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MA Thesis

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**Geopolitical Policy Dilemma for Eastern Partnership Countries:
Democracy and Security**

Tartu 2022

I have written this Master's thesis independently. All viewpoints of other authors, literary sources, and data from elsewhere used for writing this paper have been referenced.

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ABSTRACT

The Eastern Partnership (EaP) was established in 2009 to formalize the EU's interactions with Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova. The EU's goal was to strengthen cooperation, play a role to these states' economic, political, and social development, and enhance stability in the region. However, the Kremlin was concerned regarding EU initiatives to establish its own influence in the region in the CIS space: to deprive Russia of the status of the prioritized partner of some of the six aforementioned countries through the EaP and to create an alternative to Russia's integrationist strategies in the CIS.

The research study seeks to highlight geopolitical policy dilemma for Eastern Partnership Countries and underline policy tools employed by the regional actors over 6 program countries by attempting to identify an answer to the question that why the promotion of democracy which is an important element of EU's value-driven foreign policy triggers conflict of interest with Russia which leads to the security challenges for these 6 countries. Furthermore, it identifies the main motivations for the EU-Russia involvement in the region and clarifies different approaches to policymaking. The qualitative research method of data analysis, particularly document analysis is used in this research study to clarify where Russia's and the EU's objectives intersect. On the other hand, the research by analyzing the EaP countries individually examines the domestic implications from the perspectives of democratization and security challenges in which the regional actors directly or indirectly are playing important roles. The thesis is based on neoliberal theory reflecting on the research question. Particularly offensive and defensive realism explains the appropriate reaction to the security dilemma of the EaP countries. Furthermore, one of the key emphasis is placed on the issue of the security dilemma, how it demonstrates on the challenges in the EaP countries, and how it characterizes the geopolitical situation for the EaP. As a result, the research argues on the geopolitical policy dilemma of the EaP countries inferred from the conflict of interest between Russia and the EU.

Keywords: *Eastern Partnership, European Union, Russia, dilemma, security, democracy*

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List of abbreviations

EU European Union

EEU Eurasian Economic Union

UN United Nations

OSCE Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

WTO World Trade Organization

EaP Eastern Partnership

DCFTA Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area

CEPA Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement

AA Association Agreement

ENP European Neighborhood Policy

NGO Non-governmental organization

CU Customs Union

MFA Ministry of Foreign Affairs

CSTO Collective Security Treaty Organization

ESDP European Security and Defense Policy

CSF Civil Society Forum

NIT Nations In Transit index

ENI European Neighbourhood Instrument

FTA Free Trade Agreement

CSF Civil Society Forum

NATO The North Atlantic Treaty Organization

Chapter 1. Introduction

The Eastern Partnership (EaP) program was launched in 2009 with the specific goal of coordination with post-Soviet states. In this sense, the Soviet successor countries - Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan have been decided to approach, and certain partnership components have been agreed to sign. Simultaneously, Russia, by perceiving the EaP countries as part of its zone of influence, has attempted to undermine the partnership in different ways, including violent means. The region – referred to as the Eastern Neighborhood (from Brussels' standpoint) or the Near Abroad (from Moscow's perception) – became a mutual security concern for both regional superpowers-EU and Russia from the geopolitical perspective. The six regional states, particularly Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova among them became objectives for Brussels and Moscow's “power projection” (*H.Khan.2018. p.17*). This “power projection” illustrated itself in different means inferred from their perceptions, values, and traditions as international actors. The EU's involvement in the EaP countries, as well as an attempt to destabilize Russia's traditional great power potential in the geographical area, or a policy to improve stability in the region, is through the promotion of fundamental European values, which provides a framework for democratic institution-building in partner countries (*K.Valiyeva. 2016*). However, Russia's military and diplomatic resilience in the region has been demonstrated by a series of coercive measures implemented in recent years which triggers security implications for the states such as indirect military assistance for spearatist bodies¹.

The leading puzzle of the research is the policy dilemmas of the EaP countries which heavily impacted by their geopolitical position. This policy dilemma mainifests itself in between democratizaation and security for the EaP countries: the EU as a regional and integrationist actor is employing soft power by promoting its democracy in the EaP countries and this leads to the valuntary choice the program countries towards the EU itself. However, another competing regional actor, Russia, considering the region as its “spheare of influence” and interpreting the geopolitical position of the EaP countries as their “destiny” is employing

¹ <https://neweasterneurope.eu/2018/10/11/soft-power-vs-hard-power-diplomatic-struggle-western-world-east/>

hard power which primarily leads to the security challenges. In this challenging rivalry of the regional powers some of the program countries are portraying more Russian-oriented foreign policy to avoid potential military aggression and further security challenges while remainings are voluntarily illustrating more pro-European policy by representing more willingness for promotion of democracy despite challenging with the Russian aggression for their policy choice. Hence, regarding the particular case of EaP countries democratization and security challenges are presented as dilemma which requires a further study. However, it should be mentioned that the study is avoiding to claim the democratization is the only reason for triggering security challenges. Naturally, there are some other factors but in the light of ongoing processes in the EaP region it is necessary to highlight the role of the democratization.

Concerning the central concepts and research question, the democracy and security concepts have been a very significant factor in international relations, especially for the Eastern Partnership countries which are located in complex geopolitical position. Some of these countries suffer from a lack of democracy, while others maintain relatively sufficient level of democracy and suffer from security challenges. Therefore, the research, in terms of EaP countries, is attempting to examine the impact of democratization as an ongoing process on security challenges from the perspectives of the geopolitical challenges and seeks to find an answer to the research question: *why the EU's promotion of democracy triggers conflict of interest with Russia which leads to the security challenges for 6 EaP countries.*

In this thesis, democratization is the independent variable. In academic works of literature, democratization is often identified as the process through which a society becomes more open, participative, and less autocratic. Regarding the geopolitical location of EaP countries case, the EU is a significant geopolitical actor interested in promoting democracy and human rights, dictatorships fall apart. Therefore, reflecting on the particular case study of the thesis, the level of political rights indicator is brought to attention. To specify the variables, the dependent variable of the thesis is security which generally includes so broad aspects, but regarding the case study, it mainly encompasses traditional security challenges as most EaP countries suffer from traditional security challenges, especially the military dimension of the security concept which represents itself with violent conflicts and separatism. Moreover, the

involvement of any country in international relations and its geographical functions are heavily influenced by its geographical position. Therefore, the geopolitical position is the intervening variable as this research is focusing on a specific geopolitical case and by means of the intervening variable is explaining the causal linkage between IV and DV. The central question of this research is to respond to *why democratization can trigger security challenges for EaP countries regarding their geopolitical locations*. In this sense, the hypothesis is: *The EU promoted Eastern Partnership conditions such as democracy, rule of law and human rights in EaP countries can trigger security challenges because of their value-based geopolitical positions*. In order to test the hypothesis first, remarks made by officials from the EaP countries, as well as opinions expressed by the EU and Russia have been assessed. Second, available analytical reviews, statistical evidence, and online survey conducted among the citizens of EaP states were reviewed.

The thesis is to collecting the existing data and statistics, as well as information and datasets which are quickly accessible on the internet. As these data are important to assess the perceptions and seek a tangible answer to the objectives of the thesis, in light of all collected datasets the thesis will reach sufficient conclusions reflecting on the research question. Furthermore, existing datasets collected for the research purposes from reliable sources significantly help to identify the concepts of variables which accordingly enable to present a valid understanding of all three of them. Also, alongside with the existing datasets, the online survey was conducted specifically for the reflecting on information gap which addresses particular and clear questions related to variables of the study. On the other hand, before applying and comparing the data, in the first chapter comprehensible approach was applied for future readers to have clear background information.

Regarding the thesis structure, the first empirical chapter comes after the introduction which elaborates on the different perspectives and perceptions of regional actors: The EU and Russia. After presenting a comprehensive overview for the chapter I, an in-depth analysis of the theoretical framework, literature review, and methodology is speculated. The country-specific analysis is discussed in the chapter V which is followed by a strategic assessment of the Eastern Partnership Program and the future perspectives. Conclusions and a list of the references cited are also included.

Chapter 2. The Eastern Partnership from the different geopolitical perspectives: Opportunity for cooperation or a platform for confrontation

This chapter introduces the analyses of the EaP from different perspectives and provides the background information before engaging with further insights. The chapter examines the strategies of the European Union (EU) and Russia to the common neighborhood, as well as key aspects of their nature as geopolitical players. The discourse will come to an end by identifying the different strategies and geopolitical policy challenges for the member states inferred from perceptions of the regional actors.

2.1. The Eastern Partnership initiative of the EU as a new opportunity for the neighbours

"To the south, we have neighbours of Europe. To the east, we have European neighbours...they all have the right one day to apply [for EU membership],"²

Radoslaw Sikorski (Polish Prime Minister)

The EaP was initiated at the Prague summit on May 7, 2009, and that included the EU, the EU member countries, 3 Eastern European (Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine) and 3 South Caucasus partner countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia)³. According to the Prague declaration:

“The main goal of the Eastern Partnership is to create the necessary conditions to accelerate political association and further economic integration between the European Union and interested partner countries. The significant strengthening of EU policy with regard to the partner countries will be brought about through the development of a specific Eastern dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy. With this aim, the Eastern Partnership is seeking to support political and socio-economic reforms of the partner countries, facilitating approximation towards the European Union. This serves the shared commitment to stability,

² <https://euobserver.com/foreign/26211>

³ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eastern-partnership/#:~:text=The%20Eastern%20Partnership%20was%20launched,EU%20member%20states>

security and prosperity of the European Union, the partner countries and indeed the entire European continent.”⁴.

The first step was highlighted by visa facilitation and liberalization agreements that took effect for five EaP countries between 2011 and 2017, including visa-free travel for citizens of Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova. The visa facilitation and readmission agreement between Belarus and the EU entered into force in July 2020. These accords formed an important foundation for economic cooperation and contributed to a closer bond between the EU and the EaP nations' civil society organisations. The establishment of Association Agreements and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) agreements with Georgia (2016), Moldova (2016), and Ukraine (2016) was a further stage in the evolution of EU–EaP ties (2017). Due to Armenia's membership in the Eurasian Economic Union, an Association Agreement and a DCFTA have been drafted but not signed. However, a Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement entered into force temporarily in 2018. Negotiations on a Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement with Azerbaijan commenced in 2017 (M. Gahler.2021. p.16).

Table 1: Important EU agreements with EaP states⁵

	Armenia	Azerbaijan	Belarus	Georgia	Moldova	Ukraine
Visa facilitation	2014	2014	Visa facilitation/Readmission agreements signed in January 2020	2011	2011	2014
Visa liberalisation	-	-	-	2017	2014	2017
Association Agreement (AA)	2018 CEPA	2017	-	2016 (AA)	2016 (AA)	2017 (AA)

⁴ Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit Prague, 7 May 2009. (p.6):

https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/31797/2009_eap_declaration.pdf

⁵ [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2020/651966/EPRS_IDA\(2020\)651966_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2020/651966/EPRS_IDA(2020)651966_EN.pdf)

		Start of negotiations on CEPA				
DCFTA	-	-	-	2016	2016	2017

Source: Author, created based on the information provided by European Parliamentary

Research Service

Moreover, on 18 March 2020, the Commission and the High Representative adopted a new proposal for the EaP beyond 2020, based on the outcome of a consultation on the future of the EaP initiated by the Commission in May 2019 and approved by the European Council in June 2019. The consultation revealed that all the partner countries desire to personalize the cooperation to their specific needs and conditions. Whereas associated states desired to participate in joint initiatives associated with their AAs and DCFTAs, non-associated countries' objectives may have differentiated. The implementation of bilateral agreements would be advanced and supplemented by deeper sector-specific cooperation and exchange between interested partner countries under such a tailored approach. The accords, particularly the DCFTAs, highlight the EU's and EaP states' economic relations. The EU is not only the EaP countries' major or secondary trading partner, contributing for between 18.1 percent (Belarus) and 53.6 percent (Moldova) of their total trade, but it also gives financial assistance to its eastern neighbours⁶.

In relation to financial aid, Ukraine has obtained over €15 billion from the EU since 2014, with €4.4 billion awarded as macro-financial assistance, loans, and grants subject to certain circumstances, and €8.6 billion in the form of extra loans from the EU's financial institutions. Georgia and Moldova furthermore clearly benefit from macro-financial support: Georgia has obtained €137 million through three programs since 2009, and Moldova has received €190 million through two programs since 2010. Furthermore, under the COVID-19 crisis programme, these states were granted €100 million and €50 million in macro-financial support in November 2020, respectively. Aside from financial assistance, the EU also does provide economic support to the EaP countries through the EU4Business initiative, which

⁶ [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2020/651966/EPRS_IDA\(2020\)651966_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2020/651966/EPRS_IDA(2020)651966_EN.pdf)

funds small and medium business initiatives⁷. With a budget of €787.33 million in 2019, funding for 116 projects in EaP countries, ranging from 19 in Belarus to 47 in Georgia, assisting a total of 78,995 small and medium-sized enterprises, resulted in the creation of more than 117,000 jobs and the generation of €1.3 billion in additional income in the partner countries. The primary beneficiaries of this initiative were the DCFTA stakeholders, with over 50,000 jobs created in Ukraine, 31,000 in Georgia, and nearly 22,000 in Moldova. Each of the other three EaP countries added around 4,000 jobs (*M. Gahler.2021. p.16*). Moreover, the EU contributed €20 million to the employment of young people in EaP countries between 2017 and 2020 through its EU4Youth plan⁸. The financial assistance and economic cooperation described above are critical components of the EU's soft power within the EaP states. Nevertheless, Europe's economic success depends on its values and political traditions of preserving democracy, the rule of law, and human rights. Promoting and encouraging these principles in EaP states is thus a critical component of further improving relations and partnership with the EU

The EU's mandate to support democracy in its neighbours arises from Article 21 of the Treaty of the European Union (1992), which states that democracy, the rule of law, and the universality and indivisibility of human rights and fundamental freedoms are the guiding principles of the Union's external action.⁹ Since 2009, the EU's Eastern Partnership (EaP) has attempted to address these shortcomings by implementing new tools to increase the participation of non-governmental actors. The theme has been more bottom-up, locally driven democracy support. The EU's attempt to reach out beyond state institutions and tighten modes of engagement with non-state actors was one of the main innovative products of the Eastern Partnership. The EU unveiled a new concept of "partnership with society" in 2011, offering increased assistance to non-state actors in the neighbourhood. The EU has gradually become a more engaged and unified actor in the promotion of democracy in the Eastern neighbourhood as a result of the Eastern Partnership. The EU was most directly correlated in post-Soviet countries with state reforms and technical assistance for economic

⁷ <https://www.oecd-forum.org/posts/la-transformation-numerique-peut-soutenir-la-reprise-economique-des-pays-du-partenariat-oriental>

⁸ <https://www.euneighbours.eu/en/east/stay-informed/projects/eu4youth>

⁹ https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/30003/web_en_actionplanhumanrights.pdf

transformation. Following in the footsteps of Eastern enlargement, the European Neighbourhood Policy initially prioritized top-down Europeanisation. However, this strategy failed to gain traction. East European and South Caucasus post-soviet states, with little or no prior experience of democratic rule, were less advanced in democratic transformation than the majority of the EU's post-socialist newcomers. In the absence of an accession carrot, EU promises of a stake in the internal market and visa liberalization were insufficient inducements for undemocratic leaders to reform (*N. Shapavalova.2012. p.2-3*).

Following the logic of its enlargement policy, the EU supports reforms in partner countries. It selects ambitious sector specific reforms with its partners, articulates conditions primarily relating to legislation's alignment with EU standards, provides assistance for their implementation, and then scores the outcomes. When some of the following criteria are satisfied, EU assistance for democratic transformation in the EaP region works: EU-supported reform efforts are already a major concern of the government; good relations with the EU are important for the government for a number of reasons (e.g., the difficult economic and geopolitical situation), and it is willing to make some compromises in its relations with the EU; the circumstances are realistic; and reforms are backed by EU advice and synchronised international aid (*E.Kaca.2021. p.21*).

Promoting and fostering these values in EaP countries is thus a critical component of further strengthening ties and cooperation with the EU. In addition to the previously mentioned conditionality of macro-financial assistance programs, direct cooperation to improve governance is an essential component of EU soft power in EaP countries. Governance cooperation includes initiatives such as €2.4 million in election support for Armenia in 2018, 50 projects twinning EU member states' ministries and public institutions with those of Azerbaijan, and the training of 5,000 people working in Georgia's judicial segment. Furthermore, €300 million in assistance has been provided to help with Ukrainian reforms in the sectors of decentralisation, anti-corruption, upholding the rule of law, public administration reform, and public finance strategic planning. In 2019, an additional €8 million was allocated to a program in Moldova to prevent and combat corruption. Moreover, continuing dialogues such as the Armenian justice policy dialogue, the biannual dialogue of senior officials within the EU–Belarus Coordination, and the EU–Belarus Human Rights

Dialogue serve as additional tools to promote governance development in the EaP countries and bring the EU's soft power to endure (*M.Gahler.2021. p.17*).

One of the most significant EaP developments has been the increased participation of non-governmental actors in the EU's cooperation with neighboring countries. The European Commission proposed assisting civil society organizations (CSOs) in their development and establishing an EaP Civil Society Forum "to promote contacts among CSOs and facilitate their dialogue with public authorities" In the sense of reforming democratic institutions, the promise to increase civil society participation was also made. Besides that, the Commission proposed establishing fora for multilateral cooperation to increase contact between parliamentarians, local and regional governments, and business groups. EU democracy support channeled through civil society actors accounts for a small portion of EU aid to Eastern neighbors. Although EIDHR funding for CSOs in EaP countries has increased gradually from €3.3 million in 2007 to €5.7 million in 2012, it still focuses on a small number of issues. Grants are mostly given to well-established and highly professionalized non-governmental organizations (NGOs); civil society performers such as labor unions, business associations, and informal civic initiatives and social movements are excluded from EU funding. Only in Belarus, where the EU has had limited dialogue with the country's authorities, has assistance been extended to a wider range of actors, including political dissidents (*N. Shapavalova.2012. p.8*).

