

# THE IMPLICATIONS OF EUROPEAN NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICY ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM IN EASTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

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## Abstract

*The sustainable development of the tourism in the Eastern Partnership countries is closely dependent on solving problems of common interest that can be managed only by promoting bilateral or multilateral cooperation relations. Thus, appropriate policies regarding the following areas can be adopted: integrated management of the borders and of the movement of people (tourists), integrated management of the environment and of the ecosystems, the interconnection of the transport networks, the development and integration of regional tourist markets under the conditions of environmental protection and cultural heritage preservation, the promotion of good practices in terms of sustainability in tourism.*

*The present study aims to identify and analyse the implications of the initiatives adopted within the European Neighbourhood Policy on the sustainable development of tourism. For this purpose the authors made use of programming documents and reports of the European Commission, as well as statistical reports on tourism development in these countries.*

**Keywords:** eastern partnership, neighbourhood policy, tourism, sustainable development

## Introduction

The issue of sustainable development is a particularly important one on the agenda of international and European institutions. The Green Deal Strategy for the period 2019-2024 adopted by the European Commission encourages the economic sectors to propose projects, products and services that contribute to sustainable

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development. In this context, for the 2019-2024 programming period, interregional and cross-border cooperation initiatives that aims the sustainable development of tourism in the Eastern Partnership (EPA) countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine) will be encouraged and supported (Tambovceva *et al.*, 2020).

Depending on the availability and attractiveness of tourist resources and participation in international tourist flows, the countries of the former communist bloc from Central and Eastern Europe can be considered as emerging on the international and European tourism market and have significant growth rates of tourism (Băndoi *et al.*, 2020).

In the last 3 decades, tourism has played and continues to play an important role in the development of many countries, while in the case of some developing countries it is the main source of development. Thus, according to the UNWTO (World Tourism Organization, 2020), international tourist flows tripled between 1995 and 2019, growing from 530 million to 1457.7 million.

The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), launched in 2004, aims to improve prosperity (welfare), stability and security among the neighbouring countries of the European Union (EU) by establishing effective partnerships with them, in order to eliminate any demarcation line with its southern and eastern neighbours. The EU Partnership Agreement provides privileged relations with neighbouring countries, based on mutual commitment to respect for common values: democracy and human rights, the promotion of the rule of law and good governance, the implementation of market economy principles and sustainable development. In this way, the EU's neighbouring countries are more strongly involved in European policies, and by encouraging cooperation between them they can benefit from political association, deeper integration of economies, increased mobility and people-to-people contacts, which foster tourism development and transfer of know-how (Kostanyan, 2017).

In the context of the ENP, regional and multilateral cooperation initiatives between the EU and Eastern European countries have been implemented: Eastern Partnership (EaP) launched in Prague in 2009 and Black Sea Synergy launched in Kiev in 2008. To support multilateral cooperation projects, the European Neighbourhood Partnership Instrument (ENPI) has been set up to finance various actions in the following areas: justice and public administration reform, agriculture and rural development, education and private sector development; aiming to improve cooperation relations with the six member states of the Eastern Partnership, including the Russian Federation (European Commission, 2015). The aim is to reduce the disparities between the EU and the countries with which it has direct borders.

In 2014, three of the member countries of the Eastern Partnership (ENP East) - Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine - signed Association Agreements and The Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements with the EU, and in 2017 Armenia concluded negotiations with the EU to sign such agreements, while Azerbaijan



started negotiations. By signing these agreements, the European Union provides financial support to achieve the objectives set out in the action plans, encourages economic integration and access to European Union markets, facilitates travel to Member States and provides technical assistance and political support (Eurostat, 2018).

In this context, the signing of agreements and the liberalization of travel visas yields many beneficial results: supporting democracy and European integration processes in Eastern Partnership countries, stimulating trade relations and economic activities, increasing tourist flows and people-to-people contacts, limiting the flow of illegal migrants in the EU, increased credibility in relations with the EU and trust between partners (Kostanyan, 2017; Dumas and Goldner Lang, 2015).

Thus, structural reforms have been encouraged to support economic development, to improve economic governance, to attract foreign direct investment and to increase economic resilience. Between 2009 and 2019, more than 125,000 small and medium-sized enterprises from EaN countries benefited directly from EU funding, more than 25,000 new jobs were created and 11 billion in investment funds were mobilized (European Commission, 2020).

