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# EU democratization policies in the Neighbourhood countries and Russia's reaction as a destabilizing factor

## A comparative case study of Georgia and Moldova

Doina Pinzari



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## **Abstract**

The EU democratization policies have not achieved the expected results in Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries. On the contrary, they have led to the outbreak of the most important crisis in Europe after the end of the cold war. A new vision of cooperation in the field of democracy is necessary in the East, as long as even Georgia and Moldova, countries considered to be the most advanced among the EaP states, have not registered essential progress in the democratization of their societies. Assuming that democratization, as part of EU's neighbourhood policies, can be considered a threat to Russia and hence a 'destabilizing factor' for the EU partners, this thesis tried to understand what changes can be made to EU policies and to what extent cooperation between EU and Russia is possible in the process developing democratization policies in Georgia and Moldova. While arguing for the revitalization of the instruments used for the implementation of the democratization policies, this thesis finds that cooperation between the EU and Russia in the field of democracy is excluded as long as the two geo-political actors have different values and different views on the notion of democracy. The most likely cooperation that might occur between EU and Russia is the establishment of a Common Economic Space 'from Lisbon to Vladivostok'. Even though such a scenario would have the potential to reduce confrontation between the two actors in the common neighbourhood, this cooperation would, however, have a negative impact on the on-going democratic reforms in Georgia and Moldova.

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*For Vanessa, My Daughter*



## Introduction

The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and particularly one of its satellites, the Eastern Partnership (EaP), seem to have reached the stage where it is “no longer a relevant and viable policy framework in the beginning of 2015”.<sup>1</sup> A new vision of cooperation in Eastern Europe is required in the field of democracy, as none of the six EaP participating countries<sup>2</sup> have registered essential progress in this area. Although the internal factors of each state are playing a leading role in the failures of the EU democratization policies towards EaP countries, one should also consider the huge ‘Russian destabilizing factor’ that intervenes in this process. The author is talking here about Russian threats of gas supply disruptions, export bans, restrictive migration policies, activation of frozen conflicts and other threats, whose purpose is to thwart EaP countries moving closer to the European model of democracy. These Russian obstructionist policies seem to have intensified since 2013 when Moscow began to express openly its disagreement with EU democratization policies in Eastern Europe. The peak was reached when Russia halted the signature of the Association Agreements (AA) between the EU and two of the EaP countries, Armenia and Ukraine. The events that followed (the revolution of dignity in Maidan, the annexation of Crimea and then the civil war in Eastern Ukraine) astounded the European leaders as well as those of the EaP countries. The current crisis appears to be one of the most serious on the European continent after the end of the Cold War. Now, more than ever, many voices agree that identifying short and especially long-term solutions is imminent. But what should those solutions look like, and how could the EU change its democratization policies towards EaP countries so that they would ensure the prosperity and democratization of these ‘in-between’ states and at the same time provide stability and security at the EU’s border? This is the central question of this paper:

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<sup>1</sup> G. Gromadzki, *The Eastern Partnership after five years: time for deep rethinking*, EP, Directorate-general for external policies of the Union, Policy department, 2015, p. 34.

<sup>2</sup> EaP includes: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

**If democratization as part of the ENP and EaP can be considered a threat to Russia and hence a destabilizing factor for the EU partners, what changes can be made to these EU policies?**

(H1) The EU has applied in the EaP countries the same top-down approach of democratization, which worked very well in the Central Europe, but has not been very successful in Eastern Europe. The targeted countries were obliged to implement painful reforms without offering them the same incentive proposed to the Central European countries – accession to the EU. On top of that, the designers of the EU democratization policies in the Neighbourhood have not taken into account the role and influence that Russia has in these states through various levers, such as frozen conflicts.

(H2) EU policies have to be shaped by including Russia in the political process of fashioning the democratization strategies towards EaP countries. But if cooperation is not possible in the field of democracy, there should be other opportunities for joint policymaking and a constructive interaction between Russia and the EU in EaP countries.

**Methodology and limitations**

Georgia and Moldova were chosen for this paper because both take part in the ENP and EaP and aspire to join the EU, and so far they have the most developed political relations with Brussels among the EaP states. The two countries also seem to be the Neighbourhood states that have achieved the best results in terms of democratization, a possible reason why they were systematically targeted by Russian economic and political pressure. The common history with the Soviet Union left them with similar problems and consequently facing similar pressuring instruments from Moscow: trade sanctions, energy shortages, restrictive migration policies, and activation of the frozen conflicts that they both have on their territories.

For the purpose of this paper, the author will rely on relevant official documents, the academic existing literature, and information collected through eight semi-structured interviews

with officials and experts. As for the limitations of the paper, it is important to note that this paper does not aim to analyse the role of internal factors and dynamics in Georgia and Moldova, which drive the Europeanization process and represent the leading cause of the democratic failures in the two countries.<sup>3</sup>

## 1. EU democratization policies in the Neighbourhood countries

The EU began spreading democratic values around the world more consistently after the end of the Second World War. It established in 1993 the Copenhagen political conditions for accession to the European community, which contributed to “a more structured influence on the process of democratization.”<sup>4</sup> These conditions were introduced then in the Accession agreements with Central European countries as well as with Balkan states. Since the late 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s, the EU has tried to apply the same scheme of democratization in EaP countries. In promoting democracy outside its borders, the EU’s interests represent “a matter of moral principle as well as enlightened self-interest”.<sup>5</sup>

Experts closely studied the EU’s promotion of democracy. In this regard, Way & Levitsky defined two main ways of interaction between EU and targeted countries: *Western leverage* and *linkage to the West*. Through *Western leverage*, authors understand “governments’ vulnerability to external democratizing pressure”.<sup>6</sup> It refers specifically to the countries’ bargaining power vis-à-vis the West [EU], on the one hand, and the potential economic, political, security or other impact of EU action on the targeted states, on the other hand. At the same time, the term *linkage to the*

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<sup>3</sup> I. Solonenko & N. Shapovalova, *Is the EU's Eastern Partnership promoting Europeanization?*, FRIDE Policy Brief, No 97, Brussels, September 2011, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> E. Baracani, ed., *Democratization and Hybrid Regimes: International Anchoring and Domestic Dynamics in European Post-Soviet States*, European Press Academic Publishing, Florence, 2010, p. 114.

<sup>5</sup> European Council, 2003 in A. A. Magen, & T. Risse & M. A. McFaul, eds., *Promoting Democracy and the Rule of Law: American and European Strategies*. Governance and Limited Statehood Series, Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> L. A. Way & S. Levitsky, “Linkage, Leverage, and the Post-Communist Divide”, *East European Politics & Societies* 21, No. 1, February 2007, p. 50.

West designates “the density of a country’s economic, political, organizational, social, and communication ties to the West”.<sup>7</sup>

Emerson et al. distinguish two mechanisms for setting into motion the EU democratization policies: *conditionality* and *socialization*. “Under the *conditionality* model, the EU offers advantages to the neighbour [...] on the condition that economic and/or political conditions are met”.<sup>8</sup> In the second model of interaction, *socialization*, the focus is put on the attractiveness of the EU as a system of society based on democracy and rule of law. Through *socialization*, people from partner countries are changing their behaviour while interacting with their EU counterparts, be they representatives of the civil society, businessmen, students, etc.<sup>9</sup> All these policy instruments – *leverage, linkage, conditionality* and *socialization* - underlined the design of the ENP and the EaP.

The ENP was launched in 2003 as a result of the EU’s external policy expansion to the new neighbours, just before the big enlargement of 2004 entailing ten new Member States (MS). The main goal of this policy, which included sixteen countries,<sup>10</sup> was primarily to prevent the creation of new dividing lines between the EU and neighbouring countries. Democratization, as one of the objectives of ENP, was not widely promoted within this policy instrument, according to some experts. Secieru states that the EU has been criticized for having neglected a consistent promotion of the democratic processes in target countries.<sup>11</sup> A greater attention to the democratization processes has been introduced since 2011, when the ENP was revised. This review stressed once again the *conditional* nature of EU’s support leading to the ‘*more for more*’ principle, which means “the more and the faster a country progresses in its internal reforms, the

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<sup>7</sup> Way & Levitsky, “Linkage”, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

<sup>8</sup> M. Emerson, *Democratisation in the European Neighbourhood*, Centre for European Policy Studies, Brussels, 2005, p. 175.

<sup>9</sup> Emerson & Noutcheva, 2005, p. 13 quoted in L. Litra, *The EU’s Conditionality in the Case of Moldova (2001-2009): Failure or Success?*, The Study Programme on European Security, January 2011, p. 14.

