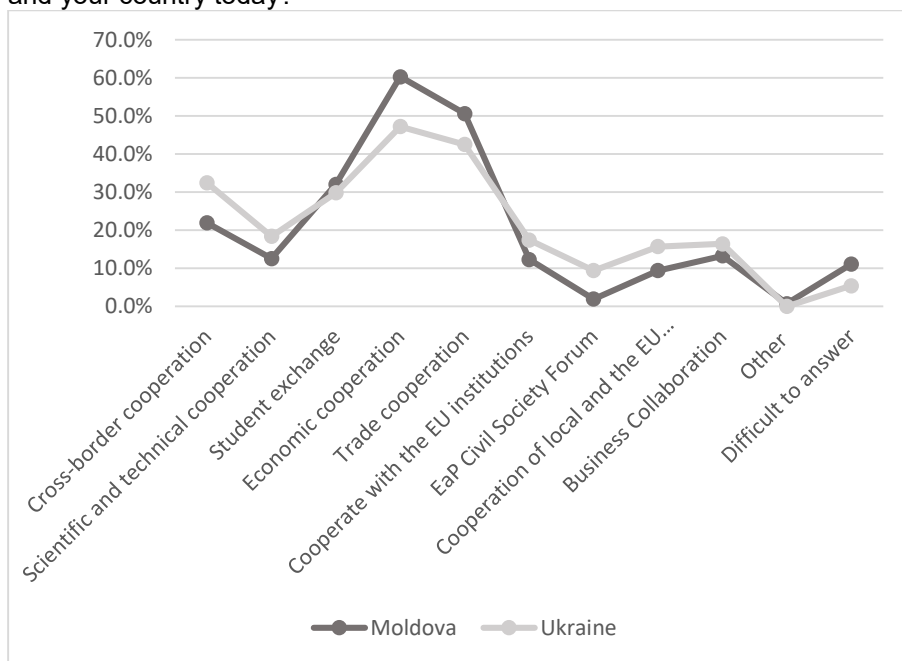
	Republic of Moldova	Ukraine
Rule of law	74.7	80.6
Democracy	75.2	82.6
Fight against corruption	80	76.6
Human rights	80.9	84.6
Political stability	76.8	72.3
Administrative capacity	75.9	74.5
Freedom of speech	78.4	82.9
Economic development	81.6	84.9

Source: the author's representation based on the survey data

Economic and trade cooperation were indicated as the most developed fields of cooperation between the EU and the neighbouring countries, followed by

cross-border cooperation and academic exchanges (figure 8). 76.9% respondents from Ukraine and 84.8% respondents from Republic of Moldova are aware that the EU provides their countries with financial assistance for cross-border cooperation programmes. However, in the mentioned regions which are subjects to and the main beneficiaries from the EU's cross-border cooperation programmes only 32.4% of respondents in Ukraine and 21.9% of respondents in Republic of Moldova see cross-border cooperation as an actively developing area.

Figure 8. What types of cooperation are mostly developing between the EU and your country today?



Source: the author's representation based on the survey data

Finally, the fields of cooperation where the respondents from the Republic of Moldova acknowledged the highest need of support from the EU were the fight against corruption and crime (58.1%), democracy and good governance (45.3%), economic reform and development (35.7%), trade and access to products and/or services (24.3%) and infrastructure development (e.g. roads, water supply, etc.) (21.9%). In Ukraine the absolute priority was given to democracy (78.3%) followed by economic reform and development (49.5%), fight against corruption and crime (33.8%), rule of law (33.1%), trade and access to products and/or services (25.1%).

Overall, the main areas in which respondents believe their countries will benefit the most while cooperating with the EU are the fight against corruption and crime, economic reform and development, democracy and good governance, trade and access to products / services (including health), law supremacy, infrastructure development (roads, water supply, etc.), employment and pensions (figure 9).