According to the results of the annual survey conducted in 2019 among citizens of the 6 EAP member countries, which aims to study their perceptions of relations with the EU, the top 3 places among the areas that must play the most important role are: promoting economic development (50%), creating better employment opportunities (34%), reducing corruption (32%). The growth of tourism ranks ninth in the top of priorities with a share of 14%. Regarding the most important positive effect of EU support to EaN countries, 61% of respondents indicated an increase in tourism, followed by better access to goods and services (56%), and improved market conditions (54%). The distribution by countries of the percentages of citizens who indicated the increase of tourism as the most important positive effect was as follows: Georgia - 85%, Azerbaijan - 70%, Armenia - 68%, Belarus - 58%, Ukraine - 58%, Moldova - 48% (EU Neighbours East, 2019).

Through this study, the authors aim to identify the policies and initiatives adopted by the member countries of the Eastern Partnership, in order to increase the contribution of tourism to sustainable regional development. At the same time, they aim to analyze the implications of the identified initiatives on the development of tourism, by maximizing the positive effects in economic and social terms and minimizing the negative effects on the environment and cultural heritage. Programmatic documents and reports of the European Commission on the development of partnership and cross-border cooperation relations with the countries on the eastern border of the European Union were used for this purpose. Also, it was made use of information on the initiatives taken by the 6 Member States together with the EU, in order to find solutions to the chronic problems facing the countries in the region: security and territorial integrity, social cohesion and security of citizens, energy dependence, resilience and development of economies, the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary, the fight against corruption. At the same time, statistics on the development of tourism in these countries were used.



## 1. Sustainable tourism development in the context of cross-border cooperation

The issue of sustainability in tourism has attracted the interest of representatives of academia, but also those responsible for developing tourism policies in the public or private sector and at different levels of government. Thus, concerns for sustainability in tourism have been the focus of international bodies that develop tourism policies: United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP), United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC); but also of some national and regional bodies empowered to elaborate regional policies (EU, European Commission). Despite the success of the concept of sustainable tourism in the political and academic world, the contribution of tourism to climate changes and the natural environment change has amplified with its economic growth (Hall, 2013). In addition to the many economic and social benefits of increasing international tourist flows, many studies draw attention to the increasing incidence of negative implications for the natural environment: changes in the destination and use of land, increased energy consumption, reduction of biodiversity and the threat of extinction of many wild species, the emergence and spread of diseases among regions of the globe, changes in the perception and attitude of tourists and host communities towards the environment (Gössling, 2002; Gössling and Hall, 2006; Hall and Lew, 2009; Hall, 2013).

Regarding the attempts to clarify the concept of sustainable development of the tourism in the literature, there is a lack of consensus regarding the explanation and particularization of the broad concept of sustainable development to the specificity of tourism (Berno and Bricker, 2001). Attempts to define the sustainable development of tourism can be divided into two categories: a first category that focuses on sustainable tourism as an economic activity and the second that perceives tourism as an important component of sustainable development policies (Nistoreanu, 2007). These attempts have failed to establish a clear theoretical link between the broader concept of sustainable development and applicability to the particular context of tourism (Sharpley, 2000).

The WTO defines sustainable tourism as the tourism that takes full account of its economic, social and environmental impact, matching the needs of visitors, economic and social actors in tourism, the environment and host communities (United Nations, 2015). The process of sustainable tourism development is “the tourism that meets the needs of current tourists and host regions, while protecting and amplifying opportunities for the future... leading to the management of all resources so that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be met while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and the integrity of life support systems” (WTO, 1998). The principles set out in this definition are almost impossible to agree on and apply in practice. The complicated context of sustainability in tourism development needs a holistic approach that requires high levels of cooperation, collaboration and integration. Sustainability in tourism is in fact related to competition in the distribution of tourism resources that

have a finite character and require a political solution, an attempt to balance between tourism activities and other potential economic activities.

The contribution of tourism to sustainable development has a dual character. On the one hand, the development of tourism generates indisputable positive socio-economic effects (direct and indirect), and on the other hand it has undesirable effects on the environment. In recent decades, European Union policies have increasingly focused on promoting sustainable tourism initiatives, as economic development and the protection of the natural environment are closely linked and mutually supportive objectives. The concept of sustainable tourism refers to the following aspects: conservation of biodiversity and natural landscapes, optimal use of tourist resources, preservation and conservation of identity and cultural heritage, economic and social activities that contribute to increasing the long-term welfare of the host communities (Tambovceva *et al.*, 2020).

