

Europeanization and De-Europeanization *in the* EASTERN PARTNERSHIP COUNTRIES

EDITED BY

Nataliya D. Brantly

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Dedicated to the individuals and communities who,
despite pressure, violence, and exclusion, continue to stand for freedom,
democratic values, and self-determination.

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Abbreviations

AA Association Agreement

AGE Advisory Group of Experts

AP Action Plan

ASEAN Association of Southeast Asian Nations

CCU Constitutional Court of Ukraine

CEE Central and Eastern European

CEPA Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement

CFSP Common Foreign and Security Policy

CIB Comprehensive Institution Building

CIS Commonwealth of Independent States

CJEU Court of Justice of the European Union

CoE Council of Europe

CSDP Common Security and Defense Policy

CSTO Collective Security Treaty Organization

CU Customs Union

DCFTA Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area

EAEC Eurasian Economic Community

EaEU Eurasian Economic Union

EaP Eastern Partnership

ECtHR European Court of Human Rights

ENP European Neighborhood Policy

ENPI European Neighborhood Policy Instrument

ESS European Security Strategy

EU European Union

EUMA EU Mission in Armenia

EUMCAP EU Monitoring Capacity in Armenia

EUMM EU Monitoring Mission

EPC European Political Community

EPPO European Public Prosecutor's Office

Eurojust European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation

EUSR EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus

GBI Greece-Bulgaria Interconnector

GD Georgian Dream

GRECO Group of States Against Corruption

GSP Generalized System of Preferences

HACC High Anti-Corruption Court

HCJ High Council of Justice

HQCJ High Qualification Commission of Judges

HR High Representative

IMF International Monetary Fund

IPAP Individual Partnership Action Plan

ITPP Individually Tailored Partnership Program

MENA Middle East and North Africa

MFA Ministry of Foreign Affairs

NABU National Anti-Corruption Bureau

NACP National Agency on Corruption Prevention

NATO North Atlantic Treaty Organization

ODIHR Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

OSCE Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

PACE Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

PCA Partnership and Cooperation Agreement

SAPO Specialized Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office

SGC Southern Gas Corridor

STRING Solidarity Ring

TACIS Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States

TANAP Trans-Anatolian Pipeline

TAP Trans-Adriatic Pipeline

UK United Kingdom

UNFCCC United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

UNM United National Movement

U.S. United States

USSR Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

INTRODUCTION

Building Europe Beyond the Union

EUROPEANIZATION, DE-EUROPEANIZATION, AND THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP

Aaron F. Brantly

Europeanization is the process of adopting or incorporating European characteristics that result in the alignment of national policies, political structures, and cultural norms with widely accepted European standards and practices. The reality of this process is that it is not fixed. There are no definitive markers of Europeanization. Rather, indicators such as alignment with policies can include national laws or regulations that mirror or approximate those codified in the various treaties of the European Union or legislation put in place since the formalization of the Union. Similarly, political structures are diverse across the Union, but the basic tenets include democratic systems with regularized, free, and fair elections that adhere to EU standards and follow an established rule of law and separation of powers. While both policies and political structures do have more concrete metrics that can in most instances be tailored to each unique state, the cultural norms of Europe are fluid and pinning down an exact definition is difficult. Cowles et al. define Europeanization as "the emergence and development at

the European level of distinct structures of governance, that is, of political, legal, and social institutions associated with political problem solving that formalize interactions among the actors, and of policy networks specializing in the creation of authoritative European rules."[1] Borneman and Fowler define Europeanization as a "fundamental reorganization of territoriality and peoplehood."[2] This process or reorganization is not unidirectional and is variable over time and space as interests across levels of analysis influence and shape subnational, national, and regional/global political environments. This volume examines Europeanization in the Eastern Neighborhood and focuses on how Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine each interpret, address, and shift their political, social, cultural, and economic institutions either to align more closely to or to provide increasing distance from the European Union.

According to the 2003 European Security Strategy (ESS), it is in the "European interest that countries on [EU] borders are well-governed. Neighbors engaged in violent conflict, weak states where organized crime flourishes, dysfunctional societies or exploding population growth on our borders all pose problems for Europe."[3] With this strategy in mind, the EU tasked itself to promote a ring of well-governed countries bordering the Union. The ESS also stated that "the credibility of our foreign policy depends on the consolidation of our achievements there" and that the "European perspective offers both a strategic objective and an incentive for reform."[4] The EU has established and employed various instruments and frameworks to integrate neighboring states with the EU policy framework. Through its policy of conditionality, the EU uses both a reward and punishment system to affect its neighboring states' domestic politics, modify their external behavior, and entice them to adopt EU norms, rules, and values.

Within the former Soviet republics, the process of Europeanization has been governed by two overlapping policy initiatives. The first policy initiative was the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), launched in 2004. The ENP focused on three joint priorities: economic development for stabilization, security, and migration and mobility.[5] The ENP is both institutional and ideational in nature. It focused on the promotion of democracy, the development of the rule of law, respect for human rights, and social cohesion. The EU stated that its core objective of the ENP was to deepen

its interactions with civil society and social partners, and as a carrot, offered partner countries greater access to the EU's unified market and institutions.

The ENP was expanded in 2009 and deepened with the creation of the Eastern Partnership Policy (EaP). The EaP sought to deepen both institutional and ideational/normative values between the EU and the partnership countries of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine. It should be noted that Belarus was suspended from the EaP in 2021 following a substantial decline in human rights, democracy, and rule of law following its 2020 elections. The EaP was directly in line with the ESS and was undertaken with the intent to build a partnership "based on common values, mutual interests, commitments, and shared ownership and responsibility."[6]

Despite concerted efforts by the European Union, the process of Europeanization has faced significant headwinds in the Eastern Partnership. Multiple studies have shown that the Europeanization processes of applicant and candidate states have slowed down, halted, or even reversed.[7] Within the literature, the reasons as to why this "de-Europeanization" may be occurring are diverse and vary country by country. This volume examines and interrogates whether a slowdown is truly occurring, whether it is universal, the conditions or causes under which it might be taking place, its potential impact on the broader Europeanization strategy, and how a turn toward or away from Europe and its institutions might affect each of the countries that are examined in this volume.

Before discussing the chapters of this volume, it is important to establish two broad theoretical lenses through which to interpret the subsequent chapters: the historical development of the EU and the evolution of the concept of Europeanization. It is also necessary to examine the process of institutional coordination that spans both the subnational and national levels of analysis and leads to synchronization across the supranational level of analysis. The constructivist notions of shared norms or ideas about how European societies should function must also be considered and framed to determine how geopolitics and regional politics influence the entrepreneurship, cascading, and internalization of norms or a backsliding away from them.

From the European Coal and Steel Community to the European Union in Brief

No discussion on Europeanization can rightly begin without the evolution of the concept of Europe itself. The concept of Europe is itself contested.[8] Yet the optimistic logic of Europe as an idea was best summarized by former French Prime Minister Lionel Jospin in a speech given in Paris on May 28, 2001, in which he declared "let us remember that Europe is a civilization, that is at one and the same time a territory, a shared history, a unified economy, a human society and a variety of cultures which together form one culture."[9] This concept of a European idea is at odds with the historical record of disunion and violence prior to the formation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). Yet both the formation of a normative conceptualization of Europe, the idea, and the institutional creation of the Union through treaty, in many ways, parallel one another. Just as institutions form legal or procedural frameworks, they concurrently establish the foundation for sociocultural ones. The recognition of human rights and democracy by the founding of the Council of Europe in 1949 was a first institutional and ideational step away from fractious disunion and discord. The founding treaty of the Union in 1951 was a risk both institutionally and ideationally. The creation of common institutions such as the High Authority, the Common Assembly, the Council of Ministers, and the Court of Justice was a critical first step toward bridging fears and animosities following two devastating world wars in the last century. Scholars such as Andrew Moravcsik focus on the domestic to international interactions and privilege the role of rational economic self-interest in the formation of the Union.[10] There is little doubt that the formation of the European Union is closely tied to national policy preferences, economic self-interest, and postwar democratization. Yet the historical record has not been kind to scholars who sought to over-privilege the economic self-interest of European states.

Rather, for the purpose of studying Europeanization and de-Europeanization, the mechanisms through which the Union formed are woven in a complex iterative development process. That process doubtless includes rational economic behaviors and national policy preferences, but these preferences only function insofar as state polities and national policymakers can extend the proverbial shadow of the future with one-

time adversaries. This process is both institutional and ideational. First, it requires states to achieve lock-in on mutually agreed and negotiated terms. This institutional lock-in is a slow process that alters the rational preference structures of participants and fosters economic and institutional alignment through iterative interactions. As Robert Axelrod demonstrated in *The Evolution of Cooperation*, it is that state focus on short-term rational interests that can be overcome and patterns of interaction can be extended and self-reinforcing over time.[11] This iterative interaction is fostered across multiple channels and generates what Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye termed "complex interdependence."[12] Complex interdependence is formed through the engagement of states and their polities through economic, institutional, nongovernmental organizations, international governmental, and even social movements. The result is a weaving together of preferences and forms what Keohane later described as neoliberal institutionalism.[13]

Yet Europeanization is more than the institutions themselves. It is the ideas that develop alongside those institutions that begin the process of constructing the ontological foundation of Europe as an idea in and of itself. In short, the combination of institutional and ideational change shifts Europe's notion of what anarchy in the international system means.[14] In six short years, the ECSC expanded in scope to include the European Economic Community and Euroatom. This expansion fostered the free movement of goods, services, capital, and people in ways that only six years earlier would have been impossible to conceptualize. Moreover, the institutional and ideational frameworks paralleled in development and fostered a desirable image that induced other states to seek to join the modified Union by 1973. In a very real sense, these interwoven institutional and ideational forces formed the backbone of European soft power.[15]

By 1979, the authority of the states was constrained in part for the first time when states willingly gave up select applications of sovereignty and allowed for European Parliamentary elections. From a purely self-interested perspective, the rational choice of states should have been to retain full sovereign control rather than to empower a supranational body to make laws or policies. Few states would normally not willingly give up even a sliver of sovereign authority were it not for strengthening institutional lock-in and powerful new concepts on the idea of Europe. The institutions and ideas being developed made it possible for states that were party to these

overlapping treaties to extend their shadows of the future—i.e., the time horizons concerning security matters—outward in a manner that fostered trust and eventually increased complex interdependence. Their efforts were further rewarded in 1986 and subsequently 1992 through the creation of the Single European Act and the signing of the Maastricht Treaty, both of which advanced the institutional and ideational conceptualization of Europe in ways that extended well beyond the sovereign jurisdictions of the member states. Since 1992, however, the path toward institutional and ideational cohesiveness has not been without turmoil. Supranational challenges—including financial and immigrant crises and Russia's war on Ukraine—have time and again stressed the institutions and the conceptualization of Europe and the European Union. Yet throughout this process, the concepts outlined in the European Security Strategy have become increasingly robust within the EU proper.

The European Union of today is in part defined by its institutions and the rules-based order that those institutions provide for both its member states and for those states on its periphery.[16] The structuring of a governance process that shares power between EU institutions, national governments and states, and regional actors requires robust institutions at many levels. Yet institutional design and function are a choice that is often inconsistent across national polities. The literature suggests that while there are improvements in institutional alignment along some dimensions,[17] it is not uniform and still results in regional variation, particularly along economic indicators.[18] Yet the concept of Europeanization is functional alignment and convergence. This functional alignment or convergence is also nonuniform and subject to both international and domestic shocks.[19] The variance of convergence and alignment over time can play a role in the concept of Europeanization and de-Europeanization.

While the institutional formation of modern Europe is more straightforward and outlined in treaty and law, the ideational construction of Europe is evident in discourses and discussions across states and actors. By the late 1950s, the concept of a "European Idea" was already quite prevalent in thought pieces in popular newspapers and journals.[20] Various scholars, politicians, artists and cultural figures have attempted to articulate European identity within specific confines that focus more on group traits

that border on the ethno-linguistic-cultural narratives.[21] Yet, as the European scholar Gemma Scalise has noted, European identity is not fixed along rigid lines but fostered through a plurality of diverse socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds.[22] Worries of the late 1980s and early 1990s over EU expansion and the loss of Europe's "true identity" have largely been supplanted by the more integrative approach that focuses on shared values and institutions.[23]

The European idea can be narrow or expansive. The former would have resulted in a consolidated block with a large periphery of nations. Rather, the block has expanded and sought to bring a convergence of institutions together and of the idea of Europe itself to the forefront. At its core, Europeanization is not a static concept, but rather the desire of EU members to incorporate peripheral nations into the block, and the desire of peripheral nations to be part of and include their influence within that block. The block offers clear social and economic benefits. But on a case-by-case basis, these benefits are nonuniform and can conflict with domestic interests.

Because the melding of institutions and the shaping of ideas is not static, neither is Europeanization. The chapters in this volume highlight both the institutional and the ideational challenges that states face when confronting the prospect of building closer ties with Europe. Contrary to some scholarship, history does not end; it evolves. This evolutionary process is messy and fraught with contradictions and, at times, seemingly irrational calculations. At times, states will not feel that Europeanization is in their interest either institutionally or ideationally. At other times, states on the periphery might find the process of Europeanization liberating and a bulwark against other visions of the future. Whether states Europeanize or not depends on both EU nations' own willingness to welcome new ideas and expand and lessen their relative power within the institutional architectures of the supranational governance bodies, and on the willingness of potential aspirant nations to converge institutions and to meld ideational structures into a plural EU polity. The conditions under which states are willing to Europeanize are not universal across states and geographies or time, nor is the willingness to continually expand the EU universal across its members. Rather, there is a complex interplay of institutional change both inside and outside the EU, as well as adaptation to new concepts underpinning the European idea itself.

Volume Overview

Each of the chapters in this volume is intended to add to and strengthen our understanding of the processes associated with Europeanization and de-Europeanization. The volume is organized alphabetically by nation, with chapters pertaining to the same country placed next to one another for contextual reasons. In some instances, analyses between chapters align on the direction of the state in question, while in others they diverge or focus on nuances or specific foci of Europeanization/de-Europeanization. By the end of the volume, the complexities of the processes at work within each state will become increasingly clear. As these processes become clear at the state level, they will, in turn, shed light on the concept of Europeanization and whether this model still works or whether it is time to modify Europe's approach.

The first chapter by Syuzanna Vasilyan centers on the uneven trajectory of Europeanization in Armenia. It articulates both the institutional arrangements that advanced Armenia toward Europe and highlights the ideational and geopolitical issues that have constrained its move. The chapter finds that security challenges, particularly the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, have been instrumental in shaping the cyclical progression of Armenia toward Europe.

The next chapter by Nareg Seferian also examines the institutional integration of Armenia across legal and technical dimensions, as well as the security challenges resident in regional geopolitics that have constrained its relationship with Europe. However, Seferian also examines the ideational–normative and values-based tensions between democratization rhetoric, domestic institutions, and convergence with European norms of governance. The chapter finds a tension in the interaction of institutions, geopolitical tensions, and norms that results in a vacillation between Europeanization and de-Europeanization.

The third chapter dives into the nuances of Azerbaijan's energy politics and security. Elkhan Nuriyev identifies the complex geopolitics brought on by Russia's war in Ukraine and examines the pragmatism that underlies building its relationship with Europe while also working with non-Western partners such as Russia, Turkey, and Iran. The result is a highly interest-driven policy model that is not so much a rejection of Europeanization but rather a deliberate self-interested policy designed to safeguard domestic sovereign concerns amid significant regional turmoil.

Chapter 4 by Anonymous and Nataliya D. Brantly highlights both the geopolitical tensions in the region and domestic political concerns, namely authoritarianism, as mechanisms that undermine Europeanization within Belarus. The authors demonstrate that the consolidated authoritarian rule of Belarus under Alexander Lukashenko, and the political proximity of Belarus to the Russian Federation have together constrained open media, civil society, and legal pathways that might have otherwise influenced potential Europeanization. Moreover, the chapter puts forward the argument that the EU efforts focused predominantly on institutional and technocratic processes failed to fully address identity and authoritarian power structures.

Chapter 5 by Lia Tsuladze confronts the consolidation of political power in the once pro-EU party, Georgian Dream, and the impact of this consolidation on narratives, ideas, and values within Georgia itself. Tsuladze examines how the transition of anti-EU rhetoric from the periphery to the central mainstream discourse has resulted in a "discursive normalization" that is inherently illiberal and nationalist. This shift is identified as consistent with patterns of illiberalism found within other states that have undertaken cultural and political rollbacks. The chapter highlights the importance of the ideational/normative side of Europeanization and its relationship to progress in institutional developments. In the case of Georgia, illiberalism in ideas has led to institutional stagnation.

Serghei Pântea's chapter on Moldova focuses its analysis on the development of criminal justice and anti-corruption reforms. He notes that Moldovan reform efforts were often hampered by state capture, elite corruption, and public mistrust. He makes the case that recent elections and domestic political changes, which spurred renewed Western interest in Moldova, have reinvigorated reform efforts. Yet he questions whether European support, combined with new reform efforts, is sufficient to overcome weak domestic political will.

Maryna Rabinovych, in Chapter 7, examines how the cross-border movement of persons impacts Europeanization. She focuses her analysis on both the prewar and wartime periods of Russia's war on Ukraine. She highlights how visa liberalization in the prewar period brought in ideas and practices from European states and forced Ukrainian society to address issues that were previously not central to domestic governance discourses. She identifies this as a bottom-up Europeanization that has the power to affect

both the constructed identity of Ukraine and its functional institutions. However, she also notes that the mass movement of refugees may cause long-term demographic problems that might result in policies that may not align with Europe. Moreover, she notes that Ukraine is also confined in its Europeanization efforts by arising from its wartime status, in particular, martial law.

Chapter 8, by Anastasia Leshchyshyn, Marta Hlomb, and Maria Popova, contextualizes the Europeanization of Ukraine within a comparative framework that leverages lessons from Eastern and Western Balkan enlargements. The authors note that an active war has driven Ukraine's civil society, local governance, and national unity in ways not found in other efforts by states to join the EU. War has been a forge of sorts to force changes on anti-corruption, judiciary independence, and minority rights, among many other related issues. Yet, although the war has forced each of these issues to the forefront, they remain contentious. Moreover, the authors go on to note that the war itself might result in stricter conditional standards as a result of geopolitical issues. The article identifies the need to balance security considerations and democratization, all while maintaining and sustaining reform momentum.

The Conclusion of this volume brings together the core concepts of institutions and ideas and contextualizes the findings of the chapters. It closes by providing a lens through which to consider whether Europeanization or de-Europeanization is truly occurring. Finally, it assesses whether, from a policy perspective, the concept of Europeanization is still effective or whether it is time for the EU to set a new course.

Notes

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CHAPTER 1

Armenia's Drive of Europeanization Forward, Back, and Forward Again

Syuzanna Vasilyan

Having embarked on the path of closer "integration with" the European Union (EU) by signing and ratifying the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) in 1999, Armenia's foreign policy was synced with the slogan of "complementarity," similar to the "balanced" or "multi-vector" policies of other former Soviet states.[1] While Yerevan's relations with the EU were politically bolstered after the launch of the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), leaning on the Action Plan (AP) adopted in 2006 as a political roadmap for the implementation of reforms in all the spheres of public life, Armenia's drive toward Europeanization was doomed to reversal.

In September 2013, Armenia's then-president, Serzh Sargsyan, announced that the country would retreat from the trajectory of Europeanization by giving up the negotiated Association Agreement (AA)/Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) with the EU, and would instead accede to the Customs Union (CU), which was later to become Eurasian Economic Union (EaEU). This entailed switching the foreign policy into what I have called elsewhere one of "supplementarity,"[2] with the weight of Russia in the equation growing and that of the EU shrinking. Irrespectively, Yerevan still sought to formally tie the relations with the EU by adopting another framework, i.e., the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA), which was ratified in 2021. Although Armenia's "(r)evolutionary breakthrough," branded as the Velvet Revolution of 2018,[3] had ostensibly charted the country's foreign course

in the pro-Western direction through "politicization,"[4] Armenia's economy remained fastened to the EaEU.

The war launched by Azerbaijan against Nagorno-Karabakh in 2020 and the exodus and the ethnic cleansing of the Armenian population in 2023, preceded by Azerbaijan's attack against Armenia proper in 2021, became triggers for the incumbent government to estrange itself from the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) by "freezing" Armenia's membership.[5] Instead, Yerevan requested deployment of the EU Mission in Armenia (EUMA) in 2023, thereby scaling up its take on Europeanization to the security level through both "securitization" in rhetoric and practical steps of searching for alternative partners in the defense sphere.[6]

This chapter expands on the concept of Europeanization by tracing Armenia's thread of Europeanization and tackling it as a two-way dynamic. The chapter covers the period of Armenia's de-Europeanization, which goes hand-in-hand with the EU's decision to use restraint, rather than bolder political engagement. It demonstrates how the country's endeavors to resume Europeanization in 2018 through "politicization" led to the latest "securitization," as evidenced by the increase in the number of meetings in the Western capitals.[7] The chapter shows how, since 2024, Armenia has been rushing to commit itself to the EU and has used two Security Strategies to elucidate the country's doctrinal inclination. Lastly, the chapter probes public opinion and measures the impact of Europeanization to draw conclusions regarding the stakes of the latter given the regional/global "tectonic shifts."[8]

Europeanization Unraveled

For a holistic understanding, Europeanization has to be stratified as a triad of "polity, policy, and politics."[9] Internally, polity-wise, according to Robert Ladrech, "Europeanization is an incremental process reorienting the direction and shape of politics to the degree that EC political and economic dynamics become part of the organizational logic of national politics and policy-making."[10] Claudio Maria Radaelli defines Europeanization as "processes of (a) construction (b) diffusion and (c) institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, "ways of doing things" and shared beliefs and norms, which are first defined and consolidated in

the making of EU decisions and then incorporated in the logic of domestic discourse, identities, political structures and public policies."[11]

Europeanization as a policy has implied success in overcoming the disarray of World War II (1939–1945) through transformation and democratic consolidation of Western European countries, regime change from dictatorship to democracy in Southern Europe, and transition from socialist to democratic forms of governance of the Central and Eastern European countries through accession to the EU. Substantively, it has been conceived as identical to European integration via membership. As a process, however, it has been defined as a never-ending tactic of striving to attain, retain, maintain, and sustain credentials, which, being encapsulated in the EU-intrinsic *acquis communautaire*,[12] are transmitted to the outside world.

As I have argued elsewhere, whereas politically, "Europeanization can be viewed as (a) a smaller version of globalization, (b) a locomotive of globalization, or (c) a by-product of globalization," it is "believed to be driving democratization and working hand in hand with it."[13] Europeanization relies on conditionality, socialization, externalization, and imitation as policy instruments.[14] Conditionality presupposes incentives, externalization, adoption of rules, socialization, persuasion based on the EU's norms, and imitation of the EU's model.[15] These notions will be stretched to drawing deductions regarding Armenia's texture of Europeanization.

Armenia's Track-Record of Europeanization

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the EU's policy toward the South Caucasus consisted of economic assistance and humanitarian aid through the grant-financed Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States (TACIS) program launched in 1991. The diplomatic mission of the European Commission was established in Armenia in 1994. Later, in 1998, the mission in Tbilisi was upgraded into a European Commission Delegation from 1999 onward, covering Armenia too.

In June 1999, the EU's relations with Armenia were formalized through the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs)—legally binding documents, which demanded "the observance of the principles of democracy, and the respect and promotion of human rights."[16] In 2002, democracy was also incorporated in the TACIS Country Strategy Papers and Indicative

Programs for Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. These documents referred to "assistance on the basis of the existence" of such "necessary elements," as "respect of democratic principles and human rights."[17] They relied solely on positive conditionality to facilitate reform.[18]

Armenia's institutional embeddedness in European organizations had been ensured by its membership in the Council of Europe (CoE) in 2001. Although the CoE, which comprises every state geographically positioned on the European continent, was the primary forum for familiarization with human rights, the rule of law, individual freedoms, and other aspects of democracy. It was through the process of approximation with the EU acquis—in contrast to harmonization required from the Union's member states—that Armenia intended to transform from a post-Soviet to an EU-bound country.

The EU remained distant from the electoral politics in Armenia both before and after the March 2003 elections. During the meeting with then-President Robert Kocharyan in December 2003, the EU's High Representative (HR) for Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) Javier Solana did not focus much on democracy, "solely referring to the fulfilment of the CoE commitments and cooperation with the EU on media issues."[19] With Armenia being reserved regarding its European aspirations, unlike neighboring countries like Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova, albeit performing better on several parameters, the EU did not push further.

Within the frames of the ENP launched on a par with the Big Bang enlargement of 2004,[20] Armenia climbed on a more solid political platform of Europeanization. Preemptively, not least, thanks to the Rose Revolution of 2003 in Georgia,[21] the EU created the post of the EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus (EUSR).[22] The ENP Strategy Paper had foreseen "reinforced, credible and sustained commitment toward democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights, and progress toward the development of a market economy."[23] By signing the ENP Action Plan (AP) in 2006, Armenia politically committed itself to championing European norms/values/principles.

Following the next enlargement round with the accession of Romania and Bulgaria—coastal states of the Black Sea—there was a shift in the EU's approach. During the presidential elections held in Armenia in February 2008, the EU residency, together with the HR and the External Relations Commissioner, praised the country for "the competitive nature of the elections and their general compatibility with the OSCE and the CoE standards."[24]

The EU reacted to the demonstrations orchestrated by the opposition and the collision with the government in March 2008, as a result of which ten people died. In a phone call with President Kocharyan, HR Solana called for "restraint" and sent then EUSR Semneby for talks "with all parties."[25] Furthermore, the External Relations Commissioner and the presidency reproached the Armenian government for the "acts of violence," curtailment of the freedom of movement of the opposition leader, former President Levon Ter-Petrosyan, and cases of detention, urging "to lift the state of emergency," which restricted the "rights and freedoms" of the citizens, demanding "an impartial investigation."[26] Notwithstanding, on April 9, 2008, Solana conveyed congratulations to the elected President Sargsyan, promising the EU's readiness for cooperation.[27]

Pursuant to the Lisbon Treaty ratified in 2009, envisaging the boost of the EU delegations into embassy-like missions, combined with the launch of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) jointly spearheaded by Poland and Sweden, political dialogue with the eastern neighbors, including Armenia, intensified. The EaP intended, among others, "to advance the cause of democracy" inter alia via the thematic platform on "democracy, good governance and stability."[28]

During a meeting held with President Sargsyan earlier in May 2010, then-president of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy, highlighted the EU's "strategic interest in stability, prosperity and development of democracy" in the east and underlined the "hope that . . . strengthening of relations" would be "a stimulus to Armenia to deliver more on democratic reforms."[29] A year later, the HR Catherine Margaret Ashton welcomed the resumption of the investigations into the events of 2008 as a "longstanding EU demand."[30] Hinging on shared values, i.e., "support for democracy, human rights and the rules of law," the relationship was judged by the HR as being "not just about money."[31] Thus, Yerevan was given credit for its efforts of approximation with the EU.

Backtracking from Europeanization

EU-Armenia relations underwent a shift when, in September 2013, President Sargsyan announced that the negotiated AA/DCFTA would be abandoned in favor of joining the CU, which in 2015 turned into the EaEU.[32] While the decision was made after the meeting with the president of Russia, Vladimir

Putin, in Moscow, it was justified by the logical strategic choice of being in an economic grouping with the same member-states with which it was allied in the security domain, namely, the CSTO. This presupposed defying European norms/values/principles introduced in the respective AA/DCFTA through conditionality.

As the EU did not wish to estrange Armenia despite the foreign policy shift of the country in favor of joining the CU in 2014, the Visa Facilitation Agreement, which envisaged reducing or waiving the fees for visas and simplifying the bureaucratic processes for application, entered into force. In July 2015, when EU President of the European Council Donald Tusk travelled to Yerevan to meet with President Sargsyan, he stated that although Armenia refrained from signing the AA/DCFTA with the EU, he emphasized the salience of cooperation "by advancing on democratic reforms, economic growth, regional integration, a better business-investment climate, and sustainable development."[33] From 2013 to 2016, the EU's rhetoric was largely devoid of normative elements.[34]

As for the "budget support programs and projects" in Armenia (and Georgia), the focus was placed on "strengthening the Human Rights Defender's" office and "media freedom . . . as an effective outlet for the opposition and the civil society."[35] Moreover, after Armenia's rescinding from closer "integration with" the European Union, the EU shifted from "democracy to justice, public administration reform, and engagement with civil society."[36] Thereby, a thick form of Europeanization pinned on facilitating "deep democracy" characterized as "not just about changing governments, but about building the right institutions and the right attitudes" was downsized to auxiliary elements.[37]

Whereas, as an alternative, Armenia sought to have the CEPA with the EU, which was deemed equivalent to the negotiated AA/DCFTA, excluding merely the economic free-trade aspect, the EU's value-laden discourse was magnified. During the meeting with President Sargsyan in 2017, President Tusk highlighted that "shared values," such as "democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, which underpin" CEPA, thereby expecting compliance.[38] He also stated that the EU "encouraged Armenia to continue reforms" pertaining to "economic development, the business environment, the judiciary, human rights, the fight against corruption and measures to ensure free and fair elections."[39]

Armenia's Velvet Revolution, unlike the Rose Revolution of 2003 in Georgia or the Orange Revolution of 2004 and Maidan of 2013 in Ukraine, "was not immediately acknowledged by the EU via a boost in its tactical and or operation toolkit, in contrast to the expectations of the new Armenian government."[40] Heralding democracy in a meeting with President Raimonds Vējonis of Latvia during his visit to Brussels in July 2018 to the EU and NATO premises, Armenia's new prime minister, Nikol Pashinyan, stated that "any Azerbaijani attack on Armenia would also be an attack on democracy,"[41] thereby seeking the West's solidarity, thanks to the magic word of "democracy." He expressed hopes that "the international community will send a very strong signal to Baku to the effect that any attempt to escalate the situation in the region, any attempt to start a war would meet with a strong reaction from the international community."[42] Despite the pledge of HR Federica Mogherini that Armenia "can lean" on the EU with respect to "fundamental reforms to advance rule of law, fight against corruption, defending human rights and other spheres,"[43] Pashinyan was disenchanted at the end of the meetings in Brussels by the fact that "warm statements" were not accompanied by "policy change" on the part of the EU.[44] While "more concrete and greater assistance" was expected, the EU did not commit to more than allocated for the implementation of CEPA and "for holding the elections that had also been allotted to the previous governments."[45]

With the help of CEPA, Armenia aspires to pursue a "comprehensive reform agenda based on democracy, transparency, and rule of law—in particular the fight against corruption, reforming the judiciary and enhancing its accountability to citizens, and ensuring equal economic, employment, and social opportunities for all" with the assistance of 65 million euros annually.[46] It postulates that "internal reforms towards strengthening democracy and the market economy, on the one hand, and sustainable conflict settlement, on the other hand, are linked."[47] Even if limping in terms of implementation, especially, when it comes to justice reforms, separation of powers, "nepotism," "clientelism," "cronyism,"[48] "backdoor" Europeanization as "social learning and lesson drawing" have been promulgated by the Armenian government, and the EU values/norms/principles and rules beefed up by positive conditionality have been "infiltrated" via externalization, "socialisation and imitation."[49]

Securitization of Europeanization?

The war launched by Azerbaijan against Nagorno-Karabakh in September 2020, during the Covid-19 global pandemic, when the UN had announced a "global ceasefire," overshadowed the Armenian government's utopic creed of democracy and peace, turning the incumbent government to the dire *realpolitik* reigning in/around the South Caucasus.[50] While the expectations of the Armenian public that the EU/West would take measures to stop or even impose sanctions on Azerbaijan, supported by NATO ally Turkey, were not met, there was also disenchantment with the Russian peacekeepers, who did not manage to prevent the nine-month-long blockade of Nagorno-Karabakh and the subsequent exodus and ethnic cleansing of the Armenian population in September 2023.

Following the meeting held among President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan, Prime Minister Pashinyan, President Emmanuel Macron of France, and President Charles Michel of Belgium on October 6, 2022, the Council had approved the deployment of up to forty EU monitoring experts drawn from the EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM) in Georgia along Armenia's border with Azerbaijan to observe and report regarding the situation on the ground. The decision pursued the objectives of "restoration of peace and security in the area," building "confidence" and fixing the administrative boundaries of "the international border" between Armenia and Azerbaijan in the aftermath of Azerbaijan's intervention into Armenia,[51] notably, the regions of Gegharkunik and Syunik in May 2021 and Vardenis, Goris, Sotk and Jermuk in September 2022.[52] Further, in January 2023, the Council approved the deployment of the civilian EU Mission in Armenia under the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP), which was dispatched in February 2023 with a civilian staff of one hundred monitors and about fifty unarmed observers. The EU's emboldened "presence"[53] and "actorness"[54] has agitated friction with Russia.

Rushing Forward with Europeanization?

Addressing the European Parliament in October 2023, Pashinyan underscored that while the European Union is a "key partner supporting the fundamental reforms of the Armenian government in recent years," "Armenia is ready

to be closer" to the EU "as much as" the latter "considers it possible."[55] In February 2024, after the fifth EU-Armenia Partnership Council meeting with Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan, EU's HR Josep Borrell pledged an "ambitious" EU-Armenia Partnership Agenda. Stating that there is "room for unlocking the full potential" of CEPA,[56] Borrell acknowledged that the European Council instructed him and the Commission "to explore ways to strengthen" EU-Armenia relations "in all their dimensions"; this was deemed to be "a strong signal . . . in a new strategic phase" of the relations.[57] He also praised the "steps taken in the justice reform, the fight against corruption" as well as recommended to tackle the "fight against discrimination, hate speech and disinformation."[58]

The rhetorical toying with the idea of EU membership kick-started in February 2024 when the Speaker of the National Assembly Alen Simonyan stated that Armenia has "better democracy indicators than many of our partners that are already members of the EU," hence the country "should think about [seeking an EU candidate status]."[59] Armenia's "freezing" of its membership in the CSTO, announced by Pashinyan a few days earlier, and the subsequent refusal to finance the activities of the Organization conveyed in May 2024, have signified a "risky" political maneuver fraught with negative ramifications, given the absence of the Euro-Atlantic option/inclination, as in the cases of Georgia and Ukraine.[60]

There was a "twist" in Armenia's official discourse starting in March 2024, when Minister of Foreign Affairs Mirzoyan voiced potential EU membership in an interview given on the sidelines of the Diplomacy Forum in Antalya, Turkey.[61] The European Parliament echoed with a resolution adopted almost synchronically welcoming the fact that Armenia "has strongly emphasized its desire to enhance and prioritize relations" with the EU,[62] believing that the EU "should respond positively and take full advantage of this potential geopolitical shift and help Armenia anchor itself more strongly in the community of democracies" and considering that a "substantial partnership between the EU and Armenia is a logical step in aligning with Armenia's choice in favour of democracy, the rule of law, the fight against corruption and respect for the international rules-based order."[63] Provision 4 of the Resolution states that "pursuant to Article 49 of the Treaty of European Union, any European state may apply to become a member of the European Union provided that it adheres to the Copenhagen criteria

and the principles of democracy, respects fundamental freedoms and human and minority rights and upholds the rule of law" and that "should Armenia be interested in applying for candidate status and continuing on its path of sustained reforms consolidating its democracy, this could set the stage for a transformative phase in EU-Armenia relations."[64] The Parliament called on the Commission and the Council "to actively support Armenia's desire for increased cooperation with the EU, not only in the area of economic partnership but also in political dialogue, people-to-people contacts, sectoral integration, and security cooperation."[65]

While in the speech delivered at the Copenhagen Democracy Summit of May 2024, Pashinyan uttered his willingness for Armenia to join the EU "this year."[66] In July 2024, he expressed restraint regarding holding a referendum on EU membership, referring to the necessity of the EU's own readiness to accept the country.[67] This reflected the Armenian government's contradictory overtures since, during the visit to Latvia in June 2024, Speaker Simonyan had told his counterpart, Speaker of the Saeima Daiga Mieriņa of Latvia, that Armenia was willing to join the EU and thus had "to leave the CSTO."[68] Simonyan also claimed in an interview that the Armenian "society has made a decision to be part of the European Union."[69] While still in 2013, the EU had conveyed to Armenia that membership in the EaEU was not compatible with an AA/DCFTA with the EU, given the divergent systems of trade tariffs and duties, phytosanitary standards, etc.,[70] Russia's Deputy Prime Minister Alexey Overchuk also alerted that as a result of such a move, Yerevan "will lose tariff-free access to the Russian market and other economic privileges granted by Moscow."[71] As Russia is Armenia's major trade partner and most direct foreign investor (surpassed only by the United Arab Emirates [UAE] in 2023), as well as its main energy supplier (owing to the war in Ukraine since 2022 and the sanctions imposed on Russia), Armenia has benefited from the re-export of Western goods to the EaEU market.

In July 2024, the Foreign Affairs Council welcomed the readiness of the European Commission "to launch a Visa Liberalisation dialogue with Armenia."[72] A few months later, in September, the European Commission and Armenia resorted to negotiations. The latter envisages reforms encompassing

"document security, border and migration management, the fight against corruption and organized crime as well as upholding fundamental rights" and does not entail "automatic transition to visa-free travel" unless "all benchmarks" are "fully met."[73]

In an interview with British journalists in April 2024 regarding ever closer ties with the EU, Pashinyan answered that relations had already become closer since the Velvet Revolution, but the signing of CEPA by the preceding government had set the path in that direction.[74] Yet, he attributed "achievements in democracy," which "created and continue to create objective conditions for the dynamic development" in the relations, to his own government.[75] In the same month, the European Commission approved the 270 million euro Resilience and Growth Plan for Armenia for the 2024–2027 timeframe: focusing on supporting "a resilient Armenian society,"[76] "investing in connectivity and businesses,"[77] and "bringing Armenia closer to Europe."[78] The package as a whole seems to entail a venture of charting Armenia's political and economic course away from the extant one in the direction of the EU.

During the Global Armenian Summit held in September 2024, Pashinyan stated that the issue of whether Armenia should officially embark on the trajectory of European integration has to be carefully formulated, "Armenia's accession to the EU is not a one-sided or even a two-sided operation" since it is contingent on the development of EU-Georgia relations, EU-Turkey relations.[79] According to him, "democracy" was adopted not by "coincidence" but as a "strategy" that would take the country closer to the EU, the United States, and other Western partners, but democracy cannot be contradicted with the "regional geopolitics."[80] Such ambivalence can be ascribed to the preference of "tactical hedging" as a "cumbersome" policy.[81]

Although Armenia has refrained from participating in the summits and drills since the "freezing" of relations with the CSTO, the frequency of the meetings with the heads of EU member-states collected in Table 1.1 demonstrates the Armenian government's (attempt at) intensification of the linkages since 2018.

