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Article

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HORIZONTAL OBJECTIVES OF EU PROGRAMMES AND THE SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTEXT FOR EAP MEMBERS

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Abstract: *As the Eastern Partnership (EaP) was founded in 2009, between European Union (EU) and six countries from Eastern Europe, its main goal was to create adequate conditions for economic integration, social and regional development of the EaP country members. Based on the same principles as the EU was built, international law and fundamental values (e.g. human rights, freedom, democracy, rule of law), sustainable development and also good governance, the EaP was regularly analysed and renewed (once every two years) in order to better respond to the needs of Eastern European countries. Even so, while the economic context was especially considered, there are still some actions to be undertaken with regards to socio-cultural factors. Therefore the aim of the paper is to analyse the socio-cultural context of the six Eastern European EaP members (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine) in order to make recommendations regarding their absorption capacity when integrating the horizontal EU objectives into the funding neighbourhood instruments. Our main research question is: what is the right approach for developing operational funding programmes (individual/bilateral or partnership/multilateral participations) for EaP members: is it by maintaining the EU horizontal objective or by adapting these objectives from the beginning considering the socio-cultural context?*

Keywords: socio-cultural context; EaP members; EU horizontal objectives

JEL Classification: O22; O29; O52

Introduction

Every year, the EU activates different instruments and resources in order to support regional development. In 2014, a budget of 550 million euro was allocated within the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) for Eastern Europe, while another 730 million euro were targeted for the next three years, 2015-2017.

The horizontal objectives of European programmes are the key principles relevant to all areas where the EU funds projects. Their purpose is to support the common principles of European development. According to European Commission, the horizontal objectives are: regional development, employment, training, SME, environment, research and innovation. Between 2008 and

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2013 the funding allocation increased for each objective, a high amount of money being constantly allocated to training and for the last three years of the period mentioned above, an increase was registered for environment protection, including energy saving (European Commission, 2014).

Within the EaP, these objectives are indirectly presented through the basic principles: international law and fundamental values. This approach is considered to be an attempt of the EU to become more flexible, more open to dialogue when considering the partnership (Korosteleva, 2013). Among all the horizontal objectives, our research pays particular attention to the following two which could be adapted to the context of EaP member countries: on one hand, it focuses on gender equality and equal opportunities and, on the other, on sustainable development. The reason is that for EaP programmes the focus for intervention is on these secondary horizontal objectives.

Firstly, gender equality refers to equal visibility, autonomy and participation of men and women in various societal roles. In the case of EaP countries, the legal status of women might register some improvements, but a real implementation of the legal framework and having equal opportunities is still limited. Even though women have same rights as men, they do not always have access to same opportunities like men or exercise their rights.

Equal opportunities refer to offering the same chances to achieve an objective, without considering gender, religion, age, vulnerability, sexual orientation issues. Likewise, diversity is a broader concept, and it is used more for organizations. It covers identifying and valuing differences in attitude and values, projects or work experiences. An organization which values diversity treats employees with dignity and respect, and is opened to a wide range of doing things. Both concepts are considered within the EU horizontal objective.

Secondly, sustainable development has a wide range of definitions, but all converge around the same idea, that the present generation should satisfy its needs without compromising the needs of future generations. All programmes and funding instruments of the EU take into consideration this objective which was proposed in 2005 through European Council declaration (Commission of the European Communities, 2005). This objective is operationalised through focusing on other three interconnected objectives: environment protection, social equity and cohesion and economic prosperity.

As such, our paper inquires whether the socio-cultural context of the EaP member countries influences the implementation of the EU programmes and the way in which the countries embrace the EU horizontal objectives. We consider that on one hand, cultural dimensions, like Hofstede's ones, could influence the country's affinity for embracing the horizontal objectives more easily (e.g. masculinity cultural dimension), or the way in which the countries succeed to implement funding

projects. On the other hand, the social factors (e.g. education, poverty, religion, other particular people's needs), may have an impact on the country's ability to attract and manage European funds and also on the country's interest for those funds. Due to the socio-cultural particularities, a more customised funding agenda is required and also better prioritising the EU interventions.