<sup>10</sup> ENP includes the following countries: Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Egypt, Georgia, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Moldova, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, Tunisia and Ukraine.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with S. Secieru, Senior Research Fellow at Polish Institute of International Affairs, via Skype, 4 March 2015.

more support it will get from the EU".<sup>12</sup> Six years after ENP was launched, the EU recognized the need for more differentiation between the partnership countries. Thus, it launched in May 2009 the EaP with the main goal to accelerate political association and further economic integration within the EU<sup>13</sup> and to persuade the partner countries to adopt measures that will contribute to EU's security.<sup>14</sup> The new political instrument emphasized the principles of *differentiation* and *conditionality*. The main incentives provided were visa facilitation and liberalization regimes and the possibility to conclude AAs.<sup>15</sup>

## 2. Democracy in Georgia and Moldova: State of play

The two former Soviet countries, Georgia and Moldova, obtained their independence after the collapse of the USSR. As newly created states, they have experienced similar patterns of advancement toward a democratic society. Levitsky & Way characterized the ruling systems of these two countries from 1990 onwards as 'competitive authoritarian regimes', "where competitive elections coexisted with substantial abuses of democratic procedure".<sup>16</sup> In this type of system, governments can eliminate independent media, arrest opposition leaders or manipulate election results.<sup>17</sup>

Weiner explains that democratization in these countries is not linear, but might be frozen or it can move towards regression, as was the case for Moldova, which "evolved since 1990/91 from an open to a partially closed society from 2001 to 2009 under the Communists' rule, and then to a

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<sup>12</sup> European Commission & High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, *Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions – A new response to a changing neighbourhood*, COM(2011) 303, Brussels, 25 May 2011.

<sup>13</sup> Council of the European Union, *Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit*, 8435/09 (Presse 78), Brussels, 7 May 2009.

<sup>14</sup> V. A. Dias, *The Russian factor in EU policies towards the 'shared neighbourhood'*, University of Coimbra, Lisbon, April 2013, p. 4.

<sup>15</sup> Baracani, *op. cit.*, pp. 116-124.

<sup>16</sup> S. Levitsky & L. A. Way, "International Linkage and Democratization", *Journal of Democracy* XVI, July 2005, p. 20.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

more competitive society from 2009 to 2012".<sup>18</sup> In Weiner's opinion, Moldova has made significant progress since 2009, and its regime can no longer be characterized as a 'competitive authoritarian' one. Moldova's regime is rather moving toward 'constitutional liberalism', a model advanced by Zakaria, whose type of regime put the emphasis on the creation of a rule of law state and a system of government based on checks and balances.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, the advancement of democracy in Moldova is hindered by state capture.<sup>20</sup>

The government system in Georgia is largely similar to that of Moldova. Whether a "democracy in zigzag",<sup>21</sup> a "liberal autocracy" or "liberal oligarchy", Georgia has been characterized as a regime in which fundamental freedoms are protected, despite its authoritarian tendencies.<sup>22</sup> Wheatley says that Georgia has oscillated between two types of regimes, being a "democracy without law" during two periods, 1992-1995 and 2001-2003, and a "limited democracy" throughout the rest of Georgia's post-independence history.<sup>23</sup> The first type of regime was less authoritarian, characterised initially by an on-going consolidation of President Eduard Shevardnadze's authority throughout 1992 to 1995.<sup>24</sup> Later, between 2001 and 2003, Shevardnadze's administration was no longer capable of governing.<sup>25</sup> The second type of regime - "limited democracy", was characterized by uncompetitive parliamentary and presidential elections, "effectively foreclosing the possibility of a rotation of power".<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> R. Weiner, "The European Union and Democratization in Moldova" in Carey, Henry F., *European Institutions, Democratization, and Human Rights Protection in the European Periphery*, Lexington Books, Lanham, 2014., p. 127.

<sup>19</sup> F. Zakaria, *The Future of Freedom: Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad*, W.W. Norton and Company, New York, 2003 quoted in Weiner, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

<sup>20</sup> T. Tudoroiu, *Democracy and state capture in Moldova*, Democratization, Routledge, 2014, DOI: 10.1080/13510347.2013.868438.

<sup>21</sup> A. Gegeshidze, "Georgia's Political Transformation: Democracy in Zigzag", pp. 25-40, in *South Caucasus – 20 Years of Independence*, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, ed., Berlin, 2011.

<sup>22</sup> J. Forbrig & P. Demes, eds. *Reclaiming Democracy: Civil Society and Electoral Change in Central and Eastern Europe*. Washington: The German Marshall Fund of the United States, 2007, p. 102.

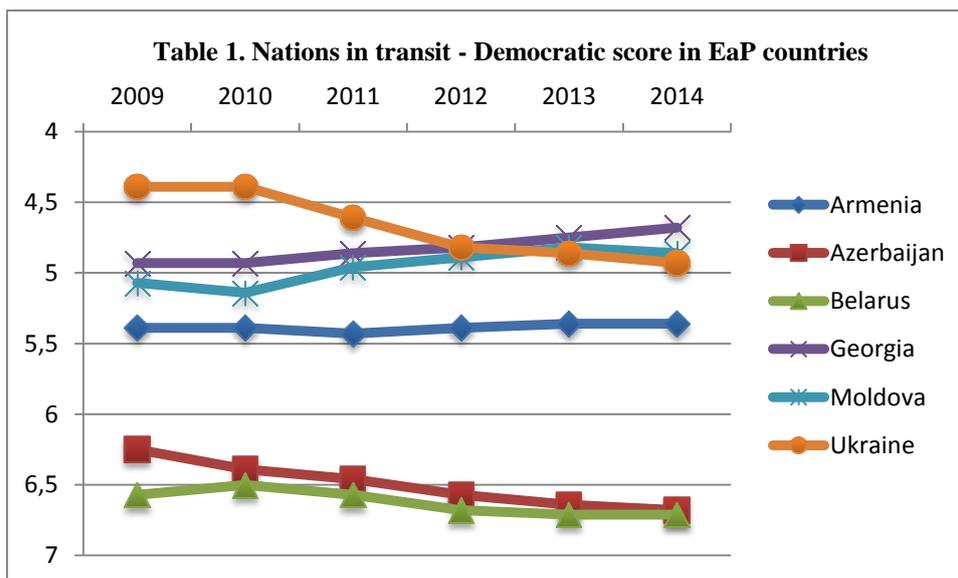
<sup>23</sup> Wheatley in Baracani, *op. cit.*, p. 351.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

Georgia and Moldova are labelled as EaP's frontrunners in democratization. Such praises must be tempered against the background of stagnation and regression of democracy in Eurasia in general, and in some of the EaP countries, such as Belarus, Azerbaijan and Armenia, in particular. As shown in Table 1, Armenia, Georgia and Moldova are the only countries that have achieved some very modest progress in improving their level of democracy.



Source: Freedom House. The ratings are based on a scale of 1 to 7, with one representing the highest level of democratic progress and 7 the lowest. The Democracy Score is an average of ratings for the categories tracked in a given year.

### 3. The effectiveness of EU democratization instruments

The level of democracy in EaP countries has not improved significantly since the launch of the ENP and EaP. The modest progress that has been achieved tends to be attributed by scholars to the internal factors at play in those countries, such as the ‘Rose Revolution’ in Georgia or the ‘Twitter revolution’ in Moldova.<sup>27</sup> Many other experts argue that the state of democracy in the East even worsened, “leaving the EU with dysfunctional tools [...] and limited *leverage* despite the growing complexity of mutual relations”.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> S. Buscăneanu, “EU Democracy Promotion in Eastern ENP Countries”, *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures*, Volume 29, No. 1, February 2015, p. 274.

<sup>28</sup> V. Rihackova, *Human rights in Eastern Partnership countries*, Briefing paper, EP, Directorate-general for external policies of the Union, Committee on Subcommittee on Human Rights, Brussels, 2011, p. 6.

The results of EU's democratization policies in Moldova and Georgia are not encouraging, a fact that is also acknowledged by European officials: "The implementation [of the ENP and EaP] perhaps was not as affective as we would like, it did not work out the way we would like to".<sup>29</sup> According to Lehne, the EU has been more effective as a model or an ideal rather than as a direct political operator, changing the structures on the ground. He does not deem EU's record as particularly positive, because these countries remain quite complicated and the future of their democracy is not secure.<sup>30</sup> EU's relative democratic success is partly placed on the absence of a significant *leverage*. Ursu stresses that the *leverage* could have been stronger and membership perspective could strengthen this instrument.<sup>31</sup> The trivial successes of EU democratization policies in Moldova and Georgia are further explained by the fact that EU was not focused exclusively on democratization. Secrieru believes that the EU was mostly focused on improving governance and boosting the economic development rather than building democracy. In his opinion, if the EU had applied democratization directly, it would have resulted in a more severe enforcement of the principle of *conditionality*. The EU have required from the partner countries to hold free and fair elections,<sup>32</sup> but the democratic *conditionality* was very weak, possibly because the EU considers that democratization can be achieved by other means and on a much longer term. Youngs shares a similar point of view, by showing that the EU does not consistently seek to promote democracy in relations with non-candidate countries.<sup>33</sup> As an example, Youngs gives the

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<sup>29</sup> Interview with C. Kendall, Team Leader Belarus, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Eastern Partnership - Bilateral (III/B/2), EEAS, Brussels, 5 March 2015.

<sup>30</sup> Interview with S. Lehne, Visiting scholar at Carnegie Europe, via telephone, 3 March 2015.

