

Relations between the European Union and its neighbourhood:
Studying the case of the South Caucasus through eclecticism and
pragmatism and different logics of action

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“The fate of the Caucasian states, such as that of Finland and the Baltic states, will depend on the international situation; however - and this will be their feature - they will be victims of their differences and divisions” (Carrere d'Encausse 2005, 238).

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Abstract

This thesis studies complex and contradictory relations between the South Caucasus and the European Union (EU). The thesis covers three main periods, which are: the early relations in the 1990s, the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the Eastern Partnership Programme (EaP). The thesis employs Europeanisation theory and uses rationalist-constructivist framework as a complementary framework. The conducted research shows that the complex relationship between the EU and the South Caucasus states cannot be explained through a purely constructivist or purely rationalist theoretical framework. Thus, material and social motives are discernible, and rationalism and constructivism are complementary in explaining the relations between the EU and the South Caucasus countries. Therefore, when approaching the dissemination of values and normative connotation of the EU's relations with partner countries from a theoretical point of view that this thesis offers, a rationalist perspective explains actors' preferences towards maximising material utility and the calculation by EU policymakers as to which strategy is most likely to advance the material interests of the EU in a given situation. This argument needs to be supplemented with insights from constructivism, which emphasises the universal nature of the values of the EU, which are inherently linked to the internal dynamics of the EU itself, and manifests in the relations with neighbouring countries. However, the thesis illustrates that rational considerations primarily justify the stances of the South Caucasus countries towards the EU, which are related to Russia's political and economic influence in the region.

List of acronyms and abbreviations

AA – Association Agreement

AAP– Annual Action Program

BP– British Petroleum

CARDS– Programme of Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development and Stabilisation

CEEC– Central and Eastern European countries

CEPA– Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement

CFSP– Common Foreign and Security Policy

DCFTA– Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement

EAEU– Eurasian Economic Union

EaP– Eastern Partnership

EC– European commission

ECHR– European Convention on Human Rights

EEAS– European External Action Service

EIB– European Investment Bank

EIDHR– European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights

ENP– European Neighbourhood Policy

ENPARD– European Neighbourhood Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development

EU– European Union

EUMM– European Union Monitoring Mission in Georgia

EURONEST– European Parliamentary Assembly

FAO– Food and Agriculture Organization

GDP– Gross Domestic Product

GRECO– Group of States Against Corruption

GSP– Generalised Scheme of Preferences

INOGATE– Interstate Oil and Gas Transport to Europe

INTERREG– European Regional Development Fund

MNPP– Medzamor Nuclear Power Plant

NATO– The North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NCDC– National Centre for Disease Control

NDI– National Democratic Institute

NGO– Non-Governmental Organisation

NHC– Netherlands Helsinki Committee

NINP– The New Instrument for Neighbourhood and Partnership

NIT– Nations in Transition

OCCRP– Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project

ODIHR– Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

OECD– Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

OPEC– The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries

OSCE– Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

PACE– Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

PCA– The Partnership and Cooperation Agreements

PHARE– Poland and Hungary: Assistance for Restructuring their Economies

SOCAR– State Oil Company of the Azerbaijan Republic

TACIS– Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States

TAIEX– Technical Assistance and Information Exchange instrument

TAP– Trans Adriatic Pipeline

TICPI– Transparency International’s Corruption Perception Index

TRACECA– Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia

USSR– Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

WTO– World Trade Organization

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Chapter 1. Introduction

The security and stability of the European Union (EU) is considered to be strengthened by the creation of an arc of countries with good governance in its neighbourhood (European Council, 2003b, p. 10). For this reason, it is crucial for the EU to support state-building in contested states on its borders, and to induce domestic reforms in these states in order to promote democracy, good governance and prosperity. The relations between the EU and the three South Caucasus states - Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia - is an example of a complex and multidimensional neighbourhood relationship, which started in the 1990s after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In that early stage of relations, the EU perceived the South Caucasus as on the edge of the European continent with little economic or political significance. Since then, the South Caucasus region has experienced a significant economic and political transformation. Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia have moved beyond planned economies and rigid communist dictatorships but have not yet become fully fledged democracies and free market economies (Popescu, 2015). While the three countries share a common Soviet legacy, weak institutions, problems with corruption and oligarchic structures, the development paths of these countries have become increasingly diverse.

The common history, culture and domestic traditions do unite these countries, but differences in domestic and foreign policy have grown as independence has gained momentum. Relations of the three South Caucasus states with the EU have moved in different directions. If Georgia is aiming for closer integration and accession to the EU, Armenia is highly dependent on Russia (economy, security, energy). Moreover, Armenia is a member of the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) but has also signed the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with the EU. Azerbaijan has no interest in integration with either the EU or Russia and pursues a balanced stance between the two. Azerbaijan is interested in increasing energy and economic relations with the EU, but accepts neither EU standards nor norms, and is not interested in the prospect of membership. The South Caucasus countries have different approaches to their relationship with the EU even though they all commenced relations with the EU at the same time. Furthermore, all three countries have a security challenge: Georgia with its two territories (Abkhazia and South Ossetia), which are occupied by Russia, while

Armenia and Azerbaijan have been involved in conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh region.

The relations between the EU and the South Caucasus require further investigations considering their complexity as such and also due to fast-changing developments and transformations in the region. Furthermore, while some scholars see Europeanisation as the only one legitimate process for modernisation and democratisation of the post-Soviet states, the South Caucasus countries make different choices (Baev et al., 2003; Boonstra, 2015; Kakachia, Meister, et al., 2018). Even though the EU has had the ambition of being the most influential external player in the South Caucasus, it has left a rather small imprint on this region's development (Korosteleva, Natorski, and Simão 2013a). Moreover, the EU has been failing to manage the development of the South Caucasus in a systematic and decisive manner (Simão, 2013). The EU's technical and financial assistance in the 1990s, the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in 2003 and more recently the Eastern Partnership (EaP) in 2009 (which includes accession to the EU's vast internal market under favourable conditions) have been used as mechanisms to encourage the partners' domestic reforms or close political cooperation. However, Russia's EAEU was a more attractive option for Armenia whereas Azerbaijan is not interested in taking any such option.

Prior studies on relations between the EU and its neighbouring countries show that the main reason for lack of success of the EU's foreign policy in the neighbourhood is insufficient reward in exchange for adoption of EU rules, norms and standards (Kelley, 2006; Lavenexa & Schimmelfennig, 2011). In addition, scholars quantify geopolitical pressures, especially in the eastern neighbourhood of the EU, including the South Caucasus, where Russia plays a role of integration "game changer" (Popescu and Wilson 2009). Having been caught between Russia and the EU, the neighbouring countries often use the bidding and manoeuvring method to pursue their own interests, associated with the high political costs of compliance (Schimmelfennig & Scholtz, 2008a). Some authors argue that the EU has helped to stabilise rather than change existing regimes in the neighbourhood (Boonstra, 2015; Börzel, 2011; Mkrtchyan et al., 2009).

The increased interest in the South Caucasus region has resulted in a growing body of literature on EU-South Caucasus relations. The majority of works, however, focus on just

one country case study: either the EU and its policies towards Azerbaijan, Armenia or Georgia, with an emphasis on domestic developments and the country's history, including the Nagorno- Karabakh conflict (Gils, 2019; Hewitt, 2013b; Hoch, 2020; Sierra, 2010). Several studies conclude that the EU has limited influence in the South Caucasus and has little effect in facilitating democratisation (Sierra 2012; Smith 2011; Chitaladze and Grigoryan 2015).

Scholars have blamed the EU for the lack of rigor and selective application of conditionality instruments that resulted in failed democratisation efforts in its neighbouring countries (Olazábal, 2019; Schumacher, 2016). The ENP and its Action Plans were hampered by an arbitrary and largely ineffective selection of democratisation benchmarks. The terms "democracy," "the rule of law," and "good governance" were used interchangeably and inconsistently without any definitions or clear criteria (Silander and Nilsson 2013; Smith 2011). Even though, a few anti-corruption measures were included in the Action Plans, they were more generic in nature and lacked specific benchmarks for measuring progress (Dandashly & Kourtelis, 2020).

Other scholars have lambasted the EU for a lack of alternative policy ideas (Heidbreder, 2013), a lack of consistency in the ENP instruments (Börzel & van Hüllen, 2014) and insufficient policy changes (Wolczuk, 2009). Despite the conceptual diversity surrounding the ENP/EaP, some literature has largely ignored the impact of domestic circumstances on the Europeanisation process in the South Caucasus and employed EU-centric foreign policy approaches (Ademmer et al., 2016; E. J. Stewart, 2011). Few studies have linked the EU's democratisation failures to domestic structures in the partner countries, such as limited administrative capacity for rule absorption and reform implementation, or incumbent elites' domestic agendas driven by political and material gains (Börzel & Pamuk, 2012; Buzogány, 2019; Dimitrova & Dragneva, 2009). Others linked Europeanisation failures in the neighbourhood to interests and legacies of the actors involved (Alieva, 2006; Schimmelfennig, 2008), foreign policy behaviours resulting from these contexts (Ayooob & Ismayilov, 2015), and bargaining power of the partner countries as explanations for varying degrees of success in enhancing actors' own interests in relationships with the EU (Gils, 2019). Tolstrup (2013, 2014) argued that domestic elites - ruling elites, opposition elites, and economic elites – are important

actors in shaping domestic and foreign policies. Domestic elites act as gatekeepers, actively facilitating or restricting links to external actors and their efforts at democratisation (Tolstrup, 2013).

The premise of this thesis is that all of the factors (domestic and external) are relevant and, in fact, necessary for understanding EU-South Caucasus relations. The aim of the thesis is to overcome EU-centric tendencies and view relations between the EU and the South Caucasus as an interactive process. This will help to avoid the pitfalls of simplification and knowledge fragmentation.

1.1 Research questions and objectives

The thesis aims to present a critical appraisal of the Europeanisation process beyond the EU borders and provide an important overview of the historical and current state of relations between the EU and the South Caucasus. From the perspective of prior and current developments in the South Caucasus, it is necessary to formulate alternative explanations of the reasons why the relations between the three South Caucasus countries and the EU have developed in different directions by applying theory to a new empirical domain and pose socially and politically relevant research questions (as explained in chapter 2).

The thesis objectives are:

1. To look at the development of the relations between the EU and the South Caucasus since the collapse of the Soviet Union.
2. To provide a qualitative and quantitative assessment of the current ties between the South Caucasus countries and the EU.
3. To explain the reasons for the political choices, domestic institutions settings, and economic preferences of the South Caucasus countries.
4. To shed light on areas of common interest between the EU and the South Caucasus countries that determine the dynamics of current and future bilateral relations.

5. To identify the factors that determine the different degree of relations and attitudes between the three South Caucasus countries and the EU.

The thesis seeks to address a number of theory-driven and empirical problems by answering the following research questions:

- What factors have determined the relations between the South Caucasus and the EU since the early 1990s?
- How did the ENP affect relations between the EU and the South Caucasus?
- Why and under what conditions Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia have established different relations with the EU through the EaP?
- What types of attitude/action have the EU and the South Caucasus countries been employing in relations to each other?

1.2 Methodology

This thesis is of an interdisciplinary nature, linking theoretical insights from EU studies, international relations and philosophy. The analysis relies on theories of Europeanisation, as well as constructivism and rationalism. The research incorporates both a methodological and an analytical toolkit which are based on the insights of Kratochvil and Tulmets' (2010) four combinations of rationalism and constructivism. The analytical toolkit is developed in chapter 2, whereas methodologically the thesis utilises a system of logic. "A system of logic ratiocinated and inductive" is a method of scientific investigation which was developed by English philosopher John Stuart Mill in 1843. In this work, he formulated the five principles of inductive reasoning known as Mill's methods (Mill, 1882). One of the principles of experimental inquiry from inductive reasoning is the method of difference. In a situation where a phenomenon being investigated has everything in common with another instance where it does not occur, according to Mill's theory, is the "effect, or the cause, or a necessary part of the cause, of the phenomenon" (Mill, 1882, p. 483).