Regarding the value-driven policy in EaP states, the European Parliament also plays an important role in the context of political dialogue. Members of the European Parliament directly interact with their counterparts in EaP countries through the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly, which was established in 2011. Prior to 2011, the EP and the Parliaments of the EaP countries collaborated bilaterally through Parliamentary Cooperation Committees (PCCs) and delegations founded under Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs). After the multilateral EuroNest PA was established, the PCCs and delegations continued to exist alongside the EuroNest PA and were welcomed to collaborate with it. It was formed "to promote political association and further economic integration between the European Union and the EU's Eastern European partners". Meetings with MEPs and investigating parliamentary procedures were presumed to have a socialization effect on members of

parliament from partner countries. Despite the declaration of joint ownership of the project, the Assembly agenda was clearly driven by the EU. Evaluating the assembly's first three plenary sessions in 2013, it becomes clear that the resolutions adopted by the assembly are obviously inspired by EU perspectives on matters of concern (*B. VANDECASTEELE.2015. p.6-7*). Moreover, the European Parliament wields soft power through a lots of instruments that are particularly visible in Ukraine: it performed election observation missions in 2014, 2015, and 2019; it has been participated in an annual discussion with the Ukrainian parliament under the configuration of the Jean Monnet Dialogue since 2016; it awarded the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought to Oleg Sentsov in 2018; and it continues to support political situation through the Young Leadership Programme¹⁰.

During the first decade of the EaP, security issues were addressed indirectly through 'soft security' policies. Some of the above-mentioned projects would inevitably broaden their scope to include new issues. For example, the digital economy must manage cybersecurity risks and develop effective tools to respond to anti-social and malicious use of digital space. Partners, on the other hand, remind the EU of the importance of playing a direct and active role in conflict resolution. Regardless of whether some EaP countries have better relations with the Russian Federation, they are all sensitive to Russian hybrid threats to varying degrees, at least with the goal of detaining and preventing further approximation to the EU. Propaganda, particularly disinformation aimed at undermining the EU's image in former Soviet and EaP states, aims to influence Europeanisation and the positive development of relations between the referenced countries of the EU. Increasing the persistence of societies in the Eastern Neighbourhood, including those vulnerable to hybrid threats, has become a legitimate concern and strategic plan for the EU, as stated clearly in the EU Global Security Strategy 2016. Whereas the EU is developing its own strategy and forging an institutional response to the increase in hybrid threats to itself, it is critical that the EU's neighbors progress their own strategies and strengthen collaboration with relevant EU institutions and EU Member states (*K. Gogolashvili. 2019*). When it comes to the EU's role in conflict resolution in EaP countries, generally that is fragile. Notwithstanding the the EU's aspirations to

¹⁰ [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2020/651966/EPRS_IDA\(2020\)651966_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2020/651966/EPRS_IDA(2020)651966_EN.pdf)

enhance its global role, these objectives have not been discovered in conflict resolution in the Eastern Partnership. The Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit (as of November 2017) calls for active EU engagement in efforts to restore confidence in conflict zones, existing negotiation formats, including immediate EU existence. However, the declaration's practical dimension, a specific action plan titled "20 EaP deliverables for 2020," includes no straightforward goals and activities associated to conflict resolution in Eastern Partnership countries (*H.Maksak.2020. p.6*). In light of this, it is not unexpected that the outcomes of structured consultation and collaboration on the future of the EaP beyond 2020 clearly demonstrate the partner countries' request for the EU to pay closer attention to the problem of frozen and active conflicts in the region. However, recent developments showed the EU's willingness in conflict resolution. In November 2021, European Council President Charles Michel mediated between Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, respectively, and got them to consent to set up a direct connection of interaction between the different states' defense ministers as well as attend a bilateral meeting level on the margins of the EaP Summit. The EU also demonstrated a remarkable attitude toward Belarus: after withdrawing from the EaP in June 2021, Minsk was represented at the EaP summit by an empty chair; and high-level EU representatives met with opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya numerous times in the run-up to the summit.

In general, The EU's strategy has a positive impact on the EaP countries, as evidenced by perceptions toward the EU in the region according to the annual survey report EaP Regional Overview – 5th Wave (Spring 2020):

- 50 % of the population of the six EaP states (49 percent, down 3 percent since 2019) views the European Union (EU) positively, one-third (36 percent, up 2 percent), and one-tenth (11 percent, up 1 percent) views it negatively.
- The majority of the population in Moldova (61 percent), Ukraine (51 percent), and Georgia (49 percent) – the three signatories to the Association Agreement (AA) – remains pro-EU. As a result of the Velvet Revolution, perceptions toward the EU are primarily positive (53 percent) in Armenia, though their effects are gradually fading (down 9 percent since 2019). In Azerbaijan (44 percent), the situation is mostly stable,

but citizens are becoming more aware of the EU every year (only 12 percent of citizens have never heard of the EU, a 7 percent decrease since 2017). In Belarus, neutrality is still the most prevalent attitude (46 percent), accompanied by a 'fair' appreciation (28 percent).

- The EU is the most trusted foreign institution, and the majority of EaP citizens trust it alone (60 percent). Trust is higher in Georgia (69 percent), Ukraine (66 percent), Moldova (63 percent), and Armenia (60 percent), and lower in Belarus (45 percent) and Azerbaijan (41%), where a lack of familiarity with the role of the EU and other foreign actors undermines trust. The two member countries with the highest levels of trust in the EAEU were Belarus (39%), and Armenia (33%)¹¹

2.2 Russian standpoint of the Eastern Partnership

"We are accused of having spheres of influence. But what is the Eastern Partnership, if not an attempt to extend the EU's sphere of influence,..."¹²

Sergei Lavrov (Russian Foreign Minister)

The implementation of the EaP has raised a number of serious concerns in Moscow. If the policy's requirements are achieved, the Russian Federation is supposed to suffer significant consequences. The most significant of these is the complexity of integration between the Russian Federation and the EaP states. This is because the EaP is regarded as impeding those states' closer relations with the Russian Federation; evidently, the Moscow believes the EaP is designed to undermine such cooperation entirely. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia has regarded post-Soviet region as its "near abroad," a component of the grand Eurasian dream in which Russia maintains the geopolitical key. Since 1991, the most of of post-Soviet countries have been members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), also known as the Russian Commonwealth. The establishment of the Eurasian Union in 2015,

¹¹ EU Neighbor east annual survey report. 5th wave.
2020:https://www.euneighbours.eu/sites/default/files/publications/2020-06/EUNEIGHBOURS_east_AS2020report_EaP_OVERVIEW.pdf

¹² <https://euobserver.com/foreign/27827>

with Russia, Kazakhstan, and Belarus as founding members, was another step toward realizing that aspiration. With Vladimir Putin in charge in Moscow, the imperialist viewpoint became more predominant. Proclaiming "Geography as a destiny," Putin seemed calculated from the start to increase Russia's engagement in the "near abroad." Following the publication of the EU report on 'Wider Europe' (2003), Russian policymakers and the intellectual elite intensely debated the feasibility of Russian participation in the wider Europe action plan, as well as the compatibility of the EU-led and Russian-led integration models in post-Soviet region (*H.Khan.2018. p.24-25*). The successive EU-Russia Summit clearly illustrated the inconsistencies, with Russia agreeing to cooperate in several aspects but rejecting the idea of being "just a partner" in the ENP, which effectively demonstrates the EU's "normative hegemony".

On the other hand, the EaP has posed a theoretical challenge to Russian foreign policy thinking. The EaP, according to geopoliticians and ideological realists (the current dominant schools in both the Russian academic community and among decision-makers), is an extension of power politics but through different (non-military/economic) implies. In this case, the EU/West employs 'soft' rather than 'hard' power. According to these schools of thought, the main geopolitical goal of the EaP is to marginalize Moscow in this part of the post-Soviet area, or even to pressure Russia out of its traditional circle of influence entirely (*B.Mikhailenko. 2019*). According to the other school of thought, social constructivism, the EaP is an example of securitization on both parties. The EU oversimplifies Russia's 'imperialist' aspirations in post-Soviet space, as well as Moscow's proclivity to employ so-called 'energy weapons.' Russia securitizes 'regular' European/Eurasian integration dilemmas by viewing them as 'soft' security risks. The EaP, according to constructivists, has heightened debate on identity issues in all six countries involved as well as Russia. They think that the vast majority of EaP partner countries chose a European identity, whereas Russia asserts a Eurasian identity and attempts to make it appealing to post-Soviet states through various initiatives including such Customs Union and Eurasian Union (*P.Bayor.2013*). Globalists and Liberals (both marginal and divisive groups) presume that the EaP, as a European integrationist endeavor in spirit, will aid in the creation of a more flourishing and safe EU

neighborhood. It will benefit the six partner countries because the EaP promotes social economic, political, and administrative reform agenda in these post-Soviet countries while also making preparations association and DCFTA agreement with the European union(A.Bibnev.2018. p.16). They also trust that it could serve as a new venue for EU-Russia cooperation on the creation of common areas in Europe. According to them, the current EU-Russia troubles with the EaP are the result of misconceptions and misinterpretations rather than a fundamental disconnect of interests. They are resolute that the EaP should achieve a balance of objectives rather than a balance of forces.

Several experts believe that in the post-Cold War period, key international players prefer to use'soft' rather than 'hard' power. Economic, socio-cultural, institutional, and legal tools, according to proponents of the'soft power' principle, are far more effective than military strength or direct political interference. Hard power became an exceptional tool and a last resort in many nations' foreign relations, instead of a regular practice. According to the concept's author, Joseph Nye,'soft' power is first and foremost an ability to be attractive. A country's soft' power is mainly based on three assets: "its culture (in places where it is appealing to others), its political principles (when they are lived up to at home and abroad), and its foreign policy decisions (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral standing)" (T.Gomart. 2010. p.19). There are also economic aspects to'soft' power, even if they can take responsibilities as components for 'hard' power. The Russian political class claims that the country has enormous 'soft power' potential, but that it is being misapplied or used ineffectively.

Looking to move from the scholar to the practitioner level, it should be mentioned that the EaP was met with cautiousness and skepticism by Moscow because it was unclear about the true EaP's goals: whether the EU is serious about making its new neighborhood a safe and stable place, or whether it is a form of geostrategic drive to diminish Russia's roles in the region. The EaP is a particularly sensitive issue for Moscow because the country has fundamental interests in the region ranging from strategic-political to economic

From the Russian standpoint, the following major EaP intentions are problematic:

- The goal of improving free trade between the EaP countries and the European Union is seen as potentially conflicting with the goal of Russian strategy of defining free trade or, even further, achieving economic union with the region's countries. (*E.Korosteleva.2016*). This is seen as inconsistent with the regulations and goals of the agreements creating a Union State of Belarus and the Russian Federation, as well as the requirements of the trilateral agreement between Belarus, Kazakhstan, and the Russian Federation designed to establish a customs union accompanied by closer integration
- Moscow is perplexed by some of the EaP states' motivations. While Georgia and Ukraine have made it clear that they intend to join Western security and economic institutions (EU and NATO), Belarus and Armenia are Russia's strategic allies who rely on Moscow for economic and military support. Azerbaijan also has significant economic stakes in Russia-Azerbaijan cooperation. Moscow is perplexed as to why these countries chose a pro-EU stance in the face of Brussels' inability to provide substantial financial assistance or other benefits (*Y.Gholizade.2018. p.47*). On the contrary, shortly after the Prague summit, the EU sent a clear message to partner countries that the EaP is not a route to EU membership.
- The proposal to include regulation of cooperation in association agreements with eastern partners, especially the possibility of a quick conclusion of dialogue about Ukraine and Moldova's membership in the Energy Community, and the European Union's willingness to support full integration of Ukraine's energy market into the EU energy market, are seen as plausibly not only altering, but also, the existing political and legal paradigms of Russian-Ukrainian and, to a lesser extent, Russian-Moldovan cooperation in the energy sector are being profoundly undermined¹³.
- Numerous Russian specialists think that the major EU interest in the matter of the EaP is the construction of alternative gas and oil pipelines that bypass Russia (such as Nabucco or White Stream). Georgia and Ukraine are viewed as essential transit points, while Azerbaijan can fulfill as both a supplier of and a transit point for energy

¹³ <http://www.nouvelle-europe.eu/en/moldova-and-ukraine-east-west-increased-implementation-european-norms-more-secure-eastern-energy>

supplies(Y.Gholizade.2018). Particularly, Russian experts, on the other hand, presume that these strategies are unrealistic and that any new energy transfer strategies that do not include Russia are guaranteed to fail.

- Even though the Eastern Partnership's guarantee of increased mobility (not least increased mobility of people employed) remains ambiguous, the potential liberalization of visa policy and free movement of people between the European Union and its eastern neighbors is seen as carrying a risk, in the long run, that could aggravate free movement of people between the Russian Federation and the EU's partner states, with a similar effect to that which happened during the Cold War¹⁴.

Moscow does not formally oppose the negotiating process of a more enhanced trade policy between the European Union and the EaP states. Notwithstanding, it sees a potential problem arising from the pursuit of the free trade purpose with Russia's strategy aim of implementing free trade or even an economic community with the region's countries. As a result, official Russian policy suggests that, while going to negotiate the relevant trade regimes, the EaP countries should not be forced to choose between free trade with the EU and free trade with Russia. Against this backdrop, the Russian authorities openly denounced a remark by former External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero Waldner, who ruled out Ukraine being a partner to free trade deals with both the EU and the Russian Federation at the same time (E.Klitsunoy.2009). The European Union, according to Moscow, is expected to respect the integration projects involving Eastern European and South Caucasian states when developing cooperation with them. The EU, in specific, is not supposed to seek to fragment Russia's integration policy toward the former Soviet republics. In this circumstance, the definition of integration can be perceived broadly to include the CIS of eleven states, or tightly to include projects such as the Union State of Belarus and Russia, the Eurasian Economic Community (which includes one state from the shared neighborhood – Belarus), or the Single Economic Space. Whether or not such a principle has ever been mentioned between the Russian Federation and the European Union, and whether or not there has been any kind of of implicit

¹⁴ <https://www.frstrategie.org/publications/notes/politique-partenariat-oriental-union-europeenne-dix-ans-apres-2020>

or explicit accord on the issue between them, Moscow continues on the assumption that the European Union has never raised explicit concerns to the claims made above. Now, as the Eastern Partnership seems to go beyond that comprehension, Moscow reminds Brussels that its approach should comply to "the previous agreement between Russia and the European Union to avoid any collision between integration processes evolving under the aegis of the EU and in the post-Soviet space" (*G.Diesen.2015*). This prospective "competition" between the European Union and the Russian Federation for EaP "integration" remains limited to a single country in the region – Belarus. And, in the short term, there does not appear to be any acute clash of policies between the European Union and the Russian Federation.

As it is discussed earlier, The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) was never designed to be a geopolitical initiative. Although centered on a 'special relationship,' it was enshrined in the agreements as a policy framework dedicated to promoting European norms and values. Following a brief period of relative cooperation between the EU and Russia, the latter turned it down an invite to participate the ENP in 2003, introducing in a period in which divergences in the EU's and Russia's values, interests, and world views became increasingly apparent, particularly in relation to the common neighbourhood. By the time the EaP was established in 2009 as a supplemental, more ambitious multilateral format for the Eastern partnership, Russia's refusal of the EaP region's 'westernisation' had already been represented in the country's military behavior in Georgia, which were accompanied by military intervention in Donbas and Crimea in 2014. The EU modified the ENP in 2015 to effectively reach the level of aspirations of EaP countries to deepen partnerships, as well as to adapt the policy to the increasingly tense geopolitical sense. Aside from the increased significance of geopolitics, the EU had discovered that "neighboring countries themselves have proven to be less inclined to adhere to EU norms than previously thought." While maintaining a discussion of democracy and the promotion of good governance, the balance in the EU's actual EaP policy initiatives changed from a normative to a more opportunistic and transactional strategy, for which the EU has obtained much critiques. According to some scholars, the EU 'once again [...] shied away from holding incumbent eastern neighbourhood regimes fully accountable

for half-hearted, sluggish, or even entirely absent political and judicial reforms, state capture, and misuse of state resources...' in 2019 (*B.Deen.2021. p. 6*)

Another critical stance of Russia is related to the the key principals of EaP - the multilateral dimension. In other words, the EaP is currently built on two pillars: a multilateral framework and deeper bilateral cooperation with the EU. The EaP's multilateral path addresses issues like good governance, economic cooperation, energy security, mobility, and people-to-people contacts. Aside from the governmental level, cooperation occurs at the civil society and parliamentary levels through the EaP Civil Society Forum and the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly. Moscow is generally skeptical of any form of multilateralism proposed by the European Union. According to Moscow, no substantial consolidation is expected, either within the group of eastern neighbors or between this group and the European Union. However, if this expectation was incorrect and the multilateral dimension of the Eastern Partnership shows progress, the concerns expressed in Moscow is significantly boosted rather than mitigated. To begin with arguments, the group of eastern neighbors is very diverse in terms of political and economic structures, as well as regulatory frameworks that have evolved over the last two decades. As a result, the individual countries of the group's underpinning interests, aspirations, and ambitions for cooperation with the European Union (and the Russian Federation) diverge more than they combine. This does not rule out the possibility that at least some members of the group will express an interest in collaborating with the European Union on specific projects, such as infrastructure development or energy cooperation (*E.Klitsunoy.2009. p.22-23*). Consequently, regardless of the scope of the action plan of the multilateral dialogues, progress in the multilateral framework of cooperation with the EU is anticipated to stay narrow. Second, the six EaP countries represent a quite fragmented number of countries, and their capacity to grow a viable framework for regional cooperation should not be claimed. The EaP framework focuses on two distinct regions with limited prospects and willingness for regional cooperation: Eastern Europe (Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine) and the South Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia). Thus, cooperation was limited to political consultation based on proclaimed shared interests.

