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**The Normative EU, the Hard Power Russia
and the Small States Between Them:
Cases of Armenia, Georgia and Moldova**

Abstract

The foreign policy choices of Armenia, Georgia and Moldova have been largely shaped by the power balance between the European Union and Russia. The EU's normativity in regional integration was opposed by Russia's hard power approach. Although the potential benefits of the integration drove Armenia, Georgia and Moldova to sign a framework agreement with the EU, the latter's inability to provide security guarantees has reduced the EU's attractiveness leaving the future of the Eastern Partnership uncertain.

Keywords: European Union, Russia, regional integration, Eastern Partnership, Europeanization

Introduction

After the fall of the Iron Curtain, democracy promotion in post-Soviet countries became a priority foreign policy goal for the European Union which consistently tried to implement political, economic and social transformation mechanisms (Sadurski 2004) in the Newly Independent States (NIS), including the Russian Federation. Good governance and democracy promotion also became the primary component of the EU's development and cooperation programmes (Zanger 2000). In 1990s the EU introduced various economic and technical cooperation programmes (TACIS, TRACECA, INOGATE etc.). In the meantime, the EU was seeking to institutionalize its relations with post-Soviet states through Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs) which were signed with ten countries and entered into force mostly in late 1990s (1997-1999). The aim of these agreements is to strengthen their democracies, encourage trade and investment and develop their economies through cooperation in a wide range of areas and through political dialogue (Partnership and Cooperation Agreements). The PCAs served as the EU's first attempt to establish formal political relations with post-Soviet countries which proved to be relatively stable in the coming years.

In 2004, after a lengthy reform and democratisation process 10 Central and Eastern European countries (CEECs)¹ meeting the Copenhagen criteria, enjoyed full EU membership, which changed the EU from inside and outside. It reached the physical borders of the former Soviet Union and started showing extended interest towards its new neighbours. This geographic shift resulted in a geopolitical shift, too. In March 2003, the European Commission (the Commission) published the communication "Wider Europe – Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours" (*Wider Europe...* 2003) which introduced the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) as an effective tool to interact with the EU's Eastern and Southern neighbours. It stressed the importance of securing the EU's external borders and considered strengthening relations with those neighbouring countries that did not have the perspective of EU membership for the time being. The Communication clearly defined the scope of those neighbours including Russia and the Western NIS (Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine) while the South Caucasus countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan and

¹ Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia. Except for Cyprus and Malta, all others are former Communist states and Warsaw Pact members.

Georgia) fell outside (*Wider Europe...* 2003, p. 4). Nevertheless, after the Rose Revolution in Georgia in November 2003, the EU started viewing the South Caucasus countries in the framework of its political interests. This change was also reflected in the ENP Strategy Paper (adopted in July 2004) where the Commission recommended the inclusion of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia within the scope of the ENP (*European Neighbourhood Policy Strategy Paper* 2004, p. 10).

The inclusion of Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan into the ENP marked a breakthrough in EU-Russia relations mostly due to the latter's perception that the EU was increasingly entering its space of 'privileged interests' (*Interview given by Dmitry Medvedev to Television Channels Channel One* 2008). Despite the Russian ban on Georgian and Moldovan wines and Russia's increasing reluctance over the ENP, the bilateral Action Plans signed between the EU and its Eastern neighbours adopted in 2006 were implemented without major obstacles. However, the 2008 Russian-Georgian war over the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia changed the security dynamics in the EU-Russia 'shared neighbourhood'. Strongly condemning Russia's unilateral decision to recognise the independence of the two entities (*Extraordinary European Council Presidency Conclusions* 2008), the EU became more concerned about the security and stability in its neighbourhood which resulted in a new targeted initiative for the Eastern Neighbours (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine), the Eastern Partnership (EaP) launched in 2009. Despite serving as a democratisation and reform platform for the countries, the programme also bred increased Russian disagreement with the EU's regional policies. The three small EaP states – Armenia, Georgia and Moldova – have been largely affected by Russian subsequent actions. The latter's hard power has been extensively used to discourage these countries' European aspirations and reassert its control over them.

The first chapter of this article compares the regional policy toolkit of the EU and Russia. It is then followed by specific sections dealing with the foreign policy challenges of Armenia, Georgia and Moldova. The final part draws conclusions over the future of the power balance in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood.

On a side note, it is worth stating that this article does not aim to assess the effectiveness of either the EU's or Russia's regional policy. It rather discusses the role these powers play in transforming their common neighbourhood.

Normativity *versus* Realpolitik in Eu-Russia Relations

The relations of the two major powers in larger Europe have been largely determined by their foreign policy tools. The fall of the Soviet Union made the EU rewrite its regional policy and take a broader view on an entire set of CEECs that started identifying themselves with the rest of Europe. In 1990, the Charter of Paris was adopted which proclaimed human rights, liberal democracy, rule of law and peaceful conflict settlement as the normative foundations of the New Europe (*Charter of Paris for a New Europe* 1990).