TABLE 1.1 Armenia's Official Visits to EU Member States[82]

Dates	Locations of Visits	International Officials and Heads of EU Member States
July 2018	Brussels	President of France Emmanuel Macron; EU HR Federica Mogherini; President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker; President of the European Council Donald Tusk
September 2018	Paris	President of France Emmanuel Macron; Mayor of Paris Anne Hidalgo
September 2018	New York	European Commissioner for ENP and Enlargement Negotiations Johannes Hahn; President of Cyprus Nicos Anastasiades at the UN
October 2018	Paris	President of France Emmanuel Macron
November 2018	Paris	President of France Emmanuel Macron
January 2019	Davos	Prime Minister of the Netherlands Mark Rutte; President of the Council of Ministers of Poland Mateusz Morawiecki at the World Economic Forum
January 2019	Cologne and Berlin	Bundestag's Germany-South Caucasus Parliamentary Friendship Group; Bundestag President Wolfgang Schäuble; Chancellor of Germany Angela Merkel; President of Germany Frank-Walter Steinmeier
March 2019	Brussels	Foreign Affairs Committee (FAC) of the European Parliament; President of the European Council Donald Tusk; HR Federica Mogherini; President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker
March 2019	Vienna	Federal President of Austria Alexander Van der Bellen; Federal Chancellor of Austria Sebastian Kurz
May 2019	Luxembourg and Brussels	Prime Minister of Luxembourg Xavier Bettel; President of the European Council Donald Tusk
November 2019	Milan and Rome	Deputy Governor of the region of Lombardia Fabrizio Sala; President of the Senate Elisabetta Casellati; President of the Council of Ministers of Italy Giuseppe Conte
February 2020	Berlin	Chancellor of Germany Angela Merkel; Bundestag President Wolfgang Schäuble; EU Commissioner for Budget and Management Johannes Hahn at Munich Security Conference; Prime Minister of Bulgaria Boyko Borissov; President of Latvia Egils Levits
March 2020	Brussels	President of the European Council Charles Michel; European People's Party (EPP) President Donald Tusk; HR Josep Borrell

Dates	Locations of Visits	International Officials and Heads of EU Member States
May-June 2021	Paris and Brussels	French National Assembly Speaker Richard Ferrand; President of France Emmanuel Macron; President of the Senate Gérard Larcher; Mayor of Paris Anne Hidalgo at Paris City Hall, President of the European Council Charles Michel; Prime Minister of Belgium Alexander De Croo
October 2021	Vilnius	President of Lithuania Gitanas Nausėda; Prime Minister of Lithuania Ingrida Šimonytė; Speaker of Seimas Viktorija Čmilytė-Nielsen
December 2021	Brussels	President of the European Council Charles Michel; Prime Minister of Slovenia Janez Janša; President of Cyprus Nicos Anastasiades
March 2022	Paris	President of France Emmanuel Macron; President of the European Council Charles Michel
April 2022	Brussels	President of the European Council Charles Michel
May 2022	The Hague	President of the Senate of the Netherlands Jan Anthonie Bruijn; Speaker of the House of Representatives Vera Bergkamp; Foreign Affairs Committees of the two chambers of the parliament; Prime Minister of the Netherlands Mark Rutte
May 2022	Brussels	President of the European Council Charles Michel
August 2022	Brussels	President of the European Council Charles Michel
September 2022	New York	NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg; U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken; President of Slovenia Borut Pahor; Prime Minister of Luxembourg Xavier Bettel; President of the European Council Charles Michel on the sidelines of the 77th session of the UN General Assembly
September 2022	Paris	President of France Emmanuel Macron
October 2022	Prague	President of France Emmanuel Macron; President of the European Council Charles Michel; Prime Minister of Greence Kyriakos Mitsotakis; Chancellor of Germany Olaf Scholz at the summit of the EPC
November 2022	Djerba	President of the European Council Charles Michel; President of France Emmanuel Macron at the International Organization of La Francophonie

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Dates	Locations of Visits	International Officials and Heads of EU Member States
February 2023	Munich	President of the European Council Charles Michel; Executive Director of Europol Catherine De Bolle; President of France Emmanuel Macron; President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen; Prime Minister of Croatia Andrej Plenković; President of Latvia Egils Levits; NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen; U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken; Chairman of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee Bob Menendez; Prime Minister of Lithuania Ingrida Šimonytė on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference
March 2023	Berlin	Chancellor Olaf Scholz; Germany-South Caucasus friendship group of the Bundestag; President of Germany Frank-Walter Steinmeier
May 2023	Prague	Prime Minister of the Czech Republic Petr Fiala; President of the Chamber of Deputies of the Czech Parliament Markéta Pekarová Adamová; President of the Czech Senate Miloš Vistarčil
May 2023	Brussels	President of the European Council Charles Michel
July 2023	Brussels	President of the European Council Charles Michel
October 2023	Granada	Prime Minister of Spain Pedro Sánchez; President of France Emmanuel Macron; Chancellor of Germany Olaf Scholz; President of the European Council Charles Michel; President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen; HR Josep Borrell; President of the European Parliament Roberta Metsola; Prime Minister of Greece Kyriakos Mitsotakis; Prime Minister of Norway Jonas Gahr Støre; Prime Minister of Finland Petteri Orpo; Prime Minister of Iceland Katrín Jakobsdóttir; President of Lithuania Gitanas Nausėda; Prime Minister of the Netherlands Mark Rutte; Prime Minister of Latvia Evika Silina; Prime Minister of Croatia Andrej Plenković; President of Montenegro Jakov Milatović at the 3rd EPC summit
October 2023	Strasbourg	President of the European Parliament Roberta Metsola
November 2023	Paris	President of France Emmanuel Macron; U.S. Assistant Secretary of State James O'Brien at the 6th Peace Conference

Dates	Locations of Visits	International Officials and Heads of EU Member States
February 2024	Munich	OSCE Chairperson-in-Office; Minister for Foreign and European Affairs and Trade of Malta Ian Borg within the framework of the Munich Security Conference; Head of the UK Secret Intelligence Service Richard Moore; U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken; Chancellor of Germany Olaf Scholz; Chairperson of the Sub-committee on Security and Defense in the European Parliament Nathalie Loiseau
February 2024	Paris	President of France Emmanuel Macron; President of the French Senate Gérard Larcher; Mayor of Paris Anne Hidalgo; Prime Minister of France Gabriel Attal
February 2024	Athens	President of Greece Katerina Sakellaropoulou; Prime Minister of Greece Kyriakos Mitsotakis; Speaker of the Hellenic Parliament Konstantinos Tassoulas
March 2024	Brussels	Prime Minister of Belgium Alexander de Croo; President of France Emmanuel Macron; President of the European Commission Ursula van der Leyen; President of the European Council Charles Michel; Prime Minister of Sweden Ulf Kristersson; Prime Minister Petteri Orpo at the Nuclear Energy Summit
April 2024	Brussels	President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen; HR Josep Borrell; U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken; USAID Administrator Samantha Power
May 2024	Copenhagen	Prime Minister of Denmark Mette Frederiksen; founder of the consulting organization 'Rasmussen Global' Anders Fogh Rasmussen; Speaker of the Danish Folketing Søren Gade
July 2024	London	Prime Minister of the Netherlands Dick Schoof; President of Finland Alexander Stubb; Prime Minister of the UK Sir Keir Starmer; Prime Minister of Luxembourg Luc Frieden; Prime Minister of Spain Pedro Sánchez; Prime Minister of Greece Kyriakos Mitsotakis; President of Switzerland Viola Amherd; President of Lithuania Gitanas Nausėda; Prime Minister of Estonia Kaja Kallas; President of the European Council Charles Michel; NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg; President of France Emmanuel Macron; Czech Prime Minister Petr Fiala; Chancellor Olaf Scholz at the 4th European Political Community Summit

(continued on next page)

Dates	Locations of Visits	International Officials and Heads of EU Member States
September 2024	New York	President of Cyprus Nikos Christodoulides; President of Poland Andrzej Duda; Prime Minister of Greece Kyriakos Mitsotakis; President of Romania Klaus Iohannis on the margins of the UN General Assembly
October 2024	Paris	President of France Emmanuel Macron and Prime Minister of France Michel Barnier; Prime Minister of Belgium Alexander De Croo; Prime Minister of Canada Justin Trudeau
November 2024	Budapest	Prime Minister of Hungary Viktor Orbán; Prime Minister of Slovakia Robert Fico; President of Bulgaria Rumen Radev; Prime Minister of Estonia Kristen Michal; President of France Emmanuel Macron
December 2024	Paris	President of France Emmanuel Macron

Source: Author's compilation[83]

Beyond demonstrating which EU member states are the most dedicated interlocutors of Armenia, the compiled data shows the rise in the number of meetings between European leaders and Armenia's prime minister, as well as the proactive role of Brussels in terms of involvement in issues pertaining to the Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia-Azerbaijan relations. This is verified by the "exponential increase in the number of visits by EUSR Klaar" in February, March, and December 2022, June 2023, January 2024 to Yerevan.[84] These were complemented by visits by high-level officials from the United States, NATO, the EU, and the United Kingdom to Armenia in the same timeframe.[85]

Notwithstanding the Armenian government's dubious posture, in September 2024, the Platform of Democratic Forces, comprising extra-parliamentary politicians and activists, launched an initiative to gather 50,000 signatures to hold a referendum for joining the EU. In November of the same year, the Central Electoral Commission of Armenia received 59,742 signatures.[86] After the passage of the draft law submitted by the Platform to the National Assembly, it will be possible to call for a referendum. The former may be bypassed if 300,000 signatures are collected from scratch.[87]

Doctrinal Orientation

The comparison of Armenia's two National Security Strategies, adopted in 2007 and in 2020, manifests the differences in the foreign policy outlook of the two governments under President Kocharyan and Prime Minister Pashinyan vis-à-vis partnerships/alliances with great/middle powers. In the 2007 National Security Strategy, Armenia formulated its policy concretely in the following manner: "Armenia's strategic partnership with Russia, its adoption of a European model of development, mutually beneficial cooperation with Iran and the United States, membership in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), and its intensification of the cooperation with the NATO alliance, all contribute to the consolidation of the potential of Armenia's policy of complementarity."[88] In the same vein, security was to be ensured simultaneously through "bilateral relations with Russia, with defense and technical military cooperation, through a strategic partnership" participation in the CSTO, "bilateral military cooperation, particularly with the United States and Greece," "cooperation with the NATO alliance," and "engagement in activities of international security organizations, such as the OSCE."[89] Attributing a paragraph to each, the Strategy emphasizes "the military component of the CSTO," which "provides privileged conditions for the supply of the military equipment to CSTO member-states, which is a key priority for Armenia," "intensive relations with NATO through the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) and the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program" and NATO's Planning and Review process, "political dialogue with NATO," "establishing compatible military units, such as the current peacekeeping battalion, capable of participating in NATO peacekeeping operations," "implementation of the PfP Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP)," which is aimed at "modernization and efficiency of the Armenian defense system," "development of bilateral relations with the United States and other allies" and "Armenia's policy of European integration."[90] To specify, "development and consolidation of Armenia's relations with the European structures, and with the European Union (EU) above all, is a priority direction for the country's foreign policy," while "intensification" of cooperation with the EU is meant to "promote the consolidation of democracy, strengthen the rule of law, and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms."[91]

In the relatively succinct 2020 Strategy, Armenia sustained its allegiance to Russia, confirming: "Armenia's foreign policy priorities include deepening and expanding its strategic alliance with the Russian Federation in the spheres of politics, trade and economy, defense, security, culture, and humanitarian assistance based on the historical friendship between the two nations."[92] While concomitantly Armenia was to participate "in joint initiatives within the framework of the CSTO, aimed at the effective protection of mutual interests of member states and the development of institutional capacity" and "work towards ensuring the fulfillment of allied commitments by the member states of the CSTO and increasing its organizational effectiveness,"[93] this commitment has been stalled.

In contrast, with respect to NATO, "reforming the defense sector and assisting international peacekeeping operations" was stated to be "a major direction of Armenia-NATO cooperation" together with "political dialogue."[94] Yet, in March 2024, Pashinyan stated that Armenia is seeking an Individually Tailored Partnership Program (ITPP) as an upgrade from the Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) adopted in 2005.[95]

Albeit mentioned once, the cooperation with the United States is imbued with strong political overtones: "friendly partnership," "strategic dialogue" for Armenia's "reform agenda, democracy, the protection of human rights, and the strengthening of international stability and security" are underscored.[96] As for the EU, "Armenia ascribes paramount importance to deepening friendly relations and expanding its bilateral and multilateral partnership with the European Union, its member states, and other European countries," specifically, through CEPA.[97] Other points of focus are "cooperation with France and Germany," "people to people contacts and mobility," "sectoral cooperation" and "economic dialogue."[98]

Public Mindset

In September 2024, a survey was conducted in Armenia asking the question, "How would you evaluate the current state of the relationship between Armenia and . . . ?" Figure 1.1 shows the public perceptions of France and the EU.[99]

Thus, 60 percent of the respondents qualified the relations with France as "very good" and 34 percent as "somewhat good." As for the EU, the corresponding figures were 21 percent and 59 percent favorable.[100]

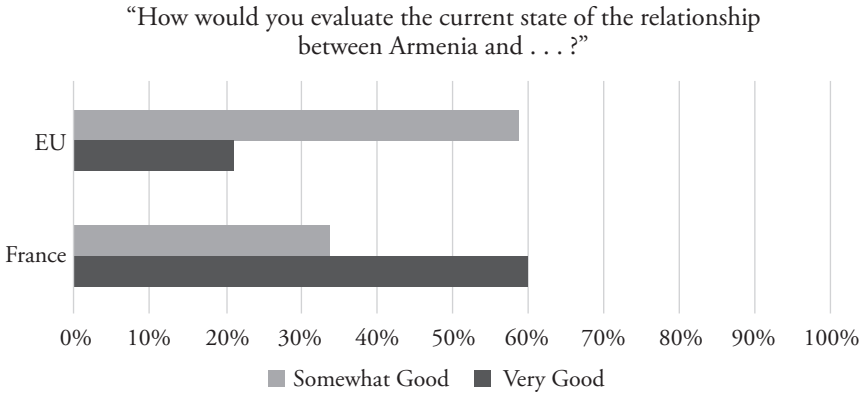


FIGURE 1.1 Public Perceptions of Relationship with France and the EU
Source: International Republican Institute 2024[101]

As for the trends, the perceived peak of the relations (91 percent) between Armenia and the EU was in October 2019, i.e., prior to the war launched by Azerbaijan against Armenia. The lowest point, 54 percent, was in May 2021. This was the same month when Azerbaijani troops intruded into Armenia's territory proper and the EU did not reprimand and/or sanction Baku. Moreover, in February 2022, the EU and Azerbaijan had agreed "to expand the Southern Gas Corridor" by increasing the supply volumes. That July, President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen visited Baku to sign a Memorandum of Understanding on Strategic Partnership in the energy field and praised the "long-term partnership" and "excellent relations"[102] between Armenia and the EU. While the respective figure for Armenia's relations with Russia was highest (93 percent) in the same month and year, it gradually fell to just 31 percent in December 2023.[103] This was due to "the perceived indolence of the peacekeepers during the blockade" of the Lachin corridor for nine months by the so-called Azeri environmental activists, the loss of Karabakh with the antecedent exodus and the ethnic cleansing of the Armenian population as a result of the *Blitzkrieg* instigated by Azerbaijan in September 2023 and the "tightening of the ties between Moscow and Baku."[104]

To the query, "Which of these countries do you consider the most important [type] for Armenia?," the respondents answered as presented in Figure 1.2:

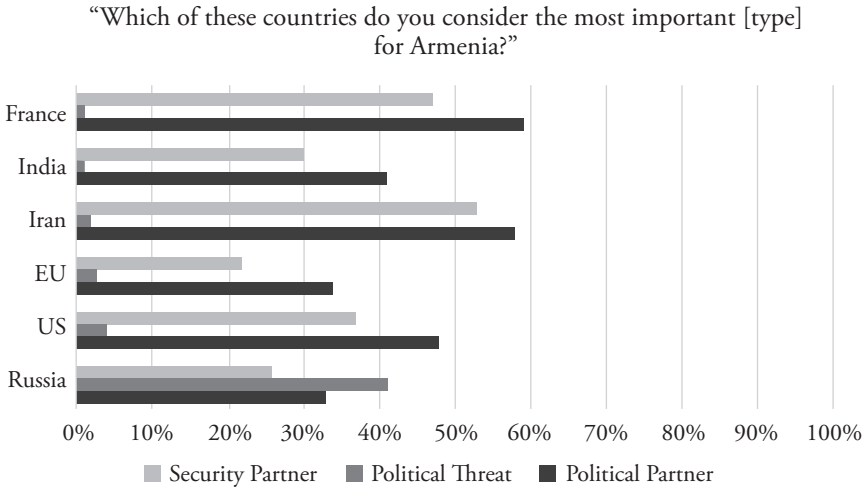


FIGURE 1.2 Public Perceptions of Partnership with Armenia
Source: International Republican Institute 2024[105]

France was viewed as the most important "political partner" by 59 percent of the interviewees, Iran followed suit with 58 percent, the United States with 48 percent, India with 41 percent, the EU with 34 percent, and Russia with 33 percent.[106] While the percentages for the EU and Russia are very close, the divergence appeared in the perceptions of "political threat:" Russia was perceived as such by 41 percent, the EU by 3 percent, India and France by less than 1 percent, the United States by 4 percent, and Iran by 2 percent.[107] As for the privilege of a "security partner," Iran was identified by 53 percent of respondents, France by 47 percent, the United States by 37 percent, India by 30 percent, Russia by 26 percent, and the EU by 22 percent.[108]

When asked, "If a referendum on Armenia's prospective European Union membership was held this coming Sunday, how would you vote?" Fifty-eight percent of the people answered that they would vote in favor, 39 percent would not vote, while 7 percent would vote against it.[109] As for identifying "the main benefit of joining the EU,"[110] the respondents provided the answers listed in Figure 1.3:

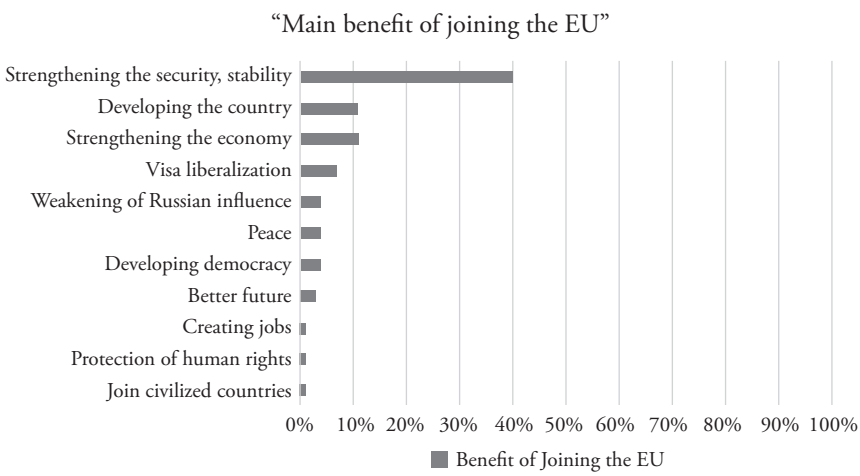


FIGURE 1.3 Public Perceptions of Benefits when Joining the EU
Source: International Republican Institute 2024[111]

As for "the main disadvantage of joining the EU," 22 percent underscored "Deterioration of Armenian family norms;" 21 percent believed that the "EU will not help, it will not be safe, they will not support Armenia, they are not reliable;" 12 percent felt such a move would lead to "Angering Russia/Increased security threats from Russia;" and 6 percent that it would have a "Negative impact on the economy."[112]

Overall, when the question "What should our country's foreign policy course be?" was posed, 20 percent of the respondents considered that Armenia's inclination should be "Only pro-European Union and the West"; 31 percent thought that the foreign policy should be "Pro-Western but keep up relations with Russia"; 20 percent that it should be "Pro-Russian but keep up relations with the European Union and the West"; alluding to "supplementarity";[113] and 6 percent "Only pro-Russian."[114] In any case, the bulk of the respondents favored a nonexclusive vector.

Armenia's Performance on Its Path Toward Europeanization

To assess Armenia's progress with adoption of the EU value-based model,[115] democracy scores are presented in Table 1.2.

TABLE 1.2 Democracy Scores[116]

Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Armenia	2.64	2.64	2.61	2.57	2.93	3.00	2.96	3.04	3.11	3.7

Source: Freedom House 2024[117]

While Armenia was a "Semi-consolidated authoritarian regime" until 2023, from 2023 onward it has transformed into a "transitional or hybrid regime.[118] As for broader "transformation," Table 1.3 lays out the evaluation of the Bertelsmann Stiftung.[119]

TABLE 1.3 "Democracy" / "Political Transformation" Sub-Index Scores of the South Caucasian States[120]

Year	2003	2006	2008	2010	2012	2014	2016	2018	2020	2022	2024
Armenia	2.6	5.20	6.0	4.92	5.25	5.35	5.23	5.12	7.10	6.75	6.90

Source: Spanger 2024[121]

In 2018, Armenia stood out as a "moderate autocracy,"[122] in 2024, it is qualified as a "defective democracy."[123] Although both ratings demonstrate an improvement in the past couple of years, Armenia does not fare yet as a consolidated democracy.

Conclusion

While Yerevan's drive toward Europeanization was affordable in the pre-2013 environment, thereafter, the aggravating tensions between the Western powers and Russia, which culminated in the New Cold War starting from the 2014 crisis and then the war in Ukraine,[124] made Armenia renege and resort to de-Europeanization. In turn, the EU loosened its political grip on Armenia until 2018, when Yerevan started exposing its equivocal posture toward the West, albeit reaping economic dividends from the bilateral trade with Russia and membership in the EaEU. Because of the 2020 Karabakh war and Azerbaijan's military intervention into Armenia's territory since 2021, the current government asserted its proclivity toward the West by inviting the EUMA in 2023 and voicing a quest for EU membership from 2024 onward, thereby augmenting the rift with Moscow. Although the EU received a reputational blow because of its moral negligence of the ethnic

cleansing and exodus of Karabakh Armenians, it remained a favorable actor in the Armenian public mindset. While the EU has been suffering from the enlargement fatigue, procrastinating with acceptance of the candidate Western Balkan countries because of Russia-West rivalry, Yerevan's full-fledged Europeanization remains a far-fetched pipedream.

Notes

1. Syuzanna Vasilyan, "Swinging on a Pendulum: Armenia in the Eurasian Economic Union and with the European Union," *Problems of Post Communism* 64, no. 1 (2016): 32–46.
2. Vasilyan, "Swinging on a Pendulum," 2.
3. The public protests that took place in Armenia in April and May 2018 pursued a short-term goal of regime-change by replacing the elected prime minister, Serzh Sargsyan, with Nikol Pashinyan and a medium-term objective of establishing justice and dignified life, as well as the improvement of socio-economic conditions by tackling corruption, cronyism, nepotism, and clientelism. Syuzanna Vasilyan, "Armenia's (R)Evolutionary Breakthrough: Constitutionalism at Work?" *ConstitutionNet*, June 28, 2018, http://constitutionnet.org/news/armenias-revolutionary-breakthrough-constitutionalism-work.
4. Ole Wæver, "Securitization and Desecuritization," in *On Security*, ed. Ronnie D. Lipschutz (Columbia University Press, 1995), 46–87.
5. The Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, "Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's Interview with France 24 TV," February 23, 2024, https://www.primeminister.am/en/interviews-and-press-conferences/item/2024/02/23/Nikol-Pashinyan-Interview-France-24/.
6. Wæver, "Securitization and Desecuritization," 52.
7. Wæver, "Securitization and Desecuritization," 53.
8. Syuzanna Vasilyan, "Novel Solutions to Resolve the Conflicts in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood," College of Europe Policy Brief (CEPOB) series no. 2.18 (Bruges, Belgium, 2018b) https://www.coleurope.eu/news/new-issue-college-europe-policy-brief-series-cepob-25.
9. Syuzanna Vasilyan, "The Tale of 'European Integration': The Union of Polity and Policy," in *Alliances and Leagues of Nations* (Leiden University, 2004), 93–113.
10. Robert Ladrech, "Europeanization of Domestic Politics and Institutions: The Case of France," *Journal of Common Market Studies* 32, no. 1 (1994): 69, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5965.1994.tb00485.x.
11. Claudio Maria Radaelli, "Whither Europeanization? Concept Stretching and Substantive Change," *European Integration Online Papers* 4, no. 8 (2000), 3.

12. The *acquis communautaire* is the corpus of EU legislation, legal acts and decisions of the European Court of Justice (ECJ). An applicant country must comply with all the 35 chapters of the *acquis* before judged as eligible for membership as determined by the Union.
13. Syuzanna Vasilyan, *'Moral Power' of the European Union in the South Caucasus* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 47.
14. Frank Schimmelfennig, "Europeanization Beyond Member States," *Journal for Comparative Government and European Policy* 8, no. 3 (2010): 319–339.
15. These are "neither comparable nor neat categories": "Persuasion originates from the EU, while imitation consists of responses by the targeted partner countries"; "conditionality may be inherent in socialization, while externalization and imitation may be a by-product of conditionality and socialization." Vasilyan, *'Moral Power,'* 47.
16. European Commission 2006a, p. 8; 2006b, 7; 2006c, 6 in Vasilyan, *'Moral Power,'* 255.
17. European Commission 2003a, p. 36; 2003b, 17; 2003c, 14 in Vasilyan, *'Moral Power,'* 255.
18. "The EU's tactics were diametrically opposed to that of the United States, which through the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) preselected countries on the basis of sixteen indicators and their democratic credentials thereby, excluding, among others, Azerbaijan." Vasilyan 2010b, in Vasilyan, *'Moral Power,'* 295.
19. European Council, Council of the European Union, n.d. in Vasilyan, *'Moral Power,'* 262.
20. EU's 2004 Big Bang enlargement granted "membership to a number of Central and Eastern European countries (Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia), as well as Cyprus and Malta." Vasilyan, *'Moral Power,'* 69.
21. The Rose Revolution of 2003 in Georgia pursued "an objective to promote democracy, human rights and the rule of law." Vasilyan, *'Moral Power,'* 140.
22. Vasilyan, *'Moral Power,'* 219.
23. European Commission 2004, 11, in Vasilyan, *'Moral Power,'* 255.
24. Vasilyan, *'Moral Power,'* 255.
25. Vasilyan, *'Moral Power,'* 255.
26. Vasilyan, *'Moral Power,'* 255.
27. This differed from the stance of the United States in 2009. With the use of negative conditionality, the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) stopped funding the country by diminishing the pledged amount and "leaving a part of the road construction and rehabilitation project incomplete." Millennium Challenge Corporation, n.d., in Vasilyan, *'Moral Power,'* 295.
28. European Commission 2004, 9–11, in Vasilyan, *'Moral Power,'* 255. The EaP is an analogy of "the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) initiated by the

French Presidency of the EU in July 2008 in order to bolster the Barcelona Process, which configured the relations" of the EU and its southern neighbors. Vasilyan, *'Moral Power,'* 81.

29. European Council, Council of the European Union, in Vasilyan, *'Moral Power,'* 263.
30. European Council, Council of the European Union, in Vasilyan, *'Moral Power,'* 263.
31. Vasilyan, *'Moral Power,'* 263.
32. Vasilyan, "Swinging on a Pendulum," 32–46.
33. European Council, Council of the European Union, n.d., in Vasilyan, *'Moral Power,'* 263–264.
34. Vasilyan, *'Moral Power,'* 264.
35. Vasilyan, *'Moral Power,'* 283.
36. Private sector reform targeting small and medium-size enterprises was also flagged. Vasilyan, '*Moral Power,'* 283.
37. Ashton 2011, in Vasilyan, '*Moral Power,'* 254.
38. Vasilyan, '*Moral Power,'* 264.
39. European Council, Council of the European Union, in Vasilyan, '*Moral Power,'* 264.
40. Vasilyan, '*Moral Power,'* 257.
41. Joshua Kucera "Pashinyan in Brussels: 'We expect more assistance,'" *Eurasianet*, July 13, 2018, https://eurasianet.org/pashinyan-in-brussels-we-expect-more-assistance.
42. Kucera, "Pashinyan in Brussels."
43. Radio Liberty, "EU Reaffirms Support for New Armenian Government's Reform Agenda," June 12, 2018, https://www.azatutyun.am/a/29359858.html.
44. Radio Liberty, "EU Reaffirms Support."
45. Syuzanna Vasilyan, "Armenia's Auspicious Democratic Advance Hanging by a Tread," in *Struggles in Eastern Europe,* ed. Michael Emerson (Center for European Policy Studies & Rowman and Littlefield International, 2021), 139.
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47. European Commission, "The EU and Armenia Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement enters into force," Brussels, Feb. 27, 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_782.
48. Vasilyan, "Armenia's Auspicious Democratic Advance," 127–128.
49. Vasilyan, "Armenia's Auspicious Democratic Advance, 140–141.
50. United Nations, "Global Ceasefire," n.d., https://www.un.org/englobal ceasefire.
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52. Syuzanna Vasilyan, "Armenia's Policy 'Twist' to Cumbersome Tactical 'Hedging,'" *Europe-Asia Studies* (forthcoming).
53. Sjostedt, 1977, in Vasilyan, *'Moral Power,'* 157.
54. Allen and Smith 1990, in Vasilyan, *'Moral Power,'* 157.
55. Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, "Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan's speech at the European Parliament," Yerevan, Oct. 17, 2023, https://www.primeminister.am/en/statements-and-messages/item/2023/10/17/Nikol-Pashinyan-Speech/.
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57. European Union External Action, "Armenia."
58. European Union External Action, "Armenia."
59. Astghik Bedevian, "Armenian Speakers Suggests EU Membership Bid, Radio Liberty," *Radio Liberty*, Feb. 29, 2024, https://www.azatutyun.am/a/32842668.html.
60. Vasilyan, "Armenia's Policy 'Twist' to Cumbersome Tactical 'Hedging.'"
61. Gian Volpicelli, "Armenia Mulling EU Membership Application, Foreign Minister Says," *Politico*, March 9, 2024, https://www.politico.eu/article/armenia-mulling-eu-membership-application-foreign-minister-mirzoyan-says/. Vasilyan, "Armenia's Policy 'Twist.'"
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70. Syuzanna Vasilyan, "Swinging on a Pendulum," 32–46.
71. Radio Liberty, "Armenian Speaker Sees Referendum on EU Membership."
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CHAPTER 2

Meandering Paths Between Brussels and Yerevan

THE "HALTING EUROPEANIZATION" OF ARMENIA

Nareg Seferian

The Republic of Armenia has faced the challenge of balancing its foreign policy and geopolitical orientation ever since it gained independence following the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in 1991. The country's foreign policy agenda has been dominated by the dispute with Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh. To a lesser extent, though related to the main issue, establishing and normalizing relations with Turkey has likewise served as a significant foreign policy challenge for Yerevan, especially in the context of advocacy campaigns for the public recognition and commemoration of the Armenian Genocide, which took place over the course of World War I (1914–1918). In terms of ties with key centers of power, Armenia's geopolitical orientation leaned strongly toward Moscow all throughout the 1990s, 2000s, and most of the 2010s. At the same time there was considerable engagement with Brussels—through the Eastern Partnership and otherwise—as well as Washington. Armenia maintained and continues to nurture a somewhat less prominent, though still significant, relationship with another important regional actor, Iran, which has sometimes had an impact on ties with the West. The balanced foreign policy implemented by Yerevan— often framed as "complementarity" in official discourse[1]—was by and large stable and successful for two decades and more.

The major geopolitical disruptions between Russia and Western actors during 2013–2014 reverberated throughout the Eastern Partnership area, including Armenia. The foreign policy pursued by Yerevan has since struggled to accommodate, on the one hand, its deep and enduring security and economic ties with Russia and, on the other hand, ongoing legal, technical, and other institutional relations as well as growing commerce with Europe. Moreover, the so-called "Velvet Revolution" in Armenia brought about a change in power in 2018, which, though not leading to major changes in foreign policy at first, later proved to be a significant point of contention in the dynamic of tensions between Russia and the West.[2] Above all, the Second Karabakh War of 2020 and its aftermath created immense rifts within Armenian society, one of the fault lines being the country's geopolitical orientation. Ever since the end of active hostilities, both Moscow and Brussels, as well as, together and separately, Paris and Washington, have noticeably devoted attention and resources to Armenia and Azerbaijan. As a result, the domestic and foreign policy spheres of Armenia have been highly contested and unstable since 2020, with the discourse of building relations with Russia or the West framed around questions of security and democratization, often presented as binaries with existential consequences. Various actors in the organized Armenian Diaspora have also played some role in these processes.

One way of understanding this dynamic is a classical reading of history, casting Armenia as the small state caught between great powers, trying to position its interests through their preferences while suffering their whims. It would be more comprehensive to consider Yerevan's own agency and how its elites navigate the disagreements among major global centers of power, while also considering the interests and policies of regional actors, namely Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Iran, as well as Georgia.

This chapter delves mainly into the numerous layers in the relationship between Yerevan and Brussels. Depending upon how exactly the categories are conceptualized, it is possible to identify both Europeanization and de-Europeanization trends in Armenia since independence, and especially since the "Velvet Revolution" of 2018. This chapter shares a brief conceptualization of Europeanization and de-Europeanization and investigates its indicators across three dimensions: (1) legal, technical, and commercial components, (2) geopolitical orientation, and (3) norms and values. It concludes that, although

Yerevan's policy agenda tends toward Brussels, Armenia has been undergoing what I would characterize as "halting Europeanization" because it is at the mercy of broader geopolitical processes over which it has limited leverage.

Defining Europeanization and de-Europeanization

Chitaladze and Gevorgyan share a brief survey of what the term Europeanization might entail. They suggest that the category involves policy moves toward norms reflected in EU instruments, alongside the adoption of a European identity—cultural, political, or otherwise. The technical layers of the process would involve both governance practices and trade, and the economy of a state aligning more and more with Brussels. What is more, Europeanization does not have to be limited to the territory of the EU.[3]

In this sense, then, Europeanization can be understood as an ideology or even a form of hegemony, not unlike an imperial or colonial setup—something akin to classical spheres of influence. The important distinction, however, is that states and societies must be compelled to adopt Europeanizing policies and practices themselves. Perhaps a more apt comparison would be with the globalization processes that occurred in the second half of the twentieth century, when institutions largely dominated by the United States set standards for local governance, international trade, and numerous other spheres of public life. Analogously, de-Europeanization would mean a purposeful avoidance of following such practices or, if they have already become a part of a state's policies, their reversal to the *status quo ante* or something else altogether.

There are numerous policies and practices, and cultural layers, to tease out in order to assess the Europeanization or de-Europeanization pursued by a state. Three dimensions of indicators along the above lines are investigated below for the case of Armenia.

1. Legal, Technical, and Commercial Components

The legal, technical, and commercial components of Armenia's Europeanization or de-Europeanization involve the country's participation in institutions and regimes as well as its trade patterns. This dimension offers the most concrete indicators to parse.

Armenia's relationship with the European Union is the most substantial starting point in this regard. The EU began developing its relations with the newly independent states of the South Caucasus not long after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with Armenia was signed in 1996, entering into force in 1999. It involved a diversity of political, social, economic, and cultural spheres. Armenia also became a part of the EU's European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) from 2004. The 1996 agreement was supplemented by the ENP Action Plan of 2006. The above dynamics built up to the Eastern Partnership (EaP) established in 2009, which included Armenia alongside five other former Soviet states in the eastern part of Europe and the South Caucasus: Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, and Azerbaijan. It was in the EaP context that an Association Agreement began to be negotiated between the EU and Armenia in 2010, adding a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) to the talks in 2012. An agreement on the DCFTA had been reached by July 2013.[4]

Arguably, the most significant turning point in EU-Armenia relations took place a couple of months later. In September 2013, during a visit to Moscow, President Serge Sargsyan unexpectedly declared that Armenia would be joining the Customs Union, later called the Eurasian Economic Union, being formed by Russia. Such an arrangement would preclude a DCFTA with the EU. At various points, Sargsyan denied coming under pressure from Russian President Vladimir Putin or others to do so but he also admitted in an off-the-record gathering that the decision was essentially taken overnight at the Kremlin. Sargsyan said that negotiations with Moscow and Brussels had been taking place with the understanding from both that neither would hinder the other, but that the EU later brought up objections.[5] Above all, the supply and price of natural gas continue to be a major source of Russian leverage over the Armenian economy, to say nothing of deep security and other political ties between the two countries.[6] The parallel case with Ukraine in that same period of 2013–2014 offered a cynical lesson of sorts for Armenia's elites and their prowess at balancing powers—a lesson that had its own local manifestation, so to speak, given the hostilities over Nagorno-Karabakh in the years that followed.[7]

All was not lost, however, in the relationship between Brussels and Yerevan. The European Union and Armenia went ahead with the political segment of what would have been the Association Agreement between

them. The Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) was signed in November 2017, entering into partial force the following year and fully in place since March 2021. The CEPA includes the Partnership Council, which oversees the agreement, the Partnership Committee and its various sub-committees, including technical spheres, human rights, and the like, the Parliamentary Partnership Committee, as well as the Civil Society Platform. The gamut of areas of collaboration is immense. As of 2024, there were some seventy projects or programs funded by the European Union in Armenia, ranging from reforms in the health sector to business development, anti-corruption measures, arts and culture, education, infrastructure, including roads and energy facilities, governance support such as legislation development, reforms in the police, digitalization of services, etc. The funding for projects from 2021 to 2026 was budgeted at 2.4 billion euros. The EU has provided humanitarian aid to Armenia as well, to the tune of hundreds of millions of euros. There is also a substantial human rights and civil society component to the EU-Armenia relationship.[8]

The EU-Armenia relationship is less rosy when it comes to economic ties. Armenia's trade turnover with the EU grew by about 60 percent in the decade up to 2023.[9] In contrast, Armenia and Russia—members of the Eurasian Economic Union since its establishment as the Customs Union—had a trade increase of some seven times in that same period.[10] Notably, the commercial activities between Armenia and Russia saw a significant boom after the latter's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and the imposition of sanctions on Moscow. (Indeed, Armenia may have served as one of the routes for the circumvention of sanctions on Russia.[11]) Proportionally, the share of trade between Armenia and the EU and Armenia and Russia each stood at around a quarter of Armenia's total trade in 2013. The percentage of trade with the EU has been steadily declining since 2019, garnering 13 percent in 2023; with Russia, Armenia's trade went up to 35 percent during those years.[12] While it is difficult to predict future trends, given the volatile political situation in the region and the instability of the Russian economy, as well as commercial and trade developments in Europe, there is a clear balance in the Armenian economy tilting to the north, rather than to the west, in the 2010s and into the first half of the 2020s.

Transportation serves as another arena of inconsistent EU-Armenia relations. Yerevan and Brussels signed an EU-Armenia Common Aviation

Area Agreement in 2021. Since the year prior, however, and as of late 2024, airlines based in Armenia were blacklisted from flying into European airspace due to safety concerns and other regulatory matters. Future reforms within the civil aviation sector in Armenia could act as indicators of technical Europeanization and de-Europeanization dynamics.[13]

The European Union's visa policy also showcases trends in both directions. Brussels and Yerevan began negotiating visa-free travel to the Schengen Area for citizens of the Republic of Armenia in late 2024. Most applying for a visa in Armenia, however, have faced practical difficulties and numerous delays in the process. Strict entry and movement requirements and discrimination against Armenian passport-holders, especially those from Nagorno-Karabakh, have also been characteristic of European visa policies in the mid-2020s.[14]

Besides the Eastern Partnership and more immediate ties to the EU, indicators of Armenia's Europeanization or de-Europeanization may be gauged from Yerevan's engagement with a variety of European bodies and regimes, whether or not directly or partially connected with the EU.