Approached in a cross-border context, tourism plays an important role in economic and political integration strategies. Research has shown that cross-border attempts to govern tourism face many obstacles, from institutional mismatches to non-recognition of mutual benefits of cross-border flows of tourists by stakeholders (Stoffelen and Vanneste, 2017; Blasco *et al.*, 2014; Ilbery and Sexena, 2011). Attempts at sustainable governance of cross-border tourism must lead to a fair spatial distribution of the positive economic effects generated by tourism, by creating cross-border institutional structures capable of highlighting the regional development potential offered by tourism development within border regions (Stoffelen and Vanneste, 2016).

Studies have identified some causes that limit the success of initiatives to set up cross-border tourism governance institutions. These include institutional incompatibility and inadequate planning and funding processes, which lead to tourism governance processes oriented towards the administrative territory of each country and not to mutually beneficial agreements and long-term cross-border cooperation actions (Blasco *et al.*, 2014). Moreover, EU financial support is most often targeted at local projects and not at structural institutional alignments, demonstrating the limitations of these financial support schemes. They aim to remove barriers to cross-border cooperation, but do not have a decisive influence on removing structural and institutional mismatches at different levels of cross-border tourism governance (Stoffelen and Vanneste, 2017).

The complexity of cross-border governance processes can undermine the attempts to establish flexible cross-border relations between tourism stakeholders, in order to capitalize the available resources and to increase the contribution of tourism to regional development. Specifically, inequality in power relations and differences in the representation of local values can lead to an unfair distribution of the costs and benefits of tourism development and can undermine the support and success of cross-border cooperation projects. Prokkola (2007; 2008) considers that the intensity of cross-border interactions in EU-funded tourism projects has been relatively low and, after the end of funding, the interactions have been short-lived. Thus, the implementation of collaborative initiatives that aim at supporting cross-border



tourism is not a guarantee for sustainable regional development (Stoffelen and Vanneste, 2017).

The EU's external border regions are heterogeneous, with divergent characteristics and development patterns (Topaloglou *et al.*, 2005), so that the adoption of practices from one (border) region to another raises issues. Despite the differences between the EU's external border regions, some common features can also be identified in terms of poor economic performance and weak links on knowledge transfer (Autant-Bernard *et al.*, 2017; Petrakos and Topaloglou, 2008). Therefore, even if it is not possible to generalize the results of research obtained in one external border region to all the others, the experiences and lessons learned can provide valuable information for understanding the relations between the other regions at the EU's external borders.

Thus, appropriate policies can be adopted for: integrated border management and mobility of people (tourists), integrated management of the environment and ecosystems in the Black Sea neighboring countries, interconnection of EU transport networks with those of partner countries, development and integration of regional tourism markets in terms of environmental protection and cultural heritage, promoting good practices in terms of sustainability in tourism.

## 2. Research methodology

In order to achieve the objectives stated by the authors, scientific studies and articles, programmatic documents and reports of the European Commission on the development of partnership and cross-border cooperation relations with the countries on the eastern border of the European Union were identified and analyzed. Information on projects and initiatives carried out by the 6 Member States together with the EU, published on the official website of the Eastern Partnership (EU Neighbours East, EU actions in the neighbourhood - tourism), was also used. At the same time, statistics on tourism development provided by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), Eurostat (2018) and national statistical organizations were used.

In order to identify the main problems that the development of tourism is facing within the 6 member states of the Eastern Partnership, the empirical research was based on an integrated methodology, which combined descriptive-exploratory research with quantitative analysis of statistical indicators on socio-economic development of tourism and with the qualitative analysis of the strategic documents and of the projects developed by the 6 member countries in partnership with the European Union.

The analysis of the documents was performed on three levels: strategic objectives, action plans, and initiatives and projects carried out. In order to highlight the importance given to sustainability at the strategic level in each of the 6 countries, the strategic documents on tourism development were identified and analyzed. For this purpose, the extent to which the objectives set out in the strategic plans support



the clear orientation towards sustainability of tourism development in these countries was analyzed.

In order to determine the orientation towards sustainability of the projects initiated by the Eastern Partnership countries within the European Neighborhood Initiative (ENI) in the field of tourism, 141 projects developed in the period 2013-2020 were identified and analyzed. They were divided into two categories: joint cross-border cooperation projects (18 integrated initiatives, with 39 national initiatives) and national projects (102). In order to establish the extent to which the projects support the orientation towards sustainability of tourism, they were divided into several categories according to the objectives pursued. Their clustering was performed based on a comparative analysis, taking into account the economic, socio-cultural and ecological (environmental) context of each.