Figure 9. Top five areas in which Republic of Moldova / Ukraine will benefit most from the European Union: societal expectations



Source: the author's representation based on the survey data

When assessing the relations between their country and the EU, the majority of respondents consider them as positive. 86.7% of respondents from Ukraine and 89.9% of respondents from Republic of Moldova rank these relations as good or somewhat good. However, they 64.5% of respondents from Ukraine and 76.4% of respondents from Republic of Moldova still believe that their countries should cooperate more actively, while 26.1% and 15.9% are entirely satisfied with the current pace of cooperation. Compared to 2009, the year when both Ukraine and Republic of Moldova joined the Eastern Partnership, the present-day dynamic of the relations with the EU has been mostly perceived as improving (53.8% in Ukraine and 58.1% in Republic of Moldova). Concurrently, 31.8% of respondents from Ukraine and 30.6% of respondents from Republic of Moldova believe that the relations with the EU have not changed much since 2009 despite their countries have significantly

progressed with the European integration, especially after the Association Agreement with the EU was signed.

***Practical recommendations:***

1. Such findings show that the EU values, models of governance or reforms cannot be imposed from the outside, merely searching for optimal formulas at the EU level is clearly not enough. In the general architecture of external relations with its eastern neighbours, the Union has not paid enough attention to the structural needs and expectations of its partners by simply associating the neighbours' interests in development reforms and international opening with the desire to suddenly replicate and transform into a European model of development. In this context, the EU should focus more proactively on societies in the region. Subsequently, such an approach could contribute to a better efficiency of the dialogue and strategic communication between the EU and its neighbours, as a condition of promoting prosperity, stability and security in the region.
2. The general impression is that there is untapped potential at the level of the border regions. Thus, both the EU and the neighbouring states could show political determination and initiative in other fields of mutual interest: economic (e.g. increased attractiveness/improved access to Ukrainian/Moldovan/Belarusian companies on the EU market, which should be linked to reciprocal measures on the neighbours' side; increased people-to-people contacts at joint business forums), political (e.g. assistance in various political and economic domains).
3. So far, the EU has not appeared to be able to sufficiently communicate ('promote') its financial support for the border regions, while at the societal level in the neighbouring countries it seems there is not sufficient awareness about the EU's contribution to various projects (such as, trade and investments, infrastructure, institutionalised expertise.). The EU should increase the visibility of its actions in the eastern neighbourhood and the border regions through a much wider dissemination of information. Moreover, the EU should consider investing more resources in actions that are likely to enhance public awareness. An important field in which the EU should redirect investments is the media segment in the neighbouring countries, which is strongly affected by the quality of information (i.e. numerous cases of disinformation are reported in the neighbouring countries, according to the EU StratCom Task Force). Such a move would entail support for the diversification of the sources of information, support for the independent press, technical assistance for independent journalism, and the transfer of know-how and expertise to improve the legal and regulatory press environment in the

neighbourhood. This support should not be limited to related projects in collaboration with the academia in the neighbourhood countries.

4. The EU should direct its energy into strengthening mobility programs, not only for educational purposes but also for the general population through various people-to-people projects, both through CBC programs and other similar initiatives. This would lead to a better knowledge of the EU and an increase in the attractiveness of its values, principles and development model for the citizens of these countries. Such actions could increase the neighbouring societies' interest in cross-border cooperation programs as key tools EU's goals to strengthen its resilience and that of its neighbours. The EU should orient its funding towards strengthening communication, sharing information and enhancing visibility through CBC tools and programs (although there is conditionality, it should also come along with a strengthening of its tools and instruments).
5. Our findings point out the need for additional investments in human capital development in the Eastern Neighbourhood countries. In this regard, the EU should also focus on increasing the role of additional cooperation networks – such as Jean Monnet or Europe Direct, which can contribute to providing information to the general public and increase the visibility of EU's actions in the region, of its contribution to the development of the economies and societies of the neighbouring countries.
6. All in all, the EU has to make sure that its voice is being heard and that societies 'on the ground' are aware of the EU intentions and are willing to undergo the envisaged transformation. Otherwise, the European Union will not succeed, despite its specific interests and efforts of Europeanisation encompassed in its Neighbourhood Policy agenda, to reduce the border effects of various physical, administrative, economic, cultural, institutional or political barriers nor to considerably reduce the risks of a growing instability at its eastern border, or a deepening of the new dividing lines in Eastern Europe. Cross-border cooperation programs can play an important role in this context, but they must be built on an in-depth knowledge of society and on the manner in which people in these regions envisage development prospects. The raising awareness within the European neighborhood policy of such a conditionality paved the way for the EU's resilience approach.

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