

# EU Lawmakers Push For More Robust Eastern Partnership

BRUSSELS — EU lawmakers are pushing for an end to international data roaming charges between the EU and Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine, a trust fund for Ukrainian investment, and possibly more sanctions on Russia ahead of a summit in Brussels in November.

According to a draft report of the European Parliament's recommendations to other EU institutions such as the European Commission and the European Council regarding the Eastern Partnership (Eap) in the run-up to the Eastern Partnership summit in Brussels in November, the chamber wants "an attractive 'EaP+' model for associated countries" that could include such things as "additional unilateral tariff preferences, the abolition of roaming tariffs between the partners and the EU, and the development of high-capacity broadband."

The paper, which was seen by RFE/RL, also states that the EaP+ model could be offered to the other three Eastern Partnership countries — Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Belarus — "once they are ready for such enhanced commitments."

## 'Roam Like Home'

The European Union abolished roaming charges for its 28 member states in June after over a decade of legislative and political wrangling.

Whereas much of the parliament's wish list is unrealistic at the moment, the issue of extending the "roam-like-home" provision to Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine is something that has been discussed by EU diplomats, according to several RFE/RL sources close to the talks who were not authorized to speak on the record.

The idea would be to announce at the summit that the EU and its partners want to abolish roaming charges, but also to caution people about how long such a move took to achieve in the EU.

The draft, which first will be discussed at a meeting in the European Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee on September 14, also suggests that "the commission, together with the European Investment Bank (EIB), propose arrangements for the implementation of a new European Investment Plan for Ukraine and other

Eastern Partnership countries that have made the most progress on reforms.”

The paper suggests an unspecified increase in the lending capacity of the EIB from today’s 1.6 billion euros per year and a trust fund for Ukraine, stressing that the fund “should focus on private and public investments, in particular on social and economic infrastructure and those aimed at boosting investment absorption capacity.”

#### ‘Sustaining Unity’ On Russia

On Russia sanctions, the European lawmakers “commit to sustaining the unity of action among EU member states in maintaining collective pressure on Russia, in particular through strengthened targeted restrictive measures.”

The text also endorses “reestablishing Ukraine’s full sovereignty in Crimea, and that of Georgia in South Ossetia and Abkhazia and of Moldova in [Transdniestar], and...putting an end to the additional threats of state-sponsored assassinations, cyberwarfare, disinformation, and other types of destabilization.”

Russia illegally annexed Ukraine’s Crimea region in 2014. It unilaterally recognized the breakaway Georgian regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia following a brief war with Georgia in 2008. And Moscow maintains troops in Moldova’s breakaway Transdniestar region over the repeated objections of the Moldovan authorities.

#### ‘Brussels Declaration’

The European Parliament report could be amended before its likely endorsement by the full plenary in November, but the main goal is to put as much pressure as possible on the commission and those EU member states that are less enthusiastic about the Eastern Partnership.

The EU member states are currently debating the “Brussels declaration,” which will be the official working document to be adopted by participants at the summit.

The current discussion about the draft declaration among EU diplomats focuses on whether one should include a sentence about “the acknowledgement of the European aspirations” of countries such as Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, which all have long-term aims of one day joining the bloc and already have functioning association agreements with Brussels as well as visa liberalization.

This sentence was included in the Riga declaration from the last Eastern Partnership summit in 2015, but both Germany and the Netherlands have so far been reluctant to commit to such language, according to EU diplomats familiar with the talks who asked for anonymity due to the sensitivity of the discussions.

The European Parliament text is clearer in endorsing the partners' future EU aspirations by referring to Article 49 of the EU treaty on enlargement and noting: "Any European state may apply to become a member of the European Union, provided it adheres to the Copenhagen criteria and the principles of democracy, that it respects fundamental freedoms and human and minority rights, and that it upholds the rule of law."

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