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EU Region-Building in the Neighbourhood

The Eastern Partnership's Contribution in the South Caucasus

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About the Author

Benedikt van den Boom holds a BA in International Politics and History from Jacobs University Bremen (2015) and a MA in EU International Relations and Diplomacy Studies from the College of Europe in Bruges (2016). Currently, he works as an analyst at the European Stability Initiative in Berlin. This paper is based on his Master's thesis at the College of Europe (Chopin Promotion).

Abstract

The promotion of regionalisation is part of the foreign policy of the European Union (EU). However, a closer understanding of the mechanisms by which its policies work towards this goal is lacking. Taking the South Caucasus as a case, this paper asks how the Eastern Partnership contributes to region-building. Based on policy analysis, discourse analysis and interviews, the study adopts a four-layered understanding of region-building as the promotion of closer cross-border contacts: Regarding economic linkages, the analysis underlines Georgia's gateway function. On political linkages, the analysis assigns importance to regulatory harmonisation as a bottom-up tool against divisive regional discourses. Cross-border management fulfils a similar technical role for the promotion of security linkages. Concerning cultural linkages, Georgia is analysed as a hub for common socialisation and people-to-people contacts. Derived from these findings, the paper induces three general hypotheses about the mechanisms of EU contributions to region-building: while combining bilateral with multilateral approaches and functional spill-over effects contribute to region-building, the inclusion of non-state actors does not advance region-building.

Introduction

According to the Association Agreement between the European Union (EU) and Georgia, both parties are "committed to promoting cross-border and inter-regional cooperation by both sides in the spirit of good neighbourly relation".[1] Efforts under the Eastern Partnership (EaP) are thus effectively linked to inter-regional cooperation. The promotion of regional cooperation as a vehicle for stability and prosperity has traditionally informed EU foreign policy.[2] By contrast, the EU's response to former Soviet countries only incrementally developed a region-centred paradigm.[3] Although some studies analyse EU policies of regionalisation,[4] gaps remain in the existing literature regarding the mechanisms by which a region is constructed.[5]

Given this context, the aim of this study is twofold. On the one hand, it attempts to illustrate how the EU contributes to region-building in its neighbourhood, and more specifically the EaP's contributions in the South Caucasus. On the other hand, it seeks to formulate a set of general hypotheses on mechanisms of externally-propelled region-building, which can be used for additional policy-oriented research. Combining these two aims, the paper follows an inductive research design towards a better understanding of region-building. It is structured in three parts. The first section provides a constructivist conceptualisation of region-building, drawing on the South Caucasus as a case study. The second section dissects the contribution of various EaP policies and initiatives on four dimensions of region-building, spanning economic interdependence, political teleology, security cooperation and cultural exchanges. Based on this analysis, the third section formulates general hypotheses on region-building mechanisms. The paper argues that the EaP mainly contributes to region-building in the South Caucasus by means of pursuing sectoral bottom-up approaches that combine bilateral and multilateral logics.

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[1] European Union, "Association Agreement between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community and their Member States, of the one Part, and Georgia, of the other Part", *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 261, 30 August 2014, p. 6.

[2] Smith, Karen E., *European Union Foreign Policy in a Changing World*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2008, 2nd ed., p. 2; Söderbaum, Frederik, Stalgren, Patrik & van Langenhove, Luk, "The EU as a Global Actor and the Dynamics of Interregionalism: A Comparative Analysis", *Journal of European Integration*, vol. 27, no. 3, 2005, pp. 365-380.

[3] Delcour, Laure, *Shaping the Post-Soviet Space: EU Policies and Approaches to Region-Building*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2011, p. 9.

[4] Haarstrup, Toni, "EU as Mentor? Promoting Regionalism as External Relations Practice in EU-Africa Relations", *Journal of European Integration*, vol. 35, no. 7, 2013, pp. 791-792.

[5] Delcour, *Shaping the Post-Soviet Space, op. cit.*, p. 78 fn23.

Conceptualisation

This brief theoretical section aims at two things. On the one hand, it operationalises the main approach of region-building as a four-fold construction of closer linkages. On the other hand, it selects the South Caucasus as case and the Eastern Partnership as source for units of analysis. This provides the backdrop for scrutinising how the Eastern Partnership contributes to region-building.

Understanding Region-Building

It has been pointed out that no universal understanding of regions exists.[6] Consequently, Delcour suggests constructivism as one possible frame of reference to conceptualise the promotion of regionalism.[7] Informed by this approach, regions are defined here as a "limited number of states linked by a geographical relationship"[8] that are "constructed entities".[9] This process of construction or region-building[10] is understood here as the "processes leading to increased cooperation and integration".[11] Region-building can be both "intentional and unintentional",[12] resulting for instance from policy design,[13] social interaction[14] or external pressure.[15]

Börzel suggests to fcus on "processes and structures of region-building in terms of closer economic, political, security and socio-cultural linkages between states and societies that geographically proximate".[16] For the purpose of this study, economic

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[6] Fawn, Rick, "Regions and their Study: Wherefrom, What for and Whereto", *Review of International Studies*, vol. 35, S1, 2009, p. 10.

[7] Delcour, *Shaping the Post-Soviet Space, op. cit.*, p. 15.

[8] Nye, Joseph, *International Regionalism*, Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 1968, p. vii.

[9] Hettne, Björn, Inotai, András & Sunkel, Osvaldo (eds.), *Globalism and New Regionalism*, Helsinki, UNI/WIDER, 1999, p. xv.

[10] Region-building is certainly not the only possible approach. For an alternative discussion on regionalism see Warlick-Leigh, Alex, "Towards a Conceptual Framework for Regionalisation: Bridging New Regionalism and Integration Theory", *Review of International Political Economy*, vol. 13, no. 5, 2006, pp. 750-771. For an alternative proposal of regionness, see Hettne, Björn & Söderbaum, Frederik, "Theorising the Rise of Regionness", *New Political Economy*, vol. 5, no. 3, 2000, pp. 461-466.

[11] Delcour, *Shaping the Post-Soviet Space, op. cit.*, p. 6.

[12] Wunderlich, Jens-Uwe, *Regionalism, Globalisation and International Order: Europe and South-East Asia*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2007, p. 137.

[13] Neumann, Iver B., "A Region-Building Approach to Northern Europe", *Review of International Studies*, vol. 20, no. 1, 1994, pp. 53-74.

[14] Adler, Emanuel & Crawford, Beverly "Constructing a Mediterranean Region: A Cultural Approach", Paper Presented at the Conference on t*he Convergence of Civilizations? Constructing a Mediterranean Region*, Lisbon, Fundação Oriente, 6 June 2002, p. 5.