Furthermore, this is a method of artificial experiment that helps the researcher, at least by direct experience, arrive with certainty of causes. Various scholars have developed this method since its invention by Mill between 1843 and 1872. The method developed by John Gerring, a professor of Political Science at Boston University, and his so called most similar cases method from the Case Study Research (Gerring, 2009) is one such example. This method requires the selection of a case with two essential elements – the causal variables of interest and outcome. The most-similar cases method examines cases that are as similar as possible, except on the outcome of interest (the dependent variable) (Gerring, 2006). Based on Gerring’s method, this thesis employs a case study that challenges a scholarly community to think differently about the relevant dimensions of a chosen theory. The thesis aims not to generalise but to problematise. The method of difference provides opportunity to select cases that are similar in various relevant characteristics except for two: the outcome the researcher is trying to explain (y – dependent variable) and what the researcher thinks explains this outcome (x – independent variable). Thus, the rationale for selecting the countries of the South Caucasus lies in their confounding similarities and disparities. Despite obvious similarities in geography and history, these countries have different attitudes towards the EU and a degree of Europeanisation. Furthermore, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia are quite similar cases in many ways, including their historical legacies, independence experience, communist and post-communist experience, and territorial conflicts. Once the methodology has been quantified and the cases have been selected, it is necessary to elucidate causal relationships. This study utilises the process tracing model in order to achieve greater systematisation of the qualitative method (Gerring, 2009). Process tracing in case study research gives an opportunity to infer from causal mechanisms (Collier, 2011). The model requires multiple sources of evidence to verify the process and test whether the observed processes among variables in a case match those predicted by previously designated theories (George & Bennett, 2005). Moreover, process tracing helps to use detailed empirical analysis. And by using the three cases explored in this thesis, the result will be a greater understanding of the causal dynamics of the relations between the South Caucasus and the EU. The following thesis is an exploratory study (hypothesis-generating) and looks at cases that differ on the outcome of theoretical interest but are similar on various factors (Gerring, 2009). Therefore, thesis case selection

meets the requirements of the most similar research design. However, it is highly relevant to employ other cross case methods (such as qualitative and quantitative) while incorporating the most similar cases method (Lieberman, 2005). To do so, this thesis employs robust research design (Gorard, 2017) and utilises data collection and the qualitative methods of analysis. The qualitative methods incorporated in the thesis include literature review, document analysis, and expert interviews. The thesis will also rely on multiple sources of evidence. Secondary sources include books, research papers and articles, as well as digital and printed media. For primary sources, document analysis is used, which will include analysis of official documents (agreements, treaties, action plans, press releases, reports, statements). Content analysis is used in order to draw conclusions and analyse the official documents (Roberts 2015). Furthermore, there are seven semi-structured interviews which were conducted in Tbilisi and Brussels from December 2018 to February 2019. In Appendixes B and C, respectively, the questionnaire and the information sheet are attached. As part of the process, all the above papers, as well as approval from the University of Canterbury Ethics Committee, were sent to the interviewees prior to the interviews. Protecting privacy and confidentiality were paramount for this research. Therefore, interviews which are included in this research are referred under the “interview” label (for example, interview1, interview2).

1.3 Importance of the research and contribution to the body of knowledge

The study of the South Caucasus and developments in the countries of this region has been an object of research on a theoretical and empirical level since the beginning of the 1990s. While the wider Caucasus region, both in its historical and contemporary dimensions, has been extensively examined in the international bibliography, the Europeanisation process in this region has received little attention in mainstream scholarship. Therefore, the innovative nature of this thesis is based on two premises. Firstly, from a theoretical perspective, the thesis presents a critical appraisal of Europeanisation theories and provides an important added value to the existing body of literature on Europeanisation, its concepts, terms and practices. Furthermore, whereas constructivism and rationalism are used and extended at the theoretical and analytical

level to study the relations between the EU and its neighbours, such an approach has not yet been used in the case of the South Caucasus. Thus, the thesis provides some alternative explanations at the theoretical level and gives a wider picture of the reality.

Secondly, at the methodological and empirical level, the thesis employs the most similar cases method, which includes three neighbouring countries from the South Caucasus region. The reasoning behind exploring these particular case studies is to illuminate the areas of shared interest between the EU and the countries concerned and help clarify why and under what conditions these three countries have different attitudes towards the EU. Considering the peculiarities of the region, the results obtained in the course of research may be of interest to foreign affairs analysts and practitioners involved in the development and implementation of EU foreign policy in the South Caucasus. This thesis' findings can also be of use to political scientists, historians and scholars and students of other related disciplines who study the South Caucasus countries or the foreign policy of the EU.

1.4 Limitations

The South Caucasus is a very complex and multidimensional region. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, this region has become the scene of economic and geopolitical competition among various states, such as Russia, the US, Iran, Turkey, China and the EU.

The thesis focuses solely on the relations between the EU and the South Caucasus and accounts for Russia, which is more present in this region (militarily, economically, and politically) than other external players. Moreover, it is considered that one of the main reasons for the lack of success of the EU's foreign policy in its neighbourhood are geopolitical pressures, with Russia playing a role of integration "game changer" (Delcour, 2018a; N. Popescu & Wilson, 2009). What is more, the role of the Russian-driven the EAEU has become an important factor in the process of assessing the compatibility of Europeanisation in the South Caucasus region (Harzl & Mickonytė, 2019; Vieira & Vasilyan, 2018a).

Another limitation of the thesis is the recent developing processes in the South Caucasus. Some important processes such as: the COVID-19 pandemic (which is an ongoing global pandemic), the 2020-21 Georgian political crisis and the recent Nagorno-Karabakh war from September to November 2020, happened at the final stage of research. Therefore, this thesis does not discuss these developments per se.

1.5 Structure of the thesis

The thesis consists of six chapters. Chapter 1 comprises the introduction, the background of the research and justifies the choice of the South Caucasus case study. The chapter also provides an overview of the methods involved, the research questions, objectives and limitations.

Chapter 2 is devoted to the theoretical framework. The first part of the chapter analyses the conceptualisation of Europeanisation and European integration theories. It includes a broad analysis of the literature of Europeanisation, its concepts, terms, and practices. Since the Europeanisation concept is broad and “conceptually stretchy”, the chapter offers to draw limitations regarding the examination of the Europeanisation process in the South Caucasus. The second part of the chapter examines rationalist and constructivist theories of international relations. Despite the epistemological and ontological differences and conflicting logics of action, the chapter suggests using the rationalism-constructivism dilemma as a complementary framework through pragmatism and analytical eclecticism. This framework helps to address the interest versus values dichotomy in relations between the EU and the South Caucasus.

The rationale for chapter 3 is to assess the beginning of the EU-South Caucasus relations after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The first part of the chapter offers a brief historical overview of the South Caucasus region, its geography and characteristics. The second section describes the general political and economic conditions and developments in the region, including the separatist conflicts of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia. The last part of the

chapter addresses the early stages of relations between the EU and the South Caucasus in the 1990s/early 2000s as well as the EU's key policies and interests in this region.

Chapter 4 examines the relations between the EU and the South Caucasus countries in the context of the ENP. Furthermore, the chapter critically discusses key concepts and approaches to analyse the ENP - its principles, prospects and instruments - and relies on Europeanisation concepts. The second part of the chapter analyses the objectives, content and principles of the Action Plans which were introduced within the ENP for the three South Caucasus states as well as the implementation and results of the ENP in the three countries.

Chapter 5 is devoted to the EaP. The first part of the chapter examines the background of the creation of the EaP, its concepts, aims and objectives. The second part of the chapter analyses the different ways of cooperation with the EU which the three South Caucasus countries have established under the EaP. Each country is presented in a separate section to follow the concept of differentiation and outline factors that determine the different degrees of relations.

Finally, chapter 6 presents the conclusions, and the main findings of the thesis. The chapter summarises the answers to the research questions posed in chapter 1, assesses the explanatory value of the applied theoretical framework and concludes with final remarks and recommendations.

Chapter 2. Theoretical framework

This chapter provides the theoretical foundation of the thesis. The first part of the chapter analyses the concepts of Europeanisation and European integration. The second part of the chapter provides the critical assessment of the rationalism and constructivism theories of international relations. The final part of the chapter defines the framework built to study the relations between the EU and its neighbourhood using constructivism and rationalism as analytic eclecticism.

2.1 The notion and conceptualisation of European integration and Europeanisation¹

Scholars have been trying to better understand how the EU influences across time and space, whereby the EU impacts domestic political and social processes within and beyond the member states. Though, as Jensen and Kristensen (2012) point out in their paper referring to Puchala's (1972) metaphor² of blind men and an elephant, in which the European Commission is the metaphor for the elephant and the scholar is the blind men, each blind man felt the different parts of the elephant and, hence, understood it in a different way. They offered a different description of the "beast" based on the part of the animal they touched.

".... scholars coming from different theoretical traditions, touch upon different parts of the elephant and thus portray a very different beast.... None of them are mistaken, but none of them have the complete picture either" (p. 267).

¹ An earlier version of this section was published in the Australian and New Zealand Journal of European Studies. The original citation is as follows: Mtchedlishvili, D. (2018). 'Theorising Europeanisation in European literature: Conceptualisation and Operationalisation,' Australian and New Zealand Journal of European Studies 10(1), pp. 79–91.

Available at: <https://esaanz.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Theorising-Europeanisation.pdf>

² See further: Donald Puchala (1972) Of Blind Men, Elephants and International Integration. Journal of Common Market Studies. Vol. 10, N. 3, pp. 267 – 284.

Using this logic, Puchala urged a search for a joint theoretical effort to understand the whole phenomenon beyond its single parts (Falkner, 1998).

At first glance, the concepts – European integration and Europeanisation - seem to be similar, though, as Radaelli (2000) argued, Europeanisation should not be identified with either harmonisation or convergence. Undoubtedly, the concept of European integration has played an important role in the theoretical analysis of the EU, as it reflects the development and institutional changes within this organisation and its predecessors from the foundation of the European Coal and Steel Community in 1951 (Mikkelsen, 1991). Furthermore, European integration began in 1950 with the Schuman Plan which launched the European Coal and Steel Community. Its supporters expected integration to expand beyond coal and steel and looked forward to deeper European integration. The creation of the EU was inspired by Jean Monnet's vision that technical and functional integration within Europe could lead to political transformation.

European Integration is traditionally defined as the convergence of relations between the various elements of the institutional structure and/or strengthening the relationship itself, that is, the intensification of any communications in the European orbit (Howell, 2002). In fact, the term European integration refers to the process of creating European institutions and policies, whereby policies are increasingly shaped and set at the EU level and impact on national governments and wider civil society (McGowan, 2007). The result will be the formation of a supranational centre around which is constituted a common European space. In some definitions, it is difficult to distinguish between European Integration and Europeanisation. As Olsen (2002) argues, European Integration and Europeanisation are the same thing, and from the perspective of the EU it is a political project in the context of unification. However, the processes of Europeanisation and European Integration have been considered two distinct phenomena and while the EU has matured as a political system, these two phenomena have developed reflexive or dependent relationships, necessitating a reconsideration of the research agenda for both phenomena (Ladrech, 2014). From Radaelli's (2000) perspective, Europeanisation is not political integration and Europeanisation would not exist without European Integration. He argues that the Europeanisation concept belongs to the ontological stage of research, that is, the understanding of a process in which countries pool together sovereignty

(Radaelli, 2000). In contrast to European Integration, Europeanisation is not a *sui generis* (unique) phenomenon, rather it is conceptualised in a way that makes it “possible to compare European dynamics with the dynamics of other systems of governance” (Olsen, 2002, p. 922). Olsen (2002) suggests differentiation of the concept with *what*, *why* and *how* questions. In particular, what is changing and how and why Europeanisation takes place. Furthermore, he has identified Europeanisation as the changes that take place in member states of the EU and quantifies processes of institutional change and how/why they take place.

Europeanisation can be interpreted in three ways. Firstly, as the emergence and development at the European level of the various structures – meaning the political, legal and social institutions (Risse, et al., 2001). This process includes institution-building at the European level/building of (common) EU institutions and explores how the Europeanisation process impacts the member states. In this approach, the level of analysis is the domestic system and the main objective of the study is the impact of the EU (Grabbe, 2006).

Secondly, the concept of Europeanisation can be seen as an incremental process while political and economic dynamics become part of the organisational logic of national politics and policy-making (Ladrech, 1994). By ‘organisational logic’, Ladrech means the ‘adaptive processes of organisations to a changed or changing environment’ (Ladrech, 1994). This scholarship of Europeanisation emphasises that the actions of pan-European institutions may have different consequences and results in the member states and that the EU's influence at the national level depends not only on the effectiveness of the functioning of its institutions, but also on specific national factors. The object of Europeanisation is not limited to national politics and one could add national identities (Radaelli, 2000). By contrast, this definition accommodates both - organisations and individuals and covers the political structure, public policy, identities and the cognitive dimension of politics (Radaelli, 2000). This interpretation suggests two types of Europeanisation - the “top down” and “bottom up”. “Top down” or a process of *downloading* (Börzel & Risse, 2000) seeks to explain the conditions and causal mechanisms through which the EU triggers domestic change (Börzel & Panke, 2016). It quantifies that EU policies and institutions are a constant impetus of domestic change for

all states (Cowles, et al., 2001). The top-down approach uses the concept of “downloading” to elucidate how the member states or the third countries can be successful at downloading EU policies and implementing them into their national politics (Börzel & Panke, 2016). Top-down Europeanisation occurs, for example, with the European Central Bank through the establishment of pan-European indicators of price stability. This is the so-called “financial integration” that requires selected policy implementation for the member states to avoid prolonged inflation and deflation and to achieve high levels of economic activity and employment (European Central Bank, 2017).

On the other hand, “bottom up” Europeanisation or *up-loading* analysis shows how states upload their domestic preferences to the EU level (Howell, 2002). An EU member state is a successful “uploader” if it manages to make its preferences heard so that EU policy, political process or institution reflects its interests (Börzel & Panke, 2016). The member states in their reform strategies try to be original with their character models to provide a way to solve their own problems, and to ensure the transfer of specific elements of the local political system at the EU level.

