



Ministry of Foreign Affairs

IOB Evaluation

Evaluation of the Matra programme in the Eastern Partnership countries 2008-2014

Evaluation of the Matra programme in the Eastern Partnership countries 2008-2014 | IOB Evaluation | no. 409 | Evaluation of the Matra programme i



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Preface

During the period covered by this IOB evaluation (2008-2014), the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries had a relatively low profile in the Netherlands. All this changed in 2014, when the Russian conflict with Ukraine put these countries unequivocally back on the map. The conflict illustrated their difficult strategic position, squeezed between a European Union looking for an appropriate role in the region and a Russian Federation that is increasingly sensitive about their closer cooperation with the EU and is increasingly assertive towards its 'near abroad'.

A similar dynamic can be seen in the Netherlands' largest bilateral programme in the region, the Matra programme. The aim of the programme is to support social transformation by contributing to the development of democratic, pluriform states governed by the rule of law, where there is space for dialogue between the government and the people. Matra focuses on capacity building and institutional strengthening of civil society organisations and government institutions, and on strengthening bilateral relations. In 2011 the government decided to phase out the programme in the EaP countries as of 2012. However, it continued in 2012, 2013 and 2014, following amendments to the budget by the House of Representatives. In 2015 the ministry again reserved funds for Matra in the EaP countries and it will decide in the course of the year on what form the programme will take as from 2016.

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This evaluation focuses exclusively on the Matra programme in the countries of the Eastern Partnership policy framework (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine). It examines the programme's effectiveness in contributing to the development of civil society and democratisation, and in promoting bilateral relations between the Netherlands and the partner countries. In doing so, the evaluation aims to provide an insight into the results of the Matra programme in the EaP countries, to enable the funds spent to be accounted for, and to learn from past experiences with a view to the future of the programme in the EaP countries. The evaluation is part of a larger policy review of the Dutch contribution to the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), due for publication in 2016. It is also one of three evaluations of the Matra programme, the other two focusing on its implementation in EU pre-accession countries (the Western Balkans and Turkey) and in the Arab countries of North Africa.

The evaluation was conducted by IOB evaluator Bas Limonard and IOB researcher Tim Scheerder. A team from ECORYS Netherlands, consisting of Erik Klaassens (team leader), Miriam Visser, Dafina Dimitrova and Corine Besseling, evaluated a selection of 22 Matra projects by means of a desk study and telephone interviews. During field missions to Georgia and Moldova, the IOB team was supported by local experts Irma Khvedeliani (Georgia) and Valeriu Prohnițchi (Moldova).

The evaluation was guided by a reference group, consisting of Max Bader (Leiden University), Dirk-Jan Kop (Special Representative for EU-Russia relations and the Eastern Partnership at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Pauline Genee, Emma Verhoeff and Alexander Smits

(Europe Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and Heleen Bakker (External Affairs Division of the European Integration Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and chaired by IOB evaluator Frans van der Wel. IOB evaluators Paul de Nooijer and Margret Verwijk acted as internal peer reviewers. IOB is grateful for their invaluable comments.

Special thanks go to the staff of the embassies in Bucharest, Kyiv, Tbilisi, Vilnius and Warsaw for putting so much time and effort into sending project documentation, facilitating country visits, participating in the interviews and briefing sessions, and providing invaluable comments on the draft Terms of Reference and the draft versions of this report. IOB is very grateful for their indispensable support during the evaluation.

Numerous people contributed to the evaluation as interviewees. Some even had to travel abroad and/or took a personal risk by talking to us. IOB highly appreciates their cooperation and openness. The names of the persons interviewed are listed in Annex 5. For safety reasons, the names of some interviewees from Belarus and Transnistria (Moldova) are not included in the list.

The final responsibility for the content of this report rests with IOB.

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List of abbreviations and acronyms

AA	Association Agreement
AIV	Advisory Council on International Affairs (<i>Adviesraad Internationale Vraagstukken</i>)
BEMO	Activity appraisal memorandum (<i>beoordelingsmemorandum</i>)
BPZ	Political Affairs Section (<i>Bureau Politieke Zaken</i>)
BZ	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands (<i>Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken</i>)
BZK	Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations (<i>Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties</i>)
CDA	Christian Democratic Appeal (<i>Christen Democratisch Appèl</i>)
CRS	Creditor Reporting System
CSO	Civil society organisation
CU	Christian Union (<i>ChristenUnie</i>)
D66	Democrats 66 (<i>Democraten 66</i>)
DCFTA	Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement
DEU	Europe Department (<i>Directie Europa</i>)
DIE	European Integration Department (<i>Directie Integratie Europa</i>)
DIE-ex	External Policy Division (<i>afdeling Extern beleid</i>) of the European Integration Department
DWM	Western and Central Europe Department (<i>Directie West- en Midden-Europa</i>)
DZO	Southeast and Eastern Europe Department (<i>Directie Zuidoost- en Oost-Europa</i>)
DZO/UM	Matra Implementation Division of the Southeast and Eastern Europe Department (<i>afdeling uitvoering Matra, directie Zuidoost- en Oost-Europa</i>)
EaP	Eastern Partnership
EEAS	European External Action Service
EEU	Eurasian Economic Union
ENI	European Neighbourhood Instrument
EnoP	European Network of Political Foundations
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
ENPI	European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument
ESG	Extended Standard Grants
EU	European Union
FICDD	Foundation for International Christian Democratic Development
FTA	Free Trade Agreement
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GL	GreenLeft (<i>GroenLinks</i>)
GMV	Good governance, human rights and peacebuilding countries
HR	European Union High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy
HRF	Human Rights Fund (<i>Mensenrechtenfonds</i>)
IDI	International Democratic Initiative
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IOB	Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (<i>Inspectie Ontwikkelingssamenwerking en Beleidsevaluatie</i>)

ISIS	Islamic State in Syria and Iraq
KAP	Small Embassy Projects (<i>kleine ambassadeprojecten</i>)
LGBT	Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender
MEP	Member of European Parliament
MP	Member of Parliament
MPP	Matra Projects Programme
MPPP	Matra Political Parties Programme
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDI	National Democratic Institute
NFI	Netherlands Forensic Institute
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NIMD	Netherlands Institute of Multiparty Democracy (<i>Nederlands Instituut voor Meerpartijendemocratie</i>)
PCA	Partnership and Cooperation Agreements
POBB	Foreign Policy Support Programme (<i>Programma Ondersteuning Buitenland Beleid</i>)
PvdA	Labour Party (<i>Partij van de Arbeid</i>)
PvdD	Party for the Animals (<i>Partij voor de Dieren</i>)
RF	Russian Federation
SGP	Reformed Political Party (<i>Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij</i>)
SVO	Foundation for Training Activities in Eastern Europe (<i>Stichting Vormingsactiviteiten Oost-Europa</i>)
ToC	Theory of Change
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
V4	Visegrád group
V4EaP	Visegrad Fund Eastern Partnership Programme
VLAP	Visa Liberalisation Action Plan
VUSG	Visegrad University Studies Grants
VVD	People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (<i>Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie</i>)
WFPP	Political Parties Financing Act (<i>Wet Financiering Politieke Partijen</i>)

Map of the Eastern Partnership countries



Main findings and lessons learned

I Introduction

The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (BZ) launched the Matra programme in November 1993 to support democratisation in Central and Eastern Europe. The name Matra is derived from the Dutch for social transformation (*'maatschappelijke transformatie'*). Since then, it has evolved from a programme focused solely on the social transformation of post-communist countries to one that also aims to contribute to EU enlargement policy and the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). Specifically, the aim of Matra is to contribute to the development of democratic, pluriform states governed by the rule of law, where there is space for dialogue between the government and the people. Matra focuses on capacity building and institutional strengthening of civil society organisations (CSOs) and government institutions, and on strengthening bilateral relations.

This evaluation examines the implementation of the Matra programme in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries from 2008 to 2014.¹ Implementation of the programme in the Arab region and in the EU pre-accession countries (the Western Balkans and Turkey) have been evaluated separately.²

Ukraine and Belarus were among the 14 countries where the programme was launched in 1994. Armenia, Georgia and Moldova became eligible for Matra in 2006, followed by Azerbaijan in 2010. In 2011, the Dutch government decided to phase out the Matra programme for EaP countries as of 2012. However, it continued in 2012, 2013 and 2014, following amendments to the budget by the House of Representatives. Consequently, there has been a budget for Matra in the EaP countries without any explicit policy framework since 2012. In its 2015 budget, the ministry again reserved funds for Matra EaP. The current Matra programme expires at the end of 2015. The government will decide in the course of that year what form the programme will take as from 2016.

This evaluation has three aims. The first is to give insight into the results of the Matra programme for EaP countries, providing accountability for the EUR 44.3 million disbursed through the Matra programme in 2008-2014. Second, the evaluation aims to produce lessons learned that can be incorporated into the future design of the Matra EaP programme. Third, the evaluation will serve as one of the building blocks for an IOB policy review on the Dutch contribution to the ENP, which is due in 2016.

¹ The EaP countries are Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

² IOB, *The Only Constant is Change: Evaluation of the Dutch contribution to transition in the Arab region (2009-2013)*, IOB Evaluation no. 400, The Hague: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, April 2015; MDF and APE BV, *Evaluation of Matra Programme (in pre-accession countries: Western Balkans and Turkey) 2012-2014, Final Report*, Ede, April 2015.

Main research questions

The evaluation sought to answer the following research questions:

- 1) Was the programme relevant? Did it address the main challenges faced by the EaP countries, did it reflect Dutch policy priorities for the EaP countries, and did it have added value compared to other support programmes?
- 2) Were the individual projects and the Matra programme as a whole effective? Did they contribute to the process of developing a democratic, pluriform state governed by the rule of law, in which there is space for dialogue between the government and the people? Did they help strengthen bilateral relations between the Netherlands and the partner countries?
- 3) Were the programme components managed in such a way that projects were selected and monitored effectively and efficiently?

The evaluation examines all four components ('sub-programmes') of the Matra programme implemented in the EaP countries:

- *The Matra Projects Programme (MPP)*: this component focused on building partnerships between organisations in the Netherlands and in the Matra countries. The Dutch organisations were the contracting partners and as such were responsible for project implementation. The MPP was managed by the Southeast and Eastern Europe Department (DZO) at BZ.³ Projects had a maximum budget of EUR 700,000 and a maximum duration of 36 months. This sub-programme was phased out as of 2010, with the last projects being completed in 2013.
- *The Matra Small Embassy Projects (KAP) / delegated projects*: funds were delegated to Dutch embassies in the region, which had a high degree of freedom in allocating the funds. Relatively small-scale projects implemented by local CSOs were funded with a view to strengthening civil society and local governance. In 2010, following the delegation of more funds and responsibilities to the embassies, the maximum project budget was raised from EUR 25,000 to EUR 300,000 and the maximum project duration from one to two years.
- *The Matra Political Parties Programme (MPPP)*: the MPPP focused on twinning between Dutch political parties and their sister parties in the EaP countries. The goal for Dutch parties was to build their networks and help sister parties strengthen their leadership and networks, thus contributing to democratisation in the partner countries. Grants were allocated to Dutch political parties based on their number of seats in the House of Representatives.
- *The Eastern Partnership Programme of the International Visegrad Fund (V4EaP)*: the Visegrad Fund was established in 2000 by the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. The Netherlands has contributed to the Visegrad Fund's Eastern Partnership Programme since 2012. The Fund used the transformation experience of the four countries of the Visegrád group (V4) to carry out small-scale projects to promote democracy and strengthen civil society in the EaP countries.

³ In 2011, DZO was incorporated in the Europe Department (DEU).

During the evaluation period, EUR 22.7 million was disbursed via the MPP, EUR 13.1 million via Matra KAP / delegated projects, EUR 5 million via the MPPP and EUR 3.5 million via the V4EaP programme.

Research

The evaluation comprised a desk study (Matra policy documents, think-tank reports, Matra project files), interviews and field studies in Belarus, Georgia and Moldova. The research method is described in detail in Chapter 1 of this report.

II Main findings

Relevance

1) During the evaluation period, the thematic scope of Matra EaP became more focused and was changed several times, but was not always sensitive to local circumstances. However, the embassies were allowed to interpret the programme's guidelines broadly and were given sufficient flexibility to tailor them to local circumstances.

At the start of the evaluation period, the Matra programme covered twelve themes. In 2010, the focus was narrowed to three regional themes (human rights, minorities and media) and one additional theme per country (three in the case of Ukraine). After the 2011 decision to discontinue Matra EaP and its subsequent extension on a year-by-year basis by parliamentary amendments to the budget, the focus was not entirely clear; though Matra was limited to the rule of law in the pre-accession countries, it was unclear whether this also applied in the EaP countries. Clarity came in late 2013, when new Matra guidelines instructed embassies in the EaP countries to focus on the rule of law, too. However, since this was not always compatible with the specific local context in each country, the ministry allowed the embassies to interpret the guidelines broadly and apply them flexibly.

2) The Matra programme addressed key challenges faced by the EaP countries and was sensitive to local needs, as all sub-programmes had a demand-driven structure.

The Matra sub-programmes and the projects implemented addressed key challenges facing the EaP countries in the areas of democratisation, strengthening the rule of law and developing the capacity of civil society and local government. Furthermore, the high degree of freedom given to the embassies to adapt the programme to specific local circumstances was key to making the programme work in the very different contexts of the EaP countries. Whereas the MPP focused relatively more on 'softer' social infrastructure themes (e.g. welfare, the environment, education, housing) and on the service-delivery role of CSOs, KAP / delegated projects focused more on strengthening CSOs in the areas of democratisation, the rule of law and human rights. Local relevance and potential impact were the key criteria considered by embassies in selecting projects. This was reflected in the varying project portfolios of KAP / delegated projects per country.

Most activities undertaken within the framework of the MPPP (e.g. training on campaigning and negotiation skills, internal party organisation, etc.) addressed important challenges facing the sister parties, but the key challenge of building a democratic political system/culture was not addressed directly.

The projects funded through the V4EaP programme focused on the transfer of expertise from the V4 countries in areas such as democratisation, governance, economic integration with the EU and public attitudes towards the EU. The programme was geared more towards strengthening the European orientation of the EaP countries than the other Matra components.

All four sub-programmes had a demand-driven structure. Although MPP grant applications were submitted by Dutch organisations, the project proposals were developed in consultation with local partners and the evaluation concluded that local ownership was high. Most KAP / delegated projects were initiated, developed and implemented by local organisations (most often CSOs) from the EaP countries, which guaranteed ownership by the local partner. The activities of political parties in the framework of the MPPP were developed in consultation with the sister parties. According to the sister parties, the MPPP stood out from other donors' political programmes as being more responsive to their needs. The project proposals for the V4EaP programme were developed by organisations from at least three V4 countries and one EaP country. Most successful applications were submitted by lead partners from one of the V4 countries, but the share of lead partners from the EaP countries increased over time. IOB did not analyse the local ownership of V4EaP projects.

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3) Matra's added value within the broader donor landscape was its easy accessibility and flexibility in adapting quickly to the changing local context. It did not show a clear overlap or synergy with other programmes.

The Matra programme's small scale, relatively broad eligibility criteria and lenient reporting requirements enabled the programme to reach small CSOs that were often unable to attract funds from larger, more traditional donors. Several projects supported new CSOs in their start-up phase and helped them develop organisational skills to enable them apply for larger funds later on. Moreover, the embassy staff's assistance in the grant application process often played an important part in professionalising the organisations. The programme's flexibility enabled embassies to achieve maximum impact by adapting the programme's focus to changing circumstances.

The Matra programme as a whole had no overlap or synergy with other Dutch programmes. Most MPP and KAP / delegated projects were stand-alone interventions. Some built on previous Matra projects or inspired later ones funded by other – often larger – donors, such as the EU. This was however more often a positive, but not specifically targeted, side-effect. There was some potential overlap between KAP / delegated projects and the Human Rights Fund, which was implemented in Armenia, Belarus, Georgia and Moldova in a similar way to the Matra programme. Human rights was also a Matra focus theme. The line dividing the two programmes was thin, especially for the overlapping networks of CSOs targeted by them. Embassies took a pragmatic approach and tried to refer project proposals to the correct programme as best they could.

The added value of the MPPP to what other donors were doing in the political field was its demand-driven approach, while the training on political ideology was different from many other programmes.

Distinguishing features of the V4EaP programme were its promotion of cross-border regional cooperation, the creation of networks, and knowledge transfer between similar organisations in the V4 and the EaP countries. Projects involved partners from three or four V4 countries and often more than one EaP country.

Effectiveness

4) Matra's effectiveness in achieving the programme objectives cannot be measured. However, individual MPP and KAP / delegated projects were largely effective. The effectiveness of MPPP activities could not be established and the effectiveness of the V4EaP programme was not assessed in this evaluation.

During the evaluation period, progress in the EaP countries in the areas of democratisation, strengthening the rule of law and developing the capacity of civil society was mixed. Generally speaking, while there has been some progress in the countries that have signed an association agreement with the EU (Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine), it has stalled in the other countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus). Developments at the macro level cannot be attributed directly to Matra support. This is not a weakness of the programme, but a logical consequence of its relatively small budget, the modest size of individual projects and the programme's demand-driven structure, which results in support for a wide variety of themes and types of activities. Moreover, the programme was implemented in a highly complex environment in which many other factors played a role. It would therefore not be reasonable or do justice to the programme to expect attributable outcomes at programme level.

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The evaluation did show that most of the MPP and KAP / delegated projects attained their goals in terms of planned outputs and short-term outcomes within the direct target group. These sub-programmes can therefore be considered effective at project level. Outcomes included increased capacity of supported CSOs, administrative reform and increased transparency of government agencies, increased journalism skills, and increased civic activism among target groups like young people or local communities. As such, these projects contributed positively, at least to some extent, to greater capacity of civil society, independence of the media, capacity of political parties, political monitoring by parliaments, and the functioning of the judiciary or government agencies. However, the extent to which the results of individual projects were sustained and had an impact beyond the immediate scope of the project depended largely on contextual factors or sustained donor support.

In the same vein, the effectiveness of MPPP activities could not be established, as these were very small in size. In addition, the summary reporting by political parties did not reveal sufficient information on the reach, contents and results of the activities to allow them to be evaluated.

5) The four sub-programmes contributed to the Netherlands' bilateral relations with the EaP countries in different ways and with varying success. There was no sense of urgency for this policy objective.

The twinning between organisations in the Netherlands and the Matra countries in the framework of the MPP resulted in close cooperation that was highly appreciated by all parties involved. This often resulted in long-lasting relationships between project partners, some of whom continued their cooperation with the support of other donors. As such, the MPP contributed to mutual understanding between the Netherlands and the EaP countries.

Delegated projects did not aim to strengthen relations between organisations. Their contribution to bilateral relations mainly consisted of expanding and deepening the embassies' relations with local civil society. Here, the embassies succeeded in generating good exposure with few resources ('bang for buck'). The way in which they implemented the programme, their open attitude and support for CSOs, and embassy staff's frequent attendance at project events were widely commended and contributed to a positive image of the Netherlands in the EaP countries. The close relations that embassies developed with local societies gave them a thorough understanding of local socio-political dynamics which was useful, amongst other things, for political reporting to The Hague. Furthermore, some former Matra participants obtained high-level government posts or became members of parliament, becoming valuable entry points for the embassies. The network established through the projects proved useful during incoming missions from The Hague, providing ministers, department directors and policy officers with a broad spectrum of people to meet and projects to visit. The decision to discontinue Matra EaP in 2011, followed by its prolongation on a year-by-year basis, put the relations with CSOs and the reputation of the Netherlands as a partner at risk.

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The MPPP showed mixed results in terms of strengthening political parties' international networks. The instable and volatile party systems in the EaP countries made it more difficult for Dutch political parties to select suitable sister parties and to build stable relations with them. Where relations did develop, they tended towards a one-way support relationship rather than a relationship between equals. The degree to which the Dutch political parties were able to disseminate knowledge obtained through these bilateral projects within their parties varied.

The Dutch co-funding of the V4EaP programme did not result in the anticipated exposure and networking opportunities for embassies in the EaP countries. The co-funding was clearly advertised by the Visegrad Fund itself, but not by project implementers. Embassies did not benefit from the networking opportunities provided by the Dutch co-funding and reported being poorly informed about the sub-programme's implementation. The co-funding therefore was mainly positive for Dutch bilateral relations with the governments of the Visegrád countries themselves, which are important partners for the Netherlands in the framework of the EU's policy on the Eastern Partnership.

Management

6) The ownership and central coordination of the programme by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs decreased during the evaluation period. Its monitoring of the MPPP and V4EaP programme was poor.

As the result of a number of developments, the ministry's ownership – and central coordination in general – of the Matra programme in the EaP countries diminished over time. First, the phasing out of the MPP shifted the centre of gravity of the programme's implementation from The Hague to the embassies. Second, the ministry's own organisational reforms, internal reshuffles and high staff turnover within the Europe Department eroded its institutional memory and staff capacity for programme monitoring. This was exacerbated by the 2011 decision to discontinue Matra in the EaP countries and the later revision of that decision by parliament. Third, the decisions to disburse a substantial amount via the Visegrad Fund and to transfer management of the MPPP to the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations (BZK) further limited the ministry's direct control over the spending of funds.

Because of the autonomy of political parties, both BZ and BZK were reluctant to interfere with the parties' strategic choices. As the already broad eligibility criteria for the grant were expanded with their inclusion in the Political Parties Financing Act (WFPP), BZK had very little scope for questioning the eligibility of activities. However, so far this has not led to noticeable changes in implementation.

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The Visegrad Fund annually reported to BZ on the types of projects funded and the types of project partners, thus providing insight into how the Dutch grant was spent. While the Visegrad Fund exercised strict financial control and its financial reporting to the Netherlands was adequate, it provided very little information at project level and no information on results, as BZ had not requested this. BZ was satisfied with the reports it received.

7) The delegation of funds to the embassies and the freedom of manoeuvre given to them worked out well for Matra's relevance and flexibility. The management of the delegated funds by the embassies was necessarily labour-intensive. The ministry could, however, have shown more interest in the programme's results.

In line with the philosophy of a delegated programme, the attainment of results was left to the embassies. They were given ample freedom to shape their programmes in a way that they felt would best fit the local context. They selected KAP / delegated projects according to their local relevance, potential impact and fit with the embassies' thematic framework. Overall, the embassies' internal procedures for selecting projects can be considered streamlined. Steering by the ministry was light and flexible. Apart from allowing the embassies to interpret the general guidelines broadly, the Europe Department (DEU) also permitted them to depart from the rules on occasion if required by local circumstances.

The embassies themselves showed the same flexibility towards their project partners. Some of them expressly played an educational role in the process of the project development, providing additional information if needed, being accessible to partners, helping to write proposals, etc. The ministry's rules dictated that grants under EUR 25,000 were paid up front, but the lack of formal instruments to monitor project implementation was made up for by intensive informal contacts between embassy staff and project implementers. The programme's flexibility, engagement and sense of partnership meant that a relatively large number of staff was involved. Compared to large programmes, Matra is quite labour-intensive, but it is precisely this method of working, enabled by the involvement and expertise of local staff, which gives the programme its value by connecting to local society.

Especially in the later years, the ministry required only very limited reporting from the embassies on the implementation of the delegated programmes, although some embassies went further on their own initiative. It also provided very little feedback. This can be seen as indicating a high level of trust on the part of the ministry, but it also reflected a lack of staff capacity and interest in the programme's results.

8) The Matra sub-programmes were implemented in isolation from each other. There was little communication between the implementing organisations.

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The four Matra sub-programmes were implemented completely separate from each other. There was no ambition to create synergy and the embassies felt ill-informed about the implementation of the MPPP and V4EaP programme. In the case of the MPPP, this was especially relevant because of the importance of political parties in the country's democratic development, the embassies' responsibility for managing Dutch relations with societal and political actors, and possible sensitivities in the volatile political context in EaP countries. The embassies could also have benefitted more from the networking opportunities provided by the cooperation between political parties or the Visegrad Fund's projects, and could also have played a role in monitoring the supported activities.

III Lessons learned

Below, IOB's findings have been converted into a number of lessons learned at the level of the overall programme and at sub-programme level.

Lessons learned at programme level

a) Sustaining support and adhering to a results framework

The clear interest of the EU and the Netherlands in seeing the EaP countries develop into stable, secure and prosperous nations and in the many challenges facing them demands not only sustained support, but also a stronger focus on results and a clear sense of where the Netherlands can offer added value. Any decision to reintroduce a structural Matra programme for the EaP countries should go hand in hand with developing a results framework or theory of change (ToC), explaining which socio-political dynamics Matra aims to address and how this may lead to tangible results.

This framework should cover the regional level, but has to be developed on the basis of a thorough analysis of the different country-specific contexts. This means that the embassies should be closely involved in developing the framework. In addition, the framework should not only cover the overall programme level, but should make it plausible how the different programme components fit the framework. It could then serve as a leading document for monitoring and results-based management. The Matra programme's flexibility in responding quickly to changing needs is one of its strengths; the results framework should respect that flexibility and be reviewed on a regular basis.

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b) Differentiating without creating divisions

The distinction between countries that have signed an association agreement (AA) with the EU (Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine) and those that have not (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus) is becoming ever more clear. This applies not only to their relationship with the EU, but also to their progress in terms of social and political transformation. For the AA countries, the association process offers potential for increasing the impact of the Matra programme. Matra could, for example, support civil society in holding the government to account for implementing the association agreements, thus creating pressure from the bottom up, show citizens the opportunities and benefits offered by the agreements or help governments more directly with fulfilling the requirements. In non-AA countries, the programme is likely to remain focused on human rights, free media and supporting suppressed civil society.

There are advantages to differentiating between Matra in the AA countries and the non-AA countries and some differences are inevitable. Nevertheless, the distinction between the two groups of countries, which still face many common challenges, must not become fixed in stone, raising new divisions within the programme itself. One way of avoiding this would be to facilitate projects aimed at cross-border cooperation between CSOs and/or governments from the different EaP countries. In this way, the countries could also benefit from each other's capacities, expertise and experience.

c) Clarifying the importance of and Matra's expected contribution to bilateral relations

Promoting bilateral relations between the Netherlands and the Matra countries has been a principle aim of the programme since its inception. However, due to the modification of the Matra programme over the years, its relative importance and the way it should be implemented has not always been entirely clear. The actors involved in implementing the programme seem to have had slightly differing ideas on how exactly Matra should promote bilateral relations. There is a clear need to clarify the role that promoting bilateral relations should play in implementing the programme and its various components. This role should be based on a vision of our future relations with the EaP countries.

d) Assigning Matra management

In the interests of keeping a keen eye on the desired results, the Matra programme would benefit from stronger coordination and central management. That requires clarifying the overarching management structure and ensuring sufficient staff capacity at the ministry, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Whereas DEU, as the owner of the programme, is the logically responsible unit for developing and reviewing Matra's policy framework, monitoring and management tasks could be assigned to a unit or staff member with the necessary skills and affinity, not necessarily integrated within DEU.

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e) Increasing interaction between the implementing agencies

Interaction between embassies should be increased, so that they can share experiences and examples of good practice, duplicate successful projects, identify cross-border projects and learn from each other's management practices. This could be achieved by, for instance, reintroducing the Matra follow-up days, either in the region or in The Hague, where embassy staff could meet staff from ministry headquarters and representatives of the political movements participating in the MPPP, Dutch organisations involved in delegated projects, or from the Visegrad Fund secretariat. Meeting colleagues in person at regular intervals would facilitate more intensive contact throughout the year.

Embassies should be informed about the implementation of the MPPP and the V4EaP programme, so that they can benefit from the networking opportunities that these programmes provide, be alert to opportunities for creating synergies and play a role in monitoring the local implementation of these programmes.

Lessons learned at sub-programme level

No specific lessons have been formulated with regard to the MPP, since it no longer exists. In view of Matra's current budget for the EaP countries, reintroducing a sub-programme with relatively large projects that is managed from The Hague is not advisable.