[15] Makarychev, Andrey, "Russia-EU: Competing Logics of Region-Building", *DGAP Analyse*, no. 1, Berlin, March 2012.

[16] Börzel, Tanja A., "Conclusion: Do All Roads Lead to Regionalism", in Börzel, Tanja A. *et al.* (eds.), *Roads to Regionalism*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2012, p. 255.

linkages are understood to encompass forms of interdependence in trade and infrastructure. Political linkages are conceptualised in two ways, as an overarching narrative, which is created in the upper echelons of political power, and as administrative cooperation, which reflects bottom-up processes of political linkage. Security linkages are defined as alliance systems and specific policy cooperation. Cultural linkages refer to people-to-people contacts. This four-fold operationalisation structures the subsequent analysis.

Selecting Case and Data

De Waal advances the case that "the South Caucasus would benefit greatly from closer regional integration".[17] This assessment follows from two observations. On the one hand, the countries of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia form a meso-region according to Sakwa's taxonomy.[18] They do not only share a common history and socialisation under Soviet rule,[19] but are also constrained by the great powers of Russia, Turkey and Iran in their vicinity.[20] On the other hand, in the proverbial assessment of a former EU Special Representative to the area, the South Caucasus is a "broken region".[21] Recent escalations in the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict over Nagorny-Karabakh have ossified the closed border between the countries.[22] Additionally, the entire 'Eastern Neighbourhood'[23] faces a choice between competing European and Eurasian integration projects, epitomised in Georgia's decision for an Association Agreement with the EU and Armenia's decision to instead join the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU).[24] This mixture of pre-existing regional features combined with a lack of actual regionalisation makes the South Caucasus an interesting case to study region-building.

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[17] De Waal, Thomas, "A Broken Region: The Persistent Failure of Integration Projects in the South Caucasus", *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 64, no. 9, 2012, p. 1721.
[18] Sakwa, Richard, "The Clash of Regionalisms and Caucasian Conflicts", *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 63, no. 3, 2011, p. 468.
[19] Iskandaryan, Alexandr, "The South Caucasus: Becoming a Region or Trying to not be One", in Iskandaryan, Alexandr (ed.), *Identities, Ideologies & Institutions: A Decade of Insight into the Caucasus*, Yerevan, Caucasus Institute, 2011, pp. 9-15.
[20] German, Tracey, "'Good Neighbours or Distant Relatives?' Regional Identity and Cooperation in the South Caucasus", *Central Asian Survey*, vol. 31, no. 2, 2012, pp. 141-142.
[21] Semneby, Peter in Lobjakas, Ahto, "EU Envoy Calls South Caucasus 'Broken Region'", *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, Prague, 3 October 2007.
[22] Broers, Laurence, "Decisive Diplomacy Essential to Securing Fragile Nagorny Karabakh Ceasefire", *Chatham House – The Royal Institute of International Affairs*, London, 11 April 2016.
[23] Delcour, *Shaping the Post-Soviet Space, op. cit.*, p. 90 fn52.
[24] Popescu, Nico, "Eurasian Union: The Real, the Imaginary and the Likely", *European Union Institute for Security Studies Chaillot Paper*, no. 132, September 2014; Makarychev, *op. cit.*

The paper focuses on the EaP as the main external stimulus to deliberately or unintentionally infuse region-building. Conceived in 2008, it brings together the six Eastern neighbours of the EU: Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia.[25] The EaP aggregates various policies, instruments and initiatives.[26] In its broadest strokes, the EaP advances economic integration and political dialogue in cooperation with governments and civil society initiatives.[27] The addition of cross-cutting issues to be addressed multilaterally to the ENP agenda constitutes a major change in the EU's take on region-building.[28] This then poses the policy-relevant question, how the EaP in fact contributes to region-building.

To establish a robust basis for such an analysis, five data sources are used.[29] First, the study looks at the Association Agreement between the EU and Georgia as main contractual document. Second, it adds a wide range of activities under the EaP. Third, speech acts by the relevant external actors and the heads of state of the respective South Caucasian countries are used. Fourth, the study draws on recent public opinion data from the Caucasus Barometer. Last, the findings from these sources are contextualised by five expert interviews. Taking Armenia's turn towards the Russian-led EEU as a significant rupture, data collection starts in September 2013. The various policies and initiatives under the EaP are treated as discreet units of analysis. Thus, the research design qualifies as an embedded single-case study.[30]

Analysis

This section traces the EaP's contribution to region-building on those four dimensions of closer contacts, which Börzel suggests,[31] namely economic interdependence, political teleology, security cooperation and cultural exchanges. For each subsection, the analysis proceeds in two steps, first describing the *status quo* and then scrutinising how EaP policies and initiatives contribute to these linkages. Overall, this section

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[25] Council of the European Union, "Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit", 8435/09 (Press 78), Brussels, 7 May 2009.

[26] Grodmadski, Gregorz, *The Eastern Partnership after Five Years: Time for Deep Rethinking*, Study EXPO/B/AFET/FWC/2013-08/Lot1/01, Brussels, European Parliament Directorate-General for External Policies of the Union, February 2015, pp. 7-10.

[27] Boonstra, Jos & Shapovalova, Natalia, "The EU's Eastern Partnership: One Year Backwards", *FRIDE Working Paper*, no. 99, Madrid, Fundación para las Relaciones Internacionales y el Diálogo Exterior, May 2010.

[28] Delcour, *Shaping the Post-Soviet Space, op. cit.*, p. 86.

[29] Based on the call for triangulation in Yin, Robert K., *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, Thousand Oaks, Sage, 2014, 5th ed., p. 241.

[30] *Ibid.*, pp. 50-56.

[31] Börzel, "Conclusion: Do All Roads Lead to Regionalism", *op. cit.*

provides a comprehensive stocktaking of the various ways, in which the EaP deliberately and unintentionally contributes to South Caucasian region-building.

Economic Interdependence

The first question is how economically interdependent the three South Caucasian countries currently are, for which Table 1 presents a snapshot overview. There is no reported trade between Armenia and Azerbaijan, so Georgia offers the most active South Caucasian market. Nonetheless, external actors are more important for trade relations than the immediate neighbours. These patterns are nothing new, however, as Caucasian trade was always directed at the Soviet centre or other Eastern bloc republics.[32] Therefore, Table 1 suggests external dependence instead of economic interdependence.