The third interpretation of the term - "Europeanisation" - summarises the previous two definitions, namely, the development and consolidation of certain institutions and practices at the EU level as well as on their national political systems (Olsen, 2002). This process relates to not only to the political system as a whole but also its individual components and, in particular, the rules, paradigms, policies and political programmes of the member states. Thus, Europeanisation is defined as the design, diffusion and institutionalisation of formal and informal procedures, beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the process of developing common European Union decisions and then incorporated into the local discourse, identities, political structures and public policies (Radaelli, 2000). This effect of Europeanisation can be conceptualised as a process of change at the domestic level in which the member states adapt their institutions, policies and processes to new practices, rules, norms and procedures through different mechanisms of institutional change (Börzel & Risse, 2000). This approach stresses the importance of change in the logic of political behaviour; which gives the opportunity to distinguish Europeanisation effects from the many other processes of change in the post-communist political context (Grabbe, 2006). Nevertheless, this type

of Europeanisation studies not only the members of the EU but also the countries beyond the Union – extending to the candidate countries for EU membership and/or the neighbouring countries of the EU.

2.1.1 Europeanisation: the EU “hits neighbours’ homes”

Sustained interest towards Europeanisation emerged in the late 1990s through the study of the dynamics of integration in the EU. As Borzel and Risse argue, the scholarship of Europeanisation has become a “cottage industry”, exemplified by various edited volumes (Börzel & Risse, 2000). For that reason, Olsen (2002) argued that Europeanisation was a fashionable term for which there were many definitions. Europeanisation might have been a fashionable term but it needed further exploration, explanation and conceptualisation (Howell, 2002). Furthermore, since the development of the concept of Europeanisation, the concept has also been applied in the investigation of international conflicts. For example, Emerson explores the prospects for resolving European conflicts in the formation of a common European political space and expanding the influence of “political Europe” borders (Emerson, 2004). This scholarship studies European regional conflicts by taking into account continued Europeanisation and integration in Europe (Noutcheva, et al., 2004).

Some researchers seek to identify the degree of the EU’s influence on cross-border conflicts through Europeanisation process and to conceptualise the channels of the EU’s influence including a range of deliberate, direct and indirect effects of integration (Noutcheva, et al., 2004; Diez, et al., 2006). Much of the literature on the theoretical understanding of “external” Europeanisation considers the EU’s influence on international relations and international regimes. The significant work of specialists of the Institute of European Integration Studies contains an analysis of the measurements, mechanisms and results of the process of the Europeanisation of the EU’s foreign policy (Müller & de Flers, 2009). The most important added value of studying European foreign policy from a Europeanisation perspective lies in the fact that Europeanisation concepts shift the attention to the interactions between national and EU levels in European foreign

policy (Müller & de Flers, 2009). Meanwhile, the range of research on "external" aspects of Europeanisation remains small, and their conceptualisation is fragmented.

Theorists of the "internal" Europeanisation (see, for example, Olsen (2002), Borzel and Risse (2003), Radaelli (2003)) agree that the Europeanisation process may unfold not only within the EU but also outside its borders, but their works are limited to the study of the experience of the candidate countries for accession. Scholars have been studying the dynamics of the impact of Europeanisation and transformations of the internal politics of the states that have been linked to the enlargement of the European Union in 2004-07. This particular research focus had shifted to issues of adaptation of the future EU member states to the requirements of supranational institutions. However, over time, European researchers were not limited to considering only this experience. They also began to apply a "top-down" approach to analyse the impact of integration on the member states and third countries. This type of Europeanisation has become increasingly referred to not only in connection with the integration and regionalisation but also in the context of globalisation and democratisation (Flers, Patrick Müller and Nicole Alecu de, 2009). As Professor Radaelli indicates, there had been many attempts to develop a theory covering "top-down" and "bottom-up" approaches to Europeanisation and the study emphases of the concept had differed from the control groups to the focus of mechanisms (rather than variables) and the qualitative aspects in politics. (Radaelli & Exadaktylos, 2009). Moreover, Radaelli and Exadaktylos examined the field of Europeanisation by looking at the control groups which contained a diverse set of journals on Europeanisation. The articles were chosen based on their high number of citations³.

Over time, the study has made a significant adjustment not only in the research of the EU member states and the candidate countries for EU membership but also in relations with neighbouring countries for the development of co-operation which was, in particular, initiated by the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in 2003-04. From this perspective, the concept - Europeanisation - should be considered as a framework concept, which is interrelated with external aspects of European integration. It is the process of spreading the EU laws, rules, values, legislation and practices, as well as forms

³ See Radaelli, C. M. & Exadaktylos, T., 2009. Research Design in European Studies: The Case of Europeanisation. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Volume 47, pp. 507–530.

of political control not only within the EU but also outside its borders (Lavenex & UçArer, 2004).

Therefore, the study of the external dimension of Europeanisation has turned into an independent area of research. The starting point in this sense has become a vast reservoir of Western academic literature focused on the comparative analysis of changes in the EU accession candidate countries in 2004-07 (Sedelmeier, 2006). This scholarship was developed by the Swiss scholars Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier who began to study the issues when relying on the provisions of New Institutionalism (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2004). In fact, the proponents of New Institutionalism affirm that the choices of individual political actors cannot be understood in vacuum, but must be placed in specific institutional contexts (Harmsen, 2000). What is more, New Institutionalism studies political institutions as a set of theoretical ideas and elucidates the relations between institutional characteristics and political agency, performance and change (Olsen, 2009). Based on these premises, Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier analysed rule transfer and the adoption of EU *acquis communautaire* (common rights and obligations that are binding on all EU countries) in non-member states, that is, their institutionalisation at the domestic level. Such institutionalisation includes the transfer of EU legislation into domestic law, the restructuring of domestic institutions according to EU rules, or the change of domestic political practices according to EU standards (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2004).

The process of the Eastern enlargement of the EU and the creation of the ENP in a 2003-04 initiative and later the EaP in 2009 significantly increased the number of theoretical studies of the EU's ability to integrate and influence beyond its formal boundaries. Hence, Europeanisation is not conceptually limited to the impact of the EU on its member states (Graziano & Vink, 2007). Furthermore, it is relevant to assume that the EU has an impact on member states, quasi-member states (such as Norway) that participate in the internal market of the EU as well as the candidate states that must adopt EU rules, norms, laws to qualify for membership (Schimmelfennig, 2012). But the question is: Can the EU also have a systematic and distinctive influence beyond its borders? (Schimmelfennig, 2012; Lavenex, 2004).

The concept of Europeanisation has an external dimension (Lavenex & UçArer, 2004). As a result, the scholarship of Europeanisation crossed the borders of the EU and, since then, the study has been generally referring to the process of various political and institutional changes of the states in the neighbourhood of the EU under the pressure of the European integration process (Schimmelfennig, 2012). In fact, after the academic debate of the 2000s about the analytical framework of governance and boundaries in the central and Eastern European countries (CEEC) and the politics of enlargement (Friis & Murphy, 1999) or later in 2002 by Filtenborg et al., Lavenex developed the concept of External Governance and the idea that Europeanisation "reaches" all EU neighbourhood countries (Lavenex, 2004) without a membership agenda by offering everything but institutions (Prodi, 2002). Whereas the EU uses the incentive of membership as the effective lever to make applicant countries adopt its rules, at least formally, this instrument is not applicable to countries which are included in the ENP. Furthermore, the ENP and the EaP do not guarantee membership of the EU. Rather, the ENP is a totally voluntary process unlike in the case of those countries from the Western Balkans where the *acquis communautaire* that are adopted in Brussels are binding.

Several scholars have attempted to define the conditions of Europeanisation for its effectiveness. Schimmelfennig (2012) identifies market power and supranational regulation as important conditions for effectiveness or credibility of its conditionality, when partner countries expect to receive rewards if the conditions are met (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2004). On the other hand, the EU creates a policy space for new initiatives on the political agenda by causing institutional adaptations that have an effect on the policy-making process (Grabbe, 2006). Another condition for effectiveness of Europeanisation is the process of socialisation. During this process, the EU instructs partner countries on the principles and rules of European governance through social channels (Freyburg, et al., 2007). In other words, the external actors accept or do not accept the authority of the EU and either adopt or not comply with EU rules. For an effective Europeanisation process, the EU has to be able to rely on administrative structures and expertise in the partner countries. Such networks require strong administrative actors in partner countries (for example, police and border guards) "to

succumb to the functional, problem-oriented dynamics of mutual learning and adaptation that the EU seeks to unleash” (Lavanex & Wichmann, 2009, p. 97).

Based on the growing interest in the European scientific community to study the EU's international activities, Schimmelfennig (2012) has reviewed the literature on external Europeanisation. The same author has shown that, despite the fact that European researchers have focused mainly on the role of the EU as transforming civil or regulatory power, their interest often focuses on the relationship between the EU as a global centre of power with other regional groupings and leading countries of the world. The implementation of this approach was reflected in an idea of promoting a European model of integration and is based on the belief that the neo-liberal model of the economy, democratic values and legal norms of the EU are able to stimulate the development of most countries and regions of the world (Schimmelfennig, 2012).

2.1.2 Differentiation of Europeanisation: candidates and neighbourhood

The conditions set out at the Copenhagen European Council in 1993 were designed to minimise the risk of new entrants becoming politically unstable and economically burdensome to the existing member states (Grabbe, 2006). The politics of accession within the EU is based on the principle of political conditionality - the obligation of all potential members of the EU to implement *acquis communautaire* at the national level. The only difference between the candidate countries for EU membership consists in the timing of the adoption of these standards into domestic law. It is a fact that the EU has been firmer with its adherence to the Copenhagen accession criteria for new candidates since the 2004-07 enlargement round, and that has caused subsequent slower progress in association/accession and stagnation in post-communist reform (Petrovic, 2013). In 2006, the European Council introduced a more stringent tool for the adoption and implementation of *acquis* chapters for the current and new membership candidate countries (Petrovic, 2013). As the European Parliament stated, the Western Balkan countries aspiring to membership are facing an additional set of politically sensitive conditions, often colloquially referred to as the “Copenhagen Plus” criteria, which relate

to the respect for and implementation of various political and peace agreements stemming mostly from the armed conflicts of the 1990s (European Parliament, 2015).

Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, under the paradigm of neo-institutionalism (an approach which studies how institutions influence individuals' behaviours (Lauth, 2000)), have been exploring the mechanisms and methods of Europeanisation of the candidate countries for EU membership from central and eastern Europe based on the two approaches (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2004). The first approach comes from the hypothesis that, in the international arena, Europeanisation can be driven by the national or EU level. The second approach is guided by an institutional logic (March & Olsen, 2004). The supranational level is built upon sanctions and/or incentives from the EU that change the distribution of costs and benefits of potential candidate countries for EU membership. The national administrations of the candidate countries must implement legally binding EU rules to avoid sanctions or on the other hand they receive rewards if successful in their implementation of those rules (Schimmelfennig, 2012). Europeanisation process in the neighbourhood is a similar process, but beyond membership perspective and without legally binding rules. In this context, Europeanisation process in the EU's neighbourhood depends on the operation of the principle of conditionality. At the political level, the EU asks partner countries to respect the *acquis communautaire* in order to gain access to its internal market, as well as financial and technical assistance. The EU is increasing its offers and grants as partner countries achieve targets. From this perspective, the interest of partner countries to comply with the requirements of conditionality is linked to the credibility of the EU, to the importance of its offers, the difficulty of its demands and the political costs and benefits for the partner countries (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2004). Thus, the EU gives the partner countries' the possibility to accept or not the proposed conditionality.

This type of Europeanisation has the effect of, as Grabbe (2006) puts it, "empowering modernisers" to change specific policies and reform the political institutions. "Europe" has been used by political elites as an external constraint to bypass national political and administrative systems and to enforce decisions and policies (Grabbe, 2006). In this process, the principle of "matching" is an important condition for effective Europeanisation (Featherstone & Radaelli, 2003). If European norms, rules and laws are

largely compatible with those at the domestic level, they do not give rise to problems of compliance or effective implementation (Borzel & Risse, 2003). There must be some *misfit* (Börzel & Risse, 2000) between the EU and neighbouring countries' domestic policies, institutions and processes. Therefore, the principle of political conditionality has a chance of practical implementation if the internal costs (democratic standards, legislation and EU practices) are not too high and do not threaten the stabilisation of political regimes in neighbouring countries.

Logically, the requirements of the EU can create the preconditions to export Europeanisation beyond the EU if these requirements meet the needs and opportunities of the third countries themselves. Hence, this process, namely Europeanisation outside the EU is quite perplexing under institutional logic. The EU initiatives might be directed towards the countries that do not identify themselves with a common European space and/or preserve their system of values in a different manner from the EU. What is more, democratic standards and EU practices might threaten the stabilisation of political regimes in neighbouring countries, based on the fact that the spread of democratic values is the basis of the EU's international activities, while "external" Europeanisation fits into the logic of the democratisation process. (Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2011). Despite the fact that this initiative is for the countries that have no prospects of membership for the foreseeable future and is based on a differentiated approach with regard to the third countries, its bases contain the basic principles of political conditionality (for a more detailed analysis of how the conditionality works in the ENP see chapter 4). However, most Western scholars are united in the opinion that the effectiveness of its application in respect of the member countries of the ENP is much weaker in comparison with the candidate countries - precisely because of the lack of real prospects of joining the EU (Schimmelfennig, 2012; Petrovic & Klatt, 2015).