Matra KAP / delegated projects

a) Reviewing the distribution of funds between the EaP countries

The current differences in spending between the EaP countries should be reconsidered; the number of projects and total expenditures in Armenia and Azerbaijan are well below those of the other countries. Although there may be good arguments for the current division of spending – the location of the embassies, the size and political priority of the countries, etc. – path dependency also seems to play a role. The rationale for the distribution of funds should therefore be clarified.

b) Maintaining maximum flexibility while strengthening a results orientation

One of the strengths of Matra's delegated budget is that it leaves embassies ample room to tailor the programme to the local context and the absorption capacity of local CSOs. This should be maintained. In the past, Matra has tried to achieve more impact by focusing on a small number of themes. In practice, however, these themes are defined so broadly that individual projects are still not interconnected or mutually supportive. It would therefore be better for delegated projects in the AA countries to focus on supporting the AA implementation process. This would allow for more synergy with the embassies' diplomatic efforts and the efforts of many other European donors. If the embassies see room for an even greater focus in certain niche areas within this framework, this should be encouraged as it could have positive effects, such as building expertise, gaining name recognition and accumulating resources, efforts and results. However, the ministry should avoid imposing restrictive templates on the embassies' programmes. In the countries that have not signed association agreements, limiting the programme to certain themes would be impractical. Nevertheless, in order to keep a clear focus on results, the delegated programmes should be based on a country-specific results framework formulated by the embassy and approved by DEU.

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c) Adding value, complementarity and achieving synergies within the donor landscape

As most donors will likely focus on the AA process in the years to come, the Matra programme should strive to complement other donors' efforts and seek possible synergies. Matra's added value lies in its outreach to small or new civil society organisations easily overlooked by larger donors, being adaptive to the changing local context, and its ability to quickly fill the gaps left by other donors' programmes. This will remain the case even if the programme is redirected towards supporting the AA implementation process in the countries concerned. Allowing projects aimed directly at government would open up opportunities to strengthen the synergy between Matra and the embassies' diplomatic activities. However, this should remain an exception and not become the rule because, with the current budget, this is not where Matra's added value lies.

d) Including disenfranchised groups

In seeking added value, embassies should keep an open mind towards target groups that are not on the radar of many other donors. By focusing on disenfranchised groups such as minorities, populations in more remote areas, religious groups etc., projects can add value to other activities by the donor community. Furthermore, cooperating with disenfranchised groups in the form of projects offers tangible results to a broad spectrum of the population,

which may encourage a favourable view of the EU and the Netherlands. The balance between engaging a broad spectrum of the population through varied, widely spread projects and preventing projects becoming isolated and putting sustainability at risk is delicate. Embassies have a crucial role in deciding the cut-off point based on their local expertise.

e) Involving Dutch organisations, but to a limited extent

There are clear benefits in involving Dutch organisations in delegated Matra projects, for example helping to establish and expand societal linkages between the Netherlands and the Matra countries and the transfer of specific Dutch expertise which is appreciated in the Matra countries. Given the small budget available, spending too much of the project budget on trainers' fees and travel costs should be avoided.

f) Maintaining sufficient staff capacity

In times of austerity it is tempting to focus extensively on attaining the highest possible efficiency – interpreted as maximising funds available for projects by keeping staffing costs as low as possible. However, IOB considers the role of the Matra policy officers at the embassies as an essential element of the projects' success. The delegated programme derives much of its strength from its ability to establish close relations between the embassies and local organisations. The staff capacity, especially of the Matra policy officers, is an essential part of this.

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Matra Political Parties Programme (MPPP)

a) Being clear on the programme's rationale

The MPPP was based on a dual rationale: on the one hand it allowed Dutch political parties to expand and maintain their international networks, while on the other hand it aimed to foster democratisation in the Matra countries. The decision to place the grant under the Political Parties Financing Act (WFPP) put the second objective, which is closest to the objective of the overall Matra programme, at risk. If the sub-programme's link with the Matra programme is to be maintained, the aim of promoting democracy should be once again given a prominent place.

b) Working on the basis of a strategy

Attaining the objective of contributing to democratic development in the EaP countries requires a vision on how party-to-party support can promote democratisation in the specific, often challenging, country contexts. Developing such a strategy requires combining the expertise of the political parties, the embassies and BZ, preferably with input from academics and the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD).

In some countries, the best way to promote democratisation may not be party-to-party support but a multi-party approach. In these cases, political parties could seek closer cooperation and develop joint activities with a broader impact on the political system. Likewise, they could seek synergies with projects financed from the delegated Matra budget, e.g. aimed at the electoral/campaigning process or strengthening the capacities of national parliaments.

c) Strengthening management of the MPPP

Working towards results should have a stronger focus in the programme's management. Currently, BZK manages the programme but has no clear mandate to monitor its implementation and has no expertise on its content. As long as this remains the case, BZ can only encourage political parties to focus more on results by engaging with them in an informal way. It could prepare the annual meetings with the parties better and invite parties to discuss their programmes individually, while embassies could be more involved in the activities taking place in their countries. With regard to monitoring the programme's implementation and results, the parties can be consulted on the best type of harmonised reporting, without impinging on their autonomy.

d) Increasing financial predictability

With a view to making political parties act in a more strategic and results-oriented way, it could be helpful to increase the predictability of the grant, e.g. by softening the direct financial consequences of electoral results. More financial security would allow parties to engage in multi-annual planning, build stable relationships with their partners and create a trajectory of concrete long-term goals with them. As this cannot be achieved under the current framework provided by the Political Parties Financing act (WFPP), this would require returning to a more programmatic framework.

The Visegrad Fund's Eastern Partnership (V4EaP) programme

a) Considering the rationale for co-financing the programme

Reintroducing a structural Matra programme in the EaP countries would, strictly speaking, remove the main rationale for co-financing the V4EaP programme: the limited capacity to spend the additional funds that suddenly became available when Matra was discontinued. This calls for reconsideration of the co-financing, based on the actual or potential merits of the V4EaP programme. The positive effect on Dutch relations with the V4 countries should be taken into account in this process.

b) Involving fewer countries

One issue to consider is whether the Netherlands wishes to support a programme which relies so heavily on the involvement of organisations in the V4 countries. IOB assessed the multilateral setup of the projects as a positive feature, allowing the transfer of knowledge to the EaP countries. However, it sees the requirement to involve organisations from at least three V4 countries as needlessly heavy handed. As the largest sponsor of this programme, the Netherlands can use its leverage to alter the setup of the programme.

c) Strengthening communication with the embassies

In order to reap the benefits of the co-financing, in terms of increased visibility for the Netherlands and networking opportunities for Dutch embassies, it is important to monitor whether project implementers at least mention the Netherlands as a co-sponsor. In addition, embassies in the region should be informed on a structural basis about ongoing projects and events taking place in their countries. This is a shared responsibility of the Visegrad Fund's secretariat and DEU, and demands a more pro-active attitude from the

embassies. DEU could ask the embassies for their assessment, after it has received the Visegrad Fund's annual report on the V4EaP programme.

d) Increasing results orientation

The V4EaP programme could benefit from a stronger results orientation, for example by specifying a results framework, requesting project proposals to present a plausible link between activities, results and effects, and introducing some form of ex-post evaluation. If co-financing continues, DEU could encourage the Visegrad Fund to introduce a monitoring and evaluation framework.

e) Developing other modalities

If BZ decides to discontinue co-funding of the V4EaP programme, it should do so in a way that does least harm to ongoing activities and relations with the V4 countries. It would be interesting to maintain an element of trilateral cooperation within the Matra programme, involving organisations from V4 and other Central European countries, to mobilise their knowledge and experience to benefit EaP countries and promote cross-border networks in the region.

1

Introduction

1.1 Background and aim of the evaluation

The Matra (social transformation) programme was launched in November 1993 to support democratisation in Central and Eastern Europe after the upheavals of the late 1980s. The aim of Matra is to contribute to the process of developing a democratic, pluriform state governed by the rule of law, in which there is space for dialogue between the government and the people. The focus is on capacity building and institutional strengthening of civil society organisations and government institutions, and strengthening bilateral relations. Since its start in 1994, Matra has evolved from a programme focused solely on the social transformation of post-Communist countries to one that also aims to contribute to EU enlargement policy and the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP).

Ukraine and Belarus were among the 14 countries where the programme was launched in 1994. Armenia, Georgia and Moldova became eligible for Matra in 2006, followed by Azerbaijan in 2010. In 2011, the Dutch government decided to phase out the Matra programme for EaP countries as of 2012. However, it continued in 2012, 2013 and 2014, following amendments to the budget by the House of Representatives. Consequently, there has been a budget for Matra in the EaP countries without any explicit policy framework since 2012. In its 2015 budget, the ministry again reserved funds for Matra EaP. The current Matra programme expires at the end of 2015. The government will decide in the course of that year what form the programme will take as from 2016.

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This evaluation has three aims. The first is to give insight into the results of the Matra programme for EaP countries, providing accountability for the EUR 44.3 million disbursed through the Matra programme in 2008-2014. Second, the evaluation aims to produce lessons learned that can be incorporated into the future design of the Matra EaP programme. Third, the evaluation will serve as one of the building blocks for an IOB policy review on the Dutch contribution to the ENP, which is due in 2016.

The evaluation examines all four components ('sub-programmes') of the Matra programme implemented in the EaP countries:

- 1) the Matra Projects Programme (MPP);
- 2) the Matra Small Embassy Projects (KAP) or delegated projects;
- 3) the Matra Political Parties Programme (MPPP);
- 4) the Dutch financial contribution to the Eastern Partnership Programme of the International Visegrad Fund (V4EaP).

1.2 Research questions

The evaluation sought to answer the following research questions:

1) *Relevance*

- Was the Matra programme's focus justified in view of the main challenges faced by the EaP countries?
- Did the programme reflect the Dutch policy priorities for the EaP countries?
- What was the programme's added value in relation to other Dutch programmes or programmes by other donors, notably the EU, that were being implemented in the EaP countries?

2) *Effectiveness*

- Have Matra projects contributed to the process of developing a democratic, pluriform state governed by the rule of law, in which there is space for dialogue between the government and the people?
- To what extent do we know something about the contribution of the Matra programme to the process towards democracy, rule of law, dialogue between the government and civil society, capacity building of civil society organisations and government agencies?
- Did the implemented Matra programme contribute to strengthening bilateral relations between the Netherlands and the EaP countries?
- Which Dutch interests were served by improved relations between the Netherlands and the partner countries?

3) *Management*

- Were the programme components managed in such a way that projects were selected and monitored effectively and efficiently?

These main research questions were operationalized by means of more specific questions per programme component (see Annex 3).

1.3 Scope

Evaluation period

The evaluation period covers the years 2008-2014.

Countries

The evaluation deals exclusively with the Matra programme in the six countries of the Eastern Partnership policy framework. The Matra programme implemented in the Russian Federation (RF) falls outside the scope of this evaluation.

Field studies were conducted for Georgia, Moldova and Belarus – in the case of Belarus, the field study was done by visiting Warsaw and Vilnius, where members of the donor community and representatives from the Belarusian civil society and political parties have

been interviewed. Together, these countries cover about 60% of total Matra disbursements in the EaP countries. Both Georgia and Moldova have signed an Association Agreement with the EU and have expressed their willingness for further integration with the European Union; Belarus has not and so was chosen to avoid only including the same type of countries. Despite the fact that Ukraine was by far the largest recipient, it was not visited. The reason was that the situation in the country was heavily in flux making an assessment more difficult. Moreover, the embassy was already under a lot of strain due to the situation in the country and the evaluation team chose not to further strain them with a visit on such short notice. The countries that were not visited were included in the study less extensively; phone-interviews were held with Dutch Embassy staff and a limited number of projects were analysed by means of desk study and telephone-interviews.

1.4 Approach and methodology

The approach and methodology of the study are elaborated in the Terms of Reference (ToR) for this evaluation.⁴ The ToR contains an evaluation matrix presenting the way in which the evaluation questions will be answered.

Based on academic literature, official reports (e.g. EU progress reports), reports of think-tanks and international NGOs, and the insights gained during the field studies, IOB has conducted an analysis of developments and challenges in the EaP countries in the areas of democratisation, development of the rule of law, human rights, media freedom, government capacity and the economy (see Chapter 2).

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Each of the four sub-programmes that was implemented during the evaluation period, was approached in its own way methodologically. In general, they were assessed based on the two goals of the Matra programme: 1) contributing to the process of developing a democratic, pluriform state governed by the rule of law, in which there is space for dialogue between the government and the people; and 2) promoting bilateral relations between the Netherlands and the EaP countries. For the MPP and the KAP / delegated projects, the relevance and effectiveness was assessed at project level. For the MPPP and the V4EaP programme, projects were not assessed individually. The MPPP activities were too small to look into them individually. In the case of the V4EaP, IOB has looked into the reporting on results by the Visegrad Fund's secretariat.

MPP and KAP / delegated projects

A selection of MPP and KAP / delegated projects was analysed by studying the project files, supplemented by interviews (by telephone or in person during country visits) with project implementers and beneficiaries. Box 1.1 describes how the individual projects have been assessed. An electronic annex published on the IOB website presents the completed assessment forms per project.

⁴ IOB, *Evaluation of the Matra programme in the countries of the Eastern Partnership 2008-2014 – Terms of Reference*, 27 February 2015, see: <http://www.iob-evaluatie.nl>.

Box 1.1 *Assessment of individual MPP and KAP / delegated projects*

Each project was assessed on the following evaluation criteria:

Relevance

- How did the project-objectives fit with the overall goals of the programme, i.e. 'contribution to a process towards democracy, rule of law, dialogue between the government and the civil society, capacity building of civil society organisations and government agencies'?
- To what extent were the project idea and project design owned by local partners?
- Did the project address a key challenge of the EaP country concerned?

Efficiency

- Was the project implemented within the planned time and budget?
- Which factors explain a smooth or laborious project implementation?
- Could the same outputs have been realised with lower costs (cost-efficiency)?

Effectiveness

- What were the outcomes at project level as reconstructed per project?
- How can these outcomes at project level be assessed from the perspective of the Matra objectives?

Sustainability

- Were outputs and outcomes still in place after project implementation?
- Have measures been taken to secure maintenance of effects (also financially)?

Scores (five point Likert scale)

The projects have been scored on each of the evaluation criteria using a five point Likert scale. This scale measures the extent to which the projects met the evaluation criteria:

- 5 – Highly satisfactory (excellent project performance: the project more than fully meets the criteria);
- 4 – Very satisfactory (the project fully meets the criteria);
- 3 – Satisfactory (the project largely meets the criteria);
- 2 – Unsatisfactory (performance less than acceptable: the project only meets the criteria to limited extent); and
- 1 – Poor (project performance with serious deficiencies).

Selection of projects

A total of 22 (8 MPP and 14 KAP / delegated) projects were analysed through desk study and interviews. The number of projects per country are recorded in table 1.1. During the field study for Belarus, IOB has also spoken to implementers of KAP / delegated projects with a budget below EUR 25,000. Despite the fact that these projects were not included in the sample, stakeholders were interviewed due to the heavy accent on these projects in Belarus. Note that no projects in Azerbaijan are included, due to the small number of projects conducted in the country.

Country	Matra Projects Programme (MPP)	KAP / delegated projects (over EUR 25,000)	Total
Armenia	-	2	2
Belarus*	2	2	4
Georgia*	2	4	6
Moldova*	2	4	6
Ukraine	2	2	4
Total	8	14	22

* Field mission countries

An overview of the 22 projects is provided in Annex 4. In the selection of these projects, expenditure per country, country visits and thematic focus were taken into account in order to best reflect the project-portfolio in terms of project sizes, themes covered and the availability of information. The projects in the countries visited by IOB are overrepresented in the selection, meaning that more projects than proportionally justified were selected for these countries. In order to include Matra projects in frozen conflict zones, the selection contained two projects that were implemented in Transnistria (Moldova). IOB visited both projects.

The selected KAP / delegated projects had a total budget of EUR 1.36 million, which amounts to 10% of the total EUR 13.1 million KAP / delegated projects portfolio. The selected MPP projects had a total budget of EUR 3.19 million, which amounts to 14% of the total EUR 22.7 million MPP projects portfolio. In total, the selected projects have a budget of EUR 4.57 million, which is 13% of the total of EUR 35.8 million that was spent through Matra projects.⁵

⁵ Source: 'Piramide', the ministry's financial management and information system. Expenditures below EUR 25,000 are not entered individually in Piramide, but collectively in so-called 'cover commitments'. The embassies have supplied the IOB with the data for these projects.

Matra Political Parties Programme

Implementation of the MPPP in the EaP countries was investigated by studying the activity reports of the relevant party organisations, telephone-interviews with representatives from the foundations linked to the Dutch political parties who received the MPPP grants and interviews with the beneficiaries (representatives from the sister parties in the EaP countries).

Visegrad Fund EaP Programme

The evaluation has acquired an insight into how the Visegrad Fund works and its added value for the Netherlands by consulting documentation (annual reports submitted by the Fund to the Dutch government, project plans and project reports) and conducting interviews with the Fund's secretariat in Bratislava and senior diplomats stationed by the Visegrád countries in the EaP countries.

1.5 Limitations of the evaluation

An important challenge in conducting this study has been assessing the effectiveness of the Matra programme as a whole in terms of its contribution to social transformation. The contribution of the Matra projects could be assessed on the micro-level – i.e. project-outputs and direct and short-term outcomes – and to a certain extent on the meso-level – the contribution of a set of related projects to, for instance the strengthening of civil society – but it has not been possible to do the same on the macro-level, meaning the attribution of observed changes in the areas of democracy, the rule of law and the capacity of local government and civil society to Matra support. This is due to the limited scale of the Matra programme and the limited size of the individual projects in relation to the programmes' goals as well as to the variety of themes and types of activities supported. Also, there are obviously many other important factors/variables in fostering political and societal development that cannot be controlled for.

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Various choices had to be made with regard to case selection, country visits and interlocutors, which have led to limitations of the study. As mentioned above, a relatively small sample of projects, covering only 13% of the Matra budget spent in the EaP countries between 2008-2014 could be analysed by means of desk study and interviews. Doing an in-depth analysis of more projects was not possible due to the high number and small size of the projects and the limited time and budget available for the evaluation. Although it was attempted to get the best-possible representation of the project portfolio there are invariably limitations with regard to the generalizability of results. Similar challenges were faced in selecting the countries that were visited by the evaluation team. Three of six countries – Belarus, Georgia and Moldova – were covered. The IOB team has selected a representative pool of countries to visit; i.e. not only those that have signed an Association Agreement and keeping in mind the relative importance and allocated budget to these countries on the other. Also, a desk study was done for the other countries. Still, the information gathered is inevitably less complete and in-depth as compared to the information on the countries that were visited. With regard to interlocutors the IOB team was relatively dependent on the perception of stakeholders in the various projects. Despite

this, the risk of a biased view is considered limited as the evaluation team has spoken to approximately 150 interlocutors during this study. Apart from direct stakeholders, there were also independent interlocutors, linked to universities, think-tanks, diplomatic/donor missions, journalists etc., so that some verification was possible. Also, generally speaking, stakeholders gave the impression of being open to critical reflection with regard to the projects that they were involved in.

Lastly, there were some challenges in attaining the information necessary for conducting this study. As a function of the many transfers of employees of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, lack of institutional memory is often a problem. Despite full cooperation and lots of effort by the colleagues of the ministry, it has proven difficult at times to attain the right project-files, data from the archives or the colleagues responsible for a certain policy-area or programme. The Europe Department (DEU), having seen several reorganisations and a staff-cut, is no different. With regard to the Matra political Parties Programme (MPPP), IOB has faced difficulty in assembling and aggregating information from the political party foundations, due to different – and sometimes rather cursory – ways of reporting on activities.

2

Context of the Eastern Partnership

In order to give a clear view of the larger context in which the Matra programme was implemented, this chapter will shortly outline the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership, as well as the characteristics of the various EaP countries, the extent to which they have made progress, and the remaining challenges and dilemmas in moving forward.

2.1 The European Neighbourhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership

The European Neighbourhood Policy

The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) was developed as a framework for relations with the new neighbours of the European Union after its eastward expansion in 2004. In short, the focus of the ENP was the development of special relations between the EU and its respective neighbouring countries in order to create a safe and prosperous region around itself, a so-called 'ring of friends'. According to the Commission's 2003 'Wider Europe' announcement, another goal was preventing that the EU's new borders would lead to the creation of dividing lines within Europe.⁶

To foster an area of stability, peace and prosperity, the EU tried to achieve political, economic and social change in the partner countries that is in compliance with European norms and values through an incentive-based approach: the EU incentivised political, judicial and economic reform by means of political association, economic integration and increased mobility (visa facilitation or liberalisation).⁷

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The ENP merged cooperation with the Southern and Eastern countries into one policy framework, underlining it was not a precursor to membership. An important difference between the Southern and Eastern neighbours is the fact that the Eastern European countries can apply for EU membership based on article 49 of the EU treaty.⁸

Relations with partner countries were structured via detailed Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs), and in some cases through the further-reaching Association Agreements (AAs) and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (DCFTAs). The ENP action plans per country reflect the interests of both the EU and the partnering countries and set out a concrete reform agenda with short and medium-term priorities of 3 to 5 years. The Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS) publish yearly reports on the progress that is made in the respective countries; these reports are the basis of EU policy vis-à-vis the partner countries.

⁶ Commission of the European Communities, *Wider Europe – Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours*, Communication, COM(2003) 104 final; Brussels, 11 March 2003.

⁷ Norms and values relating to democracy, the rule of law and human rights, good governance, the economy, the environment, etc. Parliamentary Papers 21 501-20, no. 882, The Hague, 12 June 2014, pp. 1-2.

⁸ This article in the Treaty on European Union states that any European state which respects the – European – values referred to in article 2 of the same treaty may apply to become a member of the Union.

The ENP has evolved since 2004, the substance of the policy has broadened and deepened over time; neighbouring countries were given the prospect of DCFTAs and Mobility Partnerships or a visa free regime.⁹ After the so-called 'Arab Spring' took the EU by surprise in 2011 and highlighted the weakness of the ENP's political dimension, the ENP was reformed to focus more on the role of civil society in societal change and a more incentive-based approach was employed, granting countries that were successful in their reforms deeper political association and economic integration with the EU.¹⁰ There were also various institutional changes, such as the appointment of the Union's High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy (HR) and the establishment of an EU diplomatic service, as a result of the coming into force of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009.

2014 was in many respects a rough year for the ENP. The conflict in Ukraine, pressure by Russia on the other EaP countries (see further), the protracted crisis in Syria, grave human rights violations by ISIS and other terrorist groups, the – risk of a – failing Libyan state and the enormous increase in migration cast a shadow over the European neighbourhood region, which was increasingly being seen as a 'ring of instability'. At the same time, some important steps were taken, such as making migration and mobility a more central part of the ENP and offering more room for conditionality through a new multi-annual financial framework.¹¹ In March 2015 the European Commission and the HR released a joint consultation paper setting key questions for an open consultation on the future form of the ENP. The document calls for a revision of the assumptions the ENP is based on, the scope of the policy and the instruments used.¹²

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The Eastern Partnership

In 2008 the Mediterranean Union, a multilateral component for the Southern neighbours, was established on the initiative of France. As a reaction, Poland and Sweden initiated the Eastern Partnership (EaP) as a multilateral component for the Eastern neighbours in 2009. The EaP countries are Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. The goal of the EaP was realising political association and economic integration between the six EaP countries and the EU, based on shared values and interests.¹³

⁹ European Commission and High Representative of the European Union for Foreign and Security Policy, *Towards a new European Neighbourhood Policy*, Join(2015) 6 final Joint Consultation paper, Brussels, 4 March 2015.

¹⁰ The European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) started for the 2014-2020 period, building on the aforementioned revised ENP in 2011, this successor of the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) focused more on civil society and the involvement of local authorities and allows more room for conditionality. The ENI budget increased 7% compared to the 2007-2013 ENPI budget and is now EUR 15.4 billion.

¹¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Towards a new European Neighbourhood Policy: equal, focused, and integrated (Naar een nieuw Europees nabuurschapsbeleid: gelijkwaardig, gericht en geïntegreerd)*, Cabinet appreciation yearly progress report ENP, Parliamentary Papers 22 112, no. 1961, The Hague, 17 April 2015.

¹² European Commission and High Representative of the European Union for Foreign and Security Policy, *Towards a new European Neighbourhood Policy*, Join(2015) 6 final Joint Consultation paper, Brussels, 4 March 2015.

¹³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Commitment and request of a letter with regard to the relations between the EU and Eastern Europe (Toezegging en verzoek inzake brief over de relaties tussen de EU en Oost-Europa)*, Parliamentary Papers 21 501-20, no. 882, The Hague, 12 June 2014, pp. 1-2.

There are two tracks within the EaP. A bilateral track, where the EU cooperates with partners bilaterally via a framework of association and trade agreements, and a multilateral track, with the goal of promoting cooperation among the EaP countries in different sectors and the exchange of information in the areas of economic cooperation, energy, security (borders), democratisation and good governance, as well as contacts between societies.¹⁴

All EaP countries are former Soviet republics that gained independence in 1991 and they are, to some extent at least, treated as a group within the ENP. Still, there are substantial differences between them in terms of geographical location, size and prosperity. There are also differences in the degree to which they seek closer relations with the EU. Belarus for instance, has only participated in the multilateral track of the EaP, due to the unsatisfactory record of the country in the areas of political and human rights. As a result of the crackdown by the authorities on civil society in 2010 and politically motivated arrests, the EU has imposed sanctions on Belarus. Similarly, Azerbaijan has not shown much interest in the EaP except for trade and cooperation in the commercial sectors. Meanwhile the human rights situation in the country remains poor.¹⁵ Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine on the other hand actively seek further association with the EU.

The 2013 Vilnius Summit was a pivotal moment for the relations between the EaP countries and the EU. The initialising of the AAs/DCFTAs with Georgia and Moldova was the main deliverable of the summit and this was a big step in the political association and economic integration of these countries. However, the high expectations in the run-up to 'Vilnius' were not met in all respects; Armenia backed out in the run-up to the summit due to increasing political and financial pressure from Russia, despite having all but finished negotiations on the signing of an AA. It then decided to join the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). Moreover, the summit was dominated by the decision of the government of Ukraine to renege on signing the AA, allegedly also as a consequence of Russian pressure. This spurred the Maidan-protests that led to the fall of the Yanukovich government, the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation and a separatist conflict in Eastern Ukraine, allegedly backed by Russia. The new Ukrainian government eventually signed the political chapters of the association agreement in March 2014 and the remaining sections in June 2014.

The conclusion of AAs/DCFTAs with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine has in a way formalized the divergent ambitions amongst the EaP countries. Moving forward, relations with the 'ambitious three' will focus on the implementation of these agreements. Despite the challenges ahead in this process, the agreements are likely to be an impulse for their relations with the EU. The trajectory of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus is much less certain.

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 1-2.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 2-4.

2.2 Characteristics of the EaP countries

Political development

The challenges the EaP countries face in their political development are typical for post-communist states such as those in Central Europe and the Western Balkans. Although all six countries face similar challenges, there are roughly two groups that can be discerned.

Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine have all had more or less free and fair elections in the past years. Table 2.1 shows that the democracy scores for these three countries are the lowest – thus indicating higher levels of democratic progress. The situation in Ukraine has slightly deteriorated during the period of analysis whereas the situation in Georgia and Moldova has slightly improved. This is not to say that there are no problems with regard to their political development; in none of the three countries can democracy be considered consolidated. Many political parties lacked a meaningful programme or strategic vision for the country and were mainly interested in acquiring state power. This has led to a volatile political system with many changes in coalitions and political parties. There was a relatively high frequency of political parties emerging, splitting-up or merging. Closely related to this volatility was a high degree of polarisation. Political parties were often centred around their leader and regularly lacked genuine intra-party democracy. In combination with the lack of a clear and positive political programme, this made political parties very vocal in saying what they opposed instead of searching for a constructive solution; when politics is about personalities, political disagreements become personal and vice versa. This has led to a very polarised debate with limited trust among parties and little willingness to cooperate in a constructive manner. Changes in government coalitions in Georgia for example, have led to politically motivated persecutions and lay-offs of civil servants to the detriment of government capacity.

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Country	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Armenia	5.21	5.39	5.39	5.43	5.39	5.36	5.36
Azerbaijan	6.00	6.25	6.39	6.46	6.57	6.64	6.68
Belarus	6.71	6.57	6.50	6.57	6.68	6.71	6.71
Georgia	4.79	4.93	4.93	4.86	4.82	4.75	4.68
Moldova	5.00	5.07	5.14	4.96	4.89	4.82	4.86
Ukraine	4.25	4.39	4.39	4.61	4.82	4.86	4.93

NOTE: ratings are based on the 2014 Freedom House Nations in Transit report. Ratings are based on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 representing the highest level of democratic progress and 7 the lowest. The democracy score above is an average of the ratings for 7 different indicators in the Nations in Transit Report.