Table 1: Trade Relations in the South Caucasus (2014)[33]

	Armenia	Azerbaijan	Georgia
Imports from			
Armenia	---	0 %	2.5 %
Azerbaijan	0 %	---	7.4 %
Georgia	1.7 %	1 %	---
EU-28	27.2 %	14.3 %	28 %
Russia	25.7 %	29.5 %	6.7 %
Exports to			
Armenia	---	0 %	10.1 %
Azerbaijan	0 %	---	19.0 %
Georgia	4.2 %	2.4 %	---
EU-28	32.5 %	54.5 %	20.3 %
Russia	20.4 %	2.9 %	9.6 %

Notes: (a) Percentage of overall import or export for 2014;
(b) Data relating to EU-28 from European Commission

Any analysis on the EaP's contribution in addressing this *status quo* must acknowledge that the European policy focus is on promoting trade between EaP countries and the EU, not on facilitating trade among them.[34] Nonetheless, it is implicitly assumed that trade will be encouraged between neighbours, if all of them align their legislative framework, for instance regarding sanitary standards, with the European one. Once

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[32] German, Tracey, *Regional Cooperation in the South Caucasus: Good Neighbours or Distant Relatives*, London, Routledge, 2016, pp. 21-22.

[33] World Integrated Trade Solutions, *2014 World Trade* [Dataset], Washington D.C., World Bank Group, no date; European Commission, *Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy: Statistics*, SWD(2015) 77 final, Brussels, 25 March 2015, p. 34.

[34] Interview with an Official, DG Trade, European Commission, Brussels, 21 March 2016.

Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia have similar or equal rules, economic interdependence is more likely to develop among them.[35]

This starting point opens the door to two observations on Armenia and Georgia. On the one hand, the Armenian President argues that as "member of the EEU, which most closely meets EU standards, we could become a bridge for European countries".[36] On the other hand, Georgia's Prime Minister expects the country to "be a major hub for trade throughout the region and a key player in global commerce".[37] These quotes signal Armenia's and Georgia's gateway function. By opening the door to reduced-customs trade with Russia or the EU respectively, regulatory harmonisation under the EaP could stimulate inter-regional trade in the South Caucasus despite inherent incompatibilities between the EaP and the EEU.[38]

It needs to be underlined, however, that the *de facto* differentiation between the three South Caucasian countries under EaP trade policy may affect such region-building. For the moment, however, the institutions of the EU "do not really know", what these effects might be.[39] Therefore, the study probes one level further and analyses the contribution of the EaP to two different infrastructure projects, as they provide the groundwork for future economic interdependence.

Regarding regional transportation networks, the EU-Georgia Association Agreement mandates the partners to improve "transport flows between Georgia, the EU and third countries in the region […] integrating progress achieved under various regional transport cooperation arrangements".[40] This clause designates a regional hub function to Georgia, aiming to deepen regional economic dependencies by bilaterally supporting Georgia's crossroad function. At the same time, the clause considers multilateral aspects of the EaP and embeds all bilateral efforts in Georgia in this wider framework. For instance, the EaP transport priorities include six segments in

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[35] Interview with Chris Kendall, Political Counsellor, European External Action Service, Brussels, 8 March 2016.
[36] Sargsyan, Serzh, President of the Republic of Armenia, "With Italian Parliamentarians", Speech, Rome, 10 April 2015.
[37] Kvirikashvili, Giorgi, Prime Minister of Georgia, "TANAP will Increase Economic Development in Georgia", *Caspian Energy,* Interview, Tbilisi, 4 April 2016.
[38] European Commission, *EU-Armenia: New Context but Same Resolve to Take Partnership Forward*, Memo, Brussels, 9 December 2013, p. 2; Council of the European Union, *EU-Armenia Cooperation Council,* Press 16/16, Brussels, 18 January 2016
[39] Interview Kendall, *op cit.*
[40] European Union, "Association Agreement", *op. cit.,* Art. 294, p. 110.

the South Caucasus, of which four have cross-border implications.[41] The idea is for "the Partner countries [to] join up between themselves"[42] as to provide an avenue towards closer economic links for trade.[43] Thus, the EaP attempts to change the *status quo* observed above.

Regarding energy-related infrastructure, similar observations apply. Aiming to strengthen the countries' resilience, the European External Action Service (EEAS) seeks the establishment of a regional energy and electricity grid, connecting Armenia and Azerbaijan to Georgia.[44] Accordingly, the EU-Georgia Association Agreement explicitly requires "the promotion of bilateral and regional integration in this field".[45] Thus, multilateral contributions of the EaP are channelled under one dedicated flagship initiative, for instance towards a South Caucasian energy efficiency programme.[46] The most prolific project was the 'Interstate Oil and Gas Transportation to Europe', better known under its acronym INOGATE, an "EU-funded regional energy cooperation programme in support of the priorities in the field of energy of the EaP".[47] Importantly, however, these priorities differ in the South Caucasus. Georgia is a transit country, Azerbaijan a producer and Armenia a consumer of energy resources, thus making it difficult to devise a common policy approach.[48]

In sum, this section on economic interdependence demonstrates two points. First, trade in the South Caucasus is directed at external partners, not at neighbours. It is unclear how the differentiation between Georgia and Armenia will affect trade flows. Yet it can be argued that the two countries mutually open doors to larger markets. The EaP contributes to economic region-building not only unintentionally through the effects of harmonisation, but also purposefully by means of its transport and energy policy. Second, there is, however, an essential limit to this argument. Trade is fundamentally a bilateral policy area, as are energy and road corridors. They are not *per se* devised to link the countries among themselves, but to connect Europe to

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[41] IDEA II, "Eastern Partnership Regional Transport Study: Final Report", *Transport Dialogue and Networks Interoperability II,* Brussels, June 2015, pp. 16, 18.
[42] European Commission, *Joint Declaration: Future of Eastern Partnership Transport Cooperation,* Luxembourg, 9 October 2013, p. 2.
[43] IDEA II, *op. cit.*, p. 22.
[44] Interview with Boris Iarochevitch, Head of Division, European External Action Service, Brussels, 4 March 2016.
[45] European Union, "Association Agreement", *op. cit.*, Art. 298, p. 111.
[46] European External Action Service, *The Eastern Partnership Multilateral Platforms,* Brussels, 2016.
[47] European External Action Service, "Regional Programmes", *European Union Delegation to Georgia,* Tbilisi, no date.
[48] Interview Iarochevitch, *op. cit.*

the wider world. This then opens the question whether political processes support this economic region-building, to which the analysis turns next.

Political Teleology

This section analyses the contribution of the EaP to closer political linkages in the South Caucasus on the assumption that "the lower the level, the better the contact [because] on the high level, narratives are employed by participants".[49] First, this section reveals the broken top-down discourse on the region. Second, it explores the counter-point of bottom-up political linkages, centring on processes of harmonisation and differentiation. Thus, this section shows the constructive value of technical relations for region-building.