The principle of political conditionality in the ENP is weakened by a limited set of tools to stimulate the EU's partner countries to democratise, as well as the high internal costs associated with the transformation of authoritarian regimes (Schimmelfennig & Scholtz, 2007). In this case, the principle of political socialisation (as discussed in the previous section), as one of the elements of Europeanisation, cannot be successfully "activated" because social channels are controlled by authoritarian regimes (Freyburg, et al., 2011).

Based on these perspectives, some researchers have focused on the study of alternative models of democracy assistance and have promoted within the ENP the concept of good governance (Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2011). As a result, there has been a "renaissance" of the neo-functionalist approach, according to which the introduction of a democratic model of governance - as part of the foreign policy of the EU - should be carried out in separate political subsystems. Later, the EU due to the effect of "overflow" could democratise the entire national political space (Freyburg, et al., 2011).

Since the 1990s, the influence of external actors has been incorporated into the study of democratic transition led by the literature of Europeanisation. The post-Cold War era and the successful democratisation of the CEE countries have created the tendency to examine the regime transition through the lens of the Eastern European experiment (T. Börzel & Lebanidze, 2017; T. Börzel & Schimmelfennig, 2017; Lebanidze, 2014). Some authors acknowledge that the EU has been applying the "lite version of Europeanisation" (Lebanidze, 2014) to its neighbours and the EU's policies have been incorporating "mechanical borrowing from enlargement experiences" (Kelley, 2006) without membership perspective. However, even in the absence of the membership perspective, the post-Soviet transitions have been possible and complex in the South Caucasus. After the breakup of the Soviet Union, each of the South Caucasus states had to cope with the triple transition: 1) democratisation i.e. from Soviet totalitarian state to democracy; 2) economic marketisation i.e. from the centrally planned economy to the market economy and private property 3) from a republic, in the composition of the large state, to a sovereign republic with a small economy (Korganashvili et al., 2017). Moreover, between 1985 and 1991, the democratisation process occurred in almost the majority of the fifteen post-Soviet countries. However, the last stage of transition – which is the routinising of the democratic procedures and adjusting the behaviours of the political elites into the liberal democratic rules (Pridham & Vanhanen, 1994) – did not happen except in the Baltic countries (Fierman, 2012; Zürcher, 2009). In the Baltics, after only 50 years of Soviet supremacy, no complete generational change had taken place and the societies were not heavily sovietised, unlike in the South Caucasus where this process has been more correlated after almost 80 years of sovietisation (this topic is further assessed in section 3.1). This correlation is even more obvious when compared with the flourishing of

democracy in Eastern Europe, considered by many scholars as a relevant test for the ability of democracy to take root in relatively short times. However, this success story of transition led those post-communist states which succeeded to open the process of association and later accession to the EU not only receiving the significant economic and financial assistance but especially because of the guidelines and expertise they received from the EU (Petrovic, 2013, p. 38).

To sum up, the impact of the EU is increased with the size and credibility of its conditional incentives, while it is weakened by a limited set of tools to stimulate the partner countries to democratise, as well as the high internal costs associated with the transformation of authoritarian regimes. Hence, the thesis suggests that Europeanisation outside the EU is quite perplexing because democratic standards and EU practices could threaten stabilisation of political regimes in partner countries. Based on the above analysis, in order to study the Europeanisation process in the South Caucasus, the thesis examines not only the political system as a whole but also its individual components, in particular the rules, paradigms and policies of Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia. Furthermore, the thesis takes into account the three South Caucasus countries' local discourses, identities, political structures and public policies.

2.2 A fusion of constructivism and rationalism as analytic eclecticism to study the relations between the EU and its neighbourhood

The debate between rationalists and constructivists remains one of the main axes of debate in the field of international relations, as well as in European studies. The crucial difference between the two paradigms is on the ontological level, namely, the determination of the relationship between structure and actor, and the relationship between regulatory and constitutive effects of social norms and structures. In terms of action theory, rationalism and constructivism address different logics of social action; particularly the logics of instrumental-strategic and norm-oriented; more precisely – logic of consequences versus logic of appropriateness. However, despite the ontological and some epistemological differences (discussed in greater detail in section 2.2.1) that may suffice and conflicting logics of action, this chapter suggests using the rationalism-constructivism dilemma as a complementary framework through pragmatism. Moreover, the thesis suggests seeing the issue of the use of particular theories not as a debate but as a conversation (dialogue) as outlined by analytic eclecticism in order to gain more compelling answers of reality.

2.2.1 The overview of rationalism and constructivism

Rationalism

Rationalism refers generally to formal and informal applications of rational choice theory. Since the 1950's, the theory of rational choice has played an important role in international relations. For rational choice theorists, history and culture are irrelevant to an understanding of political behaviour. Instead, its explanation is primarily defined by the knowledge of the interests of actors and an assumption that they pursue these interests rationally. An early work in rational choice theory is “An Economic Theory of Democracy” written by Anthony Downs in 1957. In this work, which studies the electoral behaviour and party competition, Downs claimed that significant elements of political life could be explained in terms of voter self-interest (Downs, 1957). Downs showed that individuals who vote for a particular political party assume great benefit in case the party

wins the elections. It is believed that the parties themselves are motivated only by the desire to win. They compete with other parties for the votes of voters, constantly changing their policies. Furthermore, rationalism has its origins in sociology such as the rationalisation of society developed by Max Weber and classical economics associated with Adam Smith, John Stuart Mill and David Ricardo. As Stein (1999) argued, the sociological theories of rational action were predominantly oriented towards the paradigm of rationality that “underlines economic theories of rational choice and strategic choice” (p. 211). Rationalism acquires a materialist connotation from political realism that dominated international relations in the 1960s. In the early Cold War period, it was useful to explore the logic of nuclear deterrence, the national interests of the states, the growth of power and self-preservation. “These goals must be achieved rationally”, as suggested by Kenneth Waltz in his publication ‘Theory of International Politics’ (Fearon & Wendt, 2002, p. 59).

Like constructivism, the rational choice approach is a metatheory since many theories are based on rationalist assumptions. Wendt and Fearon refer to rationalism as "a method, that is, as a cookbook or recipe for how to explain action and especially actions taken in a strategic or multi-actor context" (Fearon & Wendt, 2002, p. 54). Snidal speaks about a methodology that contains general theoretical assumptions (Snidal, 2012, p. 86). Fundamentally, one can say that this approach is based on two pillars: firstly, an assumption about uncertain future consequences and, secondly, an assumption about uncertain future preferences (Kahneman, 1997).

The rational choice approach assumes that social structures can only be explained through individual actions (Bevir, 1996). The actors act rationally, which means that the actor selects an action from alternatives in a certain situation with a goal to maximising the expected (material) interest (Fehr & Schmidt, 1999). The rational choice approach is a methodological approach that explains "both individual and collective (social) outcomes" in terms of “individual goals-seeking under constraints” (Snidal, 2012, p. 87). Furthermore, Snidal (2012) focuses his observations on a goal-oriented action and the identification of key players. Afterwards, the focus is on the search for goals and their enforcement (p. 103).

Rationalism has a penchant for abstraction and simplification (Fearon & Wendt, 2002, p. 54). The main actors in the international system are the states. Other bodies do exist, such as individuals and organisations, but their power is limited. The actors act in an anarchic, decentralised system based on material structures, defined by the distribution of capacities (Kowert & Legro, 1996, p. 460). The behaviour of the actors is therefore oriented to material facts. As Barnett (1997) argues, materialism is the view that the “structure is constrained by factors such as the distribution of power, technology and geography” (p. 253). The change of behaviour is therefore due only to changes in the material structure. Interests and expectations are seen as fixed, unchanging variables. Hence, interests are not based on convictions or interpretations of the world. Rather, interests are material in nature (Wendt, 1999, p. 115).

There are different opinions about the cause of anarchy among the rationalist elaborations, such as the realism of Morgenthau or the neorealism of Kenneth Waltz. However, in contrast to constructivism, rationalism is of the conception of a *homo economicus* that convinces and starts from a very materialistic image of mankind. *Homo economicus* is using rational assessments and was first proposed by John Stuart Mill. According to his definition, *homo economicus* attempts to maximise utility as a consumer and economic profit as a producer (Persky, 1995). This idea is also attributed to Adam Smith and David Ricardo who consider, following Aristotle, man to be a rational, self-interested economic agent (Fiori, 2005).

According to rationalism, people act according to a cost-benefit calculation. In a given situation, they choose the option of action that promises to be the most efficient to achieve their goals (Steinberger, 2015). Actors only act according to regulative rules that do not terminate and cannot be changed by the actor himself. Actors are considered as homogeneous entities, meaning that the world is divided into distinct, self-contained units. States know their interests. These interests, self-preservation and power growth are fixed and not variable (Feyerabend, 1981). A rational actor is not expected to be normative. According to Krasner (1991), “standards of behaviour are defined in terms of rights and obligations”(p. 2) and have regulative and cultural content (Kowert & Legro, 1996, p. 452).

According to neorealism and neoliberals, states change the behaviour but retain their rationalist interests and identities (Baldwin A., 1993). Neoliberalism and neorealism are two different theoretical approaches to international relations. Neorealists focus on high politics (national and international security concerns) and neoliberals focus on low politics (economic and social affairs). However, they both share similar worldviews. Both take similar positions about the international system: states are the main actors, they behave rationally, and international anarchy influences states' behaviour (Baldwin A., 1993). Furthermore, the very materialist view of the international system does not completely deny the meaning of ideas and the possibility of cooperation between states. Other rationalist theoretical approaches such as the liberal institutionalism of Keohane or the regime theory in its elaboration by Müller consider norms and ideas conditionally regulative to power and do not deny the states' ability to cooperate (Goldstein & Keohane, 1993a; Müller, 2004). However, the actors act rationally and do cost-benefit calculations. Norms differ as they were part of the rationalist preference list (Goldstein & Keohane, 1993b; Müller, 2004). Norms are only admitted to a regulatory role. They receive their manifestation through institutions or regimes. However, norms are only for the individual satisfaction and are designed by actors to achieve the long-term fixed static goals (Goldstein & Keohane, 1993a).

Having formalised this argument, Olson emphasised that individuals who have their own interest do not always take part in collective actions for the sake of a distant goal. He presented a fundamental criticism of pluralism and orthodox Marxism, since both currents proceeded from the premise that for political mobilisation it is necessary for citizens to share a common interest. He argued that men and women are mainly self-interested, and that they focus on their own costs and benefits when engaging in collective action (Olson, 1965). Furthermore, these private costs and benefits are affected by a group size and the nature of the interests that characterise a group (Congleton, 2015).

Rational choice theorists are making considerable efforts to modify their models. Theoreticians of rationalism have come a long way after the publication of the work by Downs. Nevertheless, critics of the theory (Aldrich, 1993; Fearon & Wendt, 2002; Kratochvíl & Tulmets, 2010; A. van den Berg et al., 1994) continue to assert that a human being is a very complex being. Men and women often act irrationally, based on senses that

are extremely difficult to understand on the basis of the theory of rational choice. To put it simply, the rational choice theory fails to cover all the aspects of political and social life.

Constructivism

Theories of international relations that dominated during the Cold War were above mentioned neorealism and neoliberalism (neo-neo-debate). Gorbachev's reforms (see section 3.1) and the changes in the foreign policy of the Soviet Union could precipitate new theoretical discourses. Furthermore, rationalist theories that dominated international relations during that time could neither predict nor explain this kind of foreign policy change of the Soviet Union. Constructivism, which places norms and ideas as determinants at the centre of its investigation, could successfully fit into this "intellectual gap" and was able to offer an alternative explanation to prevailing models.

Constructivism - the so called "idea based" approach - was introduced in the late 1980s by Onuf (1985), Kratochwil (1989) and Wendt (1987). This new theoretical discourse has provided a major challenge to the well-established "interest based" approaches (realists, neorealists and neoliberal institutionalists). At its theoretical level, the main argument of constructivism is that ideas influence policy, while "the causal beliefs provide road maps that increase actors' clarity about their goals"(Goldstein & Keohane, 1993a, p. 3). Constructivism stresses the need for examining values, beliefs and modes of investigation and often notices Max Weber's emphasis about the importance of conceptualising social phenomena at the start of any analysis (Jackson & Sorensen, 2007) . Though, not everyone invokes the "Weberian" sociology as the foundation of their approach (Ruggie, 1998). Constructivism is based on the conception of *homo sociologicus*, which is the opposite assumption to the rationalist *homo economicus* and emphasises that humans are social beings with their actions, behaviour and decisions being formed by social discourse and interaction (Checkel, 1998).