Thus, the paper looks into the way the strategic and horizontal objectives were adapted to each country's socio-cultural context, how they were operationalised and whether prioritising interventions was considered. Looking at the socio-cultural context of the six EaP member countries we have decided to analyse the five cultural dimensions of Hofstede (of the initial model) and their structural impact on the partnership in terms of: strategic objectives implementation (including action plans, administrative infrastructure and projects implemented). Regarding the social indicators, the most relevant two indicators which have been considered are the "ease of doing business" and "corruption", since the two are directly linked to the operationalisation of the funding programmes and the implementation of projects.

As far as the methodology concerns, a descriptive-exploratory analysis was conducted which focused, firstly, on identifying and describing the socio-cultural variables, and, secondly, on the possible link between these variables and the two horizontal objectives chosen (sustainable development and gender equality and equal opportunities). Moreover, a qualitative design was employed, along with documentary analysis and comparison techniques in order to identify the level of adaptation and operationalisation of horizontal objectives within the ENP funding instruments. The documentary stage was conducted considering three levels of impact of the EaP documents: strategic objectives (strategic), action plans (tactic) and projects implemented (operational). With this aim, we paid particular attention to country strategies (2007-2017), progress reports (2010-2015), memos, brochures and projects dealing with the ENP/EaP¹. The projects considered for analyses were those presented on the ENI official website.

After gathering the data, we analysed it from the horizontal objectives point of view, in order to see if a possible influence of the socio-cultural context should be considered when operationalising them through the EaP. A comparison between the progress registered and the socio-cultural variables chosen for each EaP member country was made in order to identify the main similarities and discrepancies. In the end, the countries were ranked according to their scores for each of the seven socio-cultural variables taken into consideration - ease of doing business, corruption, power distance,

¹ The information regarding projects from each country were collected from the European Union External Action Service website: <http://eeas.europa.eu>.

individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, long term orientation - in order explain (using content and logical analysis) the socio-cultural influence on ENP programmes implementation.

All the results obtained could represent the starting point in developing insights into the way the EU should integrate horizontal objectives into neighbourhood funding instruments, considering the cultural and social particularities of the six countries, including specific adaptations. The recommendations emerged also from the existing pressures and challenges of other EU countries, in order to help the EaP members' transition be more satisfactory and the East-West partnership behaviour – in terms of motivation and availability of projects initiatives - be more predictable.

1. EU horizontal objectives and socio-cultural aspects of the six membership countries

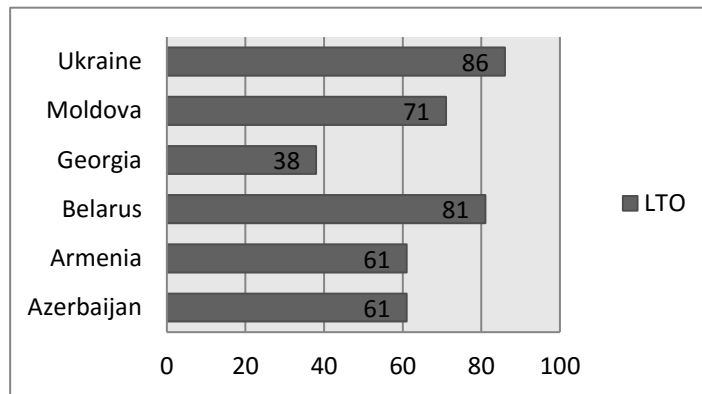
The link between few cultural variables and one EU horizontal objective (sustainable development) was previously analysed for 21 European countries, including some of the EaP countries (Ukraine and Moldova), and some relations were emphasized (Talmaciu, 2015). However, the socio-cultural factors of the six EaP country members and their influence on the two horizontal objectives considered have not yet been researched. We also consider that further investigation is necessary around cultural dimensions chosen as variables, as Hofstede cultural dimensions are the ones which are currently used.

In his studies, Hofstede shows that cultural differences depend on a dominant social paradigm even though some alternative or opposite sub-cultures exist, considering the values shared. His research included the following variables: power distance; individualism - collectivism; masculinity - femininity; uncertainty avoidance, long term orientation and indulgence. According to Kaasa (2013) above average scores for masculinity (competition) is registered in Azerbaijan, Armenia, Moldova and Georgia, while Belarus and Ukraine are focused more on life quality issues, having lower scores for this dimension. Regarding uncertainty avoidance, high scores are registered for Georgia, Moldova and Armenia, rather low scores for Ukraine and Belarus and extremely low for Azerbaijan. According to these results we may assume that the state institutions (including the ones managing European funds) from the first countries mentioned above could operate with more specific rules and have a higher level of bureaucracy.