Regarding top-down political linkages, the question is whether the political leaders converge in their perceptions of the Caucasus. First, Azerbaijan's President Aliyev employs multiple regional discourses. Describing Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey as "countries of Eurasia",[50] his discourse oscillates between "region of South Caucasus"[51] and "broad region of the Caspian".[52] Second, Armenia's President Sargsyan labels "the Armenia-Turkey state border as the last closed border in Europe".[53] At the same time, he lauds his country's accession to the EEU as "integration in the Eurasian region".[54] Sargsyan refers to "the Caucasus" as such only when discursively joining Armenia and the EU.[55] In contrast to this, Georgian President Margvelashvili aims "to turn the Caucasus into a region of opportunities".[56] Georgian leaders portray negotiations with Turkey, Azerbaijan and Armenia as "building our region - Caucasian region".[57]

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[49] *Ibid.*
[50] Aliyev, Ilham, President of Azerbaijan, "Second Meeting of the Southern Gas Corridor Advisory Council", Speech, Baku, 29 February 2016.
[51] Aliyev, Ilham, "Joint Press Statement of Ilham Aliyev and Donald Tusk", Speech, Baku, 22 August 2015.
[52] *Ibid.*
[53] Sargsyan, Serzh, President of the Republic of Armenia, "John F. Kennedy School of Government", Speech, Cambridge, 30 March 2016.
[54] Sargsyan, Serzh, President of the Republic of Armenia, "Supreme Eurasian Economic Council", Speech, Minsk, 10 October 2014.
[55] See, for instance, Sargsyan, Serzh, President of the Republic of Armenia, "Second Eastern Partnership Summit", Speech, Warsaw, 30 September 2011; Sargsyan, Serzh, President of the Republic of Armenia, "5th Media Forum: At the Foot of Mount Ararat", Speech, Yerevan, 18 March 2015.
[56] Margvelashvili, Giorgi, President of Georgia, "Interdisciplinary Centre Herzliya", Speech, Herzliya, 21 October 2015.
[57] Margvelashvili, Giorgi, President of Georgia, "At a Forum in Baku", Speech, Baku, 10 March 2016.

This brief discourse analysis provides three insights. First, Georgia is the country to most consistently apply a South Caucasian regional frame. Second, Armenia and Azerbaijan – and to a lesser extent Georgia – employ a multi-faceted discourse of regional identity, combining Caspian, Caucasian, European and Eurasian elements. Third, the EU in general and the EaP in particular, only very rarely feature in this top-down elite perception. This is most saliently reflected in a statement by Armenia's President Sargsyan on the EaP:

> The criterion of grouping partners was not clear […] and I think that this is the reason that at least one of the Eastern Partnership's components – the regional cooperation component – was doomed to failure. I still do not understand the criterion of grouping Armenia and Azerbaijan into one partnership – different opportunities, different approaches, different goals.[58]

This quote shows the powerful impact of elite discourses on political teleology for the South Caucasus. Despite immediate geographical proximity, regional cooperation under the EaP is rejected and differentiation called for. Accordingly, one EU Delegation's official emphasises that "[f]rankly, we speak here about three very different countries and having [an] homogenous approach is not feasible".[59] This becomes problematic once political linkages serve as component of region-building processes. A common teleology would be required to combine various countries into a region, but this is not given in the South Caucasus, where the "time is not ripe yet" for big common policies.[60]

This then poses the question whether the EaP can contribute to political linkages by means of bottom-up procedures instead. On the underlying assumption that "the [technical] issues are the same everywhere" in the South Caucasus,[61] regulatory convergence in sectoral policies becomes a central element of the EaP.[62] Bilaterally, the EU supports their partners' administration to bring legislation in line with European

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[58] Sargsyan, Serzh, President of the Republic of Armenia, "High-Level Meeting on the 5th Anniversary of the Eastern Partnership", Speech, Prague, 25 April 2014.
[59] Interview with Kaido Sirel, Head of Operations Section, Delegation of the European Union to Georgia, Bruges, 1 April 2016.
[60] Interview Iarochevitch, *op cit*.
[61] *Ibid*.
[62] European Commission, *Eastern Partnership: Communication to the Council and to the European Parliament*, COM(2008) 823 final, Brussels, 3 December 2008, p. 3.

requirements.[63] Multilaterally, administrators of the EaP countries are expected to become socialised. The relevant EaP platform "was particularly active, with input and ideas coming from partner country government representatives, business associations and leading donors".[64]

This focus on harmonisation warrants differentiation as openly inscribed in the EaP since its last review.[65] If its effect "on the face of it [is] divergence instead of convergence",[66] then the question is, how differentiation affects region-building. Differentiation is not pre-determined but depends on the conceptual formulations of preferences and expectations by partner countries. Once determined, coinciding policy areas signal the space in which potential for further integration exists. As such, differentiation presents a short-cut to those fields, in which harmonisation and thus bottom-up political linkages are possible. This logic results in the conclusion that differentiation "is not the detriment of integration", but one side of the EaP, which clarifies the potential for sectoral political region-building in the South Caucasus.[67]

Environmental cooperation is one such field, in which all three countries of the South Caucasus prefer collaborating. On this topic, the EU-Georgia Association Agreement induces teamwork on the "regional [level], including through the existing structures of cooperation in South Caucasus".[68] This clause refers to the Regional Environmental Centre (REC). Its work brings together national administrators, civil society representatives and environmental experts, thus fostering a regional understanding of environmental problems.[69] Given its tri-national directorate, this is the "only institution in which all three countries come together".[70] Since this centre is a civil society actor to the multilateral EaP panel on energy and environment as well, an interaction effect in terms of political linkages exists. By contractually obliging Georgia

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[63] For an example from Georgia see European Commission, *Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in Georgia: Progress in 2014 and Recommendations for Actions*, SWD(2015) 66 final, Brussels, 25 March 2015, p. 12.

[64] European Commission, *Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy: Eastern Partnership Implementation Report*, SWD(2015) 76 final, Brussels, 25 March 2015, p. 12.

[65] European Commission, *Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy*, JOIN(2015) 50, Brussels, 18 November 2015, p. 15.

[66] Interview Kendall, *op cit.*

[67] I am very thankful for a sketch of this argument in an interview with Jose Medina Navarro, Cooperation Section, European Union Delegation in Yerevan, Bruges, 30 March 2016.

[68] European Union, "Association Agreement", *op. cit.*, Art. 303, p. 112.

[69] REC Caucasus, *Who we are*, The Regional Environmental Centre for the Caucasus, Tbilisi, no date.