### 3. Research results

All countries from the Eastern Partnership face many security and stability challenges in the EU's eastern border regions, which can have a negative influence on tourism development: security and territorial integrity risks (conflicts between Ukraine and Russia that have culminated in the annexation of the Crimean peninsula by Russia, the conflicts between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the autonomy of the Nagorno-Karabakh region, the incidents in the secessionist territories of South Ossetia and Abkhazia in Georgia, the disputes between the Republic of Moldova and Russia over the Transnistrian secessionist region), vulnerability of economies, energy dependence, social risks to which citizens are exposed as a result of conflicts and of autocratic regimes affecting the rule of law (Belarus). Russia's interference and information warfare continue to undermine the EU's efforts to promote sustainable democratic reforms in these countries.

According to statistics from the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), international flows of tourists to Eastern Partnership countries have increased since the launch of the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) in 2004 (Table 1).

Thus, in the period 2005 - 2019 the arrivals of international tourists registered substantial increases in most countries: Georgia - 9.7 times, Belarus - 8.7 times, Armenia - 5.96 times, Azerbaijan - 5.92 times and the Republic of Moldova - 2.6 times. The exception is Ukraine, which saw a sharp decline in foreign tourist arrivals after the outbreak of the conflict with Russia in April 2014, from 24.671 million in 2013 to 12.712 million in 2014.



**Table 1. International arrivals of tourists in EAP countries (millions)**

Country	2005	2010	2015	2018	2019	Growth 2019/2005
Armenia	0,319	0,684	1,192	1,652	1,9	5,96
Azerbaijan	0,693	1,28	1,922	2,633	2,9	5,92
Belarus	0,253	0,677	0,966	2,142	2,201	8,69
Georgia	0,56	1,067	3,012	4,757	5,080	9,07
Moldova	0,067	0,064	0,094	0,161	0,174	2,6
Ukraine	17,631	21,203	12,428	14,104	15	0,85

Source: World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)<sup>1</sup>

**Table 2. T&T economic impact in EaP countries, 2019**

	Arm	Azr	Blr	Geo	Mld	Ukr
Total Contribution of Travel&Tourism to GDP (%)	11,8	7,2	6,4	26,3	7,3	5,9
2019 Travel&Tourism GDP Growth (%)	4,7	-26	6,3	2,6	3,9	6,1
The Contribution of Travel&Tourism to employment (%)	12,5	7,7	6,7	27,7	7,6	6,2
The contribution in total of exports (%)	25,2	11,1	2,9	39,5	14,5	3,8
The Competitive position (The T& T Competitiveness report)	79	71	nd	68	103	78
The Sustainability of TT development (The T& T Competitiveness report)	101	97	nd	76	63	114

Source: World Travel & Tourism Council<sup>2</sup>

The data on the economic impact of tourism (Table 2) highlight the following aspects:

- in the case of Georgia and Armenia, the total contribution of tourism to GDP and employment exceeds the overall global contribution (over 10%). In the other countries, the two indicators have values below the world average.
- 5 of the Eastern Partnership countries saw an increase in the contribution of tourism to GDP in 2019 compared to 2018 (except for Azerbaijan which decreased by 26%);
- Armenia and Georgia have the highest shares of the tourism and travel industry in total exports, 39.5% and 25.2% respectively. High shares are also registered in the Republic of Moldova (14.5%) and Azerbaijan (11.1%);

<sup>1</sup> World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) (2020), Tourism Statistics data (retrieved from <https://www.unwto.org/statistic/basic-tourism-statistics>).

<sup>2</sup> World Travel & Tourism Council (2020), Annual Research: Key Highlights, (retrieved from <https://wtctweb.on.uat.co/Research/Economic-Impact>).



- according to the ranking on the competitiveness of tourism made by the World Economic Forum in 2019<sup>3</sup>, the Eastern Partnership countries are in the middle of the ranking, except for the Republic of Moldova which is ranked 103. The best positioned is Georgia which ranks 68th.
- in terms of the sustainability orientation of tourism, according to the same report, 3 of the six countries are ranked at the bottom of the ranking: Ukraine ranks 114th, Armenia 101th and Azerbaijan 97th. The Republic of Moldova and Georgia are in the middle of the world rankings.