The EU has offered the NIS such benefits as financial and technical assistance, market access and people-to-people contacts which were further institutionalized through ENP and EaP. With these projects, the EU has been consistently trying to construct itself as a centre of democratic gravity (Emerson, Noutcheva 2005) attracting a ‘ring of friends’ (*Wider Europe...* 2003), that would comply with the EU norms and values. The EU has promoted democratic transition in the neighbouring countries in order to avoid potential threats of authoritarianism and weak civil societies. In the literature, this normative approach has largely been referred as ‘Europeanization’ (Featherstone, Radaelli, 2000; Cowles *et al.* 2001; Lavenex, Uçarer 2004; Freyburg *et al.* 2009; Wong 2011).

Despite taking different forms, Europeanization is a general concept of integrating EU’s partner countries into its common system of legal, political and economic norms through means of attraction and conditionality (Schimmelfennig, Sedelmeier 2004; Schimmelfennig 2012). As per security, the EU has generally attempted to establish correlation between democratisation and conflict resolution which helped create a favourable political, economic and social environment that would attract the separatist groups in the region (Simão 2012, pp. 194-196). Europeanization has also become the EU’s key conflict resolution mechanism (Coppieters *et al.* 2004, p. 4).

The Russian approach towards regional integration has been quite different. Despite the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia continued to regard the NIS as its domain of influence due to most of these countries’ energy dependence on Russia, a large number of their citizens working in Russia, and ultimately the historical proximity dating back to the Tsarist Empire. Resting on this approach, Russia did not put strong emphasis on the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) as a partnership tool but rather established bilateral relations with individual countries with an imperialist view of cutting

foreign policy alternatives for these countries. With no attempt to become a symbol of democratic change, Russia has made systematic attempts to destabilise the countries seeking closer integration with the EU (and NATO), and has increasingly used coercion to safeguard its influence in the post-Soviet space (Delcour, Kostanyan 2014, p. 1).

It is also worth mentioning that Russia is also less confined in its foreign policy toolkit than the EU. It is able to employ a broader array of instruments (Tolstrup 2009, p. 929) ranging from economic benefits to hard power. On the contrary, the EU is restricted to its own normative principles which exclude any possibility of direct military interventions or other form of coercion. However, Russia's reaction is heavily dependent on a country's proximity to the EU. The more advanced, wide-ranging and tangible integration with the EU in institutional terms, the more threatening it will be perceived as by Russia, leading to stronger countervailing responses (Delcour, Wolczuk 2015, p. 467).

Despite putting hard power at its foreign policy strategy, Russia has also introduced an institutional framework for cooperation with some CIS countries. The Eurasian Customs Union (ECU) (now Eurasian Economic Union – EEU), launched in 2007, came as a rule-based mechanism to engage in a 'normative rivalry' with the EU (Dragneva, Wolczuk 2012, p. 9). However, as discussed in the consequent sections, instead of overt confrontation, Russia has limited the potential of the 'target countries' to deepen ties with the EU thus undermining the latter's transformative capacity.

The Return of Complementarity in Armenia's Foreign Policy

Since its independence, Armenia has consistently tried to ensure a balance of relations with all regional powers, including the EU and Russia. This approach, known as complementarity, was later fixed in the country's National Security Strategy (*Republic of Armenia National Security Strategy* 2007, p. 10). The implementation of this principle has been rather smooth until 2010s mostly due to the fact that the relations between the EU and Russia remained tolerable. In 2006, the EU-Armenia ENP Action Plan (AP) was signed drawing a roadmap for Armenia's participation in the ENP and the respective reforms and legal approximation processes that would lead to Armenia's 'stake' in the EU's internal market (EU/Armenia Action Plan 2006, p. 6). The AP also included the EU's active participation in the settlement of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict while

mostly through close cooperation with the OSCE. With limited resources to influence the conflict dynamics, the EU chose to employ soft power means such as bringing stability through (financially) supporting economic, political and legal reforms in both Armenia and Azerbaijan. In the meantime, this level of EU-Armenia cooperation was fully compatible with the country's allied relations with Russia.

In 2010, Armenia and the EU started negotiations over the Association Agreement (AA) which included the component of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA). After several years of negotiations, the document was expected to be signed at the 3rd EaP summit in Vilnius, Lithuania in November 2013. However, on 3 September 2013 the Armenian president Serzh Sargsyan declared that Armenia is determined to join the Eurasian Customs Union. On 2 October 2013, Sargsyan made another declaration reasserting Armenia's readiness to the AA without the DCFTA component that contradicted the country's proposed membership in the ECU (Poghosyan 2013). This declaration was responded by the EU Commissioner Štefan Füle who clearly put that no document would be signed at the Vilnius summit since cooperation with Armenia should be based on the existing achievements.