[70] Interview Iarochevitch, *op. cit.*

to rely on this body, the EaP promotes bottom-up political linkages towards region-building.

In conclusion, this section provides two main lessons. On the one hand, elite discourses show that the dividing lines between Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia are political.[71] There are multiple constructions of allegiance and the South Caucasus is just one of them. However, there are additional bottom-up processes of political region-building, which are related to harmonisation and differentiation. This confirms Delcour's initial expectation that the multilateral side to the EaP "may nurture dialogue on concrete issues among Eastern neighbours".[72]

Security Cooperation

The third analytical section centres on security cooperation across the South Caucasus, proceeding in two parts. First, it explores the present system of alliances that permeate the region. Second, it explores Cross-Border Management (CBM) as a de-politicised tool for security cooperation in the South Caucasus. In conclusion, the EaP's contribution to region building is more pronounced in the technical realm.

"Since 2013, both Russian and EU actors have increasingly referred to their common neighbourhood in terms of geopolitical choice."[73] Present security alliances in the South Caucasus reflect this statement.[74] Table 2 shows in the left column the apprehension of public opinion for these realities: Armenia is cooperating with Russia, Georgia is seeking allegiance with the United States and European countries, and Azerbaijan is relying on Turkey. The right column of Table 2, however, reveals one potential obstacle to region-building by any external actor in the Caucasus, namely cross-border enmity between Armenia and Azerbaijan and Georgia's rejection of Russia.

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[71] Interview Medina Navarro, *op. cit.*
[72] Delcour, *Shaping the Post-Soviet Space, op. cit.*, p. 87.
[73] Delcour, Laure, "Between the Eastern Partnership and Eurasian Integration: Explaining Post-Soviet Countries' Engagement in (Competing) Region-Building Projects", *Problems of Post-Communism*, vol. 62, no. 6, 2015, p. 316.
[74] For an in-depth discussion of the foreign policy choices of the Caucasian republics, see German, Tracey, *Good Neighbours or Distant Relatives, op. cit.*, pp. 33-58.

Table 2: Public Perception of Geostrategic Alliances (2013)[75]

Main Friend	Country	Main Enemy
Russia (84%)	Armenia	Azerbaijan (66%)
Turkey (90%)	Azerbaijan	Armenia (90%)
United States (36%)	Georgia	Russia (50%)

Notes: (a) Answers "Don't know", "Refuse to answer" included in the analysis; (b) Only highest-scoring individual answers reported.

The EaP operates in this multi-directional environment. This opens the question of how the EaP actually contributes to security cooperation as a tool for region-building. In this context, units of analysis encompass "multilateral and bilateral security dialogue and practical CSDP [Common Security and Defence Policy] cooperation".[76] Bilaterally, a framework agreement for Georgian participation in EU missions was agreed on.[77] In addition, there are regular bilateral staff-to-staff consultations between EU member states and EaP partner countries.[78] Last, they can align with CSDP-related declarations emanating from Brussels.[79] Multilaterally, the respective panel conducted "joint CSDP courses and training programmes for officials from partner countries".[80] This, however, does not remove the obstacles to region-building identified above. Overall, the strong bilateral focus of the EaP with regard of security cooperation stands out.

This warrants a broader look on the regional discourse. The Armenian accession to the EEU was "conditioned by new possibilities of Armenia's economic development and, why not, by the existing regional security system".[81] Georgia, in turn, seeks "integration into the EU and Euro-Atlantic institutions".[82] This situation aggravates regional separations in the area. Georgia uses the EaP to create momentum towards

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[75] Items used: MAINFRN ("In your opinion, which country is currently main friend of your country?") and MAINENEM ("In your opinion, which country is currently main enemy of your country?") from Caucasus Resource Research Centre, *2013 Caucasus Barometer* [Dataset], Tbilisi, no date.

[76] Council of the European Union, *Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit*, Riga, 22 May 2015, Art. 22, p. 8.

[77] European Commission, SWD(2015) 66 final, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

[78] European Commission, SWD(2015) 76 final, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

[79] European Commission, *Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in Azerbaijan: Progress in 2014 and Recommendations for Actions*, SWD(2015) 64 final, Brussels, 25 March 2015, p. 8.

[80] European Commission, SWD(2015) 76 final, *op. cit.,* p. 11.

[81] Sargsyan, Serzh, President of the Republic of Armenia, "On the Occasion of Independence Day", Speech, Yerevan, 21 September 2014.

[82] Ivanishvili, Bidzina, Prime Minister of Georgia, "Statement", *Press Release*, Tbilisi, 5 September 2013.

NATO. In contrast, Armenia relies on Russia, which reinforced its choice for the EEU. This severely restricts the EaP's contribution to region-building in the field of politicised security cooperation. From this analysis of alliance systems follows the question whether the EaP contributes to less politicised areas of security cooperation instead.

The EU-Georgia Association Agreement includes one dedicated article on border management,[83] and a multilateral flagship initiative on integrated border management exists within the EaP.[84] Therefore, CBM merits its own analysis, despite the fact that one of the three borders within the South Caucasian region remains closed. Using Tbilisi as a hub, the programme includes "two bilateral cooperation components spanning Azerbaijan-Georgia and Georgia-Armenia, and three national components".[85] Therefore, the objectives of cooperation and coordination are translated into bilateral and multilateral projects, striving towards "cooperation on border control, border demarcation and trade facilitation".[86] These projects fall under the South Caucasus Integrated Border Management Programme (SCIBMP), an assistance tool towards increased cooperation.[87] The SCIBMP pilots jointly administered border crossings.[88] At the Sadakhlo-Bagratashen station,[89] whose objective includes "inter-agency/cross-border cooperation",[90] bilateral seminars for Georgian and Armenian border guards are organised.[91] This facilitates direct contact between administrators of the two countries, leads to a harmonisation of border control standards and results in reduced waiting periods for cross-border transit.