On the other hand, when it comes to the frozen conflicts as the security threads in EaP countries, until the war in Georgia in August 2008, Russia's overall policy toward the settlement of protracted conflicts in Transnistria (Republic of Moldova), Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Georgia), and Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan) was founded on the presumption that those conflicts were to be managed within the political frameworks defined in the 1990s, with the Russian Federation playing a central role in most instances. This concept was applied to both peacekeeping missions (Moldova and Georgia on the basis of contracts made in 1992 and 1994), as well as the political frameworks founded to address outstanding issues of conflict resolution, such as confidence-building, refugee return, economic reconstruction, and the definition of the status of the respective separatist entities in each of the countries involved (*M.Klein.2019*). Any engagement of the European Union in resolving conflict in the common neighbourhood was not expected to put those Russia-led peacekeeping operations or bargaining formats in risk. This demand did not preclude Russia and the EU from cooperating. However, the terms of such cooperation were not intended to call into question Moscow's primary importance. From the EU side in order to engage with security issues Special Representatives have been appointed in the South Caucasus and Transnistria since the implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy. Their functional involvement, however, was limited to monitoring the situation, maintaining close communication channels with all parties in dispute, and offering guidance on decisions made within the ESDP (European Security and Defense Policy) platform. The European Union regarded launching an ESDP mission in Moldova in 2004, but decided against it.¹⁵ Thus, until the 2008 Georgia war, the European Union never questioned Russia's role in long-term conflict management in the shared neighborhood.

Due to the obvious Eastern Partners' relations with Russia, the security dynamics in the post-Soviet space are important. All six countries are dealing with complex political, economic, and social processes that will inevitably have an impact on Russia's security. Hence, Russia's role as a mediator in the region is firmly rooted in shared security interests. In turn, the European Union lacks a pragmatic and visionary approach to resolving regional security

¹⁵ <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/caucasus/conflict-resolution-south-caucasus-eu-s-role>

challenges. Brussels does not play active role in conflict resolution and thus lacks the necessary techniques to intervene in the peace process, instead focusing on confidence-building pursuits. These constraints have called into question the Eastern Partnership's adequacy in terms of geopolitical security challenges. The dilemma that the European Union faces in advancing a more efficient and coordinated policy is not only external, but also internal, as member states continue to hold comparatively divergent views on the reasoning, significance, and ultimate goal of the Eastern Partnership¹⁶. This situation severely limits the European Union's influence in its eastern neighborhood and severely limits Brussels' ability to formulate a meaningful policy to address security challenges

Chapter 3. Theoretical Framework and Literature

A literature review on the Eastern Partnership Program revealed that from the perspectives of the research that has been conducted, has attempted to understand why within the framework of the EaP promotion of democracy triggers security challenges, is generally ineffectively structured. Hence, there is very poor literature concerning 6 EaP countries bringing together the democracy and security concepts and assessing them from the perspectives of geopolitics. A variety of arguments and conclusions based on proper reasoning can be found in the literature. However, an examination of the literature uncovers areas of disagreement and raises problems that require further investigation. Generally, in analyzing the role of the EaP, there are two extreme positions. One group of scholars (mostly from the EU countries and EaP partners) try to ensure the goals of EaP from the EU's perspectives and trust that Moscow's stance toward the Eastern Partnership is defined by post-imperial or neo-imperial reasoning which ultimately confronts the promotion of EU's values. According to them, the Russian authority notices the EaP primarily as a Brussels expansionism on Russia's traditional sphere of influence and, as a result, will never admit the project positively. The other group of scientists (mostly from Russia) tends to justify or

¹⁶ <https://neweasterneurope.eu/2020/01/30/how-the-eu-could-help-re-energise-peace-processes-in-the-eastern-partnership/>

explain Moscow's skepticism and negativism toward the EaP and the manner in which the EU has planned to implement this policy agenda. According to these scholars, Brussels initiated the EaP with no regard for Russia's strategic interests in the post-Soviet space.

Furthermore, there are few scholarly works that produce a comprehensive and balanced examination of the topic. Some publications attempt to investigate the matter from a historical context, with the goal of studying the EaP's emergence and evolution. Simultaneously, from the perspectives of 6 EaP countries, there are country-specific separate studies dedicated to democracy or security challenges. It should also be mentioned that research literature on the policy dilemma for Eastern Partnership countries regarding the EU-Russian interests is still lacking - the EaP discussion is mostly overtaken by political statements, and the substance of this discourse is mostly covered in mass media publications rather than academic scientific publications. As a result, it is critical to put the ongoing EaP debate on more rational and less sentimental foundations.

During the investigation of the problem, I came across a research gap. In terms of the subject, I have not come across produced many books, research papers, or scholarly publications. Specifically, a conflict of interests between Russia and the EU over the EaP countries, which would allow us to broaden the discussion and examine many perspectives on the issue. Despite these drawbacks, qualitative research methods produce information that is genuine and reliable, enriching research findings.

This study extends the literature on EU enlargement and, more particularly, the theoretical literature on EaP by bringing together two different concepts: democracy and security for 6 different countries: Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, from the perspectives of the geopolitics. On the other hand, a review of the literature on the subject identified that several scholars found it difficult to investigate the EaP. This Master's thesis examines using the International Relations Theory of Neorealism, which is the most effective at clarifying the international security dynamics,

The concept introduced here best explains the circumstances in the Eastern Partnership Countries, particularly from the perspectives of two overarching reasons:

- 1) Theory of Neorealism is an international relations theory that highlights the importance of power politics in international affairs
- 2) Perceives competition and conflict as permanent characteristics of powers but regards limited opportunities for reconciliation (*R. Jervis. 1999*)

It is also relevant to the research problem because it discusses the presence of the conflict of interest, which leads to a security dilemma for 6 EaP countries inferred from the geopolitical position in which power (soft/hard) is the primary significant contributing factor in promoting interest from the perspectives of regional role players. Consequently, the discussion can be analyzed using offensive and defensive methods presented by leading neorealist theorists Kenneth Waltz and John Mearsheimer, as well as the notion of soft and hard power politics characterized by Joseph Nye and Robert Keohane. It aids in characterizing the distinctions between the European Union's and the Russian Federation's policies. The EU has been portrayed as a soft power player, employing soft techniques of impact such as persuasive communication, attraction, and motivation, whereas Russia continues to follow a hard power cable conveyed by military-economic capabilities and is competitive with the EU. Consequently, competition over the neighbourhood between the EU and Russia triggers a significant security dilemma for EaP countries.

3.1 Security Dilemma as a consideration of policymaking for EaP countries

The security dilemma in international relations theory, presented by Herz and Butterfield, characterizes the challenges that two parties confront in accomplishing coordination and reconciliation. In recent years, discourse over the scope and intensity of the security dilemma has re-emerged among various factions of realist scholars. Kenneth Waltz claims that the presence of anarchy and the absence of national government are the significant determinants in the disagreement. Therefore, security dilemmas arise between the actors. Because of the uncertainty, the state must be always violent, and the use of coercion is a manner of protecting supreme interests. Consequently, all countries should be prepared to act, particularly those with powerful neighbours. It occurs because of the natural state of conflict. It implies that conflict is unavoidable, but it is up to each state to decide when and where to use power. The

main motivation for the inevitability of conflict is the absence of a central government (*C. Glaser.1997*). Referring to this rationale, the EU's effort to establish democracy in its neighbourhood diminishes Russia's security. If the main motivation for using coercion is uncertainty, the power is the mechanism of protecting supreme interests, it does not rule out direct conflict between the EU and Russia over the region countries. As a direct consequence, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia, Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine should be concerned and prepared for the use of power by a stronger regional hegemon, such as Russia, as has already occurred. However, it is debatable how much all those smaller countries are capable of defending themselves unilaterally, without the assistance of other international powers or powers to maintain capabilities.

The security dilemma is a critical factor in the relationship between the EU and Russia. To begin with, both of regional actors prefer confrontation to cooperation due to mutual uncertainty. The distinction is that there is no immediate military confrontation between those two powers (as the EU does not have its own armed forces), but they compete in political and economic terms. Furthermore, they focus on adequate changes in strategies toward the countries mentioned, which are heavily reliant on each other's motion. For instance, the EU's initiatives such as ENP or EaP, as well as the ability to liberalize visas, have accompanied Russia's visa liberalisation for those states and the formation of the Eurasian Economic Community. However, when Russia's strategic interests are challenged by the EU or another actor, it applies to military means. Russia's direct involvement in the frozen conflicts in Moldova, Georgia, Azerbaijan, and, finally, Ukraine are the clearest illustration of Russia's power exhibition and desire for regional supremacy.

Russia's engagement in the region can be clarified by the security dilemma, which implies that the greatest defensive conduct can also be considered a good offensive technique. Countries, on the other hand, must evaluate additional reactive reactions from their adversaries and weigh actual gain against the cost of the threat of aggressive behaviour. In this particular case, on the one hand, Russia's hostile action has advanced its impact in its "Near Abroad" while isolating regional countries from the Euro-Atlantic trajectory; on the

other contrary, Russia has ended up losing its prestige and image in the international arena by seeking an aggressive policy in EaP countries.

3.2 Theoretical explanation of the EU-Russia rivalry: Offensive and Defensive Realism

The security dilemma can be adequately addressed by distinguishing between offensive and defensive techniques pursued by the actors. This also makes it easier to distinguish between soft and hard power as the EU and Russia's primary strategic instruments. Significant contrasts in their objectives and behaviours lead to misconceptions and confrontation.

Neorealism, on the other hand, contends that state action is determined by the global system. As a result, the international system's structure can clarify how actors react in the way they do. One of the main proponents of offensive realism, Mearsheimer believes that actors are confused of each other's motives. Therefore, they strive to maximize their control while ensuring their existence. If the actor is powerful, dominant, and hegemonic, it creates a secure environment and the ability to defend itself against a competitor. Furthermore, he emphasizes that the great powers have motivate toward one another; even the main motivation for survival leads them to assume offensively. He claims no single actor can be certain of its own ultimate ability to feel secure while not knowing the relative power of the opponents. As a result, in anarchy, actors are never convinced how much power they need to feel secure, forcing them to compete indefinitely (*J. Mearsheimer.2019*). Inferred from above-mentioned discourse, lack of certainty is a determining factor between Russia and the EU, impeding cooperation. As a result, the EU's behaviour is in response to Russia's opposite response, which is a reflective behaviour to feel secure. This has evidenced itself via policy measures and military involvement on Russia's part. They vary in terms of functionalities, however neither party knows how much power is required to confront the opposing player. The EU does not have military power, whereas Russia does. Russia's offensive confrontation prompts the EU to respond defensively by employing soft power.

Mearsheimer acknowledges with Kenneth Waltz on bipolarity, claiming that bipolarity decreases the likelihood of conflict between great powers because two dominant powers can

easily control and manage each other's behaviours (*P. Toft. 2005*). Thus, EaP member countries must choose between approaches: bandwagon or balance. Belarus and Armenia, along with de facto republics, are on the Russian Federation's bandwagon, while Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine seek to balance Russia through integration into the European Union, and Azerbaijan remains neutral. On the one hand, Russia employs a hard power strategy and aggressively seeks to monopolise the region by trying to eliminate the EU's presence. On the other hand, the EU's soft power in the EaP which focuses on driving Russia out of the region and destabilize its dominance in the area, allowing the EU to meet its own requirements such as democracy.

3.3 Geopolitical dilemma for EaP states: balance of power and bandwagon

The circumstance in which the proportion of competences and power resources between two actors is nearly equivalent is referred to as the balance of power. It implies they can compromise each other's functionality while also controlling behaviours. Aside from that, becoming a great power balancer is not the only means to guarantee one's own security. The state can take a different path and join the dominant party on the bandwagon. On the one hand, by joining the bandwagon, the weaker state ensures its security by making alliances with the stronger state. According to Waltz, "bandwagon" is an endeavour by one party (particularly a smaller one) to gain an advantage or reduce the likelihood of failing by supporting with the dominant party. The actor who likes to join the bandwagon is motivated by absolute benefit, whereas the balancing party is motivated by relative gain and finds cooperation challenging (*D. Nexon.2009. p.335*). Inferred from neorealist reasoning, the EU and Russia are balancing each other's behaviours and capacities in the area, while Armenia, Belarus and de facto republics are relying on Russia's bandwagon and benefiting from its patronage. However, bandwagoning is dangerous due to the unpredictability of future intentions of dominant power. Furthermore, the theory asserts that the actors must accumulate the necessary resources in order to achieve their objectives. These tools include military and economic capacities, as well as the acquisition of other types of power that aid in the establishment of hegemony (*R. Keohane. 1988*). However, according to Mearsheimer the division of capabilities, on the other hand, changes across time as the power balance shifts

(*J. Mearsheimer.2019*). From the logic, the power balance is changing, with superpowers gaining and losing dominant influence. As a result, Russia's impact over the region is likely to weaken, allowing another regional power to assume the lead, which would be beneficial to the region.

3.4 The Democratization and War Theory as an explanation of domestic factors

There is a broad variety of approaches on the relationship between security challenges and democratization; some researchers find no relationship between the democratic transitions and violent conflicts (Hoeffler and Collier for example), while others see clear links between both (Mansfield and Snyder).

Mansfield and Snyder argue in their much-discussed argument that during democratic transitions, states are more confrontational and more prone to engage in violence than during times of no change and relative stability. According to Mansfield and Snyder, the fundamental reason for this is that the country's rulers feel threatened by the change since they may lose their prior entitlements, such as resources and power. The danger forces the elites and "other social groupings" to resort to violence to reclaim power and the established order (*Mansfield and Snyder 2005. p. 24*)

Some scientists who argue for a relationship between security challenges and democracy believe that democratization causes or escalates the likelihood of conflicts. Conflicts, according to other researchers with similar viewpoints, are important for the commencement of democratic processes. When mature, democracy is frequently seen as the most peaceful and ideal political structure, especially by Western scholars.

Despite the Democratization and War theory has been condemned for failing to distinguish between internal and exterior conflicts (*R. Wolf.1995*) it is necessary to have a comprehensive overview of the thesis both from the perspectives of both theories. Neoliberal theory from the perspectives of system-level factors helps us to understand the logic of security challenges emerging from geopolitical rivalry. At the same time, the perspectives of the Democratization

and War theory significantly plays a role to comprehend the domestic-level factors and finally, this combination enables us a logical base to present our hypothesis.

Chapter 4. Methodology

The qualitative method of data analysis is employed in this master's thesis, which offers us a wider understanding of the topic and allows us to address essential research questions to reach accurate conclusions. Additionally, a qualitative analysis is necessary since there is no existing evidence on the relationship between democracy and security challenges in the literature on EaP countries. The qualitative data collection and analysis are based on primary and secondary channels, with many of the material gathered via the internet according to the actor-specific criteria which allow to gather information and make judgments about their behaviour in relation to the outcomes. Also, there are a few critical issues related to the qualitative method of data analysis that is considerably regarded. For example, when doing textual analysis on many texts and interpreting their meaning, it is critical to be aware of the circumstances in which the texts are produced and the audience for whom they are targeted. Secondly, it is also essential to mention that while reading a large number of texts, the interpretation is frequently impacted by the reader's prior knowledge of the discourse and context in which the texts are presented.

The existing datasets collected for the research purposes from reliable sources significantly help to identify the concepts of variables which accordingly enable to present a valid understanding of all three of them. Alongside with the existing datasets, the online survey was conducted specifically for the reflecting on information gap which addresses particular and clear questions related to variables of the study. Also, the online survey conducted among the citizens of EaP countries was according to the purposive/judgemental sampling strategy. Moreover, various types of credible existing literature are used in this research: publications, academic papers, official websites, and various studies. For the credibility and objectivity of the data, the literature is drawn from various authors' sources. There is a summary of previous literature on the subject. Thereby, the research's reliability increases with the assistance of

comparison and a variety of viewpoints, justifications, and recommendations. Indeed, it provides the research purpose, and the conclusions are related to previous studies, identifying areas of dispute, raising questions, and identifying areas that require further development. It is also important to highlight that regarding the techniques of the qualitative data analysis, mainly the narrative analysis within the timeframe of the study will be employed as it enables the researcher to analyse the studied phenomenon from different sources (including primary and secondary sources)

In the theoretical chapter elaborated above the preliminary connections were formulated and presented through the different theoretical approaches. On the other hand, the central question of this research is to respond to why the promotion of democracy which is an important element of EU's value-driven foreign policy triggers conflict of interest with Russia which leads to the security challenges for these 6 countries. In this sense, the hypothesis is:

The EU promoted Eastern Partnership conditions such as democracy, rule of law and human rights in EaP countries can trigger security challenges because of their value based geopolitical positions.



Concerning the logical connection and rationale of the variables it is necessary to highlight that our intervening variable first of all plays an important role and specifies the case which avoids generally claiming “democracy leads to security challenges”. Moreover, as it is presented in the research puzzle, Russia considering the geopolitical position of EaP countries as their “destiny” triggers security situation in the region as a response to EU’s democracy promotion. Hence, it is rationale to argue that there is logical connection between variables and the hypothesis presented here is plausible.

In order to test the hypothesis first, remarks made by officials from the EaP countries, as well as positions expressed by the EU and Russia, in this respect, have been assessed separately

as a hypothesis expresses a presumption about a relationship between two variables in a manner that can be evaluated with empirical data, including “a cause-effect statements”.