<sup>31</sup> Interview with V. Ursu, Regional Manager for the Eurasia Program, Open Society Foundations, via Skype, 11 March 2015.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with S. Secrieru, *cit.*

<sup>33</sup> Youngs quoted in S. Lavenex & F. Schimmelfennig, "EU rules beyond EU borders: theorizing external governance in European politics", *Journal of European Public Policy*, 2009, p. 808.

case of Georgia, when the EU “has been silent on Mikheil Saakashvili’s gradual undermining of checks and balances on his power”.<sup>34</sup>

Kendall explains that the failure of democratization policies is partly due to the rigidity of ENP and EaP. He observes that it is very difficult to program resources over five-year periods and then to change the allocation on the fly to match performance. According to the source, the EU decided to take an envelope, put it on the side to reward the partners who will perform better, according to the principle ‘*more for more*’. And so it ended up giving these resources only to Georgia and Moldova, because they were the best performers, which is pretty low benchmarking, losing any real *leverage*: “These resources are no longer a strong incentive, they become just another mechanism”.<sup>35</sup>

Another important tool for EU’s democracy promotion, *linkage*, defined as the density of a country’s ties to the West,<sup>36</sup> was not fully explored by the EU vis-à-vis Georgia and Moldova. These states are falling in the ‘low-*linkage* to the West’<sup>37</sup> category of countries, according to Levitsky & Way. The two authors stressed that “*leverage* is most effective when combined with extensive *linkage* to the West”.<sup>38</sup> The weak ties between EU and the two countries were determined to some extent by the lack of geographical connection between them, something that changed after Moldova became a direct neighbour of the EU in 2007.

The next EU tool, *socialization*, which induces democratization through similar methods to those of the *linkage*, has not recorded more encouraging results in Georgia and Moldova. While *socialization* attempts to transfer the EU model of democracy to students, businessmen, it seems that in the case of Moldova this instrument was not very effective so far. This reasoning is drawn

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<sup>34</sup> R. Youngs, “Democracy promotion as external governance?”, *Journal of European Public Policy*, 2009, p. 897.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with C. Kendall, *cit.*

<sup>36</sup> Way & Levitsky, “Linkage”, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

<sup>37</sup> Levitsky & Way, “International linkage”, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

from the fact that Moldovan students do not fully take advantage of the European student exchange programs, such as Erasmus Mundus or Tempus IV.<sup>39</sup> Likewise, the EU directed its most financial assistance towards the Moldovan government rather than financing the civil society, which remains weak in Moldova and Georgia.

#### 4. The 'Russian destabilizing factor'

Moscow has been assigned the role of a "competing external power"<sup>40</sup> that has "negative"<sup>41</sup> effects on democratization processes in post-Soviet countries. Babayan calls Russia a "democracy blocker",<sup>42</sup> who is negatively influencing the democratization process in the EaP countries, accounting for the major part of their democratic stagnation and setbacks into authoritarianism.<sup>43</sup> The detrimental role of Russia in the democratization process of EaP countries has its origins in the 2000s, when Moscow excluded itself from the ENP framework and the very concept of 'shared neighbourhood',<sup>44</sup> perceiving it as a threat from EU to the Russian traditional sphere of influence.<sup>45</sup> Researchers consider that EU's democratization policies in the EaP countries constitute a direct threat to the Russian President Vladimir Putin's regime.<sup>46</sup> Svante explains that Putin's rule feels threatened by the stabilization and democratization of EaP states because, in the prospects of stable and democratic institutions, these countries will serve

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<sup>39</sup> Litra, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

<sup>40</sup> N. Del Medico, *A Black Knight in the Eastern Neighbourhood? Russia and EU Democracy Promotion in Armenia and Moldova*, EU Diplomacy Paper 7, College of Europe, 2014, p. 5.

<sup>41</sup> J. Tolstrup, "Studying a negative external actor: Russia's management of stability and instability in the 'Near Abroad'", *Democratization*, Vol. 16, No. 5, 2009, p. 922 quoted in Del Medico, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>42</sup> N. Babayan, *Democratic Transformation and Obstruction: EU, US, and Russia in the South Caucasus*. Routledge, 2015, p. 155.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Dias, *op. cit.*, p.7.

<sup>45</sup> J. Gower & G. Timmins, eds., *The European Union, Russia and the Shared Neighbourhood*, Routledge Europe-Asia Studies, Vol. 61, issue 10, London, 2011, p. 1.

<sup>46</sup> M. Tsereteli, "Georgia and Moldova: Staying the Course", in Starr, S. Frederick & Svante Cornell eds., *Putin's Grand Strategy: The Eurasian Union and Its Discontents*, September 2014, p. 144.

the interests of its people rather than those of Russia.<sup>47</sup> EU officials also acknowledge this incompatibility. They are confirming that EU's democratization policies threaten the model, which underpins the rise of power in Russia, its entire elite and economic structure: "Western democracy and rule of law is not compatible with Putin. I think that is a reasonably fair conclusion to draw".<sup>48</sup>

Russia's negative reaction in the process of democratization of EaP countries occurs as a result of clash<sup>49</sup> between its norms and EU's norms and values, leading to a "normative power rivalry between Russia and the EU"<sup>50</sup> with "zero-sum calculations and geopolitical competition".<sup>51</sup> Given the analysis of the reasons that underpin Moscow's reaction to the EU democratization policies in the Neighbourhood, the 'Russian destabilizing factor' will be defined as comprising all the tactics adopted by Moscow against the EaP states, which include *soft power* (a shared language and a shared culture with the Orthodox heritage), *carrots* (cheap gas, access to markets, subsidies), and *sticks* (trade sanctions, energy shortages, restrictive migration policies, activation of the frozen conflicts).<sup>52</sup> As its effects seem to be the most influential on the decision makers from EaP countries, an analysis will be dedicated to some of the most important *sticks* as *part* of the 'Russian destabilizing factor'.

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<sup>47</sup> S. E. Cornell, "The European Union: Eastern Partnership vs. Eurasian Union", in Starr et al. eds., *op. cit.*, p. 186.

<sup>48</sup> Interview with C. Kendall, *cit.*

<sup>49</sup> For a thorough analysis on the subject see T. Ambrosio, *Authoritarian Backlash: Russian Resistance to Democratization in the Former Soviet Union*, Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2009, 264 p.

<sup>50</sup> Steinkohl 2010 quoted in H. M. Beckman, & L. H. Sørensen & N. R. Gade & X. Kisantal, *The normative power of the European Neighbourhood Policy. Moldova and Ukraine*, Roskilde Universitet, Roskilde (Denmark), December 2010, p. 37.

<sup>51</sup> Gower & Timmins, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

<sup>52</sup> "Trading insults: a trade war sputters as the tussle over Ukraine's future intensifies", *The Economist*, 24 August 2013, retrieved on 9 March 2015, <http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21583998-trade-war-sputters-tussle-over-ukraines-future-intensifies-trading-insults>.

## 5. The main forms of the 'Russian destabilizing factor'

Economic and political pressure are the most common tools used by Russia to hinder the democratization processes in Georgia and Moldova. Moscow began using more frequently different coercive mechanisms after the launch of the ENP, and especially following the colour revolutions in EaP countries.

**Export bans.** The change of the Georgian government in 2004, as a result of the Rose revolution, was perceived in Moscow as a direct result of EU's policies pursued in the region. Consequently, the Kremlin imposed in 2005-2006 a complete import embargo on all Georgian agricultural products, as well as on wine and bottled mineral water. As a pretext for this embargo the sanitary and phytosanitary standards and health concerns were used, but it was clear that this ban, which lasted for more than six years, was underpinned by political reasons.<sup>53</sup> Although the Georgian exports of wine, bottled water and agricultural products declined sharply after the introduction of the ban, Georgia survived the Russian embargo and even registered economic growth of 9 per cent in 2006.<sup>54</sup> However, the performance was not very easy to achieve and in order to overcome the economic shock, Georgia was forced to take intensive actions for diversifying its export markets.

Nonetheless, after the change of government in Georgia and the resumption of trade relations with Moscow in 2013, the dependence of Georgian products on the Russian market has been growing, even though full trade ban lifting has not yet been achieved.<sup>55</sup> The dependence is even more important for Georgian wine. Kapanadze says that in the first quarter of 2014, almost

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<sup>53</sup> D. Cenusa & M. Emerson & T. Kovziridse & V. Movchan, *Russia's Punitive Trade Policy Measures towards Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia*, CEPS, No. 400, Brussels, September 2014, p. 7.

<sup>54</sup> E. Livny & K. Torosyan & M. Ott, *The Economic Impact of the Russian Trade Embargo on Georgia*, The ISET Policy Institute, Tbilisi, 22 January 2007, p. 5.

<sup>55</sup> Cenusa et al., "Russia's Punitive", *op. cit.*, p. 7.

