

To achieve tangible results in democratic reforms, the European Institutions need to adopt more tailored and adopted approaches to the countries of the Eastern Partnership by using more effective tools and leverage when elaborating policies **dealing with the shortcomings in the field of democratic reforms**. I also advocate for more tangible support to the civil society if political elites in place fail to provide more democracy.

Countries of the Eastern Partnership tackle issues with democracy differently based on different realities in place. Ignoring those **individual** dynamics means creating more problems rather than fixing the existing ones.

Let's for example take the case of Belarus. Belarus is the only Eastern Partnership country whose membership to the Council of Europe was stopped almost two decades ago for known reasons. While using sanctions can work for a country, like Iran and it can be harmful for another. Although there are now fewer cases of detentions of journalists and administrative fines, internet becomes more widespread, and political prisoners have been released, the European policies towards Belarus still remain drastic instead of using more flexible tools and less radical approaches. Obviously, there is still a long way to go to tackle a number of shortcomings and challenges in the field of democracy and human rights, but it would be more effective to provide more venues of cooperation and dialogue, especially with the civil society rather than pushing the country away from opportunities and creating more isolation for a country which is already under Russian pressure. The longer the punishment and isolation last, the more the effectiveness is low and gives local authorities more time to maneuver and to get adapted to sanctions.

In case of Azerbaijan, the European Parliament rightly and clearly adopted a resolution condemning the persecution of human rights defenders. **To some, this resolution has also a political dimension in the context of Azerbaijan's visible move towards Russia**. However, failing to provide other soft options of pressure in the long term, can radicalize Azerbaijan, render it more repressive and it can become even more threatening to Armenia's and Nagorno-Karabagh Republic's security and to its own people as well.

A differentiated approach was needed for Armenia as well when Armenia was on the verge to lose almost irreversibly its European integration after Armenia's sudden U-turn towards Russia just before the Vilnius Summit in 2013 under certain circumstances. **To some, this unfortunate choice can be explained, among others, by the lack of fully effective and tailored approaches and alternatives provided by the European institutions**. But fortunately, the European Institutions got the point and didn't stop cooperating with Armenia, which despite an internal discontent and lack of domestic approval became part of the Eurasian Economic Union. The European institutions should continue the implementation of their policies and pay even more attention to strengthening the civil society in Armenia as a more effective and vibrant alternative to less democracy in place. **This is true for other Eastern Partnership countries as well**.

The use of sticks and carrots shouldn't be limited to sticks only. For some countries, this can lead to facing a dilemma with no alternative. I am convinced that more cooperation with countries with less democracy and the implementation of more inclusive policies can be beneficial for all sides.