In this context, the long-term political objectives of the Eastern Partnership for the period after 2020 aim to support sustainable development by ensuring resilience in all components of development: resilient, sustainable and integrated economies; accountable institutions, the rule of law and security; environmental and climate resilience (application of the provisions of the Paris Green Deal Agreement); resilient digital transformation and resilient, fair and inclusive societies (Table 3).

**Table 3. Eastern partnership policy objectives beyond 2020**

Political objective	Measures
Strengthening the economy - creating a resilient, sustainable and integrated economy	Better regional / bilateral integration of economies, encouraging structural reforms, better access to finance for SMEs, encouraging entrepreneurship among women and young people, developing human capital and connecting the education and research system to the needs of the private sector.
Commitment to good governance - responsible institutions, the rule of law and security	Support and monitor of the judicial and rule of law reforms, fight economic crime and corruption, cooperation in order to combat natural disasters, support of the conflict-affected populations through security and cooperation dialogues.
Promoting climate neutrality - Implementing the provisions of the Paris European Ecological Agreement (Green Deal) on modernizing economies and reducing the carbon footprint.	Promoting the concepts of “green economy” and “green jobs”, developing local renewable energy sources, improving governance and collaboration with civil society, the transition to sustainable and smart mobility, actions to improve people’s health and well-being and the transition to a fair and prosperous society .
Improving connectivity - stimulating sustainable development by ensuring access to high-quality communications infrastructure and services (encouraging digitization)	Expanding secure and high-capacity Gigabit broadband in remote areas, implementing roaming agreements between partner countries, strengthening e-Government - efficient, transparent and accountable public administrations, supporting and assisting cyber security.

<sup>3</sup> World Economic Forum (2019), The Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report 2019, Geneva (retrieved from <https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-travel-tourism-competitiveness-report-2019>).



Resilient, fair and inclusive societies - involved civil society, free, plural and independent media, and protection of citizens' rights	Involvement of the citizens and civil society organizations in decision-making by the authorities and in the development of public policies, support the proper functioning of the media, support social, economic and political inclusion, and ensure mobility and people-to-people contacts in a safe and well-managed environment.
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*Source: EU EaP - Eastern Partnership (2019) The Eastern Partnership beyond 2020: reinforcing resilience an Eastern Partheship that delivers for all*

### 3.1. Orientation towards sustainable tourism in the strategic plans on EaP countries

Armenia's 2014-2025 National Development Strategy<sup>4</sup> highlights tourism as one of the 5 priority sectors for exports and job creation. Although the orientation towards sustainable tourism is clearly stated, on the whole the signals transmitted at strategic level are diffuse. Thus, in the list of principles and values promoted at governmental level in the field of tourism, the elements regarding sustainability appear on positions 5 (Sustainable development emphasizing long term preservation and protection of natural and cultural heritage) and 7 (Nature and environmental protection).

Within the strategic documents on tourism development, growth is prioritized and the orientation towards sustainability appears to be rather secondary (USAID, 2008). It appears within some of the secondary objectives (design new, competitive destinations, prioritize tourism sites and attractions in Armenia; ensure effective use and preservation of natural, cultural and historical resources; identification of new resources; develop ecotourism in specially protected natural areas; identify new natural, cultural and historical monuments and create new tourism attractions; higher quality services; ensure active and effective cooperation among all stakeholders to promote sustainable tourism).

The strategic direction of tourism development in Azerbaijan covers the following steps in setting priorities for the implementation of the objectives (Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2016): the strategy and action plan until 2020, the strategic vision until 2025 and the vision for the period after 2025. None of the strategic objectives refer in detail to the sustainable development of tourism: realization of Baku's full tourism potential by attracting more international visitors; creation of favorable environment for the development tourism across the country; development of regional tourism sub-sectors for domestic and regional tourists; creation of national tourism quality system to increase tourists' satisfaction.

<sup>4</sup> RA Government (2014), Armenia Development Strategy for 2014-2025 (retrieved from [https://policy.asiapacificenergy.org/sites/default/files/Development%20Strategy%20of%20the%20Republic%20of%20Armenia%20for%202014-2025\\_ENG.pdf](https://policy.asiapacificenergy.org/sites/default/files/Development%20Strategy%20of%20the%20Republic%20of%20Armenia%20for%202014-2025_ENG.pdf)).