Many studies (e.g. Balanh and Hesapci, 2015) correlate sustainable development with long term orientation, defined by Hofstede (2005) as the strength to be oriented to future rewards, ability proved through determination and moderation. A low score for long term orientation define the short term

orientation, which refers to past and present country/individuals orientation, high respect for customs, gaining social responsibility and keeping appearances.

Figure 1 - Long-term orientation for EaP membris



Source: AFS International Programs, [Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions VALUES.pdf](#)

According to Figure 1, long term orientation dimension registers relatively lower scores for the countries which are more normative and conservative (Azerbaijan, Armenia). Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine have above average scores, which could be favourable for implementing European projects, in general and for sustainable development objective, in particular. Georgia registers the lowest score for this dimension among the six countries, that could have a direct or indirect impact on sustainable development or it may have an influence on the way the funding system is operationalised.

Research has shown that the majority of the Orthodox and post-communist countries (the case of five of the EaP member countries) are considered having an average score for the tradition-authority dimension and a dominant score for the ‘survival’ dimension (as opposed to the countries with a high capacity of self-expression) (Inglehart *et al.*, 2004). For developed countries authority models have usually replaced the traditional component of hierarchical style with a friendlier one (Inglehart *et al.*, 2004). A comparison “masculinity”- “femininity” was made considering the way social interaction happens: while men are tempted to emphasize competition, women tend to emphasize cooperation; while men tend to emphasize dominance, women tend to have a driving style more focused on support (Minikov, 2013).

For reasons that are rooted in the nature of advanced societies, the "female" leadership style tends to be less effective than the hierarchical (masculine) style, which previously prevailed. Cultural changes associated with changing gender roles and "feminization" of leadership styles (emphasizing self-expression) are closely related to the spread of democratic institutions.

Beside indicators used in the literature (demography, employability, health, culture, education, corruption index, doing business, local identity and citizen safety), the socio-cultural context was explained also through the ideological reference model developed by Todd.

In his study, the anthropologist Todd (1985) focuses on explaining the relations between the philosophy of family and social systems, showing that family relationships extend into society especially considering the relationship between the individual and authority. The family shapes the worldview for children, furthermore generations reproduce beliefs and values absorbed, and the system is self-preserving. Those values create outline expectations that the individual has which should come from social, economic and political relationships, all beyond his family. Political ideologies resulted are nothing but family relationships, extrapolated to another scale.

For example, in egalitarian family, specific to Latin America, Poland, Romania, Greece, Portugal and Southern Spain, there was a permanent tension between individualism (progressing on their own) and equality to inheritance (their right to family inheritance). The result is a contradiction at the society level, between liberal democracy and centralized bureaucracy, which can generate anarchy / militarization. This can be found also in Moldova, Belarus, Georgia, Ukraine and Armenia considering that these countries are Orthodox and former communist. Tackling horizontal objectives could have the same resonance as in the case of Romania - the same reactions regarding including women in the disadvantaged group on the enrolment forms for the target groups, may appear.

In Azerbaijan, families are endogamous and they are characterized by rules on inheritance, cohabitation of married children with their parents, and through frequent marriages between cousins. This anthropological reality exists apparently under the influence of Islam, focusing on known groups or clans. The authority is represented by the father, relations are more horizontal than hierarchical, and relationships with siblings are the most salient (Todd, 1985). Islamic tradition recognizes two institutions as being fundamental: religion and family. Therefore, the State and administrative entities are less relevant, and this approach leads to political fragmentation (Todd, 1985). Islamism rejects the Western approach that sustains the individual is separate from his family and state (and follows his life), and also the communist approach through which the individual is separate from his family as he/she is loyal to the state (Todd, 1985). Instead, Islamism recognized two levels of social integration: family and religion community. The values, norms, beliefs and paradigms are not just beliefs, but guidelines for action and legitimacy, functioning often as ideologies (Todd, 1985). As such, in this country we expect that a better EaP functionality will involve adapting horizontal objectives according to these visions.