The core concept of constructivism focuses on the social construction of international politics (Ruggie, 1998; Wendt, 1992). In social theory, constructivists emphasise social construction of reality (Jackson & Sorensen, 2007). Social construction means that social relations construct people into the kinds of beings that make the world what it is by "doing

what we do with each other and saying what we say to each other” (Onuf, 1985, p. 386). Human relations consist of thoughts and ideas and not essentially of material conditions or forces (Jackson & Sorensen, 2007). An area of empirical research that distinguishes constructivism from both neorealist and neoliberal theories is formulation of interests. Rejecting the simple juxtaposition of norms vis-a-vis interests, constructivists examine the relationships between these two. According to Wendt (1987), the *intersubjectivity* constitute (and not merely constrain) interests and identities. *Intersubjectivity* is the key component of the concept of social construction as it elucidates the knowledge that “persists beyond the lives of individual social actors embedded in social routines and practices as they are reproduced by interpreters who participate in their production and workings”(Adler, 1997, p. 327). According to *intersubjectivity*, humans hold understandings and ideas in common that matters in international relations (Barkin, 2010). The ideas that shape international politics are more than just the beliefs of individuals. People must hold ideas or discourses in common, rather than just hold them individually. Such construction of ideas or discourses construct social reality until held in common within society (Barkin, 2010).

The second key component of social construction is *co-constitution*. Onuf (1989) defines the concept as the time when people and society construct or constitute each other. Hence constructivism from a *co-constitution* standpoint looks at effects of existing norms and discursive patterns on individuals and vice versa, hence, agents and structures are given simultaneous ontological priority (Barkin, 2010; Onuf, 1989). Constructivists consider agents as givens and making them as dependent variables. They focus on the process, when particular agents acquire their identities and interests (Wendt, 1992). This acquisition constitutes conditions that are historical (understandings of what it means to be an agent may change over time) and culturally relative rather than biological constitutive (Fearon and Wendt 2002).

Constructivism merely concerns the degree of influence of the actor which is influenced by *structure* (anarchy and the distribution of power) versus *process* (interaction and learning) and *institutions* (Wendt, 1992). Constructivism looks at the nature of the actors (states, groups and individuals) and their relationships to broader structural environments. To scrutinise the social construction of the international reality,

constructivism advances a well-developed hypothesis by Checkel (1998), that the environment in which actors operate are both social and material, hence identity and interest of the actors are socially constructed. As Wendt (1992) argues, identities are the basis of interests and actors do not have a "portfolio" of interests that they carry around independently of social context. Instead, they "define their interests in the process of defining situations" (Wendt, 1992, p. 392). By focusing on *intersubjectivity*, constructivists have been led to a wider criticism of structural materialism. Highlighting the notion of the "agent" next to the "structure" made clear the ontological deficiencies of structuralism and neorealism (Wendt, 1987; Dessler, 1989). The notion of social construction of interests also challenges several postulates of classical theories of international relations. For example, state interests cannot be simply deduced from the global distribution of material power: according to constructivists, there is also a social power (Adler, 2008). The actors define who they are and what they want based on their social context rather than just by their biological, economic or psychological position (Adler, 1997; Checkel, 1997, 1998). Despite some inclination of constructivists (for example Wendt) to exaggerate the role of structures, in fact, constructivism gives neither agents nor structures ontological priority. It argues that in international relations the agents and structures need to be viewed as simultaneously constituting each other (Barkin, 2010).

Constructivists disagree among themselves on the nature of the international system (Hund, 2008), though they agree with realists and neorealists that the structure of the international system is anarchical (Wendt, 1992; Onuf, 1989). Realists have a very pessimistic view of anarchy and they assume that it cannot be overcome, because states will never feel secure enough to do so (Wendt, 2000). Constructivists dispute this argument and state that anarchy itself does not explain the behaviour of the states. Instead, state and/or non-state actors' understanding of anarchy will push them to behave in different ways as their social context requires (Hopf, 1998). Constructivist approach to anarchy is dependent upon the meaning "we attach to the anarchy" (Hopf, 1998). Consequently, there is no "eternal" anarchy between states, acting on the same rules. In different periods of history, relations between states can be regulated by different rules and norms, hence, interests and identities change over the course of history that allow

cooperation between states where previously there had been conflict (Fierke, 2007). The example of the EU is demonstrated as the case where anarchy can be lessened through the creation of institutions as it internalises identities and interests thus creating new understandings. Nevertheless, changes will occur only when actors take certain actions and transform constitutive rules (Wendt, 1992). Furthermore, the particular meanings become stable over time, creating social orders that constructivists call structures or institutions (Hund, 2008). Rules and norms set expectations about how the world works, what type of behaviour is legitimate and which interests or identities are possible (Hopf, 1998; Hund, 2008). Rules affect actors in a more fundamental way, creating social principles that allow the creation of institutions, activity and interaction in the international arena. To highlight this argument, one can look at the rules of sports games (for example, football, rugby, chess) which make up the very nature of these games. Without the rules, the games make no sense.

Kratochwil clarifies how knowledge of the past relates to practical choices. He argues that history is not simply a storehouse of fixed data, but a “product of memory, which in turn is deeply involved in our constructions of identity and of the political projects we pursue” (Kratochwil, 2003, p. 21). Unlike neorealists, who believe that identities and interests are given and states know who they are and what they want before they begin interaction with other states, constructivists consider the identity as made - not given - and as ever-evolving and changing (Wendt, 1992). Moreover, identities and interests are developed in relations with “meaningful to others”(through the oppositional logic of “we-they”), and “an account of how a state’s own domestic identities constitute a social cognitive structure that makes threats and opportunities, enemies and allies, intelligible, thinkable, and possible” (Hopf, 1998, p. 16). The question of identity is particularly important, since “identities are the basis of interests”(Wendt, 1992, p. 391).

Constructivism is based on a research strategy of methodological holism rather than methodological individualism (Fearon & Wendt, 2002). Methodological individualism reduces its analysis to “micro foundations” that are statements about ontologically primitive individuals and their interactions (Fearon & Wendt, 2002; Jackson & Nexon, 1999). While holists argue that social wholes are better in social scientific explanations (Emirbayer, 1997).

To sum up, all the provisions of Constructivism can be derived by their two axioms. The first axiom says that the behaviour of states is determined by the fact that they are attached to the objects they are interested in (actors and structures). These objects can be estimated by the state as friendly, hostile or neutral (Wendt, 1992). The second axiom states that the international system functions based on rules and institutions that were jointly constructed by the actors themselves. Such rules and norms are called *intersubjective*, since they are shared by the majority of actors in the international arena and, accordingly, are perceived as universally valid. These axioms underlie one of the basic constructivists' ideas, which is connected with the notion of *co-constitution* when people and society construct or constitute each other.

Table 1 The core differences between rationalism and constructivism

Category	Rationalism	Constructivism
Ontology	Material facts	Social structures
Epistemology	International relations are analytically accessible and immediately recognisable. Strict separation of subject / object	International relations are hermeneutically accessible and can be accessed through interpretations. Social world is always culturally mediated
Actor concept	Homo economicus - Concept of purpose-based actor with fixed interests and goals	Homo sociologicus - Concept of the value, norm and rule-based actor on the basis of socially mediated and historically shaped experiences
Logics of Action	Logic of consequences. Benefit maximisation for fixed targets.	Logic of appropriateness. Emphasis on ideal factors

	Emphasis on material factors	
Understanding of Interests	Exogenous, static preferences	Endogenous, changeable preferences
Understanding of Institutions	Agencies between stakeholder interests and action results	Socialisation instances for actors create and shape interests

Source: (Fearon and Wendt 2002)

2.2.2 Contrasting constructivism and rationalism for empirical analysis: logic of consequences versus logic of appropriateness

As early as in 1986, Friedrich Kratochwil and John Ruggie pointed out that one cannot investigate international institutions as a product of rules without placing the specifically inter-subjective quality of social norms at the centre of analysis (Kratochwil, 1989; Onuf, 1989). Rationalist institutionalists (Hall & Taylor, 1996) conceived international regimes primarily as rule systems that influence the behaviour of actors, their cost-benefit calculations and action strategies. By contrast, their interests and identities were ignored and assumed to be stable. In contrast, sociological or constructivists institutionalists (Bell, 2011; Hay, 2009) developed a more sophisticated understanding of international institutions as social meaning and structures that constituted actors by influencing their interests and identities. Accordingly, international institutions are not only behaviour-regulating. Their norms and rules make social interactions in international politics possible in the first place, not only stabilising mutual expectations of behaviour, but also providing sense of constructions and knowledge that help the actors to find their way around the world.

The differentiation between rationalism and constructivism can also be determined by their emphasis on different logics of action. In this context, March and Olsen (1998) have introduced the distinction between a logic of consequences and a logic of appropriateness.

Rationalist approaches - whether they come from realism or neoliberalism - follow a logic of consequences. Accordingly, targeted actors seek to maximise or optimise their benefits in strategic interactions based on given and transiently ordered preferences. They behave rationally by calculating the costs and benefits of different behaviours, incorporating the anticipated behaviour of their interaction with partners into this calculus (strategic rationality). The so-called "neo-neo-debate" between realist and neoliberal or rationalist institutionalism moved within the rationalist paradigm. The question was whether and how international cooperation can be explained by assuming strategic rationality in an anarchic international system (Baldwin, 1993). Rationalist institutionalists pointed out that selfish maximisers of utility in international politics may be able to achieve their own goals only in cooperation with other actors (Müller, 2004).

In contrast, the logic of appropriateness, or normative action, followed by constructivist views differs from instrumental-strategic action and argues that actors in a given situation strive to make the socially appropriate and right decisions rather than to optimise material goals (March & Olsen, 1998). They try to find socially justified (in accordance to the given/adopted norms and values) solutions for the given social situation and to act accordingly. From this logical standpoint, human actors are imagined to follow rules that associate particular identities with particular situations, approaching individual opportunities for action by assessing similarities between current identities and choice dilemmas and more general concepts of self and identity (March & Olsen, 1998, 2008). If the standards are known and unambiguous, then they are habitual and virtually 'self-evident', without the rule being always a deliberate process (Müller, 2004). The logic of appropriateness implies that norms and rules have not only causal-regulatory but also constitutive effects on the interests and social identities of the actors (March & Olsen, 2008). March and Olsen discuss the logic of appropriateness not only as an unconscious adherence and internalisation of social norms by the actors. They claim that norm-related behaviour also refers to conflicts of norms, that is, social situations in which actors not only have to define the action situation, but also have to find out which norms are valid or which choice has to be made between competing norms (March & Olsen, 2008). Contrary to the rationalist perspective, one behaves according to the rule that best suits his/her interests.

There is still a considerable confusion in the field of international relations as to what the controversy between rational choice and constructivism is (Fearon & Wendt, 2002). Given the problems related to the multiplicity of definitions of both approaches, it is important to identify rationalism and constructivism to avoid “dragging into” metatheoretical issues (Cornut, 2015; Kratochvíl & Tulmets, 2010). The common reflection between constructivism and rationalism is that both of them should not be confused with a substantive theory of international relations. Rather, they both are the epistemological views method of thinking and way of reasoning.

Furthermore, the paradigm of rationalism *per se* stresses the rationality of actors as their main defining features (Kratochvíl & Tulmets, 2010). These approaches quantify that the actors are characterised by their selfish preferences and instrumental-strategic actions in the sense of the *homo economicus*. But even if one behaves as *homo economicus*, it is still unclear whether the actor is oriented towards relative or absolute gains (see the "neo-neo" debate between neorealism and neoliberal institutionalism (Baldwin A., 1993)). Rationalism can be defined as the approach which says that actors try to maximise their self-interests and they rationally manipulate their environment to reach their goals. Furthermore, interests can be material and/or ideational. Similarly, constructivist perspectives are neither a special epistemological point of view nor a theory of international politics with definitive stances about the social structure of the world. For constructivists, the social world is constituted first and foremost by the social action and the interpretations of these actions by the actors. Social structures do not fall "from the sky", but are socially constructed, therefore historically contingent and changeable (Fearon, 1999; Fearon & Wendt, 2002). Social structures constitute actors in so far as they convey a social identity and, in addition, open up or limit opportunities for action. In this respect, social actors do not exist outside their social environment and outside collectively shared meanings ("culture" in the broader sense). At the same time, actors can reproduce these structures through their interactions and their everyday practice and at the same time fundamentally change them. Furthermore, actors' identities require compliance with internalised norms irrespective of whether these norms bring benefits or not (Kratochvíl & Tulmets, 2010, p. 27).

2.2.3 Constructivism and rationalism complementary framework to study the EU's relations with neighbourhood through eclecticism and pragmatism

If the debate between rationalism and constructivism is defined and carried out as a matter of ontology, then the nature of the research will be a “zero-sum game” (see Table 1; also: Fearon & Wendt, 2002). If the debate is seen, as discussed above, through metatheoretical lances, then the relationship between the two approaches is more complex. The complexity of the relationship between these two theoretical views is grounded not so much on the epistemological reasons, but primarily on their ultimately incompatible ontological positions. Furthermore, there is a clash of competing theologies, each glorifying their respective explanatory “miracles” and universal truths and virtues (Lake, 2011, p. 466).