In the case of Georgia, one of the main objectives of the “2025 Strategy” (Georgian National Tourism Administration, 2016) on tourism is to attract tourists from the EU, North America and neighboring regions. For this purpose, 8 secondary objectives are set, the first two of which set the focus on sustainability: protecting and enhancing Georgia’s natural and cultural heritage and using Georgia’s natural and cultural heritage to provide unique and authentic travel impressions. The other 6 objectives aim to increase the tourism sector and improve competitiveness.

Even if the national development strategy of the Republic of Moldova does not refer directly to tourism, the orientation towards sustainability is provided in objectives 1, 5 and 6<sup>5</sup>: aligning the education system with the needs of the labor market to increase labor productivity and increase employment in economy; reducing energy consumption by increasing energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy sources; ensuring the financial sustainability of the pension system in order to ensure an adequate wage replacement rate.

Some of the objectives of the Sustainable Tourism Development Strategy of the Republic of Moldova in the period 2003-2015 (Sustainable Tourism Working Group, 2012) provided the orientation towards tourism sustainability: ensuring that tourism is developed in a sustainable way, so that the heritage is preserved for future generations; preserving the country’s major heritage and environmental attractions; providing high quality products and services to visitors.

The tourism development strategy “Tourism 2020” in the Republic of Moldova<sup>6</sup> does not explicitly highlight the orientation towards tourism sustainability, all 5 objectives prioritizing the growth of tourism: improving the legal framework in the field of tourism in accordance with tourism market requirements, adjusted to European standards; capitalizing on the national tourist potential and promoting the image of Moldova as a tourist destination; regional development of tourism; improving the level of training of specialized staff and the quality of tourist services; technological modernization of the tourism industry through the use of information and communication technology.

In 2017, under the auspices of the United Nation Development Program and the Global Environment Facility, the project “Strategy of sustainable development of Ukraine until 2030” was developed by UNDP (UNDP, 2017), whose objectives are set in accordance with the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

Regarding the strategic orientation towards sustainability of tourism in Ukraine 5 of the 14 objectives included in The State Program of Tourism Development for 2002-2010 are related to sustainable development (Ministry of

<sup>5</sup> Government of the Republic of Moldova (2012), National Development Strategy „Moldova 2020”: SEVEN solutions for economic growth and poverty reduction (retrieved from <https://cancelaria.gov.md/en/apc/national-development-strategy-moldova-2020-seven-solutions-economic-growth-and-poverty-reduction>).

<sup>6</sup> Agenția Turismului a Republicii Moldova (2014), Strategia de dezvoltare a turismului „Turism 2020” (retrieved from <http://turism.gov.md>).



Economic Development and Trade, 2017): sustainable development of the tourism industry and increase its part in the macroeconomic amount; improvements in living standards and creating workplaces; improving the quality and expand the range of travel services; efficient use of recreational resources and cultural heritage; introducing effective innovation and create the scientific base of tourism. However, the strategy developed for the next programming period (“Tourism and Resorts Development Strategy” approved in 2008) prioritizes growth, none of the 7 objectives explicitly referring to the orientation towards sustainability.

A report on direct investment in tourism made for Armenia places natural attractions in quadrant 4, with low attractiveness for investors and low value of foreign direct investment flows. Under these conditions, EU programs are among the most accessible for making investments in objectives that facilitate tourism (road and rail infrastructure, natural attractions, museums, historical sites, entertainment and recreational activities, providing support services). Products specific to sustainable tourism: adventure tourism, religious tourism, cultural tourism, event tourism (MICE - meetings, incentives, conferences, exhibitions) are considered packaging of low-investment products (World Bank, 2018).

### 3.2. Orientation towards sustainable tourism within the projects

Projects and initiatives funded through the European Neighborhood Instrument (ENI) and other European or national funding sources have been a viable alternative for supporting sustainable tourism in EaP countries (Table 4). The budget allocated to ENI for the period 2014-2020 was 15.4 billion Euros, of which about one third (5 billion Euros) is the allocation to support projects in the Eastern Partnership countries (European Commission, 2015). Through ENI, initiatives are funded to support projects specific to the three components of sustainable development: economy (EU4Business, Creative Europe, EU4Digital), social (EU4Youth, EU4Gender Equality, Cross-Border Cooperation, EU Initiative on Health Security, EU4Monitoring Drugs), environment (EU4Environment, EU4Climate, EU4Energy).