Primary among them is the Council of Europe (CoE), the group of states born out of the European Convention on Human Rights. Armenia had been granted special guest status at the CoE in 1996—an early indicator of the country's European aspirations. Indeed, at the time, that foreign policy vector would have been almost impossible to contest. Given the geopolitical circumstances, Europeanization was the most prevalent expectation of the day, certainly among the elites in Yerevan. It officially acceded in 2001. Armenia joined the CoE pointedly alongside Azerbaijan, a decision linking the issue of a resolution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict with democratization and human rights guarantees.[15]

As with the EU, Armenia continues to participate in a number of CoE programs including human rights monitoring, prevention of torture, obstruction of trafficking, etc. Among other initiatives associated with the CoE, Armenia is a member of the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO). Also, on a number of occasions, Armenia has approached the Venice Commission or the Commission for Democracy through Law in assessing substantial legislative and constitutional changes in the country.[16] In the case of these two examples, Armenia has demonstrated a selective adoption of policy recommendations on past occasions, at times passing

legislation with poor implementation, at times ignoring specific components. This is one of the reasons Freedom House ranked Armenia as "partly free" in 2024.[17]

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) has, for its part, served as a space for Armenian public life to find its expression within a broader European framework. It has been the forum in which opposition voices have found resonance, especially in cases of relatively extreme human rights violations or otherwise suppressions in Armenia, episodes possible to characterize as de-Europeanization.[18] Above all, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) has played an active role in overseeing judicial decisions and practices in Armenia, taking on hundreds of cases involving Armenia and awarding millions of euros in damages.[19] As examples of Europeanization, the ECtHR has been the reason that the accused no longer sit behind cages in courtrooms in Armenia, the process of providing broadcasting licenses has become more transparent, property and electoral rights have been amended, and alternatives to military service are available to conscientious objectors, among other reforms.[20]

Armenia is also a part of the Bologna Process, that is, the network of states involved in the European Higher Education Area with the aim of standardizing practices, pooling educational resources, and supporting the mobility of students, faculty, and researchers across the wider European neighborhood, including through the Erasmus+ framework of programs.[21] There has been a dedicated Erasmus+ office functioning in Armenia since the late 1990s. However, it was shut down by the government of Armenia in 2025, citing the ineffectiveness of its programming.[22] That unexpected move could be perceived as an instance of de-Europeanization.

The broader European context also includes the Republic of Armenia's participation in the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). That body's ties to Armenia and the region mainly involve the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh—a phenomenon arguably separate from Europeanization or de-Europeanization processes. At the same time, Armenia's involvement with the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) has been substantial, especially in the practice of election monitoring. Even though elections in the Republic of Armenia have not always been consistently transparent, the trend toward free and fair elections has been strong ever since the so-called "Velvet Revolution"

of 2018. This trend is a relevant indicator of Europeanization and the more Western attitudes in this regard held by the elites that have come to power in Yerevan.[23]

2. Geopolitical Orientation

Closely related to the first dimension is the question of geopolitical orientation and enduring foreign policy. The vast areas of cooperation between Brussels and Yerevan outlined above may be telling in and of themselves. A report by the Applied Policy Research Institute of Armenia (APRI Armenia), however, criticizes those very broad and diverse arrangements as a "patchwork" of institutions and initiatives, concluding that "the EU does not have a coherent foreign policy framework for its engagement with Armenia or the South Caucasus region overall."[24] Brussels and Yerevan collaborate strongly and consistently from project to project. But is it possible to identify more concrete overarching policy directions in the relationship?

The most far-reaching component on this point has been the security arrangements between Armenia and the EU that have emerged since the Second Karabakh War. Some months after the ceasefire of November 9–10, 2020, Azerbaijani forces began conducting incursions into Armenia proper, occupying heights along Armenia's eastern borders in various episodes starting in May 2021. A major, though brief, incident of active hostilities took place in November 2021 in one section of the province of Siunik in the south of the country. Azerbaijani forces attacked on a much larger scale all along the eastern borders of Armenia for two days in September 2022.[25] The areas remaining under the nominal control of the unrecognized Armenian-populated Nagorno-Karabakh Republic came under an Azerbaijani blockade starting in December 2022. Russian peacekeepers stationed there since the ceasefire did not prevent the humanitarian catastrophe that followed, culminating in the attacks by Azerbaijani forces into Nagorno-Karabakh in September 2023, which led to the effective takeover of the territory by Baku and the exodus of more than 100,000 Armenians in the week that followed.[26]

Throughout these recent processes, the office of the EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus had been engaged with the governments in Yerevan and Baku. In 2021, the European Union began more direct mediation efforts between Armenia and Azerbaijan, led by Charles

Michel, president of the European Council at the time. At least thirteen official diplomatic interactions were held across Brussels, Yerevan, and Baku between June 2021 and July 2023. Michel held three phone calls with the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and President Ilham Aliyev, in June and November 2021, and March 2023, as well as a video conference in February 2022, along with the participation of the President Emmanuel Macron of France.[27] The first trilateral meeting was held on the sidelines of the Eastern Partnership Summit in December 2021. More trilateral meetings were held in Brussels in April, May, and August 2022, followed by another in October 2022 as part of the first European Political Community (EPC) meeting, including the participation of Macron as well.[28] Another trilateral meeting was held in Brussels in May 2023. The second EPC summit in June 2023 had yet another such meeting between Pashinyan and Aliyev, hosted by Michel, also including Macron, as well as Chancellor Olaf Scholz of Germany. At the third EPC, in October 2023, Azerbaijan did not participate, but there were a meeting and joint statement with Pashinyan and the three aforementioned European leaders. Pashinyan and Aliyev accused one another of canceling a planned summit at the fourth European Political Community meeting in July 2024. Azerbaijan did not attend the fifth one in November 2024, during which there was no separate communiqué with Pashinyan.[29]

There were two sea changes in relations between the Armenia-Azerbaijan dynamics and the involvement of the EU in this period. The first was soon after the large-scale attacks by Azerbaijan on Armenia in September 2022. The following month, the European Union deployed forty personnel to monitor the Armenia-Azerbaijan border for ceasefire violations. They held their observations only on the Armenian side. That was a short-term arrangement known as the EU Monitoring Capacity in Armenia (EUMCAP). It was replaced with a larger civilian European Mission in Armenia (EUMA) under the EU's Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) in January and February 2023.[30]

The second sea change came about a year later, after the final assault by Azerbaijani forces on Nagorno-Karabakh in September 2023. EU officials made statements at the time about the negative humanitarian fallouts of the establishment of effective control by Azerbaijan over what remained of Armenian-populated Nagorno-Karabakh. Baku withdrew from EU-

mediated talks soon thereafter. Azerbaijan also opposed the activities of the EU Mission in its bordering areas. Armenia actively engaged with France in developing its military capacity in the same timeframe, with supplemental aid from Greece and Cyprus as well, and even support from the European Peace Facility. Those moves have been marked as substantial shifts away from the long-standing Russian presence in Armenia's security architecture. Indeed, the Pashinyan administration has frozen its participation in the Kremlin-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) among other dimensions of tension with Moscow. Within the same period, Baku had been pushing for a bilateral negotiations format with Yerevan, or sometimes more Russian mediation, or the so-called "3+3" format, which involves the three countries of the South Caucasus alongside Russia, Turkey, and Iran. By the end of 2024, not much progress had been recorded in the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace process, and certainly the direct role of the EU had been diminished.[31] (Other factors within that dynamic, including the policy positions and diplomatic efforts of the United States, events in the Middle East, and the Russia-Ukraine war, among other phenomena, had various impacts of their own on the region.)

The European Union's own, as Luciani puts it, "geopolitical turn" in the Caucasus has thus been noticeable since 2020.[32] The "patchwork" of actions and regimes transformed into a more direction projection of power, though stopping short of (armed) boots on the ground. The EU personnel merely observe the border for ceasefire violations. That model had already been visible in the region earlier with the EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia, following the war in Georgia in 2008. In one sense, the EUMA was an extension into Armenia after 2020 of the EU security policy already at play. However, for its part, the EU has been an unsteady geopolitical actor in Armenia, flexing its capabilities in fits and starts. The long-term consequences of the EUMA are difficult to assess, both for the EU's own interests as well as Armenia's. Indeed, the EU has not built the capacity or the reputation as a guarantor of security for Armenia (or Georgia, for that matter).[33]

In the near and medium term, the regional security dynamics will be more largely influenced by the relationships among the leaders in Moscow, Yerevan, and Baku, as well as Ankara and Washington. The limited capacity of the EU in this regard is an outcome of its internal institutional disagreements. Besides Armenia being compelled to balance its policy

directions, the EU has its own calculations to make when it comes to security and humanitarian issues in Armenia juxtaposed with its policies regarding Azerbaijan, especially in the important sphere of energy imports.[34] The mediation efforts spearheaded by the president of the European Council, Charles Michel, were somewhat undermined by the visit of the president of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, to Baku in July 2022. She signed a deal with the Azerbaijani government on that occasion to increase trade in gas, praising the country's trustworthiness and reliability. The step was taken in the context of the Russia-Ukraine war that had recently begun and consequent anxieties in Brussels over Europe's energy supplies. The visit was heavily criticized by human rights groups.[35]

3. Norms and Values

The dimension of norms and values in the Europeanization or de-Europeanization of Armenia is the most difficult to identify and measure. In discourse in Armenia, the term "Europe" has socio-cultural, philosophical, or even moral and ethical connotations, much in keeping with contrasts in stereotypical Orientalist framings. For example, to refer to an apartment or building that has undergone *yevroremont* [եվրոռեմոնտ]—roughly meaning European-style renovation—implies good-quality construction work, an update to the fixtures and furniture matching high global standards, and so on. Being European brings with it the expectation of propriety, whether in terms of goods and services, or policies and practices, such as free and fair elections or respect for human rights. This is the kind of admittedly problematic discourse that has accompanied much of the engagements with the European world listed above, reflected in public perceptions as well.

The International Republican Institute (IRI) has been regularly conducting public opinion surveys in Armenia since 2018. Positive perceptions of relationships with the EU have been high throughout, in the range of 80–90 percent of respondents, except in the surveys of May and December 2021, coincident with the fallouts of the Second Karabakh War of 2020 and the beginnings of the attempts of mediation by the EU.[36] According to the findings from September 2024, the EU was perceived by a substantial proportion of respondents to be both the most important political (34 percent) and security (22 percent) partner for Armenia.[37]

Moreover, 58 percent of respondents at the time said they would vote to join the EU (13 percent would be against it, 25 percent would not vote at all).[38] The poll's findings indicated that the respondents would mostly expect a more stable security situation (40 percent) as a result of EU membership, with some economic development (11 percent) to go along with it, whereas outcomes of more democracy, being a part of "civilized countries," or the protection of human rights were in the range of only 1 to 4 percent of respondents.[39] However, respondents also mentioned that EU membership would have a negative influence on Armenian family norms (22 percent) and that it would be an unreliable security partner (21 percent), provoking Russia instead (12 percent).[40] There is indeed disappointment in Armenia, especially in civil society circles, about the marked inconsistency in the EU's foreign policy on Ukraine and the aggression by Azerbaijan in Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia.[41]

Here, the sociocultural contrasts are most telling and can be identified throughout the Eastern Partnership space. The same stereotypical Orientalist framings about the term "Europe" mentioned above bring with them anxieties of, for example, liberal attitudes toward LGBTQ communities or a nebulous conceptualization of family values, steering away from more conservative, patriarchal attitudes that are prevalent in the country. The mixed expectations are also not surprising on the foreign policy front, given the instability of the preceding years. According to that IRI poll from September 2024, a significant segment of the respondents perceived Russia as the most important political (33 percent) and security (26 percent) partner. These numbers are comparable with the same perceptions regarding the EU, but with the additional detail that only 3 percent considered the EU to be a political threat at the same time, while 41 percent thought so of Russia.[42] There may be mixed and contrasting norms and values to accommodate perceptions about the European world in Armenia. The policy expectations vis-à-vis Russia seem to be rather extreme for their part. Overall, 51 percent of the respondents to that poll preferred a balanced foreign policy, though tilting more toward the West. Thirty-one percent of respondents favored a pro-Western foreign policy while maintaining relations with Russia, 20 percent desired a pro-Russian foreign policy while maintaining relations with the West, 20 percent preferred a solely pro-Western foreign policy and 6 percent a solely pro-Russian one.[43]

Since 2016, the EU has been funding its own public opinion surveys in Armenia and the rest of the Eastern Partnership, presented on its *EU NEIGHBOURS east* website, following up on the prior OPEN east and EU Neighbourhood Info Centre projects.[44] The findings largely match the IRI-sponsored polls. Positive perceptions of the EU have been generally in the 40 to 50 percent range, with a high of 62 percent in 2019, dipping to a low of 42 percent in 2022, though increasing afterward. (Neutral perceptions have also been steady, between around 30 to 40 percent.)[45] Trust toward the EU showcased a similar pattern, with a marked decrease in 2021 as with the IRI polls, though mostly staying in the 60 percent range.[46] The same movement was recorded for perceptions on the EU's relations with Armenia—a drop in 2021, rising to the more usual highs afterward. According to the findings from March 2024, the highest percentage of respondents suggested that Brussels should support security (68 percent) and economic development (60 percent) in order to increase the EU's approval rating in Armenia.[47] Questions about visa facilitation, cultural and educational programs, and anti-corruption and democratization measures also received highly favorable responses. The poll asked more explicitly whether the European Union represents certain norms and values, like freedom of expression, social justice, the environment, and gender equality, almost all receiving rather highly favorable percentages in response.[48]

Perhaps one of the most telling reflections of Europeanization along the lines of norms and values is Armenia's long-standing participation in the *Eurovision Song Contest*. The Eastern Partnership countries and, more generally, the former communist states have enthusiastically taken part in it for some time. The political imaginations behind what Jones and Subotic call "performing Europeanization" are one way to assert and crystallize the complex interplays across national identity, participation in a broader European identity, and the accommodation of one into the other.[49] *Eurovision* can also be a problematic phenomenon in some respects, given, for example, the stereotypical connotations it has with the LGBTQ community. Regardless, Armenia takes its involvement in it quite seriously, having participated regularly since 2006, only missing the 2012 and 2021 editions. The country qualified for the grand final almost every time and even won *Junior Eurovision* in 2010 and 2021.[50] (Baku was the host city of *Eurovision 2012*. Armenia did not send in a participant following a boycott campaign

and negative remarks from the Azerbaijani leadership at the time.[51] The 2021 contest, for its part, was too soon after the Second Karabakh War.[52] The victory at *Junior Eurovision*, held much later that same year, might arguably have been informed by sympathy toward Armenia in the aftermath of the hostilities and the humanitarian suffering in the country.)

As mentioned, norms and values and their public perceptions are more difficult to gauge than the other indicators investigated in this chapter. It is also worth noting that one of the two opinion polls discussed above was commissioned and funded by a US-based entity, and the second was the EU's own survey. The largely positive framings of the categories presented in them may therefore be disputed. Still, the Republic of Armenia continues to participate in many organizations that reflect those norms and values: the European Court of Human Rights, the Bologna Process, GRECO, the EU-Armenia Civil Society Platform, among many more. There is a clear buy-in from the country's elites along these lines, with significant, if hard to measure, popular support as well.

Conclusion

For more than two decades since its independence, the Republic of Armenia seemed to be on a steady, if slow and selective, Europeanization path—a fact that might have been unexpected at first glance, given its geographic and geopolitical circumstances. Delcour and Wolczuk propose that the elites of the country calculated an alignment across local demands for reforms, positive perceptions of the EU, and the capacity to accommodate Europeanization processes within Armenia's security architecture, which was heavily tied to Russia. The EU would provide means for better governance and modern development, but without causing security anxieties in Moscow. Elites would ensure signals would not get crossed since they would not be too explicit or public in pursuing what Delcour and Wolczuk call "silent Europeanisation"—the contrast being with the vociferous pro-EU positions pursued by Moldova, Ukraine, or Georgia.[53] However, the Russian security ties proved to be rather strong, and Moscow retained the role of "competing governance provider," as Terzyan characterizes it, to Armenia and other former Soviet states.[54] Since 2014 and certainly since 2022, meanwhile, the option of "silent Europeanisation" has become overly challenging, not to say impossible.

Alternatives or supplements to European spheres of engagement do exist. The most consequential areas of security and the economy were discussed above. However, people from Armenia participate in cultural or educational exchange programs in Russia, the United States, and the Middle East as well. But the range of the European "patchwork"[55] to which Armenia is attached—legal, technical, cultural, governance-related, etc.—and their depth and robustness are hard to match. By the same token, the choice not to pursue them at all could feature on the policy agenda in Yerevan. It would take a rather stark shift in policy in Yerevan to indicate a pointed move toward de-Europeanization—something like adopting Russian-style foreign agent laws or other forms of institutionalized illiberal practices.

There do not seem to be any plans in that regard. On the contrary, since 2020, the perception that the Russian involvement in the region matches the interests of Armenia has become farther removed from reality. However, expectations of a full replacement of Russia's role in the country by a security provider and economic partner from the West have been unrealistic. This has been the vicious foreign policy challenge that Armenia has faced since the Second Karabakh War. It was in similar circumstances in 2013 that President Serge Sargsyan abruptly switched the country's foreign policy agenda from signing the imminent Association Agreement with the EU to joining what came to be called the Eurasian Economic Union, led by Russia—perhaps the most notable manifestation of de-Europeanization in Armenia, as mentioned above.

A decade later—amid a similar, sharper conflict between Russia and Ukraine—the most significant expressions of Europeanization began to be expressed by the leadership in Yerevan. No longer "silent Europeanisation" in the least, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan stated in an address to the European Parliament in October 2023, that "The Republic of Armenia is ready to be closer to the European Union, as much as the European Union considers it possible."[56] He went even further in May 2024, while attending a summit in Copenhagen, when he responded to a moderator's question by saying he would like to see Armenia join the EU that very year.[57] Not long afterwards, however, in July 2024, Pashinyan pulled back on the idea of holding a referendum in that regard.[58] Some months later, a petition in the country garnered more than the required 50,000 signatures in order to initiate legislation in the Armenian parliament toward EU accession.

Pashinyan cautioned that such a move would have to be compatible with the EU's own processes. Russia's interests would also not be aligned with a possible withdrawal from the Eurasian Economic Union—Armenia's own economy would be affected as well. In the end, the parliament did adopt a bill in March 2025, calling for EU membership, and Russian officials were quick to raise the specter of heavy economic and political repercussions that could follow any serious EU membership bid.[59]

This back-and-forth offers an apt illustration of Armenia as a classic small state trying to balance great powers. Armenia is the smallest of the former Soviet republics. It is landlocked, with a modest economy. The country has relatively few reserves of natural resources. Its geographic position is not particularly favorable. In fact, Armenia serves as a space for strategic infrastructure above all to the advantage of Russia and Iran, namely military installations and transportation routes outside the scope of immediate Western oversight. The case of Armenia is a good example of how external dynamics can have greater leverage over the capacity of small states to balance their foreign policy. Small states can accommodate themselves among the great powers only inasmuch as the great powers themselves would find it befitting their interests. That became especially clear for Armenia in the period 2013–2014, when great rifts between Moscow and the West began to emerge. As a result, the leadership in Yerevan has continued to take steps toward Europeanization while at times showcasing de-Europeanization as well. Such moves are different than both the earlier "complementarity"[60] or "silent Europeanisation," which tried to accommodate the interests of the power centers while retaining as much agency as possible for Armenia. The strategy pursued by Yerevan has become more reactive, selectively taking public steps at times to appease Moscow, at times to appease Brussels and Washington—sometimes giving rise to contradictions and causing tensions with all parties.

The dynamics have been changing swiftly since the Second Karabakh War of 2020 and Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. By late 2024–early 2025, there was more fluidity available in foreign policy directions across Brussels and Moscow, as well as Washington, where new leadership could bring forward changes of its own. What remains for the elites in Yerevan is vigilance in clarifying their interests and navigating the preferences of the global centers of power. Although Yerevan's policy agenda tends toward

Brussels, Armenia has been undergoing what I would characterize as "halting Europeanization" because it is at the mercy of broader geopolitical processes over which it has limited leverage.

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CHAPTER 3

Azerbaijan's Strategic Repositioning and the European Union's Future Energy Security

Elkhan Nuriyev

Energy security is a cornerstone of the European Union's (EU) long-term stability and prosperity, yet it remains one of its most vulnerable sectors. From the early 2000s until 2022, Russia had been the EU's primary energy supplier, particularly for natural gas. However, this dependence has proven to be a strategic liability for the continent. The ongoing conflict in Ukraine has starkly exposed the risks of overreliance on Russian energy. Following the war's outbreak, the 2022 sanctions against Russian gas caused significant disruptions to the EU's energy supply,[1] with far-reaching effects on economic stability and social welfare.[2] The crisis has exposed the fragility of Europe's energy security, with immediate consequences for heating, industrial processes, and overall economic resilience.[3]

In response, the EU has initiated a strategic shift toward diversifying its energy sources, placing greater emphasis on suppliers beyond Russia, particularly in the Caspian Sea region. In this context, Azerbaijan has become a pivotal partner for the EU.[4] With its substantial energy resources, expanding infrastructure investments, and strategic geographic location, Azerbaijan is poised to become a key pillar in Europe's energy strategy. This chapter examines Azerbaijan's evolving role in strengthening EU energy security, focusing on its natural gas exports, infrastructure projects, and future contributions to green energy.

The current global energy crisis, exacerbated by the war in Ukraine, has fundamentally reshaped how energy is produced, consumed, and distributed around the world. It has underscored the importance of securing diverse, reliable energy sources that are resilient to geopolitical disruptions while aligning with environmental sustainability goals. As the EU accelerates its transition toward a clean and renewable energy system,[5] Azerbaijan's potential role in this transformation, particularly through its green energy initiatives and commitment to decarbonization,[6] stands out as significant. With the evolution of global energy politics, Azerbaijan is taking on a central role in the EU's pursuit of resilient and diversified energy systems, especially through the framework of the Eastern Partnership program.[7]

Europeanization, De-Europeanization, and Azerbaijan's Energy Strategy

To align this chapter more explicitly with the overarching theme of Europeanization and de-Europeanization,[8] it is essential to examine how Azerbaijan's evolving role in EU energy security fits within these theoretical frameworks. Europeanization, broadly understood, refers to the process through which EU policies, norms, and institutional practices influence domestic structures and policy orientations in third-party countries outside of the EU.[9]

In the case of Azerbaijan, Europeanization manifests in its alignment with EU energy norms,[10] participation in regionwide initiatives like the Eastern Partnership, and its increasing integration into the European energy market through projects such as the Southern Gas Corridor (SGC) and the Caspian-EU Green Energy Corridor, both of which are discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

However, this process is neither linear nor uncontested. Azerbaijan's pursuit of energy diversification strategies and balancing acts in foreign policy also reflect elements of de-Europeanization—the distancing or resistance to deeper European influence, often motivated by domestic sovereignty concerns, strategic hedging, or geopolitical recalibration.[11]

This duality is most evident in Azerbaijan's ability to simultaneously deepen energy cooperation with the EU while maintaining strategic partnerships with Russia, Iran, and Turkey, signaling selective engagement with European norms without full-scale political convergence.

In this context, Azerbaijan's energy policy can be interpreted as a case of pragmatic Europeanization, where alignment with EU objectives is primarily interest-driven rather than normatively grounded.[12] As Edward Stoddard has argued, while values and norms can be Europeanized in the energy sector, this tendency often breaks down in the face of national interest and pipeline politics, where bilateralism prevails over supranational coordination.[13] This distinction is equally evident in the EU's external energy partnerships, where strategic pragmatism frequently supersedes normative alignment.

At the same time, growing frustration with certain EU conditionalities or the EU's slow response in concluding long-term agreements may trigger partial de-Europeanization tendencies, visible in Azerbaijan's pivot toward non-EU partners and pursuit of diversified energy alliances that operate outside the EU's regulatory framework.

Why Azerbaijan Matters

Azerbaijan lies at the intersection of energy, geography, and geopolitics, making it a cornerstone of the EU's energy security and sustainability strategy. Its vast energy resources, geostrategic location, and growing commitment to green energy position Azerbaijan as an indispensable partner in helping the EU diversify energy supplies, reduce dependence on Russian gas, and achieve ambitious climate goals.

This positioning reflects a hybrid dynamic: while Azerbaijan embraces selective Europeanization in the energy sector to gain market access and attract investment, it also safeguards its autonomy by limiting broader political alignment, thereby sustaining a parallel de-Europeanization trajectory.

In a contemporary world reshaped by energy crises and geopolitical rivalries, Azerbaijan's emergence as a reliable partner in Europe's energy strategy is not merely a response to short-term disruptions but a reflection of its broader relevance in the evolving global energy order. Unlike many energy suppliers, Azerbaijan offers more than just resources; it embodies the potential for long-term energy security through its innovative infrastructure projects, such as the SGC,[14] and its proactive investment in renewables.[15] Recent policy analysis further highlights that Azerbaijan's expanding role in offshore wind, green electricity exports, and regional interconnectivity could make it a key driver of Europe's energy transition if supported by sustained EU engagement and investment.[16]

As the EU contends with balancing its energy demands with sustainability objectives, Azerbaijan's dual role as both a fossil fuel supplier and a pioneer in renewable energy transitions elevates its importance. Its bridging of traditional and emerging energy paradigms highlights a vital narrative: the role of emerging regional powers in influencing global energy politics.

This unique confluence of factors—not just resources but vision and reliability—positions Azerbaijan as a true strategic partner capable of shaping Europe's energy future[17] amid a rapidly changing geopolitical and environmental landscape.

Energy Resources and Strategic Infrastructure

Azerbaijan's substantial natural gas reserves, particularly the Shah Deniz field,[18] are among the most significant in the Caspian region, providing the EU with a critical alternative to Russian energy supplies. This significance is amplified by the SGC, a strategic infrastructure project that directly connects Azerbaijan's gas fields to European markets via the Trans-Anatolian Pipeline (TANAP) and the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP). By circumventing Russian-controlled routes, the SGC bolsters Europe's energy security and reduces its vulnerability to supply disruptions.

In response to the geopolitical instability triggered by the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, Azerbaijan's pledge to double its gas exports to the EU by 2027 underscores its reliability as a partner.[19] This increase not only stabilizes the EU's energy market but also solidifies Azerbaijan's pivotal role in Europe's diversification strategy.

Geostrategic Location and Regional Connectivity

Situated at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, Azerbaijan's geographic position grants it unique strategic importance as an energy and transit hub. Bordering the Caspian Sea and neighboring Russia, Iran, and Turkey, Azerbaijan plays a pivotal role in facilitating the transport of energy resources from the Caspian Basin to Europe. This connectivity extends beyond infrastructure; it reflects Azerbaijan's ability to navigate a complex geopolitical environment.[20] The country's location enables it to influence regional energy strategies and to contribute to broader geopolitical stability in Eurasia.

Azerbaijan's central role in energy transit is magnified by its potential to connect Europe to untapped resources, including the future possibility of a Trans-Caspian pipeline for Turkmen gas, which would further diversify Europe's energy supply. This role positions Azerbaijan as a facilitator of regional cooperation, enabling cross-border partnerships that are essential for long-term energy security in Europe.[21]

In addition, Azerbaijan's capacity to maintain a balanced relationship with key regional players such as Russia, Turkey, and Iran allows it to function as a stabilizing force in the region by ensuring fluid and secure energy transit. As the global energy landscape evolves, Azerbaijan's role in shaping Europe's energy future will continue to be integral to ensuring resilience against geopolitical disruptions.[22]

Renewable Energy Potential and Decarbonization Goals

Azerbaijan is increasingly aligning with the EU's decarbonization agenda. At the 29th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), more commonly known as COP29 in Baku,[23] the country prioritized investments in wind and solar power. The Caspian Sea region's significant renewable energy potential aligns closely with the EU's sustainability objectives, particularly in diversifying clean energy imports. Azerbaijan has initiated projects such as the proposed Caspian–EU Green Energy Corridor, which aims to deliver wind and solar power to European markets.[24]

Azerbaijan's renewable energy strategy, developed in alignment with EU green energy priorities, represents a functional form of sectoral Europeanization. However, the top-down nature of these reforms, limited civil society involvement, and emphasis on bilateral agreements rather than multilateral convergence with EU legal frameworks suggest a bounded and technocratic form of Europeanization, with few spillovers into governance or democratization. This again underscores the coexistence of Europeanization in energy policy and de-Europeanization in broader political dimensions.

These dynamics do not diminish Azerbaijan's significance to the EU; rather, they reflect the complex nature of a partnership that is both strategic and selective. This dual role—supplying both fossil fuels and renewable energy—uniquely positions Azerbaijan to help the EU balance its immediate

energy security needs with long-term sustainability goals as the EU advances its energy transition.

Azerbaijan's political stability and long-standing record of cooperation with the EU reinforce its credibility as a reliable energy partner.[25] Through bilateral agreements, consistent fulfillment of supply commitments, and adherence to international energy standards, the country has developed a reputation as a dependable supplier within Europe's evolving energy landscape.[26] This reliability, combined with ongoing investments in infrastructure and economic diversification, strengthens Azerbaijan's capacity to contribute to the EU's efforts to secure stable and diversified energy supplies while supporting broader objectives of long-term energy resilience and sustainability.

Azerbaijan's Impact on European Energy Diversification

Azerbaijan hosts some of the largest offshore gas fields in its sector of the Caspian Sea. According to the 2021 British Petroleum (BP) Statistical Review of World Energy, the country's proven reserves include 7 billion barrels of oil and 2.8 trillion cubic meters of natural gas.[27] Over the decades, Azerbaijan has positioned itself as a key geopolitical actor in the Black Sea-Caspian basin by developing and leveraging strategic pipeline projects to assert its influence in the region. Energy revenues, which have been a critical driver of Azerbaijan's economic growth, underpin a carefully crafted energy policy that has safeguarded its national interests since the early 1990s. As Europe intensifies its push for energy diversification, Azerbaijan's vast resource base and strategic positioning are becoming increasingly integral to both regional and global energy security.

Notably, President Ilham Aliyev has pursued an independent foreign policy, balancing relations with Russia and Iran to maintain regional stability, while fostering stronger ties with Pakistan and deepening strategic cooperation with Turkey, a critical transit country for Azerbaijani natural gas. In recent years, Azerbaijan has also drawn heightened attention from the governments and energy companies in Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Moldova, Bulgaria, Hungary, Italy, Romania, and Slovakia, with delegations from each visiting Baku to secure greater access to its energy resources. In the early weeks of the Russia-Ukraine war, Azerbaijan demonstrated its support

for Ukraine by providing free fuel for Ukrainian emergency vehicles at its filling stations in the country. Equally significant is Azerbaijan's strategic pipeline infrastructure, developed with American and European support, which facilitates the transport of substantial volumes of oil and natural gas to European and global markets without crossing Iranian or Russian territory.

Most important, the successful completion of the SGC marks a historical achievement, encompassing a 3,500-kilometer integrated pipeline system designed to enhance energy security and diversification.[28] Heavily supported by the EU through financial investments and political backing, and recognized as one of the world's most expensive pipeline projects, the SGC provides a unique East-West energy supply route, delivering Caspian natural gas directly to European markets. Its primary objective is to reduce Europe's dependence on Russian gas by providing alternative sources and routes. The South Caucasus Pipeline, the TANAP, and the TAP form the foundation of this ambitious Euro-Caspian energy project, significantly strengthening Azerbaijan's geopolitical position in the Black Sea-Caspian region.[29] Beyond its physical infrastructure, the SGC has also reshaped the political and institutional foundations of EU-Azerbaijan energy cooperation.

Azerbaijan is a linchpin in EU energy diversification efforts. This partnership was formalized through a 2022 memorandum of understanding, emphasizing Azerbaijan's position as a trustworthy energy supplier. EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen described Azerbaijan as "a crucial and reliable energy partner,"[30] while European Commissioner for Energy Kadri Simson referred to the country as "a pan-European gas supplier."[31] This political endorsement has translated into a steady expansion of Azerbaijani gas exports across Southern, Central, and Southeastern Europe.

Building on the success of the SGC, Europe's effort to expand its energy portfolio beyond traditional suppliers highlights the critical importance of Azerbaijan's infrastructure and regional partnerships in achieving diversification. By strengthening cooperation with neighboring countries and deepening its engagement with the EU, Azerbaijan solidifies its position as a key player in Europe's energy future. Through its collaborative projects with Caspian littoral states and Turkey, Azerbaijan is well-placed to continue shaping Europe's evolving energy landscape.

However, despite the progress made with the SGC and pipeline infrastructure, Azerbaijan has expressed frustration with the EU's failure to

secure long-term gas agreements, which has led to a revision of its export projections. Initially, the country had aimed to export 24 billion cubic meters (bcm) to Europe in 2027, but this figure has been scaled back to approximately 16 bcm, with President Ilham Aliyev citing financing challenges related to necessary pipeline upgrades.[32] Expanding key pipelines like TANAP and TAP is crucial to accommodate increased volumes, but securing the required investments has proven difficult. From January to November 2024, Azerbaijan produced 45.8 bcm of natural gas, with 22.9 bcm in total sales—reflecting a 5 percent increase compared to the previous year. Of this, 11.7 bcm was exported to Europe, 9 bcm to Turkey, and 2.2 bcm to Georgia, while an additional 5.1 bcm was delivered to Turkey via the TANAP pipeline.[33]

Strikingly, Azerbaijan has established a backbone network to export energy resources to Europe. Between 2021 and 2022, the country increased its gas exports to the EU by about a third, reaching 11.4 billion cubic meters (bcm).[34] As of November 25, 2024, approximately 73.3 bcm of natural gas had been transported via TANAP to Turkey and onward to Europe through TAP. Additionally, the Greece-Bulgaria Interconnector (GBI), an extension of the SGC, links into TAP, further strengthening Europe's energy security.[35] This corridor connects Azerbaijan to Italy via Georgia, Turkey, Greece, and Albania, delivering natural gas from the recently developed Shah Deniz gas field off Azerbaijan's Caspian Sea coast. The GBI significantly enhances Bulgaria's[36] and Europe's energy diversification efforts, underscoring growing interest in obtaining more resources from the Caspian basin.

Currently, the buyers of Azerbaijani gas in Europe include Italy, Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Serbia, Slovenia, Croatia, North Macedonia, Slovakia, Ukraine, Germany, and Austria, alongside Georgia and Turkey as key transit and regional partner states. Shipments of Azerbaijani gas via the TAP to Italy, Greece, and Bulgaria commenced in December 2020. Subsequently, gas supplies to Romania began in January 2023, followed by deliveries to Hungary at the end of 2023. The aggregate demand from over ten European countries for Azerbaijani gas exceeds 30 bcm annually.[37] Azerbaijan's recent mega-projects, facilitated by the SGC and its key components like TAP and TANAP, have positioned it as a critical energy hub for Europe, supplying additional volumes to meet growing demand.

The Russian invasion of and war in Ukraine has amplified European interest in Azerbaijan's energy resources. With Russia reducing gas exports

to the EU in retaliation for Western sanctions, Azerbaijani gas has gained increased significance in European markets. This shift aligns with EU energy diversification policies such as REPowerEU, which seek to reduce dependence on Russian gas.[38]

For instance, Serbia emerged as a new partner in this diversification effort. In November 2023, Azerbaijan's state-owned oil company SOCAR and Serbia's Srbiyagaz signed a nonbinding agreement under which approximately 400 million cubic meters of Azerbaijani gas will be supplied annually to Serbia starting in 2024.[39] This flexible contract enables SOCAR to fulfill Serbia's gas needs on demand and, if necessary, source gas from additional countries to address infrastructure challenges.

SOCAR further expanded its footprint in Europe with gas deliveries to Slovenia, which began on August 1, 2024. This followed a strategic agreement signed on July 17, 2024, between SOCAR and Geoplin, Slovenia's leading natural gas company.[40] Although the initial supply volumes are modest, the agreement underscores Azerbaijan's growing importance as an energy supplier in the Caspian region. Slovenia's geographic position as a bridge to Central Europe enhances the strategic value of this partnership. Slovenia's proactive step to diversify its gas sources ensures enhanced energy security, particularly during winter and unforeseen circumstances. Both SOCAR and Geoplin aim to strengthen their long-term energy partnership.

Additionally, Azerbaijan extended gas deliveries to Croatia and North Macedonia. In early September 2024, SOCAR began supplying gas to Croatia ahead of the heating season, facilitated by agreements between the governments of Azerbaijan and Croatia.[41] The Croatian private company Prvo Plinarsko Drustvo (PPD) and Swiss-based MET Group have been instrumental in these deliveries, utilizing the SGC system and the Greece-Bulgaria interconnector. This partnership enhances Croatia's access to alternative energy sources, further diversifying its supply options and bolstering its energy security in preparation for future challenges.

Similarly, SOCAR initiated gas supplies to North Macedonia in November 2024 through an agreement with the state-owned electricity company Elektrani na Severna Makedonija (ESM).[42] This collaboration ensures stable and competitive gas supplies while supporting North Macedonia's plans to invest one billion euros in a gas cogeneration system. The agreement not only bolsters short-term energy security but also

advances long-term sustainable energy transitioning, diversification and cogeneration projects, enhancing North Macedonia's energy resilience within the Balkans.

In the same way, SOCAR began gas deliveries to Slovakia on December 1, 2024, under a short-term pilot contract with Slovakia's state energy company SPP.[43] These supplies, implemented within the framework of the Solidarity Ring (STRING) initiative, reflect SOCAR's commitment to diversifying export destinations and fostering long-term energy partnerships. The STRING initiative plays a key geopolitical role by promoting regional cooperation and energy solidarity, further cementing Azerbaijan's role as a reliable energy partner for Europe.

The initiation of Azerbaijani natural gas shipments to Ukraine that began on July 28, 2025, represents a strategically significant development[44] in Eastern Europe's energy security architecture and illustrates a clear case of functional Europeanization extending beyond the EU's formal borders. The historic first test delivery, conducted via the Trans-Balkan pipeline corridor through Bulgaria and Romania, marked Ukraine's first direct import of Azerbaijani gas and reflected a deliberate effort to reduce structural dependence on Russian-controlled energy routes. Enabled by a strategic agreement between Ukraine's Naftogaz[45] and SOCAR Energy Ukraine, this arrangement demonstrates how EU-centered infrastructure and market rules facilitate sectoral integration without full political convergence. For Ukraine, the shipment carries importance beyond volume: it reflects a structural shift toward supply diversification at a time of acute vulnerability in domestic production and transit revenues. At the same time, the initiative underscores a parallel dynamic of de-Europeanization, as cooperation between Ukraine and Azerbaijan is driven primarily by security imperatives rather than normative alignment. More broadly, Azerbaijan's entry into the Ukrainian market reinforces its role as a stabilizing energy partner in a region where energy security and sovereignty remain deeply intertwined.

The commencement of Azerbaijani natural gas supplies to Germany[46] and Austria[47] in January 2026 marks a qualitatively new phase in the EU's energy diversification strategy and underscores Azerbaijan's deepening integration into Europe's core energy markets. This development is interpreted as a milestone in reducing Europe's structural dependence on Russian energy resources.[48] The supplies are enabled through the SGC and TAP, linking the Caspian basin

to Central Europe via Greece, Albania, and Italy, and further expanding the geographic reach of Azerbaijani gas within the European market. Particularly significant is the ten-year agreement between SOCAR and Germany's SEFE for annual deliveries of 1.5 bcm, reflecting a shift from marginal spot transactions toward long-term strategic cooperation.[49] Analytical assessments indicate that Azerbaijan's entry into the German and Austrian markets strengthens supply resilience at the center of the European energy system, while also highlighting the infrastructural and investment constraints that will shape the future limits of Caspian gas expansion. These developments have unfolded against the backdrop of profound structural disruption in Europe's gas transit architecture.

Nevertheless, the expiration of the Ukraine-Russia gas transit agreement at the end of December 2024 had raised concerns about its impact on energy security in Central and Eastern Europe. The 2019 deal, which allowed for the transit of up to 65 bcm of gas annually, had already experienced a sharp decline, with less than 15 bcm transiting Ukraine in 2023.[50] While the cessation of Russian gas flows through Ukraine may not trigger an immediate supply crisis, it is likely to exert upward pressure on prices across the region. Countries such as Austria, Hungary, and Slovakia that have been traditionally dependent on Russian gas are particularly exposed with potential spillover effects for neighboring states, including the Czech Republic.[51] This situation underscores the urgent need for infrastructure development and supply diversification to mitigate disruptions and reduce price volatility. In this context, Azerbaijani gas transported via the SGC can play a comprehensive role in partially meeting regional demand, although any significant expansion will depend on securing additional long-term contracts and further investment in transmission capacity.

Regional Energy Partnerships: Azerbaijan's Contribution to EU Energy Security

Azerbaijan's relationships with the neighboring Caspian littoral states of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, as well as its alliance with Turkey, further solidify its pivotal role in Europe's energy diversification efforts.