Corruption and the lack of rule of law are generally considered to be the most important challenges in the political development of these countries. Whereas Georgia scored relatively well, corruption was generally a pervasive problem in the other two countries, which scored poorly in Transparency International's 2014 Corruption Perception Index. Ukraine scored lowest ranking at 142 of the 174 countries – a low ranking meaning a high degree of perceived corruption.¹⁶ In Moldova for example it can be argued that there was a situation of systemic political corruption that could be characterized as state capture; power was monopolized by a small group of oligarchs that used their political influence to perpetuate their financial interests. The political parties were subordinated to the interests of these oligarchs. Linked to the problems with political corruption there were problems in the judiciary. Although to differing degrees, there were pervasive but indiscernible connections between government, politicians and the judiciary in Moldova and Ukraine, leading to problems with the rule of law, such as a lack of independence of the judiciary. According to the Nations in Transit report – see table 2.2 – the situation with regard to the rule of law has not improved in any of the three countries; all scored worse in 2014 than in 2008. There was not much change in Moldova and Georgia, but according to the data, Ukraine had a relatively sharp setback.

Country	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Armenia	5.25	5.50	5.50	5.50	5.50	5.50	5.50
Azerbaijan	5.75	5.75	6.25	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.50
Belarus	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	7.00	7.00	7.00
Georgia	4.75	4.75	4.75	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00
Moldova	4.50	4.50	4.75	4.50	4.50	4.50	4.75
Ukraine	4.75	5.00	5.00	5.50	6.00	6.00	6.00

NOTE: ratings are based on the 2014 Freedom House Nations in Transit report. Ratings are based on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 representing the highest level of democratic progress and 7 the lowest.

Where the above three countries were at least on a trajectory towards further association with the EU, the democratisation process in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus was either stagnant or regressing. In Armenia, the most liberal of the three countries – see table 2.1 – elections could not be called free or fair; they have been marred by irregularities such as vote buying and misuse of administrative resources and (state) media. The situation in Belarus and Azerbaijan was even more problematic. Belarus was arguably still the most repressive of the EaP countries and scored the lowest in the Freedom House Nations in Transit Index. Belarus' democracy score has fluctuated slightly between 2008 and 2014, but remained close to 7. President Lukashenka has been in power since 1994 and his regime has

¹⁶ Of the 174 countries included in the Corruption Perceptions Index in 2013, the EaP countries scored as follows: Armenia 94, Azerbaijan 126, Georgia 50, Moldova 103, Ukraine 142 and Belarus 119, see: <http://www.transparency.org/cpi2014/results>.

consistently monitored and repressed the opposition, independent media, civil society and the private business sector. The country did not have an independent judiciary and, as a consequence, there was no rule of law to speak of. Azerbaijan scored only slightly better, but has seen a sharp drop scoring 5.75 in 2008 and 6.50 in 2014. The bad record of the rule of law in Armenia, Belarus and Azerbaijan is reflected in the same table, where it can be seen that Armenia again scores markedly better than the other two countries. As can be seen in the footnote on the previous page, corruption was also a pervasive problem.

Civil society

As with the previous themes a division can be made between the countries that had a relatively open, vibrant and free community of civil society organisations (CSOs) – Armenia, Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine – and those where the regime towards both citizens and CSOs was repressive – Azerbaijan and Belarus. The same can be seen in table 2.3, which also shows the stark regression in Azerbaijan during the period of analysis. Apart from some fluctuations in Belarus, the data show relatively little change.

Country	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Armenia	3.50	3.75	3.75	3.75	3.75	3.75	3.75
Azerbaijan	5.25	5.50	5.75	5.75	6.00	6.25	6.50
Belarus	6.50	6.25	6.00	6.00	6.25	6.50	6.50
Georgia	3.50	3.75	3.75	3.75	3.75	3.75	3.75
Moldova	3.75	3.75	3.50	3.25	3.25	3.25	3.25
Ukraine	2.75	2.75	2.75	2.75	2.75	2.75	2.50

NOTE: ratings are based on the 2014 Freedom House Nations in Transit report. Ratings are based on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 representing the highest level of democratic progress and 7 the lowest.

In Armenia, Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine, the community of CSOs was relatively strong and well organized, as is reflected by their higher ratings in table 2.3. CSOs interacted with government and offered expertise and ideas. Many CSOs also had a watchdog function. Despite these positive characteristics, the main difference between these countries and the more repressive ones was the presence of formal structures for civil society. Moldova and Georgia for example still faced a low level of trust within society and widespread political apathy amongst the population, especially outside the major cities. In both countries Western funded professional CSOs have gained expertise and access to policy makers but in the process they are at risk of becoming elitist and disconnected from society themselves. Whilst many groups function relatively well in terms of advocacy work, it remains to be seen to what extent they will be successful in fostering civic attitudes amongst the broader population. The already dominant position of large, Western funded NGOs was reinforced by an increased focus on disbursing larger grants with stricter requirements in terms of applications, reporting and finances, making it harder for local organisations at the grassroots level to compete.

As an example of one of the more repressive countries, Belarusian society was characterised by political apathy. Probably induced by a long history of repression, prompting a majority of Belarusians to live their lives and stay out of public affairs if possible. Lukashenka's rule has provided the country with stability, basic salaries and pensions; the price for this seems to have been authoritarianism. Furthermore, a majority of Belarusians strongly displayed conservative values in polls and favoured cooperation with Russia over the West – note: it is likely that these polls were slanted by participation of a conservative soviet-era part of the population and the large amount of Russian propaganda. Still, the country was modernising and gradually moving towards the West, be it at a very slow pace. The little political opposition that Belarus had, was divided and suffered from in-fighting. The CSO community faced hard repression by the regime leading many CSOs to work from either Vilnius or Warsaw, where there is a vibrant community of Belarusian CSOs. For donors, it was difficult to work with CSOs in Belarus and much of the work was forcibly small-scale as the government was very restrictive in permitting activities that would be truly conducive to the creation of civic spirit. Results of cooperation with CSOs are very uncertain; little meaningful change could be registered over the last 20 years, which is not to say that things could not be changing under the surface. In some cases, CSOs developed into organisations resembling patronage-networks, which is hardly helpful to fostering civic and democratic attitudes in the long run. This is again likely to be a long term process. Areas of important cooperation identified were independent media and working with local communities.

An actor that is well-linked to society in many of the EaP countries is the Orthodox Church. Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine are all countries with a predominantly Orthodox Christian population and the Church generally enjoys a prominent position. With high numbers of followers, the Churches in these countries were relatively rich and powerful institutions. At the same time, the Church was a conservative actor in all of these countries. Furthermore, the Russian Orthodox Church had a lot of direct and indirect influence in the region. With the exception of Ukraine, the clergy was often very critical of the EU – which it saw as promoting immoral behaviour – and was more inclined towards Russia. However, there are signs of change; in Georgia for example, the Patriarch has recently made several pro-European statements.

Economy

As a consequence of historical patterns and geographical location, the EU and the Russian Federation (RF) were amongst the most important trading partners for the EaP countries, the former often more so than the latter, see table 2.4. Since the last months of 2014 the EaP economies have suffered due to declining exports to Russia – which has had its own economic decline due to low oil prices and Western sanctions. In some cases exports to the RF were limited further due to Russian embargoes to dissuade EaP countries taking a pro-European course. Several of the EaP countries' currencies have depreciated against the US Dollar in the beginning of 2015. In Ukraine, the conflict in the East has severely damaged the country's economy, making it dependent on IMF loans and bilateral support from other donors such as the US and the EU.

Country	Total trade with EU (EUR mln)	Share in %	Rank EU as partner	Total trade with RF (EUR million)	Share in %	Rank RF as partner
Armenia	1 273	27.9	1	1 108	24.3	2
Azerbaijan	11 714	44.0	1	1 981	7.4	3
Belarus	16 086	26.2	2	30 475	49.6	1
Georgia	2 205	26.7	1	598	7.2	5
Moldova	2 769	45.7	1	1 089	18.0	2
Ukraine	33 589	31.2	1	29 368	27.3	2
Total	67 636			64 619		

Source: European Commission, DG Trade. Total goods top trading partners 2013. Various reports.

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Overall, the attitude of the countries' governments in combatting the economic problems has not been very proactive, due to a fear of taking unpopular measures or resistance to privatising parts of the state-planned economy. All of the EaP countries had a significant part of their population working abroad. The remittances they sent home often amounted to an important portion of the respective economies. According to World Bank data they accounted for 21% of Armenia's GDP, 12% of Georgia's, and 25% of Moldova's. Although these remittances came from all over the world, the largest share by far came from the RF, at 9.1% of GDP for Armenia, 4.5% for Georgia and 9.3% for Moldova.¹⁷ These remittances have also gone down due to the aforementioned decline in the Russian economy.

Generating tax revenue proved another challenge in many EaP countries. Due to massive tax evasion and a large informal economy the respective states have had a hard time generating a budget. In Moldova for example it is estimated that 60 to 70% of the economy lies within the so-called shadow economy, on which no taxes are collected. According to statistics, the average Moldovan made about EUR 100 a month, which is not nearly enough to survive. Still, people in Moldova get by, indicating a large informal income. Apart from the informal economy, the aforementioned remittances make up for the lack of income. Subsistence farming is also still an important part of the economy in many countries. In Georgia 47% of the population lived in rural areas whilst the contribution of agriculture to the GDP was only 9.4%, indicating a large measure of subsistence farming which does not contribute to a viable tax base.¹⁸

Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine considered the signing of an AA/DCFTA to be an important step towards further economic integration with the EU and expected it to lead to economic growth via exports to the EU and increased foreign investments. Despite the positive step of

¹⁷ Russia's rouble crisis poses threat to nine countries relying on remittances, *The Guardian*, 18 January 2015, see: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jan/18/russia-rouble-threat-nine-countries-remittances>.

¹⁸ World Bank, *World development indicators Agriculture and Rural development*, see: <http://data.worldbank.org/topic/agriculture-and-rural-development> and <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NV.AGR.TOTL.ZS>.

signing the agreements, there are some important challenges ahead for the countries if they want to reap the benefits of the AAs/DCFTAs, especially when it comes to the transposition and implementation of large parts of the EU *acquis*. Also, a clear vision of exactly how the AA and DCFTA would lead to increased economic growth was often lacking. In both Georgia and Moldova some reforms that were considered unpopular were pushed ahead. At the same time, governments in both countries have on more than one occasion blamed unpopular measures on Brussels, risking popular support for the EU trajectory in the long run.

The Russian authorities were sensitive about closer economic integration between the EaP countries and the EU, which they claimed was harming Russian economic interests. In January 2015 the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) came into force, with Russia and two EaP countries – Armenia and Belarus – as its members. The EEU combines the Eurasian Customs Union, the Eurasian Economic Community and the Eurasian Economic Space.¹⁹ It is more ambitious than the Customs Union, considered to be more political and at an institutional level has some resemblance to the EU. An important legal consequence of the EEU was that Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) for the EaP countries with both blocs – i.e. the EU and EEU – were no longer possible. Both Belarus and Armenia were heavily dependent on Russia in terms of the economy (trade), because the Russian market was more easily accessible for their goods than the EU. The high dependence of Armenia on Russia in terms of trade and energy (gas supply) led the country to a U-turn with regard to the signing of an Association Agreement in 2013 after pressure by Russia.

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Media

The media landscape in the EaP countries was generally polarised, and often failed to offer the population neutral coverage of politics, the economy or international events. Especially worrisome was the often toxic and divisive atmosphere created by Russian propaganda. Parts of the societies – often ethnic minorities – in the EaP countries fell within what could be termed the ‘Russian information space’. With Russian being their first or second language, they got their news mostly from Russian media outlets. At the same time, other media-outlets were often also far from being objective and independent, due to their adherence to a certain political party, oligarch, religious group or other agent. Table 2.5 below features the usual division between Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus on the one hand and Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine on the other. Media independence is higher in the latter group and has shown a slightly positive trend in Georgia and Moldova. According to the data, Ukraine has featured a rather sharp drop, which reflects the gradual deterioration of the independent media in the country, mainly as a result of government pressure between 2008-2014.²⁰ Still, the media are one of the most free in the region. In the other group of countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus) media independence was markedly lower and there was no real development in the data over time.

¹⁹ European Council on Foreign Relations, *Armenia and the Eurasian Economic Union: The view from Yerevan*, 8 January 2015, see: http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_armenia_and_the_eurasian_economic_union_the_view_from_yerevan387.

²⁰ Freedom House, *Nations in Transit 2014*, Ukraine.

Country	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Armenia	5.75	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	5.75	5.75
Azerbaijan	6.25	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75
Belarus	6.75	6.75	6.50	6.75	6.75	6.75	6.75
Georgia	4.25	4.25	4.25	4.25	4.25	4.25	4.00
Moldova	5.50	5.75	5.75	5.50	5.00	5.00	5.00
Ukraine	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.75	4.00	4.00	4.25

NOTE: ratings are based on the 2014 Freedom House Nations in Transit report. Ratings are based on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 representing the highest level of democratic progress and 7 the lowest.

Minorities

Most of the EaP countries feature a multi-ethnic society. According to official census data, Armenia and Azerbaijan are both relatively homogeneous in their ethnic composition; the Armenians and Azerbaijanis make up more than 90% of the population in both countries.²¹ Belarus and Georgia have more minorities within their borders – about 17% – and Ukraine and Moldova have the largest groups of minorities, i.e. almost 25% of the population, see Annex 2 for more details.

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Although there were differences, the EaP countries faced some important common challenges to the position of minorities. Most important was their soviet past, which has been a formative factor in the way the EaP countries dealt with their ethnic minorities. Independence from the Soviet Union led to an increase in nationalism and in this context the minorities were often treated as guests or openly discriminated against. Furthermore, the frozen conflicts in the EaP countries also led to suspicion by the public and authorities, if minorities asked for a greater degree of autonomy. The minorities were often further isolated as a result of language. Many minorities used Russian as their primary language. This also meant integration into the Russian ‘information space’, resulting in a more positive perception of Russia as an international actor and a rather negative view of their own central government and the prospect of EU integration. These and other issues have led to and increased the disadvantaged position of minorities in the EaP countries which has resulted in an underrepresentation in legislative bodies, national and local administrations and the judiciary.

A vicious circle with regard to minorities persisted in which there was a failure to realize minority rights, a lack of minority participation in civil, political and economic life due to isolation, discrimination and language issues and their eventual marginalisation and relative poverty. This in turn heightened the risk of tensions between the various

²¹ It needs to be mentioned that the reliability of census data presented by the countries are often subject of debate. Still it is the best estimate available.

communities, potentially exacerbated by Russian meddling, which were destructive for the debate on minority rights and led to a more isolated position.²²

The situation with regard to sexual or religious minorities was not better than that of ethnic minorities. Even in the EaP countries which have made great progress over the period of analysis such as Georgia and where minority rights were often protected by law, minorities faced harassment and intimidation by law enforcement officers and members of the Orthodox Church. This situation was worse in Azerbaijan and Belarus.²³

Security

A common characteristic of all the EaP countries is a strong dependence on the RF for their security. All EaP countries except Belarus have unresolved territorial disputes or so-called 'frozen conflicts' (see Annex 2). The RF has a military presence in all these conflicts, making it a crucial actor in dispute resolution. At times it has destabilised the situation through Russian minorities and arms deals. One of the means of pressure used on Armenia to dissuade it from signing the Association Agreement with the EU was Russia's arms deal with Azerbaijan – with which Armenia is embroiled in a conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. This was used on top of the raising of gas prices. The RF also hinted at Moldova that signing an AA/DCFTA with the EU would risk the future of Transnistria as part of Moldova.²⁴

2.3 Challenges and dilemmas

In the course of the past few years the strategic situation for the EU in Europe's Eastern neighbourhood region has fundamentally changed. The main reason was Russia's assertive policy towards the region, which meant that the region was increasingly being squeezed between Russia and the EU.

Russia's near abroad

Russia considers the region to be its 'near abroad' and actively uses all available instruments to protect its interests in the region. As a consequence of Russia's assertive attitude and the aforementioned close economic, political and cultural ties with the EaP countries, Russia has a strong influence on the stability in the region. This is unlikely to change anytime soon as neither Russia's view towards the EaP countries nor its own authoritarian regime, are likely to change.²⁵

²² Minorityrights.org, *Minorities in the Eastern Partnership countries*, see: <http://www.minorityrights.org/11886/programmes/the-eastern-partnership-minorities-network.html> (website no longer available).

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ 'Russia threatens Moldova over its EU relations', Euractiv, 3 September 2013, see: <http://www.euractiv.com/europes-east/russia-keeps-threatening-neighbor-news-530198>.
'Europe seeks alternative gas supplies', Financial Times, 27 April 2014, see: <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/b943b2c4-b8ed-11e3-98c5-00144feabdco.html#axzz3iacCtOnk>.

²⁵ Advisory Council on International Affairs, *Instability around Europe: confrontation with a new Reality (Instabiliteit rond Europa: Confrontatie met een nieuwe werkelijkheid)*, AIV advice no. 95, April 2015.

Russia has used its economic power to dissuade the EaP countries from further integration with the EU. For instance by means of embargoes on agricultural products, which did a lot of damage to the EaP economies as Russia is an important outlet-market – see table 2.4 – and the EaP countries' products generally did not meet EU standards. Russia has also used visa-restrictions for the many workers from the EaP countries in Russia as a means of influence. Related to its economic power are Russia's large oil and gas supplies. Their large dependency on Russian gas has made some EaP countries – as well as some EU countries – vulnerable to political pressure from Russia. Armenia, Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus for instance, all imported more than 75% of their gas from Russia in 2012; this did not apply to Azerbaijan, which itself exports oil and gas.²⁶

As mentioned above, Russian media had a strong foothold in the EaP countries. Frequently reaching the minority groups that have hitherto benefitted relatively little from Euro-Atlantic integration, they were creating a divisive atmosphere using disinformation and propaganda. The role of Russian media has become more aggressive over recent years, especially with regard to the conflict in Ukraine where media was used as another domain of competition in Russia's hybrid warfare. Russian media were creating a narrative of Western aggression to which a resurgent Russia is finally standing up after years of humiliation, protecting the core values against corrupting Western influences and protecting the rights of Russian minorities everywhere.²⁷ New interpretations are cleverly grafted onto historical terms such as fascists or 'Novorossiya' in order to sway public opinion and justify Russian behaviour.²⁸

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Lastly, Russia is a decisive actor when it comes to regional security. As mentioned, all but one EaP countries had a so-called frozen conflict, in which Russia played a vital role. The annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the Russian involvement in the conflict in Eastern Ukraine have shown that Russia was willing to escalate the situation despite high costs in terms of sanctions and international reputation.

The EU's Eastern Partners

Whilst Russia considered the region one of its core political interests, the EU has taken a somewhat different approach. It emphasizes that the EaP is not a zero-sum-game between the RF and the EU for influence in the region, that cooperation between the two blocs is essential and that the EaP countries ought to be free to plot their own course. The EU is being challenged to effectively respond to Russia's short-term offers to the EaP countries. The goals of democratic transition that the EU is trying to achieve take a lot of time, but meanwhile the population in the EaP countries needs some short-term tangible results from EU approximation. Put bluntly, for many people Russia is far from an ideal partner, but it is one they know. Also, Russia provides short-term solutions – if the EaP countries fall

²⁶ 'Europe seeks alternative gas supplies', *Financial Times*, 27 April 2014, see: <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/b943b2c4-b8ed-11e3-98c5-00144feabdco.html#axzz3iacCtOnk>.

²⁷ Justyna Prus & Stanislav Secieru, *What lies behind the Anti-West outburst in Russia?*, Polish Institute for International Affairs, Bulletin No. 37 (769), 14 April, 2015.

²⁸ Peter Pomerantsev, *Russia and the Menace of Unreality*, 9 September 2014, see: <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/09/russia-putin-revolutionizing-information-warfare/379880/>.

in line, it is willing to buy agricultural products the EU deems sub-standard, provide energy at cheap rates and security-assistance were needed. Therefore it is important for the EaP to offer tangible results to the general population, but it remains to be seen whether the EU is willing and able to provide these. For the near future, the Visa Liberalisation Action Plans (VLAP) are an important incentive for reforms for all countries that have signed an AA.

A related dilemma is the long-term prospects for the EaP countries, especially the lack of the so-called 'golden carrot' of an EU membership perspective. For the countries that are seeking EU membership – Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine – the long-term perspective of membership is thought to be instrumental in the implementation of difficult reforms under the AAs/DCFTAs. At the same time, the examples of the Western Balkans and Turkey show that a membership perspective should not be considered a panacea.

If the EU wants to see reforms, both short and long term incentives for the EaP countries are important with a view to popular support for European integration. The EU must show the population that it can offer powerful incentives without losing track of its own values; which is sometimes challenging. A good example of the dilemmas the EU faces in this regard is the situation in Moldova. After the pro-European coalition won the elections in 2009 the EU started actively supporting the coalition with extra funds. The influx of EU money stimulated corruption in the country of which the EU, eager to keep Moldova on its pro-European course, was not very critical. Unfortunately, this has led to the EU becoming associated with corrupt political leaders and has not been beneficial for EU support amongst the population.

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Another inherent tension is that between a foreign policy based on considerations of security and economic interests and one based on moral values. The EU's geopolitical interests in a stable region do not always get along well with its value-based foreign policy. The recent rapprochement between the EU and Belarus is a good example. The human rights situation in the country has not notably improved but the ceasefire negotiations in Minsk over the war in eastern Ukraine have raised Belarus' international profile and the EU is positive about the role Belarus is taking in the conflict. Similarly, criticism on the human rights situation in Azerbaijan is an issue for some EU member states due to the country's role as an exporter of oil and gas, which has become even more important taking into account the EU's wish to further diversify its energy imports.

Related to this geopolitical element is the matter of third-party involvement. The EaP countries do not want the EU's policies toward the region to be a function of EU-Russia relations. Giving the Kremlin a veto in the development of relations between the EU and the EaP countries would block further progress and does not do justice to the state sovereignty of the EaP countries. At the same time, the EU cannot disregard the close ties between these countries and the RF. Also, the RF is an important trading partner to the EU, especially in terms of energy.

Lastly, there is also a tension between the principle of differentiation on the one hand and the goal of preventing a new dividing-line within Europe on the other. Differentiation and further association with the group of countries that wanted further association and the relative standstill in relations between the EU and Azerbaijan and Belarus has *de facto* created a clear dividing line within the EaP. With the 'front-runners' now asking for more differentiation, the risk of further solidifying this dividing line has increased.

3

The Matra programme – policy and implementation

3.1 Matra objective and principles

The Matra programme was launched in November 1993 to support democratisation in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe after the upheavals of the late 1980s. Since then, Matra has evolved from a programme focused solely on the social transformation of post-communist countries to one that also aims to contribute to EU enlargement policy and the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP).

Goal

In 2009 the programme's overall goal was formulated as follows:

*'The aim of Matra is to contribute to the process of developing a democratic, pluriform state governed by the rule of law, in which there is space for dialogue between the government and its people. The focus is on capacity building and institutional strengthening of civil society organisations and government institutions, and strengthening bilateral relations.'*²⁹

The two main goals that have characterized the Matra programme from its inception are:

- 1) supporting the transformation process in the Matra countries, not only socially but also in terms of political, governance and legal systems;
- 2) strengthening bilateral relations between social actors and governments in the Netherlands and the Matra countries (the networking function). Matra gives the missions and the ministry in The Hague access to useful networks at both central and local government level and in civil society for maintaining contacts and gathering information.³⁰

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Basic principles and guidelines

The following principles and guidelines were formulated for the implementation of the Matra programme:

- **Flexibility:** Optimal flexibility is seen as one of Matra's trademarks.³¹ Matra was set up to respond to the transition in former communist countries in a way that was flexible and demand-driven.³²
- **Dutch knowledge and expertise:** One consideration in continuing to provide assistance from the Netherlands was that it has valuable knowledge and expertise in a number of areas. For this reason, a number of partner countries would prefer working with the Netherlands.³³

²⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Matra modernised*, 16 October 2009, p.15, see: http://www.minbuza.nl/binaries/content/assets/minbuza/en/import/en/key_topics/matra_programme/matra-programme-modernised.

³⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *The Matra Programme: The Flexible Response to Changing Prospects for Transformation (Het Matra-programma: de flexibele respons op wisselende transformatieperspectieven)*, Appendix to the letter to Parliament, Parliamentary Papers 23 987, no. 39, 21 September 2004, p. 23.

³¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2009, *supra* note 29, p. 21.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 4.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

- *Strict but fair*: The Matra programme is also seen as a useful element of the Netherlands' 'strict but fair' stance as a critical partner in the political dialogue on the (pre-)accession process or on issues like human rights or security.³⁴ This is based on the assumption that the Netherlands will gain in credibility if it offers support as well as expressing criticism.
- *Demand-driven support*: Matra is in principle demand-driven. This means that, to ensure sufficient support in the recipient country, the projects are proposed by organisations in the country itself and are preferably supported by local or central authorities (of course depending on the nature of the project and the political context).
- *Complementary to EU and other Dutch programmes*: Matra is meant to complement both the programmes of the European Commission and other Dutch programmes (including constituency support (Kiesgroepsteun), the Stability Fund, the Foreign Policy Support Programme, the Human Rights Fund and bilateral development cooperation).³⁵
- *Tripartite cooperation*: Tripartite cooperation, in which expertise from a more advanced country can be deployed in implementing Matra activities in a less advanced country, is encouraged.³⁶

3.2 Development of the Matra programme

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Since the end of the 1990s various sub-programmes have been developed, along two lines:

- 1) Classical Matra (as of 2004 called 'Matra for Good Governance'), aimed at social and democratic transition by means of support to the civil society, political parties and local governments; and
- 2) Matra Pre-Accession: (as of 2004 called 'Matra for European Cooperation), primarily aimed at supporting the (potential) candidate EU member states in transposing and implementing the EU *acquis* and building the administrative and judicial capacity required for EU membership.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 14.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 19.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 14.

Table 3.1 Matra sub-programmes	
Classical Matra (until 2004)	Matra Pre-Accession (until 2004)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Matra Projects Programme (MPP) - Matra Programme International Nature Management (PIN) - Matra Educational Programme (MOP) - Matra Political Parties Programme (MPPP) - Matra Small-scale Local Activities Programme (KPA) - Matra Small Embassy Projects Programme (KAP) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Matra Pre-Accession Programme (MPAP) - Accession Oriented Dutch Proficiency Training (ADEPT) - Short Mission Programme (PUA) - Programme for Municipal Cooperation (GST) - Internships Matra for Pre-Accession Training Programme (IMPACT) - Departmental Initiatives Pre-Accession (DIP) - Partnership Facility
Matra for Good Governance (2004-2009)	Matra for European Cooperation (2004-2009)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Matra Projects programme (MPP) - Matra Political Parties Programme (MPPP) - Matra Small-scale Local Activities Programme (KPA) - Matra Small Embassy Projects Programme (KAP) - Logo East - Training for diplomats 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Matra Pre-Accession Programme (MPAP) - Matra Flex - Matra Drawing Rights - Matra Training for European Cooperation

Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *The Matra programme: the flexible response to changing transformation perspectives (Het Matra-programma: De flexibele respons op wisselende transformatieperspectieven)*, September 2004, p. 17; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *MATRA Modernised*, 16 October 2009, p. 9.

The number of sub-programmes, their management, the number of eligible countries and the thematic scope have been adjusted to the changing situation in the Matra countries and to shifting political views and priorities in the Netherlands several times. Significant reviews took place in 2000, 2004, 2009 and 2011, with minor adaptations in between. According to the policy note *Matra modernised* of October 2009, the existing instruments would be incorporated into a single Matra programme that could be applied in three types of contractual relationships (grant, contribution and commission).³⁷ In practice, however, several sub-programmes continued to exist and new ones were introduced later on.

Geographical scope

The number of eligible countries grew steadily over time. In 1994, Ukraine, Belarus and the RF were among the fourteen former communist countries in which the programme started. In 2006, the EaP countries that were in the Netherlands' constituency at the IMF and the World Bank – Georgia, Moldova and Armenia – were added to the list of Matra countries. It was only in 2010 that the sixth EaP country, Azerbaijan, became eligible for Matra projects.

In 2007, Matra was phased out in the Central European countries that had joined the EU in 2004. In Romania and Bulgaria, which obtained membership in 2007, it was phased out in 2011. Since then, the focus was more on supporting the (potential) candidate member states in Southeast Europe (the Western Balkans and Turkey) and the countries in the European neighbourhood, including in North Africa (the Arab region).

³⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Matra Modernised*, 16 October 2009, p. 21.