As can be seen from Table 4 during the 2013-2020 period, 141 projects related to tourism in the Eastern Partnership countries were identified. A larger number of projects were identified in countries where tourism is an important component of the economy: Armenia 43 projects (5 in cooperation with other countries and 38 national), Ukraine 30 projects (8 in cooperation and 22 national) and Georgia 26 projects (10 in collaboration and 16 national); followed by: Belarus with 17 projects, Moldova 14 and Azerbaijan 11.

Regarding the 18 projects carried out through cross-border cooperation (15 of them can be included in the sphere of sustainability), depending on the objective pursued, they can be clustered as follows:

- projects that aims to facilitate connectivity (3): Georgia and Armenia - The Northern Corridor Modernization Project (the cross-border bridge); Belarus and



Ukraine: Improving international cooperation between the customs and border guard services and The “Dnipro Ferry” - cross-border project;

- projects aimed at environmental sustainability (1): Armenia and Georgia - Cross border cooperation teams focus on energy efficiency and renewable energy technologies;
- projects aimed at encouraging the business environment and competitiveness (3): Funding green and competitive SME businesses, build more integrated economies (all countries); Belarus and Ukraine - Contest of micro projects within the Transboundary Cooperation Programme; Georgia with Austria and Sweden - Improving business environment - mountain tourism and organic agriculture.
- projects aimed at social issues and good governance (6): Armenia, Georgia and Moldova - Partnership for Good Governance - Five initiatives on inter-municipal cooperation; Azerbaijan and Georgia EaP TC Programme - Improving the living conditions of local communities and Building regional capacity through culture, education and sports; Azerbaijan with Egypt - European Training Foundation - monitoring of the running EU projects; Georgia with Austria and Sweden - Improving livelihoods of vulnerable households in remote, high mountainous regions; Moldova with Ukraine - Routes4Youth a network of young professionals which work on regional development through the Cultural Routes;
- cross-border tourism development projects (5): Armenia and Georgia - The Black Sea Silk Road Corridor project, website to promote tourism, travel and shared culture; Belarus with Ukraine - The establishment of tourist route along Dnieper-Bug Canal; Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine - EU4Youth: “Rural Tourism through the School Garden”; Moldova with Ukraine - Project selection in food and heritage tourism, local entrepreneurship and business opportunities and Improving rural tourism in cross-border regions (Soroca).

**Table 4. EaP countries initiatives and projects related on tourism between 2013-2020**

Initiative/Project Tipe	Ar	Azr	Blr	Ge	Mld	Ukr
Total	43	11	17	26	14	30
Common Initiatives	5	4	7	10	5	8
National tourism initiatives or related with tourism, of wich:	38	7	10	16	9	22
Events with different themes – including sustainable tourism	18	3	5	6	3	15
Suport for SME - Start-ups&Hackathon	9			2	2	2
Support during COVID-19 pandemic (tourism grants, mask production facilities)	1	1		2		
Renewable energy for accommodation facilities	1					1



Cycling tourism	2	2		
Tourism digitalization	2			1
Rehabilitation of the historic centers	1			
Preserving and promoting cultural heritage, local sport, education and tourism	2	2	1	2
Outdoor adventures on historic trails (EU4Tourism)	2			
Bringing into motion the tourism attraction factors - Support to local creative production,		1	1	
Sharing knowledge - tourism development , Strengthening the capacity of the Department of Tourism		2	2	2 2
Nature tourism (“inclusive” tourist site for birdwatching )			1	
Complex projects Empowering Local Economic Opportunities for Sustainable Growth”				1
‘Skills Development for Better Employability’ - Support programme			1	1

Source: authors’ representation based on EU Neighbours East site tourism projects informations - <https://www.euneighbours.eu/en/search/25?keys=tourism>

From the analysis of the 102 identified national initiatives and projects related to tourism development, it can be seen that three quarters of their number (76) are concentrated in three countries: Armenia 38, Ukraine 22 and Georgia 16. Lowest incidence of projects was registered in the case of Azerbaijan 7, followed by Moldova 9 and Georgia 10. Depending on the objectives pursued and their link with tourism sustainability, national projects can be clustered as follows:

- encouraging the business environment and competitiveness - supporting the resilience, sustainability and integration of tourism (17): Support for SME - Start-ups & Hackathon - 15 initiative (9 in Armenia, 2 in Georgia, 2 in Moldova and 2 in Ukraine), ‘Skills Development for Better Employability’ – 2 initiatives (Armenia and Ukraine), trainings on entrepreneurship; Support to local creative production and bringing into motion the tourism attraction factors 2 initiatives (Azerbaijan and Georgia);
- Knowledge transfer and sharing experiences - Events with different themes 47 initiatives (18 in Armenia, 15 in Ukraine, 6 in Georgia, 5 in Belarus, 3 in Azerbaijan and 3 in Moldova): festivals for promotion of local production, opening of Women Entrepreneurs’ club and Youth Houses, opening tourist information centers, promoting cultural Heritage, workshops on rural tourism, conferences on different themes tourism related, summer camps on rural development and tourism, Hubs for Healthy Gastronomy and Organic