Important for these technical projects is whether they do result in increased region-building. According to an independent assessment, SCIBMP has been widely

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[83] European Union, "Association Agreement", *op. cit.*, Art. 15, pp. 11-12.
[84] European Commission, Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, *Eastern Partnership: Integrated Border Management Flagship Initiative*, Brussels, 2015.
[85] Huseynov, Tabib, "The EU and Azerbaijan: Destination Unclear", in García Schmidt, Armando, Reiter-Zimmermann, Sibylle & Shupe, Cortnie (eds.), *The European Union and the South Caucasus Three Perspectives on the Future of the European Project from the Caucasus*, Gütersloh, Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2009, p. 83.
[86] European Commission, Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, *op. cit.*, p. 2.
[87] *Ibid.*, p. 3.
[88] "About us", *South Caucasus Integrated Border Management Programme*, Tbilisi, no date.
[89] "Eastern Partnership Integrated Border Management: Armenia/Georgia Bagratashen-Sadakhlo Crossing Point", *EU Neighbourhood Info Centre*, Brussels, no date.
[90] "Provision of Equipment and Infrastructure for the Bagratashen-Sadakhlo Border Crossing Point", *South Caucasus Integrated Border Management Programme*, Tbilisi, no date.
[91] "Bilateral Workshop Addresses Profiling and Risk Analysis at the Borders", *South Caucasus Integrated Border Management Programme*, Tbilisi, 15 March 2015.

integrated in the participating countries' "political and strategic consciousness".[92] Equally positive remarks are issued from within the EEAS: CBM projects amount to an "efficient initiative with numerous participation" that increasingly "develops bilateral relations" beyond mere security cooperation.[93] As the EEU acts less in this depoliticised area of security cooperation, the EU can balance out its disadvantage in the broader field of geopolitics and foster regional cooperation in the South Caucasus.[94]

Cultural Exchange

This subsection analyses the contribution of the EaP to regional cultural bonds in the South Caucasus. It first describes people-to-people contacts and then focuses on cultural contacts across the borders. It finds traces of various EaP initiatives to overcome the distrustful divides in the South Caucasus. South Caucasian social relations are characterised by high levels of distrust towards neighbouring countries. Table 3 takes the approval of economic cooperation as a proxy indicator for public opinion on this element and suggests three insights. First, the Armenian-Azerbaijani divide is a central expression of distrust. Second, Georgians are both more trusted and more trustful. Third, external partners are rated higher than any Caucasian partner in any of the three countries.

Table 3: Approval of Economic Cooperation with Neighbours (2013)[95]

	Armenia	**Azerbaijan**	**Georgia**
Armenian Business Partners	91.9%	0.4%	71.1%
Azerbaijani Business Partners	22.0%	99.2%	74.0%
Georgian Business Partners	67.3%	78.9%	97.0%
European Business Partners	76.1%	79.8%	80.9%
Russian Business Partners	88.5%	85.5%	81.1%

<u>Notes</u>: Answers "Don't know", "Refuse to answer" as well as missing cases excluded from the analysis.

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[92] Roehling, Hardy & Cooper, Adrian, *Supporting Integrated Border Management Systems in the South Caucasus: Final Assessment Report*, International Centre for Migration Policy Development, Brussels, September 2012, p. 6.
[93] Interview Iarochevitch, *op. cit.*
[94] Interview Medina Navarro, *op. cit.*
[95] Items used: BUSINARM ("Can you please tell me whether you approve or disapprove of people of your ethnicity doing business with Armenians."), BUSINAZE ("Can you please tell me whether you approve or disapprove of people of your ethnicity doing business with Azerbaijanis."), BUSINEUR ("Can you please tell me whether you approve or disapprove of people of your ethnicity doing business with Europeans."), BUSINGEO ("Can you please tell me whether you approve or disapprove of people of your ethnicity doing business with Georgians.") and BUSINRUS ("Can you please tell me whether you approve or disapprove of people of your ethnicity doing business with Russians.") from Caucasus Resource Research Centre, *op. cit.*

This *status quo* of intra-Caucasian distrust is problematic for the contribution of the EaP to region-building. Not only does the evidence displayed in Table 3 inhibit economic interdependence as analysed above, but the distrust also impedes the development of people-to-people contacts. In this sense, it is sobering that the relevant multilateral panel under the EaP reported that "another area which remained untouched [...] was Regional Cooperation and Confidence Building".[96] The assessment from the EEAS therefore applies that region-building under the EaP is constrained by the "lack of confidence, which we did not manage to overcome".[97]

Nonetheless, there are a number of contrary initiatives, to which this section turns next. One dimension to look at are projects facilitating educational contacts. The Commission has provided more than 100 million € of Erasmus funding for the entire neighbourhood.[98] In 2015 alone, around 1000 students from the South Caucasus participated in this programme. Additionally, almost 300 regional meetings took place between youth activists and decision-makers using EaP funding.[99] Admittedly, however, purely quantitative figures do not provide empirical evidence for the EEAS's "explicit intention of creating people-to-people contacts" on a large scale.[100]

Thus, another source for people-to-people contacts is the plethora of multilateral bodies under the EaP. In the words of Kostanyan, the Civil Society Forum "has indeed become a fantastic tool to establish relationships and trust and to develop a sense of solidarity".[101] Nonetheless, Azerbaijani members of the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly refused to attend its annual session in Yerevan, the Armenian capital.[102] This shows the limits to the facilitation of people-to-people contacts through the multilateral dimension of the EaP. Conflicting political narratives tend to reaffirm instead of dissolve the distrust across the region.

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[96] Bobinski, Krysztof, "Annual Activities Report 2015: Working Group 1", *Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum*, Kiev, 21 November 2015, p. 4.

[97] Interview Iarochevitch, *op. cit.*

[98] European Commission, Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, *Support for the Eastern Partnership: Stories, Facts and Figures from the European Neighbourhood Instrument 2014*, Luxembourg, Publications Office of the European Union, 2015, p. 32.

[99] European Commission, SWD(2015) 77 final, *op. cit.*, pp. 43-45.

[100] Interview Kendall, *op. cit.*

[101] Kostanyan, Hrant, *The Civil Society Forum of the Eastern Partnership Four Years on: Progress, Challenges and Prospects,* Report Commissioned by the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, Brussels, January 2014, p. 3.

[102] Delcour, Laure, "In Need of a New Paradigm: Rethinking the European Neighbourhood Policy/Eastern Partnership", *Eastern Partnership Review,* no. 20, Tallinn, Estonian Centre of Eastern Partnership, April 2015, p. 10.