In recent years, Kazakhstan has deepened its energy cooperation with Azerbaijan, particularly through the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline, which offers an alternative to Russian-controlled transit routes. In early 2023,

Kazakhstan began exporting substantial volumes of crude oil through the BTC pipeline from the Tengiz and Kashagan fields. With plans to increase its oil exports via Azerbaijan,[52] Kazakhstan's growing use of the BTC pipeline enhances Europe's energy diversification strategy and reduces its reliance on Russian energy supplies.

Similarly, Turkmenistan's growing interest in exploring new energy export routes highlights Azerbaijan's strategic importance for EU energy security. The proposed Trans-Caspian gas pipeline, which would pass through Azerbaijan and connect with the SGC, has the potential to transport Turkmen natural gas to Europe. This project, with a planned annual capacity of 30 bcm, could significantly diversify Europe's energy sources. However, the project's realization depends on the construction of a subsea pipeline, with considerable financial and technical challenges yet to be addressed.[53] Azerbaijan's function as a critical conduit for Turkmen energy remains indispensable, particularly as approximately 29 million barrels of Turkmen oil—one-third of the country's total output—are currently transported via the BTC pipeline to international markets.[54]

Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan have strengthened bilateral ties through the 2021 Memorandum of Understanding on the joint exploration of the Dostlug oil and gas field.[55] Located on the proposed route of the Trans-Caspian gas pipeline, Dostlug is a significant offshore resource that reflects the two states' increasing cooperation. This agreement underscores Azerbaijan's essential role as a transit hub and lays the groundwork for potentially extending the SGC to Turkmenistan.[56]

Still, the Trans-Caspian gas pipeline remains a key project for both the EU and the United States. Following the signing of the Caspian Convention,[57] EU officials resumed discussions with Turkmenistan regarding its potential implementation. If realized, the pipeline would further enhance Azerbaijan's status as a transit country for Central Asian gas. Yet the high costs and geopolitical complexities of constructing a subsea pipeline make this project's feasibility uncertain.

Furthermore, Azerbaijan's partnership with Turkey is equally central to Europe's energy diversification strategy. Turkey serves as a critical transport and logistics hub for Azerbaijani energy exports, facilitated by the TANAP and TAP pipelines. These infrastructure projects enable Azerbaijan to deliver natural gas directly to European markets, ensuring a steady and diversified

energy supply. The deepening strategic partnership between Baku and Ankara also strengthens bilateral energy cooperation, positioning Azerbaijan as a reliable ally for Europe in securing alternative energy sources.

Overall, through its energy ties with Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Turkey, Azerbaijan continues to play a transformative role in reshaping Europe's energy landscape, offering alternative routes and sources amid evolving geopolitical challenges.

Azerbaijan's Strategic Push for Renewable Energy Development

Azerbaijan is actively advancing its renewable energy sector to diversify its energy mix and contribute to global sustainability efforts. As of June 2024, renewables constituted approximately 20.86 percent of the nation's installed capacity.[58] By 2027, through partnerships with international energy firms, the country aims to add nearly 2 gigawatts (GW) of new capacity, increasing the share of renewables to 33 percent.[59]

Interestingly, Azerbaijan's strategy emphasizes reducing reliance on fossil fuels while focusing on alternative energy solutions. Investments in solar, wind, and hydroelectric power are shaping a sustainable framework that addresses greenhouse gas emissions[60] and strengthens energy security. By 2030, the country plans to develop solar, wind, and hydropower plants with a combined capacity of around 6 GW, reflecting its commitment to sustainable modernization.

In recent years, the government has introduced substantial reforms to attract private investment in renewables. Measures such as feed-in tariffs and tax incentives have created a supportive regulatory environment, fostering collaboration with international companies and financial institutions. Specifically, the inauguration of the 230-megawatt (MW) Garadagh solar power plant in October 2023, developed by United Arab Emirates-based company Masdar, marked a milestone in the nation's renewable energy goals.[61] Generating 500 gigawatt hours (GWh) annually, this project exemplifies Azerbaijan's aim to meet 30 percent of its electricity needs from renewable sources by 2030.[62] Furthermore, a framework agreement signed in December 2023 with Australia's Fortescue Future Industries outlines initiatives totaling 12 GW, including green hydrogen production.[63]

Additional projects under construction include the 445 MW Bilasuvar and the 315 MW Neftchala solar plants, alongside the 240 MW Absheron-Garadagh wind farm.[64] These projects, developed by Masdar and SOCAR, will collectively generate 1 GW of electricity, reducing annual gas consumption by 500 million cubic meters, freeing up some extra volumes for export.[65] Discussion with Saudi Arabia's ACWA Power has highlighted plans for new ventures, including a 1 GW onshore wind facility and a 1.5 GW offshore wind farm with integrated battery storage.[66] ACWA's ongoing 240 MW Khizi-Absheron wind project is set to begin operations in 2025.[67]

At the Baku Energy Week in June 2022, BP's Azerbaijan CEO underscored the company's commitment to transitioning to cleaner energy. During the event, BP announced plans to power its facilities with renewable energy, including replacing the Sangachal gas turbines' current output with electricity sourced from grid-connected solar and wind power.[68] In October 2024, BP joined forces with SOCAR and the Azerbaijan Investment Company to establish a joint venture, Shafag Solar Limited, dedicated to developing the 240 MW Shafag solar plant in the Jabrayil region.[69]

Meanwhile, Azerbaijan's green agenda extends across Karabakh, Eastern Zangezur, and Nakhchivan, which collectively account for approximately one-quarter of the country's territory and have been designated as green energy zones. Projects in Karabakh and Eastern Zangezur, launched over the past three years, include small hydroelectric power plants with a combined capacity of 300 MW, projected to reach 500 MW by 2026.[70] With a solar potential of 7,200 MW and wind potential of 2,000 MW, these regions are key hubs for renewable resources.[71] Nationwide, Azerbaijan's total renewable energy potential is estimated at 27,000 MW, with 9,200 MW concentrated in Karabakh and Eastern Zangezur.[72]

Finally, collaborations with leading international companies, such as Masdar, ACWA Power, and BP, have facilitated knowledge transfer, technology exchange, and investment in cutting-edge renewable energy ventures.

In November 2024, Azerbaijan hosted the COP29 conference, reaffirming its determination to spearhead initiatives that unite nations in the pursuit of a clean energy future. The event highlighted the country's significance in tackling global environmental challenges and underlined

its unique capacity to facilitate dialogue between Western nations and the Global South, particularly on decarbonization strategies.

While shaping the COP29 agenda, the government advocated for enhanced financial mechanisms to support sustainable energy initiatives worldwide. A flagship undertaking in this context is the "Green Energy Hub,"[73] a comprehensive proposal leveraging large-scale solar farms, wind turbines, and hydropower facilities to position Azerbaijan as a leading energy exporter. This project demonstrates how modernization and international collaboration can address climate challenges while unlocking economic opportunities, such as creating new jobs in the renewable energy sector and attracting foreign investment in energy infrastructure. Expanding renewable energy capacity not only enables Azerbaijan to meet domestic energy needs but also allows it to supply electricity to European markets, reinforcing the continent's energy security. These efforts set a benchmark for neighboring countries and contribute to global climate strategies.

Regionally, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan are collaborating on a green energy strategy to interconnect their power grids and enhance electricity exports to Europe. Globally, Azerbaijan's proactive engagement at COP29 has cemented its reputation as an important player in international climate diplomacy. Its ability to foster consensus on pressing issues and advocate for ambitious targets has earned widespread recognition from international climate organizations and energy stakeholders.[74] This approach supports the EU's climate objectives while advancing Western geopolitical interests in the Black Sea-Caspian region. Furthermore, it creates opportunities for strategic partnerships, including joint energy frameworks and technology transfers, which strengthen regional stability and energy security.

Despite these achievements, Azerbaijan faces challenges in its sustainability journey. Balancing economic growth with environmental goals, addressing funding gaps, and overcoming technical barriers remain significant hurdles. Substantial investments in infrastructure, grid modernization, and storage solutions will be essential to effectively integrate intermittent renewable sources, such as solar and wind, which produce electricity variably, depending on sunlight and wind conditions. Collaboration with international financial institutions and technology providers will be key to overcoming these challenges.

Strategic Pathways to Caspian-EU Green Energy Corridor

The onset of the 2021–2022 energy crisis, compounded by the escalation of the war in Ukraine in early 2022, has heightened the urgency of developing alternative export routes. Rising energy demand within the EU has driven the pursuit of new cooperative ventures. Consequently, Europe's attention has increasingly shifted to the Caspian Sea, a region with immense potential for establishing a green energy platform. The area's vast solar and wind resources are particularly noteworthy, with Azerbaijan emerging as a strategically vital partner for the EU. The country boasts over 27 GW of solar and wind capacity, along with 157 GW of offshore wind potential in its sector of the Caspian Sea.[75]

A notable development occurred in December 2022, when an ambitious initiative was launched in Bucharest under the EU-supported Global Gateway Initiative. During this event, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Hungary, Romania, and the European Commission formalized a strategic partnership to establish a 1,000-megawatt Black Sea Energy submarine cable, spanning 1,195 kilometers.[76] This agreement underscores the deepening regional cooperation within the energy sector and sets a precedent for further joint initiatives in the Black Sea-Caspian basin. The cable will transmit "green" electricity generated in Azerbaijan via Georgia and the Black Sea to Romania, with subsequent distribution to Hungary and broader European markets. With an initial budget of approximately 2.3 billion euros, the project is expected to be operational by 2029.[77]

According to European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, the project will strengthen ties between EU member states and the South Caucasus.[78] Azerbaijan and Georgia have already proven to be indispensable contributors to the EU's energy security through several energy and transit initiatives.[79] In the long term, the successful conclusion of a peace treaty between Armenia and Azerbaijan could allow Armenia to join the Black Sea Energy submarine cable project, further promoting regional economic development and integration.

Azerbaijan's recent strategy aims to leverage its green energy capacity not only to enhance its domestic energy portfolio but also to secure a competitive advantage by exporting renewable energy to European markets. The integration of Azerbaijan's renewable energy into the European grid

would facilitate the distribution of clean energy across Europe. Moreover, the EU, recognizing the rising demand for renewable energy, has also expressed strong interest in involving Central Asian states in this initiative. Both Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan possess considerable renewable energy resources, positioning them as promising partners in the green energy corridor project.

Kazakhstan, endowed with vast renewable energy potential, particularly in solar and wind power, is well-positioned to become a significant exporter of green energy to Europe. Realizing this potential requires the establishment of a submarine cable connection between Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkey, and Europe. Baku and Astana are actively engaged in a promising initiative to lay a fiberoptic connection across the Caspian seabed. This infrastructure project holds significant promise for advancing digital connectivity and facilitating the creation of a telecommunication corridor between Europe and Asia. Access to the green energy corridor would enhance Kazakhstan's energy market development and foster regional cooperation in energy security and green hydrogen production.

Similarly, Turkmenistan has expressed its willingness to supply electricity to Azerbaijan and Turkey via the Caspian Sea. Currently, Turkmenistan exports electricity to Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. Recently, the country commenced the construction of a 1,574-megawatt power plant near Turkmenbashi Port, a crucial strategic hub, serving as a key transshipment point on the East-West transport corridor, directly linked to Baku.[80] The potential for solar energy development in Turkmenistan is substantial, driven by its vast desert landscapes. Expanding renewable energy capacity in Turkmenistan could facilitate energy diversification, stimulate economic development, and promote environmental sustainability. Therefore, Turkmenistan's inclusion in the green energy corridor would allow it to capitalize on its renewable energy resources and contribute to Europe's energy transition.

Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan are richly endowed with renewable solar and wind resources. From a technical perspective, these nations are well-positioned to supply green energy to Europe through the proposed Caspian-EU energy corridor. In November 2023, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Uzbekistan agreed to explore the feasibility of a joint venture to export green energy to Europe. The initiative aims to develop strategies for exporting electricity from Central Asia to Europe via Azerbaijan and to

explore opportunities for exporting green hydrogen, including the creation of the requisite infrastructure.[81]

However, the Black Sea Energy submarine cable project faces significant challenges, particularly due to the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. Russia's continued influence in the region, through energy, cultural, and military ties, presents a complex geopolitical dynamic. Given the varying degrees of alignment with Moscow among the governments of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan, these countries are acutely aware that a Caspian-EU green energy corridor, fueled by renewables, could bring them closer to the EU and NATO. Russia may perceive such a development as a threat, potentially leading to a more assertive posture toward these Caspian basin states.

Despite the geopolitical challenges, legal obstacles, and logistical complexities, all involved parties seem committed to advancing the project. Collaborative efforts among the participating countries would not only enhance their energy security but also contribute to the EU's broader goal of transitioning to cleaner energy sources. For this reason, the EU's interest in fostering closer ties with Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkey, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan continues to intensify. The commitment to green energy in the Black Sea-Caspian region, while a regional endeavor, has global implications. By reducing reliance on fossil fuels, these nations are contributing to the global fight against climate change, illustrating the vital role of regional cooperation in addressing this urgent, borderless challenge.

Conclusion

Obviously, Azerbaijan plays a crucial role in the EU's energy security by diversifying supplies and supporting sustainability objectives. The SGC has cemented this South Caucasus nation as a reliable supplier, reducing Europe's reliance on traditional energy sources and strengthening its resilience to geopolitical risks. Beyond hydrocarbons, the country's renewable energy projects are advancing the EU's transition to cleaner energy.

Azerbaijan's increasing gas exports through the SGC provide a vital alternative to Russian imports. By enhancing production and expanding pipeline capacity, this Caspian basin state can further bolster these diversification efforts, addressing Europe's growing energy needs. The country's strategic pipeline network, including the Shah Deniz field, TANAP,

and TAP, has transformed Europe's energy connectivity. This infrastructure ensures a steady flow of Caspian resources to European markets. However, challenges such as securing long-term agreements and financing pipeline expansions remain critical issues requiring attention.

Simultaneously, Azerbaijan's focus on renewable energy signifies a transformative phase in its EU partnership. Key initiatives like the Caspian-EU Green Energy Corridor highlight its commitment to decarbonization and economic diversification. Leveraging substantial wind and solar potential, the country can significantly contribute to the EU's clean energy goals while enhancing its own economic resilience. Its political stability and adherence to international standards further strengthen trust in this evolving collaboration.

Yet balancing relations with regional actors such as Russia, Turkey, and Iran while solidifying partnerships with Europe will be essential. Collaborative opportunities with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, particularly regarding the Trans-Caspian pipeline, hold promise but require deft diplomacy. Environmental concerns linked to fossil fuel expansion also demand careful management to align with global sustainability goals.

From a theoretical lens, Azerbaijan's evolving role exemplifies the coexistence of Europeanization and de-Europeanization forces in the Eastern Partnership space. While the country embraces functional integration into the EU's energy market—a hallmark of sectoral Europeanization—it does so without committing to normative or institutional convergence. Simultaneously, Azerbaijan's strategic autonomy, regional balancing, and occasional frustration with EU bureaucratic inertia reveal subtle patterns of de-Europeanization, especially in areas beyond the energy sector. Recognizing this complex interplay is crucial to understanding how energy relations are reshaping, rather than reinforcing, the traditional paradigms of EU neighborhood influence.

Looking ahead, Azerbaijan's contribution to Europe's energy landscape appears set to grow, addressing immediate security needs while fostering a greener, more diversified future. With its dual strengths as a supplier of natural gas and a multifaceted partner in renewable energy innovation, this Caspian littoral state is emerging as a cornerstone of stability and progress in global energy politics.

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CHAPTER 4

What Was Wrong about Cooperation Between the European Union and Belarus?

IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION AND SECURITY BUILDING

Anonymous and Nataliya D. Brantly

"Lukashenko has created a system in which all legal and other instruments are used to put limits on any dissenting views and activities and keep the society within its limits. It doesn't mean that there are no dissidents, opposition, or attempts to challenge the regime. It means that the system does not have anything within itself that could serve as any kind of support for civil society… The status of civil society in Belarus? We don't have it here in Belarus; that's what we are fighting for. There is no freedom of speech and no independent judiciary—the two prerequisites for the existence of civil society."

—Andrei Sannikov, former deputy foreign minister of Belarus

Belarus occupies a strategic position at the geographical center of Europe and along the external borders of the European Union (EU). This location has provided the country with significant geopolitical relevance. Yet under President Alexander Lukashenko, Belarus has become an international pariah due to persistent human rights abuses, authoritarianism, economic mismanagement, and resistance to political liberalization.[1] Elected by a

landslide in 1994, Lukashenko moved rapidly toward authoritarian rule.[2] In 1996, he revised the national constitution; concentrated power in the presidency; dismantled parliamentary autonomy in favor of a national assembly appointed by the president; and suppressed independent media, civil society, political opposition, and judicial independence.[3] By the early 2000s, and increasingly after the brutal repression of the 2020 protests—which erupted following the widely disputed August 2020 presidential election and involved mass nationwide demonstrations demanding Lukashenko's resignation, new elections, and the release of political prisoners—Belarus had one of the worst human rights records in Europe.[4] According to reports by the U.S. Department of State and Human Rights Watch, senior Belarusian officials were implicated in the disappearances and presumed murders of opposition leaders, while independent journalists, NGOs, religious groups, trade unions, and political opponents faced systematic harassment, detention, and violence.[5]

Despite sustained domestic repression and an increasingly authoritarian political system, Belarus was frequently portrayed, at least until Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, as a source of stability and predictability in the EU's Eastern Neighborhood.[6] This chapter critically reassesses that narrative by examining how Belarus positions itself between Russia and the European Union and how Belarusian state and nonstate media construct the country's geopolitical role. In addition, it examines how Belarusian state and independent media frame the country's identity and strategic orientation. Rather than serving as a genuine bridge between East and West, Belarus employs a highly pragmatic, state-centric foreign policy that seeks to maximize strategic and economic benefits while avoiding substantive political liberalization. The central questions discussed here are: (1) to what extent Belarus has attempted to present itself as a reliable actor or stabilizing force in the region; (2) how credible such claims are given the regime's human rights record, dependency on Russia, and increasingly restrictive media landscape; and (3) whether and under what conditions engagement with the EU, particularly through the Eastern Partnership, can influence domestic reform or democratization processes. Drawing on scholarship on authoritarian resilience, competitive authoritarianism, and EU external governance, as well as an analysis of Belarusian press coverage during key geopolitical events, it is possible to discern that Belarus's

proclaimed stability is less a reflection of regional leadership than of regime-managed narratives designed to reinforce the status quo and secure strategic autonomy without political change. Although the media analysis draws on archival coverage from 2015, this period provides a critical baseline for understanding discursive patterns that persisted and intensified after the 2020 protests and the 2022 invasion, especially as independent media were later repressed or eliminated.

Scholars of European integration have long argued that external actors, particularly the EU, can play a significant role in the institutionalization of democratic reforms across post-communist Europe.[7] Through the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) and later the Eastern Partnership (EaP),[8] the EU sought to promote human rights, rule of law, and governance reforms in Belarus. Opinion surveys in the early 2000s indicated that Belarusian society was not uniformly opposed to European integration: in 2002, for example, "60% of Belarusians supported the idea of joining the EU, and a mere 10% were against."[9] Yet democratization never occurred. As Löwenhardt, Hill, Light, and others observed, the central obstacle to Europeanization in Belarus was Lukashenko himself.[10] His regime maintained a monopolistic hold over political life, preventing intra-elite competition, restricting the private sector, and enforcing ideological conformity, including compulsory subscriptions to state media, while maintaining an ambiguous national identity that often blurred Belarusian and Russian cultural boundaries.[11]

European regional development policy[12] rests on principles such as partnership, multi-level governance,[13] subsidiarity, and institutional capacity building. Through initiatives such as Comprehensive Institution Building (CIB), the EU hoped to translate such principles into reform incentives for Eastern partners. The 2003 European Security Strategy[14] envisioned the creation of a "ring of well-governed countries" to the EU's east, reflecting a broader vision of the EU as a normative and stabilizing international actor.[15] However, the promises of ENP and EaP were undermined by entrenched authoritarianism among partner states and exacerbated by the crisis in Ukraine in 2014, which exposed the fragility of the European security order.[16] Russia's annexation of Crimea and its invasion of Ukraine demonstrated the limits of EU soft power and reopened debates about territorial security, geopolitical competition, and the EU's strategic role.

From the perspective of Europeanization and de-Europeanization studies, Belarus represents a critical boundary case. Belarus is simultaneously the EU's neighbor and Russia's most deeply integrated partner, formally bound within the Union State[17] and a core member of the Eurasian Economic Union. Its political trajectory raises fundamental questions for the study of Europeanization and de-Europeanization. What happens when a neighboring state rejects EU norms, suppresses civil society, and aligns instead with an alternative civilizational project promoted by Russia? How do competing regional models, EU normative governance versus Eurasian authoritarian integration, shape the behavior and identity of states caught between them? In addition to synthesizing recent geopolitical and institutional developments, this chapter offers a distinctive contribution by analyzing how Belarusian state and independent media construct competing narratives of identity, legitimacy, and geopolitical belonging. This media-focused lens helps reveal how authoritarian information strategies shape, and at times distort, the country's positioning between two rival regional orders.

Understanding security governance in the Eastern neighborhood requires examining not only institutional relationships but also the construction of identity, legitimacy, and mutual perceptions. Belarusian state media plays a central role in this process, articulating a narrative that depicts the EU as unstable, morally decadent, or geopolitically aggressive while presenting Russia as a natural, protective ally. These narratives serve to justify authoritarian rule domestically and reinforce Belarus's geopolitical orientation externally. By contrast, the marginalization, yet persistence, of independent and counter-hegemonic media reveals alternative visions of Belarus's place in Europe, particularly during the 2020 protests when digital communication became a critical space for civil society.

The events of 2014 and especially 2022 have made these dynamics on Europeanization and de-Europeanization impossible to ignore. Belarus's support for Russia's invasion, ranging from allowing Russian troops to stage attacks from its territory to deepening military and economic integration, has drastically reduced its autonomy and further constrained any possibility of European engagement. Whether Belarus can ever return to a European path depends not only on EU strategies but on domestic transformations within Belarus itself, including the re-emergence of civil society, the fate of the opposition in exile, and the durability of Lukashenko's rule.

Modern Belarus must be situated within the broader contest between European and Eurasian integration projects, examined as to how these competing frameworks shape governance and security, and analyzed to see how media narratives reflect and reproduce these choices. By doing so, the complexities of managing a shared European space in a period marked by authoritarian resilience, geopolitical conflict, and the erosion of long-standing security norms may be better understood.

Literature Review

Research on post-communist transformations has demonstrated that external actors, particularly the European Union (EU), can shape domestic political and institutional change. Empirical studies of post-1989 transitions show how EU incentives, conditionality, and regional integration mechanisms influenced policymaking trajectories in Central and Eastern Europe. At the same time, scholars have emphasized that geopolitical regions increasingly act as structuring forces in world politics, producing distinct logics of governance and identity formation. In this context, geopolitics is understood as a multilevel process of boundary-making or bordering,[18] enacted not only through territorial lines but also through ideology, discourses, political institutions, attitudes and agency.[19] This conceptualization is particularly relevant for understanding Belarus, where identity construction, security narratives, and regional alignments are deeply intertwined.

A central concern in the literature on democratization and state-building is the role of institutions, defined not as organizations but as the "rules of the game" that define actors and their responsibilities, both in cooperation toward society's objectives and in the resolution of any conflicts that may arise, shape political behavior, accountability, and conflict resolution. To improve clarity, this definition can be stated more directly: institutions establish the responsibilities of political actors, structure their interactions, and guide both cooperation and dispute resolution. Good governance is typically associated with rule of law, separation of powers, accountable public administration, and effective anti-corruption measures. These criteria are widely used to assess governance quality in post-communist states and are highly relevant for evaluating Belarus's stagnation in institutional reform.

A more critical body of scholarship argues that the EU's ability to improve governance is conditional on two factors. First, domestic political structures, and especially the presence or absence of internal accountability mechanisms, shape how reforms are adopted or blocked.[20] Second, geopolitical competition and "cross-conditionality" involving actors such as Russia, the United States, and international financial institutions can undermine EU leverage.[21] Belarus exemplifies these constraints: weak domestic accountability institutions and deep political and economic ties with Russia significantly limited the effectiveness of EU governance initiatives.[22]

Two major research agendas have addressed governance and democratization in post-communist contexts: transitology (transitions, state-building, democratization) and Europeanization studies (European integration, governance). Both develop their own research areas and contribute to one another, especially in institutionalist analysis regarding the role of institutions.[23] Early transitology literature, drawing on cases in Latin America and Southern Europe, argued that democratization is driven primarily by domestic political dynamics.[24] Scholars have emphasized that transitions from authoritarian rule are largely shaped by national actors, with external influences playing only a marginal role.[25] These insights initially guided scholarship on the post-Soviet region, where researchers focused on democratization, marketization,[26] and national identity formation but paid less attention to state capacity and governance.[27]

However, the failures of political and economic transitions in much of the post-Soviet space led scholars to recenter the role of institutions and governance.[28] The democratic breakthroughs in Central and Eastern Europe during the 1990s, heavily influenced by the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and EU engagement, shifted scholarly debates toward the significance of international actors and conditionality. International organizations, including the EU, OSCE, IMF, and Council of Europe, introduced mechanisms aimed at promoting democratic norms, market reforms, and institutional capacity. Academic debates emerged around whether democratization occurred through external pressure (conditionality), voluntary adaptation (lesson-drawing), or socialization processes.[29] This literature thus expanded the analytical focus from domestic political struggles to the interaction between domestic institutions and external governance frameworks.

The literature on EU external governance argues that the European Union projects its rules, norms, and policies beyond its borders by extending its "legal boundary" while maintaining limits on institutional membership.[30] This produces an ambivalent form of inclusion and exclusion: neighboring states gain access to EU markets and technical assistance but without the membership perspective that drove deep reforms in Central Europe. Institutionalism, whether rationalist, historical, or sociological, underpins much of this scholarship, emphasizing that political behavior is shaped by norms, rules, and shared expectations.[31]

Yet scholars such as Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier show that EU conditionality tends to be effective only when domestic governments calculate that compliance is in their political and economic interest.[32] Political science scholarship on authoritarian durability demonstrates that rulers who rely on coercive control, noncompetitive elections, and patronage-based elite cohesion have little incentive to undertake liberalization that would weaken their hold on power.[33] In states where the costs of compliance outweigh potential benefits, as in Belarus, conditionality has little traction. Transnational channels can, however, amplify EU influence when domestic civil society and opposition actors mobilize around European norms.[34] However, this dynamic existed in Belarus only weakly. Early 2000s surveys suggested public openness to closer relations with the EU.[35] These insights may help to explain why societal-level receptivity alone was insufficient to generate substantive political change.

Europeanization—broadly defined as the diffusion and institutionalization of EU-derived rules, norms, and policy practices to other nations—has been uneven across Eastern Europe. In the Belarusian case, Europeanization was structurally constrained. Lukashenko's regime combines centralized presidential rule, strong internal security apparatuses, and tight control over civil society and the media, an institutional combination that sharply limits the potential efficacy of EU leverage. Adoption of EU norms would have altered the distribution of power among domestic actors and threatened the foundations of Lukashenko's authoritarian rule. As a result, Belarus engaged selectively with EU programs, mainly for economic or technical benefits, while rejecting political conditionality and aligning more closely with Russia's competing regional project. This selective

engagement also shifted over time: Limited cooperation in the late 1990s and early 2000s gave way to periods of heightened tensions and sanctions, followed by a partial and pragmatic re-engagement in the mid-2010s, particularly after the 2014 conflict in Ukraine. Relations deteriorated sharply again after the repression of the 2020 protests and Belarus's support for Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. As Tolstrup argues, autocracies can and often do resist external democratizing pressure by turning toward alternative regional partners, leveraging geopolitical competition, and mobilizing narratives of national sovereignty.[36] Belarus's reliance on Russia for economic support, energy security, and military alignment has enhanced its capacity to do so.

This dynamic reveals a structural contradiction at the heart of EU–Belarus relations: the EU's normative strategy presumes a reformist government capable of responding to incentives, while the Belarusian state treats such reforms as existential threats.[37] As a result, Belarus has repeatedly absorbed the costs of EU sanctions and conditionality while maintaining authoritarian equilibrium.[38] Furthermore, the Eastern Partnership (EaP), established in 2009, introduced a tiered structure of engagement that presupposed differentiated progress among partner states.[39] Countries such as Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova developed deep and comprehensive agreements with the EU, while Belarus remained restricted to multilateral tracks of cooperation due to its consistent refusal to engage in bilateral Action Plans.[40] This asymmetry illustrates both the design limitations of EU policy instruments and the agency of the Belarusian regime in selectively participating in areas that reinforce, rather than undermine, its political stability.

Understanding Belarus's trajectory thus demands attention to how regional authoritarian regimes strategically engage with EU governance mechanisms, accepting technical assistance that strengthens state capacity while resisting or neutralizing political reforms. The broader Europeanization literature helps illuminate why Belarus has remained a persistent outlier in the EU's eastern neighborhood and why institutional deadlock has continued despite economic incentives, repeated domestic and foreign political crises, and regional security shocks, such as Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. By synthesizing insights from democratization studies, external governance research, and institutionalist theory, this literature review establishes the conceptual foundations for

analyzing how Belarus constructs and legitimizes its geopolitical orientation, including through state-controlled and independent media narratives.

Belarus and EU

During Lukashenko's authoritarian regime, Belarus has maintained one of the worst human rights records in Europe. Freedom of the press remains severely restricted. In the late 1990s opposition leaders who had alleged involvement with high-ranking officials disappeared. Throughout the 2000s and 2010s, the regime escalated harassment, arrests, and violence against independent media, NGOs, trade unions, religious communities, and opposition elites across the country. These antidemocratic practices produced widespread condemnation from international actors, including the EU, the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the U.S. Department of State, and human rights organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, and deepened Belarus's political isolation.

This long-term pattern established the structural context in which EU–Belarus relations unfolded. The EU, primarily through the ENP and EaP, sought to promote democracy, human rights, and the rule of law in Belarus. From the outset, however, EU assistance and institutional engagement were explicitly conditional on improvements in political freedoms. As early as 1997, the EU limited cooperation in response to Belarus's deteriorating political situation, and the European Parliament, together with the OSCE and Council of Europe, formulated four core benchmarks for free and fair elections: (1) the restoration of parliamentary powers; (2) opposition representation on electoral commissions; (3) fair access to state media; and (4) electoral legislation aligned with international standards. Despite these announced benchmarks, EU influence was diffuse and inconsistent. Assistance was fragmented across multiple actors, each with varying priorities: the EU employed material conditionality; the OSCE and Council of Europe relied on normative persuasion and social influence. These mixed mechanisms often diluted pressure and enabled Minsk to play external actors against one another. Belarusian compliance was minimal.

Belarusian officials in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) consistently interpreted EU enlargement through a geopolitical lens,

as part of a wider struggle for influence involving the United States, Germany, and Russia. Official rhetoric emphasized a multi-vector foreign policy, balancing deep integration with Russia while simultaneously exploring selective engagement with EU member states such as Poland and the Baltic countries. MFA statements regularly underscored Belarus's geostrategic importance, particularly as a transit corridor. However, this rhetorical flexibility masked an underlying structural dependency on Russia and a domestic political order fundamentally incompatible with EU conditionality. The EU and transatlantic institutions demanded democratic normalization as a prerequisite for substantive engagement, specifically a return to pre-1996 constitutional arrangements. In practice, Belarus could neither meet these conditions nor abandon its longstanding authoritarian governance. As a result, meaningful institutional cooperation with the EU remained blocked.

Belarus's resistance to EU governance norms is closely tied to the internal political economy of the Lukashenko regime. The state retains extensive ownership over major industries, maintains tight control over public sector employment, and uses the bureaucracy both as a mechanism of coercion and as an instrument for distributing patronage.[41] As a result, institutional reform would disrupt core pillars of regime stability, particularly in areas such as judicial independence, media freedom, or decentralization. Yet state capacity in Belarus appears paradoxical: the government is capable of delivering certain public goods (e.g., pensions, predictable state employment, basic social services) while remaining structurally weak in democratic accountability, regulatory transparency, and rule-of-law enforcement.

Belarus's public administration is marked by hyper-centralized, nontransparent decision-making dominated by the presidency and its administration. Weak rule of law and pervasive corruption underpin this model. Belarus scored 33/100 on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, low even relative to Russia, and performed poorly on the Change Readiness Index, scoring under 0.5 (out of 1.0) on state capacity and societal capability dimensions.[42] These scores highlight the systemic institutional weaknesses that undermine good governance and complicate EU-led reform efforts. They also help explain why EU technical assistance often improved administrative functionality while leaving the political foundations of authoritarianism untouched.

EU–Belarus relations have never developed a robust institutional foundation. The 1995 Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) was frozen in 1997; Belarus lost Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) trade benefits in 2007 due to labor rights violations; and sanctions were imposed after electoral fraud in 2004 and again after the 2010 crackdown (with temporary easing in 2015). Belarus's role as mediator during the 2014–2015 Minsk negotiations briefly improved its international profile. The Minsk agreements[43] established a framework for implementing ceasefire, monitoring compliance, and pursuing a negotiated political settlement to the war in Eastern Ukraine. Although only partially implemented and ultimately unsuccessful in resolving the conflict, they positioned Belarus as a neutral platform for conflict resolution in Eastern Ukraine, enabling the regime to present itself as a source of stability. This diplomatic visibility, however, functioned largely as external legitimation rather than signaling genuine domestic liberalization. The authorities sought to appear more democratic to the West while maintaining tight control over civil society, which the regime has long conceptualized as an appendage of the state rather than an autonomous sphere.

The EU has struggled to formulate a coherent and sustainable policy toward Belarus, wavering between punitive measures and cautious engagement. This inconsistency reflects broader debates within EU foreign policy circles about the limits of conditionality, the risks of authoritarian entrenchment, and the geopolitical consequences of pushing Belarus toward Russia.[44] Sanctions have been the EU's most visible tool. They have targeted regime officials, state-owned enterprises, and, following the 2010 and 2020 crackdowns, broad sectors of the Belarusian economy.[45] Yet sanctions have had limited transformative impact. As scholars argue, sanctions tend to be effective only when the targeted regime is economically dependent on Western markets or politically vulnerable to domestic opposition pressure.[46] Belarus meets neither condition. Rather, sanctions against Belarus have often reinforced the regime's narrative of external hostility and accelerated its pivot toward Russia.

Belarus's political and economic trajectory has been deeply shaped by its integration with Russia. The Union State (established officially in 1999 as the union of Belarus and Russia), the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), the Customs Union, and later the Eurasian Economic Community

(EAEC) constitute overlapping institutional structures that bind Belarus firmly to Russia's geopolitical orbit. Economically, Belarus remains heavily dependent on Russian energy supplies: more than 90 percent of its gas and a significant portion of crude oil come from Russia, and refined oil products from Russian crude account for over 40 percent of Belarus's exports. Despite this dependence, state media often frames Belarus as an equal partner to Russia, strategically positioned between East and West, emphasizing the relations with the Union State.[47] Russia's consistent recognition of Belarusian election results has further ensured political durability for the Lukashenko regime. Together, these dynamics illustrate the civilizational and institutional alternative to EU integration that Belarus has embraced.

Although Belarus formally participated in the Eastern Partnership, it engaged exclusively in the multilateral dimension while avoiding bilateral political commitments. EU policy toward Belarus aimed to maintain at least nominal Belarusian independence from Russia, secure the reliability of transit routes, and strengthen border management functions. Under the 2014–2020 Country Strategy Paper, EU financial assistance, channeled via the European Neighborhood Policy Instrument (ENPI), focused on social inclusion, environmental protection, local and regional development. However, Belarus lacked an Action Plan, and assistance remained limited due to political conditionality. Persistent institutional stagnation, outdated economic structures, and the absence of meaningful state-building reforms restricted the EU's leverage.[48] Vulnerable groups, such as laborers, pensioners, and farmers, absorbed the costs of economic decline and remained core supporters of the Lukashenko regime, which continued to exploit their vulnerabilities. In addition, EU monitoring reports noted a recurring gap between project-level achievements and systemic institutional transformation.

Engagement strategies pursued by the European Union between roughly 2013 and 2019 sought to create openings for gradual liberalization in Belarus through expanded technical cooperation, covering areas such as environmental management, education, cross-border mobility, local and regional development, and civil-society support.[49] Proponents of this approach, including EU policy actors such as the European External Action Service and scholars such as Elena Korosteleva, argued that even limited engagement, especially at the societal or institutional level, could empower nonstate actors and expose Belarusian officials to European

administrative norms and governance standards.[50] Critics, including human rights organizations such as Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and Freedom House, however, warned that such a technocratic, low-profile approach risked legitimizing an authoritarian regime without generating meaningful political reform or democratic deepening.[51] The subsequent repression of the 2020 protests underscored the fragility of these assumptions. Following a disputed presidential election, mass nationwide demonstrations were met with large-scale state violence, including the detention of tens of thousands of protesters, documented police brutality and torture in custody, the forced exile or imprisonment of opposition leaders, and sweeping restrictions on independent media and civil society organizations in Belarus.[52]

These debates highlight a persistent strategic dilemma: complete isolation might further push Belarus into Russia's sphere of influence, but engagement without effective conditionality risked normalizing authoritarianism and embedding the regime more deeply. Indeed, the EU's institutional framework has struggled to reconcile these contradictory impulses, resulting in an inconsistent mix of restrictive measures (sanctions, diplomatic distancing) and selective cooperation (technical assistance, civil society support).[53] The mediation efforts surrounding the 2014–2015 political crisis and the process that produced the Minsk Agreements offered a temporary framework for pragmatic engagement with Belarus. Yet, after the 2020 mass protests and the regime's subsequent escalated repression, the EU reversed course: sanctions were expanded and formal political interaction scaled down significantly.[54] Taken together, the trajectory of EU policy toward Belarus reveals the broader structural limits of the EU's external governance model when confronting consolidated authoritarian regimes that are both internally resilient and externally anchored in a competing regional integration project.

Perceptions of the EU and Russia in Belarusian Media

State-owned newspapers in Belarus consistently prioritize the Eastern vector of foreign policy, devoting substantial coverage to cooperation with Russia and to regional integration projects such as the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Union State, the Customs Union, and the Eurasian Economic Union (EaEU). In contrast, nonstate outlets provide significantly more reporting on

Belarus–EU relations, political opposition activities, political parties, civil society, human rights issues, and international developments. Despite this difference, both state and nonstate newspapers pay considerable attention to Belarus–Russia relations, while coverage of civil society events remains limited across the print media landscape. These newspapers therefore offer a revealing, if partial, window into how the regime seeks to frame Belarus's place between the EU and Russia for elite domestic audiences.

This section examines two key moments that shaped Belarus's simultaneous relationships with Russia and the EU: (1) The Eastern Partnership (EaP) Summit in Riga (May 21–22, 2015; analyses period: May 11–31, 2015) and (2) The onset of Russia's military involvement in Syria (September–October 2015; analyses period: September 30–October 13, 2015). The analysis draws on three leading newspapers: two state-controlled dailies, *Respublika* (*Рэспубліка*), the official bilingual government newspaper (about 119,500 copies in circulation per issue), and *Zvyazda* (*Звязда*), a major Belarusian-language state newspapers (about 20,022 copies in circulation per issue) as well as one nonstate weekly, *Belorusy i Rynok* (*Белорусы и Рынок*), an independent business-oriented outlet known for its early coverage of market reforms. *Zvyazda* is an official newspaper that covers the activities of the Supreme Soviet, the Parliament and the Council of Ministers of Belarus. The monthly supplement, *Chernobyl* (which began in 1993) deals with issues linked to the nuclear power station disaster in neighboring Ukraine in 1986. The key target readership of all three selected newspapers is businesspeople and politicians. For the purposes of this study, articles that addressed Russia, the EU, or Belarus's foreign-policy orientation during the observation periods were coded for dominant frame (political, economic, security) and overall evaluative tone (positive, neutral, negative, or mixed).