There are also different literature, theory and the perception of the process. First of in order to understand the process as a whole, especially the interest of the EU side, theories of democratic transition and democracy helps us as the theories of democratic transitions are primarily concerned with domestic political and economic considerations. On the other hand, primary and actual concepts of the IR security dilemma, effective analysis through offensive and defensive methods supplied by prominent neorealist theorists established a broad overview of these countries and their choice, especially from the perspectives of geopolitics. Particularly regarding the perspectives of offensive and defensive realism refers to efforts to criticize or critically evaluate hegemonic power. In other words, it is a conflict and/or resistance to the current status quo and its legitimation in politics which is completely applicable to the study. Simultaneously, concerning the security dilemma this is “a situation in which actions taken by a state to increase its own security cause reactions from other states” which provided a tool to properly investigate the policy-making process and the origins of policy dilemma of the 6 partnership countries (*A. Wivel.2011*)

In this paragraph, considerable detail the methodological frameworks for the current analysis, including analysis instruments, case selection, operationalization, data sources, and methods of data analysis is described.

4.1. Research design and data collection

When it comes to the research design of this thesis, the choice of cases should be regarded a foundation in the process of designing a small-N comparative case study. The N should be minimal enough to allow the researcher to become familiar with each example. Hence, the current thesis has been selected a small-N case study which is guided essentially by the research question, since there are well-defined cases to investigate in this thesis - 6 members of EaP countries. The study brings together all the EaP countries due to the following reasons:

- a) Regarding the variables of the study, all of the EaP countries have either security challenges or democratic shortcomings despite with the different degrees the EU has been interested in promoting democracy by including them within the EaP
- b) As the study relies on the comparative research, it is necessary to include all of the program countries to reach more tangible outcomes by analysing the different pathways of the countries within the timeframe of the study

Accordingly, the most similar system design (MSSD) appears to be the most logical choice when conducting research cases within EaP members. This design is based on John S. Mill's difference method, which requires the researcher to look for differences among similar countries in the study. The selection of similar states neutralizes some distinctions while emphasizing others, which may explain differences in results. Particularly regarding the MSSD “is based on a belief that a number of theoretically significant differences will be found among similar systems and that these differences can be used in explanation” (K. PAVLÍČKOVÁ. 2020). The countries chosen for the study can be compared to the similar cases which enables to take benefit of the systematic comparison: most of them are tackling with traditional security challenges, sharing the border with Russia, tackling with democratic deficit, taking benefits of EU’s value-driven soft power and all of them the current members of Eastern Partnership Program and etc. Hence, the research can be considered a Most Similar Systems Design (MSSD) approach that would be appropriate to apply to the thesis

Table 2: Comparison of EaP member countries

EaP Countries	Democracy (human rights, good governance, transparency, level of corruption etc.)¹⁷	Security Challenge (frozen conflict or having separatist entity within its territory)	Sharing neighbourhood with Russia
Armenia	Partly	No	No

¹⁷ <https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-world/scores>

Azerbaijan	No	Yes	Yes
Belarus	No	No	Yes
Georgia	Partly	Yes	Yes
Moldova	Partly	Yes	No
Ukraine	Partly	Yes	Yes

Source: Author, created based on the sources discussed in the text.

As it is mentioned above the advantage of a small-N case study, the thesis is disciplined through the elements of qualitative research method. The qualitative research is considered the ideal within its social-historical framework by consolidating the real world related events and its multiple parties which precisely meets the research thesis's targets¹⁸. Simultaneously, applied theories are also related to real-world events that completes the qualitative research standards of this thesis. The timeline analysis starts with the establishment of the EU's Eastern Partnership Program which Russia intervened immediately, prompting the EU to promote a resilience strategy¹⁹. A relatively long timeline is adopted for the study because this is effective at analyzing changing tendencies and trends in development across the time. Furthermore, the presented timeline enables a remarkable focus on the validity by carefully observing the changes over time. The timeline of events and critical occasions is evaluated is elaborated in the following sub-chapters.

The research is factor-centric, especially regarding it investigates the democratic processes and traditional security challenges.

4.2.1. Data Analysis

As it is mentioned above the thesis based on qualitative research method within the framework of particular case study.

¹⁸ <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/suny-hccc-research-methods/chapter/chapter-12-interpretive-research/#:~:text=Interpretive%20research%20is%20a%20research,context%20by%20reconciling%20the%20subjective>

¹⁹ <https://www.robert-schuman.eu/en/european-issues/0589-the-eastern-partnership-between-resilience-and-interference>

According to Robert Yin, a prominent case study scholar, ‘a case study is an empirical study that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and with its real-life context’ (S. Ebneyamini.2018). In this regard, he considers that the case study should meet 3 main requirements:

- 1) The researcher has little or no control over the process and behaviour patterns of those participating in the study;
- 2) The research investigates the “why” question;
- 3) The theme is a current occasion

The subject of the thesis is a current phenomenon which is also on the agenda of regional actors: Geopolitical policy dilemma for EaP countries. The research question also meets with the requirements of the second criteria: why the promotion of primary EU value-democracy triggers conflict of interest with Russia which leads to the security challenges for these 6 countries. Furthermore, regarding the thesis bases on a current and actual topic that gives us opportunity to figure out the new features the behaviours of regional actors, including EaP member countries. Therefore, the case study is appropriate for the study which enables to generate hypothesis and properly testify it.

Taking into account the fact that democracy and security challenges separately was broadly analysed for as a country-specific study, the thesis bases on these publications to avoid repetition and elaborates on all the EaP countries, where it is crucial to analyse the variables in one comparative study.

4.2.2 Data sampling

Regarding the data sampling of the study that includes the combination of methods, the following data collection techniques were used in this thesis:

1. Review and analysis of documents:

- Certain records of the EU Council on the EaP states, as an organisation that characterizes and implements EU foreign and security policy.
- Relevant working papers of the European Commission (EC), an institution that represents the interests of the EU as a whole and monitors the implementation of EU strategic programs.

- Statements of the EU and Russian the officials
2. The following methods are used to examine the behaviour, perceptions, and perspectives of EaP member states:
- Remarks by representatives of the governmental ruling elite in Eastern Partnership states on their perspective of the EU, willingness to implement EU rules and standards, and at the same time attitude towards Russia. The timeline extends from 2009 to the current moment.
 - Signed agreements and deals of EaP countries with the EU, as well as Russia are crucial evidence for assessing attitudes toward and perceptions of the EU in the program countries which is used for assessment
 - Online survey and secondary sources including statistical data

4.2.3. Online Survey

The online survey is supplementary part of the thesis to fulfil the research gap as a primary data source. Here, quantitative data measuring was used to supplement the qualitative analysis of the thesis to analyse perception of respective citizens of program countries. Specifically, outcomes were used to interpret based on the results of the survey.

The survey was conducted during March 2022, using an online data collection methodology. Regarding the target group of the survey (citizens of EaP countries) 8 closed-ended questions (*Appendix 1*) were structured and shared in the relevant Facebook groups which are the representative sample of respondents and ensures the reliability of the survey, particularly regarding the purposes and members of the groups: Eastern Partnership, 'Young European Neighbours' network, "Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF) Members" which are the best online platforms bringing together policy experts, young professionals, Young European Ambassadors from the case study countries. Judgment or purposive sampling technique applied to the survey regarding the selection criteria which enables to recruit individuals for a certain quality relevant to this research particularly reflecting on the research objectives. Furthermore, that should be noted that, while designing the survey questions the requirements of the narrative analysis of the qualitative research is regarded as it means to examine data gathered from a variety of sources, including surveys and people's experiences

or perspectives are centred on finding solutions to research inquiries²⁰. Hence, particularly, regarding the narrative analyses presented in this study (chapter 5 and 6) it is logical to design the survey questions accordingly (*see appendix 1*)

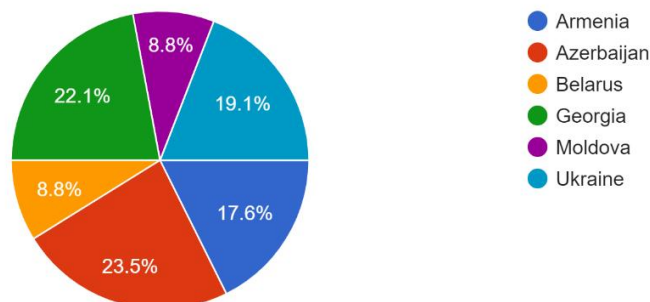
Also, from the perspectives of case study of this thesis, purposefully the citizens of EaP countries were recruited due to the following reasons:

- As the EaP countries are the “figures of grand chessboard”, the outcome of geopolitical rivalry first reflects on EaP countries and their citizens. Therefore, the citizens of the EaP countries are the most relevant respondents to assess the questions related to research question and hypothesis testing (*see appendix 1*)
- Despite the thesis is elaborating on the different aspects and considerations of regional actors, including employed policy tools (hard/soft), the thesis at the end is investigating the geopolitical policy dilemma for EaP countries, hence its necessary to highlight the voice of citizens to suggest recommendations by reaching tangible outcomes.
- As the EaP citizens feel the outcome of geopolitical rivalry, they also formulate their government through elections which can possible be pro-European or pro-Russian. Hence, the citizens are indirectly participating in maintaining country’s priority of foreign policy vector which again highlights the perceptions or attitudes of the citizens on the positive/negative image of the regional actors.

Overall, 68 people participated in this survey from 6 countries which is sufficient number of participants to present valid outcomes: Azerbaijanis (23.5%), Georgians (22.1%), Ukrainians (19.1%), Armenians (17.6%), Moldovans (8.8%), Belarussians (8.8%) and the survey generally figured out that 72.1% of the participants are optimistic about the future of EaP.

²⁰ https://www.questionpro.com/blog/data-analysis-in-research/#Methods_used_for_data_analysis_in_quantitative_research

Citizenship
68 responses



Alongside with above-mentioned sources, scholarly articles and journals have also been evaluated: publications from global network of policy research centres, dealing with the Eastern Partnership Program such as The Estonian Centre of Eastern Partnership (ECEAP). The majority of publications have been reviewed in English in order to prevent potential misunderstandings during translation. Nevertheless, a few publications in other languages were used to analyse the topic objectively/ neutrally from various perspectives (both scholarly and politically), including the perspectives of program countries. This does not undermine the research's efficiency because the case study of the subject is the EU, Russia, and program countries, which is investigated more in English, French (some relevant documents as one of the official working languages of the EU) and Russian.

4.3. Conceptualization and operationalization of variables

Democratization

In this thesis, promotion of EU's democracy is independent variable. Democracy in itself is a broad concept, however, as the study engages with different employed policy tools of the regional actors, here the process of the democracy promotion of the EU should be regarded as independent variable. Therefore, this ongoing process in the EaP countries is presented as the democratization which is the process of political regime transforming into democracy at the end (*C.Kauffman.2010. p.363*).

In fact, democratization is complex to define, owing to disagreements about how to interpret democracy. For instance, there is no agreement on where to identify the starting and final points of the democratization process. One definition of democratization is the period that occurs between the dissolution of an autocratic system and the completion of the first democratic national elections. Others indicate earlier starting moments, such as authoritarian governments initiating liberal reforms or structural changes weakening authoritarian regimes sufficiently for opposition parties to press for democratic reforms. Some democratic theorists have argued that democratization continues long after the first elections since elections alone do not guarantee a functional democracy. The difficulty with this method is that it is unclear when the process of democratization will come to an end. When evaluated against the goal of a perfect liberal democracy, all countries may be said to be in a constant state of democratization. As a result, the value of democratization as an assessment technique is limited (*Ibid*).

In academic works of literature democratization often identified the process through which a society becomes more open, participative, and less autocratic. Also, democracy as a broad concept and an ultimate goal of democratization is a form of governance that incorporates, via a range of institutions and procedures, the goal of political authority based on people's will (*Boutros Boutros-Ghali. 1996*). It depends on how we identify the term of democratization and in which policy area we investigate it. Prof. D. Acemoglu clarifies the definition of democratization and claims that "democratization is a move from non-democracy to democracy". To comprehend this process, we must first realize the concept of democracy. According to Acemoglu, democracy in reality is connected with "free and fair elections, the accountability of politicians to the electorate and free entry into politics" (*D. Löwendahl.2012. p.8*)

When dealing with the fundamental concept of democracy itself, one example of such conceptual diversity is the difference claimed between a liberal democracy and an electoral democracy. The idea of an electoral democracy is founded on a minimalist conception of democracy, which is associated with the conduct of elections to some level. There is also some conceptual uncertainty over when, say, an electoral democracy terminates and a "electoral" or "competitive" authoritarian regime starts. Several solutions have been proposed

in an attempt to reconcile the theoretical issues associated with hybrid regimes, which stand halfway between liberal democracy and authoritarianism. These differ from identifying to hybrid regimes as limited versions of democracy, as Diamond's notion of electoral democracy does, to establishing reduced varieties of authoritarianism, as Levitsky and Ways do (*D. Collier and S. Levitsky. 1997*). In contrast, Freedom House has used the phrase "partly free" to describe such democratic structures (*see table 2*). In order to give a more precise definition to our variable-democratization is identified by Geddes as motivations to oppose democracy varied considerably among elites under personalist, military, and single-party authoritarian regimes by examining the ways by which dictatorships fall apart (B.Geddes. *2014*). In the study, regarding the geopolitical location of EaP countries case, the EU which is a significant geopolitical actor and is interested in to promote democracy and human rights, dictatorships fall apart. Therefore, the last definition of democratization suggested by Geddes mostly suits and explains the conceptualization of independent variable.

In order to operationalize the independent variable "democratization" first, it is essential to maintain how it is measured. When considering democracy, it is evident that there may be differences in degrees of democracy, or as Duncan Ivison puts it in the Encyclopaedia of Political Theory, "it can be claimed that one society (whether today or in the past) is more (or less) democratic than another." When it comes to assessing democracy and the level of democratization in a state, the most traditional techniques available in scientific literature encompass first identifying different criteria for democracy and then determining the existence or non-existence of those requirements at a given time for a specific country or region. Disputes over definitions of democracy generally makes it implicated to measure where a state is in its democratization process. Despite, globally there are different levels of democracy, such as full democracies and democracies, hybrid and authoritarian regimes, in this Master's thesis mainly elaborated on 6 countries which some of them are not still democratic or newly experiencing democratic institutions (*table 2*). On the other hand, the Freedom House score, which assesses political rights and civil freedoms and represents a liberal understanding of democracy, is one frequent measurement. The Polity score, which assesses the authoritative features of governmental institutions and is more aligned with operational definitions of democracy, is another indication. This research is predominantly

using the assessment methodology used by Freedom House in its Nations in Transit Index to assess the democratic functioning of a specific EaP country. Because it is compatible with the requirements given by B. Geddes concept of democratization, hence FH's vision of a democracy will serve as the study's standard for a high degree of democracy as a final goal of democratization. Moreover, this definition of democratization helps us to explain the phenomenon through the theories applied in this study.

On the other hand, according to the UN “Democracy provides an environment that respects human rights and fundamental freedoms”²¹. Therefore, measurement of the democracy is the level of political rights indicator. Regarding the precise definition of political rights, according to Commission on Security and Human Rights in Europe (CSCE) this is “political rights refer to an individual's ability to participate in the civil and political life of the society and state without fear of discrimination or repression, and is tied closely to citizenship status. Such rights include not only the right to vote in an election, but also the rights to join a political party; run for office; and participate freely in political rallies, events, or protests”²². As previously stated, the evaluation of a country's democratic status is calculated as the average of its "political rights" and from Nations in Transit Index suggested by Freedom House. Nations in Transit assesses the state of democracy in the Central European-Central Asian region. In collaboration with the study authors, a panel of expert advisers, and a group of regional reviewers, Freedom House presents numerical ratings in seven areas that essentially describe the institutional foundations of liberal democracy for all 29 nations in Nations in Transit. The Nations in Transit ratings, although should not be interpreted as absolute indications of a country's status, are useful for making broad evaluations of how democratic or authoritarian a country is. They also enable for a comparative examination of reforms across the nations studied, as well as a review of long-term changes in a specific country²³

Furthermore, in order to objective measurement of variables, it is needed to focus on the aspect of data sources. Despite the small-N case analysis is going through the qualitative

²¹ <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/democracy>

²² Commission on Security and Human Rights in Europe// Citizenship and Political Rights: <https://www.csce.gov/issue/citizenship-and-political-rights>

²³ <https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit>

research method, the strategy is to take advantage of statistical information for giving reliable back. First of all, regarding the independent variable “democratization”, in this way, reference is applicable to the EU organizations and Freedom House as secondary literature of the study which have considerable documents about human rights observations in these 6 countries. Therefore, the source of reliability for the independent variable is satisfactory for analyzing the country is democratic or not (yes/no). As the independent variable “democratization” operationalized through political rights, taking the benefits of official information from reliable sources, primarily from Freedom House suggests a valid analysis. Moreover, alongside with above-mentioned reliable sources, the online survey which is a primary source of this study conducted specifically for the reflecting on information gap addresses specific and clear questions related to our IV which enables us to measure the current circumstance of political rights in respective countries.

Security

The dependent variable of research is security which generally includes so broad aspects, but in this term, regarding the case study that mainly encompasses violent conflicts. Security, like stability, nationality, and other terminology in that sphere of international political science, has engendered a diversity of meanings. Generally, security is regarded as a "neglected" and "largely debated" concept. Buzan characterizes security as an immature concept, citing significant empirical investigation on security challenges as well as a shortage of well-developed theoretical literature. Baldwin also concerns about a lack of engagement in the notion of security, claiming that it has not earned the same level of serious consideration as the concepts of justice, freedom, and power (*Baldwin.1997. p.8*).