2. EU and EaP membership countries cooperation and horizontal objectives operationalization

Because of its complex nature of multi-level structure of governance, analysing the EU horizontal objectives operationalisation within the EaP is rather challenging. However, a brief analysis of each country member was conducted considering, first, the strategic objectives proposed, second, the way state institutions are developed in order to accommodate the EaP requirements, and, third, the nature and purpose of the projects funded and implemented through ENI financial schemes.

2.1. Armenia

EC and Armenia's contractual relationships started in 1996 and entered into force in 1999. The two parts signed a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement which was implemented through an Action Plan in 2006. For the 2006-2013 period the cooperation was focused on five strategic objectives, out of which four can be directly linked to the two horizontal objectives taken into consideration in this paper. These objectives are in the area of political dialogue and reform, economic and social reform, poverty reduction and sustainable development, cooperation in specific sectors, including transport, energy, environment and people-to-people contacts with a focus on education and health.

The Action Plan focused on eight priorities most of them referring to developing the legal framework for democracy and economic development, strengthening respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and reducing poverty. However, considering the annual country progress reports, the progress seemed to be rather limited in most areas of intervention. Considerable efforts were made for human rights, sustainable democracy and offering better social services, but the results are still far from being satisfactory. Efforts have been undertaken to introduce a law for discrimination and domestic violence (equal opportunities), however, no framework for complaints was developed, thus complaining about inequality remains limited to social media and internet (European Commission, 2015a). The 2014 EC progress report underlines a concern regarding inequality between women and men motivated by "deeply rooted patriarchal attitudes and stereotypes" that easily determine high levels of domestic violence (European Commission, 2015a, p. 8).

Considering the projects that were funded through ENI, out of 57 projects classified in six areas of interest (which were directly linked to the two horizontal objectives considered), most of them (31 projects) were on governance, democracy and human rights and support for economic and institution

reforms. Gender equality was directly linked with three projects totalising 1.35 million euro. The projects focused more on establishing and developing proper administrative capacity, migration issues, as well as on justice challenges.

Furthermore, great financial support was directed to projects that directly focused on developing better management for migration services and increasing awareness of human rights issues (mistreatment in prisons, at work and issues concerning children's rights). Regarding the sustainable development objective, the projects funded encouraged natural agriculture development, adopting sustainable technologies and food security.

The primary objectives for the next funding period (2014-2017) remain the same: poverty reduction, good governance and greater respect for human rights. It is expected that by the end of 2016 the anti-discrimination law and the law on domestic violence and equal rights and opportunities will be adopted and will also start to be rigorously implemented.

2.2. Azerbaijan

Under the agreement with the EU, in Azerbaijan most programmes and projects were aimed at strengthening state and civil society institutions and tackling some of the challenges existing at social level, challenges related to education, economic development, energy, food quality, justice, poverty reduction (EU Neighbourhood Info Centre, 2011).

Thus, during 2006-2014 several projects directly related to sustainable economic development were focused on capacity building and also towards investment in less developed regions. Among the most relevant actions in the field is "Support to the Ministry of Economic Development 2009 -2011" programme, having specific objectives for improving human resource management within the ministry and also for analysing the impact of the oil-led economic growth and prospects for economic development of non-oil sectors. Other approaches have included Support to Investment and Export Climate, targeting economy diversity, energy reforms, agriculture and rural development. Considering projects that have focused on civil society organizations, relevant for sustainable development has been "The Adult Training Centres as an Opportunity for Poverty Reduction, Education and Social Inclusion - COPE" project has been relevant for sustainable development, having objectives that stimulates increased employability and social inclusion in rural areas of Azerbaijan. Other projects relevant for sustainable development referred to: strengthening 20 village municipalities capability to provide public services in rural areas from central Azerbaijan as a result of a partnership between local authorities, civil society; developing several community approaches in

six disadvantaged regions in rural Azerbaijan for a healthy environment and poverty reduction issues, as a result of best practices exchange with other regions having successful projects.

Regarding environmental protection, some indicators show an improvement, others a worsened situation (Spurgeon *et al.*, 2011). Within the Eastern Partnership framework there were no relevant projects conducted in this area, but the specific objectives were achieved indirectly through projects from the action Promoting Development of Sustainable Energy in Azerbaijan.