70 per cent of Georgian wine exports went to Russia.<sup>56</sup> Thus, “a possible re-introduction of Russian embargoes on Georgian imports would significantly hurt the Georgian wine industry”.<sup>57</sup> A renewed economic pressure began to be exercised on Georgia following the conclusion of the DCFTA with EU, when Russian press reported that Moscow was planning to unilaterally suspend the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with Georgia, in force since 1994.<sup>58</sup> Even though for now no other hostile actions have been undertaken by Moscow, the Russian market remains very instable for Georgian products, as proved over time, being perceived as “politically-dependent and unreliable” and “a political arm of Russian foreign policy that regularly blocks imports”.<sup>59</sup>

Imposing embargoes on Moldovan products was one of the main weapons used systematically by Moscow to punish Chisinau’s intentions to move towards European integration. Using this type of restrictions has become so usual that some authors stated that banning exports from Moldova depends “on the political humour of the Kremlin”.<sup>60</sup> The restrictions have not sparked Chisinau’s humour though, as the Russian market was and still remains important for Moldova’s economy. Being an agricultural country, almost the entire production of fruit, vegetables and wine used to be exported to Russia a market inherited from the Soviet era. The situation changed after Chisinau declared in 2005 that integration in the EU is its strategic objective. This shift in Moldova’s foreign policy was followed in 2006 by a total embargo on its wine production, representing 25 per cent of Moldovan exports.<sup>61</sup> In the next years, the embargo was extended to other Moldovan products and maintained or removed, depending on Chisinau’s

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<sup>56</sup> S. Kapanadze, *Georgia’s vulnerability to Russian pressure points*, ECFR, Policy Memo No. 106, Brussels, June 2014, p. 3.

<sup>57</sup> L. Fix, *Georgia Knocking on Europe’s Door. Russia, Georgia, and the EU Association Agreement*, The German Council on Foreign Relation, No 10, Berlin, June 2014, p. 3.

<sup>58</sup> Cenusa et al., “Russia’s Punitive”, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

<sup>59</sup> K. Kakachia, *Georgia and Russia: From Uneasy Rapprochement to Divorce?*, PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 264, Washington, July 2013, p. 3.

<sup>60</sup> M. Emerson, *After the Vilnius fiasco: Who is to blame? What is to be done?* CEPS, No. 8, 21 January 2014, p. 5.

<sup>61</sup> T. Dunlop, “Moldova: Caught between Russia and EU”, *BBC News*, 21 November 2013, retrieved on 10 March 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-24992076>.

willingness to cooperate with Moscow. Russia's hostile actions materialized in embargoes intensified during 2013, when Moscow announced a new ban on Moldovan wine. The purpose was to discourage Chisinau from initiating the AA/DCFTA with the EU.<sup>62</sup> This embargo is in force until now. In 2014, other restrictions were introduced to constrain Moldova in the process of the AA/DCFTA implementation. "As soon as the agreement was ratified, Russia banned Moldovan meat and fruit 'for health reasons'".<sup>63</sup> Also, Russia's punitive measures aimed at the abolition of preferential tariffs on Moldovan exports of goods in the CIS area,<sup>64</sup> by removing the 'zero duty' for 19 products<sup>65</sup> and thus declining the demand for Moldovan products.

**Energy shortages.** As the largest exporter of natural gas,<sup>66</sup> Russia was until recently the only energy supplier of both Georgia and Moldova. The situation has changed only in the case of Georgia, which diversified its energy suppliers and got rid of the Russian gas domination mainly due to its location in an area with rich energy resources. However, prior to obtaining independence from Russian gas in the Georgian case, both countries had to face enormous pressure from Moscow, whereby it halted natural gas supplies. The pressures were motivated mainly by Gazprom's desire to expand its infrastructure, buying gas pipelines in Georgia and Moldova and pursuing its interests "to create a unified gas infrastructure... [in order] to control the potential gas flow from Iran to the EU".<sup>67</sup> The debts that Georgia and Moldova accumulated in the 2000s towards Gazprom allowed the Russian company to pressure them to convert these debts into Russian infrastructure assets.

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<sup>62</sup> Cenusa et al., "Russia's Punitive...", *op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>63</sup> A. Paul, *Moldova – Heading into a hot autumn*, European Policy Centre, Policy Brief, Brussels, 6 October 2014, p. 2.

<sup>64</sup> J. Radeke, *The economic impact of Russian trade sanctions*, GET Moldova, Newsletter, Issue No. 24, Chisinau, July - August 2014, p. 1.

<sup>65</sup> A. Hug, *Trouble in the Neighbourhood? The future of the EU's Eastern Partnership*, The Foreign Policy Centre, London, February 2015., p. 44.

<sup>66</sup> B. A. Gelb, *Russian Natural Gas: Regional Dependence*, CRS Report for Congress, January 2007, p. 1.

<sup>67</sup> T. Varol, *The Russian foreign energy policy*, EGALITE, European Scientific Institute, Kocani, 2013, p. 307.

In lack of other solutions and constrained by a poor economic situation, Moldova sold its infrastructure and shares in MoldovaGaz, a subsidiary of Gazprom. Thus, Gazprom currently holds 63.4 per cent<sup>68</sup> stake in MoldovaGaz and controls Moldova's domestic gas infrastructure. This total dependence on Russian gas allows Moscow to exert enormous pressures on Chisinau when it moves closer to the EU. Moldova's gas supply problem worsens as its debts towards Gazprom are increasing daily, due to the fact that the breakaway region of Transnistria does not pay for its gas consumption since 2009.<sup>69</sup> Currently, Moldova's estimated debt to Gazprom amounts to USD 3.7 billion,<sup>70</sup> of which 90 per cent<sup>71</sup> is Transnistria's debt.

**Activation of the frozen conflicts.** The situation in Georgia and Moldova regarding Russia's pressure through frozen conflicts is similar. Both countries went, in the early 1990s, through separatist conflicts involving Russian support. These conflicts left behind breakaway regions: in Georgia - Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and in Moldova – Transnistria.<sup>72</sup> Since then, these secessionist regions have enjoyed Moscow's support, including financial aid, and have been consistently used by Russia as a powerful instrument to hinder the democratization processes in Georgia and Moldova. However, experts note one important difference in the level of Russian *leverage* over the two countries. This difference is mainly based on the fact that Russia lost some *leverage* over Georgia after having recognized the independence of the separate regions, following the short war of 2008.<sup>73</sup> At the same time, Transnistria remains unrecognized by Moscow, which keeps an important Russian *leverage* over Chisinau.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> S. Woehrel, *Russian Energy Policy Toward Neighboring Countries*, Congressional Research Service, 20 May 2009, p. 11.

<sup>69</sup> K. Całus, *An aided economy - The characteristics of the Transnistrian economic model*, OSW Commentary, No. 108, Warsaw, 14 May 2013, p. 5.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>71</sup> "Prioritățile noului guvern al Republicii Moldova în procesul soluționării conflictului transnistrean", *Europa Libera*, Dialoguri transnistrene, 30 March 2015, retrieved on 20 April 2015, <http://www.europalibera.org/content/transcript/26929880.html>.

<sup>72</sup> Tsereteli, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

<sup>73</sup> Tsereteli, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

Russia uses many other actions to destabilize the situation in Georgia. Among them, scholars enumerate the “borderisation campaigns”, with Russian border guards present along South Ossetia’s “state borders” and the installation of barbed-wire partitions at the administrative borderline line between the region and the rest of the Georgian territory.<sup>75</sup>

The situation in Moldova with the Russian *leverage* seems even more complex, as Chisinau still has reasons to keep Moscow at the negotiating table, hoping to find a better solution than the scenario applied in the Georgian case with the recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia’s independence. Całus emphasizes that the Transnistrian region seems unable to function by itself, being able to survive only thanks to support from Russia,<sup>76</sup> which is also its second trade partner after Moldova. Being aware of its huge *leverage*, Moscow does not hesitate to use it in order to halt the Europeanization processes, which contravene to Kremlin’s interests.

## 6. Adapting EU’s democratization policies

**Ownership.** One of the basic criticisms of EU’s democratization policies is that the model applied in EaP countries, and particularly in Georgia and Moldova, was almost similar to that implemented in Central European states: “a copy of the skeleton of the enlargement policy set-up”.<sup>77</sup> The significant difference is that in the case of the Central Europe, EU’s *leverage* was incomparably greater - accession to the European Community, which mainly drove the democratization and modernization of societies.