According to Samuel Makinda, security is "the preservation of society's norms, rules, institutions, and values". He continues to argue that all groups and institutions, values, and structures, including their individuals, must be defended from "military and non-military dangers." Contemporary debates are mainly expressed the security in terms of “global”, “common”, “cooperative”, “comprehensive”, “human” and so on. However, in international politics the notion of “national security” is still common usage of the security concept that also includes violent conflicts (*H. Stritzel.2006*). On the other hand, according to the Penguin

Dictionary of International Relations, security is "the absence of threats to scare values." Although absolute security is unrealistic, it represents the state's main objective. Economic security, human security, information security and environmental security are some examples of security dimensions (*M. LUKACIC. 2000*). Similarly, according to Baldwin the security is "a low probability of damage to acquired values" such as territorial integrity, national independence, and autonomy.

Baldwin developed an analysis in his paper by consolidating security under seven questions: for whom, for what values, how much, from what challenges, by what techniques, at what expenses, and in what time frame. Security is a broad topic that might be difficult to describe. Therefore, the above-mentioned Baldwin standards are useful in looking at specific security challenges by analyzing many aspects of this concept.

Security for whom?

As the first question is elaborated above (what is security) it is necessary to answer to the second question. According to Baldwin the appropriate response may change depending on the research question. For this thesis, region is a key element of investigation as it is presented as geopolitical position as an intervening variable of the study. Buzan and Jaap describe region (geopolitical position) as a particular security subsystem among a group of nations whose security is interconnected due to geographical vicinity (*Buzan and Baldwin. 1998*). This closeness can sometimes lead to security reliance, which is referred to as "security challenges".

Security for what values?

States commonly struggle to preserve their "minimal national fundamental values," such as national independence and territorial integrity. Other values that people, nations, and other social actors may have include economic and social well-being, physical safety, and autonomy (*Wolfers. 1962. p.154*). Nations may see the maintenance of further minor values less important than their survival.

How much Security

This point of Baldwin mainly refers to the same points discussed in theoretical framework chapter of the thesis (*see sub-chapter 3.2-3.2*) which basically means the security is a relative concept, since no one can ever feel absolutely secure in such an anarchic international system.

From what challenges

Military, political, economic, sociological, and ecological challenges may jeopardize the survival of a state. Military threats have always been the top priority in countries' national security concerns. Baldwin mentions "Communist threats," which are referenced in several papers, although it is unclear if this word refers to ideological, military, or economic concerns, or a mix of all three (*Buzan. 1991. p.115-117*). In general, insecurity is regarded as a mixture of threats and risks.

By what techniques

Methods is particularly important in international political debate. As according Wolfers, the methods of security strategy are just as essential as the ultimate purpose. He addresses many methods of increasing a security of the country, including as arms, alliance formation, neutrality, international collaboration, compromise agreements, and the buildup of an appropriate force against an aggression. He also emphasizes the significance of context: security measures may be useful in one environment but ineffective in another (*Wolfers.1962. p. 155*). He also differentiates between coercive and non-coercive security measures

At what expenses

This criterion is significant for Baldwin because authors frequently indicate that costs are negligible. Security always comes at a price, and these prices are significant. Additional sacrifices of other values are the expenses of achieving each level of security (Baldwin 1997, 16-18). Baldwin also criticizes realists/neorealists and their opponents for remaining silent about the price of achieving security.

While researchers examine this concept from many perspectives, they have some mutual understanding. Therefore, we can define security as traditional security, that encompasses military and political components. Hereby, regarding case study of the thesis, the last definitions given by Penguin Dictionary of International Relations and Baldwin are much more similar to this thesis' target, because the study is speculating on the traditional

dimension of security concept which the EaP countries are challenging as consequence of geopolitical confrontation between the EU and Russia.

According to Allen, the first stage in operationalizing variables under investigation is to explicitly identify concepts. In the previous paragraph, the notion of security was addressed from several aspects and defined in relation to the study topic. Then, to operationalize the dependent variable “security” it is important to find an indicator of measurement. Despite, as it is above-mentioned, security has different aspects, this study primarily addresses traditional security challenges because of space and time constraints. Accordingly, as most EaP countries suffer from security challenges, especially military dimension of the security concept which represents itself with violent conflicts and separatism (*table 2*), hence it is logical to operationalize the dependent variable through analyzing the traditional security situations in these states. More precisely, in order to measure the security challenges EaP states are facing violent conflicts (territorial/secessionist) within its internationally recognized sovereign territories are analyzed through the primary and secondary source of the study.

When it comes to maintaining reliability for the dependent variable “security” reference to the OSCE which actively engages in managing conflicts and maintaining sovereignty in EaP countries is crucial²⁴. The key security publications of the EU and EaP members, as well as official statements, is be assessed in order to identify primary risks and security challenges, as well as gaps between EaP countries' aspirations of the EU and the EU's ambitions. The primary data is written statements and speeches that describe conventional and non-traditional security, as well as the frequency with which they are repeated and the sequence in which the threats are expressed. For example, the top four threats mentioned by the National Security Concept of Georgia include classic security concerns such as military conflicts and territorial integrity (*National Security Concept of Georgia. 2011*). Furthermore, the online survey conducted among the EaP citizens specific to the research objectives contributed to fill information the gap by posing questions related to security challenges (*see appendix 1*). Generally, the thesis uses datasets coming from official sources, and statistics

²⁴ <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/c/4/25823.pdf>

coming from esteemed organizations such as the Council of the EU and the OSCE which are quite reliable sources.

Geopolitical position

The involvement of any country in international relations and its geographical functions are heavily influenced by its geographical position. Each scenario has its own set of geopolitical norms that a country must adhere to while formulating policy and strategy (*H. Sadranian.2019*). According to European People's Party "Russia is a country in which the corrupt ruling elite is deliberately undermining democratic principles, disregarding the rule of law and the international order, infringing on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of its neighbours, manipulating the international community, spreading disinformation..." that means Russia in this way embodies a political model that clashes with liberal democratic values while the advocacy for democracy and the rule of law remains the cornerstone of EU policy, both within the EU and beyond²⁵. In terms of EaP countries, the consequences of the developing EU–Russia competition in their common neighborhood triggers geopolitical challenges for the countries. As a geopolitical competition between two coherent blocs, the EU and EEU forming a new regional structure which promotes different values, sometimes triggers violent clashes (*D. Cadier.2014*). Accordingly, adopted text by the EU Parliament (EP) highlights "...the main interest of the EU is to maintain freedom, stability and peace on the European continent and beyond, which are being threatened by the aggressive policies of the Russian authorities, which represent one of the main challenges to the EU's strategic and foreign policy agenda"²⁶ which obviously helps to understand the logic of our intervening variable and identifies the concepts to present its role in between IV and DV. On the other hand, the online survey conducted among the citizens of EaP countries revealed that absolute majority of them consider geopolitical position of their countries plays an important role in security challenges. Therefore, regarding case study of the thesis,

²⁵ European People's Party. Position Paper. From a Strategic Partner to a Strategic Challenge? (p.2). 2021: https://www.epp.eu/files/uploads/2021/06/Russia_Paper_28_June.pdf

²⁶ European Parliament recommendation on the direction of the EU-Russia relations. Paragraph C. 2021: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0383_EN.html

geopolitical position is intervening variable as the thesis is focusing on specific geopolitical case and by means of intervening variable explains the causal linkage between IV and DV. As it is mentioned above, the recommendation by the EP contributes to explicitly identifying concepts. Therefore, the operationalization of the intervening variable is the direction of the EU-Russia relations which enables an appropriate indicator of measurement. This is first of all because the geopolitical position in terms of this particular case study represents itself with EU-Russia relations which can be varied according to the direction of the relations and impact on the policy-making process of the EaP countries reflecting on direction of the geopolitical rivalry. On the other hand, authorized EU institutions (in terms of EU-Russia relations and the EaP), particularly the EP regularly issues recommendations to the Council, the Commission, and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy by mainly emphasizing on the direction of the relations in terms of geopolitical rivalry. Hence, the direction of EU-Russia relations is the leading indicator of measurement for the study which is referring to reliable sources, particularly to the recommendation of the European Parliament.

Chapter 5. Domestic implications of the EaP countries: Between Democracy and Security

The chapter explores the domestic implications of EaP partners from democracy and security aspects by presenting country-specific analysis. Generally, analysis and discussion for the thesis are divided into two levels: first, in this chapter systematic analysis of the EaP countries is elaborated from the perspectives of security challenges and democracy/democratization as a process within the timeframe of the study. Second part of the discussion (chapter 6) is presenting an analysis of the study in a broad sense, from the perspectives of the regional actors. The raise of pluralistic or diversifying foreign policy strategies in recent years among the EaP countries expanded their foreign policy options by collaborating with major powers in the region in different degrees. Russia initially attempted to halt, then reverse, this tendency. The region's security gap has been exacerbated by its increasingly aggressive attitude toward neighbors. This negative tendency has resulted in

increasing demand for the EU, as well as the EU's ongoing development to become region's one of the main integration manager by employing completely different strategies. As the common past that formerly connected EaP countries are perceived and reimagined from various national contexts, this neighborhood is progressively becoming a space where states make their own political and economic decisions. Also each EaP member, in addition to these regional actors, has its own development tendencies. Accordingly, the six country-specific analyses presented in chapter highlight the complexity of promotion of the EU values, such as democracy and democratic reforms, as well as the realities particularly the security challenges which formulate these six countries' diverse developmental pathways. Thus, by discussing the implications of 6 program countries the chapter aims to figure out the logic of different integration pathway briefly elaborated above.

5.1. Armenia: between the EU and Russia

Armenia was provided a platform for even deeper cooperation with the EU when the Eastern Partnership (EaP) was established in 2009. Whereas Armenia moved quickly to capture all of the advantages of the EU's new offer, this progress was interrupted by Russia's interference, which proposed the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) as a regional alternative. As a consequence of Armenia's accession to the EAEU, the EU and Armenia had to reassess bilateral cooperation and seek means to find a revised, less confrontational framework agreement. The Velvet Revolution in 2018 opened up the possibility that partnerships with the EU could be improved, within the limitations imposed by EAEU membership and the country's security requirements (*R. Giragosian. 2019*)

The previous decade of the EaP have been a tough time for Armenia and its interaction with the EU, marked by huge expectations, disappointments, and maneuvers. In light of recent events, this time frame can be divided into three stages: pre-accession to the Russian-led EAEU, reflection, and negotiations for the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA). During the first stage (2009-2013), Armenia continued to pursue a more ambitious program, anticipating the signing of the Association Agreement (AA), that would include a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA). As other EaP partners for Armenia being competent to join the AA and DCFTA, would enable the possibility of

even deeper integration into the European market and improved mobility. The timeframe between September 2013 (when Armenia entered the EAEU) and 2015 was also significant because it was a duration of reflection in which the country evolved a comprehension of the "red lines" that separated the two distinct integration formats, the EU and the EAEU (*R. Giragosian and B. Poghosyan. 2020. p.67-68*)

The EaP was launched during an extremely difficult period for Armenia in terms of domestic politics. Following the presidential elections in February 2008, there were massive protests, which resulted in confrontations between opposition activists on the one hand and police and the troops on the other. As a result, ten people were killed, there were widespread protests, political repression, and a deep political turmoil (*Human Rights Watch. 2009*)²⁷. Serzh Sargsyan, the newly elected president, lacked legitimacy as a result of these corrupted elections and a particularly low level of public confidence. As a result, the only manner to prevent the loss of domestic support was to interact in external political exchanges with global and regional stakeholders which would characterize him as effective in international deal negotiations. Moreover, the EaP would not only compensate the low level of president's legitimacy, but it also provided Armenia with additional foreign policy prospects. Furthermore, the Armenian expert sector and civil society anticipated that the EaP will aid in the promotion of reforms and democratic principles in the country, specifically in the realm of human rights protection, anti-corruption, and judicial reform (*L. Delcour. 2015*). Accordingly, the EU intended to encourage Armenia by assisting the country in reforming its election system as President Sargsyan campaigned for constitutional change to transition Armenia from a presidential to a parliamentary republic. The opposition and civil society were invited to participate in the reform process, which began in the spring of 2016. However, due to the ruling party's inconsistency, this effort did not result in a positive shift.²⁸

²⁷ Human Rights Watch. Democracy on Rocky Ground. 2009:
<https://www.hrw.org/report/2009/02/25/democracy-rocky-ground/armenias-disputed-2008-presidential-election-post-election>

²⁸ <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/new-constitution-old-faces-in-armenia/>

Regarding the status of Russian-Armenian relations, notably security cooperation, has always been considered as an important element to consider when analyzing the effectiveness of the EaP. Since establishing a bilateral treaty in 1995, Russia has maintained a military involvement in Armenia, guarded Armenia's border with Iran and Turkey, and provided Armenia with subsidized weapons and equipment. In 2010, this agreement was upgraded and prolonged until 2044²⁹. Armenia is also a member of the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), which has a security guarantee in place in the case of foreign intervention³⁰. Ultimately, Russia is recognised as an essential component of Armenia's national security. Furthermore, Russia maintains a substantial economic presence in Armenia. It owns a considerable percentage of Armenia's strategic infrastructure, including factories and businesses in the energy and communication services sectors. Hence, Russia commands considerable power over Armenian authorities and society through its economic presence (*V.Veebel.2017. p.14*). With Armenia's accession to the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) in 2015, economic cooperation attained a high. As a result, Moscow became Armenia's most important trading partner. Russia has remained the leading foreign investor since then (40 percent of FDI in 2021). It maintains its dominance in vital areas such as energy: Armenia's reliance in this field is a great advantage for Moscow, which is managing the renovation work of Armenia's only nuclear power plant, located in Metsamor, through the corporation Rosatom until 2026 (it is seen as one of the least safe in the world).³¹ Migration: specifically when it comes to migrants working illegally in Russia, is another tool of pressure. Russia challenged to deport illegal migrants back to Armenia in reaction to the anticipated signature of the Association Agreement between Armenia and the EU, which would have enhanced internal strain on the country and had a negative impact on the economy in a state where a large segment of the population is heavily reliant on remittances sent by migrants living Russia. More than 80% of those transactions are accounted by Russia, where thousands of Armenians are working for years³². Eventually, the Nagorno-Karabakh

²⁹ https://www.rferl.org/a/Russian_President_Medvedev_To_Visit_Armenia/2131915.html

³⁰ <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/int/csto.htm#:~:text=CSTO%20members%20are%20Russia%2C%20Armenia,nor%20the%20three%20Baltic%20Repubics>.

³¹ <https://regard-est.com/armenia-what-degree-of-dependence-on-russia>

³² <https://www.refworld.org/docid/552e0d864.html>

conflict, and Russia's involvement as a potential contributor for the conflict's escalation, the most vital tool of influence that Moscow applied to Armenian governments and society generally. Due to Russian pressure, Serzh Sargsyan decided not to sign the AA and DCFTA; rather than, Armenia entered the Russia-led EAEU in 2015 (*R. Giragosian and B. Poghosyan. 2020. p.19*).

Armenia has seen a difficult period since the establishment of the EaP marked by protests and a shift in foreign policy priorities. Today, Armenia is the only EaP country that has integrated legal frameworks with both the EU and Russia. Its membership in the EAEU and signing of the CEPA as a framework instrument has resulted in a complex and uncertain circumstance. Armenia's interest for the EaP program varied from time to time, and the country's choice to withdraw from the association process keeps throwing a undermining role in bilateral cooperation. Nevertheless, in the instance of Armenia, the assessment of the EaP's outcomes is still overwhelmingly favourable (*N.Kepolyan. 2021*). However, alongside with the positive attitude towards EaP, Armenia regarding the factors discussed above is tend to maintain a uni-vector foreign policy which is bandwagoning with Russia in order to protect country's security and economy.

To sum up, the country specific analysis of the Armenia revealed that the country is located in a complex geopolitical position. Armenia is not sharing direct borders with Russia, however, deteriorated relations with neighbours Turkey and Azerbaijan emerge additional challenges which ultimately make the country seek its security and bandwagoning with Russia. As the security challenges is measured through the existence of violent conflicts (territorial/secessionist) within its internationally recognized sovereign territories it is logical to claim that Armenia is not challenging with security challenges especially in comparison with other EaP countries. Furthermore, regarding the democratization, despite bandwagoning with Russia, democratization process (see table 3) can be assessed as moderate, particularly since the „Velvet Revolution“ it is visible to see a positive tendency on democratization.

5.2. Azerbaijan seeking for a balance?

When the Eastern Partnership (EaP) was initiated in 2009, it was welcomed positively by major Azerbaijani stakeholders for a range of factors: the authority saw it as a way to speed

up pragmatic cooperation with the EU, the opposition assumed it would increase EU's pressure for democratic reforms, and civil society presumed stronger relations and more institutional and material assistance from Brussels. Notwithstanding their differing viewpoints, all parties were unified in their conviction that the EaP will strengthen relations with the EU. Unfortunately, due to a variety of diverse reasons, anticipated consequence did not materialize, and relationships between the EU and Azerbaijan have continued difficult over the time passed (*I.Mammadova.2017*). The governing class of Azerbaijan has shifted its attitude toward the EaP from moderate optimism to dissatisfaction and skepticism over time. This dynamic has been molded by both external and internal concerns and changes, which are typically linked. The image of Russia in Azerbaijan, Baku's intentions of the EU, and European energy security considerations are all part of the external components. Internal factors such as social demand for democratic reform, human rights, and regime survival prerequisites are all part of the internal components (*L.Aliyeva.2014. p.4*)

During the initial periods of the program, the Azerbaijani government felt that Moscow was not particularly critical of the EaP and, as a result, would not take punitive actions against EaP partners, particularly against Azerbaijan. This was due to two primary factors: First, following a temporary suspension in EU-Russia relations as a result of the Georgian war, Russia rapidly implemented a "refresh" approach with the US and moved to reestablish relations with the EU. The second key factor was that in 2008, Moscow initiated a new, more organized trilateral negotiation mechanism on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Russia had just finished a military conflict in Georgia and wanted to demonstrate that it could also be a mediator. The Russian gas monopoly Gazprom has offered to purchase gas from Azerbaijan as a demonstration of its goodwill³³. As a result, from Baku's standpoint in 2009, Azerbaijan could play both games effectively: expanding relationship with the EU while also leveraging its idea of development with Russia to pursue its regional security agenda.