Another set of projects was directly oriented towards providing administrative support and legislative and institutional harmonization in order to facilitate implementing and monitoring of the European programmes. Thus, a specific example in this context is the programme called Technical Assistance to the Energy Reform Support Programme in Azerbaijan, which was meant to be a support for "Mechanism of Disbursement of funds by the European Commission Transferred to the State Budget of the Republic of Azerbaijan for Programmes Implemented under the ENP". Other projects were aimed at increasing the capacity of civil society to develop plans in partnership with local communities that would help developing and promoting initiatives with direct results on community development and other urgent issues.

Very few projects have focused on gender equality (and when the topic was approached that was in an indirect manner), while no project was geared directly toward that goal. All the steps taken were for supporting and strengthening the administrative capacity of civil society to address social issues in general. Among the relevant projects there are "Support to the enhancement of the capacity of the Ombudsman administration and to the development of awareness on Human Rights and Discrimination", "Strengthening civil society message - meeting the needs of disabled children and their families" and "Improving legal environment and organizational capacity of civil society organizations in Azerbaijan". Quasi-absence of the actions taken in this area is noteworthy, even though the country indicators regarding equal opportunity and gender do not suggest a favourable situation. The last progress report shows that the national plan for gender equality is at drafting stage, more consistent actions being needed in this area (EU Neighbour Info Centre, 2015).

2.3. Belarus

Even though Belarus represents one of the six country members of EaP, it does not fully participate in the ENP. In spite of establishing a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement in 1995, the contractual relations were frozen in 1997. However, the cooperation between the EU and Belarus continues in the fields of democracy, education and economic development, being directly linked to

the minimum civil society needs. Information about the country progress is briefly described in annual memos where the main contribution of EU is presented.

Most of the initiatives were multilateral, the country being involved in regional projects related to environment, education and cross-border cooperation. There are 11 projects presented on the ENI official website, among which more than half were or are implemented by United Nations Development Programme. The projects with less than 1 million budget were implemented by other local entities, while all the United Nations Development Programme projects have budgets larger than 1 million euro. The initiatives directly addressed social needs, like health related issues, education and also environment issues like green economy development for sectors like energy, agriculture, sustainable tourism.

The bilateral assistance to Belarus for the current period (2014-2017) focuses on the same issues underlined before: the environment, social inclusion and local and regional economic development. A total amount of 19 million euro were committed to Belarus for modernisation of vocational schools and training system in order to facilitate labour market insertion and also assisting an university to function (13.5 million euro) and support to civil society and developing an independent media (5.5 million euro).

Despite the fact that Belarus is a highly centralised country and the level of corruption is high, the EU continues to offer support also through continuous dialogue with the civil society, developing different online platforms in order to facilitate reforms development, including a legal framework for easier international cooperation.

2.4. Georgia

The contractual relationship between EC and Georgia started in similar conditions to those between EC and Armenia and were based on a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement from 1999. Starting with 2006, an ENP Action Plan was approved for a period of five years.

The EU-Georgia partnership relied on five strategic objectives, among which, four of them are from the same areas of objectives as in the case of Armenia, meaning: a mutually beneficial partnership promoting Georgia's transition, the smooth implementation of the ENP and the EU-Georgia ENP Action Plan, security challenges and development policy objectives. In addition there is also an energy security and diversification objective, through which new sources of energy, including green ones are prospected. Regarding the two EU horizontal objectives considered in the paper, they are directly linked with the last three objectives. For example security challenges refers

to offering help in reconstructing different areas from the conflict zones in order to offer a sustainable development. Also the objectives referring to development policy align to the three main principles of EU: poverty reduction, promoting good governance and greater respect for human rights.

The priorities of the Action Plan are similar to those of EU-Armenia, the difference coming from the hierarchical order, having economic development and business climate improvement among the first positions. Analysing progress reports from 2010-2015, it appears that Georgia made some visible progress even from the beginning, regarding democracy and human rights as many relevant laws were adopted and implemented, creating a proper framework to work against corruption, discrimination and other inequalities. The last available report concludes that important achievements were made especially in the area of fundamental rights, including equal opportunities, while cooperation with civil society continued. A special action plan on gender issues was also proposed and integrated into human rights action plan in order to prevent and combat violence against women (including domestic violence).