Belorusy i Rynok, which targets business elites and policymakers, has long played an influential agenda-setting role in Belarus. As the first nongovernment newspaper in the country to examine the complexities of transitioning to a market economy, it provides rare analysis of emerging private enterprises and structural economic reforms. Despite these developments, the Belarusian economy still retains many features of a planned system: a large share of GDP continues to be directed toward social expenditures, and roughly 80 percent of industry remains under state control.[55] Within this context, the newspaper positions its mission as supporting the development of democratic institutions

in Belarusian society. Although the empirical media sample analyzed here is limited to coverage from 2015, subsequent developments underscore the vulnerability of such outlets. In December 2022, however, the Ministry of Information banned *Belorusy i Rynok* for allegedly disseminating "extremist" materials, a move consistent with the broader crackdown on independent media and the intensifying censorship landscape in Belarus.[56] This trajectory highlights how the already narrow space for independent print journalism has continued to shrink, pushing much critical communication into digital and exiled media beyond Belarus's borders.

The Perception of Russia in Belarus Media

Across both observed periods, Belarusian newspapers, especially the state-controlled ones, continued to emphasize Belarus's role within the Union State, the politico-economic union with Russia established in 1999. State media often highlighted the Union State even more than Russia itself, framing bilateral relations primarily through the lens of institutionalized integration.[57] Economically, Belarus's dependence on Russia remained a central theme. During the observation period, over 40 percent of Belarusian exports consisted of refined oil products made from Russian crude, and more than 90 percent of Belarus's gas supply come from Russia. In subsequent years, this dependence deepened further, with Russian crude oil and gas providing the overwhelming majority of Belarus's energy needs, reinforcing the structural asymmetry that underpins media narratives of "partnership."[58] Nonetheless, state media often portrayed Belarus as an independent and equal partner.

In political coverage, state-controlled media emphasized Russia's consistent recognition of Belarusian elections, framing this as a proof of stable and reliable bilateral political support. Belarusian outlets also claimed that Russia relied on Belarus for security cooperation, reinforcing the narrative of mutual strategic dependence. The relationship was situated not only within the Union State but also within broader regional integration frameworks such as the CSTO, the Customs Union, and the EaEU. Against the backdrop of the war in Ukraine in 2014, Belarusian media increasingly portrayed the country as a transitional space between the EaEU and the European Union.[59] Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, and especially the use of Belarusian territory as a staging ground for

Russian military operations, this narrative shifted further, with Belarus more frequently depicted as a "buffer state" or "bridge" connecting Western and non-Western political worlds.[60]

State newspapers frequently presented Belarus as superior to the EU, its member states, Russia, and Ukraine, citing its strong state control *over* economic life and a *balanced* foreign policy. Coverage under the economic frame focused on standardization and unification efforts within the Eurasian Union, joint industrial cooperation, deepening trade ties with Russian firms, and creating joint financial institutions and business associations. At times, this discourse resembled a narrative of authoritarian developmentalism, in which state-led coordination was contrasted with perceived instability in neighboring countries.

State media repeatedly invoked Belarus's historical position *between* the EU and Russia. Coverage highlighted the presidency's pragmatic foreign policy, emphasizing Belarus's desire to leverage its geographic position. For example, Belarus's efforts to attract Chinese investments and participate in China's revived Silk Road project were framed as evidence of its potential to serve as a stable, business-friendly transit hub between China and the EU. Similar narratives appeared in discussions of Belarus's relations with EaEU states.

Analysis of the three newspapers shows the following distribution of evaluations of Russia and Russian actors in the articles coded for the 2015 observation periods: neutral: 46.4 percent; between neutral and positive: 21.4 percent; positive: 25 percent; negative: 7.1 percent. Negative coverage appeared primarily in economic reporting. For instance, falling cargo turnover in EaEU markets forced Belarusian transport firms to reconsider their operations, and the devaluation of the Russian ruble, combined with mutual Western–Russian sanctions, destabilized established trade patterns. Yet such criticisms were consistently softened by affirmations of historical friendship, shared achievements, and integrationist commitments. Headlines often conveyed positive imagery, emphasizing themes such as Russian assistance to Belarusian customers, working in unison, unity and strength, and Belarus as a so-called island of opportunity.

State media placed strong emphasis on the common economic, political and military cooperation with Russia as well as the shared historical narrative of the Great Patriotic War (as World War II is described in Russia), portraying it as a source of unbreakable Belarus–Russia unity. Coverage of events such

as the "Books Serve Peace" exhibition in St. Petersburg reinforced this remembrance politics, framing World War II memory as a moral duty and as a basis for resisting so-called "distortions" of history. Security narratives were similarly shaped by integrationist logics. Media accounts linked the creation and consolidation of the Union State to perceived external threats, particularly NATO enlargement. Military cooperation was portrayed as both a defense against such threats and a mechanism for strengthening the Union internally.

During the second observation period, Russia's entry into the war in Syria, Belarusian media devoted far more attention to domestic political and economic developments, especially given the proximity of the 2015 presidential election. International events, including those involving Russia, were overshadowed by coverage of national achievements, cultural life, and economic constraints.

Contrary to expectations, the media analysis revealed little overt skepticism toward Russia. Belarus's press, especially when state-controlled, periodically sent calibrated signals to Moscow intended to reaffirm the regime's autonomy and bargaining power. Yet such signals do not amount to substantive criticism. Instead, state outlets tended to emphasize Belarus's superiority to the West (and occasionally to Russia) in maintaining social stability, economic order, and state-directed development. The hierarchy of actors interacting with Russia in media coverage was clear: first, state officials (the president, central bank leadership, MFA officials), then business elites (primarily representatives of state-owned enterprises), and finally civil society actors (appearing rarely and with marginal influence). This structure reflects the broader authoritarian media ecosystem, in which coverage reinforces state priorities and mirrors the power distribution within Belarusian society. Collectively, these narratives naturalize Belarus's place within a Russian-led regional order and marginalize the EU as a serious normative alternative, functioning as a key discursive mechanism of de-Europeanization.

Media Perception of the EU in Belarus

Media analysis across both state and nonstate outlets indicates that Belarus continues to maneuver between Russia and the West. While Russia dominates foreign-policy coverage, the European Union, often conflated with "Europe" more broadly, occupies a secondary yet consistently visible place in

Belarusian media. Belarus's formal participation in the Eastern Partnership (limited to the multilateral track) keeps the EU present in political discourse, though often ambiguously framed. Across all outlets, the EU is portrayed in predominantly neutral terms in the 2015 sample—neutral: 50 percent; between neutral and positive: 15.8 percent; between neutral and negative: 15.8 percent; negative: 13.2 percent. Compared to Russia, the EU receives significantly more negative attention, reflecting an entrenched skepticism in the population toward Western institutions and policies.

The content analysis highlights the uncertain and often contradictory nature of the EU's image in Belarusian media. Two frames dominate: politics (critique of democratic standards, migration policies, security issues) and economy (trade, investment, visas, market competition). The official state media often questions European democratic practices, portraying elections as flawed or polarized, and highlight the high cost of Schengen visas, reinforcing a narrative of European exclusivity. Yet simultaneously, newspapers report favourably on cheap, high-quality Polish goods and the importance of cross-border trade. This ambivalence underscores a central message: Belarus must remain open to economic cooperation, but under strict state control. Any form of competition free from state oversight is depicted as undesirable or unlikely to ever occur. In discursive terms, Europe is thus framed primarily as a market and a source of consumer goods, while the EU as a normative community of liberal-democratic rules is either downplayed or problematized.

Belarus–EU cooperation has historically been defined by the 1995 Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA), which the EU froze in 1997 following the 1996 constitutional referendum that consolidated presidential powers and undermined democratic institutions. Subsequent electoral violations, particularly the 2010 crackdown on protests following the disputed presidential election, which involved the violent dispersal of demonstrators in Minsk, mass arrests, the detention of opposition leaders, and criminal prosecutions of activists,[61] further limited formal engagement. In media coverage, these episodes typically appear not as detailed institutional histories but as background markers that justify calls by state officials and state-aligned media for pragmatic and non-politicized cooperation with the EU. In this context, EU policy goals are presented as emphasizing the maintenance of Belarus's formal independence from Russia, securing transit

routes for goods and energy, and supporting for border management and migration control.

The 2015 EaP summit in Riga was portrayed across newspapers as disappointing and misaligned with the ambitions of participating states. Originally intended to promote good governance, economic integration, energy security, and visa liberalization, the EaP was shown to have limited tangible progress. Belarus signed the final declaration, but with notable omissions such as the refusal to condemn Russia's annexation of Crimea and the rejection of visa liberalization commitments. Foreign Minister Vladimir Makei criticized the EaP's trajectory while emphasizing Belarus's nonconflictual approach, positioning the country as a uniquely stable actor in a turbulent region. The press reinforced this framing by highlighting pragmatic economic cooperation, for example, visits by Polish entrepreneurs exploring investment opportunities.

Coverage also focused on the EU Court of Justice's annulment of sanctions against businessman Yuriy Chizh and two of his companies (the company Triple and the football club Dynamo Minsk).[62] Media emphasized the EU's failure to substantiate claims of his financial support for the Belarusian regime, framing the court decision as evidence of inconsistent or unfair EU pressure. This story fed into a broader narrative created by the regime that sanctions are politically driven and unevenly justified.

More broadly, the Minsk Agreements and subsequent easing of EU sanctions in October 2015 allowed Belarus to present itself as a constructive regional actor. Lukashenko's inauguration speech portrayed Belarus as a guarantor of stability and peace, and the media amplified messages about warming Belarus–EU relations and the possibility of a new stage in bilateral cooperation. Across all newspapers, the EU appeared as a prospective economic partner, though state media adopted a cautious and distinctly pragmatic tone. For example, relations with the Baltic states were described as based on concrete infrastructure projects, in contrast to Russia's ideological approach to the region.

The hierarchy of actors engaging with the EU mirrors that in Belarus–Russia coverage: government officials and the presidency dominate news coverage. Business leaders and academia appear in a supporting role. Civil society actors are present but marginal, largely confined to noncontroversial issues. State media echo Lukashenko's statements that improved dialogue

with the EU will lead to full normalization. These narratives emphasize economic and investment cooperation while avoiding political reforms.

Analysis shows the emergence of a government-aligned variant of civil society in the Belarusian media landscape. In official discourse, civil society refers not to independent organizations advocating for rights or accountability but to public associations partnering with the state to implement official policy.[63] Both state and nonstate outlets tend to reproduce this framing, reporting on civil society actors primarily in the context of social, educational, or cultural projects. Critical voices, such as expert Svetlana Matskevich's assessment of Belarus's Bologna Process membership as symbolic rather than transformative, appear only rarely and often in depoliticized form. Conceptual metaphors in article titles reveal greater negativity toward the EU than toward Russia, deploying imagery such as "foggy Albion," "negative impact of soft power," "declarations and decorations," and "the sky has been shut down." These metaphors reinforce a narrative of an unreliable, bureaucratic, or overbearing EU. For EU democracy-promotion instruments that rely on partnerships with civil society, this co-opted understanding of the term severely limits the transformative potential of engagement and helps explain why Europeanization remains discursively and institutionally constrained in Belarus.

Conclusion

Across presidential election cycles since the 1994 election of Alexander Lukashenko, the Belarusian authorities have sought to appear more democratic to Western audiences while preventing meaningful internal change. Civil society is treated not as a counterweight to state power but as an extension of the regime, tasked with supporting state goals rather than scrutinizing them. This dynamic complicates the position of opposition actors, who aim to participate in politics without legitimizing fundamentally noncompetitive elections. Since the mass protests of 2020 and the subsequent consolidation of repression, this logic has intensified, with most independent civic and political activity forced either into silence or into exile.

The broader public sphere remains constricted. Spaces for intellectual debate continue to shrink, and key issues, geopolitical orientation, historical memory, language policy, and the future social and economic model, are rarely addressed in the media. The EU's desire to deepen engagement with

Belarus is constrained by its own normative commitments to human rights and democracy, while Belarus remains one of Europe's most restrictive and hostile media environments. Following Belarus's support for Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, this gap widened dramatically as political isolation, sectoral sanctions, and information controls further severed the remaining channels of EU–Belarus interaction.

EU-funded programs have largely supported social and humanitarian projects, given the impossibility of launching major political or governance reforms under the Lukashenko regime. Although recent events, most notably the 2020 protests, demonstrated moments of rising public responsibility and civic mobilization, the regime has repeatedly neutralized such efforts through arrests, forced migration, and the dismantling of independent organizations and media. As a result, much of what now constitutes Belarusian civil society operates through digital platforms and exile-based networks, rather than within the country's formal institutional space.

In sum, contemporary Belarus remains a highly centralized, authoritarian state where the media landscape limits genuine political pluralism. Despite periodic rhetorical warming toward the EU, systemic obstacles persist, driven by both the regime's internal logic of control and the geopolitical pressures that position Belarus between Russia and Europe. The analysis of Belarusian state and independent media demonstrates that this positioning is not merely geopolitical but actively discursive: State narratives normalize deep integration with Russia while recasting the EU as an economic partner devoid of normative authority. In this sense, Belarus represents not simply a stalled case of Europeanization but a consolidated instance of de-Europeanization, in which alternative regional integration, authoritarian information strategies, and post-2022 security dependencies mutually reinforce one another.

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CHAPTER 5

The Puzzle of Europeanization in Georgia

DISCURSIVE NORMALIZATION OF EU-HOSTILE RHETORIC IN THE COUNTRY ASPIRING FOR EU MEMBERSHIP

Lia Tsuladze

Georgia has been aspiring for European integration for more than two decades. This is evidenced by both the Georgian constitution that declares Euro-Atlantic integration as a foreign policy priority (Article 78) and public opinion polls demonstrating that the vast majority of the population (70–80 percent) is supportive of Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration.[1] Concurrently, Georgians' political and popular discourses on Europeanization have been rather ambivalent, worrying about the asymmetrical dependence on the European Union (EU) or fearing the reinforcement of non-heterosexual relations.[2] This ambivalence has become the major feature of Europeanization discourses voiced by Georgia's ruling party of Georgian Dream (GD) since the spring of 2023, when it initiated the so-called "foreign agents law."[3] The chapter delves into the ambivalence characteristic of the ruling party, which used to hold a constitutional majority until the latest parliamentary elections of October 2024, tracing GD's contradictory discourses and attempting to uncover the puzzle of Europeanization in Georgia.

When the GD coalition came to power in 2012, it continued the pro-European course of the previous ruling party, the United National

Movement (UNM). Moreover, there was a continuous competition between GD and UNM over the figurative ownership of the European project: Both had boasted of their achievements on this path, disregarding their political opponents' contributions. GD had a priority in this discursive as well as performative battle, as the EU-Georgia Association Agreement was initiated in 2013 and signed the next year after GD's coming to power. In 2017, the country's citizens were granted visa-free movement through the EU. However, already in June 2019, the wider public was alarmed, questioning whether the ruling party had genuine European aspirations. This happened after the so-called Gavrilov night, when a representative of the Russian Duma, Sergei Gavrilov, who did not recognize the country's territorial unity, occupied the parliamentary speaker's seat in the Parliament of Georgia. The public immediately gathered in front of the parliament, organizing a pro-European/anti-Russian rally, which was attacked by the ruling party. In July 2021, the EU started voicing its concerns that GD was deviating from the European course, after the ruling party withdrew from President of the European Council Charles Michel's agreement aimed at mitigating the country's political crisis. (This had been the opposition parties' major concern for several years.)

This chapter addresses the puzzle of Europeanization in Georgia, focusing on the paradoxical situation of the country whose ruling party both claims to aspire to European integration and voices EU-hostile discourses. The author analyzes how and why EU-hostile discourses, which used to be unacceptable and mainly voiced by a few marginal Russia-friendly media outlets in Georgia, have been appropriated and mainstreamed by the ruling party, what the actual contents of these discourses are, and how they point to the country's not just performative but also substantive de-Europeanization.[4]

Discursive Normalization of EU-hostile Rhetoric

De-Europeanization, as a growing divergence between the EU's and its member/aspirant countries' political and normative frameworks, can progress at two policy and discursive levels. (For a detailed conceptualization and operationalization of this concept, see Lia Tsuladze et al., 2024.) Authors studying de-Europeanization issues, such as Luca Tomini and Seda Gürkan, argue that "the main indicator of de-Europeanisation at the EU-state level is

the political elite's declining commitment to the EU, and this is manifested in the form of a lack of or negative reference to the EU in the political elite's discourse."[5] Thus, one of the major indicators of de-Europeanization is the rise of negative references to the EU in the local political actors' rhetoric. In the current chapter, I look at this discursive de-Europeanization, focusing on how marginal EU-hostile discourses have been mainstreamed among the ruling party officials in Georgia.

As defined by Katy Brown, Aureliene Mondon, and Aaron Winter, mainstreaming is "the process by which parties/actors' discourses and/or attitudes move from marginal positions on the political spectrum or public sphere to more central ones, shifting what is deemed to be acceptable or legitimate in political, media and public circles and contexts."[6] It is argued that political actors strategically use their discourses and this usage is especially visible in pre-election or other critical periods, when political actors are quite active in the "discursive normalization" of previously marginal, unacceptable or illegitimate discourses.[7] In order to understand why this process takes place in particular periods, it is important to analyze respective discourses in their historical context, thereby tracing their "structural embeddedness."[8] Based on the Georgian case, I will argue that such discursive shifts occur in times of internal political crisis, often related to a ruling party losing its legitimacy, which triggers the need for adjustment of its discursive framework to the changing political conditions.

When it comes to EU-hostile rhetoric, usually local political elites delegitimize EU norms and values in the name of defending their national interests or sovereignty,[9] which starts as a strategic move and then gradually transforms into a stable trend. No doubt, the main target of discursive normalization is the local population, who are expected to get used to the legitimation and widespread circulation of previously unacceptable discourses. One of the examples is the discourse on Western liberal values endangering *our* sovereignty, which is the rhetoric instrumentalized by undemocratic governments aspiring for European integration (such as Georgia's ruling party) or even those representing EU member States (such as Viktor Orbán's government in Hungary). This trend results in the rise of populist nationalism,[10] which Margit Feischmidt and Balázs Majtényi define as "the shift that has moved discourses using unique collective identities, emphasizing a closed and homogeneous national-ethnic community and

utilizing historical legitimacy, from the margins of public debate into the mainstream."[11] Thus, like de-Europeanization, populist nationalism can be viewed as a discursive shift. Moreover, it can be argued that de-Europeanization implies a discursive shift toward populist nationalism, as its accompanying discourse usually stresses the urgency of defending *our* national interests and sovereignty. Although "this discursive and ideological shift was first noticeable in the case of far-right parties, today it characterizes a wide swatch of the political spectrum,"[12] which means that nationalist discourses of far-right groups penetrate the mainstream politics today. Feischmidt and Majtényi suggest that constitutions are "the most important documents for defining the identity of the state as well as the values that public authorities present to society as norms."[13] If we consider the cases of Georgia and Hungary, we can argue that there is a discursive normalization of illiberal values by the ruling parties, alongside respective changes to the constitutions/legislation. This is well evidenced by the adoption of the so-called "foreign agents law" as well as the law against "LGBTQ propaganda" in Georgia, and the adoption of the law on safeguarding national sovereignty in Hungary. In the case of both countries, the argument highlighted by Dace Dzenovska in "Paradox of Europeanness" holds true: "Europeanization gained in the realm of neoliberal economics was quickly lost in the realm of liberal politics."[14]

How can the discursive normalization of EU-hostile rhetoric and a discursive shift toward populist nationalism be measured? One of the possible ways is to use the framework developed by Michel Foucault in his "Politics and the Study of Discourse" (1991), which looks at how political discourses are constructed and how those behind these constructions exercise control over public opinion. Foucault's framework consists of "the set of rules which at a given period and for a given society define the limits and forms of" the *sayable, conservation, memory, reactivation,* and *appropriation.*[15] To briefly define each category, the *sayable* focuses on what is acceptable or unacceptable to voice in the current political context. *Conservation* traces what discourses have remained prevalent over time or disappeared from the political agenda. *Memory* uncovers discourses that are considered valid and invalid or even foreign by political and other actors. *Reactivation* looks at the transformation (if any) of previously dominant discourses. Finally, *appropriation* aims to identify the actors/groups competing to maintain

their control over dominant discourses. The Foucauldian framework makes it possible to trace the discursive shifts in the ruling GD party's rhetoric about Europeanization, to identify what GD officials currently deem sayable regarding the EU, and to explain the puzzle of Europeanization in Georgia, where the ruling party both attacks the EU and promises the population to ensure EU membership for Georgia by 2030.

Research Methodology

The research is based on methodological triangulation, integrating quantitative and qualitative methods of data analysis.

In order to identify Georgian political and media actors' most frequently voiced discourses, quantitative content analysis of six popular media outlets was performed in the period from July 2021, when GD withdrew from Charles Michel's agreement and started voicing its defensive discourse in response to the EU's critique, to June 2022, when Georgia was refused EU candidate status and the GD's previously defensive discourse became explicitly offensive toward the EU, according to Tsuladze et al. (2024). These six media outlets were selected based on the following criteria: TV channels were selected based on their popularity and ownership: public (Georgian Public Broadcaster) and private (pro-government Imedi TV and pro-opposition Mtavari TV). Print/online periodicals were selected based on their dissemination of pro-European (Radio Tavisupleba and Netgazeti) and anti-European (Georgia and the World [GeWorld]) discourses. The analysis targeted key events in EU-Georgia relations during the research period: the July 2021 GD withdrawal from Charles Michel's agreement aimed at mitigating the country's political polarization; the August–September 2021 refusal by the ruling party to accept the EU's Macro-Financial Assistance (MFA); the October 2021 self-government elections in Georgia held and criticized by the EU for an unequal electoral environment; Georgia's March 2022 application for EU candidate status following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine; and the EU's June 2022 refusal to grant Georgia candidate status. Prime time news and political talk shows were analyzed in the three TV channels starting from the date of the event and covering the subsequent week, while special keywords—such as the EU, European integration, visa liberalization, Association Trio, candidate status, European identity, etc.—

were used to select relevant articles from print/online periodicals during the whole analyzed period. The data collected from the six media outlets were subject to quantitative and qualitative content analysis, by studying the agenda that the target media outlets set and analyzing the frequencies of particular discourses and their actual contents.

Furthermore, two key speeches were selected for critical discourse analysis (CDA) from the later period, when both the internal political crisis intensified, and Georgia's tensions with the EU escalated. These two critical periods (in spring 2023 and 2024) followed the ruling GD party's (re-)introduction of the so-called "foreign agents law," which was strongly criticized by both international and local actors for attacking civil society and independent media, and resisted by the citizens through massive protests. The first speech was made by then-prime minister Irakli Garibashvili at the Conservative Political Action Conference in Budapest on May 4, 2023. The second speech was made by the founder and honorary chair of the ruling GD party, Bidzina Ivanishvili, at the government-organized rally in support of the "foreign agents law" on April 29, 2024. Ruth Wodak's[16] and Teun A. van Dijk's[17] approaches to CDA were utilized to reveal how the ruling party's main faces framed their agenda and what discursive strategies they used to persuade the public. While quantitative and qualitative content analyses facilitated the tracing of the discursive shift in the ruling party's rhetoric, CDA enabled the deconstruction of the essence of this discursive shift through capturing the *sayable, conservation, memory, reactivation,* and *appropriation.*[18]

Discursive Shift in the Ruling Party's Rhetoric

The dominant discourses on Georgia's European integration, as voiced by political and media actors in the mainstream media in the period of July 2021–June 2022, are presented in this section. Quantitative content analysis of the abovementioned six media outlets helped identify major, adjacent, and counter discourses voiced by politicians and journalists. Such a categorization is based on the prevalence of certain discourses and the occurrence of their accompanying discourses, as well as their alternative ones. All the presented major and adjacent discourses are derived from the rhetoric of the three target TV channels (Public Broadcaster, pro-governmental Imedi TV, and

pro-oppositional Mtavari TV) and pro-European media outlets (Radio Tavisupleba and Netgazeti), while the respective counter discourses result from the rhetoric of the only anti-European media outlet (GeWorld). The exceptions are the counter discourses on the EU's financial support to Georgia and Russia's role in Georgia's European integration, voiced by not only GeWorld but also pro-governmental Imedi TV (especially after Russia's invasion of Ukraine). Table 5.1 cumulatively summarizes the major, adjacent, and counter discourses based on a respective discursive unit.

TABLE 5.1 Major, adjacent, and counter discourses on Georgia's European integration[19]

Discursive Unit	Major Discourse	Adjacent Discourse	Counter Discourse
1. The government's/ opposition's role in Georgia's European integration	The government deviates from the European course (pro-opposition and pro-EU media). The opposition deviates from the European course (pro-government media).	Deviation from the European course goes against the state's interests.	Georgia's government has finally "woken up" and raised its voice against the West's "slavery."
2. Russia's role in Georgia's European integration	Russia attempts to make Georgia deviate from the European course. The government and the opposition blame each other for being pro-Russian.	If Georgia deviates from the European course, it will end up under the Russian influence.	The EU is guided by double standards imposing its conditions and refusing to reward Georgia. The EU pretends to be Georgia's friend, while Russia is its real friend.
3. The EU's support of human rights	The EU supports human rights protection in Georgia.	The EU upholds Georgia's democracy by supporting the proportional electoral system and judicial reform.	**The EU imposes moral degradation and non-heterosexual relations on Georgia.***

(continued on next page)

TABLE 5.1 Major, adjacent, and counter discourses on Georgia's European integration[19] (*continued*)

Discursive Unit	Major Discourse	Adjacent Discourse	Counter Discourse
4. The EU's financial support	If the reforms are not implemented, the EU will not further financially support Georgia.		Georgia does not need the EU's financial support because of the country's economic growth. The EU uses its financial support to reinforce its influence in Georgia.
5. Georgia's aspiration toward European integration	The Associated Trio jointly aspires for European integration.		**The EU/West has provoked the war in Ukraine.***
6. "I am Georgian and, therefore, I am European."	Euro-Atlantic integration is the choice of the Georgian people.	Georgia as a Christian country is a member of the European family.	**European liberal values represent a threat to Georgian values.***
7. How European is Georgia?	Georgia is in the process of becoming a European state.		The majority of Georgian politicians stage a pro-European performance.
8. The EU's interference in Georgia's internal affairs	The EU is concerned about the weakening of its influence in Georgia.	The EU is Georgia's strategic partner and friend.	**The EU intrudes in Georgia's internal affairs.***

* Bolded entries indicate discourses initially circulated by anti-EU/pro-Russian media outlets and later adopted by the ruling party.

The analysis of the selected media outlets reveals that the pro-government and pro-opposition media disseminated very similar discourses regarding Georgia's European integration, highlighting the importance of the EU in promoting human rights in the country, stressing the importance of Georgians' European identity, as well as warning against the Russian threats and noting that Georgia's diverting from the European course meant its ending up under the Russian influence. The major difference between the pro-opposition and pro-government camps was that the former

accused the ruling party of deviating from the European course, while the latter made such accusations against the opposition. This was followed by each camp blaming its opponent for holding a pro-Russian stance. Thus, the pro-opposition and pro-government camps' EU-related agenda closely overlapped with each attempting to portray itself as the guardian of the country's European integration and blaming the other for deviating from the European trajectory. The anti-EU media outlet's agenda considerably differed from others in that it represented the EU as a threat to Georgian values and the country's sovereignty, accused the EU of only pretending to be Georgia's friend due to its imposition of double standards on the country, and even directly blamed the EU/West for provoking the war in Ukraine. It is also noteworthy that before July 2021, anti-EU media were highly critical of the ruling party's attempts to integrate with the EU, while after GD's withdrawal from Charles Michel's agreement and later its rejection of the EU's MFA, the anti-EU media outlet started openly praising the ruling party for raising its voice against the West's "slavery."

When did the discursive shift in the ruling party's rhetoric occur, and how was it manifested? As demonstrated by the author's previous research, the ruling party's EU-critical rhetoric became especially visible after Russia's invasion of Ukraine,[20] when Georgia refused to join the EU's sanctions against Russia and started following what prime minister Irakli Kobakhidze called "pragmatic politics,"[21] attempting to please both the EU, in the hopes of being granted much-awaited candidate status, and Russia, in order to financially gain from Russia, which had tried to avoid the EU's sanctions with the help of Georgia. In fact, since September 2021, GD started claiming that Georgia did not need the EU's "debt"—how GD officials referred to the EU's MFA—because of the country's "unprecedented" economic growth. GD also accused the EU of using double standards toward Georgia—imposing its conditionality, though being reluctant to reward the country—after Georgia was refused candidate status in June 2022. However, it was after August of 2022 that the ruling party started appropriating the major discourses of anti-EU media outlets, overtly blaming the EU/West for provoking the war in Ukraine and attempting to "drag Georgia into war."[22] This was the GD's first attempt to voice its "Global War Party" discourse.[23] Since March 2023, after the initiation of the so-called "foreign agents law," GD started representing Western liberal values as a threat to Georgian values and the

country's sovereignty.[24] Undoubtedly, the failure to secure candidate status for Georgia in June 2022, which was later granted on strict conditions, and the initiation of the "foreign agents law" in March 2023, both aggravated the internal political crisis and contributed toward the worsening of EU-Georgia relations. As a result, the ruling party's highly hostile rhetoric against domestic opponents (calling them "war parties" since March 2022) was strengthened with that targeting the EU (labeling the Western allies the "Global War Party" since April 2024). In this way, the politics of fear[25] as the ruling party's discursive strategy aimed at discrediting and demonizing the local critics (opposition parties, civil society, and independent media) expanded from domestic to international "enemies." Thus, the discursive shift in the ruling party's rhetoric, which became visible after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, further escalated after GD's initiation of the "foreign agents law" in March 2023 and reached its peak after GD's reintroduction of this law in April 2024 and its adoption in May 2024.

Mainstreaming EU-Hostile Rhetoric in a Period of Political Crisis

The abovementioned discursive shift in GD's rhetoric has been especially visible since the spring of 2023. After its failed attempt to adopt the "foreign agents law" because of a three-day massive public protest and Western pressure, the ruling party started arguing that liberalism threatens Georgian values and the country's sovereignty. This discourse became especially prominent after then-prime minister Irakli Garibashvili's speech at the Conservative Political Action Conference in Budapest on May 4th, as it was immediately adopted by other GD officials. Such discourses also proliferated after GD's reintroduction of the "foreign agents law" (this time titled as the law on "Transparency of Foreign Influence") in April 2024, which caused a fifty-day massive public protest. The government-organized rally held on April 29 of that year in support of this law, under the banner of "Homeland, Language and Faith" was the first occasion when the "Global War Party" discourse was articulated by GD's founder and honorary chair, billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili. These two cases demonstrate how internal political crises triggered discursive shifts in the ruling party's rhetoric, expanding its politics of fear from domestic to international opponents. In what follows, I will provide CDA of the abovementioned two

major discourses, tracing GD's *appropriation* and mainstreaming of EU-hostile rhetoric, illustrating the shift in GD's boundaries of the *sayable*, its *reactivation* of the discourses previously circulated by anti-EU media, and its attempts to *validate* this discursive shift (thus, creating its own version of *memory*).

On May 4, 2023, Georgia's then-prime minister Irakli Garibashvili spoke at the Conservative Political Action Conference in Budapest, where he declared:

> Undoubtedly, adherence to traditions does not mean that we stand against innovation. Although we must be careful, as we know that evil often comes exactly in the name of innovation. . . . How do forces that oppose the freedom and truth try to achieve their goals? Definitely, by destructing the traditional family values and coercing false freedoms—through LGBTQ+ propaganda and attempts to legislate gender-affirming procedures for children—bypassing their parents, as well as by forcing so-called "innovations" that will cut people off from their own roots, family, traditions, culture, and history. They do so because it is easy to control a rootless person—someone who has forgotten his/her history and faith. Therefore, in such difficult times, our main weapon and foundation is traditional, Christian, conservative, family values.[26]

This statement is a vivid example of how the politics of fear can be instrumentalized in support of populist nationalism. To avoid sounding radical, Garibashvili starts with a disclaimer: We do not object to innovation, *but* evil often comes in the name of innovation.[27] In this context, he introduces the *us* vs *them* dichotomy, where *us* is represented by GD, portrayed as a safeguard of "traditional, Christian, conservative, family values," and *them*—"rootless" people who betray their own traditions, history and faith through "LGBTQ+ propaganda and attempt to legislate gender-affirming procedures for children." As a result, *our* supposedly good (traditional, conservative) values are juxtaposed with *their* presumably bad (liberal) values. No doubt, this statement targets the Western world, as usually "LGBTQ+ propaganda" is depicted as an outcome of embracing Western liberal values. The next statement by Garibashvili utilizes disclaimers again:

> In 2014, in accordance with the requirements of the EU Visa Liberalisation Action Plan, as well as with the sense of responsibility towards our own citizens, we adopted the anti-discrimination law that strictly protects the

> constitutionally guaranteed rights of our citizens. However, we also protect the rights of the majority, for whom the family is a union between a man and a woman; where a woman is a mother, and a man is a father. . . . The absolute majority of our society shares traditional, conservative, family values. . . . Therefore, we will protect the rights of all, but just as we will not allow violence against the minority, we will not allow the violence of the minority against the majority. We will not support the minority's attempts to change with aggressive propaganda the values, which the majority of our population considers to be given by God, on which the Georgian identity, uniqueness, and our entire history are based.[28]

This time, Garibashvili attempts to both persuade the EU that Georgia follows its normative framework and emphasize that Georgia cannot give up its "uniqueness" and the values "consider[ed] to be given by God." This hidden battle with the EU is especially obvious from Garibashvili's discourse, which is structured around these disclaimers: We protect the rights of our citizens, *but* we also protect the rights of the majority; we will protect the rights of all, *but* we will not allow the minority's violence against the majority. Even though Garibashvili seeks to sound diplomatic, his negative attitude toward the LGBTQ+ community is obvious. This is especially visible when accusing *them* of the "aggressive propaganda" against the traditional and conservative values shared by the "absolute majority of our society." This discourse indirectly targets the EU, as it is the EU that granted Georgia visa liberalization on the condition of adopting the anti-discrimination law protecting the rights of minorities. "However, we also protect the rights of the majority," the prime minister states, underscoring that even this imposed legislation cannot dissuade the "absolute majority" of Georgians from believing that "the family is a union between a man and a woman."

Other GD officials were quick to adopt Garibashvili's rhetoric and disseminate it through pro-government media outlets. It widely circulated among the ruling party officials when Minister of Defense Juansher Burchuladze declared that "liberalism, besides the need to be viewed from the religious and moral prism, might represent a direct threat to our security and sovereignty."[29] It was after this declaration that GD officials started reiterating that liberal values threaten the country's sovereignty. In this way, the discourses about the EU/West imposing non-heterosexual relations on Georgia and about liberal values threatening Georgian values, which were voiced by merely anti-EU, Russia-friendly media even in the summer

of 2022 (see Table 5.1), have been appropriated by ruling party officials since the spring of 2023. As a result, the discourses, which GD considered unacceptable before introducing the "foreign agents law," have become *sayable* and *valid* after the introduction of this law, the massive protest it triggered, and the EU's growing critique of the ruling party for attacking civil society and independent media. Thus, the confrontations with domestic and international actors were followed by GD's *reactivation* and the wide circulation of conservative EU-hostile discourses to enact the politics of fear against these very actors.

Another type of discourse that marked GD's even more prominent shift toward EU-hostile rhetoric featured the notion of the so-called "Global War Party." As noted above, it was voiced at the government-organized rally in support of the "foreign agents law" on April 29, 2024.[30] The founder and honorary chair of the ruling party, Bidzina Ivanishvili, utilized the imaginary "Global War Party" to once again enact the politics of fear, instrumentalizing Georgians' historical trauma of the Russian occupation by bringing up the role Western actors played in the 2008 Russo-Georgian war. In fact, it is in this context that Ivanishvili introduced his conspiracy theory about this party:

> Despite the promise made at the Bucharest Summit in 2008, Georgia and Ukraine were not allowed to join NATO and were left outside. All such decisions are made by the Global War Party, which has a decisive influence on NATO and the European Union and which only sees Georgia and Ukraine as cannon fodder. They first had Georgia enter into a confrontation with Russia in 2008, and in 2014 and 2022, they put Ukraine in an even more difficult situation. The main reason for the Global War Party's aggression toward Georgia is that it failed to turn Georgia into a second front despite great efforts, which it could have achieved very easily with the agents' return to power.[31]

According to the above narrative, the entity called the "Global War Party" controls the EU and NATO and is blamed for using Georgia and Ukraine as "cannon fodder." Thus, it is not Russia that is responsible for invading its two neighboring countries, but the imaginary "Global War Party" (directly) with NATO and the EU (indirectly). As noted above, the notion that the EU/West provoked the war in Ukraine was promoted by pro-Russian media outlets beginning in March 2022, and its somewhat modified version (that the EU/West "wanted to drag Georgia into war") was widely circulated

by GD officials starting in the summer of 2022. Thus, one can easily infer from the above rhetoric that the EU and the collective West comprise the "Global War Party," even if Ivanishvili avoids directly mentioning them. It is also noteworthy that Ivanishvili introduces the concept of "agent" in this context as an actor guided by the "Global War Party" and thus supported by Western entities. That he blames the latter for supporting agents, meaning nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), is evident from the passage below:

> The complete truth is that the non-transparent funding of NGOs is the main tool with which you can appoint the authorities of Georgia from abroad. . . . The funding of NGOs, which they often begrudge us and count as aid, is used almost exclusively to strengthen the agents and bring them to power. Accordingly, these funds have nothing to do with aid, and, on the contrary, their only goal is to deprive Georgia of its state sovereignty.[32]

The whole narrative tries to convey the idea that the Western powers have attempted to appoint Georgia's government "from abroad," thus interfering in the country's internal affairs and depriving it of its sovereignty. They have tried to achieve this mission through funding their local proxies, that is, NGOs and opposition parties (as the subsequent narrative suggests). Thus, based on Ivanishvili's words, the "Global War Party" that allegedly controls NATO and the EU wants to "drag Georgia into war" with the help of local NGOs and GD's political opponents (according to Ivanishvili, the "radical opposition"). The indirect blaming of the EU shifts to the direct pointing of fingers in the passage that follows, where the EU's accusations of the ruling party (for instance, for triggering political polarization in Georgia) are projected onto the EU itself. Ivanishvili blames the latter again for interfering in the country's internal affairs and thus violating its democratic principles. He goes so far as to accuse the European Parliament of adopting "a completely un-European resolution" and "destroying European values with its own hands." As a result, the EU is portrayed as a hypocrite disloyal to its own values and principles, which Ivanishvili goes on to label its "hallmark":

> Radicalism, so-called polarization, and periodic political upheavals, which have cost our country and its economy dearly over the years, were induced from outside in a completely artificial manner. If it had not been for external support, Georgia would have broken the vicious circle of so-called polarization in a short period of time. You all saw the resolution

> adopted by the European Parliament a few days ago, in which European politicians were once again advocating for the guilty leaders of the National Movement. In this case, as well, the Global War Party forced the European Parliament to support a completely un-European resolution. All of this had two goals: on the one hand, they once again tried to brazenly interfere in Georgia's affairs, and on the other, they once again showed everyone that the European Parliament had become yet another one of their tools, to be used at their convenience. By adopting this completely un-European resolution, the extent of the Global War Party's influence over the European Union has once again been demonstrated. The Global War Party has the European Union destroying European values with its own hands, which is its hallmark.[33]

Thus, the ruling party introduces an illusory dilemma, depicting the reality as consisting of two poles: on the one hand is the GD, safeguarding Georgia's sovereignty from external and internal "enemies" and, on the other hand is the imaginary Gobal War Party, supposedly encompassing the collective West and controlling GD's domestic opponents, such as opposition parties and NGOs. The ruling party attempts to justify its introduction of the "foreign agents law" by portraying itself as a guardian of Georgian society against foreign and local "agents." Based on the analysis of GD's discourses since July 2021 and comparing them with its discourses voiced in the previous period,[34] it can be argued that the ruling party's EU-hostile rhetoric has never been so direct and outspoken before. Despite this, Ivanishvili proudly concludes his speech with the promise to ensure EU membership for Georgia by 2030, apparently fearful of upsetting many voters, 80 percent of whom support the country's European integration.[35]

In fact, the ruling party's politics of fear reached its peak in the run-up to the parliamentary elections of October 2024, with GD's banners stating "No to War! Choose Peace!" and depicting the ruined Ukrainian cities, roads, churches, and schools on the black-and-white part of the banner where the major opposition parties' numbers were crossed vis-à-vis the flourishing Georgian cities, roads, churches, and schools on the colorful part of the banner depicting the ruling party's number. Thus, GD's electoral campaign was solely based on the politics of fear, portraying *them* (political opponents) as wanting war and devastation for Georgia and *us* (GD) as the only actor bringing peace and prosperity to the country. GD's pre-election slogan and, later, the government program conveyed the very same meaning:

"Only with peace, dignity, prosperity to Europe."[36] Here, "peace" refers to GD's safeguarding of the country against the domestic "war parties" and the "Global War Party" controlling them, "dignity" implies the defense of sovereignty, and "prosperity" corresponds to the "unprecedented" economic growth GD has claimed to achieve.