However, against the expectations of the government, the EaP provided a platform for greater civil society activities in Azerbaijan, while the EU started to encourage the authority to protect fundamental human rights. The European Parliament, for instance, has asked for

³³ <https://www.reuters.com/article/orubs-gazprom-azerbaijan-idRUMSE59D1YF20091014>

specific penalties and travel bans against individuals in Azerbaijan who are implicated in political repression.³⁴ The government replied aggressively, using anti-Western sentiments. The government's storyline was primarily the same as that used in Russia: Western democracies were accused of forming a 'fifth column' by cooperating with the opposition and civil society organizations, encouraging a colour revolution in Azerbaijan, and intervening in the country's domestic issues through a strategy of double standards³⁵. It was seen as a concern to the political government's survival, especially given the current economic crisis. As a response, Baku took several efforts to distance itself from the European Union. In 2015, Azerbaijan temporarily ended its membership in the EuroNest Parliamentary Assembly and the EU-Azerbaijan parliamentary cooperation committee, and threatened to retaliate if the EU imposed targeted sanctions (*E. Guillot. 2016*). Simultaneously, the Azerbaijani authorities took action to strengthen their hold on power and decrease the EU's considered intervention in their domestic matters. The EU insisted on a normative framework, but Azerbaijan declined to adopt any significant reforms in the areas of the judicial system, democracy, and human rights. The situation deteriorated as the EU (especially the European Parliament) renewed its demands for Azerbaijan's authorities to protect human rights. The government increased its influence over civil society, resulting in a worsening of the human rights situation. In 2012, Azerbaijan passed a law prohibiting non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from taking funds coming from external donors³⁶. After the Maidan protest in Ukraine, where democratic society expressed its strength by waving EU flags, the pressure on civil society became more severe. The Azerbaijani elite became even more concerned of the EaP and civil society actors and institutions as a result of these developments.

Furthermore, the events in Ukraine in 2013-2014 transformed Azerbaijan's views on Russia, from the perspectives of regional security challenges. It was evident after 2014 that a revived Russia considered the EU as a competitor, and that the post-Soviet area was one of the primary battlefields in this heightened geopolitical confrontation. Russia aimed to enhance

³⁴ European Parliament. 2015: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2015-0316_EN.html?redirect

³⁵ <https://www.azerbaijan-news.az/view-77322/ikili-standartlar-cilovu>

³⁶ <https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/field-reports/item/12654-azerbaijan-restricts-ngo-funding.html>

its position by expanding its territory, expanding the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), and instrumentalizing separatist bodies in the post-Soviet zone. The Maidan uprising in Ukraine in 2013 and the following war proved how far Russia was willing to go to fight against the closer integration with the EU, and this functioned as a message to Azerbaijan's elite. Azerbaijan intended to stay out of Russia's EAEU proposal as well as the EaP's deeper integration process, which included the signing of an Association Agreement. Accordingly, Azerbaijan was familiar with Russia's classic position of strategic aggressiveness and tactical conservatism, so it was realized that some reconciliation of Russia, as well as a public condemnation of the EU, could be necessary (*Sh. Abilov.2015. p.17-18*)

On the other hand, Azerbaijani authorities thought that Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea would spark a wider international discussion and bring more attention to territorial sovereignty issues. They expected the EU will reconsider its stance on Nagorno Karabakh and demonstrate stronger solidarity for Azerbaijan and its territorial integrity. Therefore, in keeping with the EU's attitude towards the other post-Soviet separatist conflicts in Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia, Azerbaijan has requested the EU to support its territorial integrity. But the EU took a neutral stance on the issue, which provoked the condemnations from Baku. The ruling elite's dissatisfaction grew as a result of the EU's failure to take a clear stance on the issue. Furthermore, the EU's treatment of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict damaged the EU's reputation in the eyes of the people, resulting in a drop in popularity for the EaP. As a result, the proportion of people who had a positive opinion toward the EU has decreased from 47 percent in 2017 to 39 percent in 2018³⁷

Despite Azerbaijan's skepticism of the EU and the EaP, relations between the EU and Azerbaijan have been normalizing and cautiously re-engaging after 2016. The EU has been seen as a reliable ally who may assist in resolving structural issue. In certain geopolitical circumstances, the EaP has changed the character and geographical perspective of EaP countries. The six countries are progressively being referenced to as "Eastern Partnership states" rather than "post-Soviet countries" in EU publications and elsewhere. Maybe this is a sign that, after nearly three decades, the post-Soviet term is disappearing. For this rebranding

³⁷ EU Neighbours East Survey. 2018: [https://www.euneighbours.eu/sites/default/files/publications/2018-07/EU%20NEIGHBOURS%20east AnnualSurvey2018report EaPOverview.pdf](https://www.euneighbours.eu/sites/default/files/publications/2018-07/EU%20NEIGHBOURS%20east%20AnnualSurvey2018report_EaPOverview.pdf)

exercise, the EU deserves credit. But, the EaP can make more of a difference in EU-Azerbaijan cooperation than only this essential but symbolic exercise.

To conclude, in the light of failing democratization and declining rate of democracy in Azerbaijan, the country is attempting to balance the interests of regional actors. Furthermore, the country is challenging with security challenges by having secessionist conflict within its internationally recognized territory. Hence, the situation is quite complex for Azerbaijan by having both security challenges and failing democratization while seeking a symmetry of the policy dilemma.

5.3. Belarus: from different expectations to suspension

Belarus and the EU regarded the Eastern Partnership (EaP) with opposing goals and ambitions from the starting. Belarus joined the EaP framework with modest aspirations, focusing on enhanced collaboration and foreign investments, but the EU embraced a more aspirational objectives such as regional security, freedom, and development. The initial stage of the EaP was a failure for both Belarus and the EU as a result of this disparity. Apparently, the program had little impact on the dynamics of the EU-Belarus relationship (*K. Shmatsina. 2021*). It primarily intended to keep open lines of communication between Minsk and Brussels during a period of tense ties as a result of sanctions and the lack of an agreement between Belarus and the EU on a framework.

Generally, Belarus has failed to completely engage in the EaP after the period which resulted in its suspension of membership in the EaP³⁸. Thus, Belarus was not eligible for any of the EaP's three "grand bilateral offers" (political association, free trade, or visa-free travel). Moreover, due to the lack of legal links between Minsk and Brussels, Belarus was unable to participate fully in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and is mainly excluded from the EaP's bilateral aspect. As a result, the country's accessibility to EU financial instruments, which are available to the rest of the neighbours, was limited. Some components of the EaP, on the other hand, were not available to Belarus in the first instance, either to its participation

³⁸ <https://belsat.eu/en/news/28-06-2021-backlash-attempt-belarus-to-suspend-participation-in-eap-readmission-agreement-with-eu/>

in alternative regional programs or its lack of membership in international organizations that regulate trade concerns. Belarus, for example, is not yet a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO), hence the EU is unable to grant it an FTA. Even if Belarus were to join the WTO, it would be unable to negotiate a separate FTA with the EU due to its participation in the EAEU (*P. MICCO.2015. p.6*). Therefore, Belarus's participation in the EAEU places some restrictions on how far bilateral trade cooperation with the EU could progress. On the other hand, in relation to Belarus, the EU was committed to a so-called "critical engagement" approach. This entails a steady development of the EU's engagement with Belarusian governmental bodies, as well as assistance for civil society and a drive to maintain Belarus' economic and political reforms on the table. Belarus, for its side, wanted to develop its ties with the EU at a considerably quicker speed. From Minsk's perspective, the EU's isolation policy has hindered the restoration of relationships, influencing important decisions by the relevant EU bodies, resulting in residual sanctions remaining in place.

Belarus had to perform a spectacular balancing act in order to enter the EaP. While welcoming the invitation from Brussels, Minsk had to show its allegiance to Russia, its military and economic partner. Because the EaP idea was viewed with suspicion in Moscow, which saw it as a challenge to its own integration goals, particularly in its "Union State". Correspondingly, Belarus' foreign office released a statement on May 7, 2009, explaining that the Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit was developed with Belarus' active engagement, and it was compatible with the country's national interests. It was stressed that the program's implementation should not be intended against any foreign country³⁹. Minsk insisted to convince Moscow that Belarus's membership in the EaP would neither jeopardize Belarus-Russia cooperation or imply a shift to the West. Besides, the Belarusian government worked hard to persuade the Kremlin that it had no goal of 'moving away from Russia,' and represented its participation in the EaP as a purely technical activity aimed at removing economic barriers with the EU (*K. Vinogradova. 2010. p.22*). This charming effort was followed by political measures that were not explicit. Belarus's representation at the opening EaP summit in Prague was revised down: President Lukashenko

³⁹ <https://ria.ru/20090508/170415227.html>

did not join the conference, instead sent First Deputy Prime Minister Vladimit Semashko. President Lukashenka met with Russian Ambassador Alexander Surikov on the day of the conference to emphasize Belarus's strong ties with Russia. At the end of the day, Russia appeared to have agreed to Belarus' involvement in the program. Russia's foreign affairs minister, Sergey Lavrov, stated in an interview that he has no concerns about Belarus's objectives⁴⁰. However, Moscow's concerns about the EaP being a geopolitical project were addressed in 2010 when Minsk joined the Eurasian Customs Union, which developed into the Eurasian Economic Union in 2015 (EAEU).

Generally, Belarus benefited from the European Union's strategy of differentiating among neighbours. Indeed, the Belarusian government received a lot of what they expected in the end: more projects and investment in the massive infrastructure sectors, and less political conditionality. The EU's preliminary support package to Belarus under the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) ranged from €71 million to €89 million from 2014 to 2017, which is much less than the previous financial context⁴¹. This was partly due to the deterioration of bilateral cooperation following the post-election violence in 2010. However, following a 2014 thaw in ties, a decision was made in 2016 to increase the amount of aid to €91.5 million⁴². Belarusian civil society has also profited significantly from the establishment of the EaP multilateral channels. The EaP Civil Society Forum (CSF), which was formed in the guideline of the EaP and was integrated into the National Platform at the country level, assisted in boosting national cooperation and coordination of civil society organizations (CSOs) and encouraged concepts from Belarusian civil society with EU institutions⁴³. These strategies employed by the EU also appeared to have triggered Russia's concerns that Belarus was on the edge of political westernisation because of its involvement in several European projects with normative conditions. Because Minsk started to consider the EaP favourably, seeing substantial possibilities for improving practical cooperation with the EU.

⁴⁰ <https://www.belvpo.com/88818.html/>

⁴¹ <https://www.eubusiness.com/europe/belarus#:~:text=In%202014%2D2017%2C%20ENI%20bilateral,maximum%20of%20%E2%82%AC89%20million.>

⁴² https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/MEMO_16_3107

⁴³ <https://belinstitute.com/en/blog/eu-and-civil-society-belarus>

Simultaneously, Belarusian officials conveyed strong indications to both Brussels and Moscow that involvement in the effort would take second place to the bilateral frameworks between Belarus and Russia and Russian-led integration projects in the post-Soviet area.

To sum up, in the short term the EaP has failed to meet the major objectives set by the EU at its founding, especially in Belarus. However, events after 2013 (particularly the invasion of Crimea) shifted the EaP formula in favour of both the EU and Belarus. On the one hand, the EU has become more pragmatic about what can be accomplished in the neighbourhood in the short to medium term, notably in Belarus. Minsk, on the other hand, became completely conscious of the pressing necessity counterbalance Russia's increasing influence by normalizing relations with the EU and broadening its trade. In this respect, the EaP provided a valuable venue for multilateral interaction between the EU and Belarus (together with other neighbouring governments), fostering enough confidence to build new bilateral discussion and partnership frameworks.

Finalizing the discussion, Belarus is bordering with the EU and Russia which the geopolitical position enables to make a clear policy choice in dilemma. However, in the light of failing democratization and having the least level of democracy index among the EaP countries Belarus is bandwagoning with Russia.

5.4. Georgia: More ambitions, more challenges

The Rose Revolution, which dismissed Shevardnadze in 2003 and welcomed in Mikheil Saakashvili's presidency, was a defining moment in Georgia's history. Despite continuing domestic implications, the new president strengthened Georgia's ties with NATO and the EU. The opposing party won legislative and presidential elections in 2012 and 2013, and there appeared to be a chance for democratic reform under the "Georgian Dream" program. In the 2000s, however, the most difficult issue was Georgia's relationship with its two separatist regions, which escalated the war with Russia in 2008. Also, Georgia's participation in the EU's neighboring policy and Integrated Action Plan from 2006 was one of numerous causes that triggered the war. The large percentage of Georgia's domestic governing elite, who desired political integration with Europe, backed the country's new EU relationships. Russia,

on the other hand, had geopolitical ambitions in the Caucasus, which were put to the test during the Chechen–Russian conflict, with Georgia being one of the few countries to support Chechnya's proclamation of independence. Russia has begun to impede any further NATO and EU expansions to the east. NATO announced Georgia that it will become a future member in April 2008, further alarming Russia. At the same time, the EU announced its neighborhood policy and was ready to begin the "Eastern Partnership" a program aimed at tying Georgia to the EU (*R. Newnham. 2015. p.163*). Accordingly, the EaP was officially inaugurated in Prague in May 2009, following two major events in Georgia's history. At the NATO meeting in Bucharest in April 2008, Georgia was assured that, together with Ukraine, it would join NATO in the future⁴⁴. The US government, which backed Mikheil Saakashvili's reformist team at the time, was enthusiastic about Georgia's ambitious goal for NATO membership. Despite Russia's severe opposition, then-US President George W. Bush indicated strong support for post-Soviet Ukraine and Georgia entering the alliance during a visit to Kyiv in 2008.

The EU's increased relations with Georgia exacerbated the following security challenges, resulting in further military clashes between South Ossetia and Georgian forces. Georgia had given Abkhazia and South Ossetia more autonomy inside the Georgian Republic, but both territories declared independence in February 2008, drawing inspiration from Kosovo's declaration of independence. At the same time, President Putin stated that in case of Georgian military incursion, Russia will stand behind the two separatist regions. When Georgia ultimately chose to intervene militarily against the separatist regions in mid-August 2008, Russia bombed several Georgian towns and launched a massive attack of both South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Most Western countries opposed Russia's recognition of both territories' status. In 2011, the European Parliament declared South Ossetia and Abkhazia to be Russian occupied territories⁴⁵. Following the battle in 2008, the two separatist territories formed a military alliance with Russia and associated with the Russian Federation. The Georgian army

⁴⁴ https://www.nato.int/cps/us/natohq/official_texts_8443.htm

⁴⁵ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-6-2008-0253_EN.html?redirect

was forced to withdraw from both Abkhazia and South Ossetia by Russian armed forces⁴⁶. Russian armed personnel have stayed in both separatist territories since then. Georgia departed the Commonwealth of Independent States after the war and focused its attention to Western institutions primarily NATO and the European Union. In addition, Abkhazia and South Ossetia have also forged tighter links and association agreements with Russia after the 2008 war. All these developments challenged Georgia with a security dilemma.

Georgia's aspiration toward Europe following the 2008 Russo-Georgian war was bolstered by the progress of the EaP, which was further supported by the AA/DCFTA dialogue. The EU introduced the EaP program in May 2009, which, unlike the ENP and its Action Plan, offered actual advantages to Georgia. Supporting citizen mobility and visa liberalization in a secure environment, as well as political association and further economic integration between the European Union and interested partner countries were among the tangible benefits listed in the Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit⁴⁷. Two years later, at the Warsaw Eastern Partnership Summit, the EU emphasized that one of the EaP's primary goals was to increase citizen movement in a safe and well-managed framework. As a first phase, visa facilitation and readmission agreements were reached, followed by gradual moves toward visa-free regimes on a case-by-case basis once these agreements were completed and implemented successfully. The EaP provided bilateral and multilateral platforms to the partner countries. The Georgian administration (both past and current authorities) has been more engaged in developing the bilateral aspect of the EaP since the outset of the EaP. As a consequence, Georgia has actually involved in the EaP initiative in order to strengthen economic relations with the EU, to fully utilize bilateral dialogue with the EU, and to achieve the status of "the best" in order to receive more and more from the EU (*L. Delcour. 2013. p.344*). However, the recent decline of the EU values in Georgia, particularly democracy index inferred from electoral process and independent media rating decline as well as the arrest of M. Saakashvili and N. Melia raised serious concerns for the EU⁴⁸.

⁴⁶ <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/the-2008-russo-georgian-war-putins-green-light/>

⁴⁷ https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/31797/2009_eap_declaration.pdf

⁴⁸ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/georgia/nations-transit/2021>

The EaP has been the driving force of reforms in the country since 2009. In this sense, members from the executive and legislative branches of government have constantly praised the EaP's importance. Georgia has reached an important point with the AA/DCFTA and visa-free travel. The visa dialogue began in 2012 and ended five years later with Georgian people having biometric passports no longer needing short-term permits. Georgia's close EaP partner neighbors in the region (Armenia and Azerbaijan) have not been able to take advantage of this opportunity. A strong security element might be included in the renewed EaP. Georgia has involved in a variety of CSDP missions in Mali, Somalia, the Central African Republic, and Libya since signing a framework agreement with the EU in 2013 on involvement in crisis management missions around the world. Georgia, on the other hand, desires a tighter security partnership with the EU in addition to increasing its own national security by modifying its National Security Concept. Moreover, the EUMM is already assisting Georgia in maintaining the ceasefire (*G. Gogolashvili. 2017. p.18*).