Following Lake (2011): “no single theoretical or epistemological approach deserves hegemony, thus, diversity of theory and method is necessary” (p. 478). Joseph Nye (2015) argued that “*the puzzles should not be set by methods, rather researchers should consider why they are not able to explain something and how they can better explain it...and then use whatever mix of theories and methods*”. Therefore, the relationship (or the dialogue) between the two different approaches has become possible due to the empirically grounded research. There had been several attempts to seize the middle ground and to build the bridges between these two approaches (Adler, 1997; Müller, 2004) or to use them as analytical lances (Fearon & Wendt, 2002; Kratochvíl & Tulmets, 2010). Based on Jürgen Habermas’ theory of communicative action⁴, Risse suggested to focus on how far the actor can push one logic of action (logic of consequences or logic of appropriateness) to account for observable practices and which logic dominates a given situation (Risse, 2000, p. 3). The actor is involved in various relationships; either it is the *homo economicus* of rational choice or the *homo sociologicus* of constructivism. Hence, a researcher can treat both approaches as analytical lances (Fearon & Wendt, 2002;

⁴ In addition to the two logics (logic of consequences and logic of appropriateness) outlined by March and Olsen (1989), Risse (2000) suggests the third logic – the “logic of truth seeking or arguing”. Risse calls it the ‘argumentative rationality’. This third logic is based on Haberman’s theory of Communicative Action. In sociology, communicative action is cooperative action undertaken by individuals based upon mutual deliberation and argumentation.

Kratochvíl & Tulmets, 2010). It is a pragmatic, empirically grounded choice of rationalism and constructivism, which can show when particular actors employ the *homo economicus* or *homo sociologicus* modes of action depending on their social roles (material interests and goals versus value and norm based actions) and also how and under what conditions this actor moves from one mode to the other or behaves in both modes simultaneously (Kratochvíl & Tulmets, 2010). The choice of pragmatic and combined use of the two theoretical approaches in this research is guided by the following premises: pragmatists seek to bypass "meta physical disputes that otherwise might be interminable" and instead to "try and interpret each notion by tracing its respective consequences" in particular situations (Sil & Katzenstein, 2010, p. 417). According Shusterman, the world that we know through human experience is a world without absolute permanence and always changing (Shusterman, 2010, p. 60). Thus, pragmatists focus on the consequences of truth claims in relation to different strategies for addressing social problems (Kaag, 2009; Sil & Katzenstein, 2010).

Following Hellman (2009), pragmatists refuse to position themselves on either side in the debate on "realism" versus "antirealism", rather they reject the very distinction as it relies misleadingly on an understanding of truth as accurate representation (Hellmann, 2009, p. 640). Similarly, George Herbert Mead claims that it is important to employ pragmatic scholarship to elucidate why and how some agents choose to reproduce, while others redefine and transform (Mead, 1934).

In this thesis, based on pragmatic premises, the rationalist - constructivist factors (material and ideational) are studied by applying what Katzenstein and Sil call "analytical eclecticism" (Sil & Katzenstein, 2010). Epistemologically, analytical eclecticism is an empirical-theoretic project (explanatory in nature) which addresses empirical puzzles (Reus-Smit, 2013). It aims to expand the range of assumptions and has an objective to develop a novel understanding of "real world without obscuring their complexity for the sake of conformity to metatheoretical or methodological tenets" (Sil & Katzenstein, 2010, p. 411). Analytic eclecticism addresses problems of wider scope that fill in gaps within research traditions and generates complex causal stories (Sil & Katzenstein, 2010, p. 412). This approach is considered to be more practically oriented through "gladiatorial paradigm wars" (Reus-Smit, 2013, p. 591). Analytic eclecticism constitutes an alternative

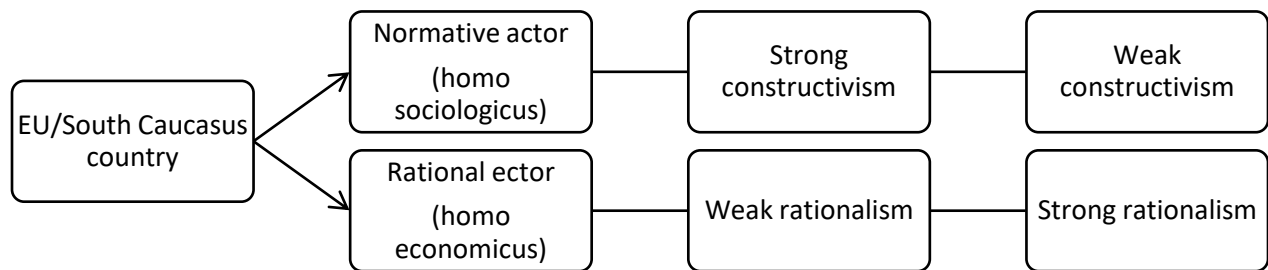
understanding of research practice that requires a flexibility to accommodate a wide range of problems, concepts, methods and causal arguments (Sil & Katzenstein, 2010, p. 412). Here the rationalism-constructivism issue is not seen as a debate, but rather as a dialogue which represents pragmatist inquiry (Fearon & Wendt, 2002; Sil & Katzenstein, 2010). In International relations dialogue and synthesis is possible even among scholars with opposite views on ontology, methodology or epistemology (Hellmann, 2003).

Answering the question - Why eclecticism? – Sil and Katzenstein (2010), following Hirschman's (1970) argument, argue that social scientists should avoid the paradigm-focused research. They state that unlike social scientists, practitioners (experienced politicians) take a variety of forces into account. Therefore, it is necessary to apprehend of many elements and unfold of large-scale of social transformations (Sil & Katzenstein, 2010, p. 414). Moreover, it is necessary to entail "bracketing" for eclecticism, where one should show the distinct effect of one side of the relationship on the other and then do the same thing in the other direction (Parsons 2007, 43). Applying rationalism-constructivism as analytic eclecticism develops a perspective in which everything matters. It uncovers many of the factors and how these factors matter in relation to specific research questions (Sil & Katzenstein, 2010).

In this thesis, rationalism and constructivism contain important causal insights that need to be taken into account while studying the relations between the EU and the South Caucasus countries (or the Eastern Partnership countries in general). The reasons behind choosing these particular theoretical discourses in this eclectic analysis are threefold. First, the study of the Eastern Partnership programme has been marked by the inclusive dichotomy of values *vis-à-vis* interests (a prevailing rationalist-constructivists dilemma) (Börzel and Schimmelfennig 2017; Delcour and Duhot 2011; Kratochvíl and Tulmets 2010). Second, the South Caucasus is a complex region. It is characterised by the political, security and economic challenges, including separatist conflicts (South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and Nagorno-Karabakh) and the high influence of external players (Russia and the EU at a higher degree; also Iran, Turkey, the US and China) (Palonkorpi, 2015; Paul, 2015c). The complex nature of developments in the region requires incorporating complex interactions among multiple mechanisms and logics drawn from more than one paradigm. Whereas the EU's approach and policies towards the South Caucasus have

evolved since the early 1990s, their objectives and achievements have been seen through the different lances by the EU and the South Caucasus countries (T. Börzel & Schimmelfennig, 2017; Delcour, 2015b; Kratochvíl & Tulmets, 2010). Third, while Georgia indicates that its main national objective is Europeanisation and full EU membership, the other two South Caucasus countries, namely Armenia and Azerbaijan, do not stress EU accession as a national priority. Armenia became a member of the EAEU in January 2015 (a counterpart integration project to the EU under Russia’s umbrella), and Azerbaijan has chosen to balance between the EU and Russia. The relations between the EU and the South Caucasus countries have been full of complexity and multidimensionality. Therefore, the thesis applies a complementary framework of rationalism and constructivism to explore the reasons for the different relationships between the EU and the South Caucasus.

Figure 1 Two positions of rationalism and constructivism in the study of the relations between the EU and its neighbourhood



Source: (Kratochvíl & Tulmets, 2010)

In this thesis, the relations between the EU and the three South Caucasus countries are studied following the two positions (see Figure 1), which are based on the insights of Kratochvil and Tulmets’ (2010) four combinations of the use of rationalism and constructivism in analysing relations between the EU and its external partners. The aim

of these positions is additive for the theoretical framework, which will help to demonstrate how each approach can be used to explore important aspects of the Europeanisation process (such as actors' behaviours, actions and policy change) in the South Caucasus and its outcome.

In the first position, both the EU and a South Caucasus country are represented through the value, norm and rule-based actions (normative actors) on the basis of socially mediated and historically shaped experiences (*homo sociologicus* and logic of appropriateness).

- Strong constructivism takes place when the cooperation and the conflict between the EU and the South Caucasus country are interpreted as a parameter of the proximity and the compatibility of their identity (Kratochvíl & Tulmets, 2010, p. 28). In this position both parties (the EU and neighbouring country as suggested above) define their policies in strictly homo-sociologicus terms and, if their identities are perceived as incompatible, the two normative actors clash and compete for dominance in the contested areas (Schumacher et al., 2018, p. 104). In other words, the constructivist determinants (such as identity, values, norms) play such a huge role in relations between the EU and the South Caucasus country that misunderstandings result between the EU and partners.
- During weak constructivism, the EU and the South Caucasus country are not essentially rule-followers and their behaviour is not directly linked to their identities. In this position the EU continues to act based on its norms and values. However, the South Caucasus country and its leaders are rational actors who accept EU norms but try to manipulate to their own advantage. While the EU acts according to its established *acquis communautaire* and their pre-established norms are largely predictable, the neighbouring countries change their positions, adapt the EU's normative pressure and try to receive benefits (for example to receive financial assistance or visa free travel to the EU) (Kratochvíl & Tulmets, 2010; Schimmelfennig & Scholtz, 2008a).

In the second position, both the EU and a South Caucasus country are represented through the rational actions on the basis of *homo economicus* and logic of consequences.

- In weak rationalism the EU behaves as a rational actor of *homo economicus*, whose goal is to spread its influence in the South Caucasus and the neighbours “are unable to withstand the focused political and economic pressure of the Union” (Schumacher et al., 2018, p. 73). Furthermore, the EU still applies its normative instruments according to its *acquis communautaire*; however, the EU establishment is aware of the goals they want to achieve in the neighbourhood. In other words, the EU is the rational actor who uses its influence to change the behaviour of the neighbouring country (here the EU might prioritise security and stability over integration and Europeanisation) (Kratochvíl & Tulmets, 2010, p. 29; Tulmets, 2016).
- The last position is strong rationalism, when all actors act according to cost-benefit calculations (Aldrich, 1993; Müller, 2004). Both sides (the EU and the South Caucasus country) are utility-maximisers and both believe that their relations are based on shared interests and mutually beneficial interdependence (Fearon & Wendt, 2002; Kratochvíl & Tulmets, 2010).

The main goal of this model is to show: first, when a particular actor (EU or the South Caucasus country) employs the *homo economicus* or *homo sociologicus* modes of action depending on their social roles (fixed interests and goals versus value, norm-based actions) and second, how and under what conditions this actor moves from one position to another or behaves in both positions simultaneously. After all, as already discussed, this model is based on pragmatism which legitimises an eclectic analysis with theoretical frameworks from different parts of the epistemological spectrum (Cornut, 2015, p. 53). As suggested by the so-called ‘forum of the international relations theorists’ (such as: Kratochvíl, Smith, Neumann, Moravcsik, Hellmann), “students have to get used to viewing the world through rationalist *or* constructivist, or for that matter, through positivist or postpositivist lenses” (Hellmann, 2003, p. 148). The question is not which approach is inherently superior, but which yields greater insights under what circumstances (Lake, 2011, p. 466). In this context, this logic is analogous to that invoked by Philip Tetlock (2005) in suggesting to act like “Foxes than Hedgehogs”⁵ in academia.

⁵ See Sil and Katzenstein (2010) p. 414, also Ober (2008).

This judgement style was first expressed by the ancient Greek warrior poet Archilochus: “The fox knows many things; the hedgehog one great thing.” According to Tetlock’s interpretation, hedgehogs have one grand theory or metatheory (such as Marxism, libertarianism, realism) which they are happy to extend into many domains and relishing its parsimony and expressing their views with great confidence. Foxes, in contrast, tend to draw on the “many little things” they know from separate sources and traditions and are sceptical about grand theories, diffident in their forecasts, and ready to adjust their ideas based on actual events (Tetlock, 2007). Following this argument, whether it is the *homo economicus* (former acting on consequences based on preferences) or the *homo sociologicus* (appropriateness based on habit or role), empirically, people do both, and there can be a comparative advantage to both approaches (Fearon & Wendt, 2002). Following Lake, it is crucial to end the “theological crusades and seek progress in understanding real problems of world politics” (2011, p. 478). Thus, this thesis has chosen dialogue over debate and synthesis over pluralism.

2.3 Conclusions to chapter 2

In order to propose explanations and to design the study, this thesis employs the theoretical framework in two ways. Firstly, the thesis overviews the theory of Europeanisation, explains and clarifies the main concepts, terms and practices related to the Europeanisation process. Moreover, the conceptualisation of the first subchapter helps to address local discourses of the South Caucasus countries and take into account the three South Caucasus countries’ domestic institutional constellations and public policies.