Thus, a drastic shift occurred in the ruling party's boundaries of the *sayable*, with its earlier soft or latent critique of the EU transforming into manifestly EU-hostile rhetoric. The anti-EU media outlet's rhetoric about the EU interfering in Georgia's internal affairs, as well as liberal values threatening Georgian values and sovereignty, were *appropriated* and *conserved* (in Foucauldian terms) by GD, and then used as ammunition in its anti-EU rhetoric. The ruling party used its "war party" discourse to enact its politics of fear, initially targeting GD's domestic critics (opposition parties and NGOs) and, after the escalation of GD's tensions with the EU and the United States, expanding to the country's Western allies, labeling them the "Global War Party." Thus, the discourses, which used to be deployed by a marginal anti-European media outlet and were considered *foreign* as they replicated the messages spread by Russian authorities, were appropriated and mainstreamed by Georgia's ruling party beginning in the spring of 2023. In this way, rhetoric previously viewed as unacceptable and unsayable in a country aspiring for EU membership not only became acceptable but was also strategically used by GD to reinforce populist nationalism featuring sovereigntist, illiberal, and homophobic sentiments. Although this discursive shift started as the ruling party's performative strategy to enact the politics of fear against its domestic and international critics, it soon transformed into a stable trend that resulted in the adoption of anti-democratic and illiberal laws, such as that on "Transparency of Foreign Influence" and the one banning "LGBTQ propaganda." Thus, the discursive normalization of EU-hostile rhetoric was followed by Georgia's substantive de-Europeanization.

Conclusion

This chapter has addressed the puzzle of discursive normalization of EU-hostile rhetoric in a country aspiring for EU membership. The empirical analysis has revealed the discursive shift in the ruling party's rhetoric,

changing its boundaries of the *sayable* and legitimizing previously unacceptable discourses. Although GD's EU-critical discourses intensified after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, when Georgia's ruling party refused to join the EU's sanctions against Russia and started following the so-called "pragmatic politics," it was only in the summer of 2022 that these discourses transformed into overtly EU-hostile ones. In this period, GD introduced the discourse that the EU/West "wanted to drag Georgia into war." The latter marked the expansion of GD's politics of fear from domestic ("war parties") to international (the "Global War Party") opponents. The subsequent political crisis further intensified GD's hostile rhetoric toward its internal and external "enemies." After the initiation of the so-called "foreign agents law" in the spring of 2023, which triggered massive public protests and was highly criticized by the country's Western allies, the ruling party *appropriated* illiberal and EU-hostile rhetoric, which had been previously disseminated by anti-EU, Russia-friendly media outlets. This *reactivation* further escalated GD's confrontations with EU and U.S. officials. This trend reached its peak in the spring of 2024, after the ruling party's successful attempt to adopt the "foreign agents law," along with another illiberal law banning "LGBTQ propaganda." Following these developments, the discursive normalization of EU-hostile rhetoric strategically used by GD to demonize its international critics rapidly transformed into a stable trend, pointing to Georgia's substantive de-Europeanization. While the latter is evident from the constitutional/legislative changes, the ruling party continues its use of discursive manipulations targeting domestic audiences: On the one hand, GD boasts of its own achievements on the country's European path, while on the other hand, it has stalled Georgia's further progress toward European integration; on the one hand, GD blames the EU and NATO for "wanting to drag Georgia into war," while on the other hand, it promises the citizens to secure EU membership by 2030. This confirms that despite its EU-hostile rhetoric and substantive de-Europeanization, GD—fearing public outrage and trying to maintain its power—stages a pro-European performance for domestic audiences, with its slogan proudly declaring "Toward Europe with Dignity." This interplay between performative Europeanness and substantive de-Europeanization is the main feature of Georgia's highly complex dynamics of (de-)Europeanization.

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CHAPTER 6

Moldova's *European* Integration

A ROAD TO DEFINING A DIFFERENT CRIMINAL JUSTICE?

Serghei Pântea

The Association Agreement of the Republic of Moldova with the European Union (hereinafter Association Agreement) was signed on June 27, 2014, marking a new step for Moldova: cooperation with the EU and moving into the integration process. Since 2014, several policy documents have been adopted and enforced in Moldova to develop implementation actions, including the obligation to protect the European funds through criminal legislative measures.[1] Initially, key elements of the agreement focused on promoting and strengthening cooperation in the areas of freedom, security, and justice; reinforcing respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms; respecting the rule of law, an independent judiciary, and legal cooperation; cooperating on migration and border management; fighting against organized crime, corruption, money laundering, and illegal drugs; aligning security policies; and committing to regional stability, including the fight against terrorism and measures against weapons of mass destruction.[2] The Republic of Moldova, currently a member of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) comprised of Russia and other former Soviet-bloc countries, applied for EU membership eight years later and was granted candidate country status on request in June 2022. Accession negotiations were officially opened in June 2024. Subsequently, the EU and the Republic

of Moldova have cooperated in the context of the Eastern Partnership[3] and European Political Community.[4]

The working relationship with the Eastern Partnership and the European Political Community has been assessed periodically through governmental and civil society evaluations. The World Justice Project shows a constant underperformance of the Moldovan criminal justice system and its efforts to efficiently tackle corruption and crime, assessing a score under half of the rating, situating the 2024 index for *absence of corruption* at 0.38 out of 1 and 0.42 for *criminal justice*.[5] Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) assesses a similar trend, with Moldova scoring 43 out of 100 points and ranking 76th out of 180 countries, just above Albania and Hungary and just below Romania and Montenegro.[6] According to the same CPI, Denmark, a Western European country and a member of the European Union, scores 90 out 100 points, while CIS countries such as associate member Turkmenistan (with a score of 17, or 165th place), the Russian Federation (score 22, or 154th place), Belarus (score 33, or 114th place), and former CIS member Ukraine (score 35, or 105th place) were at the bottom of the ranking.

Even though Moldova's criminal justice system does not damage the country's relationship with the EU, it is a matter of constant criticism and a cause for concern. Moldova has successfully integrated by adapting to EU regulations and procedures, but integration is about shaping people and their behaviors, as well as the practices and limitations of such an exercise. Indeed, a criminal investigation and trial are not abstract processes or theoretical exercises; their techniques are not random but strictly regulated, imposing procedural compliance of form and content. It is important in all criminal cases to respect safeguards, which might involve multiple and complex stages and requirements of form and content, i.e., procedural exigency. Examples of such procedural exigency include the legality of initiating the proceedings; the means and content of the notification about the commission of an alleged illegal act or misconduct; the existence or absence of immunities; the competence to investigate; evidence rules; authorization of actions or special measures of investigations; arrest, seizure, and confiscation; and different forms of cooperation and interaction, including cross-border cooperation), as well as other intrinsic aspects to these processes.

The methodology applied while researching the Moldovan criminal justice system consists mainly of logical methods, legal analysis, systematic,

historical, comparative analysis, and observation. The goal was to enrich the research with transcripts of public debates and private interviews with practitioners and representatives of civil society, as well as by using whatever mixed-research tools the subject required. Public materials (press and nongovernmental reports) and available academic sources were also reviewed, placing emphasis on the findings in the yearly reports of the Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Moldova.

Briefly from the Past to the Future

Moldova established its relationship with the EU almost 30 years ago. It was granted, on request, a formal candidacy for accession status into the EU in 2022. The path to integration has not always been clear. Some developments went drastically wrong. Just after the EU–Moldova Association agreement was signed in 2014 and a visa liberalization for citizens of Moldova was achieved the same year. Moldova ended up being what the international partners and the media has called a "captured state"[7] and has drifted from its position as a success story of the Eastern Partnership to having a corrupt, pro-European ruling elite that is mostly focused on an internal battle for control over state and financial institutions.[8] Moldova's criminal justice system landed in the same gray area of state control and abuse, behaving as a "racketeering state" and adopting that illegal practice as part of its system.[9] The fraud and crime that have occurred over time have gained worldwide notoriety. Several prominent Moldovans were wanted but have since been extradited to Moldova, such as former party leader Vladimir Plahotniuc, while others have been convicted but have yet to be extradited, such as former politician and businessman Ilan Shor.[10] Many criminal activities have taken root and become even more prevalent in Moldovan society. They include the defrauding of the banking system, the smuggling of drugs, cigarettes, and other goods, the establishment of generalized corruption and embezzlement schemes, and the obstruction and weaponization of justice, all of which have emerged over time and continue to be revealed. Over the years, new investigations have exposed the unbelievable scale of the crimes perpetrated.

After several election cycles, and in the wider regional context, Moldova has recently regained political support from foreign entities for fundamental and structural reforms, including from the Western world. It has, for now, a

chance to return to the European integration route and work to preserve the reforms for a better way of life.

In 2022, the European Council invited the European Commission to report on the fulfillment of the conditions specified in the Commission's opinion on Moldova's membership application. In response, the Government of Moldova decided to design an action plan for the fulfillment of the nine conditions outlined by the European Commission, prioritizing several areas in a sequence of importance: (1) Justice reform; (2) Electoral framework; (3) Anticorruption measures; (4) De-oligarchizing and mitigation of private interest influence; (5) Combating organized crime and money laundering; (6) Enhancing public services and public administration reform; (7) Public finance management; (8) Engagement of civil society; and (9) Protection of human rights.[11]

More than half of the challenges outlined refer to justice and corruption, organized crime, human rights, the rule of law, and good governance, while three targets directly focus on the area of criminal justice in a narrow sense: organized crime, justice reform, and combating corruption. Corruption has been recognized as a national security challenge for many years. Since 1997, when Law no. 619/1995 on the security authorities came into force, Moldova recognized corruption and organized crime as security challenges, not only as a criminal phenomenon but also to be addressed by security authorities in a wider sense. Among the authorities involved include the Intelligence and Security Service of the Republic of Moldova, the National Anti-Corruption Center, the State Protection and Guard Service, the Border Police under the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the Customs Service. As the highest form of organized crime described by Moldovan criminal law, a criminal association (network) not only commits common crimes for personal gain, but also strives to influence the economic and other activities of citizens and legal entities or to control them in order to gain economic, financial, or political advantages.[12] Additionally, it is worth noting that seeking political influence can be a crime in itself.

The Screening as an Inception

Technically, before accession to the European Union, a preparatory stage of the accession negotiations called screening must be carried out. According

to EU statutes, the screening process is a formal and technical exercise meant to provide the analytical examination of the EU's acquis—i.e., the EU legislation. The exercise allows candidate countries to familiarize themselves with the acquis and the obligations it entails.[13] The main criteria or elements of the Copenhagen criteria are, namely, the stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and a respect for and protection of minorities; a functioning market economy and the ability to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the EU; the ability to take on the obligations of membership, including the capacity to implement the rules, standards, and policies of EU legislation; and adherence to the aims of political, economic, and monetary union.[14] Therefore, the stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights, respect for and protection of minorities, which includes the criminal justice system as well, known as the *ultima ratio* safeguard, has a decisive role in ensuring the respect and general functionality of the political, economic, and society construction.

Accordingly, the criminal justice system in Moldova, as part of a legal framework and institutions, must accompany the integration process in the sense of replacing or adjusting existing standards and procedures that demonstrate poor performance or underperformance. These standards and procedures must be redefined to the extent that they can enforce the standards described in the EU legislation, and to safeguard the legal order. The World Justice Project (WJP) "Rule of Law Index" indicates a general and intense degradation of Moldova's ranking in a variety of areas between 2015 and 2019, including criminal justice, fundamental rights, the absence of corruption, and constraints on government powers,[15] although its scores in those areas improved steadily after 2019. For instance, Moldova's "absence of corruption" WJP ranking was downgraded from 92nd place in 2015 to 109th place in 2019, even though the country's corruption score improved from 0.30 to 0.32. This situation reflects continuing uncertainty and emphasizes an underperformance for the geographic region as a whole.

The screening process for Moldova—the first step in becoming a member of the EU—began in September 2024, commencing with the chapter of EU legislation on the "Functioning of Democratic Institutions," continuing in mid-October, with the chapter "Justice and Fundamental Rights,"[16] which emphasizes the importance of the justice pillar for the whole integration

process. The screening process will involve a good deal of factchecking on the ground to assess the quality of improvements in Moldova's journey toward European integration and thus the Europeanization of its society.

The Standards: Is Moldova's European Integration a Road to Defining a Different Criminal Justice System, or Is It More Form Than Content?

To better understand the effects of the European integration process on Moldova, and thus the Europeanization of the country's criminal justice system, it is important to highlight that European integration as a process is characterized by the adjustment to or redefinition of certain standards established by the European Union member states and the EU's institutions in different fields of human activity, its infrastructure, and the elements of which they are comprised, for the benefit of the people of the EU as a whole. These people are characterized by both their status as citizens of the member states of the European Union and their participation in the institutions of EU society that is complementary to their citizenship. EU citizenship comes with a multitude of rights and duties, in addition to those that accompany national citizenship, all of which are directly enforceable in the courts, horizontally (between individuals) and vertically (between the individual and the state).[17]

The cornerstone of the process is the standards—a broad category that can involve different approaches and is often hard to assess. While justice, in common terms, is the element that must safeguard and ensure the applicability and protection of all human activities, rights, and freedoms in contemporary society, it also enforces the concept that all people fulfill their legal duties in their relationships with the state as a political and juridical construction, as well as between individuals themselves.

To achieve these purposes, the EU member states have developed several criteria—with, to some extent, objective and subjective elements—that are meant to ensure the functionality of the member state societies and their governments' capacities to develop higher living standards. Even though the official motto of the European Union is "United in diversity," the intention is for Europeans to work together for peace and prosperity, while at the same time being enriched by the continent's various cultures, traditions, and languages. They cannot be united by different standards and approaches

to core problems or by allowing their governments and societies to choose to apply lower standards where they see fit. What unites them are the minimum standards below which no member may slip without attracting the attention of the others and inciting the general disapproval of the majority. Those member states whose governments are an expression of and emanate from the popular will and are thus the products of their individual societies, may not share the general values within the agreed-upon limits to which all have consented. As a result, they may face limited funding and lending and might be subject to sanctions and other instruments to bring them back into the fold, occasionally through proceedings for *bad practices* applied by their own nation's criminal justice. These are the standards that the European community understands as beneficial for itself and its member states. These elementary terms, however, may prompt some debate even within the greater European family when it comes to, for instance, understanding the concepts of rule of law, human rights, and good governance.[18]

For those countries that have already achieved international acceptance, meeting the Copenhagen criteria to preserve democratic governance and human rights is paramount. It means, for example, that they have achieved, in broad terms, a functioning market economy. They have accepted the obligations and the purpose of the European Union as a supranational construction. Yet when they become an EU member state, they often a struggle to maintain these standards and adjust to the overall development of the EU framework and its functionalities while avoiding the occasional backsliding that might come with societal and political changes.

It should be noted also *ab initio* that the main types of competences, or powers, in the relationship of the EU to its member states have to be respected—i.e., specifically, Articles 3, 4, and 6 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, which refer to the exclusive competences the shared competences, including the areas of freedom, security, and justice; and the supporting competences of the EU.[19] However, the burden is on the candidates for accession to prove that they meet the criteria and commit to ensuring an area of freedom and security for all EU citizens, including their own nationals. That is why, for the people living in Moldova, the European integration, and thus Europeanization, is both a process and an end goal that must be sustained by constant effort. This is not just a formal criterion resulting from a written agreement between the subjects of international law.

The Models

When it comes to the security, judiciary, and law enforcement architecture, a broader subject is the complexity and abundance of models that exist in different EU member states. As previously mentioned, the standards are abstract, as are the approaches to mitigating the challenges, but the minimum threshold is visible. While it is not described in policy documents or studies on the subject, it is possible to find a superior criminal justice model to follow or accede to, although it can be a challenge to assess the functionality qualitatively and quantitatively. There have also been a multitude of studies conducted in the various jurisdictions such as Poland and Romania, that suggest the challenges and differences in the practices of law enforcement and the judiciary. The models that have been implemented throughout the globe, including in the EU member states, reveal occasional weaknesses and gaps that are addressed on a case-by-case basis in the national courts. When a case reaches the threshold of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) and the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU), the failures of that country's criminal justice system are often laid bare. It is therefore necessary to establish some sort of minimum EU standard of justice for every case. Likewise, in Moldova, an appropriate study or model of a European system has not been identified, such as an exceptionally successful Western system that, if incorporated into the Moldovan national legal order, would be just as effective, especially in countering organized crime and corruption. For example, Romania has two operational specialized authorities to fight corruption and organized crime: the National Anti-corruption Directorate (DNA) and the Directorate for Investigating Organized Crime and Terrorism (DIICOT). Croatia has the Office for the Suppression of Corruption and Organized Crime (USKOK). Some EU candidate countries, such as Albania, have developed their own models of institutions to tackle corruption and organized crime, like the Special Structure Against Corruption and Organized Crime (SPAK). Some countries have created special courts to deal with these kinds of cases. Different approaches have been taken to the same exercises in different countries, with different grounds for prosecution and scenarios concerning same concepts. Therefore, it is important to be aware of these differences and avoid as much as possible labeling that which would induce a false perception that something is "rotten" in the West, or, by contrast,

that accession to the EU will definitively and forever ensure the rule of law and democracy. While Moldova's system has achieved a certain maturity, the changes to the laws and regulations should continue to be systemic and thought out.

In countries that have a longstanding democratic history—the rule of law is a common value integral to their society supported by constant, predictable elections cycles. In those countries, elections do not fundamentally change the nation's overall security and justice or cause a transformation in the governmental and political establishments. Such countries are less susceptible to pronounced and radical influences, including the threats of corruption and state-linked organized crime. But, even in Europe, there have been occasional scandals in which charges are brought against public officials for crimes like abuse of power, negligence, fraud and misappropriation of funds, corruption, treason, obstruction of justice, etc. These kinds of situations prompt conflicting, often incongruous attitudes toward the political establishment and decision-making processes, as well as negative attitudes toward EU integration. While political interference has been mentioned as a challenge to justice, little evidence has been identified or highlighted in official investigations. The dilemma of the weaponization of the criminal justice system is that it is not only characterized by the pressure *not* to prosecute members of the political establishment, but also by the decision to prosecute opponents. And while this may be true, how many public officials confess to influencing or to being influenced in a particular case to decide it in a certain way? How many entitled public officials understand that it is their duty to adhere to an official code of conduct, taking responsibility and being accountable for that particular conduct? There have been multiple cases in which political opponents were indicted, tried, and later acquitted, such as the case of the Dorin Chirtoaca, the former mayor of Moldova's capital, Chișinău, charged with corruption for approving the construction of several new public parking lots in the city.[20]

Another problem is the multitude of criminal justice and legal models established throughout the continent and the national legislators' continuing insistence on maintaining such legal fragmentation, often to the detriment of the clarity, stability, and predictability of core legal principles. Without a systematic approach or a solid rationale, these legislators distort the original meaning of political or governmental reform and confuse practitioners. They

challenge the self-confidence of professionals by confusing them when they give the mistaken appearance of resistance to change and progress, thus fostering a stream of defiance that could be misunderstood as de-Europeanization.

Short Predictions about Prosecution and Judiciary

However, what will be the effect of the accession process on the citizens and legal practitioners on the ground? We can argue on the level of basic criminal prosecution activities, such as: the interaction between the first officer at a crime scene and the witness or victim; the apprehension and arrest of the suspect; the conduct of the searches; the arrangement and appointment of the expert and forensic examinations; the search, seizure and confiscation of evidence; the documents and assets filed; the use of habeas corpus; the conduct of special investigative activities and surveillance; the application of the exclusionary rules; and other specific criminal prosecutorial, investigative, and pre-trial activities, through the prism of standards in the European integration process. One might disagree with the importance of such specific and concrete elements when assessing the entire integration process, but these are the primary issues that shape the construction of the criminal justice architecture at the grassroots level. Knowledge will have to be acquired through learning and training, exchanging information with other member nations, and ensuring that whatever knowledge is acquired remains in the country and is absorbed by it as much as possible. It will take patience and time for criminal justice legislation to provide legal professionals the instruments and resources they need in their practice for the benefit of society.

We can speculate as well on the importance of high-profile, noteworthy cases, which will gain symbolic importance for assessing the efficiency of the justice system, while the question of what percentage of all cases they represent, the court records, and crime statistics will continue to remain undervalued. The analysis of acquittals and convictions for crimes committed most likely will continue to be an internal subject of assessment for the prosecution, law enforcement, and judiciary themselves, while the public perception of safety will continue to be shaped by exemptions, by notable names and the most common statistics. While the qualitative assessment of Europeanization would have to be oriented to some extent on efficiency, trying the particular cases will require effort and resources, which will impose pressure to provide results. For

example, a study conducted on the length of judicial proceedings in Romania suggested that official statistics indicate that most trials were concluded faster than the public perception.[21] By contrast, it was found that, in 2020, criminal and minor offense cases were decided in Moldovan courts more slowly than those by the Council of Europe (CoE) (an average of 473 days in Moldova compared to 390 days by the CoE). On average, in the 47 CoE member states that were analyzed for 2020, criminal and minor offence cases were decided 21.3 percent faster than those in the Republic of Moldova.[22]

Hence, even if it is a fairly well-established European practice to have fair trials and judiciary independence and to make that part of European standards, judicial motivation in handing down decisions will continue to be emphasized more than the quality of the evidence and facts of the cases. Therefore, that which is abstract and unclear will take precedence over the more important discrepancies between objective and subjective facts. It is also expected that the courts of first instance (trial courts) will have to establish the facts and take more responsibility to establish the truth and assess the evidence, while the burden of appellate and supreme courts will be shifted to higher and more overarching points of law, as they attempt to avoid challenging and revising basic decisions and pretending not to admit inadmissible immixture. That will bring more pressure on the courts of first instance and pose a dilemma for the judges either to act and take responsibility for the facts on which they are called to rule or to postpone the hearings and the process as much as possible. In Moldova, there is a general tendency to prefer panels, or councils of judges, rather than one-person, one-sided judgment. The same trend is occurring in criminal prosecutions, in which non-definitive decisions are allowed,[23] such as non-discontinuing decisions that do not close cases or even pass the burden onto higher courts but are validated by a magistrate, for example, during a prescriptive period (a time-bound statutory limitation). To address these kinds of practices and to somehow redress the consequences, the country's legislature has changed the law in subjects related to statutory limitations, affecting the entire criminal law system by extending time limitations without addressing the root of the problem. That is why the European integration assessment will have to be naturally linked to the quality of the improvements, thus necessitating that quantitative, statistical assessments be conducted on a case-by-case basis, besides via formal legislative amendments.

Apart from the adjustments to the legislative framework, the assessment of progress will have to determine whether anything has changed in the instruments, tactics, and methodology of investigating crimes, as well as in prioritizing cases, and how inter-institutional and international cooperation is carried out. Should we continue on the same path, or do we change the approach?

To address this question, we should describe if and how Europeanization will shape the number of rights and freedoms of the parties involved in a criminal process, including the victim, state, and suspect, as well as the instruments used by authorities to efficiently solve cases. Do we grant more rights to the suspect, and how do we balance those rights with those of the wider public? Do we help speed the prosecution of the criminal in the interests of the alleged victims? Do we prioritize cases, decriminalize some deeds, or continue to overregulate? Do we evade transparency by replacing the legal process with the current political will, hoping that the solution is perfect? Or do we involve and engage the public and accept a whole-society approach to policymaking?

Policy, Integration, and Resistance

Has anything changed in the way decision-making is carried out, or in the hierarchy of functions and actors in the justice system? Since the political establishment seems to adopt laws and regulations at will, do society and legal professionals tend to nullify the law, are the resistant and dismissive forms of defiance described by the international scholar Valerie Braithwaite valid?[24] It is not a new phenomenon that, in particular cases, neither the spirit nor the letter of the law is applied, *eo ipso*. This is as true for Moldova as it is for European countries. In Moldova, the attitudes of nullification and defiance are commonly epitomized in the saying "Este lege, dar este și omenie" (There is the law, but also the human side of the issue). Is the process of integrating Moldova into the European community able to reduce the impact of customs and habits, rather than avoid addressing the problem per se?

It is important to understand different approaches to mitigating the various elements of the criminal justice system as a whole, such as the digitalization of judicial processes, the emphasis on high-profile cases referred to courts and adjudicated in a timely manner, and asset seizures. It

is just as important, however, to have the appropriate instruments, resources, and even-handed focus on the other elements and overall construction of the system, to equip legal professionals with tools and technical means to enhance their practices.

In order to assess the success of reforms and the achievement of conditionalities, very strict performance and result indicators must be developed and approved, which will have to correspond qualitatively and quantitatively to the standards that are set. For example, if the aim is to improve respect for human rights, to avoid victimization, to avoid false statements of torture, to preserve evidence by recording the suspect's initial behavior, etc., by applying audio and video recording to the act of interrogation, a natural quantitative indicator would be to equip criminal prosecutors with specific tools. Those tools would include audio and video equipment, media storage, digital infrastructure, and other technical equipment down to the smallest detail, as well as a staff and training in place very quickly. Some formal provisions at early stages of the criminal process would be excluded so that the witnesses, victims, suspects, indicted people, etc., do not end up being deposed or publicly testifying at least two or more times. De-bureaucratizing of the criminal justice process, reducing the burden of some of the formalities in the process of investigation and judgment, must be included in the legal framework improvements.

Cooperation and Integration

Europeanization will bring a great change in Moldovan criminal justice through fostering international cooperation, increasing the openness and quality of information exchanges between law enforcement and prosecution authorities with peer partners all over the continent. While European member states apply largely two important and decisive instruments in the criminal justice system, namely the European Investigation Order (EIO) and the European arrest warrant (EAW), for EU membership candidates and their institutions, a legal and practical preparation process for the application of these instruments will have to occur in a timely manner as well. There is expected to be closer cooperation and integration within the well-established regional initiatives, such as the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol) and the European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation

(Eurojust).[25] Cooperation platforms are also expected to be set up, including local points of contact, initiatives for the European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats (EMPACT), the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF), and the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO), and various liaison offices, where Moldovan authorities will actively provide and receive information and assistance, even before they join the European Union. For example, EPPO might want to use tools drawn up by Eurojust with third-party countries, such as the cooperation agreement Moldova and Eurojust signed in 2014.[26] Where appropriate, EPPO and the Moldovan Prosecutor's Office will cooperate according to the terms of the cooperation agreement[27] between them that was signed on July 13, 2022. A question that naturally follows and has to be addressed with some urgency is whether the national authorities will continue to cooperate on security, corruption, and organized crime issues with non-European member states. This issue applies to agreements such as the initiatives in the countries formerly part of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the bureau that fights organized crime in the CIS,[28] mutual legal assistance treaties, police and border bilateral or multilateral cooperation initiatives, and the Interpol National Bureaus in the wider region, including the east (Belarus, Russia, and Caucasus), Southeast Asia (the ASEAN region), and the Middle Eastern and North African countries (the MENA region), to name just a few. A timely and clear policy should focus on the amount of cooperation to be achieved and whether the level of interaction will continue or decrease, bringing some security concerns and possible backsliding in the legal and security instrumentation. These questions must find a place in criminal policy and law enforcement documents, considering that a clear priority is to ensure that the initiatives and platforms are used for fair purposes and not exploited in any way.

Another thing worth noting is that, even after accession, some EU states have continued to be monitored by the EU's justice organisms for long periods. Historically, justice has been one of the most vulnerable areas in accession, especially in Eastern and South-Eastern European countries. There have been some notorious instances of backsliding as countries struggle to democratize, including political interference into justice departments in various countries of the EU,[29] such as Poland in central Europe, or Bulgaria in the South. Stemming the erosion of the judiciary despite EU membership and ongoing reforms is a challenge. The great degree of attention the EU

gives to its members in this area demonstrates the size of the problems, which call for their continuous mitigation in a decisive manner. That struggle has to be considered while assessing criminal justice in Moldova during the integration process.

Policy, Integration, and Resistance

European integration as an end goal will have to bring tangible, measurable, and specific results for Moldova. Integration has to provide reasoned assessments to show whether the formal conditions were achieved to the greatest extent. It cannot be asserted that once an organized criminal group is dismantled, the objective to overcome organized crime has been achieved because this is a continuous process. Permanent efforts will have to be applied; the same may be said for anti-corruption efforts. For these reasons, when it comes to operational activities, crime trends—such as drug and human trafficking, smuggling, counterfeit goods, contraband, cyber fraud, money laundering, and financial crimes—with a known presence in Moldova and the region will continue to pose a challenge during and after the EU integration process. Success in eradicating or even just stemming these crises will have to be assessed on quantity and quality.

Even if an increase is expected in arms and drug trafficking in the wider regional context, as well as in financial crimes that are specific to countries with closer interaction with EU member states, there is little expectation of an uncontrolled, chaotic rise in crime. Strong support can be observed in the European integration process for revising the system of criminal prosecution, trial, and referral of cases related to the illegal circulation of drugs,[30] with great emphasis on revising the quantities of drugs trafficked according to European models associated with the countries that have lost the war on drugs. A systematic approach is necessary, though. When debating the operational level of crime, the lack of effective jurisdiction of Moldovan authorities on the eastern bank of the Nistru River (the so-called Transnistria region) is important. That region continues to be controlled by underground criminal organizations acting on behalf of powerful individuals. The security issues caused by this criminal activity will continue to threaten Moldova's economy as well, and it will pose a great challenge for criminal justice reform. Moldova will have to contribute more to its obligations to eradicate the problem.[31]

The Quality of People and the Vetting of Professionals

The last key element that is a priority for shaping the criminal justice system in the future is the quality of the people involved in the system and the public trust in the justice system itself. There are two immediate approaches to improving the pool of professionals in the criminal justice system: training and background checks. In Moldova, a rigorous exercise for screening judges and prosecutors has been conducted since 2023. Nevertheless, many lack confidence in the approval process for practitioners, with members of the public and politicians complaining that it is too slow, is selective and unfair, and is more a test of loyalty than a true verification of qualifications. Criminal justice is also a matter of morality, ethics, and the conscience of societies. It is commonly accepted that the judiciary and, to some extent, the criminal justice professionals—judges, prosecutors, law enforcement officers, judicial experts, and other participants in the criminal process—are the faithful expression and product of the society to which they belong. Thirty-five years after the proclamation of sovereignty and twenty-five years after the first negotiations on the establishment of a relationship with the EU, Moldova, with the support of foreign nations, decided to conduct a rigorous screening process for only a portion of its legal professionals, instead of roughly the 60 percent that was recommended, naming a select few of its prosecutors and judges to the most sensitive offices. It was decided that the vetting of judges and prosecutors must be thorough and ongoing to prevent corruption from undermining reforms, and that they must be vetted in a timely manner. The process is expected to continue despite the criticism leveled against it, but more emphasis is needed on the ethical criteria adopted by the professionals during their careers and used in their decisions. Some suggested improvements include deeper and more thorough involvement of the professionals in the vetting process, since they know the ins and outs of the system so well. On the other hand, more training should also be available and more exchanges with peers from other countries should be supported. Formal and informal education for different professionals will foster interaction, build networks and enhance the capacities of the professionals to apply their knowledge, including methods and techniques that are available in different jurisdictions. This approach will contribute to the overall improvement of criminal justice reform and facilitate the adjustment of the professionals to the standards

established by the EU. The improvement in training was reported in official activity reports of the General Prosecutor's Office.[32] However, an eloquent example of the program's shortcomings is the lack of training in the application of techniques for conducting hearings with digital technology (making video and audio recordings), as well as information analysis and the use of analytical software.

Conclusion

European integration, and thus Europeanization, requires commitment from both the Moldovan government and the public. Institutional reforms must be complemented by cultural shifts that prioritize integrity and accountability. Moreover, international partnerships and EU support are indispensable in navigating the transformations. More emphasis on meritocracy and accountability will support the improvements in the criminal justice system, and that will support and safeguard the reforms that are necessary for the welfare of Moldova's citizens and to secure the integration process. The assessment of Moldova's achievements on the road to integration should have a strong emphasis on quality and efficiency, while professionals should take more independent action and avoid a passive stance, so that the public feels safe and its trust in the legal system improves. More involvement of the prosecution and judiciary in the vetting process will enhance the quality of the legal profession by raising the level of competency, the efficiency of criminal investigations, and societal trust. Comprehensive training initiatives will bring Moldovan professionals closer to EU standards and Western models while equipping them with the tools needed to efficiently address crime, corruption, and public safety in the region and world. These measures are essential to a criminal justice system that seeks to be more resilient, professional, and aligned with Western and transatlantic values.

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CHAPTER 7

(De)Europeanization Under War?

THE CASE OF FREE MOVEMENT OF PERSONS IN EU-UKRAINE RELATIONS

Maryna Rabinovych

Ukraine is the first country ever to have received European Union candidate country status during a full-scale war. This political move—which also represents an important symbol of the EU's solidarity with Ukraine—gave a strong impetus to deepening EU-Ukraine relations. It also incentivized the Ukrainian government to adopt important reforms to strengthen the rule of law and develop anticorruption statutes, including reforming the Constitutional Court of Ukraine and ensuring the operational independence of anticorruption bodies.[1] These steps enabled the parties to formally open accession talks in June 2024, which, along with the conclusion of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement of 2014, represents another milestone on Ukraine's European integration path.[2]

Nonetheless, variations in prewar integration levels, combined with the multifaceted effects of the war and complexities of the planned reconstruction process, create varied de-Europeanization dynamics across policy areas within which Ukraine's European integration takes place. The objective of this chapter is to examine the mixed dynamics of de-Europeanization in the area of freedom of movement between the EU and Ukraine. Although the movement of persons between the EU and Ukraine has not been fully liberalized as of 2026, the chapter will consistently use the term "freedom of

movement of persons" as a reference to the policy area or one of the freedoms under the EU's Single Market. Conceptually, the analysis engages with the notions of top-down and bottom-up Europeanization, emphasizing their intertwined and mutually reinforcing nature—unless disrupted by crisis-driven concerns and political constraints, such as the presence of powerful actors opposing European integration. This examination also refers to the concept of de-Europeanization as the opposite of Europeanization, or the process by which states or societal actors challenge, resist, or disentangle from EU norms and practices.

The chapter advances three arguments. First, it stresses the role of prewar top-down Europeanization, particularly through national adaptation and sectoral integration under the visa liberalization process, as the framework for the bottom-up practices that have evolved since the process was concluded in 2017. Engaging with this top-down framework is essential for understanding how EU-Ukraine mobility norms and practices have developed over the past eight years, including during the war.

Second, it is argued that, notwithstanding the war-induced restrictions on combat-aged men, the EU's activation of its Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) on March 4, 2022, in response to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, has reinforced prewar trends related to mobility and people-to-people contacts. In this vein, the TPD further contributed to bottom-up Europeanization in two ways. It fostered everyday Europeanization by providing many Ukrainians with direct experience of lifestyles, norms, and practices in EU member states, while also strengthening both people-to-people and institutional ties between the EU and its member states, on one hand, and Ukraine, on the other. Furthermore, the successful TPD implementation experience sparked intra-EU debate on the postwar status of its beneficiaries, particularly in light of Ukraine's EU accession process and the full liberalization of the movement of persons that this would entail.[3]

Third, we demonstrate that these bottom-up dynamics have not been paralleled at the top-down level. While at the current stage we do not find evidence of intended de-Europeanization practices by the Ukrainian government, limited prewar integration levels and capacity constraints constitute an obstacle to the ongoing national adaptation and sectoral integration processes. Risks of de-Europeanization, however, exist and may exacerbate in the postwar period, as rapid advancements toward aligning

with the EU's freedom of movement framework stand in conflict with the Ukrainian government's focus on the return and reintegration of Ukrainian citizens. With this, the case of the free movement of persons contributes to studies of de-Europeanization by highlighting the complex intra-sectoral dynamics of this process under interstate war in an EU partner country, presenting a complex governance challenge and necessitating tradeoffs between different policy objectives.

The analysis is structured as follows. First, it explains the top-down and bottom-up facets of Europeanization. Second, it focuses on the free movement of persons as an integral component of the EU's Single Market, offering a concise reflection on how this freedom has been implemented in the enlargement context and why it is important at the current stage of EU-Ukraine relations. Third, the empirical analysis of wartime de-Europeanization dynamics is explored, regarding the movement of persons between the EU and Ukraine, with references to prewar top-down and bottom-up developments, where relevant. The concluding section discusses the implications of the analyzed case for EU-Ukraine relations and Ukraine's EU accession process, including the risks of postwar de-Europeanization stemming from intertwined demographic and national security concerns on Ukraine's side.

Conceptual Framework and Operationalization

Broadly defined, Europeanization refers to "the mutual influence of the European Union (EU) and its member states, on interactions within and between member states driven by the EU, and to the effect of the European Union on EU applicant state."[4] With its history dating back to the regional integration theories of the 1950s, the concept has been originally applied to explain the evolution of the EU. Since the 1990s, Europeanization was increasingly used to study the effects of European integration and governance on EU member states.[5]

Already in the 2000s, the study of Europeanization beyond EU borders was prompted by the two rounds of EU enlargement in 2004 and 2007, and the launch of the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) as a broad and ambitious policy framework for the EU's enlargement with new neighbor countries in the East and South.[6] While originally scholars were skeptical as to the potential impact of Europeanization beyond EU borders,[7] subsequent

studies have demonstrated the EU's ability to shape domestic policies, institutions, and practices in nonmember states, albeit with significant variation across regions, sectors, and contexts.[8]

Alongside this top-down impact, there is extensive scholarly evidence showcasing the importance of the bottom-up dynamics in both Europeanization processes in partner countries and the supranational integration dynamic.[9] There is considerable scholarly evidence of the role of civil society in partner countries, with professionals participating in transnational networks, businesses, and citizens in shaping Europeanization processes in EU partner countries from below through everyday practices, reform promotion, and grassroots mobilization.[10] While rooted in existing top-down arrangements, such bottom-up processes may push their boundaries forward by exerting influence on supranational policy debates and decision-making processes, e.g., through advocacy and lobbying.[11] In this way, the relationship between top-down and bottom-up processes can be seen as intertwined and mutually reinforcing, that is, unless disrupted by crisis impacts or political constraints. Clear-cut distinctions between top-down and bottom-up Europeanization are thus hardly possible. Considering the dynamics of Europeanization in certain cases—especially over time—requires integrating both perspectives.