When the Matra programme was reviewed in 2011, it was decided that as from 2012 the programme would focus on the pre-accession process of the countries of the Western Balkans and Turkey and to limit its substantive focus to promoting the rule of law.³⁸ In addition, funds were reserved for a new Matra programme for the Arab region. Conversely, Matra would be phased out in the EaP countries between 2012 and 2014, because of budget cuts and the need to set clear priorities. Still, Matra in the EaP countries was continued as a result of amendments to the budgets for 2012, 2013 and 2014 by the House of Representatives.³⁹ Consequently, there has been a budget for Matra in the EaP countries without any explicit policy framework since 2012. In its budget for 2015, the ministry has again reserved funds for Matra projects in the EaP countries.

Thematic focus

Prior to the October 2009 policy note *Matra modernised*, Matra focused on 12 themes. The policy note did not change the number of themes, but clustered them in two groups (see table 3.2). It further stated that embassies were expected to choose a limited number of themes in order to bring more focus into the programme.

Rule of Law and Rights	Social Infrastructure and Living Environment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Legislation / law - Public order / governance / police / anti-corruption - Human rights / minorities - Information / media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Welfare - Health care - Labour / social policy - Education - Public housing - Culture - The environment - Biodiversity

The policy note stated that:

'[f]or each country, themes will have to be chosen for a period of several years, based on a sound analysis of the situation. Line ministries and the missions will be consulted. In the case of the missions, themes will be chosen to tie in with their multi-year strategic and annual plans. The themes selected should provide the greatest possible contribution to social transformation and not conflict with line ministries' priorities. By analogy with the principle adhered to at missions, in partner countries where aid is limited to two sectors, focusing on themes will prevent resources from being spread so thinly that their impact is negligible and Dutch involvement invisible.'

³⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Social transformation / review of the Matra programme (Maatschappelijke transformatie / herziening Matra programma)*, Parliamentary Papers 33 000 V no. 57, The Hague, 14 November 2011, pp. 1-2.

³⁹ House of Representatives of the States-General, Amendment by MPs Henk Jan Ormel and Han ten Broeke to replace the text under No. 108, Parliamentary Papers 33 000 V, no. 115, 1 December 2011; House of Representatives of the States-General, Motion by MPs Han ten Broeke and Désirée Bonis, Parliamentary Papers 33 400 V, no. 57, 19 December 2012; House of Representative of the States-General, Revised amendment by MPs Han ten Broeke and Michiel Servaes to replace the text under 18, Parliamentary Papers 33 750 V, no. 19, 27 November 2013.

3.3 Implementation of the Matra programme in the EaP countries

With regard to the Eastern Partnership countries the policy note *Matra Modernised* of 2009 stated that the Netherlands and the EU would both benefit from stable neighbours whose social infrastructure and legislation [were] increasingly geared to the EU. The Dutch government also expressed its wish to contribute actively towards the transformation and modernisation of these countries, into a region marked by safety, prosperity and freedom, based on shared European values.

The following Matra sub-programmes were implemented in the EaP countries during the evaluation period (2008-2014):

- Matra Projects Programme (MPP)
- Matra Small Embassy Projects (KAP) / delegated projects
- Matra Political Parties Programme (MPPP)
- Visegrad Fund's Eastern Partnership (V4EaP) programme

Matra Projects Programme (MPP)

The MPP focused on partnerships between a Dutch and a local organisation. Whereas the project ideas had to originate from the Matra countries ('demand-driven'), the grant applications were submitted by the Dutch organisations, who acted as contracting partner. The projects had a maximum duration of 36 months and a maximum budget of EUR 700,000. There was no specified budget per country; the best projects from the region were selected.⁴⁰ As of 2010 the MPP was phased out, due to budget cuts for Matra. This meant that no new commitments were made after 2010. The last ongoing projects were completed in 2013. The MPP's implementation was managed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Southeast and Eastern Europe Department (DZO). There were two calls for proposals per year.

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Matra KAP / delegated projects

Matra KAP was originally intended for small, short-term projects managed by the embassies. Each embassy had a set budget for the programme. Its aim was to strengthen civil society and local government by funding relatively small-scale activities. The small scale of the activities made it possible to respond quickly to changing local circumstances. This enabled the embassies to create a broad and diverse network of NGOs, to keep them informed on important national issues.⁴¹ Until 2010, the maximum project budget was EUR 25,000, but this was raised to EUR 300,000 with the transition from KAP (Small Embassy Projects) to the larger 'Matra delegated projects' when Matra policy was reviewed at the end of 2009. Embassies had considerable freedom in choosing their focus and mode of implementation.⁴²

⁴⁰ Embassy of the Netherlands in Ukraine, *Impact Assessment: 20 years MATRA Programme in Ukraine 1994-2014*, 17 June 2014, p. 14.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

The distribution of the available Matra budget between embassies was based on a combination of historical patterns in budget allocation, the number of countries in an embassy's district, DEU's priorities, implementation capacity at the embassies, budget exhaustion in the previous year and specific requests from embassies.

Matra Political Parties Programme (MPPP)

The MPPP aimed to strengthen democracy in the Matra countries by supporting twinning between Dutch political parties and their sister parties or connected organisations.⁴³ The funds were provided through grants to foundations linked to Dutch political parties represented in parliament.⁴⁴ The programme's objective was to strengthen the leadership and networks of the parties or organisations in the target countries. In the longer term, it aimed to strengthen democracy in the target countries. The twinning element was intended to contribute to the development of bilateral relations ('political party diplomacy') and to the Netherlands' knowledge of the countries concerned.⁴⁵

The total grant per year was divided among the applicant party organisations as follows: it consisted of a basic sum per applicant plus an amount per seat in the House of Representatives. Furthermore, the funds were divided over the different Matra regions. In 2012, two thirds of the funds allocated to each party were intended for European countries (the Western Balkans, Turkey and the EaP countries) and one-third for the countries in the Arab region.

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Until 2013 the programme was managed by the ministry's Southeast and Eastern Europe Department (DZO), which was merged into the Europe Department (DEU) in 2011. As per 2013 the programme's management was transferred to the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations (BZK), when the grant was brought under the framework of the Political Parties Financing Act (WFPP). The transfer was meant to streamline the process of awarding grants to the different political parties' foundations, and avoid the application of different statutory frameworks and thus of different management rules to different grants.

Visegrad Fund's Eastern Partnership (V4EaP) programme

The Visegrad Fund is a development fund set up by the four countries in the Visegrád group (the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia), all former Matra recipient countries. In 2012 the Visegrad Fund launched its Eastern Partnership (V4EaP) programme. The aim of the programme is to contribute to the acceleration of political association and further

⁴³ Twinning is an instrument of partnering two or more entities/organisations – in this case political parties – with a shared mission or interest, in order to bring benefits to the participating organisations. It is usually employed to bring people from different parts of Europe together. It provides the opportunity to transfer knowledge and expertise, to share problems, exchange views and understand different viewpoints.

⁴⁴ The Political Parties Financing Act (WFPP) calls these foundations 'institutions for activities abroad' (section 4). Of the parties currently represented in the House of Representatives, the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD), Labour Party (PvdA), Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA), Democrats 66 (D66), GreenLeft (GL), ChristianUnion (CU), Reformed Political Party (SGP) and Animal Rights Party (PvdD) have institutions for activities abroad.

⁴⁵ Activity appraisal document for the Foundation for International Christian Democratic Development (FICDD), 2012, pp. 2-3.

economic integration between the EU and the EaP-countries. The V4EaP programme seeks to support political and socio-economic reforms facilitating comprehensive approximation towards the EU and building strong institutional capacity and civil society. In doing so it is focused on providing access to the V4 countries' experience to support transformation and implementation of European standards in the EaP states. An underlying effect – and goal – of the V4 countries cooperating in conducting multilateral activities with the EaP countries is the strengthening of V4 cooperation. The Dutch government decided to contribute EUR 1.5 million from the Matra budget to the V4EaP programme in 2012, and EUR 1 million in 2013 and again in 2014. The Dutch money was used in conjunction with the Fund's own resources for projects involving organisations from at least three V4 countries and at least one EaP country. The programme was managed by the Visegrad Fund secretariat in Bratislava.

3.4 Actors and responsibilities

Various organisations were involved in the implementation of the Matra programme, with roles and responsibilities changing over time. The most important actors and their respective responsibilities will be outlined below.

Southeast and Eastern Europe Department (DZO) / Europe Department (DEU)

The organisational unit primarily responsible for the Matra programme in the European countries was the Southeast and Eastern Europe Department (DZO) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (BZ).⁴⁶ In 2011 DZO merged with the West and Central Europe Department (DWM) to form the Europe Department (DEU). DZO/DEU was responsible for formulating the overall policy with regard to the programme and its guidelines, for setting and allocating the budgets delegated to the embassies, and for handling the centrally managed funds, such as the MPP, the MPPP and the contribution to the V4EaP programme.

Responsibility with regard to the various programmes within DZO/DEU changed during the period of analysis due to reorganisations. DZO originally had three divisions: the Western Balkans Division (DZO/WB), the Eastern Europe Division (DZO/OE) and the Matra Programme Implementation Division (DZO/UM). After DZO/UM was dissolved in 2009, its employees were divided over the Western Balkans and Eastern Europe divisions. Within these divisions the Matra projects were partly done by project staff and partly by country desk officers. In 2011 the Europe Department (DEU) was formed, without clear geographical defined divisions. The responsibility for the implementation of the Matra programme and its components rested with various country desk officers, mainly responsible for the Western Balkans.

⁴⁶ The Ministry's North Africa and Middle East Department (DAM) was responsible for the implementation of the Matra programme in the Arab region.

Embassies in the EaP countries

The Netherlands is represented in the region by embassies in Baku (Azerbaijan), Tbilisi (Georgia) and Kyiv (Ukraine). The embassy in Tbilisi was accredited for Georgia and Armenia and also managed both projects in Azerbaijan. The embassy in Warsaw (Poland) was accredited for and managed the implementation of Matra projects in Belarus. The embassy in Kyiv was responsible for the programme's implementation in Ukraine and, until 2014, as well in Moldova. As per September 2013 the accreditation for Moldova was transferred from Kyiv to Bucharest (Romania) and the responsibility for the Matra programme followed this transfer.

During the years when the MPP was still operational, the embassies were involved in the appraisal process by commenting/advising on the project proposals. They were also asked to visit project events and DZO stimulated project implementers to involve the embassies.

In the policy note *Matra modernised* of 2009 the missions in the Matra countries were given a leading role in the implementation of the Matra programme. It was considered that, with a view to the demand-driven nature of Matra, the embassies in the countries concerned were excellently placed to assess the capacity, representativeness, integrity and relevance of the organisations in question. Furthermore, every request for aid must at the very least be considered in the light of what other donors are doing in that area.

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Therefore, the centrally managed MPP was phased out and the budgets delegated to the embassies were increased. Although DZO/DEU formulated the guidelines for Matra's implementation and allocated the budgets, embassies had ample room for filling in the specifics.

The Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations (BZK)

As per 2013, the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations (BZK) is responsible for managing the MPPP, as it is also overseeing the State's financial relations with the Dutch political parties. Unlike the Matra granting framework, the Political Parties Financing Act (WFPP) does not impose any conditions on the countries where the funds are spent, so as to avoid any control over the party foundations by the minister. As a consequence, the role of BZK in assessing the eligibility of supported activities is light. After the transferral of the MPPP's management to BZK the involvement of BZ was mainly limited to participation in the annual round-table meetings with the political party foundations.

International Visegrad Fund

The International Visegrad Fund's secretariat in Bratislava managed the implementation of the V4EaP programme and its sub-programmes. The Visegrad Fund has appointed senior diplomats working at the embassies of the Visegrád countries in the EaP capitals as so-called 'honorary trustees'. These honorary trustees act as contact points for the Fund's secretariat and are asked to comment/advise on project proposals and to visit project events taking place in the country where they are stationed.

Neither BZ nor the Dutch embassies in the EaP countries are involved in project selection or project reporting. The International Visegrad Fund informs DEU by means of annual reports, outlining the way the Dutch contribution has been spent, describing the kind of projects that have been supported and providing a list of supported projects.

3.5 Expenditure 2008-2014

During the evaluation period, a total of EUR 44.3 million was spent in the EaP countries through the Matra programme.⁴⁷ Table 3.3 presents the expenditure by sub-programme.

Matra component	Total expenditure in EUR
Matra Projects Programme (MPP)	22.7 million
Matra Small Embassy Projects (KAP) / delegated projects	13.1 million
Matra Political Parties Programme (MPPP)	5.0 million
Visegrad Fund Eastern Partnership (V4EaP) programme	3.5 million
Total	44.3 million

The total Matra expenditure of EUR 44.3 million accounted for a little under 47% of the ministry's bilateral expenditure in the region.⁴⁸ The remaining funds (EUR 50 million) were spent through other programmes or modalities. The largest of these were structural macro support (EUR 14.2 million), the Cross-cutting Theme Programme in GMV (good governance, human rights and peacebuilding) countries (EUR 7.8 million), the Stability Fund (EUR 7.2 million) and the Human Rights Fund (EUR 6.1 million).⁴⁹

Expenditure per year

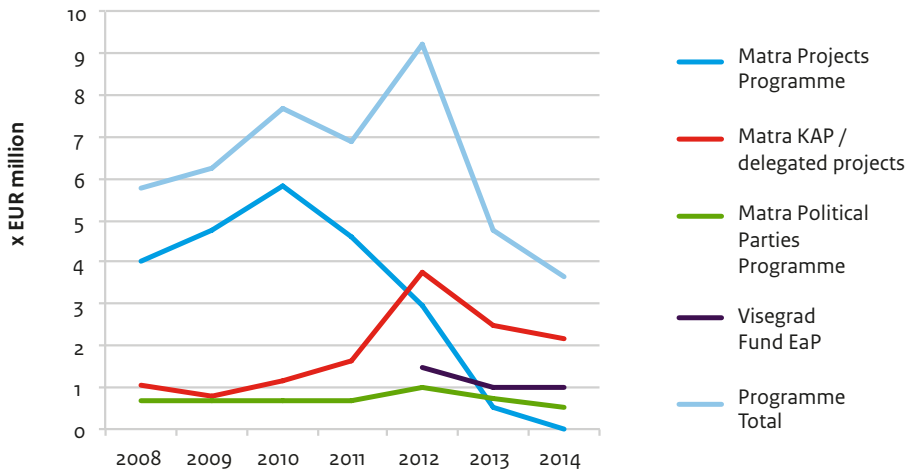
Matra spending accounted for about EUR 6.3 million on average per year, but as figure 3.1 shows, with large variations. Total annual expenditure rose from almost EUR 6 million in 2008 to EUR 9 million in 2012 and dropped sharply to somewhat less than EUR 4 million in 2014. Figure 3.1 further shows that the KAP / delegated projects replaced the MPP as largest sub-programme.

⁴⁷ Source: Piramide.

⁴⁸ Expenditure in the region by other ministries is not included in the evaluation.

⁴⁹ Source: Piramide, calculation IOB.

Figure 3.1 *Matra expenditure by year*



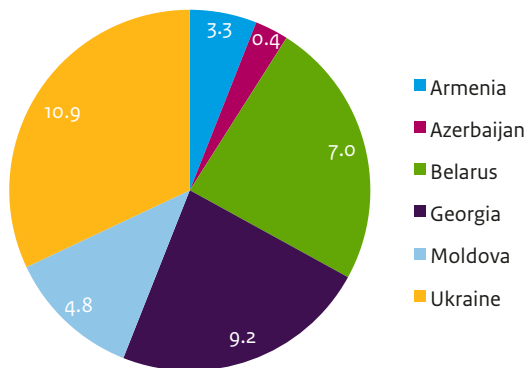
Source: Piramide combined with data provided by embassies, calculation IOB.

Expenditure of MPP and KAP / delegated projects per country

The expenditure per country has only been counted for MPP and KAP / delegated projects, as it was not possible to allocate the expenditure of the MPPP and V4EaP programme activities to individual EaP countries.

The highest expenditures were in Ukraine (31%), followed by Georgia (26%), Belarus (20%), Moldova (13%) and Armenia (9%) (see figure 3.2). In Azerbaijan (1%), only two Matra KAP projects were conducted during the evaluation period. The picture changes drastically, however, when the size of the countries' populations are taken into account. Matra expenditure per capita in Ukraine was only EUR 0.24 compared to EUR 2.05 in Georgia, EUR 1.34 in Moldova, EUR 1.12 in Armenia and EUR 0.74 in Belarus (and EUR 0.05 in Azerbaijan).

Figure 3.2 Expenditure MPP and KAP / delegated projects per country (in EUR million)



Source: Piramide combined with data provided by embassies; calculation IOB.

4

Matra Projects Programme

4.1 Background

The Matra Projects Programme (MPP) aimed to contribute to a pluriform democratic state and promotion of the rule of law. The programme supported activities contributing to the process of modernising the state, state institutions, civil society organisations (CSOs) and the connections between them. Moreover, the setup of the programme was such that it contributed to the bilateral relations between the Netherlands and the Matra countries.⁵⁰ The MPP focussed specifically on institutional strengthening of CSOs or local governments by creating partnerships between organisations in the Netherlands and in the Matra countries.

The MPP was managed by the Matra Programme Implementation Division of the Southeast and Eastern Europe Department (DZO/UM) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (BZ), and after reorganisations in 2011 by the Europe Department (DEU).

Projects had a maximum duration of three years and a budget between EUR 100,000 and EUR 700,000. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs had a call for proposals twice a year for the whole Matra region. There was no specified budget per country; the project proposals considered to be the most relevant and of highest quality were selected. The programme covered 12 themes; some related to social development, such as welfare, the environment, education, housing and health care, others related to the rule of law, such as human rights, information / media and governance.

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Projects had to be demand-driven, meaning that, in principle, the projects were proposed by organisations in the Matra countries and were preferably supported by local or central authorities, depending on the nature of the project and the political context. However, the Dutch organisations involved submitted the grant application and acted as contracting partners for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The MPP was phased out as of 2010, due to budget cuts for Matra. This meant that no new commitments were made after 2010. The last projects were completed in 2013.

4.2 Expenditure

As mentioned, there was no MPP budget specified per country; the division of funds was primarily based on the appraised relevance and quality of the submitted proposals. Still, as the ranking of projects was not mathematical, an eye was also kept on the geographical distribution of funds in the sense that all countries had to be served. As Azerbaijan became eligible for Matra only in 2010, no MPP projects were implemented in this country. Table 4.1 presents the expenditure and number of started MPP projects by year and by country.

⁵⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Subsidy operating instructions Matra Projects Programme (Subsidie-handleiding Matra-projectenprogramma)*, 2009, p. 4.

Country	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	Total
Ukraine	1 313	1 289	2 135	1 521	438	9	0	6 703
# started projects	4	3	0	0	0	0	0	7
Georgia	864	1 117	1 645	1 390	1 003	184	0	6 203
# started projects	5	3	1		0	0	0	9
Belarus	878	806	710	600	833	92	0	3 920
# started projects	3	1	1	0	0	0	0	5
Moldova	747	1 003	509	556	448	62	0	3 325
# started projects	5	3	0	0	0	0	0	8
Armenia	244	565	835	543	232	153	0	2 572
# started projects	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	3
Total	4 046	4 780	5 834	4 609	2 954	500	0	22 724
# started projects	18	11	3	0	0	0	0	32

Source: Piramide, calculation IOB.

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During the period 2008-2014, EUR 22.7 million was disbursed through the MPP. As can be seen in table 4.1, the total MPP expenditure rose steadily from 2008 to 2009 and peaked in 2010 with EUR 5.8 million. Thereafter expenditure declined rather quickly due to the phasing out as from 2010, only to drop sharply in 2013.

When expenditure is compared across countries, Ukraine shows the highest total of EUR 6.7 million. Interestingly, the difference with Georgia, which has only 10% of the number of inhabitants, is not all that big, making the spending per capita in Georgia about ten times higher than in Ukraine. The other three countries received markedly less funds than Ukraine and Georgia.

The number of projects that started annually declined sharply from 2008 onwards. No projects started after 2010, due to the aforementioned discontinuation of the MPP. Most projects were started in Georgia, followed by Moldova and only then by Ukraine. The average project budget was EUR 467,731 with quite some variation between countries.⁵¹

⁵¹ The average project size per country was: Armenia EUR 633,156; Belarus EUR 642,428; Georgia EUR 478,365; Moldova EUR 307,301 and Ukraine EUR 535,022.

4.3 Relevance

The relevance of MPP projects has been assessed from the perspective of their thematic focus, whether or not they addressed a major challenge of the EaP countries, the extent to which they were demand-driven and lastly, whether there was any overlap, inconsistency or synergy with other projects.

IOB has classified all MPP projects that were registered in the ministry's Piramide system in fourteen themes.⁵² A first remark is that each project fitted within the – broad – thematic scope of the Matra programme. When looking at the expenditures per theme (see table 4.2 below), three 'groups' can be discerned. The environment, human rights / minorities, welfare and information / media are the biggest themes and make up 50% of all expenditure during the evaluation period. Although 'harder themes' like human rights / minorities and information / media are also present, most interesting is the relatively strong focus on welfare and environment within this group. This is a remarkable difference with the KAP / delegated projects which, as will be explained in the next chapter, focused much more on themes like democratisation, legislation and human rights. The prominence of environment and welfare is a reflection of the broad thematic scope of Matra until 2011, which included many 'softer' social development themes. The second group with percentages between 8 and 5, consists of a broad array of themes such as education, democratisation and health care. In total the group accounts for 40% of spending. Finally, the last 11% are made up by four smaller themes including labour / social policy, culture and housing.⁵³

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The division of expenditures over the themes per country differs from the above described totals. Except for Armenia, the environment was an important theme in all countries. In Armenia projects were spread over five themes, due to the small number of projects implemented in the country. In Belarus more than half of all projects fell within either the environment or strengthening civil society. In Georgia and Moldova expenditure was spread relatively evenly over the various themes. In Ukraine ten themes were covered, with a strong focus on both welfare and legislation / law compared to the other countries. Overall, the data show that the focus was more on softer, social development themes that were less sensitive with the respective local governments. However, a caveat needs to be made: as the selection of projects was based primarily on their relevance and quality and not on their fit with any pre-formulated country-specific thematic focus, any trends discerned in the data are, at least partially, coincidental and do not reflect any strategy.

⁵² The themes are: environment, welfare, information / media, human rights / minorities, strengthening civil society, health care, education, legislation / law, public administration / order, democratisation, housing, labour / social policy, culture and 'other'. The classification was based on the project title, the formulated project goal and, where relevant, CRS code (CRS = Creditor Reporting System).

⁵³ Due to the use of rounded percentages.

Themes	Armenia	Belarus	Georgia	Moldova	Ukraine	Total
Environment	-	31%	17%	14%	14%	16%
Human rights / minorities	25%	-	9%	12%	19%	13%
Welfare	-	-	12%	10%	21%	11%
Information / media	24%	2%	6%	19%	8%	10%
Education	11%	-	10%	-	13%	8%
Strengthening civil society	-	28%	10%	-	-	8%
Health care	-	18%	15%	-	-	7%
Legislation / law	-	-	5%	-	18%	7%
Democratisation	15%	-	5%	10%	-	5%
Public administration / order	-	-	10%	12%	2%	5%
Labour / social policy	-	15%	-	-	-	3%
Other	-	6%	-	15%	-	3%
Housing	25%	-	-	-	2%	3%
Culture	-	-	-	8%	3%	2%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: Piramide, calculation IOB.

IOB analysed eight of the 32 MPP projects that started in the period 2008-2010 in detail, two of which were implemented in Belarus, two in Georgia (one of which also included Armenia), two in Moldova and two in Ukraine.

Addressing major challenges faced by EaP countries

Most of the analysed projects addressed relevant (social) issues, such as free and democratic labour unions in Belarus, the protection of neglected and abused children in Georgia, local government capacity and cross-border cooperation between Georgia and Armenia, support structures for youth in rural areas in Moldova, media / journalistic training and social services for orphans and abandoned children in Ukraine. As the list of challenges for the EaP countries was long, it was not hard to come up with projects that addressed relevant issues.

However, in some cases the prioritisation of the chosen issue, although certainly relevant to some extent, can be questioned. An example is the promotion of sustainable food consumption (eco-labels) in Belarus or improving the care for refugees and asylum seekers in Moldova (a country with a very small number of asylum seekers). Despite the fact that there might have been bigger problems to address, the projects were appraised as relevant by BZ because they promoted cooperation between the CSOs operating in that particular field and promoted dialogue between those CSOs and the responsible government agencies and other stakeholders.

Many of the MPP projects were concerned with raising the capacities of CSOs that were primarily aimed at delivering services where governments failed to deliver them, while the KAP / delegated projects focussed on CSOs that were involved in awareness raising or lobby and advocacy activities. Examples are the care for asylum seekers and refugees, for neglected or abused children, for youth in rural areas, or for children deprived of parental care. Still, whereas these projects supported CSOs in their service-delivering roles, they were also aimed at improving their position vis-à-vis and dialogue with relevant government agencies.

Demand-driven

In almost all evaluated projects the project idea and the project design were developed in consultation between the Dutch and the local organisation(s). Furthermore, interviews learned that the sense of ownership and appreciation by the local partners for the project was high. Judging from implementation, project ownership and support for the projects by the wider group of stakeholders, among which local government, was not fully secured in every project, but overall it was in order.

Reflecting Dutch policy priorities

As mentioned in the previous section, there was no country-specific thematic focus during the years in which MPP projects were identified. As the policy framework was broad and included 12 themes, it would be hard to identify a project that would not fit the thematic scope. All projects fitted with the programme's objective of promoting democracy, the rule of law and the institutional strengthening of civil society and local governments.

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Overlap, inconsistency or synergy with other programmes

The project assessments revealed no clear overlap or synergy with other Dutch programmes or programmes of other donors. Nearly all analysed projects were rather stand-alone interventions, the exceptions being two projects in Belarus, which built on previous cooperation between the project partners. Based on interviews it can be said that a small number of the analysed projects have inspired similar projects sponsored by the EU or even direct follow-up projects by the same project partners. However, this was more by coincidence or based on the need to sustain the project results than being the result of a specific aim to function as a catalyst for larger (EU) projects.

Donor coordination

In the process of identifying projects, the ministry was not directly involved in donor coordination activities. The ministry asked for and received feedback on the proposals from the relevant embassies in order to check possible overlap with ongoing projects.

4.4 Effectiveness

The effectiveness of the projects has been assessed both from the perspective of their contribution to the objectives of the Matra programme with regard to promoting democracy, the rule of law, and capacity of local government and civil society, as well as their contribution to the bilateral relations between the Netherlands and the EaP countries.

Contribution to social transformation

All evaluated projects have been implemented largely according to plan, despite some minor deviations from planned activities or with slightly less participants in trainings than envisaged. Concrete project results outputs included increased skills through trainings and courses, the introduction (or accreditation) of new working methods, cooperation among CSOs and/or other stakeholders, development of manuals and curricula, and the publication of information material (see table 4.3).

Country	Project output (deliverable)	Project outcome (effect)
Belarus	Information campaign to promote sustainable food production, retailing and consumption, trainings and study visit to NL. Cooperation among stakeholders.	Little impact on sustainable food consumption. Distrust among stakeholders in the area of sustainable/ecological food products has been reduced.
	Creation of new local branches of the independent and democratic trade union, internal strategy discussions, seminars at plant level, trainings and courses, establishment of youth and women networks.	Membership of independent and democratic trade union kept stable despite increasingly repressive environment; increased involvement of plant level unions in health and safety and policy issues, internal democracy has hardly improved.
Georgia	Study materials, a curriculum and a toolkit for professionals of rehabilitation centres and various other professionals working with abused or neglected children.	Better protection of children from all forms of violence. Especially in the longer run as interest in the topic and the skills of professionals have been increased.
Georgia/ Armenia	Trainings and pilot projects on planning, participatory policy-making and service provision and regional/cross border cooperation by local governments. Capacity for cross-border cooperation and service provision to citizens by the local governments has been increased.	It is unclear to what extent the increased capacities are being used in practice.

Moldova	Trainings, a common vision on supporting asylum seekers/refugees and a clear division of tasks between CSOs involved, a common case management system, brochures and a website.	Improved legal and social assistance for asylum seekers and refugees and improved cooperation between the CSOs concerned.
	The creation of youth support structures (youth centres) in four rural communities and increased knowledge and skills of youth workers.	Increased youth participation in community development in the respective communities.
Ukraine	Trainings resulting in improved knowledge, understanding and use of new media by Ukrainian mainstream media and increased knowledge of good journalism principles by civil journalists/bloggers.	The extent to which the population has better access to uncensored information and the extent to which new media are used by journalists are hard to relate directly to the project, as it was dependent on many other factors, but the project has made a positive contribution.
	Introduction of new support methodologies, trainings, government accreditation of manuals and strengthening the network of stakeholders in the field of support to vulnerable children.	Increased quality of services to institutionalised children so that their chances of becoming independent and productive citizens are increased.