Despite the successes of the EU's strategy on promoting its values and conducting an effective value-driven policy in Georgia, the EU's engagement in security issues and conflict management policies in the neighborhood is insufficient, as seen by Georgia's current security challenges. Despite enormous resources allocated to offset the effects of the different policy areas, particularly on democracy, human rights and transparency, EU support could not substitute a durable strategy on security challenges. The worsening of the security reality on the ground swiftly undermined the EU's financial initiatives to foster long-term conflict resolution's prospective stabilising consequence. A rapid escalation of the security situation on the ground, headed by an increasingly aggressive Russia and a new administration in Georgia that intended to unfreeze conflict settlement mechanisms, contradicted the EU's long-term strategy to resolving conflict as it mentioned in the EU Security Strategy “we should be ready to act before a crisis occurs. Conflict prevention and threat prevention cannot start too early” (*European security strategy. 2003. p. 35*)⁴⁹

⁴⁹ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/30823/qc7809568enc.pdf>

To conclude, the analysis illustrated that Georgia is most democratic country in the South Caucasus region (see table 3) and EU's democracy promotion is relatively successful. However, this successful democratization costed massive security challenges for the country.

5.5 Moldova: geopolitical choice between East and West

The goal of European integration has driven Moldova's internal and external policy objectives over the past decade, notwithstanding the slow pace of transformation. The country's ruling elites frequently lacked the practical or ideological determination to undertake a systematic European integration process that went beyond pronouncements and expectations. It's also evident that in Moldova, European integration was often viewed as a geopolitical option between East and West, rather than a way of ensuring long-term political, economic, and social reform in accordance with European standards, norms, and principles. Over decades, this notion has impacted Moldovan citizens' opinions more towards the EU. Finally, this transformed governments' perceptions toward the EaP, progressing from initial confusion to forward-looking optimism to less aspirational pragmatism – with the election of a new pro-reform reformist government in early June 2019, a new possibility for EU-Moldova partnerships appears to have opened.

Moldova has been considered to as the EU's most important, devoted, and trusted partner since 2012, with the state being called the EaP's "success narrative" Moldova was doing more than other EaP members in the run-up to the 2013 EaP Vilnius Summit. Following the conclusion of the Association Agreement and the granting of visa-free travel to the EU in 2014, Moldova grew more assertive in its relations with the EU and the EaP, requesting a clear European vision. The Moldovan authorities was also urging the European Commission and EU member states for a commitment that a "road map" with a definite membership prospect would be on the agenda by 2018 (*J. Benedyczak. 2015*). The bubble of Moldova's "success story" collapsed shortly after the November 2014 parliamentary elections, when a large banking scam was exposed. The incident uncovered systemic issues in the financial sector, the judicial, regulatory and law enforcement agencies, as well as high-level corruption across the spectrum. This precipitous decrease can also be linked to previous governments' extreme politicization of the European integration agenda and their inability to complete

reform that would be felt by people. The banking scam exposes the 'pro-European' elite's systemic and persistent corruption. Moldova was already a renegade success story ahead of the 2015 EaP Summit in Riga.

When evaluating Moldova's involvement in the EaP, it seems that progress was made in areas other than the long-term fulfillment of systemic reforms, democratic ideals, and rule of law. This is perhaps unsurprising, given that these initiatives necessitate greater political will from Moldova's ruling elites and would undermine ruling classes' veto rights. The EaP proposal for Moldova in 2009 made far more sense when it represented short-term financial, economic, or political rewards for the elites, which they could exploit to boost their domestic support. As a result, the EU's conditionality and benchmarking policy was much more successful wherever a significant incentive was associated, whether it was EU assistance, visa-free travel, or access to the EU market for Moldovan exports under the DCFTA. However, the Association Agreement's value-based component remains unresolved. The country's political and democratic transition processes have not yet taken place. Those reforms that have been implemented have mostly focused on secondary issues that are significant but do not result in fundamental changes, resulting in a minor impact on the country's internal development. At the policy level, steps have been done to strengthen the performance of the judicial process (*M. Emerson and D. Cenuşa. 2021. p.15.16*).

Moldova has received a variety of EU aid packages through bilateral and multilateral support programs under the European Neighbourhood Instrument since 2009. According to Moldova's support management platform, the EU has promised over €935 financial assistance over the last decade, with €442 million ultimately delivered. The entire amount of EU assistance supplied to Moldova has tripled since its EaP participation, compared to the corresponding period between 1991 and 2009 (€235 million). Moreover, the majority of EU funding was offered during the 'new relationship' in EU-Moldovan partnerships, from 2010 to 2014, in the field of technical aid and direct budget support, including EaP 'more-for-more' performance financing and a macro-financial support (MFA) program totaling €90 million in grants (2010-2012), matching the IMF program of USD 586 million. Since 2015, the EU has begun to impose greater conditionality tied to the outcomes of reforms as well as respect

for democratic norms, the rule of law, and human rights(Z. Siscan and M. Hachi. 2013. p.2, table3). Due to a lack of progress in the investigation into banking system fraud, the EU's direct funding assistance was terminated for the first occasion in June 2015.

On the other hand, regarding the security challenges Moldova face, the Russian-backed separatist territory of Transnistria is one of the main elements of this concern. In 2003, Dmitri Kozak, a Russian politician and strong supporter of Vladimir Putin, presented a strategy for settling the Transnistrian conflict and merging the territory with Moldova, which marked a pivotal point in Moldova's engagement with Western institutions. The 'Kozak Memorandum' introduced an asymmetrical federal structure for Moldova's government, in which Transnistria and Gagauzia would have had considerable autonomy, disproportionately representation in a proposed upper house of parliament, veto power over any international treaties, and the ability to gain independence if Moldova's sovereignty was capitulated. The agreement would also have ensured a Russian military presence for the next 20 to 30 years (*International Crisis Group. 2004*)⁵⁰. The agreement would not only legitimate Russian foreign policy in the frozen conflicts, but it would also ensure Russian supremacy in the region for the conceivable future. The denial of the Kozak Memorandum provoked a rapid and harsh response from Russia. Acknowledging that it could no longer rely on Russian support, Voronin and the ruling Party of Communists of the Republic of Moldova (PCRM), which had traditionally campaigned integration into the Russia–Belarus customs union, made a "overnight" change in strategy that shifted Moldovan foreign policy from East to West. Moldova's response can be interpreted as a difficult balance approach used against a regional hegemon (*M. Emerson and D. Cenușa. 2021. p.41*).

Moldova has gotten substantially closer to Western institutions in terms of diplomatic coordination. In 2004, an EU–Moldova Action Plan was drafted, indicating that European integration had become a near-unanimous foreign policy priority. Moldova has increased its alliance with NATO while preserving its nominal neutrality. Soft balance was brought about by a mix of power imbalances with Russia, a favorable international context resulting from

⁵⁰ ICR. MOLDOVA: REGIONAL TENSIONS OVER TRANSDNIESTRIA. 2004:
<https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/412b43be4.pdf>

increased EU involvement in Moldova, and a local political environment that enforced little electoral penalty to the PCRM's shift in perspective. Russia, on the other hand, has a vested interest in protecting its hold over Moldova. Russian policymakers consider Moldova as the country's window on the Balkans, essential for Russia's regional interests to be maintained. Russia's military intervention is also part of the country's plan to keep its area of influence in the 'near abroad' as other EaP partners. Since the 2004 EU enlargements, Russia has viewed the EU as a rival for influence in its direct proximity, with Moldova serving as one of the primary battlefields, especially regarding its geographical proximity to the EU (*R. Kennedy. 2016*). Moldova is a component of Russia's ambition to establish a Euro-Asian sphere of influence to challenge NATO and the EU's dominance through initiatives like the Eurasian Union. To this objective, Russia has imposed severe penalties on a number of former Soviet republics, particularly in the South Caucasus. Lastly, Transnistria is viewed as a barrier against NATO's continuous expansion, particularly towards Ukraine. This is particularly important in light of Russia's occupation of Crimea, because the loss of votes for pro-Russian groups in Crimea has ensured that Kyiv's administration will be substantially more pro-Western in the near term.

Lastly, the analysis reveals that Moldova has a successful European pathway and relatively successful democratization process. However, as most of the other EaP countries, the country is challenging with security threads

5.6. Ukraine: More than Eastern Partner

Many in Ukraine have viewed the EaP as an unbalanced response to the country's aspirations to pursue EU membership and the great expectations it has faced in this respect since its establishment in 2009. Ukraine had been in negotiations with the EU on the Enhanced Agreement, eventually known as the Association Agreement, for almost two years at the time of its announcement (AA). Likewise, since October 2008, Ukraine has maintained a visa negotiation with the EU. As a consequence, the EaP, which provided precisely the same benefits to the EU's other eastern neighbors, was seen as having no additional value for Kyiv, given that Ukraine already had the EaP's fundamental bilateral provisions on the ground. From a Ukrainian standpoint, the dissatisfaction stemmed mostly from the reality that the

EaP doesn't really guarantee EU membership – despite the fact that the political discussion regarding accession in Ukraine was often marked by inconsistencies and verbal maneuvering by officials. In principle, the EaP was seen as a "one-size-fits-all" approach, and Ukraine regarded the EaP as a supplement to the bilateral deal that Kyiv had already concluded with the EU, with some extra multilateral levels of collaboration. As a result, Ukraine's primary focus was on bilateral relations with the EU instead of the EaP as a whole. This is not to imply that it ignored the EaP entirely; Ukraine recognized the relevance of the EaP's multilateral character and attempted to benefit on it. The EaP was also seen as a move further by Ukraine since it distinguished between the EU's southern and eastern neighbors, placing them in distinct institutional groups (*I. SOLONENKO. 2011. p.125-126*).

The thirteen years of the EaP might be divided into two phases for Ukraine: before and after the Euromaidan Movement and the signing of the Association Agreement. The agreement was reached on March 21, 2014 (the political part) and June 27, 2014 (the technical and economic parts). Starting in 2014, Ukraine's European integration journey was defined by two important milestones: the Association Agreement and visa liberalization, as well as several domestic developments linked to these two events. However, the conflicts in Ukraine over Luhansk, Donetsk, and Crimea have all been linked to the EU's and the ENP's role in the geopolitical area. The EU offered Ukraine an association agreement in November 2013, but the pro-Russian president, Victor Yanukovich, declined. Yanukovich eventually defeated pro-EU Yulia Tymoshenko in the 2010 presidential election. The election turnout reflected a country divided between the east and south, which backed Yanukovich, and the west, which supported Tymoshenko. Overall, Ukraine experienced significant democratic disappointments due to rising authoritarianism and a political schism between pro-Russian and liberal Western-oriented politicians. Ukraine's relationship with the EU deteriorated during Yanukovich's presidency, as Russia continued to increase its support and assistance to Ukraine in the version of expansive trade preferences and cheap gas. At the time, Russia announced its intention to establish a political and economic union spanning the entire Eurasian region, together with post-Soviet countries (*T. Sauer. 2016*). This was a geopolitical reaction to the EU's previous enlargement, the emergence of the Eastern Partnership, and the EU's deeper aspirations for its eastern neighbors.

On the other hand, in its early example, the EaP tended to less concentrate on security and instead focused on promoting trade and community relations. Russia has repeatedly and extensively pressed Ukraine to impede its European integration development, employing all of its hybrid warfare techniques and instruments at its disposal which triggered security challenges. The political pressure exerted by the Kremlin on Ukraine was rapidly intensifying. During Viktor Yanukovich's presidency, ties with Russia were conducted in a restricted, asymmetrical "political-economic barter" style, with Ukraine's national security interests traded for Russian economic (including natural gas) priorities. The so-called "Kharkiv Agreements," which were signed on April 21, 2010, offered for a 25-year renewal of Russia's license on naval installations in Crimea in consideration for natural gas favourable treatment from Russia. Starting in the mid-2000s, the broad application of various trade barriers became a key tactic of Russia's economic and political stress on Ukraine. Large-scale trade battles emerged on January 20, 2006, when Russia unexpectedly prohibited all animal products imports, supposedly due to their low condition. Later, Russia enlisted the help of its allies to impose anti-Ukraine trade sanctions. Parallel to this, Russia used energy sector levers and blackmail to exert pressure on Ukraine. Russia's "gas" campaign against Ukraine began long before military action was launched. Russia's aggressiveness against Ukraine has once again proved that the security dimension cannot be neglected, and that the EaP requires to have a strong security aspect to balance the other dimensions. Depending on the course of developments in Ukraine, there are various scenarios for Russian aggression which are similarly applied to other EaP members: (a) bringing pro-Russian forces to power in Ukraine and keeping it under Russian impact; (b) federalization of Ukraine with special status for the "DPR" and "LPR" and the right to impact Ukraine's foreign affairs in order to prevent the country's integration into NATO and the EU; (c) "preservation" of conflict and formation of a compressive stress in the "DPR" and "LPR" as a significant presence for renewed aggression; (d) if "peaceful" ways of subjugating Ukraine fails, secession of Ukrainian territories with the capture of Eastern and Southern oblasts and land-based union of Transnistria and Crimea with Russia unachievable (*Razumkov Centre Journal. 2020*)⁵¹.

⁵¹ Razumkov Centre Journal. 2020: https://razumkov.org.ua/uploads/journal/eng/NSD177-178_2019_eng.pdf

Meanwhile, Russia's primary purpose is to subjugate and dominate Ukraine, keeping its accession to NATO and the EU.

As paradoxical as it may seem, Russia's hostile approach toward several EaP members has actually helped them execute reforms more effectively. The political transition in Ukraine has intensified, and the extent of the reform has been broadened to include formerly unreformed areas. As a result, Ukraine currently has a considerably better success rate in implementing reforms than it did in the pre-war period. However, while reforms are a component of the solution to some national security challenges, they require a protective security umbrella to be long-term viable. Kyiv expects that the revived EaP would provide greater aid to Ukraine in constructing such a shield, allowing it to better mitigate external challenges while focusing on its internal transformation programme. Ukraine has made huge progress in developing stronger and closer connections with the EU during the last eight years, having moved on from the years of missed opportunities (2009-2013). The achievements, however, are fragile, and the reforms are yet changeable. Elections and a transition of administration in Ukraine in 2019 was the measuring stick for the next stage of EU-Ukraine cooperation. The country's decision to remain on the route to European integration will be heavily reliant on the EU's desire and competence to provide Ukraine focused on increasing to encourage additional political, economic, and social transformations in the aftermath of the Revolution (2013-2014) (*T. Kuzio. 2016*). In the next period of time, an updated version of the Eastern Partnership platform (EaP) might play a critical role in carrying about structural reforms in Ukraine. Moreover, Russia's annexation of Crimea and aggressive behavior against Ukraine in 2014 and recent Russian invasion prompted Kyiv to consider requesting additional security contributions from the EU. Until now, the EU has focused on soft security, primarily fighting corruption (which is commendable) and supporting capacity building in the civilian security sector through the EU Advisory Mission in Ukraine (EUAM). But even so, given the security threats that Ukraine currently faces from the east (via the sea and on land), the soft security strategy will almost certainly need to be enhanced, in tandem with Ukraine's potential and progressive incorporation in some of the EU's defense activities.

The country-specific analysis of the Ukraine within the timeframe of the study reveals that Ukraine can be assessed as the most pro-European country illustrating the highest level of democracy index. On the other hand, in the light of current processes it is obvious to claim that this pro-European attitude costs massive security challenges and a direct intervention of Russia. In the following chapter, the analysis will be conducted from the perspectives of the regional actors and the EaP in a broad sense.

Chapter 6. A strategic assessment of the Eastern Partnership Program and the future perspectives

This chapter elaborates on the strategic assessment of the Eastern Partnership Program and the future perspectives by analysing effectiveness/ineffectiveness of employed policy tools of regional actors in the program countries. The main purpose of the chapter is to provide analysis by discussing in a more broad sense as the previous chapter presents the analysis at the domestic level. The discourse will come to an end by identifying current implications and future perspectives regarding the recent developments.

The Eastern Partnership (EaP) of the European Union is widely viewed as a inefficient program. However, The EaP is a successful initiative, according to an EEAS officials. Regardless of the fact that the program has lost momentum and has been continuing for an exceptionally long period of time, the resolutions of the Vilnius and Riga summits are being executed successfully. Multilateral platforms are still in use, and several levels of meetings are held. Obviously, the most pressing challenge confronting the EaP is the program's representation in geopolitical dimensions. Assessing the EaP's states in terms of a choice between the EU and Russia (when listening to EU decision-makers, it appears that these are the only available options), may be the program's Achilles' heel. When Poland and Sweden initiated the EaP, they had no idea the signing countries would be faced with such a dilemma. Surprisingly, the strategy leading up to EU accession is the most productive. In terms of these states, the absence of such a future deprives the EU of power and influence (*T. Stepniewski. 2016. p.4*). However, as it is seen from the country-specific analysis it is

important noting that, at the moment, EaP states are not prepared for European membership (in terms of all membership criterias).

According to the European Parliament The EU's primary objective is to preserve democracy, freedom, security, and peace on the European continent and beyond, which are under threat from Russia's confrontational actions, which pose one of the most significant threats in relation to the EU's strategic and foreign policy objectives and "President Putin's foreign policy is clearly aggressive and revisionist, as he wants to be seen as the defender of Russian interests and is trying to gain control over territories he considers were lost after the collapse of the Soviet Union and beyond.... consolidate the regime's interference in post-Soviet countries and beyond; ...use frozen conflicts areas as a strategic element for interfering in the affected countries and preventing them from moving closer to the EU..."⁵². On the other hand, Russia considered the program's objectives as a threat for its "sphere of influence" and call for a geopolitical rivalry. Sergei Lavrov (Russian Foreign Minister) since the very begging stated that "We are accused of having spheres of influence. But what is the Eastern Partnership, if not an attempt to extend the EU's sphere of influence,..."⁵³. At the same time, in 2009 when the EaP newly established, Russia's Permanent Representative to the European Union Vladimir Chizhov remarked that "Naturally, our attitude to the Eastern Partnership is critical. We see it as a European Union's attempt to draw some of the former Soviet republics closer to itself..."⁵⁴. Regarding the positions of EaP countries in this geopolitical rivalry Armenian former President Serzh Sargsyan stated that his country has learnt that "geopolitical competition bears nothing good," and that only by "combining interests" with regional actors can everyone avoid security challenges. Similarly, former Moldovan Prime Minister Pavel Filip expressed his position as "We would like to build balanced relations"⁵⁵. Therefore, regarding the position of EaP officials and challenges (which are extensively elaborated in the thesis, particularly in the country-specific part) that member countries

⁵² European Parliament recommendation on the direction of the EU-Russia relations. Paragraph H. 2021:

https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0383_EN.html

⁵³ <https://euobserver.com/foreign/27827>

⁵⁴ <https://tass.com/politics/1381935>

⁵⁵ <https://www.dw.com/en/uncertainty-competition-mark-the-space-between-the-eu-and-russia/a-42631827>

within the timeline of the study ensure a strong plausibility of the hypothesis to speculate. Secondly, available analytical reviews, statistical evidence, and online survey conducted among the citizens of EaP states were reviewed to test the hypothesis which confirmed the plausibility of given a hypothesis.