However, the most oppressive social priority remains the poverty level of population, as one third of the population lives below the poverty line, high differences being registered between various country regions (European Commission, 2015c). Georgia's economy grew slowly after 2013, but by the end of 2014 it was expected to downsize again. In this context, among approximately 100 projects funded through ENI mechanism between 2006-2015, many projects addressed sustainable economic development issue indirectly, focusing more on developing collaboration between institutions, and on facilitating integration into society of former prisoners, minorities, children, women (vulnerable groups in general) without giving specific details regarding the integration measures. Projects were framed into the same six relevant sections like for Armenia, although a special section dedicated to environment and sustainable management of natural resources was added. Besides the administrative capacity and infrastructure development, a clear focus was also on children's rights, education and protection. Few projects could be directly linked to women's rights issues, including diminishing domestic violence, most of the progress being registered within the legal framework.

The most remarkable initiatives considering sustainable development objectives were registered in *environment and sustainable management of natural resources* sector where five projects on climate change were implemented. The projects covered all countries from South of Caucasians and addressed the biodiversity issues, proposing intervention solutions/plans for diminishing the effects of climate change. A total amount of approx. 4 million euros was allocated for 2011-2014, and countries like Armenia and Azerbaijan were also beneficiaries.

2.5. Moldova

Moldova has a clear orientation towards European horizontal objectives (Government of Republic of Moldova, 2013), because out of the eight long-term development goals, three refer to equal opportunities (ensuring access to compulsory education; promoting gender equality and professional development and empowerment for women; improving maternal health) and five of them to sustainable development (eradicate poverty and hunger; reducing child mortality; combating HIV / AIDS and tuberculosis; ensuring environmental sustainability; creating a global partnership for development).

A discrepancy can, however, be noticed between these strategic objectives, monitored through regular reports, and the 2020 National Strategy (Republic of Moldova Parliament, 2012), where the priorities are the economic objectives and measures. Another deficiency was that in some areas, strategic coordination was unsatisfactory, having major investments without adequate logistic support, which led to funds obstruction and lack of conclusive results.

As for the legal framework - building administrative systems for better implementation and monitoring of programs - significant progress has been made in the 2006-2014 period. Legislative harmonization between Moldova and the EU is planned to last ten years, until now 20% of the specific actions being covered (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration of Moldova, 2016). A strong partnership with the civil society was developed, many of the projects being initiated and/or implemented by NGOs or different consortiums.

Orientation towards gender equality and opportunities is demonstrated through multiple projects having women as target group, or through diligent monitoring of gender indicators and of the progress registered in the field. Moldova is placed on an honourable 10th place, considering the women managers indicator, as 44.1% of managers are women (International Labour Organization, 2015). The target indicators regarding the percentage of women in decision making structures are similar to those of the EU, a legislative initiative that proposes a quota of 40% women in political structures being in a draft stage.

Regarding sustainable development projects there are wide issues addressed, from funding and supporting citizens' information centres in terms of responsible consumption, to environmental protection and afforestation, to poverty combating and developing competencies needed on the labour market, especially for young people.

2.6. Ukraine

Ukraine case is a very special case. If at the starting point of the partnership the country's progress has been significant, similar or, in some areas, even superior to the other EaP countries (Moldova and Georgia), after the exacerbated political problems there was a slowdown and even a sharp reduction of actions aimed at achieving the objectives agreed in cooperation with the EU.

Regarding ongoing projects with European funding, Ukraine proved to be an active player, implementing numerous projects especially in the field of good governance support and human rights, and also water and energy area. Some projects were funded in partnership with Moldova, Belarus and Romania, or with other countries with common borders, this situation offering an advantage in identifying common issues that led themselves to common solutions.

As for the projects implemented, out of more than 100 projects presented on the official ENI website, only one project directly focused on equality and gender opportunities (Equal opportunities for young mother -students in getting profession in higher education establishment). Considering sustainable development, efforts were directed especially to rural areas and on supporting biodiversity and protected areas. Within the last two years the EaP funding focused more on civil society demands in order to help them become involved in the decision-making process of the community.

Because of suspending most funding directions, until clarifying the strategic framework at political and legal level, it is difficult to frame this country in the structural matrix of collaboration within EaP – the following steps taken by this country will be critical.

Conclusions

The original research question of the present paper referred to prioritising the EU intervention in the context of the extremely complex EU non-member countries, and, especially, to what extent adapting of strategic and horizontal objectives, is considered in order to match with the socio-cultural context of the EaP countries.