More detailed project descriptions can be found in the electronic annex 'Project Assessment Forms of MPP and delegated projects', published on the IOB website.

For most projects it is clear that they have increased the capacities of the CSOs involved, which in turn has led to increased service delivery by them and an improved dialogue with the relevant government agencies. It is however hard to draw conclusions beyond the direct sphere of influence of the individual projects, as they were rather stand-alone activities. Due to the demand-driven nature, and the regional and broad thematic scope of the programme, MPP interventions were rather fragmented, which makes it difficult to identify any higher level results than those at project level. Still, it is plausible that the projects' results have contributed to the development of civil society in the EaP countries. The sustainability of the projects' results was a challenge, often dependent on the availability of funds, the political priority given to the issue and broader political developments.

Strengthening bilateral relations

The projects clearly contributed to the establishment or intensification of partnerships between Dutch organisations and their counterparts in the Matra countries. Interviews revealed that in a number of cases the partnership still existed, even years after conclusion of the project. There are a few examples where project partners were able to continue their cooperation by means of projects sponsored by other donors, such as the EU. Many personal and professional relations have been created between the Netherlands and the EaP countries, which have increased mutual understanding on a personal level.

From a government-to-government perspective, many projects have created visibility for the Netherlands because of their significant size, relatively long duration and the frequent involvement – be it in a limited manner – of the relevant government agencies in the projects. The embassies in the region were said to have been present at many project events and to have addressed the issues concerned in their government-level contacts. As the MPP was primarily focused on CSOs, there were very few projects that established direct government-to-government contacts.

4.5 Management

As mentioned, the grant applications (or project proposals) were submitted by Dutch organisations. The Matra policy officers at DZO forwarded them to the relevant embassies, country desk-officers at BZ and – when opportune – line ministries in The Hague for feedback. Embassies were asked to rank the good project proposals and usually gave feedback with regard to potentially similar projects already being implemented. Thereafter projects were discussed in a ‘projects commission’ which consisted of the Matra country-officers, checked by the head of DZO/UM and formally approved by the director of DZO.

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It was difficult for the DZO staff in The Hague to accurately assess the context determining the local demand for the project at its relevance. It was difficult to assess the local ownership of the project proposals based on the support letters by local stakeholders that were sent together with the applications, but the absence of support letters usually led to a rejection of the application.

The Dutch embassies in the countries concerned were better placed to assess the capacity, representativeness, integrity and relevance of the organisations in question. They sometimes pointed at similar projects being implemented, which led to a rejection of the application. Still, the regional and broad thematic scope of the MPP and the demand-driven approach did not allow for a clear prioritisation of issues.

The grants were disbursed by means of half-yearly advance payments up to a maximum of 90% of the total grant. The payment of the last 10% was done after project completion. Together with the annual progress reports submitted by contracting partners, this gave DZO sufficient means to monitor project implementation. Embassies were not required to visit project events, but they were stimulated by DZO to do so. They did so depending on the size and relevance of the project, as well as on the location (capital or periphery) of the event. In turn, DZO advised project partners to consult with the embassies. Project implementers interviewed proved satisfied with their contacts with the embassy.

BZ was rather flexible in allowing small deviations from the project plans and small extensions of the project period, especially when this warranted a more effective project implementation. Towards the end of the programme BZ became more strict in keeping contracting partners to the planned implementation period.

Interviews revealed that contracting partners were in general satisfied with the way BZ managed the programme. Criteria were said to be clear and not too strict, BZ was said to be accessible and to show genuine interest in the projects.

4.6 Conclusion

Relevance

All projects addressed subjects that fell within the thematic scope of Matra. Most projects scored well on relevance, in terms of aiming to counter local problems. However, the prioritisation of some chosen themes can be questioned. At the same time, these projects – like most others – aimed at promoting the cooperation among CSOs and the dialogue between CSOs, the relevant government agencies and other stakeholders in that particular field. Most MPP projects aimed at strengthening the service roles of CSOs, and in doing so increased their standing vis-à-vis the government. The local ownership of the projects was in order and appreciation for the projects was generally high.

Effectiveness

Overall, the projects were well implemented and reached their intended objectives, sometimes with minor deviations. Most projects have clearly improved the capacities of the CSOs (or local governments) concerned, which has often led to a better service-delivery and improved dialogue with government. It is not possible to discern any higher level results in terms of strengthened civil society, increased democracy or better functioning of rule of law as a result of the MPP. The MPP was too small and the projects were too fragmented. Also, sustainability of results was a challenge and depended much on continued financial contributions and political developments.

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The projects have contributed to the bilateral relations between the Netherlands and the Matra countries, by means of establishing or intensifying the partnerships between Dutch and local CSOs. Most projects were visible at government level and have thus contributed to a positive image of the Netherlands as a partner for the EaP countries. At the same time, it is not clear how the intensified relations would be made of use to the Dutch government.

Management

Management of the MPP was sufficient and flexible, but the setup of the programme made it difficult to identify priority issues and to assess true local ownership. The grant applications were submitted by Dutch organisations, there was no country specific thematic focus and project proposals were handled by the ministry in The Hague. The involvement of embassies in assessing the relevance from a local perspective was important.

5

Matra Small Embassy Projects (KAP) / delegated projects

5.1 Background

Originally, the Matra Small Embassy Projects (KAP) sub-programme was intended for small, short-term projects managed by the embassies. Its aim was to strengthen civil society and local government by funding relatively small-scale activities. Until 2010, the maximum budget per project was EUR 25,000, but in 2010 this was raised to EUR 300,000, following the decision to delegate more responsibility for the Matra programme to the embassies and to limit the centrally managed budget for the programme (see Chapter 3). From then on, the programme was referred to as the Matra delegated budget.⁵⁴

As the main budget holder, DZO/DEU delegated budgets to the embassies. The embassies had considerable freedom to choose their focus and mode of implementation. Each embassy had a set budget for the programme, which DZO/DEU determined on an annual basis. The money was to be used for activities by local organisations. Dutch organisations (or organisations from other former Matra countries) could be involved in the projects, but not as contracting partners. It was left to the embassies to decide whether they would organise time-bound calls for proposals or accept project applications all year round.

The thematic scope of the programme changed a number of times during the evaluation period. In the first years (2008 and 2009), Matra addressed 12 themes. In January 2010, after the October 2009 policy memorandum *Matra Modernised* demanded more thematic focus per country, the 12 themes were clustered around a set of regional and country-specific themes. The regional themes, which applied to all EaP countries, were human rights, minorities / media; the country-specific themes are listed in section 5.3. When the minister of Foreign Affairs decided in 2011 to phase out the Matra programme for the EaP countries and to limit Matra's thematic scope to the rule of law, it was not clear – after parliament decided to prolong Matra in those countries – whether this also applied to Matra EaP. This was clarified in October 2013, when DEU sent a general instruction to the embassies in both the pre-accession and the EaP countries stating that projects had to focus on the rule of law and exclusively on one or more of the following themes: legislation / law, public administration / public order / police, or human rights / minorities. This explicitly extended the thematic focus that already applied to pre-accession countries to EaP countries. Embassies received an update of the instructions in May 2014, stating that Dutch organisations were also eligible for a grant and allowing government-to-government projects and knowledge exchange between Dutch ministries and their counterparts.

⁵⁴ The embassy in Warsaw still refers to its delegated projects as 'Matra KAP', as it has chosen to continue to support mainly small projects.

5.2 Expenditure

During the evaluation period, EUR 13.1 million was spent through Matra KAP / delegated projects. As table 5.1 shows, expenditure fluctuated considerably throughout the years. It decreased in 2008 and 2009 due to budget cuts in the overall Matra budget, but increased again after 2010 as a result of the above-mentioned delegation of the budget (the centrally managed Matra Projects Programme was phased out as of 2010). However, new budget cuts resulted in decreasing delegated expenditure in 2013 and 2014.

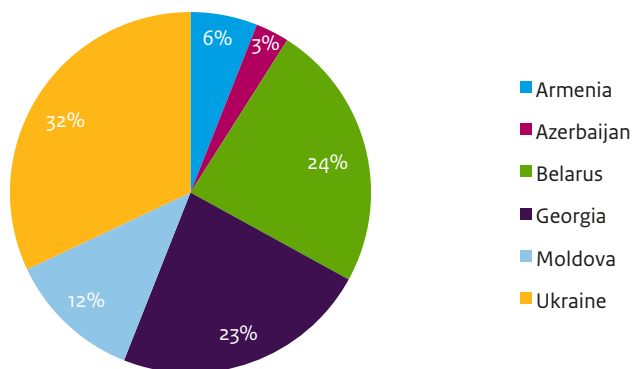
Country	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	Total
Ukraine	345	259	465	543	1 086	633	899	4 230
Belarus	458	292	256	420	832	553	300	3 111
Georgia	66	102	171	340	913	781	638	3 012
Moldova	126	72	165	231	308	172	285	1 511
Armenia	67	65	117	86	250	162	32	778
Azerbaijan	-	-	-	-	240	202	-	442
Total	1 062	789	1 174	1 620	3 780	2 503	2 154	13 083

Source: Piramide and data provided by the embassies. Note: The IOB has counted the expenditures for projects under EUR 25,000 as spent in the contracting year, although in practice payments may have been made in consecutive years. This may result in deviations from the embassies' financial data.

Expenditure per country

The distribution of the available Matra budget between embassies was based on a combination of historical patterns in budget allocation, the number of countries in an embassy's district, DEU's priorities, implementation capacity at the embassies, budget exhaustion in the previous year and specific requests from embassies.

Almost one third (32%) of Matra KAP / delegated funding went to Ukraine. Only two delegated projects were implemented directly in Azerbaijan, which did not become eligible until 2010. In 2011, the embassy in Tbilisi started to focus on regional projects in the Southern Caucasus, so that organisations and individuals from Armenia and Azerbaijan also benefited from several projects implemented in Georgia. The Warsaw embassy managed to disburse a relatively large amount to projects implemented in the repressive environment of Belarus (see figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1 Share of total expenditure by country**Project size**

As table 5.2 shows, there were four times as many small projects as larger projects, but the latter consumed a slightly larger share of the budget. The average size of small projects was EUR 14,000 and of larger projects EUR 80,000.

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country	projects below EUR 25,000		projects over EUR 25,000		all projects		average project budget
	no.	EUR x 1,000	no.	EUR x 1,000	no.	EUR x 1,000	EUR x 1,000
Armenia	20	335	4	443	24	778	32.4
Azerbaijan	-	-	2	442	2	442	221.2
Belarus	140	2 142	11	969	151	3 111	20.6
Georgia	29	479	29	2 533	58	3 012	51.9
Moldova	46	635	17	876	63	1 511	24.0
Ukraine	140	1 619	35	2 611	175	4 230	24.1
Total	375	5 209	98	7 874	473	13 083	27.7

Source: Piramide and information provided by embassies. Calculation IOB.

There was a large variation in the size of projects supported by the embassies in the various countries. This reflects deliberate choices made by the embassies, based in large part on the absorption capacity of CSOs, the local context and, to some extent, the embassy's management capacity. The embassy in Tbilisi chose to work mainly through larger projects after 2012, while the embassy in Warsaw worked through smaller projects, reflecting the lower absorption capacity of the CSOs in Belarus and the restrictive environment. In 2012 the Kyiv embassy decided to raise the minimum project budget as it was allocated extra budget.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Ukraine and Moldova, *Matra programme overview 2012 and tentative planning 2013*, no date, BZ archives.

5.3 Relevance

The relevance of projects was assessed from the perspective of their thematic focus in relation to the Netherlands' policy, their focus on major challenges in the EaP countries, the extent to which they were demand-driven, and overlap, inconsistency or synergy with other projects.

Thematic focus

Based on an analysis of all projects registered in the ministry's Piramide system, IOB observed that the vast majority of delegated projects larger than EUR 25,000 addressed one of the 12 themes specified in *Matra Modernised*. IOB classified all projects according to the 12 themes, adding democratisation and strengthening civil society, as many projects fitted these categories better than any other. Interestingly, *Matra Modernised* did not specify democratisation as a theme but, given the overall goal of Matra, it is a key component of the programme. According to the embassies, it is a logical part of the rule of law cluster. Democratisation proved to be the largest theme in terms of disbursements (26%), especially in Georgia where it accounted for 45% (see table 5.3).

Theme	Armenia	Azerbaijan	Belarus	Georgia	Moldova	Ukraine	Total
Democratisation	18%	-	-	45%	26%	19%	26%
Information / media	-	32%	87%	7%	4%	19%	21%
Legislation / law	-	-	-	23%	44%	16%	18%
Human rights / minorities	56%	-	10%	13%	4%	15%	14%
Strengthening civil society	-	68%	3%	19%	5%	7%	8%
Public administration / order	-	-	-	-	14%	11%	5%
Environment	-	-	-	5%	-	3%	3%
Fighting corruption	-	-	-	-	4%	7%	3%
Health care	-	-	-	1%	-	2%	1%
Education	-	-	-	-	-	2%	1%
Biodiversity	-	-	-	2%	-	-	1%
Welfare	11%	-	-	-	-	-	1%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

IOB analysed the ministry's management database Piramide and labelled each project with a theme, based on the project title, formulated project objective and – where applicable – CRS code (CRS = Creditor Reporting System). Note that 40% of KAP funds were spent on projects below EUR 25,000 (in Belarus, this was as high as 68%). These projects were not registered in Piramide and are therefore not reflected in the table.

Matra Modernised requested embassies to focus on a small number of themes. In January 2010, DZO informed the embassies which themes had been chosen, based on the input of the embassies themselves and after consulting the relevant ministries in The Hague. Apart from the regional themes, which applied to all countries (human rights, minorities and media), one additional theme per country was selected. In the case of Ukraine, three additional themes were chosen (see table 5.4).

Country	Theme(s)
Armenia	Welfare
Azerbaijan	Justice and home affairs
Belarus	Education
Georgia	Environment and nature
Moldova	Welfare
Ukraine	Justice and home affairs; environment and nature; welfare

Source: diplomatic cable from DZO to Matra embassies, DZO-01/10, 5 January 2010. Justice and home affairs includes legislation / law, public order / public administration and police / fighting corruption; environment and nature includes environment and biodiversity.

In its 2010 annual plan, the Kyiv embassy referred to the themes, while its annual plans for 2013 and 2014 referred to the ‘Matra Rule of Law fund’, clearly identifying rule of law as the new Matra focus theme. The Tbilisi embassy did not identify themes in its annual plans, but they were reflected in its call for proposals in 2011 for Georgia and Armenia.⁵⁶ The projects selected after 2010 largely fell within the aforementioned thematic scope. Democratisation was also an important theme, especially in Georgia. The Warsaw embassy did not specify focus themes, as it considered that society in Belarus would benefit more from a concentration on small-scale projects with a prime focus on promoting civil society activity, regardless of the precise thematic orientation.

The ministry’s October 2013 guidelines prescribed that delegated projects should focus on the rule of law and exclusively relate to: 1) legislation / law, 2) public administration / public order / police, or 3) human rights / minorities. Most of the projects selected by the embassies in 2014 fell within this scope. According to a strict interpretation of the guidelines, ten of the 25 delegated projects addressed other themes.⁵⁷ However, the ministry allowed embassies to interpret the guidelines broadly, as the thematic scope proved not to fit the context of every EaP country equally well, especially Belarus. The Warsaw embassy therefore

⁵⁶ Call for applications by the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Georgia and Armenia, 25 April 2011, see: <http://www.fundsforngos.org/developing-countries-2/georgia/call-applications-embassy-kingdom-netherlands-georgia-armenia/>.

⁵⁷ These included democratisation (6), information / media (1), strengthening civil society (1), environment (1) and health care (1).

decided to interpret the general instruction in such a way that it reflected local needs.⁵⁸ Applying the 'comply or explain' principle, the ministry also allowed embassies to deviate from the rule of a minimum project budget of EUR 25,000. The embassy in Warsaw decided in this respect, too, that it was necessary to be flexible; in Belarus, adhering to the general rule of a minimum grant of EUR 25,000 would in a majority of cases lead to unjustified high project costs and ineffective financial management of the projects.

As table 5.3 shows, the project portfolios varied widely per country. Issues that stand out are the focus on democratisation in Georgia and on the justice sector in Moldova. In Ukraine, grants were quite evenly distributed across the various themes. The emphasis on information and media in Belarus does not reflect the actual portfolio very accurately. This can be explained by the fact that a small number of relatively large amounts were spent in support of independent radio and television stations, while most delegated projects in Belarus had budgets smaller than EUR 25,000 and are not reflected in the table. These smaller projects mainly focused on human rights and strengthening civil society.

The differences between countries can largely be explained by the different contexts in which the embassies implemented the programme and their relatively large degree of freedom in identifying needs in society and responding to ongoing developments. They selected projects on the basis of analysis of their relevance in the local context. Sometimes, building or maintaining relationships with certain project implementers also played a role. In identifying and appraising projects, the embassies were clearly more concerned with being flexible and responsive to emerging project opportunities than with building a coherent portfolio that contributed to a specific sector.

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Addressing major challenges faced by EaP countries

Each of the analysed projects clearly addressed a local need, which was explained in the project proposal and the embassies' activity appraisal memoranda (BEMOs).⁵⁹ The list of challenges for the EaP countries was of course long, which meant there were ample relevant project proposals to choose from. Examples include promoting the political participation of women in Armenia, professionalising an independent television station in Belarus, strengthening civil society organisations in Transnistria (Moldova), increasing the integrity, independence and transparency of judicial institutions in Moldova, and increasing the skills of parliamentary staffers and MPs for oversight of the security sector in Georgia. Two of the projects in Georgia had a regional scope, as they brought together young journalists or young politicians from Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia with a view to promoting personal

⁵⁸ This resulted in the following list of eligible activities: strengthening the rule of law; promoting public participation; strengthening civic activism; strengthening non-governmental organisations' ability to influence transformation processes; strengthening the role of innovative education in an active society; and changing social attitudes towards human rights.

⁵⁹ As explained in Chapter 1, IOB selected 14 delegated projects with expenditures higher than EUR 25,000 for detailed analysis. As one of these projects failed, 13 were scored on their relevance in terms of addressing important challenges in the EaP country concerned, contributing to the overall Matra objective, and correspondence with Dutch policy.

networks between the countries, thus enhancing mutual understanding and encouraging a more open-minded attitude towards each other.

All projects fitted the Matra objective of contributing to democratisation, the rule of law and dialogue between the government and its people. It follows logically from the programme's focus that only a few projects were aligned with the policies of the governments of the EaP countries. Most projects supported CSOs that were acting independently from the government. This was most obviously the case in Belarus where the delegated programme mainly supported unregistered CSOs, which were thus considered illegal by the regime. However, two of the analysed projects in Moldova involved multiple judicial institutions, one in Ukraine supported Lviv city council and one in Georgia primarily benefited parliamentary staffers and members of parliament.

Demand-driven support

The principle of demand-driven support was a strong feature of Matra KAP / delegated projects. In most of the cases analysed, the project ideas were put forward by the local partner and the projects were implemented by local organisations. Two of the projects in Georgia were developed by Dutch partners in consultation with the embassy. In the case of the parliamentary oversight of the defence sector project, however, the initial idea did originate from a Georgian cabinet minister. In the case of the journalists for democracy project, it was because of the project's regional scope, where making a partner from one of the countries the lead party could have invoked a negative response from the others. One of the projects in Moldova was also initiated by the Dutch partner the Netherlands Forensic Institute (NFI) and developed together by the NFI and a local partner. Still, IOB observed on the basis of interviews that local ownership and appreciation for the projects were high. These examples show that development by a local organisation is not necessarily a precondition for local ownership and relevance. Although the capacity of local CSOs to develop their own projects has increased over the years, there are still areas where the knowledge and expertise of Dutch organisations is much welcomed.

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Overlap, inconsistency or synergy with other programmes

Most projects were stand-alone interventions, but there were some examples of co-funding and many of the implementers of the evaluated projects had implemented similar projects funded by other donors. There are also examples of projects that built on previous Matra projects, such as the parliamentary oversight of the defence sector project in Georgia. In Belarus, the support given to some independent media organisations was more or less structural and was provided in cooperation with other donors, as this was crucial to the continuation of their activities.

Matra especially gave small and newer organisations an opportunity for funding. Few other donors provided funding on this small scale and with broad eligibility criteria and lenient reporting requirements. Several Matra projects supported organisations in their start-up phase, helping them develop the necessary organisational skills to apply for larger funds in the future. In that way, Matra filled a clear gap and had added value in the donor landscape. Matra was much appreciated by CSOs and donors for its flexibility and its ability to respond

to emerging needs as identified by the CSO community. There was broad recognition for the fact that Matra complemented the larger programmes ran by the EU and most other donors, which focus either on government institutions or on well-established NGOs that can draft sophisticated project plans and reports but are not firmly embedded in society. By contrast, many Matra projects were aimed at promoting a civic culture/spirit within the community at large, a theme that was scarcely addressed by other official donors.⁶⁰

There was minimal overlap with other Dutch programmes (e.g. the Foreign Policy Support Programme (POBB), Stability Fund, Constituency Support Fund or private sector instruments), nor were there evident synergies. There was however potential overlap with the Dutch Human Rights Fund (HRF), since Matra KAP / delegated projects also covered projects in the field of human rights and minorities. In 2010, the HRF was opened to all EaP countries, but since 2012 there has been a list of priority countries, including Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia and Armenia. The HRF was managed by the embassies in much the same way as Matra delegated projects. Generally speaking, it focused on more direct forms of human rights promotion (e.g. protecting human rights defenders, promoting LGBT and prisoners' rights, etc.), while Matra projects aimed for a more indirect effect, creating a climate that is conducive to respect for human rights (e.g. free media, minorities, the legal system etc.). Still, the line between both programmes was thin and could be especially hard to see for local human rights organisations. Some activities seemed eligible for both funds. Embassies took a pragmatic approach, doing their best to distinguish different types of projects and serving more or less the same network of human rights organisations with both programmes. Sometimes they referred applicant organisations to the other programme.

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There was no clear synergy or overlap with the Matra Political Parties Programme (MPPP) or the Visegrad Fund EaP (V4EaP) programme. The three components were implemented completely separate from each other. There were no evident opportunities for creating synergies, although synergies between delegated projects aimed at democratisation and the MPPP may be conceivable in the sense that a healthy political system and democratic structures can be mutually conducive. Embassies reported that they were poorly informed about the other components and would be interested in learning more about their implementation so as to make use of their networking opportunities.

Donor coordination

Although donor coordination by large organisations such as UNDP and the EU is not an immediate concern for Matra due to its limited size, the embassies were generally well connected to both formal and informal donor coordination networks. Through informal coordination, they were well-informed about ongoing processes and developments in the donor community (the dynamics in other donors' programmes), identified opportunities

⁶⁰ Civic culture is defined here on the basis of Almond and Verba's *'The Civic Culture'* (1963). It is understood as a belief in participation in civic duties and is characterized by orientation towards the political system, pride in one's nation, expectation of fair treatment from authorities, ability to talk freely and frequently about politics, an emotional involvement in elections, tolerance towards opposition parties, valuing active participation in local government activities, parties and in civic associations, confidence to participate in politics, civic cooperation and trust and membership in political associations.

for co-funding and exchanged experiences with implementing partners to check their implementation capacity and avoid overlap. The appraisal documents of the analysed projects, however, did not reveal information on coordination with other donors on specific projects.

The embassy in Tbilisi participated in several thematic donor coordination settings. Matra was however mainly coordinated informally with other, mostly like-minded donor organisations (USAID, UK, the EU delegation). Other missions complimented the embassy for being a proactive and well-qualified partner. The embassy in Bucharest was still in the process of connecting with the coordination networks in Chisinau, but was clearly making a serious effort. The Warsaw embassy was well connected with the donor community for Belarus, located in both Warsaw and Vilnius. Although formal donor coordination did take place in Brussels, informal coordination was more relevant, especially when dealing with organisations in a repressive environment, for exchanging information on developments and implementing partners. Although the Netherlands did not have an embassy in Minsk, the Warsaw embassy succeeded in building extensive formal and informal networks. In terms of implementing a human rights policy, the fact that the embassy is based in Warsaw works in its favour, as it is free to implement any activities without being restrained by the Belarusian authorities. Embassy staff in Kyiv are members of various thematic coordination networks in the capital and are always included in expert briefings, consultation rounds, incoming missions etc. organised by the major donor countries and international organisations.

5.4 Effectiveness

Effectiveness was assessed based on two questions: 1) did the projects contribute to democratisation and the formation of a pluriform state governed by the rule of law, where there is room for dialogue between the government and the citizens, and 2) did the projects contribute to strengthening bilateral relations between the Netherlands and the EaP countries?

Contribution to social transformation

Most of the projects analysed achieved their planned outputs, by and large within the planned timeframe. One project in Ukraine failed because the bank where its budget was deposited was declared insolvent. Other donors stepped in to save the project, but it had not yet been concluded during the evaluation period. One project in Moldova was not completed because a study tour to the Netherlands was postponed several times and it was uncertain whether it would still take place. In some of the other 12 projects, there were slight deviations from the planned activities or minor extensions of the project period. The projects resulted in a wide array of outputs and outcomes (see table 5.5).

Table 5.5 Results of the studied projects		
Country	Project output (deliverable)	Project outcome (effect)
Armenia	Informational and educational programme on women's political participation, training courses and a study visit to Sweden, a website and newspaper on women in politics.	Increased political skills and networks for women, slightly increased media reporting on women in politics, some increased voter awareness on female participation.
	CIVICUS Civil Society Index Rapid Assessment on state of affairs in civil society, human rights training for CSOs, sub-granting projects on human rights, democratisation and the rule of law, sharing recommendations with government.	Increased capacities of Armenian CSOs to further improve their ability to influence democratic policy-making.
Belarus	Study tour around Belarus to connect councillors, NGO activists, schoolteachers and cultural activists to Polish counterparts, documenting Jewish cemeteries and monuments, an internet portal, workshops on how to set up and run an NGO, a documentary and a book on protecting Jewish heritage in Belarus.	Increased skills and networks for preserving Jewish heritage in Belarus and increased cooperation among NGOs, researchers, teachers (civil society) and local government on protecting Jewish heritage.
	Technical training of staff of the independent Belarusian TV station 'Belsat TV', production of a live news module and integrating the module with the website to enhance interactivity with audience.	More interactive and dynamic live news broadcasting by Belsat TV.
Georgia	Establishment of a Legal Care House (free legal aid) for minorities, eco-migrants and internally displaced persons, training of lawyers, publication of legal dictionary.	Improved legal protection (legal aid) for minorities, eco-migrants and internally displaced persons, in the fields of citizenship, social rights, property law etc.
	Training courses and a seminar for parliamentary staffers and MPs on issues concerning their role and necessary skills for oversight of the security sector.	Increased skills of staffers and MPs with regard to parliamentary oversight of the security sector.
Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan	Multi-party in-country meetings for young politicians and one international meeting covering the three countries, a website and a questionnaire.	Increased cooperation between young politicians from different political parties and from the three countries involved.
	Training for young journalists in multimedia reporting and critical storytelling, establishment of a platform for multimedia journalists from the Southern Caucasus.	Increased skills in and experience with multimedia reporting and critical storytelling by a small group of journalists, a fast growing regional network of (mainly young) multimedia journalists.

Moldova	Seven policy papers on the institutional independence, autonomy and transparency of justice sector institutions, draft legal changes and proposals for institutions involved, workshops and a conference bringing together justice sector institutions and CSO representatives.	Greater institutional transparency of some important justice sector institutions and increased civil society involvement in their reform processes as a step towards greater integrity and institutional independence for these institutions.
	Introduction course for magistrates and forensic experts on the value of forensic expertise in the criminal justice sector, training on the certification process of forensic experts.	Increased awareness by magistrates of the importance of accredited forensic expertise in the criminal justice system.
	Creation of four initiative groups of young people in Transnistria, establishment of youth interest groups, registration of four CSOs, training seminars, internships in well-established CSOs, projects in local communities and a round table with local authorities, NGOs and mass media.	Empowerment of targeted youth groups.
	Update of database of CSO representatives in Transnistria, needs assessment (in terms of knowledge gaps) of registered organisations, publishing basic guides for CSOs, various training courses and re-granting for five local NGOs.	Increased capacity and activity of small CSOs in Transnistria.
Ukraine ⁶¹	Survey on the quality of life in Lviv, performance indicators to evaluate Lviv city council departments, periodic monitoring of employees and organisational units, ISO 9001 Certification of Lviv city council, publication/dissemination of information charts on various city council procedures for citizens.	Improved service delivery of Lviv city council to citizens, also as an example for other municipalities in Ukraine.