In the absence of a clear EU membership prospect, the EU loses the legitimacy of using the same top-down approach, based on a donor-recipient relationship, the imposition of

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<sup>75</sup> Kapanadze, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

<sup>76</sup> Całus, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

<sup>77</sup> Kelley 2006, p. 30, quoted in Beckman et al, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

predetermined formal rules, and the asymmetrical relationship between insiders and outsiders.<sup>78</sup> Sadowski argues that despite declarations about 'co-ownership' and the importance of adopting coordinated decisions, the ENP and EaP are primarily designed by the EU and serve Brussels' interests.<sup>79</sup> The considerable amount of regulations and directives that Georgia and Moldova have to transpose into their national legislation demonstrates again the fact that EU is using the same pre-accession methodology. This led to a situation in which Georgia and Moldova have to transpose into their national legislation more than 300 EU directives and regulations,<sup>80</sup> including most of the EU trade-related *acquis communautaire*, without having the same financial support as EU-candidate countries. Parmentier points to the same thought: he maintains that the problem stems from the difference between claimed objectives - helping these countries to build widespread democratic institutions, as in the case of the enlargement policy - and the resources allocated to these objectives. Compared to the resources deployed and the regional context, the EaP countries have limited results, but at least it should be mentioned that the countries concerned do not sink further towards autocratic regimes.<sup>81</sup> In a recent co-authored paper, a high-ranking official from the EEAS suggested that the sheer volume of commitments taken by Georgia and Moldova reflects the willingness and ambition of these countries, and that they would have had opportunity to negotiate over these commitments.<sup>82</sup>

**Differentiation.** Another aspect that the EU needs to improve is strengthening the differentiation between the countries included in EU democratization policies. Different scenarios are proposed

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<sup>78</sup> Korosteleva, Elena, "Change or Continuity: Is the Eastern Partnership an Adequate Tool for the European Neighbourhood", *International Relations*, 25(2) June 2011, p. 251.

<sup>79</sup> R. Sadowski, *Partnership in times of crisis. Challenges for the Eastern European countries' integration with Europe*, OSW, Point of view No. 36, Warsaw, July 2013, p. 28.

<sup>80</sup> M. Emerson, *Trade policy issues in the wider Europe – that led to war and not yet peace*, CEPS, No. 398, Brussels, 2014.

<sup>81</sup> Interview with F. Parmentier, Programme Director at Sciences Po Paris, via email, 25 March 2015.

<sup>82</sup> G. Wiegand & E. Shulz, "The EU and its Eastern Partnership: Political association and economic integration in a rough neighbourhood", published in Herrmann/Simma/Streinzi (eds.), *Trade Policy between Law, Diplomacy and Scholarship – Liber amicorum in memoriam Horst G. Krenzler*, EYIEL Special Issue, (forthcoming in 2015). Gunnar Wiegand is director in EEAS for Russia, Eastern Partnership, Central Asia, Regional Cooperation and OSCE.

for the differentiation between EaP countries. The assumption that all EaP countries are heading in the same direction, but at different speeds, is no longer relevant in the current situation and “moving ahead calls for a differentiated ‘3-1-2’ approach in response to the different circumstances the EU faces”.<sup>83</sup> Gromadzki considers that EaP countries have to be divided into two groups: those having an AA with the EU, and the rest.<sup>84</sup> However, the differentiation into two groups would be still “too rough”,<sup>85</sup> explain Delcour & Costanyan, who refer to the different stage of economic and political reform in Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia. The two authors call for a more tailored adjustment of the AAs signed with these countries during their implementation phase.<sup>86</sup> Stewart argues that offers should be adapted to the situation of each country and to correspond both to the agenda of the country and to that of the EU.<sup>87</sup>

**Focus.** Focus of the EaP has to be re-evaluated, by making this policy more geopolitical, putting more emphasis on EU’s values and norms, and reducing the bureaucratic and technical dimension of the EaP,<sup>88</sup> Sadowski argues. Gromadzki is advocating the same idea, namely a returned EaP initiative “much more politically oriented and less technically oriented”.<sup>89</sup> Emerson recommends a similar approach towards Neighbourhood policies: “more targeted and geopolitical, and less a bureaucratic robot for demanding indiscriminate compliance with masses of EU laws”.<sup>90</sup>

Respect for human rights, free and fair elections, independence of the media and of the judiciary have to be further strengthened and have to receive much more attention in the bilateral

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<sup>83</sup> Hug, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

<sup>84</sup> Gromadzki, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

<sup>85</sup> L. Delcour & H. Kostanyan, *Towards a Fragmented Neighbourhood: Policies of the EU and Russia and their consequences for the area that lies in between*, CEPS No. 17, 17 October 2014, p. 8.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> S. Stewart, *The EU, Russia and a Less Common Neighbourhood. Lessons Reinforced by the Vilnius Summit*, SWP Comments 2014/C 03, January 2014, p. 6.

<sup>88</sup> Sadowski, *op. cit.*, pp. 31-34.

<sup>89</sup> Gromadzki, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

<sup>90</sup> Emerson, “After the Vilnius fiasco”, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

cooperation between the EU and the partner countries. These issues are important in the context in which many experts would say that the EU was not so strict and dedicated to its democratic values when it established cooperation programs with some of the EaP countries. More targeted policies would mean the prioritization of domains in which transformation might be induced, focusing on key issues for the current capacity of the EU and its partner.<sup>91</sup> Because of the partners' limited capacities, they cannot undergo fast and deep transformations in all areas at the same time, Sadowski says.

**Flexibility.** EU's democratization policies towards Georgia and Moldova also require more flexibility and quicker responses to the challenges faced by the two countries. Even though some improvements might be achieved in this regard, the rigidity of the democratization instruments will not be completely eliminated because of the very nature of EU foreign policy, constrained by the need for coordinated actions between MS.

An EEAS official explains that the rigidity of EU's policies is partly due to the inflexibility of the funding instruments and of the multiannual financial framework, traditionally adopted for a period of seven years.<sup>92</sup> EU finds it hard to program resources especially when applying the principle of '*more for more*', which makes it unable to predict the performance of the partner countries and the 'envelope' that will be needed to reward these performances. Cenusă raises the necessity to deploy certain risk assessment tools. The expert points out that the EU has to realize that Eastern Europe is a very specific area, where changes might occur quickly, depending on the regional factors, one of which is Russia. Thus, the EU is obliged to clearly assess the foreseeable scenarios for the region. Delecour & Kostanyan suggest that the EU should also be more flexible towards Georgia and Moldova in terms of its requirements for the transposition of the *acquis communautaire*. In their opinion, the *acquis* was designed for the needs of the MS and its

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<sup>91</sup> Sadowski, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

<sup>92</sup> Interview with C. Kendall, *cit.*

effectiveness may be questioned as long as Georgia and Moldova have a different level of development.<sup>93</sup>

However, Youngs does not apparently welcome a greater degree of flexibility for EU policies. The author examines the case of Armenia, where EU has already begun to show more flexibility in choosing areas of cooperation, based on the interests of the country.<sup>94</sup> Youngs shows that EU's willingness to be flexible in Armenia does not solve the problem of "how the EU can and should fashion a more effective geostrategic identity in its East".<sup>95</sup>

### **6.1. Revitalizing leverage, conditionality, linkage and socialization**

It is not a revelation that the EU has "too little influence"<sup>96</sup> in EaP countries, including in Georgia and Moldova, which renders its democratization tools ineffective in imposing the change the EU wants. Both partner countries as well as European officials admit in their discourses that the EU is not as attractive<sup>97</sup> to the EaP states as Brussels envisioned it. Moreover, EU's modest influence on EaP countries is eclipsed by the more assertive Russia, which proposes a different model of development and integration, one that can be less costly for the corrupt elites of these countries. In this respect, the EU has to bear in mind that, unlike Central European countries, which in the 1990s could only count on their Euro-Atlantic integration, "European integration is not the only option for the Eastern European states".<sup>98</sup> Because they have to face the considerable Russian pressure and to 'pay' a high price for their European choice, the EaP

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<sup>93</sup> Delcour & Costanyan, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

<sup>94</sup> R. Youngs, "Armenia as a Showcase for the New European Neighbourhood Policy?", *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, April 2015, retrieved on 20 April 2015, <http://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/?fa=59617>.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> Sadowski, *op. cit.*, p. 48. Although Levitsky & Way classified Georgia and Moldova as countries where EU leverage should be considerable, this influence still remains low.

<sup>97</sup> Wiegand & Shulz, *op. cit.*, p. 27-29. Speech in Vienna, *op. cit.*

<sup>98</sup> Sadowski, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

countries “are increasingly disillusioned with EU’s policy, because what the Union has to offer does not match their expectations”.<sup>99</sup>

Many academics and practitioners explain the gap between EU’s offer and the expectations of Georgia and Moldova by the lack of a clear EU membership perspective for these countries. More specifically, the absence of EU membership prospects diminishes EU’s *leverage* on these states and undermines the long-term benefits, which might be generated “if their ultimate aim was clearly defined”.<sup>100</sup> Gromadzki says that Georgia and Moldova “should be perceived as more than partners”,<sup>101</sup> and the EU Council should follow EP’s example and officially declare the right of Georgia and Moldova to make use of the Article 49 TEU. While Emerson considers that politicians are to be blamed for being unable to overcome disagreement over EaP countries’ membership perspectives,<sup>102</sup> Bobinski stresses that EU is trapped by the enlargement fatigue and by the fears to provoke Russia in the current unstable situation in the region.<sup>103</sup> Under these conditions and in the hypothesis of a stable situation, the EU should rely on enhancing of the ‘*more for more*’ principle as one of the main *leverage*.<sup>104</sup> However, the implementation of this principle will be more effective only when the performance of the two countries will be evaluated on a country-based approach instead of a wider regional comparison as done currently. This shift in the assessment methodology is needed for avoiding situations whereby the principle ‘*more for more*’ becomes a simple mechanism, instead of serving as means for *leverage*.

