

Eastern Partnership Summit: Kyiv's growing disappointment

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The Eastern Partnership (EaP) Summit took place in Brussels on 15 December, with the first face-to-face meeting in four years between the EU heads of state and government, the President of the European Council, the head of the European Commission, and the leaders of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine (Belarus suspended its participation in the initiative in June 2021 in response to EU sanctions). The aim of the talks was to endorse the long-term assumptions of the EaP policy beyond 2020. The post-summit statement committed to cooperation in five sectors: sustainable and integrated economies; responsible institutions, rule of law and security; environment and climate; digital transformation; gender equality, and a fair and open society. The document also stresses support for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of all the EU's eastern partners, which should be read as both a reference to the ongoing conflict in eastern Ukraine with separatist forces backed by Russia and the current threat of a Russian military assault. Support was also expressed for the Association Trio initiative created by Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, as an additional form of closer cooperation with the EU. Despite Kyiv's aspirations, the statement does not include elements concerning the prospect of EU membership.

Commentary

- The EaP summit provided Ukraine with an opportunity to highlight its growing disillusionment with the EaP formula. The participation in the EaP of states that have not expressed a desire to join the EU (Armenia and Azerbaijan) is seen by Kyiv as an impediment to further deepening cooperation with Brussels. The Association Trio's message, published on the initiative of Ukraine, calls on the EU to support the Trio's actions to join the Community. The authors of the message intend it to provide an impetus to changing the current format in order to take into account the aspirations of these states to a greater extent. For Ukraine, the Association Trio is an instrument for positioning itself as the leader of transformation in the region, which was to be confirmed by a separate meeting of the initiative's members with the heads of 11 EU states, organised during the summit. This will have the effect of further undermining the significance of the EaP on the part of Kyiv, by being seen as a format in which no real political benefits can be gained.
- Behind the scenes of the summit, Volodymyr Zelensky met with President Emmanuel Macron and Chancellor Olaf Scholz. Although as a result it was agreed that negotiations in the Normandy format (NF) will be continued, Zelensky also allowed for other configurations of peace talks: US involvement in the NF, the US–Russia–Ukraine format, and his direct talks with Vladimir Putin. In addition, he appealed to the leaders of France

and Germany to exert pressure on the Kremlin for a full ceasefire in Donbass and an exchange of prisoners of war, and to introduce sanctions against Russia even before it decides to intervene militarily. Kyiv's disappointment with the German government's conservative policy towards Russia was evident, as was the disclosure of information about Germany's blocking of arms supplies to Ukraine as part of the NATO-led NSPA programme. Kyiv is thus trying to persuade Berlin and Paris to support it more forcefully in the peace process and to enable the supply of modern arms to the Ukrainian army.