The second part of the theoretical framework discusses rationalism and constructivism that contain important causal insights to study the relations between the EU and the South Caucasus countries. Given the complexity and conflicting ontological nature of these two approaches, the thesis suggests using them as complementary rather than as competing theories by employing eclecticism and pragmatism. Therefore, the thesis suggests studying complexity and multidimensionality of relations between the EU and

the South Caucasus countries following the two positions, which are the EU/South Caucasus country as normative actors and/or rational actors.

The selected theoretical framework will help to cover the complex relations between the EU and the South Caucasus countries and incorporate systematic interactions among multiple mechanisms and logics drawn from more than one paradigm. All in all, this will help to provide a framework for data analysis and interpretation.

Chapter 3. The beginning of relations between the EU and the post-Soviet South Caucasus in the 1990s

The following chapter assesses the beginning of EU-South Caucasus relations and the limits and the lack of the EU's policy towards the South Caucasus after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The first part of the chapter provides a brief historical overview of the South Caucasus region - its geography, pre-communist and communist developments. The second part outlines political and socio-economic conditions and attempts for post-communist democratisation in the region after the collapse of the Soviet Union, including the separatist conflicts of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia. The last part of the chapter discusses the early stage of relations between the EU and the South Caucasus in the 1990s, as well as the main policies and interests of the EU in respect of this region.

3.1 A brief historical overview of the South Caucasus region

The Caucasus is a mountain range and also a regional term used to describe an area situated between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea. This region includes the Ciscaucasia (or the North Caucasus which is now the part of Russia) and the Transcaucasia (the South Caucasus which constitutes three independent countries: Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia). The history of the Caucasus is long and contradictory. Since ancient times, the Caucasus has been the untamed crossroad of large empires and the intersection of cultures and civilisations. The geopolitical significance of the South Caucasus was largely determined by its maritime and communications systems. Its trade and transit functions were connecting Europe and Asia. Therefore, this small region was a strategic area in various historical epochs for which the conquerors of neighbouring and distant lands fought fiercely (Lordkipanidze & Totadze, 2010). The region was invaded by the legions of Rome, troops of Parthia and Sassanids, Byzantium and the Arab Caliphate, Seljuk and Mongols, Ottoman and Russian empires (Kolbaia et al., 2010).

The Caucasus is a “museum of peoples” (S. E. Cornell, 2014, p. 4). During its history, the Caucasus has been a place for various peoples. Before 1905, the number of ethnicities living in this region amounted to 22 and the languages spoken amounted to 44 (Mkhoyan, 2017b). The majority of the population were Tatars (Turkic-speaking peoples) - 37%, Georgians - 25%, Armenians - 20% and Russians - 5% (ibid 2017b, p. 912). The extreme linguistic and religious diversity of the Caucasus has not prevented, at certain times, the development of common Caucasian traditions, especially in the mountainous areas. The peoples of the Caucasus were dominated by various empires that imposed their own forms of government. Until the Soviet era, the region was more or less a single entity, with no clearly defined borders and a free movement of ethnic groups (Matveeva, 2002).



Map 1 Ethnolinguistic groups in the Caucasus region

Source: Library of Congress

Armenians, like Georgians, are among the world's oldest Christians dating back to 301 and 326 A.D. Throughout history, Armenian kingdoms have controlled lands which are

now situated in modern-day Armenia, Azerbaijan, Iran and Turkey. When the Byzantines and Sassanids partitioned Armenia in 387, the western part became known as Byzantine Armenia, while the eastern (and much larger) part became a vassal state within the Sassanid territory (Imranli-Lowe, 2012). In the second half of the 7th century, Armenia was conquered by the Arab caliphate. The territories of Armenia and Kartli (Georgia) were united by the Arabs and called "Armenia" ("Armenia" is the old Persian equivalent of the Babylonian toponym "Urashtu" (for more details: Greenwood, 2009; Wilhelm, 2008). In the 11th century, the Seljuk Turks conquered Armenia, and the Mongols - in the 13th century (Prezbindowski, 2012). In the 16th century, Ottoman Turks and Persians fought over the Caucasus and in 1639 Armenia was divided between them. Western Armenia became part of the Ottomans, and the east - Persians. Eastern Armenia was part of the Persian Empire until 1828, when it was conquered by the Russian Empire (Hirsch, 2014). The western part of Armenia, which remained Christian, was part of the Ottoman Empire until the outbreak of the First World War. In 1915, Ottoman military leaders pushed for the deportation and massacres of Armenians, claiming that Armenians were a potential fifth column working for the enemy (Russia) (Moranian, 2004). As of 2020, 28 countries (out of which 15 are EU member states) have recognised the 1915 events as a genocide (for more details see: Bass, 2014; Bloxham, 2011; Moranian, 2004).

The modern Azerbaijanians are Turkic ethnic people who have been ruled by the Sasanid, Turkish-Seljuk, Central Asian Timurid (14th to 15th centuries) and Iranian Safavid (16th to 18th centuries) empires throughout history (King, 2008). As soon as the Arabs defeated the Sassanids and the Byzantines in the 7th century, they began to settle on the Mtkvari and Arran rivers in the Caucasus. During this period many Arabs left Basra and Kufa (present-day Baghdad) and took possession of the preferred lands in Azerbaijan. This is how the Arabs became inhabitants of Azerbaijan and the vast majority of Azerbaijanis converted to Islam (Goyushov et al., 2012). The Seljuk period was more important in the history of Azerbaijan than the Arab invasion, as they formed the national ethno-linguistic formation of the modern Azerbaijani Turks (Leeuw, 2000). At the beginning of the 11th century, the territory of Azerbaijan was taken over by the Turkish Oghuz tribes (Seljuks), who came from Central Asia. Representatives of these tribes, the Ghaznavids, were from northern Afghanistan, who occupied Azerbaijan by 1030 (S. E. Cornell, 2015). During the

Seljuk period, unique architectural designs were built in the form of castles, mosques, schools, mausoleums and bridges, in Baku, Ganja and Absheron (S. E. Cornell, 2015; King, 2008). Russia started to invade Azerbaijan in the 18th century, and by 1828, when the border with Iran was established, it had annexed the territory of modern-day Azerbaijan.

Georgia was united as a kingdom under the Bagrationi dynasty in the early 11th century by King Bagrat III of Georgia (Urushadze et al., 2018). This united Georgian kingdom arose from a number of predecessor territories of the ancient kingdoms of Colchis and Iberia (Tuite, 2008). The Mongol invasion of Georgia in 1236 resulted in centuries of fragmentation and dominance by the Muslim Ottoman and Persian Empires. Georgian rulers sought protection from Russia starting in the 18th century.

The modern history of the South Caucasus has been closely linked to Russia. The important turning point in the history of relations between Russia and the South Caucasus occurred in the 18th and early 19th centuries. During this period, when their region struggled from the conquests of Iran and Turkey, the Christian nations of the Caucasus, the Armenians and the Georgians, were in a pro-Russian orientation, and the Muslim Azerbaijanians were partly pro-Turkish, partly pro-Iranian (Allen & Muratoff, 2011). Russia wanted to strengthen its position in the East, and for that reason it needed to control the Caucasus. In the 18th century, the Russian Empire was stronger than the Ottoman empire (Lieven, 1995). This fact was well known to Erekle II, a Georgian monarch of the Bagrationi dynasty, who reigned as the king of Kartl - Kakheti (two eastern Georgian kingdoms) from 1762 until 1798 (Gloveli, 2019). While trying to find a powerful protector for its small nation, Erekle II asked Empress of Russia Catherine II to receive the royal patronage of Kartl-Kakheti in 1782. In 1783 a treaty was signed in the Russian fortress of Georgievsk (Urushadze et al., 2018). Georgian King Erekle II accepted Russia's protection and refused to follow an independent foreign policy. Also, the Georgian king pledged to support the Russian empress with his troops (Kolesnikov & Menyaylov, 2020). Catherine II, for her part, affirmed the dignity of Georgian lands and Georgia was granted full internal autonomy (Hartley & Gvosdev, 2001). The Georgievsk treaty significantly weakened the positions of Persians and Ottomans in the Caucasus. However, most conditions of the treaty were not fulfilled by the Russian side. Russia did

not protect Georgia during the battle of Krtsanisi in 1795, when Agha-Mohammad-Khan, the ruler of Iran, declared war against Erekle II in response to Georgia's alliance with Russian empire. The Georgians were defeated decisively, and their capital, Tbilisi, was captured and totally destroyed and eastern Georgia was temporarily incorporated into the Persian empire (Black, 2013). Later, Russia invaded the South Caucasus again in 1801 with the annexation of Georgia and after two Russo-Persian wars, which ended in 1828 with the annexation of the khanates of Yerevan (Armenia) and the khanates of Karabakh, Baku and Kuba (Azerbaijan). In 1846-49 the whole Caucasus was divided into provinces. In 1864, the Caucasus received the status of a regent (Reynolds, 2011).

The 1918-1921 period

The independent states that constitute the South Caucasus today gained a brief independence after the fall of the Tsarist Russian Empire in the February Revolution of 1917. The three South Caucasus countries proclaimed their independence in 1918: Georgia on 26 May, Azerbaijan and Armenia on 28 May (Mkhoyan, 2017b). The Supreme Council of Allies (Britain, France, Italy, the US and Japan) recognised the *de facto* independence of the South Caucasus countries in January 1920: Georgia and Azerbaijan were recognised on 10th of January and Armenia on 19th of January. However, in December 1920, the admission requests of the South Caucasus states to the League of Nations were rejected, largely because many members of the League were keen to respect the historical and geopolitical roles of Russia in the Caucasus and wanted to avoid confrontation with its new communist rulers (Gzoyan, 2018).

Meanwhile, Russia went through two revolutions in the course of one year. The first one was the so-called bourgeois-democratic revolution (Medvedev et al., 2019) which took place in February 1917. The February Revolution was caused by several key factors. The First World War turned out to be catastrophic for the Russian empire. Despite initial successes, Russia has suffered serious defeats at the hands of Germany. The consequences of the war had a severe impact on Russia: the social situation deteriorated and the empire was nearly on the brink of starvation (Badcock, 2007; Rendle, 2010). During the revolution, which was supported by many political parties (Octobrist Party, Socialist

Revolutionary Party, Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (Mensheviks), Bolsheviks⁶) lasting 5 days, there were mass demonstrations and armed clashes with police and gendarmerie. The Russian army sided with the revolutionaries. The events led to the resignation of Emperor Nicholas II, which ended the rule of the Romanov dynasty and the Russian Empire. The emperor was replaced by a provisional government of Russia headed by George Lvov (Fortescue, 2020). The provisional government was an alliance of liberal and socialist forces who wanted political reforms. They founded the democratically elected Constitutional Assembly. In addition, the socialist-oriented parties formed the Petrograd Soviets (a city council that ruled Petrograd (St. Petersburg), then capital of Russia) which functioned in parallel with the provisional government (Kolonitskii, 2009). During this time, urban workers began to organise into councils (soviets), wherein revolutionaries criticised the provisional government and its actions. The provisional government remained widely unpopular, especially because Russia was still fighting in the First World War (Badcock, 2007). The left-wing Bolsheviks were deeply unhappy with the government and began an armed uprising. On 10 October 1917, the Petrograd Soviet, led by Leon Trotsky, voted to back a military uprising (Haslam, 2011). The next day a full-scale uprising erupted, as a fleet of Bolshevik sailors entered the harbour and tens of thousands of soldiers rose up in support of the Bolsheviks. Bolshevik guard forces began the occupation of government buildings on 25 October 1917. The following day, the Winter Palace (the seat of the provisional government located in Petrograd) was captured. The Bolsheviks' takeover was not immediately accepted by the political and military elites of the old Tzarist regime who started the civil war which lasted for four years and was particularly extensive in some (Ukraine, South Russia) regions of the former Empire. Eventually, the Bolsheviks' Red Army prevailed and by the beginning of 1922 it was able to consolidate Soviet/communist rule in most parts of what was left from the pre-First World War Tzarist Russia.⁷

⁶ A radical, revolutionary Marxist faction founded by Vladimir Lenin and Alexander Bogdanov in 1903.

⁷ The Brest-Litovsk peace treaty of March 1918 ended Russia's participation in the First World War. The treaty gave Germany hegemony over the Baltic states. Russia also recognised Ukraine's independence and ceded its province of Kars Oblast in the South Caucasus to the Ottoman Empire. For more details see: Abramovitch, 2017).