- Products, “boot camp” for promoting innovative rural entrepreneurship, seminars and forums on tourism development etc.
- projects aimed at sustainability in tourism - promoting climate neutrality: Renewable energy for accommodation facilities 2 (Armenia and Ukraine); Preserving and promoting cultural heritage, Support for local sports, culture, education and tourism 7 initiatives (1 in Georgia, 2 in Armenia, 2 in Belarus and 2 in Moldova); Rehabilitation of the historic centers Armenia 1 project;
  - projects aimed at social issues and good governance: Sharing knowledge on tourism development, Strengthening the capacity of the Department of Tourism 8 initiatives (2 in Azerbaijan, 2 in Georgia, 2 in Moldova and 2 in Ukraine); Empowering Local Economic Opportunities for Sustainable Growth 1 project (Georgia);
  - encouraging forms of sustainable tourism: Cycling tourism 2 initiatives (Armenia and Ukraine), Outdoor adventures on historic trails 2 initiatives in Armenia, Nature tourism - inclusive tourist site for birdwatching 1 project in Belarus;
  - digitization in tourism (3 projects): 2 projects in Armenia and 1 in Ukraine;
  - combating the effects of the pandemic crisis: Support during COVID 19 pandemic (tourism grants, mask production facilities) 4 initiatives: 2 in Georgia, 1 in Armenia and 1 in Azerbaijan.

The great variety of project orientation is specific to countries that have multiple needs to improve the field. The orientation towards sustainability is clear, thus supporting investments not covered by the private sector.

## Conclusions

Eastern Partnership Member States have made real progress in the 16 years since the launch of the European Neighborhood Policy on multiple levels: improving the safety and security of citizens, strengthening democracy and the rule of law, promoting structural reforms to support economic development, improving economic governance, the integration of the economies of neighboring countries, increasing the mobility of people and people-to-people contacts, increasing tourism. However, they face many challenges, which can undermine the joint efforts of Member States and the European Union. Most countries face conflicts that can have a negative influence on tourism development.

Statistical data show a rapid increase in the flow of foreign tourists in all partner countries between 2005 and 2019, and in some countries tourism has a significant contribution to gross domestic product, employment and exports (Georgia and Armenia).

From the analysis of the programmatic documents on tourism development in the Eastern Partnership countries we can conclude that the growth of tourism is prioritized while the orientation towards sustainability appears rather as a secondary objective. The orientation towards tourism sustainability is explicitly provided in the strategic documents of Georgia and Armenia.



From the analysis of projects and initiatives adopted within Eastern Partnership countries during the 2013-2020 period, two categories can be identified:

- common initiatives (bilateral or multilateral) – oriented to: improving connectivity between countries, supporting SME financing, improving social issues and governance, supporting of some cross border tourism projects of common interest. Most of these projects contain objectives that support the orientation towards sustainability of tourism.
- national projects and initiatives oriented to achieve various objectives related to sustainable tourism development: promoting female and youth entrepreneurship, promoting newly opened tourism attractions (craft centers or parks), preserving of cultural heritage, financing of innovative start-ups, digitization of tourism, orientation to renewable energy, rehabilitation of historic center, Knowledge transfer and sharing of expertise, human resources development in tourism etc.

The distribution by countries of the identified tourism initiatives and projects highlights a higher incidence in countries with more developed tourism sectors or where the orientation towards sustainability is supported: Armenia 46 projects, Georgia 27, Ukraine 34. The projects identified in the field of tourism support achieving the political objectives of the Eastern Partnership for the next period: creating resilient, sustainable and integrated economies; responsible institutions, the rule of law and security; stimulating sustainable development by ensuring access to high quality communication infrastructures and services (encouraging digitization); implementing the provisions of the Paris European Ecological Agreement (Green Deal) on modernizing economies and reducing the carbon footprint; resilient, fair and inclusive societies.

Orientation towards sustainable tourism becomes an imperative requirement in the context of the current crisis in the tourism field.

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