More detailed project descriptions can be found in the electronic annex 'Project Assessment Forms of MPP and delegated projects', published on the IOB website.⁶¹

Nearly all projects that achieved their planned outputs contributed to the anticipated outcomes, although not always to the extent that was aimed for. Most projects contributed to changes in the directly targeted organisations or participating individuals. It is difficult, however, to relate the outcomes at project level to broader developments beyond a project's immediate scope, such as the functioning of free media or the development of civil society as such. Many projects were concerned with building the capacity and increasing the skills of individuals and organisations. The extent to which these capacities can be applied in practice depends on many contextual factors beyond the influence of the Matra programme or the Dutch embassies. This is not a failure of the projects, but a logical consequence of the programme and its projects having a relatively small budget and addressing diverse themes. Furthermore, the projects are implemented in a complex and challenging environment. As described in Chapter 2, these contexts also vary quite widely between EaP countries.

⁶¹ The second selected project in Ukraine was still ongoing.

The sustainability of results was a serious risk, especially when the political context of the project was not favourable. In many cases, the implementing partners aimed to continue to address the issue at hand in order to sustain or build further on the results and often sought support from other donors or even the Matra programme. It is clear that the donor dependency of CSOs in these countries will remain an issue for some time.

Strengthening bilateral relations

Unlike the Matra Projects Programme (MPP), the KAP / delegated programme was not aimed at twinning Dutch organisations with their counterparts in the Matra countries in order to establish societal links between the two countries. Nevertheless, some of the analysed projects, for example the project in Moldova on forensic expertise, involved Dutch organisations as trainers or experts. As mentioned in section 5.3, Dutch organisations operated as contracting partners in two projects managed by the embassy in Tbilisi. Target groups commended the Dutch project partners, trainers and experts involved for their open manner of communication or for introducing new, inspiring ideas or working methods. The cooperation contributed to a positive image of the Netherlands among professionals such as journalists, parliamentarians/assistants and magistrates, and to the recognition of Dutch expertise.

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From the perspective of promoting bilateral relations, the KAP / delegated programme clearly contributed to optimising the embassies' networks. Thanks to the sub-programme, the embassies are well-connected with civil society. This puts them in an excellent position to gather information on social, cultural, political and economic patterns and developments in their countries. During field visits, IOB found that the embassies had a thorough understanding of the country's situation, aligning with the analysis of leading experts interviewed. The diplomatic reporting by the embassies to The Hague of course benefited from their deepened understanding of society. Apart from this, incoming missions from The Hague (ministers, department directors, policy officers) had ample opportunity to meet and consult with representatives from the embassies' Matra networks through round tables, bilateral meetings and field visits to projects.

Besides the information function, Matra uniquely supported the embassies' diplomatic activities. Having such a programme added to their visibility and good standing. The fact that Matra funds could be disbursed at short notice allowed the embassies to respond to emerging needs. The embassy in Tbilisi believed that Matra proved useful in enhancing its network and effectiveness.⁶² According to representatives of CSOs and other missions in Tbilisi, the Dutch embassy was a well-heard voice in Georgia. This was different for Belarus of course, as the Warsaw embassy was only engaged in a limited diplomatic dialogue with Belarusian authorities and the embassy supported CSOs and media that were suppressed by the regime. In Moldova, Dutch support for the rule of law was well-known and highly appreciated at the political level, and led to requests for more support. Some embassies felt that Matra's role in supporting diplomatic activities could be strengthened by allowing them to work directly with central government (an option that was introduced by the Matra

⁶² Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Georgia, *Annual Plan Georgia and Armenia, 2013*.

guidelines in May 2014). Furthermore, as some Matra participants obtained government posts or became members of parliament, the programme provided ambassadors with excellent high level entry points.

On the whole, Matra created good exposure with a small programme in financial terms ('bang for buck'). Embassy staff frequently participated in the events of supported projects, which also contributed to the embassy's visibility and good standing within the donor community, the diplomatic corps, government and society. Still, compared with the Matra programme in the EU pre-accession countries, the programme was less known at government level and in the broader donor community, because of its relatively small size and its focus on non-governmental organisations. Embassies had slightly different perceptions on the need to 'market' Matra as a brand. In particular, the way in which Matra was carried out, with strong involvement by embassy staff, contributed to a positive image for the Netherlands. The embassies were praised for the flexible way in which Matra was implemented. Virtually all project partners interviewed were very positive about their cooperation with the embassy. Staff were accessible, explained what had to be done and helped with implementation. Many CSOs described the embassies as good partners, even beyond the immediate scope of the projects. The embassy in Warsaw, for example, actively paid attention to the educational role the embassy can play in building relations between donor and recipient, by assisting and being open to questions during the process of drafting proposals. Various embassies noted that the decision to discontinue the programme in the EaP countries in 2011 was a blow to the CSO community and put the partnership with the Netherlands at risk.

5.5 Management

Project appraisal

Embassies had ample freedom to implement the Matra programme in a way that fitted the local context and their capacity to manage it. This relative freedom was in keeping with the principle of delegating budgets, which placed responsibility for attaining results with the embassies, and also applied to the procedures for project selection. In the first years covered by this evaluation, most embassies issued calls for proposals, usually once per year. They communicated the availability and purpose of the programme on their websites and to their networks. Proposals had to be submitted before a fixed deadline and grants were awarded by a certain date. From 2013 onwards, most embassies found these calls for proposals too cumbersome given the amount of funding available and replaced this strict procedure by a more *ad hoc* identification of project ideas. They published open calls on their websites year-round and actively sought funding opportunities during networking activities. In 2014, all embassies except Warsaw had adopted this more *ad hoc* way of working. The Warsaw embassy had replaced a more organic identification process by a six-monthly call for proposals procedure with a fixed timetable in 2013.

The general programme framework, which was already rather broad, was not applied in a strict sense. DEU allowed embassies to depart from the rules on occasion if required by local circumstances, which they much appreciated.

The embassies have developed efficient internal procedures for project appraisal. Project proposals were in general sufficiently detailed and gave a clear picture of the background to the project, what it wanted to achieve and by means of which activities. However, the quality of the log frame varied. The appraisal memoranda (BEMOs) often followed the application almost literally, sometimes copying texts from the proposal without comment. This is not a problem if the project proposal is good but, with some proposals, the logic underlying the intervention was of insufficient quality. Not all project proposals and BEMOs made explicit how the project fitted within Matra's overall objective.

The embassies welcomed the establishment of the Regional Support Office (RSO) in Prague, as the additional financial management capacity allowed the embassies to focus more on content.⁶³ The RSO in The Hague developed an abridged BEMO route for small projects, reducing the administrative costs of programme implementation in Belarus, where most projects were small. The regular BEMO format changed in 2014, becoming lengthier and more time-consuming, and this may increase the administrative burden for embassies that support a lot of projects with budgets slightly over EUR 25,000.

Project monitoring

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Reporting requirements for Matra projects were less strict than those of most other donors, which was highly appreciated by project partners, especially the smaller and newer ones, as it saved them a lot of administrative costs. The contracting partners for projects over EUR 25,000 were only required to submit a final narrative and financial report. They did not have to draw up intermediary reports unless the project had a duration exceeding one year. Money was disbursed in two instalments of 95% and 5%, respectively.

Grants for projects under EUR 25,000 were paid up front, in a single payment, and as of 2011 no reporting was required for them. This meant that embassies lacked a formal instrument to establish that funds were used legitimately and effectively. However, the embassy staff were closely engaged in the supported projects and monitored project implementation through frequent informal contact with project partners by email or telephone/Skype, though this was not apparent from the project files. Many implementers of small projects still chose to report on project completion. The fact that organisations wanted to apply for a grant for a new project the next year was an important incentive for complying and reporting. The Kyiv embassy monitored projects on a regular basis, developing a monitoring plan at the start of each year. In this way, 80-90% of supported projects were monitored either through participation in project events or organizing specific monitoring missions to the oblasts of Ukraine.

The implementing partners were given sufficient flexibility to change the project duration and to make changes between budget lines, as long as they provided good arguments. The way that the programme was implemented was quite labour-intensive, but the flexibility, outreach and sense of partnership created in this way is one of the key strengths of the Matra programme.

⁶³ In 2013, the RSO in Prague was established to provide embassies in Eastern Europe with financial and administrative management support, including for the Matra delegated projects.

Programme monitoring

Embassies provided DZO/DEU with lists of supported projects on an annual basis and reported on implementation of the programme in their annual reports. In the last years of the evaluation period, they were expected to devote no more than one paragraph to the Matra programme. Only the embassy in Kyiv filed a separate annual report on implementation of the Matra programme and the Human Rights Fund, but it never received feedback.

5.6 Conclusion

Relevance

The thematic scope of the programme, which was broad in the beginning and narrowed during the evaluation period, was reflected by the projects. The wide variation in the project portfolios per country reflected the relative freedom and flexibility of embassies in identifying important challenges and responding to developments in their countries.

Overall, the projects addressed local challenges, and quality and local relevance were the key criteria for project selection. This does not mean that projects were always aligned with the policy of the country's government; this was especially the case with projects that supported civil society in Belarus and Transnistria (Moldova). Nevertheless, a number of projects (particularly in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine) engaged with government institutions.

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Local ownership was high and the programme was implemented in a demand-driven manner, as most projects were initiated by local partners. Only two of the 14 analysed projects were initiated from the Netherlands.

The Matra programme fulfilled a niche role in the broader donor landscape. Due to its small scale, broad eligibility criteria and lenient reporting requirements it reached out to small and new civil society organisations. Apart from some potential overlap with the Human Rights Fund (HRF), which was addressed in a pragmatic way, there was no overlap or synergy with the other Dutch programmes. Coordination of the programme with other donors mainly took place informally with like-minded donors, identifying opportunities for co-funding and exchanging experiences with implementing partners in order to check their implementation capacity and avoid overlaps.

Effectiveness

Twelve of the 14 analysed projects achieved their planned outputs, by and large within the set timeframe and budget. Most contributed to the organisational capacities and/or personal skills of CSOs, journalists, parliamentary staffers or local governments. In many cases, this led to changes within the direct target group, but the long-term and broader impact is hard to assess. This depends for a large part on the socio-political context, which in general seems more favourable in the countries that seek closer association with the EU, and demands sustained efforts by the donor community.

In terms of promoting bilateral relations, the programme most clearly contributed to the networks of the embassies concerned. The close relations established with civil society placed them in an excellent position to exchange information. The programme also supported the diplomatic activities of the embassies. For such a small programme in financial terms, Matra offered good exposure. Furthermore, the possibility of using Matra funds quickly, proactively and effectively to fill gaps in the EaP countries based on emerging needs, added to the credibility and effectiveness of the embassies' messaging. Establishing societal relations between the Netherlands and the Matra countries was not part of the programme's design; only a few projects involved Dutch organisations transferring their expertise to local counterparts.

Management

As mentioned, the ministry gave the embassies ample room to shape their programmes to best fit the local context. In turn, the embassies showed the same flexibility towards their project partners, which also appreciated this way of working. This flexibility entailed some risk, especially with grants under EUR 25,000, which were paid up front. But the lack of formal procedures was made up for by intensive informal contacts with project implementers. Some embassies also played an educational role in the process of developing projects, providing additional information if needed, being accessible to partners, helping to develop proposals, etc.

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The programme's flexibility, engagement and sense of partnership meant that a relatively large number of staff was involved. Compared to large programmes, Matra is quite labour-intensive, but it is precisely this method of working, enabled by the involvement and expertise of local staff, which gives the programme its value.

6

Matra Political Parties Programme

6.1 Background

Since 1990 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (BZ) of the Netherlands enables the Dutch political parties financially to support capacity building of political parties in Eastern Europe. As of 1994 this has been done through the Matra programme under the 'Matra Political Parties Programme' (MPPP). The objective of the MPPP was to strengthen the leadership and networks of the sister parties in the pre-accession countries and the countries neighbouring the European Union in order to contribute to democratisation and to strengthen the networks between the Dutch political parties and their sister parties.

The available grants are provided to foundations linked to the Dutch political parties represented in the Dutch House of Representatives (*Tweede Kamer*). Until 2013 seven parties applied for the grant and in 2013 an eighth party joined.⁶⁴ For reasons of readability, the names of the political parties instead of those of the affiliated foundations are used in this report.

During the first years of the evaluation period, the programme's implementation was managed by BZ. In 2013 the programme's management was transferred to the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations (BZK), as the MPPP was brought under the Political Parties Financing Act (WFPP).⁶⁵ The transfer was meant to streamline the process of awarding grants to the different political parties' foundations, and avoid the application of different statutory frameworks and thus of different management rules to different grants.

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In 2006 an evaluation of the MPPP was commissioned by the Southeast and Eastern Europe Department (DZO) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (BZ) and executed by an external research organisation. The implementation of the programme in Georgia was one of the cases studied.⁶⁶ Box 6.1 summarises the findings and recommendations of said study.

⁶⁴ The parties that applied for, and received, the grant were: VVD (Haya van Someren Stichting), PvdA (Foundation Max van der Stoel), CDA (Eduardo Frei Stichting), D66 (International Democratic Initiative – IDI), ChristenUnie (Foundation for International Christian Democratic Development – FICDD), GroenLinks (bureau De Helling) and SGP (Foundation for training activities in Eastern Europe – SVO). In 2013 the Animal Politics Foundation of the Party for the Animals applied for the subsidy for the first time.

⁶⁵ Interestingly, the programme was already managed by BZK from 1994 to 2000. As the MPPP activities were closely linked with the foreign policy of the Netherlands, the management was transferred to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (BZ) at the request of the political parties in 2000.

⁶⁶ Warner Strategy and Fundraising, *From party to party: Dutch support for political parties in European countries in transition; Evaluation of the Matra Political Parties Programme 2000-2005 (Van partij naar partij: Nederlandse ondersteuning van politieke partijen in Europese landen in transitie; Evaluatie Matra Politieke Partijen Programma 2000-2005)* Wormerveer, 2006.

Box 6.1 Findings and recommendations of the MPPP evaluation 2006

Findings

- Party foundations carried out the MPPP with great dedication.
- Most activities were small-scale activities costing relatively little.
- Those participating in the activities have benefited personally, but the effects at party level were difficult to determine.
- The MPPP, originally conceived as support for political parties in countries with prospects for EU accession, was shifting to countries where the political situation was unstable, where chances for EU membership were uncertain or absent, and where a pluralistic, democratic society was solely a distant possibility. It was difficult for Dutch political parties to select a sister party in these countries based on a programmatic relationship.
- The work in countries of this sort was impossible without a clear strategy, a vision as to party support, knowledge of topical, political context and coordination and fine-tuning among the Dutch party foundations and with party foundations from other Western countries.
- The ministry of Foreign Affairs refrained from judging content and from commenting on strategic choices and activities because it could not interfere with the autonomy of the parties.
- Both the necessary stimulus and the required advice that could lead to quality improvement and programme enrichment were lacking.

Recommendations

- An independent committee with representatives from both the political parties and the ministry could better oversee programme management and quality. The MPPP should take on the character of a real subsidy programme with formal demands and evaluation and selection criteria, making it easier to assess the results the programme delivers.
- It would be better for party foundations to work on a strategy with a longer term, incorporating a clear vision of party development, and an offer of activities per country, best fitting the actual political situation there.

Source: Warner Strategy and Fundraising, *From party to party: Dutch support for political parties in European countries in transition*; Evaluation of the Matra Political Parties Programme 2000-2005 (*Van partij naar partij: Nederlandse ondersteuning van politieke partijen in Europese landen in transitie, Evaluatie Matra Politieke Partijen Programma 2000-2005*), Wormerveer, 2006.

As a result of the 2006 evaluation, BZ decided to provide the subsidy in a three-year framework (2008-2011) instead of yearly ones.

6.2 Expenditure

Apart from the period 2008-2011, the political foundations applied for the subsidy on a yearly basis. In most years the grant ceiling was EUR 2 million, covering all eligible countries, meaning the Eastern Partnership countries, the pre-accession countries (the Western Balkans and Turkey) and, as of 2011, some Arab countries in North Africa.

Year	Europe initial budget	Europe* additional budget due to parliamentary amendments	Arab region	Total
2008	2 000	-	-	2 000
2009	2 000	-	-	2 000
2010	2 000	-	-	2 000
2011	2 000	1 100	-	3 100
2012	1 200	1 000	500	2 700
2013	1 000	750	500	2 250
2014	1 000	500	500	2 000
Total	11 200	3 350	1 500	16 050

Source: BZ-archives

*The additional budget for Europe was meant for MPPP in the EaP countries.

By and large, the total budget for MPPP remained the same over the years, but the budget available for the EaP decreased from EUR 1 million in 2012 to EUR 500,000 in 2014.

The total grant was divided among the applicant party foundations as follows: the grant consisted of a basic sum per applicant plus an amount per seat in the House of Representatives. For instance, in 2011 the basic sum was EUR 82,000 and the amount per seat was EUR 13,082.57, leading to the following distribution of grants as presented in table 6.2.

	No. of seats in the House of Representatives	2011 (in EUR)	%
VVD	31	488 000	24 %
PvdA	30	474 000	24 %
CDA	21	357 000	18 %
GL	10	213 000	11 %
D66	10	213 000	11 %
CU	5	147 000	7 %
SGP	2	108 000	5 %
Total	*109	2 000 000	100 %

Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, appraisal memorandum 2011 [DZO-0002/2011].

* The parties holding the remaining seats (total number of seats: 150) did not apply for the grant.

The distribution of funds across parties was linked to the results of the parliamentary elections, which meant that changes in the number of seats in parliament were immediately felt. For example, during the period 2010-2014 the CDA went from 41 to 13 seats in two steps, meaning that the party had to accommodate large shifts in the distribution of funds in a short period of time. Prior to 2013, the financial consequences of the elections took effect as off the next granting period, whereas under the Political Parties Financing Act (WFPP) the financial consequences took effect within 3 to 4 months after the elections.⁶⁷ This poses a challenge to planning activities in a year when parliamentary elections are scheduled.

Geographical spread of spending

When the MPPP was managed by BZ, the granting decision specified which amount of the grant was to be spent in which region. For instance, in 2012 the parties were asked to spend 40% of the grant in the pre-accession countries, 40% in the EaP countries and 20% in the Arab countries. Conversely, the Political Parties Financing Act (WFPP) does not impose any conditions with regard to regional distribution of funds. However, in a letter to the parties concerned, the ministers of BZ and BZK did express their expectation that in practice the grants would be spent in the Matra countries. As table 6.3 shows, the average proportion of MPPP funds used in the EaP countries – for those political foundations who still made the distinction in their annual reports – was one third of the total grant. This was somewhat less than the 40% that was earmarked for the region prior to 2013. It has to be said however that it is not possible to verify exactly how much money was spent in which countries, because since 2013 the regional distribution of funds was no longer a mandatory element in the planning and reporting documents as required and used by BZK.

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Year and party	Eastern Partnership	Pre-accession	Arab region
2013 SGP (project costs)	52 %	42 %	6 %
2013 D66 (programme costs)	37 %	27 %	37 %
2013 GL (total costs)	33 %	67 %	0 %
2013 VVD (project costs)	37 %	41 %	22 %
2013 CDA (total allocation)	15 %	52 %	33 %
2014 GL (total costs)	33 %	67 %	0 %
2014 SGP (project costs)	45 %	33 %	22 %
Total sample	33 %	44 %	21 %

Source: MDF/APE, Evaluation Report Matra Programme (in pre-accession countries: Western Balkans and Turkey), 2012-2014, Ede, April 2015, p. 44; (original source: annual reports political party foundations), calculation IOB.

⁶⁷ According to articles 13 and 14 of the Political Parties Financing act (WFPP), the minister will adjust the subsidy on the first day of the fourth month after the elections.

6.3 Relevance

The issue of relevance is addressed from the perspective of the consistency of the MPPP with the overall objective and principles of the Matra programme and whether the activities addressed the needs of the sister parties and challenges of the EaP countries.

Consistency with Matra objective and principles

The objective of the MPPP, strengthening local political parties in order to foster democratisation, fits the overall goal of Matra as it encompasses contributing to the process of developing a democratic state. With the transfer of the subsidy from the Matra programme's framework to the Political Parties Financing Act (WFPP) in 2013, fostering democracy is no longer one of its formal objectives (see section 6.5).

Political parties are a fundamental part of functioning democracies, tasked with translating the needs and opinions of citizens into policy. All established democracies have a party system in which two or more different parties gather around an ideology and develop a comprehensive socio-economic programme. Political parties can be a vehicle for broad political participation and a mechanism for deciding trade-offs between various policy options. In addition, having assertive political parties in opposition is a prerequisite for governmental accountability.⁶⁸

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Party-to-party versus multi-party democracy building

The MPPP is based on the idea of twinning between ideologically related parties.⁶⁹ This is the so-called 'party-to-party model' or 'fraternal party approach'. Ideological commonality is assumed to provide a good basis for cooperation and support. This ideological kinship is usually established based on membership of the same international party organisation, during fact-finding missions or based on previous bilateral contacts. Another approach is the multi-party approach, where one organisation provides support to multiple (in principle, all) democratic political parties in a specific country.

As was pointed out by the previous MPPP evaluation in 2006, the party to party approach works best in a situation where ideological partners can be clearly identified and where there is a certain amount of stability of the political landscape, warranting political pluralism.⁷⁰ As described in Chapter 2, the party systems in most EaP countries were still rather unstable and volatile during the evaluation period. There was also a strong polarisation between parties. In this context it was not always easy for the Dutch parties to identify suitable and stable partners. It also raises the question whether the party-to-party approach was the best approach for every country. A multi-party approach could be used to

⁶⁸ P. Alfonso et al. (ed.), *EU support for political parties – why does it matter and how can it be enhanced, A Discussion Paper from the European Network of Political Foundations (EnoP)*, 1 October 2014, p. 2.

⁶⁹ Twinning is an instrument of partnering two or more entities/organisations with a shared mission or interest, in order to bring benefits to the participating organisations. It is usually employed to bring people together from different parts of Europe. It provides the opportunity to transfer knowledge and expertise, to share problems, exchange views and understand different viewpoints.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

foster trust and cooperation between parties, although this is also challenging in a context of distrust and strong polarisation.

Interestingly, some variants of the multi-party approach have been implemented under the MPPP; in the period 2011-2013 the VVD, CDA and the PvdA jointly organised so-called Leadership Academies in Armenia and Georgia with participants from a variety of political parties. These training programmes focused on young leaders of all parties and were coordinated by the local representations of the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung and the Friedrich Naumann Stiftung.⁷¹ The Dutch parties undertook these joint projects as they had not yet identified suitable partners in these countries to develop full cooperation programmes with.⁷² This cooperation enabled them to show that, in the Dutch political culture, parties can work together and still be effective in realising their objectives while forming a coalition. Also, the South Caucasus Representation office of the Netherlands Institute for Multi-party Development (NIMD) in Tbilisi, Georgia, has undertaken some interesting multi-party projects, that were in part financed by the Dutch embassy in Tbilisi under Matra's delegated programme.

Country focus

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The political party foundations were not equally active in each EaP country. Whereas the larger parties at least tried to be active in every EaP country, the smaller ones were more selective, mainly because of limited resources and the difficulty to find suitable partners. IOB analysed the foundations' activity reports over the period 2011-2013. In this period only the VVD and the PvdA were active in all EaP countries. The latter however has pulled out from Azerbaijan in 2014 as it considered that the political situation became too difficult to develop a programme of sufficient quality. The CDA has been active in all countries but Azerbaijan (see table 6.4). It had to make some critical choices after its grant was reduced due to the electoral results in 2012. It pulled out from Moldova in 2012 and decided to take a break in Ukraine in 2013.

⁷¹ The Konrad Adenauer Stiftung is the German Foundation for Christian democratic politics and the Friedrich Naumann Stiftung is the German foundation for liberal politics.

⁷² Besides these joint trainings, the PvdA organised activities for the Armenian Youth Federation (youth branch of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation), and in Georgia with Our Georgia, Free Democrats Party, the Social Democrats for Development (SDD) and members of the Movement for Solidarity and other left wing clubs; the VVD organised activities with the National Movement of Armenia and with the Liberal Academy Tbilisi (regional projects covering the South Caucasus), the Republican Party and the Liberal Political Club in Georgia; and the CDA in Georgia worked with the Christian Democratic Movement (CDM), which split up in 2012, and the Georgian Youth Christian-Democratic Organisation.

Table 6.4 Country focus 2011-2013								
		Armenia	Azerbaijan	Belarus	Georgia	Moldova	Ukraine	Regional
VVD	2011							
	2012							
	2013							
PvdA	2011							
	2012							
	2013							
CDA	2011							
	2012							
	2013							
D66	2011							
	2012							
	2013*							
CU	2011							
	2012							
	2013							
GL	2011							
	2012							
	2013							
SGP	2011							
	2012							
	2013							

Source: Annual reports political party foundations 2011, 2012 and 2013, description of activities.

The dark coloured cells indicate that one or more activities have been undertaken or supported in the country.

* planned

Addressing the needs of sister parties and challenges with regard to democratisation

According to the annual reports of the participating political foundations over the period 2011-2013 the following activities have been undertaken:

- Trainings on:
 - practical skills (e.g. campaigning and communication, negotiating, project management, social media and effective training);
 - party ideology and formulation of party platforms;
 - political leadership, mainly focused on young party leaders, covering aspects such as ideology, personal values, speaking, debating and making political commercials;
 - party building: internal party structures and intra-party democracy;
 - the role of women or youth in political parties, setting-up women and youth organisations;
 - policy and strategy development, on policy issues such as local governance, cross-border cooperation, rule of law, gender equality, agricultural policy;

- Exchanges / study trips to the Netherlands;
- Financing the participation of (young) party leaders in international political (youth) conferences;
- Regional conferences and seminars (sometimes as fringe meetings during conferences of the European political family organisation);
- International or regional summer/winter schools for political training.

About 80-90% of implemented activities by the Dutch political parties were trainings or courses. These were more or less evenly spread among trainings on organisational skills, personal skills (political leadership) and ideology. The three largest parties focussed almost exclusively on giving trainings themselves. The smaller political parties were more active in organising regional seminars and conferences. Some also financed the participation of young party leaders to international party or youth federation conferences.

Despite the addition of elements such as social media or internet security, there was no clear development in the kind of activities throughout the years. One Dutch respondent pointed out that whereas trainings in the beginning were rather basic, lately there is more room for 'train the trainer'-kind of support.

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Activities were mainly focused on state level or regional (multi-state) level. The challenge of developing party organisations and democratic politics at the local level was no focal point, although many activities were open for political representatives at the local level.

A large share of activities was aimed at young party leaders and youth organisations/federations. One of the Dutch parties even worked exclusively with political youth organisations in three of the six EaP countries. This may be a sound investment in the future democratisation of the EaP countries, its impact on current politics is limited however.

All large and medium-sized Dutch political parties provided trainings on party ideology. Especially the liberal parties (VVD and D66) gave many trainings on the issue. Developing a more value/ideology based politics was indeed one of the key challenges in the EaP countries and this is where party-to-party support could have added value in relation to what other supporting organisations do. Some of the respondents from the sister parties appreciated this type of training more than others.

Other donors and demand-driven support

Most parties in EaP countries also benefitted from the support from other organisations. Most frequently mentioned in this respect were the American International Republican Institute (IRI) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI), which both follow a multi-party approach, and the German political foundations and the British parties through the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, who work on a party-to-party basis. These organisations work towards the same objectives and organise similar activities as the Dutch parties. The German party foundations are much larger than the Dutch and spend several millions euros per year and have permanent offices in almost every EaP country. They are important partners for most of the Dutch parties. The Dutch party foundations benefit from

their local knowledge and network and some of them develop their training events together with their German counterpart, for instance by providing funds or trainers to a training programme coordinated by the German partner.

With these large programmes being implemented, what is the added value of the Dutch support? One key aspect appears to have been that it was provided in a demand-driven way. This was mentioned by local beneficiaries as a strong feature of the Dutch support, especially in relation to the support provided by others which were said to have more standardised programmes or display a stronger political agenda of their own. The Dutch parties were credited for providing the opportunity to local parties to put forward their own agenda.

6.4 Effectiveness

Effectiveness is assessed from two perspectives: firstly, have MPPP activities contributed to leadership development and network-building by sister parties or organisations in EaP countries? Secondly, have MPPP activities strengthened Dutch political parties' networks in EaP countries and access to information?