In this vein, this chapter understands top-down Europeanization as the process in which the EU, its institutions, policies, and norms shape institutional structures, domestic legislation, and policies, particular in candidate countries.[12] In theoretical terms, the outcomes of the top-down Europeanization process tend to be explained with the rational choice institutionalist framework, which emphasizes that national governments and domestic actors act in ways that maximize their own benefits while minimizing costs.[13] From this perspective, the adaptation of national policies and legislation to align with European policies and laws occurs when the benefits that a national government receives—such as economic incentives, political advantages, or increased integration—outweigh the economic and political costs associated with such adaptation. Conditionality serves as a key mechanism of national adaptation, whereby compliance with European policies and laws is incentivized through the promise of rewards, such as financial aid, market access, or political support, contingent upon meeting specific conditions related to domestic reforms.

Based on top-down arrangements, another important mechanism of Europeanization is sectoral integration, i.e., third-country involvement in EU agencies and funding programs like the Energy Community, the European Common Aviation Area (ECAA), or Horizon Europe. At the same time, illustrating the thesis as to the tight interplay between top-down and bottom-up Europeanization dynamics, sectoral integration gives rise to horizontal information exchange and policy learning among officials from the EU and partner countries. Such activities are, in turn, likely to both promote the spread of European norms and practices in partner countries and lead to the transferring of resolutions of certain issues and ideas to the EU level.[14] As well as sectoral integration, other bilateral or unilateral top-down arrangements—such as the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement (AA) or the TPD—are likely to both serve as a framework for bottom-up developments and be subsequently influenced by them.[15] Notably particular is its ability to spark bottom-up Europeanization and influence the policies and practices of the Ukrainian government makes us regard the TPD as a case of EU-driven unilateral top-down Europeanization.

As noted above, bottom-up Europeanization can be understood in two senses. The first is as a pro-European change in partner countries that is driven by these countries' own citizens, professionals, and civil society actors. These actors, through their engagement and advocacy, may exert influence on supranational policy debates and EU-level decision-making processes. To observe this aspect, this study uses the notion of everyday Europeanization, through which ordinary individuals, families, and other groups of people experience and engage with the influence of the European Union in their daily lives.[16] Everyday Europeanization is largely rooted in a top-down framework—in our case, the prewar EU-Ukraine arrangements on the movement of persons and the wartime activation of the TPD by the European Parliament and the Council.[17] Its substance, however, deals with the micro-level effects of European integration, emphasizing how "Europe becomes an important object of identification,"[18] and how EU norms, policies, and practices become embedded in routine activities and local settings, such as economic behavior, mobility practices, or access to new educational opportunities.

Though the concept usually focuses on such micro-level effects, occurring within a partner country, the analysis will use it in a broader,

cross-border sense, to signify the wartime everyday experiences of Ukrainians as beneficiaries of temporary protection (TP) in the EU. Although TP is a temporary arrangement, it currently serves both as a key top-down framework allowing a large group of Ukrainians to reside in the EU and to exercise mobility between the EU and Ukraine, as well as a starting point for policy discussions on the future status of this group. These considerations—particularly that the future of TP is often discussed in the context of EU accession, presupposing full access for Ukrainians to the four freedoms of the EU Internal Market (i.e., free movement of goods, services, persons, and capital)—underscore the importance of exploring both the status quo and the prospects of the current regime for Ukrainians in the EU through the lens of the freedom of movement of persons.

At the same time, focusing on the everyday experiences of Ukrainians as TP beneficiaries in EU member states adds nuance to this perspective and allows us to highlight the factors that determine the uniqueness of the current arrangement, as well as the policy choices faced by both the Ukrainian government and the governments of EU member states. First, although clearly designed as a temporary measure, TP for Ukrainians has been active for more than three years. On the one hand, this has allowed for the consolidation of implementation practices at the member states' level and provided individuals with considerable room for integration in host countries, including the possibility of switching to another status if they are engaged in education or work. At the same time, the lack of clear prospects for a postwar status for TP beneficiaries forces them into a situation of "permanent temporariness"[19] prompting many to focus on sustaining and expanding their professional and personal ties with Ukraine. Second, both the close ties of TP beneficiaries with Ukraine and the fact that, in most EU member states, they are allowed to make short trips to their home country facilitate the exchange of experiences and practices with Ukrainians who stayed behind or returned after living abroad. In this way, everyday experiences of Europe become an important topic of discussion and exchange in Ukraine, not only virtually but also physically. Third, exploring the effects of TP beneficiaries' experiences in Ukraine is also relevant from the perspective of government policies and practices, which must adapt to the fact that 4.3 million Ukrainian citizens[20] currently reside in the EU

with this status, including in their communications with the Commission and EU member states.

Finally, standing in sharp contrast to Europeanization, de-Europeanization signifies the process by which state or societal actors challenge, resist, or disentangle from EU norms and practices European Union (EU) norms, policies, and structures.[21] Like Europeanization, de-Europeanization can take both the top-down and bottom-up forms. While Brexit (Great Britain's separation from the European Union) or Belarus's official departure from the EU's Eastern Partnership (EaP) following the suppression of protests by the Lukashenka regime exemplifies the top-down process, the bottom-up form can be exemplified by popular Euroskepticism or grassroots mobilization opposing EU norms and values, e.g., in the form of anti-LGBTQ movements.[22] Notably, top-down de-Europeanization can take multiple tacit forms, such as partial or full rejection of EU norms despite continuing official membership in or close alignment with EU policies and norms. Moreover, both in the case of the top-down and stakeholder-driven bottom-up dynamics, de-Europeanization does not necessarily represent an all-encompassing rejection of European norms, but can instead manifest as sectoral resistance or divergence, often in response to specific policies that challenge national values or goals. One sector can thus embed mixed dynamics of de-Europeanization and complex interplay of top-down and bottom-up facets, for instance, with some civil society stakeholders supporting and others contesting top-down de-Europeanization policies.

To sum up, as presented in Table 7.1 below, the analysis will engage with the following sub-concepts and mechanisms of de-Europeanization in relation to the free movement of persons between the EU and Ukraine:

TABLE 7.1 De-Europeanization and the Freedom of Movement of Persons Between the EU and Ukraine

Type	Form	Mechanism	Application to the Case
Top-down Europeanization	National adaptation	Conditionality, often supported by technical assistance and capacity-building	Ukraine's adaptation of its domestic policies and laws related to free movement of persons between the EU and Ukraine, and its entry to and participation in respective EU administrative bodies, networks and funding instruments
	Sectoral integration	Alignment of national systems to ensure a partner country's participation in EU administrative bodies, networks and funding instruments	
	Unilateral EU-driven top-down Europeanization	EU's application of unilateral instruments, not necessarily oriented on integration, yet capable of fostering it with no additional third-country adaptation efforts	EU's activation of a TPD as a crisis response instrument
Bottom-up Europeanization	Everyday Europeanization	Partner country's citizens' everyday engagement with the EU, its values, norms and ways of life and responses by the government in a partner country, occurring within a certain top-down arrangement	Everyday experiences of Ukrainians within the top-down framework of the TPD, unilaterally launched by the EU, while remaining active in Ukrainian society and influencing government policies and practices.
	Bottom-up Europeanization in a classical sense	The impact of third-country actors, such as civil society, professionals, entrepreneurs and citizens on policy debate at the EU level and the adoption of EU policies and norms, also exercised through horizontal networks with EU counterparts	Debate on the future status of TP beneficiaries in the EU and its connection with the free movement of persons between the EU and Ukraine

Type	Form	Mechanism	Application to the Case
De-Europeanization	Norm rejection and resistance at the sectoral or issue level	Refusal to align with EU policies or norms by the government (top-down) or other stakeholders (bottom-up)	The Ukrainian government or other stakeholders challenging free movement of persons between the EU and Ukraine

Freedom of Movement of Persons and EU Enlargement

The freedom of movement of persons is one of the fundamental principles of the EU Single Market.[23] While this freedom is inseparable from the other three freedoms under the EU Single Market, namely the free movement of goods, services, and capital, it also represents a cornerstone of EU citizenship.[24] Additionally, the free movement of persons in the EU is facilitated by the Schengen Area, enabling EU citizens to travel, work and live in an EU country without special formalities and "move around without going through border checks.[25] As presented in more detail in Annex 1, located at the end of this chapter, the current EU legal framework provides for multiple aspects of the right to free movement, such as the right to work and live in any EU member state, the prohibition of discrimination, social security coordination, mutual recognition of qualifications, and borderless travel within the Schengen Area.

During the three most recent waves of enlargement—with the 2004 "Big Bang" enlargement,[26] the accession of Bulgaria and Romania in 2007, and of Croatia in 2014—free movement of persons has consistently sparked debate. As exemplified by the 2004 case, key member states' concerns in this vein related to the propensity to migration among the nationals of acceding states; acceding states' potential as a gateway for illegal migration; and the capacity of older or original member states to cope with migration pressures.[27] In all three cases, these concerns were met through transitional arrangements, enabling older member states to delay the full application of free movement rules for citizens of newer member states. Typically limited to seven years and applicable only to labor market access for the citizens of newer member states, transitional arrangements ensure phased implementation of the free movement of people. Nonetheless, evidence from the three most recent

enlargement rounds suggests that transitional arrangements and their uneven application by older member states may be perceived in recently acceding countries as a sign of their second-class status within the EU. Scholars, therefore, question whether the benefits of transitional arrangements truly outweigh the risks of undermining EU legitimacy and fueling bottom-up de-Europeanization in the newer member states.[28]

As will be discussed later in relation to the future status of Ukrainian TP beneficiaries, these experiences are highly relevant for shaping Ukraine's roadmap toward the complete liberalization of the movement of persons as a part of its EU accession process. Given Ukraine's demographic challenge, also addressed below, it may be the Ukrainian government, rather than the member states, that favors the use of transitional arrangements or an alternative intermediary solution in this context. Similar to Croatia's experience with postwar emigration,[29] the legitimacy of these solutions within Ukrainian society may influence Europeanization processes in the country.

Free Movement of Persons between the EU and Ukraine

This section shows that already prior to the war, the EU-Ukraine AA and the visa-free regime, as an outcome of the visa liberalization dialogue, have created a favorable basis for the intensification of movement of persons between the EU and Ukraine. Unilaterally activated by the EU, the TPD became an important element of the top-down framework, reinforcing prewar mobility trends and, as demonstrated in the subsequent section, contributing to Ukraine's bottom-up Europeanization.

The EU-Ukraine AA, fully in force since September 1, 2017, serves as the key legal basis for this relationship. Its role has remained unchanged even after Ukraine was granted EU candidate status and began accession talks with the EU.[30] Title III of the Agreement, "Justice, Freedom and Security," contains framework provisions as to the movement of persons, encouraging the parties to continue to deepen their visa liberalization dialogue, referred to below.[31] When it comes to the economic aspects and Ukraine's integration into the EU's Single Market, the AA's economic part, also referred to as the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA), nonetheless primarily engages with the free movement of goods, services, and capital. Thereby, natural persons are referred to only in the context of the progressive reciprocal

liberalization in trade and services,[32] highlighting that the AA/DCFTA did not intend to ensure Ukraine's access to all four freedoms of the Single Market.

While still seeking to strengthen economic, civil, and personal links, the EU and Ukraine engaged in a visa liberalization dialogue in 2008. This dialogue aimed to align Ukraine's visa policies with EU standards, with the goal of granting Ukrainian citizens visa-free travel to the Schengen Area for short stays (up to 90 days within a 180-day period). To fulfill this, the Ukrainian government complied with the 2010 EU-Ukraine Visa Liberalization Action Plan (VLAP), focusing on document security (e.g., biometric passports), border management, migration management, and human rights and governance. Following the Commission's evaluation of Ukraine's completion of the VLAP, the European Parliament and Council updated the list of third countries whose nationals are exempt from the visa requirement.[33] The visa-free regime between the EU and Ukraine has remained operational during Russia's full-scale war with Ukraine, alongside the TP regime.

Adopted in 2001 amid the Yugoslavian wars, the TPD was first activated by the Council decision on March 4, 2022, in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The primary objective of the TPD is to ensure that the EU can provide an immediate response to the mass influx of displaced persons from crisis-affected areas without overburdening national asylum systems. Although the TPD limits the duration of TP to three years, the Council extended TP for Ukrainians in June 2025, until March 2027.[34] From a substantive law viewpoint, TP represents a minimum standard of rights that its beneficiaries are entitled to in all EU member states, such as residence, housing, access to the labor market, medical assistance, social welfare assistance, and access to education for children. Individuals under TP typically enjoy free movement within the EU, while hosting member states decide on rules for their short trips to Ukraine. Swiftness, clear and unified eligibility criteria for beneficiaries, individual member state choices, and the right to travel to the home country have made TP significantly different from traditional lengthy asylum procedures, thus contributing to the overall success of this measure.[35]

With this, TPD and its activation by the EU constitute a crucial unilateral top-down framework for the wartime Europeanization of Ukraine (and Ukrainians) in the free movement of persons. Beyond the war situation, it is only the visa-free regime that performs such a function for short stays.

For longer stays on specific grounds (e.g., education, job, or marriage), Ukrainians can seek national visas and residence permits on the same conditions as other non-EU/EEA citizens.

Bottom-up Europeanization

This section will explore the phenomenon of bottom-up Europeanization in the free movement of people realm from the everyday perspective (i.e., Ukrainians' everyday experiences with free movement in Europe and their influences within Ukraine and Europe) and the classical perspective on bottom-up Europeanization (i.e., the impact the implementation of the TPD has had on EU-level policy debate).

Everyday Perspective

This subsection highlights how the EU's application of the TPD has advanced the trend of everyday Europeanization. This trend gained momentum after the 2014 Euromaidan Revolution and was significantly boosted by the introduction of visa-free travel in 2017.

Back in 2017, the start of the visa-free regime was widely celebrated with music and parties at Maidan Square, which, after the Euromaidan, has become symbolic of Ukraine's aspirations for a European future.[36] Pendulum employment-seekers—Ukrainians from the Western part of the country who are able to regularly cross the border for short-term work—were particularly interested in informal jobs in the EU (e.g., construction in Poland or caregiving in Italy).[37] Youth also benefited from the visa liberalization, as Ukraine joined Erasmus+ in 2014, easing participation in exchanges.[38] Despite differing goals, both pendulum employment-seekers and youth gained experiences in traveling to Europe, navigating daily life, and socializing with Europeans. However, pendulum migrants often faced exclusion and discrimination (e.g., limited access to social protection in receiving countries, or the imposition of stereotypical identities)[39] while participation in youth exchanges was viewed positively, focusing on socializing effects and democratic values.[40]

Alongside the youth, Ukraine's rapprochement with the EU has influenced everyday experiences and practices of other population groups, including academics, civil servants, and business representatives. For

academics, Ukraine's accession to both the Erasmus+ (which provides support for not just for exchanges but also for university institution- and capacity-building through international cooperation) and the Horizon 2020 framework for research cooperation signified enhanced opportunities to interact with colleagues from European universities, attend international conferences, and publish in international peer-reviewed journals. In the post-Euromaidan period, participation in EU-funded programs and cross-dimensional pro-reform networks in Ukraine, facilitated by the EU, has significantly influenced the routine operation of Ukrainian civil society organizations.[41] The Europeanization of their activities included, *inter alia*, regular interactions with EU and member states' officials and nongovernmental organization (NGO) representatives, participation in trainings and conferences in the EU, and the use of European project management and reporting systems. Finally, the reorientation of Ukraine's trade away from the markets of Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the EU's support for DCFTA implementation contributed to the mobility of Ukrainian business representatives, subsequently leading to the integration of Ukrainian enterprises into European value chains.[42]

The prewar rise in people-to-people contacts and trade had already contributed to better connectivity and lower costs of travel between the EU and Ukraine. For instance, in 2018, the major Irish low-cost airline company Ryanair opened multiple routes from Kyiv and Lviv to ten European destinations, including Barcelona, Bratislava, London, Stockholm, and Warsaw.[43] Also, new bus and train routes were launched from Ukrainian cities to Bratislava and Warsaw, the capitals of neighboring countries.[44] The visa-free regime, affordable flights, and bus/train trips gave further impetus to the abovementioned contacts and facilitated touristic trips to the EU by Ukrainians. Overall, from the launch of the visa-free regime in June 2017 until the start of closures stemming from COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, Ukrainians made nearly 49 million visa-free trips to the EU and EEA countries.[45] Such trips undoubtedly contributed to the Europeanization of everyday life, especially for upper-class Ukrainians, who were better positioned to travel frequently and do leisure trips, for instance to "drink fantastic coffee in Bratislava . . . or visit Vienna opera," as notoriously argued by Ukraine's former President Petro Poroshenko.[46] At the same time, alongside informal pendulum migration, the visa-free regime facilitated legal migration to the

EU, particularly connecting higher education and employment.[47] That is why, already before the Russian invasion, Ukraine was the largest recipient of remittances in Eastern Europe, with its volume reaching $18 billion during the first year of war.[48]

The EU's wartime support for Ukraine has been conducive to the preservation and reinforcement of prewar trends related to mobility and people-to-people contacts in several ways. First, building on prewar tools, funding schemes, and networks, the Commission has broadened Ukrainians' access to targeted support programs for academics, civil society, and SMEs and/or launched dedicated initiatives specifically designed for them.[49] A notable example is the launch of the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA4Ukraine) for Ukrainian researchers, which awarded 125 fellowships, in addition to those granted to Ukrainian applicants through the regular MSCA program.[50] This is similar to the Erasmus+ program: From 2014 to 2020, Ukrainians participated in 17,000 mobilities, with the number of both completed and scheduled mobilities having nearly doubled to 33,000 between 2022 and 2025.[51]

Compared to targeted support schemes, the TP initiative has fostered a more widespread and inclusive form of everyday Europeanization, providing more than four million Ukrainians with immediate experiences of living in EU member states and interacting with local communities, institutions, and labor markets. Through these experiences, Ukrainians have engaged with diverse European systems, adapted to varying cultural norms, and accessed essential services. This mobility and exposure have facilitated their integration and thus individual Europeanization, with more than 50 percent of respondents in a 2024 EU Agency for Asylum survey reporting feeling "well adapted" in their host countries.[52] Nearly 60 percent cited "better opportunities" as the reason they would like to stay.[53] However, differing levels of support and integration opportunities across host countries mean that these experiences are not evenly distributed. For example, while Germany quickly offered Ukrainian refugees equal access to jobs, education, and social benefits, Sweden delayed providing personal identification numbers, limiting access to services.[54] In Poland and the Czech Republic, essential services like language courses and psychological support were largely provided by volunteer organizations rather than state programs. Across many countries hosting Ukrainians, diaspora initiatives and those

launched by the local population to support newcomers (e.g. the "German-Ukrainan Society" and "Ukraine-Hilfe Berlin," respectively[55]) have played a key role in fostering collective Europeanization. They have providing spaces for Ukrainians to communicate and integrate, facilitating their interpretation and reinterpretation of experiences with Europe and fostering exchange between them and host communities.

An important vehicle through which both Ukrainians who receive target support in the EU and TP beneficiaries contribute to the Europeanization of Ukraine is the back-and-forth movement between the EU and Ukraine. While there is no data regarding trips back home by Ukrainians belonging to the former category, 40 percent of TP beneficiaries report having visited Ukraine at least once since being displaced by the war.[56] During such trips, they tend to visit relatives and friends. These interactions likely involve the transfer of knowledge, values, and practices acquired in the EU. These may even include new standards in governance, service delivery, education, entrepreneurship, or even interpersonal norms (e.g., gender equality in household roles), all of which contribute to a diffuse, informal process of social and cultural Europeanization. Notably, Europeanization during physical trips is supplemented by digital forms of engagement, as Ukrainians share their everyday experiences with friends and family in broader networks online, including discussing healthcare and education standards, civic participation, and lifestyle choices. Although such exchanges predate the war and have been facilitated by both long-term Ukrainian migrants and those who seized temporary opportunities in the EU, they have intensified significantly since 2022, as approximately 10 percent of Ukraine's prewar population now resides in EU member states.

Similar to the prewar situation, trips between the EU and Ukraine continue to be facilitated through infrastructural adaptation. With air traffic over Ukraine still closed due to ongoing air attacks, land borders, particularly the Polish-Ukrainian border, have become key gateways for both Ukrainian and EU citizens.[57] Therefore, both Ukrainian and European bus operators, such as Flixbus, have expanded their routes, increasing the number of connections between EU member states and Ukraine.[58] The increased cross-border movement has also led to partnerships between railway operators from EU member states and Ukrainian Railways (PAT "Ukrzaliznytsia"), enhancing connectivity and transforming long-distance trains into important

sites of experience exchange and cultural interaction. Moreover, the demand from Ukrainians abroad pushed many Ukrainian businesses to expand their operations to European markets, facilitating the exchange of business practices between Ukraine and the markets and business communities of receiving countries.[59] With offices in fourteen EU member states, Nova Post Europe is a salient example of this development.[60]

It is worth noting that an important difference between prewar and wartime bottom-up Europeanization is the gender composition of the individuals involved. The fact that combat-age men are generally not allowed to leave Ukraine—except in cases of health issues or caregiving responsibilities—has undoubtedly impacted the current Europeanization dynamics. First, as 44.7 percent of TP beneficiaries are women, and 31.8 percent are minors immediately influences both their personal integration strategies and host states' migration policies, for instance, necessitating the focus on childcare, education, and family support services.[61] Second, the demographics of TP beneficiaries shape their experiences of and with the EU, which they acquire and exchange through their networks. This contributes to the growing importance of topics such as family life, gender equality, and child welfare, as these issues become central to the integration process and the exchange of social norms between Ukraine and the EU. Third, the movement of Ukrainian men who are often illegally fleeing military conscription adds another layer of complexity to both the bottom-up Europeanization dynamics and the perceptions of Ukrainian refugees in the EU. Although the granting of TP to men who illegally left Ukraine raises ethical dilemmas for EU member states, especially those heavily invested in supporting Ukraine, there are currently no signs that this will affect their legal status in the EU, either now or in the foreseeable future.[62]

Ultimately, coupled with EU-targeted support to individuals (e.g., scholars, civil society), the TPD gave rise to a new large-scale wave of everyday Europeanization, unevenly exposing more than four million Ukrainians to life in Europe and facilitating people-to-people networks between them and host communities. Both physical trips to Ukraine and digital communication with family, friends, and broader networks have enabled Ukrainians residing in the EU to share their experiences of employment, education, family life, gender roles, and child welfare in Europe as a whole. Similar to the 2017 visa-free regime, wartime bottom-up Europeanization has reinforced

transnational business ties between the EU and Ukraine, particularly in transport, infrastructure, and postal services.

Classical Bottom-Up Perspective

Referred to in a parliamentary briefing as an "overall success" and "the enabler of an unprecedented whole-of-society effort," the experience of TP implementation gave rise to extensive policy debate at the EU level.[63] Though predominantly focusing on exit strategies from the TP and the future status of current TP beneficiaries in the EU, it also addresses TP's potential role as a bridge to liberalizing the movement of persons with Ukraine. As shown below in Table 7.2, expert and political discussions about the future of TP beneficiaries are generally optimistic, highlighting both the prospects for those who wish to remain in the EU and the opportunities to maintain strong ties with Ukraine. This makes them quite different from the traditionally cautious perspective often seen in deliberations on the liberalization of the movement of people in the enlargement context.

Apart from TP beneficiaries' return to Ukraine immediately after the end of hostilities, the suggestions of EU politicians and experts for the future of TP beneficiaries can be distinguished into three groups: (1) those with an international component; (2) solutions based on member states' law; and (3) supranational solutions (illustrated in Table 7.2). The former solution suggests that if the TP expires while a safe return to Ukraine remains unviable, TP beneficiaries can apply for asylum in EU member states. While such applications are likely to overburden national protection systems, analysts suggest various pathways for a group-based approach to addressing the needs of Ukrainians.[64] Also revolving outside of the realm of EU-Ukraine relations, possible national avenues include the granting of residence permits to Ukrainians on either humanitarian or other grounds relevant under national law (e.g., job, education).[65] In both cases, however, analysts underline the challenge of variation in member states' law, including the limitedness of pathways to long-term residence in some member states.[66]

Given the complications that emerge regarding options (1) and (2), contemporary debate emphasizes the value of EU-level coordination in managing the transition from the TP framework and the future of Ukrainians in the EU. As demonstrated in Table 7.2, reconstruction and pre-accession

permits are immediately linked to the potential liberalization of movement of persons between the EU and Ukraine:

TABLE 7.2 Supranational Solutions for the Future Status of Ukrainians in the EU

Suggestion	Substance	Problems with realization/critique
Unilateral EU measures with no actual/potential connection to the bilateral liberalization of the movement of persons between the EU and Ukraine		
Access to long-term residence status	Amending the EU Long-term Residents Directive (LTRD),[67] which is currently under revision, so that Ukrainians can get the status of EU long-term residents after three years of TP.	Current need to change the status under national law to be eligible for LTR. The current version of the LTR requires third-country nationals to stay in the EU five years to be eligible for LTR.
Suggestion with actual/potential connection to the free movement of persons		
Reconstruction permits	Unified long-term permit to be launched by the EU in cooperation with the Government of Ukraine for current TP beneficiaries for the estimated duration of Ukraine's reconstruction (e.g., 10 years). The permit would allow for clear status, access to the labor market and socio-economic rights in the EU for TP beneficiaries, as well as the right to free movement within the EU and between the EU and Ukraine (with no loss of permit).	Potential opposition by the Ukrainian Government, seeking to reintegrate its citizens on a permanent basis (discussed in more detail below). Unequal rights for former TPD beneficiaries and other Ukrainians.
Pre-accession permits	Long-term residence permits for current TP beneficiaries, linked to Ukraine's progress in the accession process and serving as a "pilot" version for free movement of persons between the EU and Ukraine, with the scope of rights similar to the "reconstruction" ones.	

Source: Author's own elaboration based on the review of secondary sources.[68]

With this, the EU's and member states' experience with TPD implementation has generated policy debate on transitioning out from the TP and the future of TP beneficiaries, in particular at the EU level. Although it is unlikely that, as envisioned by the *classical* bottom-up Europeanization, TP beneficiaries influenced the debate through advocacy or lobbying, their

impact is evident in their engagement with public authorities and societies in host countries. The latter point can be additionally substantiated by positive attitudes to Ukrainian refugees, reported by EU citizens, notwithstanding the above-mentioned dilemmas regarding Ukrainian men. Thus, the debate itself, along with the prominence of EU-level solutions—such as those related to the liberalization of movement between the EU and Ukraine—reflects the positive role the TPD experience has had in driving the bottom-up Europeanization of EU policy towards Ukrainians.

Wartime Top-Down Responses by the Ukrainian Government

Despite the current bottom-up developments and the Ukrainian government's ad hoc adaptation to these dynamics (e.g., ensuring citizens' digital access to public services and broadening opportunities to get national identity cards and passports abroad), policy and legal challenges continue to hinder substantial progress in Ukraine's top-down Europeanization in the freedom of movement of realm.

In broad policy terms, the return and reintegration of TP beneficiaries and other Ukrainians represents a key priority of the government.[69] Return is expected to serve as at least partial compensation for the negative demographic effects of the war, occupation, and flight, leading to an estimated 6 to 8 million decrease in population in the government-controlled territories between early 2022 and 2024 (from slightly more than 41 million to an estimated 33 to 35 million).[70] In this respect, the recently adopted Strategy of Ukraine's Demographic Development (until 2040) distinguishes the prevention of Ukrainians' outmigration and stimulation of their return from abroad as the key direction of Ukraine's demographic policy.[71] Attracting migrants from foreign countries is seen as a possible future priority only in case natural population and return migration trends fail to compensate for the negative demographic trends. Importantly, though referring to EU legislation on migration and asylum as well as to Ukraine's European integration course and human rights concerns, this strategy does not relate to the potential liberalization of the movement of persons between the EU and Ukraine. Additionally, the emphasis on return is reported to play a salient role in Ukraine's diplomatic strategy vis-à-vis the EU and its member states.[72] In the future, the Ukrainian government may oppose EU-

level plans for new residence permits for current TP beneficiaries and resort to de-Europeanization practices, such as openly rejecting or undermining EU norms on the movement of persons that could facilitate Ukrainians' outmigration.

Nonetheless, since the EU-Ukraine AA does not envisage the liberalization of movement of workers between the EU and Ukraine, there is currently no sufficient evidence to regard what is described in the 2023 Ukraine report as the country's "early stage of preparation regarding the freedom of movement of workers" as a manifestation of de-Europeanization.[73] In particular, we have not revealed any Ukrainian official documents, which would openly reject the idea of free movement of persons or advocate for postponing its implementation (on the contrary, the Ministry of Economy in Ukraine suggests that the Ukrainian government is in dialogue with the EU on this matter).[74] More specifically, it is difficult to determine the extent to which demographic considerations, in particular, formulated in Ukraine's Demographic Development Strategy lag behind progress as regards national adaptation in the free movement domain, as noted in EU Enlargement Reports, issued between 2023 and 2025.[75]

The lack of national adaptation in this realm is, however, an established fact. The reports distinguish three key tasks Ukraine should fulfill to improve the level of its adaptation to EU law in the free movement of persons domain. First, Ukraine does not have specific legislation on the employment of EU nationals. Therefore, EU nationals can be employed in Ukraine not on the same conditions as Ukrainians but as third-country nationals, which bears certain restrictions (e.g., they cannot be employed as civil servants) and thus contradicts the principle of free movement of workers. Secondly, Ukraine has agreements on the coordination of social security services only with eight EU member states, which prevents it from joining the EU system for social security coordination. This not only creates challenges for Ukrainian citizens wishing to access social benefits across the EU, especially after the TP expires, but also complicates matters for EU citizens working or residing in Ukraine. The lack of comprehensive agreements may lead to gaps in social security coverage, double contributions, or difficulties in transferring benefits, potentially discouraging individuals from changing their place of residence and work. The third issue at stake deals with the implementation of the European Health Insurance Card in Ukraine, given that no national health

card has yet been implemented in the country. Once again, the presence of such issues does not necessarily testify to de-Europeanization but may stem from the confluence of the rigidity of existing norms, lengthy bilateral negotiations required to coordinate with member states on social security matters, and financial challenges (e.g., when it comes to the introduction of the national health insurance card).

The latter considerations can be indirectly proven by the case of Ukraine's potentially joining of the European Employment Services (EURES) network as a case of sectoral integration, as referred to in both EU enlargement reports.[76] In October 2024, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine adopted the preparation of a plan for joining the EURES, with the focus on measures aimed at learning from the experience of other countries participating in the network.[77] Some of these measures are of a technical nature (e.g., analyzing algorithms of exchanging CVs and motivation letters through the EURES network), while others aim at making future policy and legal decisions (e.g., as to the role of intermediaries in the labor market). This plan also envisages measures for harmonizing Ukraine's national classification of professions with that of the EU, which is also likely to take time. The case of the EURES thus shows that challenges with advancing top-down liberalization may not necessarily testify to de-Europeanization but may be linked to the complexity of issue areas at stake and/or financial implications of national adaptation and/or sectoral adaptation.

We thus demonstrate that since the onset of the war Ukraine's policy and legal frameworks have not kept pace with the bottom-up Europeanization developments related to the movement of persons between the EU and Ukraine. Such a situation can be, however, more likely attributed to the limitedness of prewar integration and present capacity constraints, rather than intended de-Europeanization.

Conclusion

This chapter analyzed the dynamics of de-Europeanization in the realm of the movement of persons between the EU and Ukraine amidst the Russia-Ukraine war. The case illustrates the complex interplay between top-down and bottom-up facets of Europeanization, resulting in mixed dynamics within a single policy area in the context of EU-Ukraine relations. This

finding is particularly relevant for understanding that, although Single Market integration is often regarded as an attainable milestone on Ukraine's thorny and highly politicized path toward the EU, fully liberalizing the movement of persons, which is just one of the four fundamental freedoms, remains a challenging and potentially contested issue. While no signs of intentional de-Europeanization have been identified in this policy area at the present stage, contradictions between Ukraine's demographic policy and the goal of full liberalization may foster such risks in the future, particularly in the postwar period.

We showed that the EU's wartime support to Ukraine and Ukrainians, including the activation of the TPD, has reinforced earlier bottom-up, especially everyday Europeanization trends, stemming from the AA-based intensification of Ukraine's European integration since 2014 and especially since the launch of the visa-free regime between the Union and Ukraine in 2017. Positive experiences of the TPD implementation in EU member states have also influenced the EU-level debate on the future status of current TP recipients in the Union and the free movement between the EU and Ukraine.

In response to the large-scale emigration caused by the war, the Ukrainian government was compelled to adapt its domestic legal and regulatory frameworks. However, the demographic consequences of the war and concerns about further emigration to the EU have shifted the government's focus toward encouraging the return and reintegration of its citizens. This emphasis is evident in the recently adopted Demographic Development Strategy, which prioritizes repatriation over the liberalization of labor mobility. At the same time, Ukraine's national efforts to align with EU norms on the free movement of persons—both in terms of legal adaptation and sectoral integration—continue to lag behind the everyday and classical bottom-up facets of Europeanization. Nonetheless, these dynamics are difficult to interpret as deliberate de-Europeanization, as there is no explicit political rhetoric rejecting the principle of free movement. Instead, the gap between top-down and bottom-up processes amid wartime conditions likely reflects limited prewar integration and the state's reduced institutional capacity, rather than a conscious reversal of European integration efforts. Yet, as noted above, the risk of such a reversal remains. In the case of the free movement of persons, its severity will largely depend on the trajectory of Ukraine's postwar development, particularly with regard to demographic trends.

The potential liberalization of the movement of persons between the EU and Ukraine constitutes a unique case, shaped by the complex interplay of Ukraine's integration aspirations, demographic challenges, and postwar reconstruction pressures. As such, the case of free movement of persons between the EU and Ukraine offers a valuable perspective for understanding the complexities and uneven pace of de-Europeanization within a single policy domain, and stressing policy and legal difficulties surrounding Single Market integration of current candidate states, widely advertised as a step towards their eventual EU membership.

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Appendix

TABLE A.1 Scope of the free movement of people

Aspect	Scope	Source
Right to work and live in any EU member state	The right to take employment without needing a residence permit. The right to reside in any EU member states if an individual has sufficient resources to cover the costs of their living and does not become a burden for social security services of a host member state. The right to be accompanied by family members, even though they are not EU citizens.	Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), Title IV EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, Art. 45 Art. 6–8 under the Directive 2004/38/EC
Nondiscrimination	EU citizens who move to another member state should not be treated less favorably than nationals of that state, e.g. in the area of employment and social security services.	TFEU, Art. 18 Directive 2004/38/EC, Art. 24
Social security coordination	Rules, aimed at preventing EU citizens from losing social security benefits they are entitled to, when moving to another EU member state.	Regulation (EC) No 883/2004 on the coordination of social security systems
Mutual recognition of qualifications	Mechanisms that allow for the recognition of professional qualifications and educational degrees across member states, allowing for easier mobility of skilled workers.	Directive 2005/36/EC on the recognition of professional qualifications
Borderless travel within the Schengen Area	Abolition of internal border controls between participating countries (with possible exceptions, e.g. for security reasons).	Schengen *acquis*

Source: Author's own research.

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CHAPTER 8

Ukraine's Journey to EU Membership

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Following the Euromaidan Revolution of 2013–2014, Ukrainian authorities undertook wide-ranging reforms that unequivocally demonstrated commitment to their country's Euro-Atlantic integration and requisite democratization—pursuits that have been adamantly endorsed by the general population.[1] Ukraine's successful resistance to Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022 not only reflected the country's consolidated national identity and commitment to independent statehood but also spotlighted higher-than-anticipated institutional capacity, the efficacy of civil society-state cooperation, and the strength of local governance as an outcome of political decentralization. All these characteristics offered justification to Ukraine's attainment of EU candidate status in June 2022.

While the offer of candidate status symbolized the EU's solidarity with Ukraine, it also outlined seven priority reform areas for Ukraine's path to EU accession, including in the areas of judicial reform, anti-corruption, and minority rights. This chapter starts with an overview of the EU enlargement process literature with a focus on the most important lessons that the successful Eastern Enlargement (2004–2007) and the stalled Western Balkan Enlargement (2010s–present) offer for Ukraine. It then provides an analysis of Ukraine's progress in tackling the prioritized reform areas, highlighting both the incentives and the obstacles encountered in the process. It will highlight how Ukraine's progress will be determined by the endurance of civil society's commitment to the reform process, the extent of political will

from the Ukrainian government, and by the process of EU conditionality that is relevant to all candidate states.

EU Enlargement: Lessons from Two Different Waves and Their Implications for Ukraine

EU conditionality refers to the legal, administrative, economic, and political standards that applicant states are required to adopt, encapsulated by the *acquis communautaire* (the cumulative body of EU law currently in force) and articulated in the Copenhagen criteria (the set of conditions candidate states must fulfill before accession).[2] EU conditionality evolved into a more structured form throughout the 1990s in the context of the accession processes of the post-communist Central and Eastern European (CEE) states (hereinafter, Eastern Enlargement).[3] Conditionality replaced the more passive approach previously used, in which Western European democracies in the EU simply served as role models for the fledgling Eastern European post-communist democracies that aspired to join the EU and derive the benefits that EU membership provides, including a vast common market, more robust national security, and the satisfaction of a return to Europe. The active leverage approach of conditionality was based on monitoring candidates' compliance with concrete EU requirements and tied membership to meritocratic achievement.[4] Conditionality sought to trigger democratization and facilitate the entrenchment of the rule of law in candidate states and has long been considered a highly successful policy and a critical EU foreign policy tool.[5]

While EU conditionality started out as a highly effective foreign policy instrument, it has not maintained universal and uniform success. During the Eastern Enlargement, EU candidate status was offered to states that, for the most part, were more advanced in the process of democratization than those states in the later Western Balkan Enlargement. Notably, while many CEE states had adopted crucial political reforms prior to the onset of EU conditionality, the Western Balkan states had not undertaken such reform at the same point in the process.[6] Countries such as Poland and Hungary, for example, had engaged in what has been referred to as the "anticipatory adaptation" of rules and norms related to EU membership, and while these frontrunners actively undertook reforms without external pressure to do so,[7] EU conditionality was decisive in prompting necessary reforms in Bulgaria

and Romania.[8] Whereas most countries in the Eastern Enlargement had made notable strides in democratizing before the onset of conditionality, the Western Balkan states faced the demands of conditionality at the very moment of transition from authoritarian rule in the 2000s. In addition, Western Balkan states were not to be treated as a single "enlargement round," a decision that was meant to strengthen the credibility of EU conditionality by judging every candidate on its own merit, and to prevent less compliant candidates from piggybacking on the successes of their compliant counterparts.[9] It has been argued that the approach proved detrimentally premature, creating multiple opportunities for illicit economic activity and the emergence of informal networks amid the volatile context of simultaneous democratization, market liberalization, and post-conflict state-building.[10]

In addition, over time, the threshold for meeting EU conditionality became more demanding, a development that further increased the adoption costs of reforms among candidate states. Most recently, in 2020, the EU adopted a tougher methodology that requires unanimous Council approval to close each of the six clusters of the negotiation chapters and allows the European Commission to stop the process or even reverse it if a candidate state does not meet strict conditions. As a result, the likelihood of the Western Balkans' successful Europeanization has decreased.[11] The strict methodology might similarly strain the political will to secure compliance with EU standards in Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova, although to varying degrees. The drive for rule of law reform is seen by some local political and economic "elites" in the Western Balkans as jeopardizing their rent-seeking interests, which became highly entrenched on account of the prolonged accession process—their position in power, as well as the accompanying impunity from criminal indictment and imprisonment.[12] That the EU has directed its focus toward technical issues related to legislative improvement and the redesign of formal institutions has, moreover, been seen to facilitate strategies of mere window dressing, allowing local elites to bolster their legitimacy despite low levels of accountability and transparency.[13] Nevertheless, the declared commitment to reform has been sustained among Western Balkan states, as EU membership remains a high priority in light of relatively steady support for EU accession among the countries' electorates.