This abrupt shift in Armenia's foreign policy can be thoroughly explained by the multiple factors of Armenian-Russian relations. First of all, Russia can produce both security and insecurity for Armenia. The military cooperation between the two countries and Russia's leading role in the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) can be directed to provide security guarantees to Armenia, especially over the long-lasting Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. At the same time, Russia's extensive arms sales deals with Azerbaijan can pose threats to Armenia's security. Secondly, Armenia is totally dependent on Russian energy supplies. Besides, since the country's gas distribution network is owned by the Russian Gazprom, Armenia has no potential to diversify its energy market through the Iranian gas, for instance. Lastly, the remittances from Armenian migrant workers in Russia help sustain the Armenia's economy and their potential cut might create deep socio-economic problems.

Armenia's eventual involvement in the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) in January 2015 seemed to hold back the cooperation with the EU. However, after a 'strategic pause', negotiations over a new framework agreement between Armenia and the EU started several months later. This balancing act of the Armenian government showed the country's commitment to combine several foreign policy options with as few losses

as possible. After two years of negotiations, the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA), which did not include the DCFTA component of the AA, was signed in the margins of the 5th EaP summit in Brussels in 24 November 2017, making Armenia the first country to sign a framework agreement with the EU while being in a different economic alliance. While it is too early to claim full implementation of complementarity, the existing facts are enough to say that Armenia has to a certain extent reached equilibrium between the two major regional powers with little harm to the stateness.

Georgia's Costly European Choice

Georgia's road to European integration has certainly been rocky. After the Rose Revolution, the newly elected president Mikheil Saakashvili clearly defined the country's commitment to the integration with the EU and NATO. For such a small country with so few resources, this was an unprecedentedly determined political move, which however came at a cost. Between 2004 and 2008 Russia employed various tools to halt Georgia's pro-Western aspirations. For example, Russian passports were offered to citizens of the two breakaway regions: Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Delcour, Wolczuk 2015, p. 468).

In 2006, Georgia was subjected to Russian trade embargoes on wines and water and deportation of a large number of Georgian migrant workers from Russia. However, the breakthrough moment in Georgian-Russian relations was the August 2008 war which resulted in Russia's recognition of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the deployment of Russian troops to these areas. With this move, Russia clearly showed its potential to endanger Georgia's territorial integrity which more consolidated Georgia's pro-Western ambitions rather than forced to take a step back.

After the launch of EaP in 2009 and with Georgia's strengthening economic and trade ties with its immediate neighbours, Turkey and Azerbaijan, Russian pressure has been less visible. Before the 2013 Vilnius summit Russia has again attempted to restrain Georgia from getting closer to the EU by threatening to suspend the 1994 free trade agreement and through 'borderisation', namely the construction of barricades alongside the administrative border with South Ossetia and the gradual expansion of the territory by moving the fences (Delcour, Kostanyan 2014, p. 6). Nevertheless, these restrictive measures made the EU market even more attractive for Georgia and forced the latter

to diversify its energy sources. Moreover, Georgia's domestic political environment became even more united over the country's foreign policy with both the ruling "Georgian Dream" party and the opposition "United National Movement" determined for a deeper integration with the EU.

After signing the AA with and being granted visa-free travel to the EU, Georgia has become even closer to the EU gradually aspiring for full EU membership. However, it is worth reasserting that Georgia's achievements so far have been accompanied by the de facto loss of important territories and permanent threat from the Russian side. With obviously larger military potential and little EU resistance, Russia easily controls internal developments in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. As compared to the case of Armenia, the EU has wider normative tools to interfere with the conflict settlement in Abkhazia and South Ossetia since the other party of the conflict is Russia, while Nagorno-Karabakh is disputed between two EaP members. Therefore, the EU has usually avoided positioning over the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and has constructed its relations with both Armenia and Azerbaijan based on cooperation in other spheres. In case of Georgia, the EU has clearly condemned Russia for its aggressive actions and sent a fact-finding mission to Georgia.

Despite the EU's clear approach Georgia's security, it has not been able to influence the conflict resolution. However, thanks to its attractiveness, the EU has secured Georgia's smooth Europeanization.

Moldova's Troubled Europeanization

Moldova's Europeanization has been the most praised and arguably the most uncertain. The collapse of the Soviet Union left Moldova heavily dependent on Russia since 80% of Moldova's exports were to the latter. By 1997 Moldova's energy debt grew to 11% of its GDP (Korosteleva 2010, p. 1268). Besides, the 1992 war cut the country into two: the Republic of Moldova and the self-proclaimed Transnistrian Moldovan Republic (Transnistria). These harsh starting conditions have been visible in Moldova's foreign policy, too.