The question is then, how in this constrained situation the EaP contributes to cultural exchanges. The multilateral objective of cultural cooperation[103] was translated into the bilateral EU-Georgia Association Agreement.[104] As main instruments, culture programmes are meant to strengthen "regional cultural links and dialogue within the EaP", which encompasses the essence of region-building.[105] Armenia participated in 13[106] and Azerbaijan in three of those regional projects in 2014.[107] Georgia is the only Caucasian country that can apply for the culture programmes under the Creative Europe title, but it regularly invites its neighbours into projects.[108] These transnational cooperation projects include translation work[109] or support for on-screen projects.[110] However, the central Georgian effort focuses on the formulation of a culture strategy, which is an essentially bilateral exercise.[111] Therefore, it is unlikely that the Georgian conviction, voiced by its president, of being of "a European culture", is transmitted to the neighbouring countries.[112]

Another example regarding cultural contacts are territorial cooperation projects, of which two exist in the South Caucasus. Again, both use Georgia as hub and link the country to its immediate neighbours. These projects should advance social and economic development, among others through "cultural diversity […] strengthen-ing contacts at local level".[113] The Georgian-Armenian project pronounces cross-cultural elements, which can be explained by the large Armenian community living in the relevant Georgian provinces.[114] As the EEU does not provide any comparable projects or funding − which in the case of the EU is in the range of 450.000 € for culture

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[103] European Commission, *Eastern Partnership Platform 4: Core Objectives and Work Programme 2014-2017*, Ref. Ares(2014)80541, Brussels, 15 January 2014, pp. 1-2.
[104] European Union, "Association Agreement", *op. cit.*, Art. 374(1), p. 125.
[105] "Eastern Partnership Culture Programme", *EU Neighbourhood Info Centre*, Brussels, no date.
[106] European Commission, *Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in Armenia: Progress in 2014 and Recommendations for Actions*, SWD(2015) 63 final, Brussels, 25 March 2015, p. 14.
[107] European Commission, SWD(2015) 64 final, *op. cit.*, p. 14.
[108] "Eligibility of Eastern Partnership Countries", *Culture & Creativity: EU-Eastern Partnership Programme*, Kiev, 2015.
[109] "Culture Sub-Programme", *Culture & Creativity: EU-Eastern Partnership Programme*, Kiev, 2015.
[110] "MEDIA Sub-Programme", *Culture & Creativity: EU-Eastern Partnership Programme*, Kiev, 2015.
[111] "Strategy", *Culture & Creativity: EU-Eastern Partnership Programme*, Kiev, 2015.
[112] Margvelashvili, Giorgi, President of Georgia, "US Council of Foreign Relations", Speech, 29 September 2015.
[113] Eastern Partnership Territorial Cooperation, *Strategy for the Eastern Partnership Territorial Cooperation Programmes*, Tbilisi, no date, p. 4.
[114] Eastern Partnership Territorial Cooperation, *Armenia-Georgia: Joint Operational Programme*, Tbilisi, 10 June 2014, pp. 9-10.

alone[115] – territorial cooperation is an example for the EU's singular effort towards furthering cultural exchanges. In conclusion, however, the scope of EU contributions in cultural exchanges pales in comparison to the problems for region-building that follow from South Caucasian distrust.

Explaining EU Region-Building: Towards Testable Hypotheses

This final section expands on the descriptive analysis provided above. It first suggests three general hypotheses on the mechanisms of external region-building that can be empirically tested on the EaP or other policies on regionalisation. Second, it outlines some of the limitations inherent to these findings.

The preceding analysis traces the links between a multitude of policies under the EaP and region-building in the specific case of the South Caucasus. From this analysis the question emerges whether there are overarching mechanisms that explain the EU's contributions towards region-building. This subsection argues that there are three general contributions towards region-building, which are expressed in testable hypotheses.

First, the findings reflect the fact that the EaP at large embodies a "novel two-track approach" in combining bilateral and multilateral dimensions.[116] Repeatedly, the analysis suggests the existence of an interaction between these two dimensions in terms of region-building. Whereas European standards are bilaterally promoted, the existence of a shared framework subsequently facilitates cross-border policy formations, for instance in the field of environmental cooperation. In parallel to this, Georgia plays a central role as a hub for European projects on all four dimensions of region-building. Since Armenian-Azerbaijani cooperation is severely restricted, Georgia needs to connect them. The EaP's bilateral dimension allows to address Georgia directly and to later on advance the relevant contractual obligations of the Association Agreement on a multilateral basis. At the same time, however, it can be argued, for instance with regard to geopolitical alliances, that there is bilateral divergence in the South Caucasus. Multilaterally, tense relations result in confrontation

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[115] *Ibid.*, p. 15.
[116] Korosteleva, Elena, A., Natorski, Michal & Simão, Licínia, "The Eastern Dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy: Practices, Instruments and Social Structures", *East European Politics*, vol. 29, no. 3, 2013, p. 257.

instead of cooperation, which defeats the goal of South Caucasian region-building. Nonetheless, the case of the South Caucasus suggests the general hypothesis that

(H1)   The combination of bilateral and multilateral elements contributes to region-building.[117]

Second, the findings across all four dimensions of region-building suggest a split between top-down and bottom-up processes. As divisive political discourses disrupt cooperation and trust on a number of issues, the EaP's contribution becomes most salient in technical issues. Joint management of border crossings or infrastructure projects on main transport axes are a case in point here. In other words, the bottom-up process of functional linkages on the administrative and technical level removes some discursive obstacles to cross-regional action on the political level. This opens the way for cooperation and thus contributes positively to region-building. Arguably, however, this abstraction of the analysis has more predictive than observational value. In the difficult context of the South Caucasus it remains to be answered, to what extent administrative cooperation can in fact contribute to region-building. In reference to functionalist integration theory,[118] it is worthwhile to formulate the second general hypothesis that

(H2)   Spill-overs from administrative and technical levels to political levels contribute to region-building.

Third, Börzel assumes that non-state actors "not only define state preferences or pressure and persuade them into building regional institutions, but engage in their own regional institution building".[119] The analysis refers to a number of working groups and panels across the EaP. These bodies provide venues for non-state actors to work towards region-building, leading external observers to point to socialisation effects.[120]

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[117] As normative underpinning for this hypothesis see also the argument that international regimes with bilateral and multilateral elements are most effective in Thompson, Alexander & Verdier, Daniel, "Multilateralism, Bilateralism, and Regime Design", *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 58, no. 1, 2014, pp. 15-28.

[118] For instance following the argument that functional-administrative and elite-political links initiate a deepening of regional integration processes in Tranholm-Mikkelsen, Jeppe, "Neo-Functionalism – Obstinate or Obsolete: A Reappraisal in the Light of the New Dynamism of the EC", *Millennium – Journal of International Studies*, vol. 20, no. 1, 1991, pp. 12-15.

[119] Börzel, Tanja A., "Comparative Regionalism: A New Research Agenda", *KFG Working Paper Series*, no. 28, Berlin, Kolleg-Forschergruppe (KFG) "The Transformative Power of Europe", August 2011, p. 5.

[120] Kostanyan, Hrant & Vandecasteele, Bruno, "The Socialization Potential of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum", *Eastern Journal of European Studies*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2013, pp. 95–110.