Although corruption is a top issue of salience in Ukraine, the country is uniquely positioned with an established (albeit evolving) institutional

architecture for combating corruption that had preceded the country's attainment of candidate status. This feature not only distinguishes Ukraine from the Western Balkan states, but also from several states in the Eastern Enlargement, most notably Bulgaria, Romania, and Croatia, whose corruption scores were comparable to those in Ukraine.[14] The anti-corruption architecture of these three states developed in the 2010s—in parallel with Ukraine, but *after* their accession to the EU—and was an initiative prompted by a global push for anti-corruption institutions rather than a locally induced process.[15] Long-standing academic debates about the accuracy of corruption indices[16] illuminate underappreciated temporal dimensions of EU accession. Later accession candidates might be assessed as having higher levels of corruption not primarily or exclusively because the level is truly higher, but because the increased attention to and concern for the control of corruption in the post-2000s has made the issue more salient with both the public and international observers. This salience serves to artificially increase the perception-based corruption index scores, which in turn are used to justify delays in accession. This possibility raises questions about the extent to which EU enlargement may be regarded as a fully meritocratic process, as opposed to one driven in large part by geopolitical considerations. Thus, although Ukraine's recent attainment of candidate status has been characterized as a geopolitical priority, an emphasis on the country's sizeable corruption problems in the 1990s and 2000s, although real, offered a convenient cover for the EU's concerns about offending Russia by including Ukraine in the Eastern Enlargement strategy. It remains to be seen whether the attainment of requisite qualifications will ultimately trump geopolitical considerations in a scenario where Ukraine fulfills reforms in line with EU standards.

The EU's vested interest in security has also explained its tolerance for illiberal tendencies among aspiring states, which enables a professed regional stability that is preferred over the potential volatility of strong pushes for reform. In the Western Balkans, this has prompted continued engagement with actors of questionable integrity, or those known to have been infiltrated by clientelist networks.[17] EU leaders' disinclination to publicly "name and shame" politicians responsible for undermining democracy in candidate countries effectively lends external legitimacy to these so-called "stabilitocracies."[18] One of the most notable examples of such an individual

is Macedonia's Nikola Gruevski, whose decade-long tenure as prime minister was characterized by both autocratization and corruption entrenchment, yet the EU allowed the country to retain its prospective membership status. That the EU is willing to trade its own accession conditionality for so-called stability has lowered overall degrees of compliance, undermined democratization pressure on the Western Balkan regimes, and thwarted the effectiveness and credibility of EU conditionality.[19]

Although the EU's calculus on considerations of security and defense is shifting following Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the U.S. government's weakening of the Euro-Atlantic security architecture under President Donald Trump, the EU's preference for stability appears to endure, both in the Western Balkans and among new candidate states. President Aleksandar Vučić's administration in Serbia—a country central to the stability of the Balkans—maintains cozy economic and cultural ties with Russia and has been reluctant to implement trade and financial sanctions against it.[20] Growing anti-corruption protests against Vučić's government indicate significant popular commitment to the country's EU accession process, although the EU's relative silence in response has been discouraging.[21] A similar attitude has also been demonstrated vis-à-vis the "Georgian Dream" in Georgia, a pro-Russian illiberal regime that has not been curtailed despite sustained protest by pro-EU activists, and that continues to be tolerated by the EU with minimal reprimand.[22] Enabling these regions' agents of change to meaningfully challenge existing norms and to hold their leaders accountable is a crucial step toward democratization,[23] although the EU's preference for stability is likely to endure for as long as Russia's war on Ukraine drags on. Insofar as Ukraine's active and developed civil society sector has proven so vital to the country's war effort, perhaps the EU's deepened interactions with Ukraine will offer valuable insights on how civil society may be empowered in the "stabilitocracies," as a force for navigating the volatility that accompanies adamant strides toward democratization.

Finally, the legitimacy of EU conditionality has been tarnished by recurring incidents of bilateral disputes among EU member states and candidates that have complicated and prolonged the EU accession process. These disputes generally have less to do with formal membership conditions and more to do with historical and national grievances that lead member states to veto a candidate's accession unless certain concessions are extracted.

Examples include Slovenia's veto of Croatia's accession over a long-standing border dispute (Croatia eventually joined the EU in 2013), Greece's veto of Macedonia's accession over a state name dispute, and, most recently, Bulgaria's veto against North Macedonia over grievances about its national identity, language, and interpretation of history. The EU has no formal mechanism to resolve these disputes, a reality that permits their possible reemergence in the future. It is unlikely that policymakers would introduce proposed institutional reforms such as qualified majority voting to address the issue.[24] The disputing states are expected to resolve the conflict among themselves, and the asymmetric advantage held by the member states is seen to fuel antagonism and hostile relations that muddy any hope for a prompt resolution.[25] Given the effectiveness with which Hungary has already exercised its leverage in Ukraine on the premise of concern for the Hungarian minority, it can be expected that Ukraine will be vulnerable to such vetoes as it advances through the stages of negotiations with the EU, even after demonstrating progress concerning reforms.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has reinvigorated discussions about EU enlargement, following years of lost momentum driven by so-called enlargement fatigue, giving EU states little appetite for adding new members, and the rise of Euroscepticism, which has led member countries to criticize the EU and question the wisdom of continued participation in it. Ukraine's determined defense of its sovereignty and democratic values inspired an unprecedented showing of solidarity among European states, facilitated the diffusion of a shared EU identity,[26] and revitalized interest in EU enlargement, both among EU member states and aspirants.[27] Russia's invasion also instigated a growing appreciation for the benefits of European integration, including in defense,[28] a process that has acquired yet more urgency as European NATO members come to terms with an increasingly unreliable and volatile defense alliance with the United States under the Trump administration.

Ukraine's Road to EU Candidacy

Ukraine applied for EU membership on February 28, 2022, only four days into Russia's full-scale invasion. The main reason was to reaffirm the country's commitment to Europe and its values despite the widening war with Russia, but also to secure political and military support from the EU

and its member states. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy made another bold move, requesting immediate EU accession "via a new special procedure" to be applied to Ukraine.[29] This request, which sought to grant Ukraine immediate candidate status and open accession negotiations, was supported by several Central and Eastern European states,[30] including, interestingly, Hungary,[31] whose government has since switched gears and now tries to block Ukraine's EU accession.[32] Following the application submission, the European Council promptly conducted a meeting in March 2022, issuing a statement that "Ukraine belongs to the European family" and formally inviting the European Commission to submit an opinion on Ukraine's application.[33]

Within the next two months—an unprecedentedly short time frame—Ukraine filled and submitted legal questionnaires to the European Commission.[34] This swift progress was backed by strong EU support. After Russian troops withdrew from Kyiv at the end of March 2022, EU officials resumed visits, and diplomats returned to the city, signaling solidarity for Ukraine's EU accession. Solidarity, however, did not mean suspending the EU's meritocratic accession criteria just because Ukraine was at war. Several EU member states, some of which were among Ukraine's strongest military allies, firmly insisted that the accession process needed to remain merit-based (the Netherlands), and pointed to weaknesses in Ukraine's institutional stability, rule of law, and fight against corruption (Denmark and Sweden).[35] The European Commission had the authority to independently decide on Ukraine's application, but needed unanimous approval from EU member states to grant Ukraine candidate status. Unwilling to take risks, the Commission sought certainty before making its move. On account of rising skepticism, there was a chance that Ukraine could have faced Bosnia and Herzegovina's scenario (before it received candidate status in December 2022) and become a "potential candidate" with conditions to fulfill before receiving actual candidate status. To prevent this outcome, the European Commission reportedly held informal talks with the skeptical member states, incorporating the conditions they saw as necessary to secure their support.[36]

This Commission-led process eventually produced consensus, and on June 17, 2022, the Commission issued a positive opinion on Ukraine. The Commission recommended that the European Council grant Ukraine an EU membership prospective and candidate status, while setting seven steps as conditions for this status:

1. Improved selection of Constitutional Court (CCU) judges with the participation of international experts.
2. Finalizing the relaunch of key judicial institutions—namely, the High Council of Justice (HCJ) and High Qualification Commission of Judges (HQCJ)—with the participation of international experts.
3. Anti-corruption measures, including finalizing the appointment of a new Specialized Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office (SAPO) Head and the launch of a selection procedure for a National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine (NABU) Head.
4. Anti-money-laundering initiatives.
5. Implementation of the anti-oligarchization law, including recommendations by the European Commission for Democracy Through Law, otherwise known as the Venice Commission.
6. Harmonization of audio-visual media legislation with EU standards.
7. Changes in legislation on national minorities.[37]

This made the Commission's opinion on Ukraine a unique case. Unlike usual practice, the Commission did not recommend opening negotiations with the candidate country but instead granted candidate status, formally implying that Ukraine was not yet ready to receive it but would be once it fulfilled these seven key steps. In addition, the opinion did not clearly specify that negotiations with Ukraine would be opened once conditions have been fulfilled. Moreover, it explicitly stated that any step could be reversed if the underlying conditions were not met, signaling that backsliding on any step might potentially revoke the candidate status in principle.

The seven steps outlined by the European Commission were essentially reform blocks that Ukraine needed to implement to build the core of its future compliance with the political Copenhagen criteria related to stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and respect for minority rights.

First, the European Commission highlighted the urgent need for Ukraine to reform its Constitutional Court (CCU) in line with Venice Commission recommendations. The issue stemmed from the CCU's previous decision of October 2020, which abolished electronic asset declarations, deprived anti-corruption bodies of verification powers, and eliminated criminal liability

for false declarations for public officials. This paralyzed the anti-corruption system and triggered a constitutional crisis, forcing the Ukrainian president to request an opinion from the Venice Commission on the overall constitutional situation and the state of anti-corruption legislation after the CCU's decision was passed. In one of the recommendations, the Venice Commission called for the transparent and credible selection of CCU judges, including through integrity checks.[38] Since relevant legislation on such selection was already pending in the Ukrainian Parliament, the European Commission urged the legislation's swift adoption and implementation as the first step.

On judicial governance, the Commission noted that since July 2021, Ukraine has had a legal framework for integrity and ethics checks of HCJ and HQCJ members, fully aligned with Venice Commission recommendations. Vetting bodies were operational, and their work was resumed after the start of the full-scale invasion. Therefore, the European Commission called for completing this process as a second step.

In contrast to the other steps, in which the Commission mainly focused on implementation issues, corruption was flagged as a significant challenge to be addressed. In its assessment of measures already in place to fight corruption, the Commission gave a rather comprehensive assessment, acknowledging Ukraine's success in preventive tools, including an electronic asset declaration system and the Prozorro public procurement platform. At the same time, it stressed the need for stronger law enforcement reforms to be effectively implemented, including a larger number of investigations and a credible track record of high-level corruption prosecutions. The Commission also raised concerns about the independence of the specialized anti-corruption institutions, calling for the transparent, merit-based selection of their leadership, including integrity checks. Further, the Commission issued an unprecedented demand to finalize the appointment of the SAPO Head, who had been selected but remained unappointed due to internal opposition among the selection commission's national members, allegedly controlled by the Office of the President. The Commission also called for the launch and completion of the selection process for the NABU head. Both requirements were combined into the third step, and the government proceeded to complete the long-delayed appointments.[39]

These first three steps formed the core of the Commission's opinion, while the following four steps were not decisive in terms of future

compliance with the political Copenhagen criteria, but were included following consultations with either Ukraine or EU member states. Step five (on implementing the anti-oligarchic law) was a result of consultations with Ukraine, and step four (on anti-money laundering) and step six (on harmonizing the audiovisual media legislation with EU standards) were included on account of consultation with EU states—although the latter step did not even specify the issues to be addressed.

Hungary requested the inclusion of step seven (concerning changes to legislation on national minorities), on account of its alleged concerns over Ukraine's Hungarian minority, which Viktor Orbán's regime has long leveraged in its dealings with Ukraine. Beyond concerns over the country's minority language protection regime, Hungary had previously clashed with Ukraine on issues of dual citizenship (through attempts to distribute Hungarian passports in contravention of Ukrainian legislation), and with calls for cultural and political forms of autonomy for the Hungarian minority.[40] Although Hungary promised not to block Ukraine's EU candidacy in 2022, its leaders likely envisioned that the inclusion of the seventh step would secure the endurance of their leverage in future negotiations. Nevertheless, the seventh step prompted the Ukrainian government to finalize much-needed amendments to its legal framework on national minorities, as well as accompanying implementation mechanisms, which it submitted to the Venice Commission for evaluation.

On June 23, 2022, based on the Commission's recommendation, the European Council granted candidate status to Ukraine on the condition that it implement the seven steps outlined in the opinion from June 17th and invited the Commission to monitor Ukraine's progress and report by the end of 2022. (Moldova was granted candidate status on the same date.)

Road to Opening Negotiations

Already in December 2022, the Ukrainian Parliament passed legislation for a transparent, merit-based selection process for CCU judges, which ensured participation of international experts.[41] It introduced a pre-selection body: the Advisory Group of Experts (AGE), comprising six members, half of whom were international experts, to assess candidates' "high moral qualities" and "recognized competence in law."[42] The president, parliament,

and the Council of Judges each appointed one Ukrainian member, while international members had to be formally appointed by the government based on nominations by the Venice Commission and international donors. This mirrored the pre-2022 model for the judicial council's relaunch. However, unlike that earlier model, the new legislation did not grant international AGE members a decisive vote, as they needed support from at least one national member to decide on a candidate. This maintained the possibility for national members to potentially block the process, which had already happened in the selection process for the SAPO Head.

On the one hand, Ukraine has a solid rationale to insist on a different model of international expert participation in CCU judge selection, as appointing judges to the highest court deciding on the constitutionality of legislation and procedures is a domestic issue crucial to internal sovereignty. On the other hand, it is reasonable to guess that Ukrainian authorities sought to influence the selection given the CCU's power to decide on the constitutionality of martial law, elections during wartime, and other important issues. Surprisingly, they received unexpected backing from the Venice Commission. When assessing draft legislation in November 2022, the Commission approved a voting mechanism that excluded the potential for a decisive vote by international members while acknowledging the potential for deadlock.[43] Predictably, Ukraine took this conclusion as a green light to pass the legislation.

After the law's adoption, the Venice Commission revised its previous recommendations, urging Ukraine to either expand the number of international members in AGE or to grant a decisive vote to international members.[44] Until that happened, the Commission refused to nominate its AGE member. The Ukrainian Parliament drafted amendments to the law, changing the voting procedure and giving preference to international votes. The Venice Commission refused to provide an opinion on this draft until it conducted rounds of consultations with Ukrainian authorities and civil society.[45] In July 2023, the parliament finally adopted amendments to the law incorporating the Venice Commission recommendations.[46] By November, AGE members were appointed,[47] which marked Ukraine's fulfillment of step one.

The initiative to reestablish the two key judicial councils emerged in 2020. The judicial councils were responsible for the selection, promotion,

and disciplining of judges, processes undertaken through integrity vetting and transparent, merit-based selection procedures that meaningfully engaged international experts. In 2019, Ukraine used a panel of international experts to assist in selecting judges for the new High Anti-Corruption Court (HACC), a model proposed by civil society and backed by international donors,[48] and considered successful in addressing corporatism and corruption in judicial appointments. Full-scale vetting of all judges using this model was seen as costly and time-consuming, so relaunching the judicial councils that are responsible for overseeing judicial appointments and integrity seemed a more efficient way to ensure public trust in the broader reform process. As a result, in 2020, Ukraine was required to implement the relaunch of the judicial councils as a condition for receiving EU macro-financial COVID-19 pandemic assistance for enlargement and neighborhood countries.[49]

To meet EU conditionality, Ukraine drafted laws to establish panels of international experts to evaluate integrity and professional ethics: the Ethics Council for vetting and selecting HCJ members and the Selection Commission for appointing HQCJ members (non-operational since 2019), to be composed of an equal number of national and international members, with the latter being nominated by donors and holding a casting vote, thus ensuring that decisions required their majority support.[50] The Venice Commission supported this "temporary but effective measure" to foster public trust and overcome corporatism in the Ukrainian judiciary.[51] After lengthy discussions, the parliament passed the laws in October 2021, and both panels became operational.

As expected, this sparked strong backlash from the Ukrainian judiciary, which resisted reforms to the judicial council's oversight of their careers. As the only operational council and backed by the Supreme Court, the HCJ challenged laws in the CCU, arguing that they threatened judicial independence. The petition framed international participation as a threat to Ukraine's sovereignty.[52] In February 2022, the Ethics Council began integrity vetting of sitting HCJ members. Russian President Vladimir Putin, in his infamous TV address right before the full-scale invasion, claimed that Ukraine had lost judicial independence by delegating the selection of HCJ and HQCJ members to international experts, following the "West's" demands. This rhetoric echoed the HCJ's own narratives.[53] Surprisingly, the day after this address, most sitting HCJ members simultaneously resigned,

raising suspicions that corrupt officials sought Russian backing to block reforms and were aware of the upcoming invasion.[54]

Due to Russia's full-scale invasion, both the Ethics Council and the Selection Commission suspended their activities but gradually explored ways to resume work in subsequent months. By the time the European Commission issued its opinion on Ukraine's candidacy, both panels had fully restored their operations. Given previous opposition from the Ukrainian judiciary, the European Commission considered it crucial that the relaunch process was completed, leading to its inclusion as a second step.

This step was implemented without major scandals or criticism. The most notable concern regarding the Ethics Council was that it eliminated the broadcasting of its interviews as an attempt to ensure confidentiality and personal data security under martial law. With regards to the Selection Commission, the most discussed issue was its failure to provide reasons for rejecting candidates, as it applied a positive selection approach.[55] As a result of their work, the Ethics Council vetted 148 candidates and four sitting members, leading to a relaunch of the HCJ in January 2023 with a quorum of 15 (out of 21) members appointed, while the Selection Commission has assessed 302 candidates, and the HQCJ was restored in June 2023 with all members appointed.

At first glance, the formal implementation of step three required Ukraine to achieve tangible results by simply increasing the number of investigations and maintaining a credible track record of prosecutions and convictions for high-level corruption, as well as appointing the heads of SAPO and NABU. However, as mentioned earlier, step three on fighting corruption was most extensively covered by the European Commission in its opinion. Since corruption was emphasized as a significant issue in Ukraine, the third step was framed in broad terms, highlighting challenges rather than offering specific solutions. It appeared that Ukraine was mostly expected to demonstrate a clear commitment to addressing this deep-rooted problem. This resulted in some level of confusion with its fulfillment.

Firstly, despite the full-scale invasion, NABU, SAPO, and HACC managed to increase their prewar case numbers. During the period spanning mid-2022 to mid-2023, NABU and SAPO initiated 286 corruption cases (by handing notice of suspicion), which represented an 11 percent increase compared to 2021, with 129 cases exposed. The quality also seemed to improve.

In 2021, investigations were initiated against thirty-eight top public officials, including one member of parliament, while from mid-2022 to mid-2023 the number increased to fifty, including fifteen members of parliament. Notably, this period saw high-profile cases, including one in which Vsevolod Kniaziev, a former president of the Supreme Court, was allegedly caught with a $3 million bribe from an oligarch, and another in which Vasyl Lozinskyi, a deputy minister for Communities, Territories, and Infrastructure Development, allegedly took a $400,000 bribe for facilitating state procurement.[56] HACC contributed to a credible track record of high-level corruption convictions, delivering seventy-four verdicts from June 2022 to September 2023, compared to thirty-four verdicts in 2021. Moreover, the number of acquittals decreased while guilty verdicts increased compared to the pre-2022 period, suggesting stronger prosecution efforts and improved case quality.

Secondly, in July 2022, the appointment of the previously selected SAPO Head was completed, which helped unblock investigation procedures in high-profile criminal cases after years of delay, including into the so-called "Rotterdam Plus" case, where overpayments for electricity between 2016 and 2019 resulted in alleged damages that exceeded UAH 38 billion (approximately $1.35 billion). In addition, in March 2023, a new NABU Head was appointed during a transparent and merit-based selection process involving international experts.

In principle, this should have meant the successful fulfillment of step three by Ukraine as a whole. However, the European Commission expected it not to just formally achieve results within a year but to continue efforts to sustain progress. This reflected a general approach in the Commission's evaluation of any candidate country's anti-corruption efforts. As a result, challenges highlighted within the third step would still require further action. This included, for example, institutional independence of anti-corruption bodies (particularly SAPO, which remained a structural unit of the politically influenced prosecutor general's office), their limited capacity (including insufficient NABU staff, SAPO prosecutors, and HACC judges), and ineffective criminal procedures that hindered high-profile corruption cases (NABU's lack of access to independent wiretapping and forensic services; legal provisions enabling procedural delays and insufficient time limits for pretrial investigations, as well as grounds for plea bargain agreements in corruption cases).

Although the European Commission spoke highly of Ukraine's corruption prevention mechanisms when outlining the seven steps, in October 2023, Ukraine restored the submission of electronic asset declarations by public officials and public access to the declarations register, which was restricted under martial law to protect the personal data of public officials, especially those in temporarily occupied territories. Restoring public access was debated by national authorities due to security concerns and closely monitored by civil society and the European Parliament.[57] When restoring this submission process, Ukraine simultaneously limited the verification mandate of the National Agency on Corruption Prevention (NACP), excluding certain assets from review (already verified or acquired before joining civil service). This was a move that was difficult to justify based on security grounds. Predictably, it caught the Commission's attention and made it factually reconsider Ukraine's progress on preventive measures. For Ukraine, it was a clear signal that any reverse in reforms would not go unnoticed.

Steps four to six were also moving toward implementation, and the European Commission deemed the progress acceptable. The money laundering and de-oligarchizing measures facilitate long-term processes that all states deal with. In other words, there is no moment or context in which money laundering stops being a problem that needs tackling, and most politically advanced states deal with such issues. In 2023, Ukraine's institutional capacity in tackling money laundering increased as the number of investigations nearly tripled and the number of final verdicts more than doubled.[58]

The seventh step will require long-term negotiation between the Ukrainian state and society and the EU. Ukrainian society is composed of a wide range of national, ethnic, linguistic, and religious identities. In 1998, Ukraine became a party to the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. Since 2005, it has been a party to the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages. Candidate states are required to reform their minority rights legislation in adherence with the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, which serves as a benchmark in the European Commission's assessment of candidates' progress (although not all EU member states have ratified this convention). Nevertheless, minority protection policy within Ukraine since independence has been characterized as largely inconsistent and susceptible to the interests of ruling parties.[59]

Among the foremost concerns of minority rights advocates in Ukraine are policies related to language and education. Language policy has long figured as a fraught issue in Ukrainian public discourse and has gained evermore resonance since Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022. The Ukrainian language was declared the official language of Ukraine in Article 10 of Section I of the 1991 Ukrainian Constitution, which also guarantees the "[f]ree development, use, and protection of Russian and other languages of national minorities."[60] Successive legislative efforts to secure the prominence of the Ukrainian language attracted much scrutiny, spurred by concerns over the rights of minority language speakers. Advocacy initiatives calling for the official recognition of the Russian language, which is spoken by most Ukrainians, often overshadowed activism that called for the protection of minority languages spoken among only a fraction of the population.

Viktor Yushchenko's presidency (2004–2010) witnessed the active promotion of the Ukrainian language and increased attention to the reform of Ukraine's minority language legislation (in part to signal Ukraine's commitment to its Euro-Atlantic reorientation). The next Ukrainian president, Viktor Yanukovych (2010–2014), immediately sought to reverse Yushchenko's Ukrainization policies. In a bid to secure a more prominent role for the Russian language in Ukrainian society, Yanukovych pushed through the 2012 language law, which declared Russian a "regional" language in territories where the share of people declaring it as their native language exceeded ten percent of the population—a criterion that consequently extended this status to the entire southeastern half of the country.[61] Although eighteen minority languages were granted the same status on much smaller territories inhabited by their speakers, the scope of their public use remained limited, and the law primarily concerned the status of Russian.[62]

In the immediate aftermath of the Euromaidan, the Ukrainian Parliament revoked the 2012 language law on the premise that its adoption had violated parliamentary procedure. Anti-Maidan activists declared the annulment to be discriminatory against Russian speakers. Even pro-Maidan forces were concerned that the move was ill-timed and threatened to figure as a controversial flashpoint in Ukrainian society.[63] Concerns over language rights also permeated the rhetoric of Russian-backed separatists in the territories of Donetsk and Luhansk, where the Russian-speaking population had long been exposed to disinformation and anti-Ukrainian sentiment

through Russian-language media and social networks sanctioned by Russian authorities. Even before the annexation of Crimea and military clashes in southeastern Ukraine, Russian TV channels were leveraged to encourage Russian speakers in Ukraine to undertake aggressive actions against Ukrainian authorities. These media outlets promoted ideas of greater autonomy for various regions in Ukraine through the country's so-called federalization in order to undermine the power of Ukraine's central government and its unitary structure.[64]

Following Yanukovych's ouster on account of the Euromaidan Revolution (2013–2014), the promotion of the Ukrainian language gained momentum under President Petro Poroshenko. The adoption in 2019 of the Law on State Language, which made Ukrainian compulsory in various spheres of public life, was seen as the culmination of the gradual prioritization of a dominant ethno-linguistic group in Ukraine following a series of laws from 2015 on toponomy and language quotas in media and education.[65] The law prescribed the use of Ukrainian as the default language of all public communication, reduced education opportunities for minority languages, and removed the compulsory teaching of Russian in high schools and onward. The 2019 law's treatment of the Russian language was especially contentious, drawing criticism from Russian speakers in Ukraine who considered the law a violation of their linguistic freedom, as well as from international observers, who stressed that the longstanding repression of the Ukrainian language did not justify the marginalization of minority languages (with the Russian language seen as foremost among them).[66]

The era following the Euromaidan ultimately increased the politicization of Ukraine's policy toward its ethno-cultural minorities.[67] Although minority groups (notably the Hungarians, Crimean Tatars, and the Roma) were initially embraced under Poroshenko's presidency and several institutional structures for inter-ethnic policy were established, these initiatives were deemed limited by minority rights advocates who condemned the continued incoherence of developments in minority protection standards.[68] The Venice Commission also monitored these developments and expressed particular concern about a perceived imbalance between the legitimate goal of promoting the Ukrainian language and the need to safeguard minority language rights.[69] Following the election of Volodymyr Zelenskyy in 2019, institutional initiatives were undertaken to amend the 2019 law, including the creation of a designated

autonomous body on ethnic affairs, the State Service of Ukraine for Ethnic Affairs and Freedom of Conscience, which was intended to formalize the dialogue between state and minority groups.

Despite their critics, these legislative efforts, especially the 2019 law, attracted widespread support among most citizens.[70] The gradual implementation of the law considerably increased the presence of Ukrainian in the everyday life of the urban population. Its increased prevalence ultimately served as a valuable focal point around which to rally against Russia's escalated invasion. Moreover, it aided a widespread transition among many Russian speakers in Ukraine who adjusted their language practices in favor of Ukrainian.[71] In the aftermath of the full-scale invasion in 2022, the Ukrainian parliament passed laws restricting Russian books, music, and media, reflecting widespread acknowledgment of the threats posed by the language of the oppressor/aggressor and the need to use Ukrainian as a language of resistance. Yet international observers have stressed that the longstanding repression of the Ukrainian language did not justify the marginalization of other minority languages, including Russian.[72]

The Venice Commission's recommendations on the subject in its offer of EU candidacy added the impetus to actively address remaining gaps in Ukraine's minority rights legislation, which were first demonstrated in the adoption on December 13, 2022, of the Law on National Minorities of Ukraine that replaced the original 1992 law. Among the foremost issues raised by the Venice Commission were perceived limitations on the use of minority languages as languages of instruction in schools, concerns that had been expressed in its previous opinions on a separate but related law concerning education.[73] It was also stressed that representatives of national minorities and indigenous peoples should be consulted in the legislative process; that seemingly arbitrary categorical distinctions between languages of indigenous peoples, national minorities, and those that are official languages of the EU should be removed; and that priorities to strengthen the status of the state language must be balanced with protections of minority languages.[74]

Start of Negotiations

According to the Council's decision of June 23, 2022, the European Commission was to assess Ukraine's progress on the seven steps as part of

its regular enlargement package. On November 8, 2023, the Commission issued its first annual enlargement report on Ukraine, which confirmed the fulfillment of steps one, two, four, and six, while it noted that steps three, five, and seven required further action. The Commission recommended that the European Council adopt the negotiating framework once Ukraine fulfilled an additional four steps:

1. Enacting a law proposed by the government to increase the staffing cap for NABU.
2. Removing provisions in the Law on Corruption Prevention restricting NACP's powers to continue the verification of assets that have already undergone the verification process, and provisions limiting NACP's powers to verify property acquired by declarants before joining public service, without prejudice to rules applying to national security during wartime.
3. Enacting a law regulating lobbying in line with European standards, as part of the anti-oligarch action plan.
4. Enacting a law addressing remaining Venice Commission recommendations of June and October 2023 linked to the law on national minorities, while also addressing Venice Commission recommendations linked to laws on state language, media, and education.[75]

On December 14, 2023, the European Council passed a decision to open accession negotiations with Ukraine, inviting it to adopt negotiating frameworks once steps set out by the Commission were taken.

The European Commission's recommendation to open accession negotiations with Ukraine was significant not only because it recognized the country's progress in fulfilling the seven steps or because it set four new conditions, but also because the Commission signaled its willingness to start preparatory work, including the screening (analytical examination of the *acquis*) and drafting of a negotiating framework. In practice, this meant that although Ukraine had four remaining conditions to fulfill, the technical preparations could begin immediately after the Council's decision to approve the recommendation. Contrary to Ukraine's experience, Albania and North Macedonia had to wait for over two years for such a stage to begin, since the EU used it as a de facto blockade. In Ukraine's case, geopolitical factors

and effective accession diplomacy ensured a streamlined process, preventing technical steps from becoming another delay.

When it came to the additional conditions outlined by the European Commission, the first two related to step three were no surprise for Ukraine. As mentioned earlier, the European Commission expected sustained commitment from Ukraine in tackling systemic corruption. Starting in June 2022, the Commission closely monitored Ukraine's reforms, not only regarding this step but in a broader context, paying particular attention to civil society's reactions. Some have even suggested that Ukraine was already aware of these additional conditions and had begun addressing them right after the Commission's opinion was published, even before it was approved by the European Council's decision in December that year.[76]

Therefore, at the beginning of December 2023, Ukraine amended its law on NABU to increase its staff cap from 700 to 1,000, raising the number of senior positions from 500 to 750. Given budget constraints, staffing expansion had to be phased accordingly: 100 positions in 2024, 100 in 2025, and an additional 100 in 2026. That same month, Ukraine amended the Law on Corruption Prevention to grant NACP's mandate of verifying assets already covered by previous verification or acquired before joining the civil service if new information was received or new sources of information became available. Technically speaking, Ukraine preempted the fulfillment of these two conditions before it even received the European Council's approval.

Since the adoption of the 2022 Law on National Minorities, the Venice Commission and the Ukrainian government have continued a dialogue concerning further amendments to solidify the law's compliance with European standards. The 2022 law was amended twice in 2023, following two Venice Commission Opinions containing further recommendations on the need for more specificity in certain aspects of the law.

The 2022 Law expanded on the compulsory use of Ukrainian in the public sphere, including in public communications (such as signs, announcements, and captions), in national and regional media (where 90 percent of content must be in Ukrainian), and private publishing houses (which must produce half of their books in Ukrainian).[77] Particularly controversial among critics were ongoing limitations concerning provisions on the use of minority languages as languages of instruction in schools. Notably, the ongoing issue raised the ire of Hungary and Romania, who

accused Kyiv of limiting the rights of national minorities and requested that the Venice Commission review the new law.[78]

The 2023 amendments have reduced the number of subjects that must be taught in the Ukrainian language in secondary schools where national minorities are enrolled who use one of the official languages of the EU.[79] The Ukrainian government agreed that only subjects of key importance to national identity, namely Ukrainian language and literature, Ukrainian history, and national defense, would be taught in the Ukrainian language, which has been recognized as a significant compromise that further demonstrates Ukraine's commitment to the EU accession process.[80] The amended law also permits election campaigns to be conducted in minority languages (on condition that translations of the electoral materials into the official language are provided) and allows national minorities to broadcast 70 percent of their radio and television programs in their language. The Ukrainian government's amendments eventually received more positive assessments from the parties representing the Hungarian and Romanian national minorities in Ukraine, and Budapest and Bucharest have similarly acknowledged that important concerns were addressed.[81]

On the Ukrainian side, concerns were raised about recommendations that pushed for provisions that granted the Russian language the same rights as other national minorities five years following the suspension of martial law. Ukraine proceeded to grant privileged status and protections to Ukraine's indigenous languages and the official languages of the European Union, strategically omitting explicit acknowledgment of responsibilities toward the Russian language. Although the Venice Commission has recognized the justification for this approach in light of Russia's brutal aggression, it has been clear that the approach will be tolerated in the "transitional period during martial law," after which it would expect legislative action to prevent discrimination against ethnic Russians and the Russian-speaking population.[82] These debates speak to broader questions of categorizing Russian as a "minority language" in line with other languages spoken by small fractions of Ukraine's population. The problem is that, because of Russia's centuries-old political domination over Ukraine, Russian is not a minority language per se, but a language in which a large majority of the Ukrainian population is proficient, in addition to Ukrainian and/or other languages they may consider a native or mother tongue.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the steady and fast progress that Ukraine has made on its road to EU accession, which Ukrainians see as an existential goal for their independent state. It is a remarkable achievement both for the Ukrainian state, which has managed to implement difficult reforms amid fighting against a full-scale invasion by a bigger state, and the EU, which, despite its fame for slow bureaucratic process, has tapped into European solidarity to give crucial momentum to the enlargement process. In February 2022, many expected that if Ukraine's accession were at all realistic, it would take decades; barely three years later, Ukraine is at the negotiation stage and already meeting some benchmarks.

Despite the fairly optimistic status quo, challenges and potential obstacles remain beyond the elephant in the room: Russia's continued aggression and maximalist goal of ending Ukrainian independent statehood. On Ukraine's side, the main danger is the gradual loss of momentum in reform processes as entrenched interests seeking to derail the anti-corruption progress manage to consolidate and mount a backlash. Revelations of a kickback scheme in Ukraine's energy industry in the summer of 2025 prompted widespread protests that put Zelenskyy's feet to the fire and demonstrated the Ukrainian public's enduring expectations of government accountability, even in wartime. Although the incident came with the short-term cost of Ukraine's reputation damage internationally, it underscored the successes of a functioning anti-corruption infrastructure and the long-term benefits of durable transparency at home.

As illustrated by Eastern European EU members such as Romania, Bulgaria, and Croatia, the road toward lower corruption is not only long and winding, but also full of potholes. While the trajectories are positive overall, progress has been slow and uneven. On the EU's side, there are two potential obstacles. The first one is a veto by a member state along the lines of Greece and Bulgaria's staggered vetoes of North Macedonia's accession. In Ukraine's case, a veto is most likely to come from Hungary's pro-Russian Orban regime, but it is not impossible to imagine a strained Polish-Ukrainian or Romanian-Ukrainian relationship over memory politics or economic integration issues, especially in the agriculture sector. The second potential obstacle may come from far-right victories in Europe, which could place the entire enlargement

process on the back burner, as some member states may seek to redesign the union, pivoting from liberal democracy.

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CONCLUSION

Europeanization in Practice

CONTINUITY, CHANGE, AND REGIONAL REALITIES

Aaron F. Brantly

Is Europeanization dead? At the conclusion of all these chapters, the likely answer to this question is no. However, this does not mean that Europeanization is thriving. Each chapter in the volume has highlighted many of the diverse challenges facing states in the Eastern Partnership/European Neighborhood. Each state faces unique challenges that undermine or strengthen its willingness to engage in Europeanization. Moreover, the challenges are dynamic and changing over time in relation to domestic and geopolitical considerations. The introduction to this volume sought to contextualize Europeanization within the neoliberal institutionalist and constructivist literatures. Europeanization is simultaneously an effort to foster institutional and normative convergence. It identified that Europeanization is a process both inside the EU and external to it. Furthermore, it showed that Europeanization is evolutionary over time and space.

The chapters in this volume each took different theoretical and methodological perspectives on the overarching concept of Europeanization and de-Europeanization. And while some countries experience a cyclical ebb and flow relationship with the EU, and others have turned away from Europe because of domestic and regional geopolitical concerns, each chapter

recognizes that the idea of Europeanization remains attractive to large portions of each country's polity.

The core idea of Europe and, by extension, Europeanization as a process remains, even if not all states are actively pursuing it. States where governments are actively de-Europeanizing and seeking alternative models must, in some measure, address the underlying institutional and normative concepts presented by Europeanization. This forces states and polities to look in the proverbial mirror, not because Europe is perfect, but because it offers a model for how states can come together and build a rules-based order that fosters pluralistic norms.

The chapters also highlight a broad and largely insurmountable short-term challenge to Europeanization. Namely, that states which are faced with complex security environments largely defined by other regional actors, particularly the Russian Federation, are caught between two worlds. While the present trend in Georgia is towards Russia, we see in the Moldova chapter that this need not always be the case. The Belarus case is particularly instructive as it highlights the most extreme version of de-Europeanization, but it also inherently highlights the weaknesses of authoritarianism. The challenges faced by both Armenia and Azerbaijan are unique and largely regional in nature. Both are heavily constrained by recent conflict and by their mutual relationship to regional actors. Continued European engagements with both are likely to have a moderating effect. A similar moderating effect is likely to also be present in Georgia.

The place where Europeanization remains most robust is Ukraine. Again, geopolitical shifts in 2014 and again in 2022 have forced Ukraine toward Europe. This is not an unwilling move by Ukraine, although the speed at which it is occurring might be even greater than expected were it not for large numbers of displaced persons and a large-scale war. Ukraine's push toward Europe and its Europeanization process also illustrates one of the fundamental challenges faced by Europeanizing states, particularly those on the periphery: How does the state maintain itself when its people want to live and work in Europe? How can it Europeanize, build institutions, develop norms and behaviors, and integrate without undermining the stability of the state itself?

Europeanization is disruptive. In some instances, it may even be destabilizing. That does not mean it is bad. The institutions and idea of

Europe have been evolving since the late 1940s. States have sacrificed some forms of sovereignty for social, cultural, political, and important economic benefits. These benefits also have associated costs for domestic economic and political actors. Where the European Union can induce states to Europeanize while minimizing the negative externalities of doing so, Europeanization will continue to be successful. Where the negative externalities, either in the form of domestic politics, domestic economic concerns, or regional geopolitics, outweigh the perceived benefits of Europeanization, states will continue to vacillate, both recognizing the benefits but also balancing them against domestic or regional issues.

This volume fills a gap in the literature by diving deep into the concept of Europeanization and de-Europeanization in the Eastern Partnership. It adds to a robust literature on European integration and provides country-specific nuance that illustrates that Europeanization is not a fait accompli. As much as scholarship might like to think of the European idea, institutions, or norms as fixed and complete, this does not align with the historical record. Europeanization as a concept continues to evolve to meet challenges across dimensions of interaction. Institutions and ideas serve as a guide for other states to follow and a bridge by which to join. But the choice to Europeanize still largely resides outside the hands of Europe itself. And this choice is conditioned by a range of factors that have less to do with the validity and value of the EU's institutions and norms and more to do with the unique conditions within the partnership countries. Europeanization is not dead, nor is de-Europeanization a significant phenomenon within the Eastern Partnership. Rather, Europeanization remains a means of engagement with states on the periphery of the EU that has varying degrees of success, largely dependent on conditions within or surrounding those countries.

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Nataliya D. Brantly

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