In 1999 European integration was officially declared to be Moldova's main foreign policy priority which drove the country to willingly join the ENP and successfully ne-

gotiate an AP with the EU. Being the poorest among the Eastern ENP countries², Moldova could also largely benefit from closer ties with the EU. Moldova's pro-European ambitions were also conditioned by Russia's interference with Transnistria conflict³. On the contrary, the EU-Moldova ENP AP attaches huge importance to the settlement of the Transnistria conflict (EU/Moldova Action Plan 2006) through supporting a long-term process of democratization in Moldova with the aim to make the latter more attractive for Transnistria (Del Medico 2014, p. 24). The EU's involvement in the conflict resolution has been more visible in Moldova rather than in Armenia or Georgia. With a clear view of supporting the country's territorial integrity, the EU imposed a travel ban on Transnistria explained by the latter's lack of cooperation with Moldova over conflict resolution (Council Common Position 2003). Another set of restrictive measures were taken to oppress the campaign against the Latin-script Moldovan schools in the Transnistrian region (Poli 2015, p. 159). In 2005, the EU joined the '5+2' negotiation format⁴ reasserting its readiness to support the conflict settlement.

Despite the EU's active involvement in Moldova, Russian factor has been quite a strong opposition. With military presence in Transnistria and noticeable influence in Gagauzia (another autonomous region of Moldova mostly populated by Turkish- and Russian-speakers), Russia has gained an immense power to control the regions' relations with the Republic of Moldova. Moreover, remittances from Moldovan migrant workers in Russia and Moldova's total dependence on Gazprom create obstacles on the country's European path. In the wake of Vilnius summit (September 2013), Russia also introduced an embargo on Moldovan wines and later (February 2014) supported the organization of a referendum on EU integration and ECU in Gagauzia (Delcour, Kostanyan 2014, p. 6) where 98% of the votes were in favour of the region joining the ECU (Kostanyan 2016, p. 2).

Nevertheless, Moldova's Europeanization problem is not merely the Russian opposition, but also the country's unstable political leadership. In 2009 parliamentary elections, the Communist Party was announced the winner which was followed by large-

² As an illustration, according to the World Bank 2002 data Moldova's GDP per capita was the lowest among all ENP countries (*European Neighbourhood Policy Strategy Paper* 2004, p. 30).

³ In November 2003, Russia offered solving the conflict through deploying troops to Moldova for a 20-year period (*"Memorandum Kozaka": Rossijskij plan obyedinenia Moldovy i Pridnestrovia* 2003).

⁴ The 5 key parties were Moldova, Transnistria, Russia, Ukraine and the OSCE. The EU and the US joined them as observers.

scale street protests. As a result, a second round of election was organized where the Alliance for European Integration (AEI) gained majority yet was not able to appoint a Head of State until 2012 (Rizescu 2014, p. 126). After the successful signing of AA with EU Moldova experienced another power change, this time in favour of Socialist party whose leader and country's current president has announced its pro-Russian stance numerous times⁵.

Despite Moldova's good record of Europeanization, the existence of Transnistria frozen conflict, the Russian influence in the country and the changing political leadership led to internal divides in the Moldovan society with 40% supporting European integration and 44% in favour of Eurasian integration (*Moldovans' Public Perceptions of Politics and Government: Results of NDI's November 2015 Public Opinion Research* 2015).

Conclusion

The article has examined the role of the EU and Russia in the foreign policy orientation of three small states that lie in their 'shared neighbourhood': Armenia, Georgia and Moldova. Summarizing the above discussed issues, three conclusions can be drawn.

Firstly, Russia perceives the post-Soviet area as its natural interest zone based on shared historical past and cultural proximities. Due to this, it does not attempt to raise its attractiveness especially for countries included in the EaP rather responding to EU actions in these countries. In the meantime, the EU seeks to employ normative instruments such as conditionality and differentiation to attract its Eastern partners which is perceived by Russia as a threat to its strategic interests leading to the latter's pressure on target countries to leave the European integration.

Secondly, Russia's main instruments in the rivalry with the EU are hard power and coercion. Any country where the EU attempts to extend its normative appeal is securitized by Russia leading to military interventions or presence limiting the EU's transformative power.

⁵ See, for instance, *Moldova president sees move towards Russia-led trade union in 2017* (2017), Reuters, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-moldova-dodon/moldova-president-sees-move-towards-russia-led-trade-union-in-2017-idUSKBN1AD253> [14.12.2017].

Lastly, despite the differences in their relations with the EU, Armenia, Georgia and Moldova are united by the influence of the Russian hard power which has mighty potential to impact the developments in entire countries or parts of their territories.

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