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<sup>99</sup> Sadowski, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>101</sup> Gromadzki, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

<sup>102</sup> Emerson, “After the Vilnius fiasco”, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

<sup>103</sup> K. Bobinski, “Eastern countries deserve an enlargement perspective at the Riga summit”, *Euractiv*, 10 April 2015, retrieved on 14 April 2015, <http://www.euractiv.com/sections/europes-east/eastern-countries-deserve-enlargement-perspective-riga-summit-313665?hootPostID=274b73bc7860facbda22675bbbd54b03>.

<sup>104</sup> Gromadzki, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

Extending an enhanced '*more for more*' principle has to be accompanied by a more objective and strong *conditionality*, since it is currently assessed as weak.<sup>105</sup> Many authors agree that EU has to apply systematically a strict *conditionality*, which was not always the case in the past. For example, in the case of the Republic of Moldova, after the power shift in 2009, the EU mistakenly perceived politicians' commitment as a genuine engagement to European integration. However, EU's overly optimistic expectations for democracy promotion were never met by truly democratic deliveries of the Moldovan government: as the 2014 parliamentary elections demonstrated, the democratization process was not sustainable and could be easily reversed. The result of this overconfidence came at a price for the EU, which "became associated with the misdeeds of the pro-European coalitions"<sup>106</sup> and further lost the confidence of the Moldovan people. In a recent survey, being faced with the choice between joining of the EU and Eurasian Customs Union (ECU), the first option was chosen by 32% of respondents, and the second - by 50% of respondents, while 18% of respondents did not want to answer to this question.<sup>107</sup>

The same conclusion was drawn from the Georgian case, where reforms were rather superficial, with still not sufficiently strong institutions and with democracy linked very much to political personality.<sup>108</sup> While acknowledging the unsystematic use of *conditionality*, Secieru wonders whether a more severe *conditionality* would lead to higher or lower results.<sup>109</sup> At least in the Belarusian case, where the EU has been very strict with the democratic *conditionality*, progress was absent in this direction. However, Georgia and Moldova's aspirations to join the EU should serve as strong incentives for European officials to impose a strict *conditionality* on these countries. The EU should no longer trust the governments of these countries only on the basis of

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<sup>105</sup> Interview with Secieru, *cit.*

<sup>106</sup> Hug, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

<sup>107</sup> *Barometrul Opiniei Publice*, IPP, April 2015, retrieved on 22 April 2015, <http://www.ipp.md/libview.php?l=ro&idc=156&id=733>.

<sup>108</sup> Interview with Kendall, *cit.*

<sup>109</sup> Interview with Secieru, *cit.*

the politicians' statements. Moreover, the EU must no longer allow the coalition governments to assign positions in the institutions of the judiciary on the basis of party affiliation.

Besides strengthening *conditionality* and the '*more for more*' principle, many experts call upon the EU to concentrate its efforts on creating tight links between the people of Georgia and Moldova and those of the EU MS. This aspect is very important in the opinion of specialists, because civil society may represent a fundamental tool in maintaining pressure on the governments of Georgia and Moldova in the process of advancing democratic reforms. Therefore, the EU is called "to place greater premium on contacts with civil society [...] and recognise these contacts as being equally important as contacts with governments".<sup>110</sup>

Furthermore, the EU should reconsider its communication strategies in Georgia and Moldova and envisage an expansion of the resources allocated to this aim.<sup>111</sup> These communication strategies are needed especially to counter Russia's propaganda<sup>112</sup> and to inform in a consistent way about the achievements of the partner countries. For example, Cenusă believes that the communication campaign regarding the AA between Moldova and the EU was started too late. Already at the time of its initiation, there could have been in place a specific information strategy for Georgia and Moldova with concrete explanations about the possible outcomes of the document's provisions for the citizens of these countries. This might have helped avoiding the crisis in the Moldovan autonomy of Gagauzia in 2014.<sup>113</sup> The information strategies should emphasize the short-term effects. In this respect, the EU should consider splitting the process of Europeanization into smaller stages in order to increase the chances of success for easily measurable benefits.

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<sup>110</sup> Gromadzki, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

<sup>111</sup> Delcour & Costanyan, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

<sup>112</sup> Hug, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

<sup>113</sup> Interview with D. Cenusă, Associated expert at Expert-Grup Think-tank, Chisinau, via Skype, 7 March 2015.

## 6.2. Can the EU and Russia agree on common democratization policies in Georgia and Moldova?

The hypothesis about the cooperation between the EU and Russia in designing the process of democratization policies in EaP countries was advanced in this paper due to the numerous criticisms levelled to Brussels concerning its mistake for having excluded Moscow from this process. Academics, EU officials, as well as representatives of the partner countries argue that the EU neglected “Russia’s role as a strategic player”<sup>114</sup> in EaP states, and therefore Moscow must be brought back to the discussion table, “in order for the EaP policy to become ultimately successful”.<sup>115</sup> In Parmentier’s opinion, the main failure of the EaP is to have marginalized Russia.<sup>116</sup>

As a result, the EU is already considering, within the on-going ENP review,<sup>117</sup> on how to effectively cooperate with ‘the neighbours of neighbours’, among others, having in mind Russia. On its part, Russia is trying for some years now to convince EU to engage in the deepening of their economic relations through the means of a CES ‘from Lisbon to Vladivostok’.<sup>118</sup>

In testing the hypothesis whether cooperation between the EU and Russia is possible or not, there have been identified two major obstacles that prevent this cooperation. The first one consists in the lack of common values on which these geopolitical powers could build a partnership. The second one refers to the complete absence of EU’s confidence towards the Kremlin regime. Furthermore, any possible cooperation between these two powers is almost excluded for the near future, considering the current instable situation in Ukraine. Additionally,

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<sup>114</sup> Wiegand & Shulz, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

<sup>115</sup> Wiegand & Shulz, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

<sup>116</sup> Interview with Parmentier, *cit.*

<sup>117</sup> European Commission & High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, *Joint consultation paper: Towards a new European Neighbourhood Policy*, JOIN(2015) 6 final, Brussels, 4 March 2015.

<sup>118</sup> V. Putin, “An economic community from Lisbon to Vladivostok”, translated by EU-Russia industrialists round table from *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 25 November 2010, p. 22, retrieved on 21 April 2015, [http://eu-russia-industrialists.org/documents/ArticleSuddeutscheZeitung\\_English.pdf](http://eu-russia-industrialists.org/documents/ArticleSuddeutscheZeitung_English.pdf).

the establishment of any kind of partnership is conditioned by Russia returning to the application of the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 on the territorial integrity and independence of its neighbours,<sup>119</sup> and respecting the two Minsk agreements.<sup>120</sup>

Secrieru finds that upon an objective assessment of the previous attempts to build a strategic partnership between EU and Russia based on 'four spaces',<sup>121</sup> this cooperation did not work because Russia has other interests, not because EU lacks willingness to cooperate.<sup>122</sup> In his opinion, there are no chances for any kind of cooperation between the EU and Russia in the area of democratization in EaP countries. Secrieru stresses that Russia promotes a different type of democracy, which is the opposite model of that promoted by the EU. Therefore, the most that can be done in terms of cooperation between EU and Russia is to establish some form of redlines that cannot be trampled. Parmentier shares Secrieru's opinion, by adding that democracy does not seem a common goal for EU and Russia, thus cooperation in this area is not possible for the simple reason that the very definition of democracy is not shared between Europeans and Russians.<sup>123</sup>

Ursu advances a similar sceptical opinion regarding a possible cooperation between the EU and Russia. He argues that there cannot be any sectorial cooperation between the two powers, including in the EaP countries, as long as there is an on-going conflict in Ukraine where Russia is directly involved.<sup>124</sup> In the current conditions, the conclusion of any cooperation between Brussels and Moscow might be interpreted as a reward to Russia, despite its obstructionist

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<sup>119</sup> Wiegand & Shulz, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

<sup>120</sup> Interview with Parmentier, *cit.* The first agreement for a ceasefire in the Ukraine's region Donbass was signed on 5 September 2014. The agreement collapsed in January-February 2015. A new Protocol for halting hostilities was agreed in Minsk, on 11 February 2015.

<sup>121</sup> Four Common Spaces were agreed at the EU-Russia Summit of 10 May 2005: the Common Economic Space, the Common Space for Security, Freedom and Justice, the Common Space for External Security, and the Common Space for Research and Education, retrieved on 4 May 2015, [http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/international/cooperating-governments/russia/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/international/cooperating-governments/russia/index_en.htm).