However, non-state actors were absent from the interviews conducted within the scope of this study. Even if prompted, none of the respondents mentioned the Civil Society Forum or other non-state representatives. In fact, most aspects of the analysis show that the distrust between South Caucasian societies, both on the highest governmental and on grassroots non-state levels, permeates all interaction. Seven years of the Civil Society Forum have not changed this pattern, provoking the argument that even from a long-term perspective the study would suggest as third general hypothesis that

(H3)   The inclusion of non-state actors does not contribute to region-building.

Applying inductive reasoning, these three hypothesised mechanisms derive from the previous analytical steps and the initial methodological considerations. Consequently, limitations in these areas restrict the hypotheses' applicability. This plays out primarily in two regards.

Methodologically, the analysis and discussion are tending towards an 'inside-out' perspective.[121] This means that initiatives, policies and instruments of the EaP are taken for granted without questioning their usefulness in the South Caucasus or the degree to which they are desired. This bias is mitigated to some extent by relying on discourse analysis, but, in its most extreme form, the study explores region-building in the South Caucasus although the countries in the South Caucasus do not seek regional cooperation.

This limitation is further perpetuated by a reliance on constructivist approaches. Any value-based elements of political vision are disregarded in the study. If a region is defined as a community of shared norms,[122] then it is crucial to understand the foundation of these norms and values, to which the study makes no reference whatsoever. Thus, this paper's methodological foundations are limited.

Analytically, the study suffers from a limited link between data points and the formulation of hypotheses. The analysis takes the existence of certain policies, for instance the cultural funding mechanisms or regional environmental cooperation, as

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[121] Keukeleire, Stephan, "Lessons for the Practice and Analysis of EU Diplomacy from an 'Outside-in' Perspective", in Gstöhl, Sieglinde & Lannon, Erwan (eds.), *The Neighbours of the EU's Neighbours: Diplomatic and Geopolitical Dimensions beyond the European Neighbourhood Policy*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2015, pp. 227-228.
[122] Simão, Licínia, "Region-Building in the Eastern Neighbourhood: Assessing EU Regional Policies in the South Caucasus", *East European Politics*, vol. 29, no. 3, 2013, p. 288.

an indicator for region-building without first assessing in-depth their *de facto* effectiveness. In other words, the study's blind spot is impact.

The formulation of the three hypotheses implicitly assumes that there is an impact of the EaP's policies and initiatives on South Caucasian region-building. The second hypothesis, for instance, is silently based on the claim that the REC or CBM measures have fostered something of a South Caucasian regional understanding. In parallel to that, the third hypothesis implies that the EaP's impact on non-state actors has been sufficiently small to exclude them from the mechanical understanding of region-building.

However, empirical proof for these claims on impact remains scarce. This is due to the fact that this study did not attempt to analytically disassociate mechanisms from impact. To address this shortcoming, the study would have to rely on more insights from the EaP's funding institutions, mostly the Commission, and from its leading administrators on the ground. Since the hypotheses do contain an implicit reference to the policy's impact, this limitation consequently indicates a potentially insufficient link between the analysis of several EaP policies and overarching hypotheses regarding region-building.

Notwithstanding these methodological and analytical limitations, the study offers a policy relevant extension of existing literature on the South Caucasus, which has explored choices from within the country,[123] legal questions,[124] or singular sectors of region-building.[125] In addition, the hypotheses derived from this analysis can be used to structure explorations of other EU region-building projects. For instance, this would apply to Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova, which are equally addressed under the EaP, or to the EU's Southern neighbours. Additionally, there are various non-European region-building projects worldwide. The contribution of external policies and projects can be better analysed with reliance on the three general mechanisms suggested as hypotheses above.

Conclusion

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[123] Delcour, Laure, "Competing Region-Building Projects", *op. cit.*, p. 318.
[124] Dragneva, Rilka & Wolczuk, Kataryna, "Commitment, Asymmetry and Flexibility: Making Sense of Eurasian Economic Integration", in Dragneva, Rilka & Wolczuk, Kataryna (eds.), *Eurasian Economic Integration: Law, Policy & Politics*, Cheltenham, Edward Elgar, 2013, pp. 204-221.
[125] German, Tracey, *Good Neighbours or Distant Relatives, op. cit.*

This paper departs from the observation that the promotion of regionalism is central to EU foreign policy. In the post-Soviet sphere, this approach grew incrementally, culminating in the EaP, whose stylised objective is regionalisation. However, the understanding of the mechanisms behind region-building through EU policies is not well developed. Consequently, this study investigates how the EU contributes to region-building in its neighbourhood. It suggests a constructivist understanding of region-building on four dimensions, conceptualising region-building as the creation of economic, political, security and cultural linkages.

The paper answers the question in two steps. First, it analyses the EaP's contributions to region-building in the case of the South Caucasus. This exploration follows the four-fold linkages that form a region. As for economic interdependence, the study shows that transportation and energy networks are promoted in order to expand on low-level Caucasian trade. Regarding political narratives, technical cooperation and regulatory harmonisation are essential to balance out divisive regional discourses. In relation to security cooperation, CBM projects stand in the face of divergent alliance strategies and persistent cross-border conflicts in the region. Regarding cultural exchanges, low-level projects on territorial cooperation or educational people-to-people contacts are inhibited by high levels of distrust that mark the *status quo*.

In general terms, these findings suggest that the EU, when faced with social and political obstacles to region-building, should focus on technical and administrative initiatives to lay the foundations for cross-regional linkages. However, it must not forget addressing misgivings among elites as well as among the public in order for region-building to take hold in the long run. In the specific case of the South Caucasus, the policy proposal for the EU would be to continue with its differentiated approach to Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. Differentiation provides a shortcut to those areas, in which technical cooperation is possible and desired, despite the persistence of distrust across the three countries.

Second, this study extrapolates three general mechanisms and concludes that the EU contributes to region-building by means of sectoral bottom-up approaches that combine bilateral and multilateral logics. These hypothesised mechanisms derive from the analysis of the EaP's contribution in the South Caucasus. First, the study suggests a positive effect of combining bilateral and multilateral approaches. This conclusion follows from the observation that Georgia is bilaterally used as a hub to

multilaterally bridge the Armenian-Azerbaijani divide. Second, the study advances neo-functionalist advocacy of technical cooperation and positive spill-over effects. This is the logical conclusion from the toxic political discourse which inhibits a common regional understanding. Third, the study remains doubtful about the contributions of non-state actors towards region-building. This conclusion acknowledges the fact that non-state actors in the South Caucasus replicate rather than overcome the anti-regionalist discourses.

These hypotheses derive from an analysis of multiple policies and initiatives of the EaP on South Caucasian linkages, specifically economic interdependence, political discourses, security cooperation and cultural exchanges. To assess their general applicability, these hypotheses need to be tested through further research on the EU's promotion of region-building outside the South Caucasus.

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