Regarding the further discussion which also helps us to test test the hypothesis, three of the six member countries—Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine—have advanced to the next stage of the EaP and signed association agreements with the EU, including the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA. *See table 1*) regarding indicators of institutional development toward primary EU value-democracy (elections, local and democratic governance, civil society, free media, judicial independence and anti-corruption efforts) As explained previously, one of the ENP's goals has been to promote and deepen democracy in all partner countries, hence establishing security in the area. Using the NIT's democracy ratings in respect to regime types, we might be enabled to generate intriguing insights about democracy in EU partner countries (see table 3). First, practically all ENP partner countries have a poor democratic trend over the years. The NIT Index revealed an average democratic score of 2.56 for all partner countries in 2009, when the EaP was established. In 2021 (latest available data), it fell to 2.49, indicating a decline trend in average democratic scores, leaving the region with primarily authoritarian characteristics.

*Table 3. Nations in transit index rating and average democratic score (2005–2021)*⁵⁶

PARTNER STATES	2009	2021	HIGHEST SCORE
ARMENIA	2.61	2.96	3 (2020)
AZERBAIJAN	1.75	1.07	1.75 (2009)
BELARUS	1.43	1.29	1.5 (2010)
GEORGIA	3.07	3.18	3.39 (2017)
MOLDOVA	2.93	3.11	3.18 (2013)
UKRAINE	3.61	3.36	3.39 (2020)
AVERAGE SCORE	2.56	2.49	2.7

Source: Author, created based on the information provided by Freedom House

⁵⁶ <https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit>

Belarus and Azerbaijan are consolidated authoritarian regimes, whereas Armenia is a semi-consolidated authoritarian system, according to Freedom House. Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia, the three additional partner countries that have signed association agreements with the EU, are currently categorized as hybrid or transitional regimes (*ibid*). Furthermore, none of the hybrid/transitional countries has been classed as a consolidated democracy or a semi-consolidated democracy. Furthermore, there are few, if any, indications that the hybrid/transitional countries are progressing toward greater democracy. Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine should be regarded as hybrid regimes rather than transitional regimes, according to the NIT's classification of countries. These three partner countries have witnessed extremely limited democratic growth over time, with repeated reverse transitions into more authoritarian tendencies. Rather than being in democratic transition, the NIT shows that a frozen democratic and authoritarian state in Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine will eventually leave them as hybrid governments with somewhat more democratic than authoritarian characteristics. Finally, the overall average score for the EU's eastern neighborhood is low. This constrained democratic environment among ENP partner states contrasts sharply with the previous central European scenario in the 1990s–2000s, when liberalization was accompanied by transformations into solidified democracies and, finally, full EU membership. The successful enlargement policy of the 1990s, which supported democracy and security in former Eastern Europe, was clearly followed by a failing neighborhood policy in Europe's new Eastern partner states throughout the 2000s (M. NILSSON AND D. SILANDER. 2016. p.51). When we examine the NIT index to other democratic indicators, we may observe the same general negative democratic development, indicating that the EU's democratic ambitions in the ENP have failed. However, this is not mean that the EU has not assisted to democratic reforms in the region (the democratic situation may have been worse if the EU had not enacted the ENP), despite it has failed to ensure the EaP's democratic objectives.

On the other hand, the countries of the EaP do not operate in a vacuum, but are influenced by both internal and foreign factors. Among the external actors, the EU and Russia appear to be crucial. As a result, analyzing Russia's intentions (actual and unstated) with respect to these countries appears crucial from the standpoint of EaP states. This is done in order to

identify Russia's tactical, as well as strategic, intentions in relation to the EaP and post-Soviet states in general. There are frozen conflicts in Transnistria in Moldova, Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia, and active conflicts in eastern Ukraine, among the three most democratic EU Eastern partner countries as well as Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan. These conflicts should be understood as the result of the EU's unfulfilled ambition to extend democratic norms and ideals eastward and establish democratic peace with surrounding states through its neighborhood policy. It should also be viewed in light of Russia's counter-hegemonic reactions to the EU's promotion of democracy in its neighboring territories. Accelerated democratic reforms in EaP countries, particularly in associated countries, according to Russian politicians, represent a potential threat to Russia's interests and political outcome. Obviously, democracy in EaP will be feasible only with the aid and close participation of Western entities. Russia is well aware of this truth, which is why it is so deeply opposed to Ukraine and Georgia becoming a member of the EU and NATO. One could even argue that Russia's strategic goal for EaP is to prevent it from democracy and integrating with the West. Regardless of the aforementioned, it is worth noting that Russia has been consistent in its efforts to reintegrate the post-Soviet region during the last two decades. From Russia's standpoint, securing its hegemony in space and forcing the West out will reinforce its imperialist status in regional and global dimensions, as well as permit the realization of a number of minor socioeconomic objectives. Furthermore, in order to defend its sphere of influence, Russia did not hesitate to take a confrontational stance toward the West. Lastly, the reality that EaP member states are heavily reliant on Russia's influence should be emphasized. In other words, Russia has a multitude of tools at its disposal to affect the situations in these countries. Therefore, the EU should have a clear and basic grasp of the geopolitical purpose for its Eastern Partnership policy: unless the EU promotes security to its Eastern neighbors, it risks importing instability to the region. Since 1990, there has not been a single example of a post-communist or post-totalitarian state in the EU's neighborhood that has achieved stability and prosperity without integrating into the EU. The achievement of the newly democratic Central European and Baltic countries in the 1990s was made possible primarily by their quick incorporation into the EU. Their strong visions of EU membership,

made possible by the EU's Copenhagen criteria in 1993, kept them constantly motivated to implement critical reforms⁵⁷.

Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine clearly have higher objectives and achievements toward European integration than Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Belarus, and they want to see their collaboration pushed to a higher platform. It is also critical not to neglect about the others and to involve them as much as feasible in the cooperation, which is why we need a dynamic model for the future to enable the first set of countries to go faster while retaining partnership links with all EaP countries. When considering the Eastern Partnership and the Eastern Partners' long-term aspirations, the potential of their accession to the EU always comes up⁵⁸. However, despite the visible progress by each three Associated Trio countries (Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine) over the last decade, the EU still does not provide them clear accession prospects. This is not just determined by the three states' reform implementation, but also on an absence of political will within the EU. Without a more even wider perspective from the EU, at least certain new significant steps on the integration route, the inspiration for reforms in the Associated Trio countries will begin to weaken, political polarization will increase, and less focus will be paid to meaningful reforms, which are required for integration. We can only speculate on how such lost enthusiasm may appear, but it will be substantial unless the existing EU Eastern Partnership program is refreshed with new, more ambitious concepts that could result in major integration progress over the next period of time.

However, on the other hand, it is necessary to confront the reality of the situation: the EU is not yet ready to offer the EaP members, particularly to the Associated Trio members a direct roadmap for EU membership. There are several factors for this, but one of the most crucial is the necessity for deep reforms inside the EU and its structures. This is also something that President Emanuel Macron has mentioned on several occasions⁵⁹. Because EU member states have veto power, it is difficult to make decisions with the present 27 member states. This will become significantly more hard, if not unattainable, if the EU is expanded to include six

⁵⁷ SCEEUS Platform for Reflections on the Eastern Neighbourhood No. 1:

<https://www.ui.se/forskning/centrum-for-osteuropastudier/guest-commentary/the-future-of-the-eus-eastern-partnership-policy-everything-but-institutions/>

⁵⁸ <https://icds.ee/en/the-future-of-the-eastern-partnership/>

⁵⁹ <https://www.ceps.eu/macrons-non-to-eu-enlargement/>

Western Balkan and three Associated Trio countries. Challenges with the rule of law in Poland and Hungary are also driving EU member states increasingly hesitant to unlock the door to full-scale enlargement.

In conclusion, the analyses presented in the last previous chapters both at the domestic level and regional system levels in a broad sense confirmed the proper selections of theoretical explanations of the study. Neorealism is mainly contributing to a logical explanation of the geopolitical rivalry of the regional actors and explained the logic of policy dilemmas for the EaP members, particularly from the perspectives of the security challenges they confront. On the other hand, democratization and war theory which were added as an additional explanation of the study helped to present a valid understanding of the domestic factors which primarily pretends that democratization causes or escalates the likelihood of conflicts. Moreover, inferred from the suggested theoretical approached to the study, the hypothesis is presented: *The EU promoted Eastern Partnership conditions such as democracy, rule of law and human rights in EaP countries can trigger security challenges because of their value-based geopolitical positions.* The proposed hypothesis is tested in this chapter first of all through the “cause and effect” statements. Then following the discussion through the analysis of empirical numbers confirmed that the suggested hypothesis is valid. Furthermore, conducted survey specifically for this research played an important added value role. First of all, as it is discussed in this chapter, opinions of the citizens of EaP countries confirmed that the proposed hypothesis is valid. Secondly, in order to present a tangible analysis/results and answer to the research question specific questions were addressed to the respondents (the importance of the voice of EaP citizens is extensively highlighted in the methodology part). Hence, in the light of the logical sequence of chapters of the thesis, well-connected variables, logically proposed theoretical approaches, and valid hypothesis it is reasonable and rationale to present the results.

Conclusion

The thesis examined geopolitical policy dilemma for Eastern Partnership countries from the perspectives of democracy and security by tackling with the research question of why the promotion of EU's democracy/democratization triggers conflict of interest with Russia which leads to the security challenges for these 6 countries. The main objective of the study was to figure out the reasons for clashes of geostrategic interests of regional players: the EU and Russia and its impact on the policy-making process of the 6 EaP countries in terms of democracy and security as it was presented policy dilemma in this research thesis. Moreover, the research is attempted to fill the research gap as previously no similar study is presented bringing together democracy and security concepts and analyzing them from the perspectives of all EaP countries. The topic has addressed the given research questions using the qualitative research method of data analysis in association with a comparative case study. However, quantitative data measuring was used to supplement the qualitative analysis of the thesis to analyze the opinions of respective citizens of program countries and to interpret datasets provided by the NIT index of the Freedom House. Additionally, the research was examined using the Neorealism international relations theory, which is relevant to the research problem because it discussed the presence of the conflict of interest, which leads to a security dilemma for EaP countries inferred from the geopolitical position in which power (soft/hard) is the primary significant contributing factor in promoting interest from the perspectives of regional role players.

The thesis, first of all, elaborated on the general perceptions of the EaP program and employed policy means by the regional actors. The chapter identified that over the past time, the EU has steadily increased its value-driven foreign policy towards the eastern neighboring countries which relied on the soft power tools such as economic, political, and strategic involvement by promoting its democracy. A stronger presence and broader participation have contributed to a more comprehensive knowledge of the area and the various mechanisms at work in each of the states. The EU is now in a stronger position to interact with these countries more effectively. On the other hand, Russia since its establishment Moscow regarded the EaP with skepticism because it was uncertain about its true intentions of the EaP: if the EU is genuine about making its new neighbors a stable and secure environment,

or whether it is a type of geopolitical campaign to weaken Russia's influence in the region. The Kremlin's main concern with the EaP is that it would reduce Russia's dominance in post-Soviet space and undermine Moscow's aspirations to reunite this region under its control. If the EaP states sign association and free trade agreements with Brussels, they will be prevented from joining the Customs Union and the Eurasian Union, both of which are viewed as critical tools by Moscow in carrying out its reintegration objectives. As a result, Russia's hard power is being employed to protect its dominance over the "Near Abroad" to prevent the EU's soft power dominance while also reaffirming its sphere of influence.

Secondly, the thesis is speculated on the country-specific analysis and strategic assessment parts which presented a broad understanding of the complexity of promotion of the EU values, such as democracy and democratic reforms, as well as the realities, particularly the security challenges which formulate six countries' diverse developmental pathways. The analysis revealed that despite the EU's soft policy approaches, not all EaP states are eager to have a more formal relationship with the EU. Armenia and Belarus, for example, favored participation in the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union and declined to sign the Association Agreement. Armenia, furthermore, is a Russian Federation bandwagon, unable to defy Russia's role because of its control of Armenia's security and all economic sectors. Moreover, Azerbaijan represents a compromise between Russia and the European Union by failing both in democratization and tackling with security challenges. It makes an effort to maintain equal relationships with both parties. Furthermore, Azerbaijan does not want to aggravate its northern neighbor any further, nor does it want to lose the EU as a reliable and useful partner. On the contrary, concerning the associated trio, notwithstanding security challenges and failing security strategies on the ground, they have a determined orientation toward Euro-Atlantic integration and a relatively successful democratization process. In recent years, Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine approached European values and have obtained a variety of benefits outlined in the Association Agreement.

The central question of this research was to respond to why democratization can trigger security challenges for EaP countries regarding their geopolitical locations. The study revealed that geopolitical position plays a key factor here as Russia interprets it as "their destiny,,. Therefore, the EU's value-based policy tool - democratization is one of the main

factors emerging security challenges as a response of Russia's reaction. Moreover, regarding the analysis of table 3 (chapter 6) identified an interesting tendency that the least pro-European country Belarus which is having also the least level of democracy indicators over the time is not challenged with security threads while the most pro-European country among the EaP countries-Ukraine who is ranked at the highest level of democracy is challenging with the massive security challenge. Accordingly, it is also logical to pretend that in the sense of EaP countries the higher level of democratization leads to a higher level of security challenges.

Following the discussion in order to understand the logic of the processes, primarily geopolitical competitions of the EU and Russia as well as the domestic issues, theoretical approaches were speculated in order to present an outlook of the study and frame the phenomenons. In this sense, after the theoretical framing of the study, regarding the logical sequence, the hypothesis was presented: The EU promoted Eastern Partnership conditions such as democracy, rule of law, and human rights in EaP countries can trigger security challenges because of their value-based geopolitical positions. While testing the hypothesis, analysis of literature, remarks made by officials from the EaP countries, as well as opinions expressed by the EU and Russia revealed that the proposed hypothesis is valid and the promotion of EU values in EaP countries triggers Russia to act aggressively. Because the EU's value-driven foreign policy towards the EaP countries through the promotion of its values is the element of its soft power to play as an important actor in the region which emerges an image of a reliable partner in the region. Accordingly, the online survey conducted among the EaP citizens, first of all, confirmed the validity of the hypothesis as well as contributed to address to the research question:

- Almost half of the respondents considered that the EU is successful in promoting its values and their respective countries fulfil the European values (42.6%)
- Nearly half of the responds revealed that from the perspective of the foreign policy the EU is priority for the EaP countries (48.5% EU, 16.2% Russia, 35.3% balanced)
- 71.4% of the respondents considered the EU has more positive impact on their countries as a regional actor than Russia (10.7%)

- And as a last but one of the most important parts of the survey questions revealed that predominant part of the respondents (70.6%) thinks despite the positive impact, the promotion of primary EU values triggers Russia to act aggressively.

On the other hand, a similar analysis figured out that, in response to the EU's successive soft strategy towards the EaP countries, Russia mostly employs the elements of hard power to protect its influence which ultimately leads to the traditional security challenges, that encompasses military and political components. According to the survey specifically conducted for the targets of this study illustrated that the absolute majority of the participants think currently their country is challenged with security issues (85.3%) and the geopolitical position of their countries plays an important role in security challenges (according to the 86.8% of the interviewee).

To sum up, the study identified several evidence of EU-Russia rivalry and clashes of interests in the democracy and security aspects. The road to dominance is formed by the implementation of political initiatives, methods, and other persuasive tools. As a result, both powers possess considerable influence. However, the analysis identified that despite Russia's natural advantages such as the geopolitical proximity and historical ties with the EaP countries, in reality, it losses to the EU in this competition because of its coercive integrationist policy on the ground while the EU implementing value-based soft strategy and assisting countries which in return for the EaP countries leads to the voluntary choice of democracy even if the potential security challenges are waiting for them.

Suggestions for Future Research:

The findings of the study are elaborated on above but there are several aspects that can be addressed in future studies. First, in the light of current escalations and increasing aggression, the study lacks to propose tangible future predictions which necessities further studies in the future. Furthermore, to avoid personal bias (as the personal experience is not always an asset for a researcher) the author sometimes used explanatory long sentences and linking words which should be regarded in future studies to use legible and short sentences.

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Survey questions: Geopolitical Policy Dilemma for Eastern Partnership Countries: Democracy and Security

- 1) Citizenship
- 2) Do you consider your country is fulfilling the European values (democracy, human rights etc.)? Yes/No/Partly
- 3) Do you think that your country has security challenges? Yes/No
- 4) Does the geopolitical position of your country have a negative effect on security issues? Yes/No
- 5) Which foreign policy vector is a priority for your country? The EU/Russia/Balanced
- 6) Which regional actor has a more positive impact on your country? The EU/Russia/Balanced
- 7) Are you optimistic about the future of Eastern Partnership Program? Yes/No
- 8) Do you think the promotion of European values in your country triggers Russia to act aggressively? Yes/No/Not Sure

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14/05/2022