<sup>122</sup> Interview with Secrieru, *cit.*

<sup>123</sup> Interview with Parmentier, *cit.*

<sup>124</sup> Interview with Ursu, *cit.*

actions in the region.<sup>125</sup> Any type of cooperation, should it occur in the security, trade, or energy areas, would be viewed as “a weakness of the EU”.<sup>126</sup> Ursu adds that, unlike the EU, which invests in the development of democratic elections and independent judicial systems, Russia supports the maintenance in power of corrupt governments in EaP countries, which are much easier to blackmail, and thus to have them as faithful allies.<sup>127</sup> Bond explains the same differentiation between the approaches of the EU and Russia towards EaP countries. He says that the EU is aiming at making its neighbours stronger by sharing its values of democracy, while Russia wants their neighbours either as vassals or as enemies.<sup>128</sup> Ursu explains that the EU and Russia also have different understandings of the notions of stability and prosperity. This was demonstrated by the fact that the two geo-political powers could not advance in their negotiations on the new strategic partnership. “If the EU and Russia could not agree on the development of their own bilateral relations, how could they agree on a common vision regarding the development of the EaP countries”,<sup>129</sup> asks Ursu.

EU officials, interviewed within this research, expressed a more positive opinion about a potential cooperation between EU and Russia. Kendall considers that cooperation is definitely possible, but it requires confidence and dialog, which are currently lacking. In his opinion, Russian officials should first have the willingness to cooperate, then to demonstrate that they mean it and finally to prove that they can be trusted.<sup>130</sup>

The experts who expressed a sceptical opinion about a possible cooperation between the EU and Russia consider that the only hope that exists is the change of regime in Kremlin in 2018 or in 2024. “The geo-political competition to the East will last at least until the end of the Putin

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<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> Gromadzki, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

<sup>127</sup> Interview with Ursu, *cit.*

<sup>128</sup> I. Bond, *The EU and Russia: Uncommon spaces*, Centre for European Reform, London, April 2014, p. 5.

<sup>129</sup> Interview with Ursu, *cit.*

<sup>130</sup> Interview with Kendall, *cit.*

era".<sup>131</sup> At the same time, the prospects for a possible maintenance in power of Putin's regime beyond 2018 would be very unfavourable for the EU-Russia cooperation and moreover, for the future development of the European continent, considers Secrieru.<sup>132</sup>

The analysis of views above proves that there are an overwhelming number of experts who do not see any potential for cooperation between the EU and Russia in the field of democratization of the EaP countries. However, many other experts would say that these pessimistic views are not the best solution for the development of the European continent and, most importantly, they cannot represent a sustainable long-term vision for the two powers. In this respect, Parmentier believes that if the two Minsk agreements are respected, there will be certainly a need to find a solution for getting out of the crisis. It might take several months at best, and most likely even years before finding a new way for cooperation is possible, considers Parmentier. Delcour & Costanyan also emphasized that despite lacking common values, the EU "needs a strategy towards Russia that goes beyond sanctions",<sup>133</sup> stressing that "an outright split would be much more problematic because of the interdependence of the two partners".<sup>134</sup> Therefore, Stewart urges the EU "to remove faulty assumptions of Russian support for democratization"<sup>135</sup> and to focus on cooperation in areas where this is possible. Youngs also opts for the inclusion of Russia in a more constructive dialog, pointing to the fact that further destabilization of the Russian economy might affect the security in Europe, which is not in the interests of the EU.<sup>136</sup>

The solution for an EU-Russia cooperation, which was most frequently advanced by the interviewees, as well as by the literature, is the establishment of a CES 'from Lisbon to

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<sup>131</sup> Gromadzki, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

<sup>132</sup> Interview with Secrieru, *cit.*

<sup>133</sup> Delcour & Costanyan, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

<sup>134</sup> Delcour & Costanyan, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>135</sup> Stewart, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>136</sup> Interview with R. Youngs, Senior Associate at Carnegie Europe, Democracy and rule of law program, Brugge, 25 March 2015.

Vladivostok'. Even though this idea may sound utopian to many, Emerson points out that "the status quo is a messy amalgam of competing and partly overlapping projects",<sup>137</sup> between Russia and the EU.

### **6.3. Would a common economic space 'from Lisbon to Vladivostok' be suitable for democratization?**

The idea of creating a CES 'from Lisbon to Vladivostok' is not a new one.<sup>138</sup> Its roots can be traced back to the late 1980s, when Mikhail Gorbachev called for a "common European home" in his speech at the Council of Europe in Strasbourg in 1989.<sup>139</sup> Boris Eltsin resumed the initiative in 1997 within the same European forum, calling for "a Europe in which large and small countries will be equal partners united by common democratic values".<sup>140</sup> The liberal and democratic rhetoric of this initiative was, however, left aside by Vladimir Putin, who took over the idea since 2000s.<sup>141</sup> He detailed the initiative of a CES in a German newspaper editorial<sup>142</sup> in 2010, and then he reiterated it later in different speeches and press articles.<sup>143</sup> "[We] are proposing [...] the creation of a harmonious community of economies 'from Lisbon to Vladivostok', [...] with] possibly a free-trade zone and even more advanced forms of economic integration",<sup>144</sup> Putin said. His plan for a 'Greater Europe' was providing for cooperation in the areas of economy, energy, science, education and human contacts, while making it clear that "the EU should not expect Russia to first adopt European standards".<sup>145</sup> As for the EaP countries, according to Putin's plan, they would

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<sup>137</sup> M. Emerson, *A European view of Putin's foreign and security policy*, CEPS, Brussels, 2 March 2012, p. 2.

<sup>138</sup> I. Timofeev, "From Lisbon to Vladivostok' at risk", *Russia-direct*, 11 December 2014, retrieved on 22 April 2015, <http://www.russia-direct.org/opinion/lisbon-vladivostok-risk>.

<sup>139</sup> M. Menkiszak, *Greater Europe - Putin's vision of European (dis)integration*, OSW, No. 46, Warsaw, October 2013, p. 8.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.* p. 9.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>142</sup> Putin, "An economic community", *op. cit.*; "Putin warns EU energy laws hurt business", *Euractiv*, 26 November 2010, retrieved on 16 April 2015, <http://www.euractiv.com/energy/putin-warns-eu-energy-laws-hurt-news-500036>.

<sup>143</sup> Menkiszak, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

<sup>144</sup> "Putin warns EU energy laws hurt business", *op. cit.*

<sup>145</sup> Menkiszak, *op. cit.*, pp. 14-15.

have joined the CES 'from Lisbon to Vladivostok' via EaU, alleging that an initial accession to the EaU/CU would help EaP countries to "integrate into Europe sooner and from a stronger position".<sup>146</sup> Putin insisted for the realization of this plan and even managed to convince countries like France and Italy to support Moscow's position "that the four 'roadmaps' developing 'common spaces' with Russia should be adopted separately, rather than through EU's suggestion of adopting them as one package."<sup>147</sup> However, a large number of MS opposed this scenario due to the fact that it lacked other 'common spaces', such as freedom, security and justice, which otherwise also included democratic values.<sup>148</sup>

Therefore, the idea of a CES 'from Lisbon to Vladivostok' has not been realized mainly due to the discrepancies in values between the two powers. However, the situation has radically changed after the Ukrainian crisis, following which there were taken actions that indicate the possible implementation of at least some of the components of Putin's CES. Even though in March 2014 the EU suspended its bilateral talks with the Russian Federation,<sup>149</sup> Brussels was later forced to change its position towards Moscow. As a proof can serve EU's attempt to lure Ukraine into a trilateral trade format, including Russia, making it clear to Ukraine that it "should seek to accommodate its EU FTA with an older agreement it had with Russia".<sup>150</sup> Kendall believes that the decision to involve Russia in the discussion over the implementation of the DCFTA in Ukraine is rather controversial and it is questionable whether this was the right thing to do.<sup>151</sup>

The model of trilateral talks between EU, Russia and Ukraine could be extended to other countries, like Georgia and Moldova. A high EU official confirmed that in March 2015 technical

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<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>147</sup> Emerson, "Democratisation", *op. cit.*, p. 196.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> Council of the European Union, *Statement of the Heads of State or Government on Ukraine*, Brussels, 6 March 2014.

<sup>150</sup> G. Gotev, "EU pushing Ukraine towards trilateral free trade, with Russia", *Euractiv*, 15 April 2015, retrieved on 16 April 2015, <http://www.euractiv.com/sections/europes-east/eu-pushes-ukraine-toward-trilateral-free-trade-including-russia-313816>.

<sup>151</sup> Interview with Kendall, *cit.*

talks between the EU and the EaU as such were held on the possibility of overcoming certain existing difficulties that made it impossible for the EaU and for the DCFTAs signed by Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia with the UE to be fully compatible.<sup>152</sup> According to the source, there are already two cases, Serbia and Israel, which have a FTA with both the EU and Russia.<sup>153</sup>

Emerson advances exactly the same idea. He says that the EU, Russia and all that lies in-between “have to find a formula for coming together in a civilized way. The fundamental resolution of the big mess has to come through a return to the noble idea of the Common European Home”.<sup>154</sup> One of the possible scenarios would be for Georgia and Moldova to have a FTA with both EU and Russia, which might be seen as “a more radical route of forming a Pan-European free trade area”.<sup>155</sup> This would require the modernization of the Russian economy and addressing the problem of technical standards, stresses Emerson. In the context of compatibility between the EaU and the EU, Wiegand & Shulz say that not only Russia will have to adapt its economy to the WTO standards, but also the other two members of the EaU, Belarus and Kazakhstan. “It will require that all CU members demonstrate willingness to undertake liberalizing steps to fulfil WTO criteria for a FTA”.<sup>156</sup>

Kendall agrees in saying that there is no reason why the ECU cannot coexist with the EU and have shared standards.<sup>157</sup> “That is easily done. That is our daily work here; we can easily have parties working together to negotiate common standards. But in order to do that, you need a partner you can negotiate with”.<sup>158</sup>

Besides the trilateral talks already applied in the case of Ukraine, both EU officials and experts talk more frequently about the possibility of creating a CES ‘from Lisbon to Vladivostok’.