Contributing to capacity building

It is clear that knowledge, skills and experience have been transferred to the members of political parties in EaP countries, by means of the numerous trainings that have been provided. In the same vein, the funding of the participation of (young) party leaders to international conferences has to some extent contributed to strengthening the international networks of the political parties and youth federations. Interviews also indicate that those involved in these activities appreciated and personally benefitted from the activities. At the same time, it is hard to see results at the party level. The way that the individual benefits feed into the wider party and the party system is dependent on many contextual factors (development of the party and of the party system itself, elections, career paths of people involved etc.). The same goes for progress at the party level, or at the level of the political culture.

Assessing the effectiveness of the programme is further limited because the summary reporting by the party foundations does not reveal sufficient information, about the number and background of the participants, the specific contents of the trainings or the achieved results to allow a claim on effectiveness. There is also little information provided on developments at party level.

Lastly, it is hard to assess effectiveness in the absence of a framework for party development or success indicators. The issue of developing a strategy for support to party building was addressed in the previous evaluation of the MPPP in 2006, but has not been taken up.

In sum, there are no clear indications that party organisations in EaP countries have become stronger or better organised, and even if this were so, it would be hard to attribute these developments to the support provided by the Dutch parties. The broader political context is

important for attaining results at party level. In some countries the political context is too restrictive for democratic parties to develop (Belarus, Azerbaijan), in others politics is still centred around some strong political figures or oligarchs. Party development is hampered by the unstable and volatile party system. The effectiveness of the MPPP in its current form in terms of its contribution to democratisation cannot be established, which – as in the case of the other Matra sub-programmes – does not automatically imply it is ineffective.

Contributing to the networks and information position of Dutch political parties

The MPPP provides Dutch political parties with an opportunity to deepen relations with sister parties beyond the framework of international party organisations. According to the Dutch party foundations, their prime motivation for engaging in the MPPP was solidarity with their sister parties and the wish (or moral obligation) to support democratic development in the EU's neighbouring countries rather than to benefit themselves from the contacts with these parties. Still, the international activities conducted contributed to the international profile of the parties and created networking opportunities for individual party leaders as well.

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During the evaluation period the relations between Dutch and the political parties in the EaP countries were in the developmental phase or, in some cases, that of consolidation. Establishing stable relations with political parties was often hard. The relationship between the political parties seemed to be focused more on support than being aimed at creating equal partnerships. At least, interviews did not reveal a clear strategy with regard to building relationships with sister parties. Of course coordinating and implementing activities with sister parties provided the Dutch parties with information on the local political situation and on the countries' position with regard to EU integration, but the degree to which the political parties were able (or interested) to disseminate the knowledge that was obtained through the programme within their party structures varied. Some published an electronic newsletter, others relied on periodic meetings with their members of parliament. The PvdA stood out in this respect, as it held the secretariat of the European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity and managed its website, containing information and updates about political developments in EU's neighbouring countries and emerging democracies further abroad.⁷³

Oftentimes, Dutch members of parliament (MP's) were not involved in the MPPP activities due to their busy schedules. In most cases when elected representatives or officials contributed to the activities, this concerned members of the European Parliament (MEP's), aldermen, members of city councils or provincial states, mayors or former MP's. The extent to which high-ranking politicians want to engage in international activities also depends on their personal affinities with this kind of work. Furthermore, parliamentarians and especially spokespersons for foreign affairs have their own international contacts and networks beyond those established by the MPPP. Some parties, however, pointed out that in the past, relationships had been developed – partly – through the MPPP with persons who later got cabinet posts and provided high-level entry points.

⁷³ <http://www.europeanforum.net>.

IOP concludes from interviews that the political parties in the EaP countries highly appreciated the cooperation. Besides the support in building their capacities, for them the cooperation means international recognition, which provides standing in a competitive political environment and access to an international network. In the increasingly geopolitical context of the EaP, political parties and politicians are glad to be seen and recognised by Western partners.

6.5 Management

Transfer from BZ to BZK

As mentioned, until 2013 the MPPP was managed by the Europe Department (DEU) of BZ. In 2013, the administration was transferred to the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations (BZK), which was already responsible for overseeing the State's broader financial relations with the political parties. Prior to 2013, the grants were provided directly to the party foundations, guided by a letter which set out the granting framework. Since 2013, the MPPP grants are provided to the Dutch political parties as part of the regular state subsidy they receive. The amount intended for international activities is to be forwarded to their foundations for international cooperation. Under article 7:2c of the Political Parties Financing Act (WFPP) the grants are to be used for: 'maintaining relations with sister parties abroad and to contribute to capacity development and network building of those parties'. This formulation provides the parties with a larger degree of freedom as to which international activities to employ. In addition, there are no formal conditions with regard to the regions or countries where the grant is to be spent. In a letter to the parties concerned, the ministers for BZK and BZ did, however, express their expectation that in practice the grants would be spent in the Matra countries.⁷⁴

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The political foundations applied for the subsidy by submitting annual plans that were assessed by the responsible ministry. This assessment was already relatively light prior to 2013. DEU assessed the eligibility of the planned activities using a broad interpretation of eligible activities. The assessment was somewhat stricter on the regional allocation of the spending in accordance with the granting decision. This did not apply to an even spread among the countries within the same region, as the possibility to cooperate depended on the availability of suitable partners.

Since the transfer of the responsibility of programme management from BZ to BZK, the requirements for the annual plans and their assessment have become even lighter. The formulation of eligible activities has become very broad and there are no formal requirements with regard to the geographical spread of the activities. Furthermore, both ministries (BZ and BZK) were reluctant to intervene in the choices made by the party foundations, so as to avoid interference of the minister with choices made by the political parties. With funding under the WFPP, there were hardly any formal grounds for intervention. The party foundations noticed that since 2013 they hardly received any substantial feedback on their proposals.

⁷⁴ See e.g. the letter of 6 April 2012 on MPPP to the VVD, ref. DAM-024/2012.

Communication and coordination

The annual reports on the implemented activities submitted by the party foundations varied considerably in structure and elaborateness. Some provided contextual information on the countries, others did not; some provided financial information per activity, others did not. In general, reporting mainly focused on a description of the activities undertaken instead of results.

Apart from the formal contacts during the application and reporting phase, there was informal communication with BZ, for instance on the eligibility of activities that were newly inserted into the programme. This kind of contact diminished with the transfer of the programme to BZK, although parties may still contact BZ or embassies when there is a clear motivation to do so. The current level of contacts depends on the willingness of the individuals concerned and personal relations established in the past. Political parties did not see a significant change in the way the programme was managed by BZ and BZK, although some regretted the loss of informal contact with and substantive feedback from BZ.

BZ organised yearly round-table meetings with the representatives from the party foundations participating in the MPPP with the aim of sharing information, providing feedback and improving quality. BZK continued this practice. According to those involved, the meetings were used by the ministries to inform the party foundations on policy changes with regard to the programme, while the parties informed the ministries and each other about their activities and plans. In addition, views were exchanged on political developments in the countries concerned. Strategic issues with regard to the support provided were hardly touched upon. BZ participated in the two meetings organized by BZK, but there was no coordination between BZK and BZ prior to the meetings, which would have allowed a more proactive role on the part of the ministries.

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Apart from the annual meetings at the ministries, there was little coordination among the Dutch parties. There was some coordination between D66 and the VVD, as they both worked with liberal parties and organisations, and there was some coordination among the VVD, the PvdA and the CDA with regard to their joint trainings in Armenia and Georgia.

During the evaluation it appeared that the Dutch embassies in the EaP countries felt ill-informed about the implementation of the MPPP in the countries within their resort. Embassy staff said they would highly appreciate to be informed about the activities of the political parties because of the importance of political parties in the democratic development of the country, their responsibility for managing Dutch relations with social and political actors and because of possible sensitivities in the volatile political context in the EaP countries. They could also benefit from the networking opportunities that are provided by the party-to-party support.

All in all, the transfer of the management to BZK has brought the MPPP in line with the practice of non-intervention and respect for the autonomy of political parties by BZ. At the same time, this means that the MPPP lacks a formal mechanism for quality control. Although in theory a grant can be refused or reclaimed when spent on a non-eligible cause, this is unlikely to happen with the broad definition of eligible spending.

6.6 Conclusion

A first remark to be made is that the findings of the 2006 evaluation of the MPPP (see box 6.1) are still valid. As far as the recommendations are concerned, the steps that have been taken since largely go in the opposite direction. The evaluation called for more attention for strategy, quality and better management of the programme and recommended the MPPP take the form of a true subsidy programme. However, the framework and the management have become even looser. This development suggests that developing a granting framework based on strict criteria is difficult for government when political parties are involved.

Relevance

The objective of the MPPP included the promotion of democracy and was consistent with the overall aim of Matra. When the MPPP was brought under the Political Parties Financing Act (WFPP), it lost this connection, as the new formal objective is only 'to maintain relations with sister parties abroad and to support training and education activities for their members'. From a formal point of view, the funds do not even have to be spent in the Matra countries anymore. At the same time, there are no signs of parties spending the funds entirely different than before, although the spending has become less transparent.

Except for the two largest ones, the political parties were not active in all countries of the region. Armenia and Azerbaijan were least served, as the way in which the subsidy is spent depends a lot on the availability of sister parties with whom a constructive relationship can be built.

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The vast majority of activities were trainings or courses, focusing on the transferral of knowledge, skills and political ideology, especially those of the larger parties. The smaller parties, with less capacity and financial means, organised regional seminars or fringe meetings. Some also sponsored the participation of young leaders of the sister parties in international party conferences.

In addition, given the volatile and antagonistic political climate in the EaP countries it can be questioned whether the party-to-party approach was the most suitable way of supporting democratisation. Overall, the support was provided in absence of a clear vision or strategy on how party-to-party support would contribute best to the process of democratisation, which is especially challenging given political culture in these countries.

The MPPP was implemented in parallel with programmes by other donors (e.g. American and German ones) and sometimes in cooperation with those organisations. The added value of the Dutch support was first of all that it was provided in a demand-driven way. Second, the attention given to political ideologies was a rather distinctive feature of the Dutch parties.

Effectiveness

It was not possible to establish the effectiveness of the MPPP in terms of contribution to capacity at party level, let alone the democratisation of the EaP countries. The separate activities have likely contributed to knowledge and/or skills on a personal level, but little can be said about results at party or political system levels, as these are influenced by many contextual factors. Another factor limiting the reliable assessment of results is the summary – and diverse – style of reporting by the party foundations; most reporting is general in nature and does not reveal details on participants' backgrounds, specific aspects of the trainings or obtained results.

On the front of bilateral relations, the MPPP has led to a stronger connection between Dutch political parties and their EaP counterparts. These relations tended, however, towards a one-way support relationship rather than a relationship between equals. Also the Dutch political parties' knowledge of the countries concerned was increased. However, the ways of disseminating this knowledge beyond those directly involved in the activities varied.

Management

By placing the MPPP under the WFPP and transferring the programme's monitoring from BZ to BZK, the formal criteria for eligible activities and the regional scope of the activities became looser. There is hardly any ground left to steer the choices made by the political parties. On the one hand, this reflected the practice of non-intervention during the period when BZ managed the programme, in order to avoid interference of the minister with choices by political parties. In other words, the legal framework was brought into conformity with practice. On the other hand, it can be questioned whether it was sensible to eliminate the explicit objective of supporting the democratisation process, which is a key objective of the Matra programme, and which makes it even harder to apply any conditions to the way in which the funds are spent. This goes against the trend of making government subsidies more result-oriented. It is even unclear to what extent the subsidy is still related to the Matra programme.

Up to this point, however, it does not seem that the changes in the framework and the transfer of management have led to evident changes in the way that parties operate the programme. The reporting by political parties already differed in structure and elaborateness and these differences have become stronger.

7

Visegrad Fund Eastern Partnership Programme

7.1 Background

The International Visegrad Fund is an international organisation, based in Bratislava, Slovakia, and founded in 2000 by the governments of the Visegrád group (V4) countries – the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. The purpose of the fund is to facilitate and promote closer cooperation among citizens and institutions within the V4 region as well as between the V4 and other countries, especially in the Western Balkans and the countries of the Eastern Partnership (EaP). The fund does so through grant support of joint cultural, scientific and educational projects, youth exchanges, cross-border projects and tourism promotion, as well as through individual mobility programmes (scholarships, residencies).⁷⁵

The Visegrad Fund launched its Eastern Partnership (V4EaP) programme in 2012. The aim was to assist democratisation and the European orientation of the EaP countries by providing the experience of the V4 region. The programme seeks to support political and socio-economic reforms facilitating comprehensive approximation towards the EU and building strong institutional capacity and civil society. In doing so it is focused on providing access to the V4 countries' experience in order to support transformation and implementation of European standards in the EaP states. An underlying effect – and goal – of the V4 countries cooperating in conducting multilateral activities with the EaP countries is the strengthening of V4 cooperation.

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In late 2011, after EUR 5 mln was made available for Matra in the EaP countries as the result of parliamentary amendments to the budget of the Dutch ministry of Foreign Affairs (BZ), the ministry decided to spend EUR 1,5 million via the V4EaP programme. This was considered an attractive option as it allowed the Netherlands to contribute to the transformation process in the EaP countries, without having to invest in implementation capacity for only one year (as was thought at the time). The aim of the Dutch contribution to the V4EaP programme was to support democratisation and civil society in the EaP countries. According to the appraisal memorandum (BEMO) the co-financing of the V4EaP programme would also contribute to:

- a) joining means and expertise of the Netherlands and the International Visegrad Fund for an effective and efficient spending of Dutch money in the EaP countries (donor cooperation instead of competition),
- b) opportunities for the Dutch embassies in the region to connect to the V4 network in the EaP countries,
- c) making use of the experiences of countries that had recently gone through such a transformation process themselves, and to
- d) intensifying relations with the V4 countries ('goodwill') to promote other Dutch interests.⁷⁶

After the Dutch parliament adopted new amendments to the ministry's budget for 2013 and 2014, the Netherlands continued its contribution to the V4EaP programme with EUR 1 mln in 2013 and again in 2014.

⁷⁵ International Visegrad Fund, *About the Fund*, see: www.visegradfund.org/about.

⁷⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Europe Department, appraisal memorandum MATRA projects via Visegrad Fund, 9 May 2012 (no page numbers).

The contribution provided by the Dutch government would supplement the budget allocated by the Visegrad Fund to the V4EaP programme. The initial agreement between the Fund and the Netherlands stated that the Dutch contribution would be used to finance two schemes: Flagship projects and University Study Grants (VUSG). However, in November 2012 it was agreed that the contribution to the VUSG would be replaced by a newly established 'Extended Standard Grants' (ESG) scheme, because VUSG projects could not be executed within the timeframe of the Dutch support. The Dutch contributions in 2013 and 2014 were exclusively used for the ESG scheme. Box 7.1 presents the initial support schemes of the V4EaP programme.

Box 7.1 *Initial support schemes of the V4EaP programme*

- *Flagship projects*: The aim was to support long-term projects with a strategic character that were meant to support reform processes, political association and economic integration with the EU, strengthen institutional capacity, contribute to the development of civil society and the overall transformation of the EaP countries. Preference was given to projects involving organisations from many countries to encourage applicants to establish wide ranging cooperation cutting across multiple borders. Applicants had to involve subjects from all four V4 countries and at least two EaP countries.⁷⁷ The Fund's support could not exceed 70% of the total project costs (annual budget: EUR 600,000).
- *Academic scholarships*: Scholarships finance individual mobility of EaP scholars to pursue study or research stays at accredited public or private colleges/universities in the V4 countries (annual budget: EUR 600,000).
- *University Study Grants (VUSG)*: This scheme specifically targets colleges and universities in the EaP region. The grant is intended as support for the development, accreditation and launching of university courses or whole degree programmes that deal with specific phenomena related to the V4 countries' experience with transformation, democratisation, human rights, EU accession, etc. (annual budget: EUR 80,000).

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Extended Standard Grants

The development of the ESG scheme was encouraged by the Dutch contribution and it was designed to accommodate the Dutch support. The purpose of the ESG projects was to promote democratisation and to strengthen civil society in the countries of the EaP through medium-term projects (12-18 months). The projects were aimed at providing access to the experience of the Visegrád group countries in democratic transformation, EU integration, civil society building and regional cooperation.

⁷⁷ International Visegrad Fund, *Grant Guidelines: Flagship Projects/Extended Standard Grants*, 11 July 2014, p. 2 (par. 1.2), see: <http://old.visegradfund.org/v4eap/guidelines-eap-2014/>.

Projects under this scheme were selected by means of an annual call for proposals. Because of the emphasis on the transfer of knowledge from V4 to EaP countries, only organisations from either the V4 countries or one of the EaP countries could apply.⁷⁸ Furthermore, applicants needed to secure the participation of subjects from at least three V4 countries and a single EaP country, but preference was given to projects involving more partners.⁷⁹

Budget proposals were to adhere to the following framework conditions:

- total budget could not exceed EUR 70,000;
- the own contribution of applicants needed to be at least 10 percent;
- the implementation timeframe for projects was set at a maximum of 18 months;
- purchasing tangible and intangible assets allowed up to 7 percent of the approved sum of which at least 60% had to support project implementation by EaP organisations; and
- overhead costs were set at maximum 7 percent of the approved grant.

Dutch conditions

The Dutch government attached the following conditions to its support:

- 1) The Visegrad Fund was supposed to inform Dutch embassies of projects in the countries within their resort that were co-sponsored by the Netherlands.⁸⁰
- 2) Projects were not to promote the possible EU accession of the EaP countries. Contrary to the Netherlands, the V4 countries were not reluctant to providing the EaP countries an EU membership perspective. This condition was only expressed informally.
- 3) Projects were not allowed to directly support national governments of the EaP countries, but this was already in conformity with the Fund's own rules.⁸¹
- 4) Half of the contribution in 2014 was to be earmarked for projects in Ukraine.⁸²

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7.2 Expenditure

The Netherlands contributed EUR 1.5 mln in 2012, EUR 1.0 mln in 2013 and EUR 1.0 mln in 2014, so EUR 3.5 mln in total. About 5 percent of the Dutch contribution was spent on overhead costs (mainly personnel, office and banking costs), the remainder was spent on projects.⁸³

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 1, (par 1.1).

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 1-2 (par. 1.2).

⁸⁰ The arrangement between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the International Visegrad Fund, signed 21 June 2012, states in article 10: 'The Organisation will also ensure that Embassies of the Kingdom of the Netherlands are informed of projects that are funded through this arrangement in countries within their resort'.

⁸¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Europe Department, appraisal memorandum MATRA projects via Visegrad Fund, 9 May 2012, no page numbers (archives BZ).

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ International Visegrad Fund, *Annual reports for 2012, 2013, and 2014 on the utilization of the subsidy provided by the Dutch Government to the V4EaP program of the International Visegrad Fund* (archives Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands).

The Dutch contribution was used in conjunction with the Fund's own resources. In 2013, the Swedish government started to contribute as well. Even then, the Dutch contribution made up more than seventy percent of total ESG expenditure (see table 7.1).

Co-funder	Flagship projects 2012	ESG 2012	ESG 2013	ESG 2014
Visegrad Fund	256 000	160 000	220 000	228 060
The Netherlands	(77%) 860 000	(77%) 540 000	(74%) 935 000	(71%) 945 000
Sweden	-	-	105 000	155 300
Total budget call	1 116 000	700 000	1 260 000	1 328 360

Source: annual reporting by the Visegrad Fund to BZ, calculation IOB.

In 2012, 61% of the Dutch contribution was spent on Flagship projects and 39% on the ESG scheme. Thanks to the Dutch co-funding 18 Flagship projects were supported, as well as 13 ESG projects. In 2013, 21 ESG projects were supported by the Dutch co-financing and 23 ESG projects in 2014. The average contribution of the Fund to each ESG project was EUR 54,069.

7.3 Relevance

Consistency with the Matra objective and principles

The formulated goal of the ESG ('to promote democratisation and strengthen civil society in the countries of the Eastern Partnership') was clearly based on the stated objective of the Dutch co-funding of the V4EaP programme. However, the overall objective of the V4EaP programme (see section 7.1) also included elements that were not featured in the general aim of the Matra programme, such as the acceleration of political association and further economic integration between the EU and EaP countries, support to socio-economic reforms and facilitating comprehensive approximation towards the EU. The V4EaP programme was – more explicitly than the Matra programme – tailored towards the specific position of the EaP countries vis-à-vis the EU, at least of those countries that had signed an Association Agreement. This does not mean that the Dutch government did not subscribe to these elements, as they follow logically from the EaP framework. They were however not conceptualised in the Matra programme for the EaP countries.

The selected ESG projects clearly reflect the broader V4EaP programme's objective, as many projects focused on economic cooperation and influencing public attitudes towards the EU. As table 7.2 shows, only few projects were aimed at promoting democratisation.

Table 7.2 Thematic focus of Extended Standard Grants projects 2013-2014			
Themes	projects 2013	projects 2014	Total
Civil society development	7	6	13
Economic development / integration	5	7	12
Awareness raising with regard to EU	6	4	10
Governance	4	1	5
Democratisation	0	3	3
Other	1	2	3
Total	23	23	46

Source: annual reporting by Visegrad Fund to BZ, thematic coding by IOB.

Trilateral cooperation

The co-financing of the V4EaP programme clearly reflected the ambition of the Matra programme to realise so-called ‘trilateral cooperation’. The idea behind this principle was that the Matra programme would be used to mobilise the experience that Central European EU member states had built up in their post-communist transformation processes and in adopting and implementing EU rules and standards. It is clear that the transfer of expertise from the V4 countries to the EaP countries was a central element in the V4EaP programme. However, as the role of the Netherlands did not go beyond that of co-financer (there was no involvement of Dutch actors in the programme), the cooperation was not exactly trilateral in nature.

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Demand-driven

Both the Flagship projects and ESG schemes worked in a demand-driven way, by means of an annual call for proposals. This was fully in line with common practice within the Matra programme. Apart from this procedural aspect, demand-driven support means that projects reflect a clear demand from an actor in one of the EaP countries. The setup of the ESG scheme however did not automatically imply this, as the grant applications were submitted by the lead partners. Almost two thirds of successful proposals were submitted by organisations from one of the V4 countries, but the number of lead partners from the EaP countries did increase over time. A true assessment of project ownership at EaP side would require further inquiry on project level.

Complementarity to EU and other donors

The V4EaP projects were complementary to programmes of the EU and other donors, mainly because of their multilateral/cross-border approach and because they connected organisations in the EaP countries to multiple counterparts in the V4 countries. In order to incorporate the experience of the V4 as a group, and not just of individual V4 countries, the programme framework prescribed that each project had to include organisations from at least three V4 countries and preferably more. In the years 2012-2014 the average number of organisations from V4 countries that participated per project was just above 3.5. The multilateral character of ESG projects, in the sense that they often involved more than one partner from the EaP countries, clearly decreased (see table 7.3).

	2012 Flagship projects	2012 ESG	2013 ESG	2014 ESG
Average no. of V4 countries involved	4.0	3.6	3.6	3.5
Average no. of EaP countries involved	2.8	2.0	2.0	1.4
Projects involving more than one EaP country	18 / 18 (100%)	7 / 13 (54%)	9 / 21 (43%)	6 / 23 (26%)

Note: flagship projects required a minimum participation of four V4 countries and two EaP countries; ESG projects a minimum of three V4 countries and one EaP country.

There was no clear ambition to synergise the V4EaP projects with those of other donors, e.g. the bilateral programmes of the V4 countries, the Netherlands (Matra) or larger donors, such as the EU.

Country focus

Lead partners (i.e. the organisations that applied for the grant and that were responsible for project implementation and reporting) could be from either a V4 country or an EaP country. It follows from the programme design that V4 countries featured more prominently as project partners. As table 7.4 shows, the frequency of countries having a project partner was the result of both the applications that were submitted and the selection process. According to the respondents that were involved in the selection process, there was no ratio for distributing the projects across countries. Still, the project participation by the V4 countries was rather evenly spread.

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	2012 Flagship	2012 ESG	2013 ESG	2014 ESG	Total	% of total
Czech republic	18 (4)	13 (2)	20 (3)	19 (2)	70 (11)	93 (15) %
Hungary	18 (3)	12 (2)	19 (2)	21 (3)	70 (10)	93 (13) %
Slovakia	18 (4)	12 (2)	19 (4)	19 (4)	68 (14)	91 (19) %
Poland	18 (3)	9 (2)	18 (4)	21 (3)	66 (12)	88 (16) %
Visegrád group	14 leads	8 leads	13 leads	12 leads	47 leads	63 %
Ukraine	11 (2)	8 (3)	12 (5)	14 (4)	45 (14)	60 (19) %
Georgia	9 (1)	6 (1)	9 (2)	8 (4)	32 (8)	43 (11) %
Moldova	9 (0)	6 (0)	9 (1)	6 (2)	30 (3)	40 (4) %
Armenia	7 (1)	3 (0)	5 (0)	1 (0)	16 (1)	21 (1) %
Belarus	7 (0)	1 (1)	4 (0)	2 (1)	14 (2)	19 (3) %
Azerbaijan	4 (0)	2 (0)	4 (0)	0 (0)	10 (0)	13 (0) %
Eastern Partnership	4 leads	5 leads	8 leads	11 leads	28 leads	37 %
Total	18	13	21	23	75	100%

Source: lists of selected projects, submitted by V4 Fund to BZ, calculation by IOB.

*When a country had a lead partner, this was also counted as having a project partner.

The frequency of organisations from the EaP countries taking the lead has steadily increased over the past three years. Especially 2014 saw a growing interest by Ukrainian and Georgian organisations, both as applicants and as project partners. On the other hand, Belarusian partners showed only moderate interest.⁸⁴ In general, interest was about four times higher than the number of projects that could be awarded.⁸⁵

The country focus was similar to that of the Matra programme, with Belarus being under-represented. As table 7.4 shows, there was an increasing focus on the three countries that have signed Association Agreements with the EU (Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine). This is probably a matter of self-selection, as it is left to the 'market place' which configurations of organisations apply for projects. Organisations from the three association countries might be more interested, but perhaps also better connected to partner organisations in the V4 countries. For organisations from especially Azerbaijan and Belarus this may be more difficult. The increasing focus on the three association countries also reflects the objective of the V4EaP programme, which includes approximation towards and economic integration with the EU.

Addressing major challenges of the EaP countries

The selected projects addressed major challenges that were faced by the EaP countries. As table 7.2 showed, they mainly addressed issues concerning civil society development, economic development/ integration, raising awareness and influencing public attitudes towards European integration and, to a lesser extent, governance and democratisation. Projects, for example, focussed on empowering civil society organisations through enhancing their management, communication and fundraising skills, on increasing the knowledge of local authorities with regard to regional development, on registration of local food products and their ability to export to the EU, on the transfer of knowledge with regard to the implementation of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (DCFTAs), on information campaigns with regard to the consequences of European integration or on the coordination of European policy at central government level.

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Most projects addressed relevant topics. They often consisted of a combination of comparative studies into a broad scope of issues concerning the transition of the V4 countries, leading to the formulation of policy options for the EaP countries and the organisation of workshops, seminars, trainings and study tours to the V4 countries. Not all projects focused explicitly on the transfer of expertise, but they did enable the creation of a network or platform where knowledge or viewpoints could be shared. Creating networks and promoting people-to-people contacts between the two groups of countries can be valuable in itself.

Whereas they all addressed relevant issues, the selected project proposals did not always make a convincing case on how the planned project activities and outputs would contribute to tangible results for the EaP countries. The quality of the selected project proposals varied.

⁸⁴ International Visegrad Fund, *Annual report for 2014 on the utilization of the subsidy provided by the Dutch Government to the V4EaP program of the International Visegrad Fund* (archives BZ).

⁸⁵ With 64 applications for the ESG scheme in 2012, 94 in 2013 and 73 in 2014 (ibid.).

In general, projects would have benefitted from the application of some kind of log frame model, creating a plausible link between project activities, results and effects.

Several respondents pointed at the risk of working with 'usual suspects', as the Fund would focus too much on well-established NGOs and would be too limited in its scope of cooperation partners. Indeed there were quite some organisations that acted as lead partners in consecutive years. This may in part be explained by the fact that the Fund attached great importance to the demonstrated credibility of contracting partners, because it was managing a budget provided by other countries. Also, the design of Flagship projects and ESG, which requires applicants to team-up with organisations from many different countries before applying, may have been an obstacle to reach out to new partners.