The issue of prioritization is becoming salient considering the increasingly restrictive framework of EU support in the EaP region: limited funds, critical monitoring system and access to the data, discrepancies between the EU and the partner countries legislation, lack of competent human resources in project management field and, polarized economic areas, with multiple regions dominated by poverty and social problems. Difficulties in prioritization also identified in the EU member states, leads to a waste of EU funds, diminished confidence in the effectiveness of

community programs, demotivation of groups involved in supporting these programmes and a lack of sustainability of project results. Within the matrixed balance – already extremely fragile – between the thematic, functional priorities, on one hand, which are so important in the first stage of strengthening an effective system, as being considered by EU, and horizontal priorities considered like a burden of community interventions, on the other hand, the specific constraints of the socio-cultural context of the partner countries bring increased difficulties in setting appropriate, tailored and sustainable solutions.

Considering these difficulties we align with the solution proposed by Slusarciuc (2014), who emphasized the need for covering several steps when making priorities at national level, among which a stakeholder consulting phase is very important (Slusarciuc, 2014).

Another challenge is represented by the efficiency of management systems for national programs implementation. The progress reports of all the six partner countries underline the difficulty of the funding system: partial involvement of institutions in assuming European objectives; loss of institutional memory, with the political changes; skipping different phases, because of misunderstanding the importance of a minimal mandatory infrastructure needed to cover priorities more specifically to developed EU countries; lack of databases and poor access to information; lack of some key indicators; more focus on formal aspects using quantitative approach; financial and human resource constraints; partnership with civil society non-existent or cumbersome. However, on average, the EU funding absorption rate, for all the six countries, is considered to be satisfactory, being registered a percentage of 67%, until 2014.

Regarding the seven variables describing socio-cultural context of the EaP members, the six countries were ranked considering their positive influence on attracting the EU funds. Thus for the indicators: ‘doing business’, ‘power distance’, ‘masculinity’, ‘uncertainty avoidance’, and ‘long term orientation’ smaller scores represented better ranking, while for the rest a smaller score represented a lower ranking. The results are presented in the appendix.

As a result of the qualitative analysis, two sets of conclusions could be underlined, conclusions that should be considered as hypothesis for the next research. First, regarding the interest in projects that support horizontal objectives, the most interesting initiatives were those from Moldova and Georgia, as they had a large number of projects that were directly linked to the two horizontal objectives. Also high scores for long term orientation, variable that could easily be tied up to sustainable development could predict an interest for this type of projects (Moldova, Armenia, and Azerbaijan). The case of Belarus could be considered special, as they have other political issues that have an overwhelming influence on the EU funding relations. The interest for developing gender and

equal opportunities policies may be also explained through a lower or medium score for masculinity cultural dimension, as registered for Georgia and Moldova.

On the other hand, a short term orientation could be associated with the capability of being efficient and flexible, competences that help to better project implementation, and thus, more funds attracted (like the case of Georgia). Also a higher score for individualism cultural dimension could set the scene for the mechanism of funding competition. Again, Georgia represents a good example in this case too.

The second set of conclusions should refer to the implementation system coherence and efficiency. Therefore it should be mentioned that having a centralized system and bureaucracy may raise some challenges at operational level. This situation may also occur in countries with high scores for power distance and uncertainty avoidance, in our case Belarus and Ukraine. In association with high level of corruption, it is easy to assume that these countries have difficulties in developing an efficient and coherence system.

The issues raised in this section could represent a starting point for a research paper where the hypothesis could be tested. However, considering the progress reports and projects implemented by each country, it is obvious that Moldova and Georgia made the most remarkable progress, followed by Armenia and Azerbaijan.

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Appendix

Table 1 – EaP country members ranking considering the scores of socio-cultural variables

Country	Doing business	Corruption index	Power distance	Individualism	Masculinity	Uncertainty avoidance	Long term orientation
Armenia	2	2	3	2	5	3	3
Azerbaijan	5	5	3	3	6	1	3
Belarus	3	4	5	4	1	2	6
Georgia	1	1	1	1	3	5	1
Moldova	4	3	1	4	4	6	5
Ukraine	6	6	6	4	2	3	2

Source: Created by the authors based on Hofstede (2010), Kassa (2013), European indicators (2016)