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<sup>152</sup> Interview with an EU official, Brugge, 7 March 2015.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>154</sup> Emerson, “After the Vilnius fiasco”, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-14.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.* p. 14.

<sup>156</sup> Wiegand & Shulz, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

<sup>157</sup> Interview with Kendall, *cit.*

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

An eloquent example is the speech of the former president of the EC Jose Manuel Barroso, who stated after the EU-Russia Summit in January 2014 that the creation of a CES 'from Lisbon to Vladivostok' could reinforce the trust between Brussels and Moscow. "It may seem a dream, but dreams can become reality",<sup>159</sup> Barroso said. Likewise, the factsheet of the same summit mentioned that both sides would like to lay the foundations for a future CES from the Atlantic to the Pacific.<sup>160</sup>

Lehne thinks that it remains in EU's interests to move in the direction of a dialog between EaP countries, EU and Eurasian Union (EaU), which could be, in his opinion, a way to overcome the trade barriers that are now consequences of the weak cooperative developments.<sup>161</sup> "I think that clearly we should aim at a situation when Russia and the EU cooperate and support countries 'in-between', and help them to develop in a positive fashion."<sup>162</sup>

However, there are experts who believe that the creation of a CES 'from Lisbon to Vladivostok', to the detriment of European values, would not lead to a very positive democratic development neither for the EaP countries, nor for the European continent. "The battle chosen by Putin is over European democratic civilization for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The scope is to re-expand the frontiers of political darkness and coercive foreign policy."<sup>163</sup> Given that the level of democracy in the world has regressed,<sup>164</sup> more than ever must the EU ensure that the democratic values, based on which it was created, are expanded everywhere in Europe. The EU must understand that its tensions with Russia are the result of "the rivalry between liberal democracy and the so-called 'modern authoritarianism' [which] became more attractive to many countries in Europe and

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<sup>159</sup> European Commission, *Statement by President Barroso following the EU-Russia Summit*, Brussels, 28 January 2014.

<sup>160</sup> Council of the European Union, *Factsheet EU-Russia summit*, Brussels, 28 January 2014.

<sup>161</sup> Interview with Lehne, *cit.*

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>163</sup> Emerson, "After the Vilnius fiasco", *op. cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>164</sup> According to Gromadzki, *op. cit.*, p.28, for the 8<sup>th</sup> consecutive year there were more declines in democracy than gains. *Freedom of the Press* 2015 finds also that global press freedom declined in 2014 to its lowest point in more than 10 years.

around the world now than they were two decades ago”.<sup>165</sup> Russia plays a key role in the world’s democratic decline,<sup>166</sup> becoming a country that is “less democratic, less economically liberal and less co-operative internationally”<sup>167</sup> after Putin’s 15-years regime.

This is why Gromadzki believes that a CES ‘from Lisbon to Vladivostok’ would provide the EaP states with the status of ‘transitional countries’ between two blocs, without the possibility to integrate into the EU.<sup>168</sup> This will further reduce EU’s *leverage* on Georgia and Moldova, which even in the current conditions remains modest. “Moscow wants to weaken the Union’s influence in Russia’s Neighbourhood and to ensure that the EU notions of rule of law do not spread too far.”<sup>169</sup>

Before accepting the creation of a CES ‘from Lisbon to Vladivostok’, the EU should consider the results it has obtained upon previous concessions it has made to Moscow. Azubalis states that as a result of EU’s consent to include Russia in G8 and WTO, Brussels got in return a war in Georgia and one in Ukraine, and the violation of WTO rules.<sup>170</sup> The EU should learn from these experiences. Before making any concessions to Russia, the EU needs to speed up reforms in EaP countries and grant membership prospects to the states that are aspiring to it, “otherwise the geo-political vacuum will be very soon filled by Russia”.<sup>171</sup> This is because only a mature democracy in Georgia and Moldova can inspire other countries in the region to choose the same path,<sup>172</sup> while allowing the EU to contribute to the promotion of “principles that have made the EU a beacon of prosperity and political freedom”.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Gromadzki, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

<sup>166</sup> Gromadzki, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

<sup>167</sup> Bond, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

<sup>168</sup> Gromadzki, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

<sup>169</sup> Bond, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

<sup>170</sup> A. Azubalis, “A United Eurasia from Lisbon to Vladivostok?”, *Euobserver*, 5 December 2014, retrieved on 21 April 2015, <https://euobserver.com/opinion/126790>.

<sup>171</sup> Azubalis, *op. cit.*

<sup>172</sup> Gromadzki, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

<sup>173</sup> Bond, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

## Conclusion and recommendations

The European continent is going through the most difficult period after the end of the Cold War. At the same time, the level of democracy in the world has been constantly decreasing during the past years, with more and more states heading towards authoritarian regimes. The EU and Russia are among the key actors who contributed each in its own way to these circumstances. The role of the EU and Russia is particularly important in the evolution of democracy in the countries of Eastern Europe, including Georgia and Moldova, which were the focus of this work.

Assuming that the democratization process as part of the ENP and EaP can be considered a threat to Russia and hence a 'destabilizing factor' for the EU, this paper tried to explain what changes can be made to EU's policies, and to what extent a cooperation between EU and Russia is possible in the process of designing the democratization policies in EaP countries.

The EU did not have a strong enough *leverage* to influence Georgia and Moldova in moving faster to the implementation of democratic reforms. Likewise, the EU has not imposed a strict *conditionality* to boost the democratization process. Instead, Brussels has given unjustified trust to politicians, which have slowed down the reforms, thereby losing the trust of citizens and undermining the image of the EU. Meanwhile, Russia has applied systematically all the possible pressuring tools to halt Georgia and Moldova from their advancement towards democratization.

In a context of continuous Russian pressures and certain weaknesses of EU's democratization policies, this paper advocates for changes in EU's strategies for Georgia and Moldova. The EU applied in Georgia and Moldova the same top-down approach of democratization as in the candidate states, except for leaving a certain room for manoeuvre. This conclusion validates the first hypothesis of the paper: Brussels needs to revisit this aspect and ensure a better inclusion of 'the others' in the process of designing cooperation policies. The EU should also apply a higher degree of differentiation between EaP countries, even between Georgia and Moldova, by adapting its policies to the situation of each of these states, especially during

the implementation of the AA/DCFTA. In the same context, it would be welcomed if the EU made its policies towards Georgia and Moldova more geo-political, less technically oriented and more focused on democratization. The flexibility of EU policies could be strengthened by the deployment of risk assessment tools, in order to be prepared to act quickly in various scenarios that might occur in such an instable region.

EU also needs to revitalize the instruments it uses for the implementation of democratization policies. Granting EU membership prospects to Georgia and Moldova could strengthen EU's *leverage*. But since this seems impossible in the current circumstances, the EU will have to make use of a more systematic application of the '*more for more*' principle. This principle has to be combined with objective benchmarking and assessment methods of the countries' democratization progress. Brussels has to apply a more strict *conditionality*, and to strengthen its cooperation with the civil society of the two countries. Last but not least, the EU needs to build an efficient communication strategy in order to better convey the achievements of its policies in partner countries, and thus informing citizens in those states about the benefits they may have following the implementation of reforms.

The cooperation between the EU and Russia in designing democratization policies in Georgia and Moldova is virtually impossible, as long as the two geo-political powers have different views on notions of stability, prosperity and democracy. At the same time, the possibility to establish an economic cooperation between the EU and Russia by creating a CES 'from Lisbon to Vladivostok' is becoming increasingly plausible. A radical way of implementing this economic cooperation seems to already take place in Ukraine, through the trilateral talks between the EU, Russia and Ukraine on the implementation of the country's DCFTA with the EU. Thus, Ukraine might be the first state in Eastern Europe that has a FTA with both the EU and the EaU. Although nothing yet indicates that a similar tactic could be applied in the case of Georgia and Moldova, this scenario cannot be permanently excluded. Even though such a scenario would have the

potential to reduce the confrontation between the EU and Russia in their common Neighbourhood, including Georgia and Moldova, this trade cooperation will however have a negative impact on the on-going democratic reforms in the two countries. What this cooperation could mean for the EU, in the words of the former European Commissioner for Enlargement, Štefan Füle, is a “slide back in the direction of real politics only”<sup>174</sup> a slide that the EU should not uphold, but might be obliged to do so, in the detriment of the democratic values that it cherishes.

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<sup>174</sup> “Europe’s East: The Way Forward for the Eastern Partnership and Conclusion”, *Atlantic Council*, Conference, 30 January 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gqWnjQWFlhw>.

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