Consistency with the Dutch conditions

Informing Dutch embassies

According to the Fund's secretariat, the information about the completion of the selection process and the list of supported projects was normally sent to the Dutch ministry of Foreign Affairs, but not to the Dutch embassies directly. In addition, Dutch embassies were said to have been informed directly about project events from time to time – if the Fund itself knew about them in time. The Fund's secretariat also asked the main project implementers regularly to inform the Dutch embassies of the most important project implementation events. By and large however, embassy staff declared to feel ill-informed about the V4EaP projects in the countries within their resort (see also section 7.4).

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Not promoting possible EU accession

It was clearly not the objective of the V4EaP programme to promote the possible EU-accession of the EaP countries and no projects doing so were found. The projects did support the European orientation and economic integration of these countries, but this was in line with EaP policy. Some projects that were selected under the 2014 call for proposals for instance sought to assist the implementation of the Association Agreements and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (DCFTAs) by Georgia and Moldova.

50% earmarked for Ukraine

The Netherlands earmarked half of its 2014 financial contribution for projects in Ukraine, due to the political priority given to this country at the time. Since the ESG projects were by definition multilateral in nature, this meant that, in practice, at least half of the Dutch contribution was used to support projects which focused on Ukraine. Under the 2014 call for proposals 14 of the 23 selected projects (61%) were focused on Ukraine, sometimes in combination with other EaP countries. Ukrainian organisations had the lead in four of them (17%). The funds allocated to these projects were EUR 744,169 (56,9%), out of which the contribution of the Dutch government was EUR 595,335.

7.4 Effectiveness

As the Terms of Reference for this evaluation specified, IOB has not assessed the effectiveness of the Dutch sponsored projects in terms of promoting democratisation or civil society in EaP countries. Effectiveness has only been studied from the perspective of their contribution to the visibility, network and access to relevant information for the Netherlands.

Visibility for the Netherlands

The Dutch contribution to the fund was visible for – and appreciated by – the governments of the V4 countries and the project implementers, but it did not provide broader visibility. The fact that the Netherlands was co-financing the V4EaP programme has been noticeably published on the Fund’s website and in the publications of the call for proposals. It is therefore expected that project implementers should have been well aware of the Dutch contribution. Project implementers were also required to indicate the Dutch financial support in their public communications with regard to the project. However, IOB found that the websites that were being developed for each project (a contractual requirement by the Fund) did not mention the Dutch funding.⁸⁶ The same applied to the press releases that were published by the project implementers.

Use of the networking potential by embassies

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The Dutch embassies in the EaP countries have hardly benefitted from the networking potential of the V4EaP programme. It was up to the project implementers whether or not to invite a representative of the Dutch embassy to their events. According to the embassies, this has not happened frequently.

In fact, not even all ‘honorary trustees’ in the EaP countries were invited on a regular basis. These honorary trustees, appointed by the Fund, are diplomats of the embassies of one of the Visegrád group countries in an EaP country. They are regularly consulted on issues pertaining to grantees and on any issue concerning project implementations. The honorary trustees are also involved in the selection process of supported projects. There was no strong communication line between the honorary trustees of the Visegrad Fund in the EaP countries and the Dutch embassies, as this was not their responsibility. Most embassies were not even aware of their existence. In September 2014 the Dutch embassy in Kyiv was visited by the honorary trustee in Kyiv, joined by representatives of the Visegrad Fund, for an exchange of information session. Although appreciated from both sides, it appeared to be a one-of-a-kind meeting. There were regular diplomatic contacts between diplomats of the V4 embassies and the Netherlands, but the Visegrad Fund apparently was not a regular subject.

The implementation of the V4EaP programme has potential to expand the networks of Dutch embassies with implementing partners. However, this also depends on the type of organisations and their use for the embassies and the embassies’ capacity to visit events and maintain relations. So far, embassies have not taken a pro-active stance with regard to the Visegrad Fund’s activities.

⁸⁶ IOB visited a random sample of project websites and none of them mentioned the Dutch contribution.

7.5 Management

After the agreement between BZ and the Fund had been concluded in 2012, the Europe department (DEU) of BZ monitored the V4EaP programme only on the programme level, not on the project level. It left the management of the programme completely to the Visegrad Fund. As mentioned, no Dutch actors were involved in project selection or monitoring.

The reporting on programme implementation by the Visegrad Fund secretariat was done in accordance with the ministry's requirements. BZ was informed by the Fund's secretariat by means of annual reports. These provided insight in the spending of the Dutch co-funding, the kind of projects that had been selected/implemented and the partners that were involved. The reports included a list of projects, mentioning title, budget, lead partner organisation and the countries of the other project partners. Although this information did not provide a clear picture of the projects' contents, DEU did not request further information.

The management of the projects by the Fund was largely focussed on issues regarding project inputs and results in terms of outputs. Attention for results on outcome level could have been stronger. Many stakeholders, including project implementers, emphasized the exhaustive procedures for financial control by the Fund. In 2012 staff members of DEU performed a risk analysis of the Visegrad Fund (a so-called COCA-exercise) with a highly satisfying result.⁸⁷ Reporting at project level varied in quality, with much attention devoted to activity description and varying attention for results at outcome level.

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7.6 Conclusion

Relevance

The objective of the V4EaP programme as a whole was different from the overall goal of the Matra programme, because it focussed on accelerating the political association and further economic integration between the EU and the EaP countries. Although the goal of the ESG scheme was based on the Dutch objective of supporting civil society and democratisation, the selected projects clearly reflected the overall V4EaP goal. This meant that projects focused more on economic cooperation and influencing public attitudes towards the EU than the regular Matra programme, and less on democratisation.

The programme was implemented in a demand-driven manner. On average, projects involved three to four partners from V4 countries and two partners from EaP countries. This multilateral approach was a key feature of the programme, setting it apart from most other programmes. Besides the transfer of expertise in most projects, this allowed CSOs in EaP countries to connect to a network of like-minded institutions in the EU. At the same time, the heavy accent on the participation of organisations from at least three V4 countries

⁸⁷ COCA = Checklist for Organisational Capacity Assessment, a tool for assessing managing organisations before making commitments.

meant that a relatively large proportion of the fund was spent in the V4 countries and on coordinating costs. The ownership of the projects in the EaP countries has not been studied.

All projects addressed relevant topics, but the quality of selected project proposals varied. The link between proposed project outputs and tangible results for the EaP countries was not always presented convincingly.

Effectiveness

IOB has not assessed the effectiveness of projects in terms of their contribution to civil society and democratisation. The contribution of the co-financing to the visibility of the Netherlands and the networks of the embassies in the region was limited. Although the Fund mentioned the Dutch co-funding on its website and in the calls for proposals, project implementers did not mention the Dutch sponsorship on their websites or in their press releases. The Dutch embassies in the EaP countries felt ill-informed on the programme's implementation. On the other hand, they did not take a proactive stance with regard to the programme.

Management

The Europe Department of BZ left the management of the programme completely to the Visegrad Fund's secretariat. It monitored the programme only on the basis of the annual plans that were submitted by the Fund. Although the annual plans did not contain detailed information on the supported projects nor on results, the ministry was satisfied with the information and did not ask for more.

Annexes

Annex 1 About IOB

Objectives

The Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB) aims to contribute to knowledge of the implementation and impact of Dutch foreign policy. IOB meets the need for independent evaluation of policy and operations in all the policy fields of the Homogenous Budget for International Cooperation (HGIS). IOB also advises on the planning and implementation of evaluations falling under the responsibility of the policy departments of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands and its embassies.

IOB's evaluations enable the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation to *give account* to Parliament for their policies and for resources spent. In addition, the evaluations aim to contribute to *learning* by formulating lessons and options for policy improvements that can be incorporated into the ministry's policy cycle. Insight into the outcomes of implemented policies allows policymakers to devise new policy interventions that are both more effective and better targeted.

Organisation and quality assurance

IOB has a staff of experienced evaluators and its own budget. When carrying out evaluations, IOB calls on specialist knowledge from external experts with knowledge of the topic under investigation. By way of quality control, IOB appoints an external reference group for each evaluation, which includes not only external experts, but also relevant policy-makers from the ministry and other experts. Moreover, for each evaluation IOB appoints several of its own evaluators to act as peer reviewers. IOB's *Evaluation policy and guidelines for evaluation* are available on the website www.iob-evaluatie.nl, hard copies can be requested through the IOB secretariat.

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Evaluation programming

IOB consults with the policy departments to draw up a ministry-wide evaluation programme. This rolling multi-annual programme is adjusted annually and included in the Explanatory Memorandum to the ministry's budget. IOB bears final responsibility for the programming of evaluations in development cooperation and advises on the programming of foreign policy evaluations. The themes selected for evaluation respond to requests from the ministry and Parliament and/or are considered relevant to society. IOB actively coordinates its evaluation programming with that of other donors and development organisations.

Approach and methodology

IOB aspires to relevance, high quality and methodological innovation. Whenever possible, the research applies both quantitative and qualitative methods leading to robust impact evaluations. IOB also undertakes systematic reviews based on empirical results relating to priority policy areas. IOB has extended its partnerships with evaluation departments in other countries, for instance through joint evaluations and evaluative knowledge exchanges, undertaken under the auspices of the OECD-Development Assistance Committee Network on Development Evaluation.

Annex 2 Characteristics of the EaP countries

Country / Capital	Population ⁸⁸	Territory in km ² ⁸⁹	GDP in USD ⁹⁰	GDP per capita in USD ⁹¹	Ethnic groups ⁹²	Territorial conflicts
Armenia Yerevan	3,0 mln	29,743	10,4 bln	3,505	Armenian 97.9%, Yezidi (Kurdish) 1.3%, Russian 0.5%, other 0.3% (2001)	Nagorno-Karabakh (since 1991, status issue with Azerbaijan)
Azerbaijan Baku	9,4 mln	86,600	73,5 bln	7,812	Azerbaijani 91.6%, Lezgian 2%, Russian 1.3%, Armenian 1.3%, other 3.7% (2009 est.)	Nagorno-Karabakh (since 1991, status issue with Armenia)
Georgia Tbilisi	4,5 mln	69,700	16,1 bln	3,602	Georgian 83.8%, Azerbaijani 6.5%, Armenian 5.7%, Russian 1.5%, other 2.5% (2002)	Abkhazia and South Ossetia (since 1991, in 2008, separated with support from RF)
Moldova Chisinau	3,6 mln	33,800	7,9 bln	2,230	Moldovan 75.8%, Ukrainian 8.4%, Russian 5.9%, Gagauz 4.4%, Romanian 2.2%, Bulgarian 1.9%, other 1.4% (2004 est.)	Transnistria (since 1990, <i>de facto</i> autonomous, supported by RF)
Ukraine Kyiv	45,5 mln	603,700	177,4 bln	3,900	Ukrainian 77.8%, Russian 17.3%, other 4,9% (2001 est.)	Crimea (2014, annexation by RF), People's Republics of Donetsk and Lugansk (2014, one-sided declaration of independence)
Belarus Minsk	9,5 mln	207,595	71,7 bln	7,575	Belarusian 83.7%, Russian 8.3%, Polish 3.1%, Ukrainian 1.7%, other 3.3%, (2009 est.)	None

⁸⁸ Population in 2013, see: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL/countries>.

⁸⁹ See: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/country_profiles/default.stm.

⁹⁰ GDP in 2013 in USD, by rate of 31 October 2014, see: <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD/countries>.

⁹¹ GDP per capita in 2013 in USD, rate of 31 October 2014, see: <http://databank.worldbank.org/data/reports.aspx?source=quarterly-public-sector-debt&Type=TABLE>.

⁹² Various data estimations (as recent as possible) and census were used. Categories below 1 percent were grouped as 'other', except when this concerned Russians.

Annex 3 Questions per Matra sub-programme

I Matra Projects Programme (MPP)

Relevance

- Did the MPP projects address the major challenges faced by EaP countries?
- Did the MPP projects reflect Dutch policy priorities for the EaP countries?
- Were the MPP projects demand-driven?
- Has there been overlap, inconsistency or synergy with projects from other Dutch programmes or programmes of other donors, notably the EU?
- Did BZ coordinate MPP support with other donors?

Effectiveness

- Have MPP projects contributed to the process of developing a democratic, pluriform state governed by the rule of law, in which there is space for dialogue between the government and the people?
- Have project results been sustainable?
- Have projects strengthened bilateral relations between the Netherlands and the EaP countries?

Management

- Was the management of MPP fit for an effective and efficient process of project appraisal?
- Has BZ effectively executed substantive and financial monitoring of projects?

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II Matra Small Embassy Projects (KAP) / delegated projects

Relevance

- Did the KAP / delegated projects address the major challenges faced by EaP countries (or of specific target groups)?
- Did the KAP / delegated projects reflect Dutch policy priorities for the EaP countries?
- Were the projects demand-driven?
- Has there been overlap, inconsistency or synergy with projects from other Dutch programmes or programmes of other donors, notably the EU?
- Did embassies coordinate KAP support with other donors?
- Did the Human Rights Fund partly take over the function of the Matra programme after 2012?

Effectiveness

- Have KAP / delegated projects contributed to the process of developing a democratic, pluriform state governed by the rule of law, in which there is space for dialogue between the government and the people?
- Have project results been sustainable?
- Have projects strengthened bilateral relations between the Netherlands and the EaP countries?

Management

- Was the management of KAP / delegated projects fit for an effective and efficient process of project appraisal?
- Have embassies effectively executed substantive and financial monitoring of projects?

III Matra Political Parties Programme (MPPP)

Relevance

- To what extent was MPPP consistent with the overall Matra objective and principles?
- Did MPPP activities address the needs of party organisations in EaP countries and major challenges with regard to democratisation?

Effectiveness

- Have MPPP activities helped with leadership development and network-building by sister parties or organisations in EaP countries?
- Have MPPP activities strengthened political parties' networks in EaP countries and access to information?

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Management

- Did BZ (up to 2013) and BZK (as of 2013) have sufficient instruments to assess the MPPP activities in advance and to increase effectiveness of this programme component where necessary?

IV Visegrad Fund Eastern Partnership (V4EaP) programme

Relevance

- To what extent was the V4EaP programme consistent with the Matra objective and principles?
- Did the projects address the major challenges faced by the EaP countries?
- Was implementation of the V4EaP programme consistent with the conditions the Netherlands attached to its financial support?

Effectiveness

- Has the V4EaP programme contributed to the visibility, network and access to relevant information of the Netherlands?

Management

- Was sufficient information provided to the Netherlands on the spending, projects and results of the V4EaP programme?

Annex 4 Selected projects

Country	Budget holder	Programme component	Project number	Theme	Project title	Start	End	Budget (EUR)
Armenia	Tbilisi	KAP	24105	Democracy	OSCE Women Pol. Emp. Armenia	2012	2014	144 575
Armenia	Tbilisi	KAP	25426	Human rights / minorities	MATRA ARM Counterpart Int.	2013	2014	157 986
Belarus	Warsaw	KAP	23138	Strengthening civil society	BY/KAP/11/41/	2011	2014	30 000
Belarus	Warsaw	KAP	24046	Information / media	BY/KAP/12/02/	2012	2014	250 000
Belarus	DZO/DEU	MPP	17846	Environment	DZO Better quality of life	2008	2013	454 211
Belarus	DZO/DEU	MPP	20513	Strengthening civil society	DZO Indep. trade union movem.	2010	2014	376 285
Georgia	Tbilisi	KAP	25393	Democracy	TBL Oversight defence	2013	2014	98 565
Georgia	Tbilisi	KAP	25823	Democracy	MATRA NIMD Pol. Youth Forum	2013	2014	120 066
Georgia	Tbilisi	KAP	24049	Information / media	TBL JOURNALISM PROJECT	2012	2013	103 374
Georgia	Tbilisi	KAP	23366	Legislation / law	TBL Legal Care House	2011	2013	27 038
Georgia	DZO/DEU	MPP	19708	Environment	DZO Regional developm GE & AM	2009	2014	335 885
Georgia	DZO/DEU	MPP	18637	Welfare	DZO GE Child Protect./DCI 2009	2009	2014	565 380
Moldova	Kyiv	KAP	23554	Democracy	KIE Step by step democracy	2011	2013	26 730
Moldova	Kyiv	KAP	21979	Strengthening civil society	KIE Consolidation Civil Society	2010	2013	40 128
Moldova	Kyiv	KAP	25893	Legislation / law	KIE Forensic Expertise in MD	2013	2014	70 252
Moldova	Kyiv	KAP	24628	Legislation / law	KIE Justice Reform in Moldova	2012	2014	124 680
Moldova	DZO/DEU	MPP	16797	Human rights / minorities	DZO Eq. opport. for students	2008	2013	195 328
Moldova	DZO/DEU	MPP	18644	Welfare	DZO Youth in the Center!	2008	2013	329 430
Ukraine	Kyiv	KAP	25147	Public administration	KIE Art of Governance UA	2012	2014	97 131
Ukraine	Kyiv	KAP	25879	Information / media	KIE European wave	2013	2014	76 503
Ukraine	DZO/DEU	MPP	20547	Human rights / minorities	DZO Get your chance!	2009	2015	497 863
Ukraine	DZO/DEU	MPP	18696	Information / media	DZO New Media Initiative	2008	2012	435 484

Annex 5 List of interviewees

Armenia

- Carel Hofstra, former chief of party Armenia, Counterpart International
- Oliver Randolph McCoy, democratisation officer, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

Georgia

- Mamuka Abuladze, president National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia
- Kristina Baleišytė, deputy head, NATO liaison Office in Georgia
- Maka Botchorishvili, deputy director, department of European Integration, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Gigi Bregadze, democratic governance team leader, United Nations Development Programme
- Anna Butchart, political officer, Embassy of the United Kingdom
- Vano Chkhikvadze, EU integration field manager, Open Society Georgia Foundation
- Tamta Chumburidze, parliamentary assistant, European Integration Committee, Parliament of Georgia
- Eva Gibson-Smedberg, head of development co-operation (SIDA), Embassy of Sweden
- Kakha Gogolashvili, director of EU studies, Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies
- George Gogua, manager, My Angle Media and freelance journalist
- Bakur Gvarliani, lawyer
- István Gyebnár, deputy head of mission, Embassy of Hungary
- Laura Hochla, political officer, Embassy of the United States of America
- Hans Horbach, head of mission, Embassy of the Netherlands
- Jan Huisman, policy officer, Embassy of the Netherlands
- Boris Iarochvitz, deputy head of mission, Delegation of the European Union to Georgia
- Sergi Kapanadze, director, Georgia's Reforms Associates
- Archil Karaulashvili, head of European Integration Coordination Department, Office of the State Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration
- Tamara Karelidze, journalist, Georgian Association of Regional Broadcasters
- Irakli Khorbaladze, parliamentary secretary, The Republican Party of Georgia
- Levan Khorkheli, counselor, Department of European Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Natia Kuprashvili, director, Georgian Association of Regional Broadcasters
- Monika Lenhard, deputy head of mission, Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany
- Lela Lomia, policy officer, Embassy of the Netherlands
- Manana Melikshvili, head Quality Control Department Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Tbilisi State University
- David Melua, executive director, National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia
- Salome Mukhuradze, programme officer Political Party Assistance Programme, South Caucasus Representation Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy
- Guido Müntel, head Economic Section, Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany
- Floor Nuiten, deputy head of mission, Embassy of the Netherlands

- Eva Pastrana, attaché (project manager), human rights and good governance, Delegation of the European Union to Georgia
- Jiri Preclik, political officer, NATO liaison Office in Georgia
- Danielle Reiff, democracy and governance director, United States Agency for International Development
- George Rukhadze, acting vice-president, Christian Democratic People's Party, former secretary Christian Democratic Movement
- Khatuna Samnidze, chair, The Republican Party of Georgia
- Lia Saralidze, executive director, National Foundation for Development of Public Health
- Alessandro Savaris, deputy head of office (acting head), Council of Europe Office in Georgia
- Veronika Sido, deputy head of mission, Czech Embassy
- Albert Sido, attaché for development cooperation, Czech Embassy
- Arnold Stepanyan, chairman, Public Movement Multinational Georgia
- Maia Todria, economic officer, Embassy of the Netherlands
- Levan Tsutskiridze, representative in the South Caucasus, Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy
- Ketevan Vashakidze, president, Eurasia Partnership Foundation Georgia

Lithuania (for Belarus) *

- Roel Dijkman, senior policy officer, Embassy of the Netherlands
- Vilius Ivanauskas, senior policy analyst, Policy Analysis and Research Division, Eastern Europe Studies Centre
- Balazs Jarabik, Country Representative Belarus & Ukraine, Pact
- Jake Jones, resident, country director, International Republican Institute
- Vytyis Jurkonis, director Vilnius office, Freedom House
- Laurynas Kasčiūnas, head, Political Analysis and Research Division, Eastern Europe Studies Centre
- Giedrus Kazakevičius, deputy director, Development Cooperation Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Vytautas Keršanskas, policy analyst, Policy Analysis and Research Division, Eastern Europe Studies Centre
- Kamil Kłysiński, second secretary, Embassy of Poland
- Aleksandras Kudaba, head, Multilateral Cooperation Division, Development Cooperation Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Bert van der Lingen, head of mission, Embassy of the Netherlands
- Michael Murphy, resident director Belarus Programme, National Democratic Institute
- Ongjen Radonić, country manager Belarus, Forum Syd
- Wolfgang Sender, director, Country Office for Belarus, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung

* In addition, IOB interviewed twelve representatives from ten CSOs and six representatives from five political parties. The names of these respondents spoken to will not be disclosed for reasons of their personal safety.

Moldova *

- Ghenadie Barba, deputy head of office, Council of Europe Office
- Arcadie Barbaroșie, executive director, Institute for Public Policy
- Salifou Belemvire, IT/social assistant, Charity Centre for Refugees
- Sergiu Boghean, international officer, Liberal Party
- Joanna Bojko, counsellor, Embassy of Poland
- Igor Botan, executive director, Association for Participatory Democracy
- Svetlana Budistean, specialist youth issues and sports, Mayor's Office Varnita
- Rodica Cărnici, project assistant, Pro Community Center
- Ion Cebanu, president youth branch, Liberal Party
- Valeriu Cupcea, head of the Anti-corruption Policies and Programmes Division, National Anti-corruption Center
- Robert de Groof, honorary consul, Consulate of the Netherlands
- Mindaugas Kačerauskis, political officer political and economic section, Delegation of the European Union to Moldova
- Kent Larson, country director/first secretary, United States Agency for International Development
- Ion Manole, executive director, Promo-Lex
- Olga Manole, human rights program coordinator, Promo-Lex
- Svetlana Melnicenco, executive director, National Council of Forensic Experts and Highly Qualified Specialists
- Tatiana Molcean, head of the Economic Cooperation and Sectorial Coordination Unit, General Directorate for European Integration, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration
- Anatolie Munteanu, director and parliamentary advocate, Centre for Human Rights of Moldova
- Mihai Nani, monitoring and evaluation specialist, Pro Community Center
- Oazu Nantoi, program director, Institute for Public Policy
- Andrei Nikolaev, executive director, Rodolyubets
- Lyudmilla Nikolaev, founder/former executive director, Rodolyubets
- Norma Nitescu, policy officer, Embassy of the Netherlands in Bucharest
- Sergej Ostaf, executive director, Resource Center for Human Rights
- Djavid Paknehad, director/programme coordinator, Charity Centre for Refugees
- Vitalie Postu, executive director, Pro Community Center
- Narine Sahakyan, deputy resident representative, United Nations Development Programme
- Gerhard Schaumberger, head of office, Coordination Office for Technical Cooperation, Embassy of Austria
- Aneil Singh, first counselor/head of cooperation, Delegation of the European Union to Moldova
- Christina Tarna, deputy director, National Anti-corruption Center
- Oleg Tulea, former vice chair, Democratic Party
- Liliana Vitu-Iesanu, journalist and former policy advisor to the prime minister
- Inga Zipovan, project assistant, Charity Centre for Refugees
- Alexandru Zubco, jurist, Promo-Lex

* Three employees of the Intelligence and Security Service of the Republic of Moldova were also interviewed. Their names will not be disclosed.

The Netherlands

- Ruken Baris, project officer, Free Press Unlimited
- Lizzy Beekman, programme manager for the Southern Caucasus, Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy
- Arjen Berkvens, director, Foundation Max van der Stoel
- Mirjam Blaak, programme manager youth law, Defence for Children
- Evelien Boersma, controller, Europe Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Anne de Boer, staff member, Bureau de Helling / Wetenschappelijk Bureau GroenLinks
- Annette Bombeke, expert, Dutch Council for Refugees
- Jan Cartier, project coordinator, TIE-Netherlands
- Anicq van de Craats, senior forensic advisor, Netherlands Forensic Institute
- Reinier Fleurke, senior policy officer, Department for Governance, Democracy and Finance, Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations
- Monique de Groot, senior policy officer, Europe Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Roy Hans, policy officer western Balkans and Matra, Europe Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Michiel Hendrix, international officer, D66
- Ineke Hogenkamp, policy officer Matra, Europe Department / Department for Southeast and Eastern Europe and Implementation Matra, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Onny Jalink, senior policy officer, Europe Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- René Leenhouts, senior staff RSO-WEU, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Bert Meijerman, former head of the Matra Division and deputy director, Department for Southeast and Eastern Europe and Implementation Matra, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Bronne Pot, secretary, Eduardo Frei Stichting
- Wouter Pronk, senior project manager, Milieukontakt International
- Jan Rinzema, senior policy officer, Europe Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Albana Shala, project officer, Free Press Unlimited
- Erik Sportel, programme manager, Centre for European Security Studies
- Marjan Tilmans, project manager, European Journalism Center
- Malinda Twaalfhoven, project director, VNG International
- Emma Verhoeff, senior policy officer, Europe Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Mark Zellenrath, head DEU-2, Europe Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Poland (for Belarus) *

- Krzysztof Bobiński, president, Unia & Polska
- Wojciech Borodzicz-Smoliński, senior assistant Belarus, Embassy of the Netherlands
- Łukasz Byrski, coordinator of the programme «For Belarus», Stefan Batory Foundation and former Matra / Human Rights Fund policy officer, Embassy of the Netherlands
- Anna Maria Dynier, senior analyst, The Polish Institute of International Affairs
- Piotr Górski, coordinator, Res Publica
- Zuzanna Kierzkowska, head Department of Development Aid, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Kasia Kolman, political and cultural officer, Embassy of the Netherlands
- Agnieszka Komorowska, chairwoman, East European Democratic Centre
- Zbigniew Krużyński, national coordinator for Visegrád cooperation, European Policy Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

- Bogusława Ogrebacz, international cooperation officer, Belsat TV
- Adriaan Palm, deputy head of mission, Embassy of the Netherlands
- Wojciech Przybylski, editor-in-chief, Res Publica
- Paula Roos-Schindeler, first secretary, Embassy of the Netherlands
- Katarzyna Słoniewicz, main expert Eastern Partnership Section, Eastern Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Albert Stankowski, director, Jewish Historical Institute
- Robert Szadurski, first counsellor European Policy Department European Policy Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Małgorzata Twardowska, deputy director Eastern Department and EaP Envoy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Pavel Usov, director, Centre for Political Analysis and Prognosis

* In addition, IOB interviewed ten representatives from seven CSOs. The names of these respondents spoken to will not be disclosed for reasons of their personal safety.

Ukraine

- Kateryna Bardadym, senior policy officer, Embassy of the Netherlands
- Lyudmilla Bilenko, policy officer, Embassy of the Netherlands
- Alexander Kobzarev, director, Lviv City Institute and advisor, Lviv City Mayor
- Vitaliy Moroz, head of new media, Internews Ukraine
- Marisia Pechaczek, head political section, Embassy of the Netherlands
- Stepan Veselovskyi, former director International Cooperation Program, Lviv City Council

International Visegrad Fund

- Ferenc Jári, coordinator Eastern Partnership

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The Dutch Matra programme was launched in 1993 to support democratisation in Central and Eastern Europe. Since then, it has evolved from a programme focused solely on the social transformation of post-communist countries to one that also aims to contribute to EU enlargement policy and the European Neighbourhood Policy. Matra aims to contribute to the development of democratic, pluriform states governed by the rule of law, where there is space for dialogue between the government and the people. In addition, Matra aims to strengthen bilateral relations between the Netherlands and the partner countries.

In this report IOB examines the implementation of the Matra programme in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries. Being former republics of the Soviet Union, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine share many characteristics, but they have chosen distinctive paths since their independence. After a period of having a relatively low profile in the Netherlands, tensions in 2014 and the broader developments in the ring around Europe unequivocally put the EaP countries back on the map. With this report IOB contributes to the post-2015 review of the Matra programme in the region.

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