The new Bolshevik regime established in Russia after the 1917 October revolution was also not recognised by the Caucasian political and intellectual elites. An anti-Bolshevik coalition of the South Caucasus leaders formed a Transcaucasian Commissariat in Tbilisi on 11 November 1917. This was the first attempt to create a proper federal structure in the South Caucasus, through the vertical and horizontal divisions of authority (de Waal, 2012). However, it collapsed after five months, in April 1918 because the South Caucasus countries declared independence. The federation was governed by an electoral body called the Transcaucasian Seimas. The "Muslim faction", which represented Azerbaijan in the Transcaucasian Federation became, in fact, the first parliament of Azerbaijan which made it the first parliamentary republic in the Muslim East (Mamoulia, 2020). The first parliament of Azerbaijan (headed by non-partisan Fatali Khan Khoyski) consisted of 11 factions and it was the first in the Islamic world which gave women the right to vote (Aliyeva, 2015). On November 19, 1917, a national congress was held in Tbilisi, at which the National Council of Georgia, or the de facto government was elected (Jones, 2014). Georgia held its first democratic elections in 1919. This is how the Constituent Assembly of Georgia, analogous to the modern parliament emerged (Gallin, 2018). Fifteen parties participated in the election and six of them became members of the Constituent Assembly. For the first time in history, the Social Democrats became the ruling party (Kandelaki, 2014). On February 21, 1921 the Constituent Assembly adopted the first constitution in the history of Georgia. The constitution protected the rights of women, religious and ethnic minorities. Furthermore, it abolished the death penalty (Jones, 2014). At the same time, the Independent Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan (originally the "People's Republic") was established on May 28, 1918 in Tbilisi. This happened two days after Georgia announced its withdrawal from the Transcaucasian Federation. Similarly to Georgia and Azerbaijan, the first independent Republic of Armenia was established in Tbilisi on 28 May 1918, in the early days after the October 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, and lasted for a short period of time - from May 1918 to December 1920. However, during this short period, some important state institutions were established in Armenia such as: a parliament, an army and foreign affairs (Imranli-Lowe, 2012).

As shown above the attempts at building first independent republics of Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia in 1918-1921 were quite similar, associated with the similar

process of institution building and heterogeneity. But the three republics were defeated by Bolsheviks in 1921 and were included in the USSR in 1922. The Bolshevik army encountered strong resistance but also received support from workers and minorities, such as the Abkhaz, Ossetians and Karabakh Armenians (de Waal, 2012, p. 1714).

The 1922-1953 period

In 1922, Stalin, who was the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, found a new Soviet Transcaucasian Federation, known as the ZSFSR (*Zakavkazskaya Sovetskaya Federativnaya Sotsialisticheskaya Respublika*) and four autonomous entities of the Soviet Transcaucasus: Adjara, Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh and the South Ossetia (de Waal, 2012, p. 1715). By the end of 1921, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan had all come under Bolshevik control. Discussions proceeded in Moscow about the potential representation of the three South Caucasus nations. It was agreed that the Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic (TSFSR) would be constructed to serve the three republics in Moscow while maintaining their own national governments (O'Loughlin et al., 2014). Until 1922, there were still several other political parties that the Bolsheviks tolerated, such as the Mensheviks and the Socialist Revolutionaries. But from 1922, in all the Soviet Union, including the Transcaucasian republics, other political parties had been dissolved and banned by decision of the Moscow authorities and thousands of Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries had been arrested, imprisoned, or exiled to labour camps (Schapiro, 1967).

The process of Sovietisation of Transcaucasia had begun simultaneously since the occupation of Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia by the Bolsheviks in 1921. In the early 1920s, the process of the formation of the Transcaucasian Federation was accompanied by very heated discussions about the form of such a structure and the system of distribution of power (Bond et al., 1990). However, the central authorities in Moscow sought to control the economy and administration, providing some freedom in cultural and national construction. Literally from the first days of Sovietisation, the main task that

Moscow set for the new authorities was to unite countries in a “common communist family”, first at the regional level, and then at the level of the USSR as a whole. One of the first acts was the decision to unite the Transcaucasian railways (Abasov & Krikorova, 2016). The dictatorship of proletariat entailed the extension of political monopolisation to other areas of social life, including the structure and functioning of the economic system. The Soviet economic structure was constructed around communist ideology and party law, just as the creation of economic institutions were based on state and collective ownership and a highly centralised system of economic planning. The First Five-Year Plan was proclaimed by the Communist Party's Congress in 1927; its implementation became obligatory in 1929; and, amid the state's rising pressure on the peasantry as early as 1926-1928, the height of collectivisation occurred between 1930 and 1933 (Crampton, 2002). The core features of the Soviet economy emerged and became ingrained during this period. Nevertheless, in this economic structure, central planning remained to be the main indicator to measure the success of the economy (Whitesell, 1985).

In December 1936, the Transcaucasian SFSR was dissolved and divided again among the Georgian, Armenian and Azerbaijani Soviet Socialist Republics (SSRs). The reason behind such division was that on December 5, 1936, the so-called “Stalin constitution” was adopted, which confirmed the triumph of socialism in the USSR (Getty, 1991). Labour was declared the duty of every Soviet person. The official constitutional law of the Communist Party was proclaimed to direct the activities of state bodies and public associations (Stefan, 2000). Formally, the 1936 Constitution was a big step forward for the USSR– it consolidated the social and political equality of citizens, as well as the equality of women and men (Bond et al., 1990). The constitution established universal, equal, direct suffrage by secret ballot and abolished restrictions on the participation in elections of certain categories of persons on class or social grounds. Furthermore, the new constitution legally cemented the totalitarian control of the party by General Secretary Joseph Stalin (Jones, 2014).

Establishing the Soviet narrative was paramount to the Soviet communist ideology; in particular, the idea to bring up a “new man” in the Soviet Union was to erase the differences between peoples and to establish a qualitatively new Soviet person (R. J. Hill, 1994). Consequently, the focus was on replacing ethnic identity with a unified Soviet

identity that would be deeper and stronger than all other identities (Bassin & Kelly, 2012). Although the Constitution guaranteed them significant autonomous and ethnic rights (equal treatment to different ethnic group; usage of native languages in elementary and secondary schools, colleges, and universities⁸; (for more details see: Roucek, 1961)) Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia continued to be governed from Moscow, and the constitutionally guaranteed rights were not backed up by any institutional mechanisms and democratic procedures because they were dominated by the absolute power of the party elite. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the unifying Soviet identity disappeared and the ineffectiveness of an ideology-based narrative became clear (Ayoob & Ismayilov, 2015). This fact also affected the South Caucasus and was painfully reflected in the lives of people, which was primarily manifested by the outbreak of ethnic conflicts in the Caucasus region (see section 3.3).

From 1929 a series of rigorous transformation campaigns coming from the centre started in all parts of the Soviet Union. Stalin's political purges, which occurred throughout the 1930s and were particularly intensive from 1936 to 1938, affected the South Caucasus as well, destroying much of the intelligentsia of these nations. The purges were orchestrated by Georgian Lavrenti Beria, who was the long-serving head of Stalin's feared secret police service (abbreviated NKVD). During the 1930s purges, Beria was sending countless politicians, journalists, scientists, peasants, and ordinary people to prison cells and torture rooms (Zhukov & Talibova, 2018). The irony of the history for Soviet Georgia is the fact that the main leaders of the great terror came from this country. Beria, like Stalin, was a Georgian, but he shared with his mentor the desire to turn on his countrymen without remorse and inflict the most heinous cruelty on them (Knight, 1991). Attitudes towards Stalin are still ambivalent in Georgia. This can be seen from the fact that the birthplace of the most famous Georgian has become a hagiographic museum in his hometown of Gori in Georgia.

If in the past, as already discussed, the South Caucasus countries enjoyed some cultural autonomy, Stalin replaced it with such a transnational concept as "friendship of peoples"

⁸ In 1938, the Russian language was introduced as a compulsory subject in all non-Russian schools from the first grade onwards; at this point, the Communist policy of superimposing Russian on the native tongue replaced the previous policy of minorities (Roucek, 1961).

(Plamper, 2004). This policy aimed to consolidate Soviet identity by incorporating both Russian and non-Russian ethnic groups into the above mentioned unified Soviet identity.

The 1953-1991 period

After Stalin's death in 1953, the new government of the Soviet Union headed by Nikita Khrushchev undertook political and social restoration. This restoration process, which is known as “de-Stalinisation” (Pospelovsky, 1968), and/or “the Khrushchev Thaw” (Pyzhikov, 2011), aimed to expose the personality cult of Stalin. Nikita Khrushchev condemned the crimes committed by his predecessor, destroyed Stalin's image as an infallible leader, and promised a return to so-called socialist legality and Leninist principles of party rule at the 20th Party Congress in February 1956 (Kolonitskii, 2009). The first step toward de-Stalinisation was the rehabilitation of victims of Stalin's repressions. The government released political prisoners and allowed people to return in their homelands to restore their autonomous regions (McDermott & Stibbe, 2015). Censorship in literature and cinema has become less harsh, non-conformist art has ceased to be prohibited, and official art has gone beyond the strict Stalinist framework (Thompson, 1993). The 1957 International Festival of Youth and Students in Moscow gave birth to the fashion for jeans, sneakers, rock and roll and badminton in the Soviet Union (Peacock, 2012; Verspieren, 2017). The government of the USSR also allowed translation of the books written by foreign writers, among whom the most fashionable in the USSR became Remarque and Hemingway (Burak, 2013). In 1956, criminal liability for voluntary dismissal and for being late for work was abolished. The working day has been reduced from 10 to 7 hours with a six-day working week, the work of adolescents under the age of 16 was prohibited, forced mobilisations to factory schools have been stopped, maternity leave has been increased, and universal pensions have been introduced (for more details see: Buchli, 1997; Hornsby, 2010). However, despite these reforms, the process of de-Stalinisation (not the reforms themselves but Khrushchev's attempt to destroy Stalin's cult) was ambiguous both in the party itself and in society (Kabachnik et al., 2015). Many treated it as a slander against the "father of nations" (Stalin) - suffice it to recall the mass

demonstrations in Tbilisi in March 1956, in which several hundred people died (Blauvelt & Smith, 2016). The myth about the infallibility of the leader of the USSR, that it can do nothing wrong, was destroyed (Larson, 1968a). The leadership of the USSR tried to present the "personality cult" as a personal "tragedy" of Stalin, who began to use repression and violence in order to build a "bright future" (Larson, 1968b). But the critically minded population began to identify these crimes with the entire Soviet system, and not with an individual. Therefore, some academics believe that the collapse of the Soviet Union began from Khrushchev's period (see: Dallin, 1992; P. Jones, 2005).

In 1964, Brezhnev succeeded Khrushchev as a Soviet leader. Brezhnev revoked some of Khrushchev's reforms and partially rehabilitated Stalinist policies, resulting in social stagnation (Hyland, 1979). Since September 1965, the decentralised system of government has been replaced by the centralised system (Linchenko & Anikin, 2020). The centralised government limited authority of the republics of the USSR and their administrations. In the second half of the 1960s, the national liberation movement became more active, as protests against violations of human rights were staged. The Sinyavsky–Daniel trial in 1966, the first show trial in Soviet history in which writers were openly convicted solely for their literary work, marked the end of the Khrushchev Thaw (see: Voinovich, 1975). The suppression of the Prague Spring in 1968, when the Soviet Union and other Warsaw Pact members invaded the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic to suppress the reforms initiated by Alexander Dubček (for more details see: McDermott & Stibbe, 2018; Skilling & Williams, 1998), was another example of the beginning of the social and political stagnation.

Mikhail Gorbachev was the last reformist leader of the Soviet Union before it collapsed in 1991. After becoming General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in March 1985, Gorbachev introduced a series of changes in domestic and foreign policies of the USSR (Desai, 2011; Martin, 1990; Rosefielde & Hedlund, 2008). The main three terms/elements of Gorbachev's reforms were: perestroika (restructuring), glasnost (openness) and demokratizatsiya (democratisation). Perestroika was one of the most important elements of a reform programme of the USSR because it involved restructuring of political and economic systems.

Gorbachev realised that the USSR was increasingly lagging behind the developed countries, and the decrease in growth rates throughout the 1970s and early 1980s made the economic situation much more difficult (Hale, 2005b). The arms race and the war in Afghanistan from 1979 to 1989 exacerbated the situation as well. 40% of government budgets were spent on military-industrial production, whereas 20% on gross social product. Furthermore, out of 25 billion roubles of total science expenditure, 20 billion was spent to research and develop military technology (Thompson, 1993). The Oil Complex provided approximately 20% of all budget revenues in 1981-1985 and 70–75% of all the country's foreign exchange receipts (Martin, 1990). During this period, the USSR became the largest importer of foodstuffs because of the stagnation of its own agriculture (Sadchikov, 2016). Perestroika was neither a radical change in the Soviet economic system nor the introduction of the market economy. Rather, it was an attempt to restructure Soviet planned economy and address its inefficiencies. The major shortcoming of the economic reform was that it could not adequately address the inefficiency of the Soviet command type industry nor advance any sensible agricultural reform (Lavigne, 1999; Thompson, 1993). Stalin's forced collectivisation of agriculture in the 1930s had such a traumatic effect on Ukrainian and Russian peasants, that it transformed them into a passive workforce (Martin, 1990). The economic inefficiency remained due to the inability of the political system to establish a "real" market economy which would be based on private ownership (Lavigne, 1999). Gorbachev made it clear that he could not tolerate private land ownership (Thompson, 1993). Instead, he favoured worker-ownership enterprises and a mixed economy that would include "state ownership, co-operative ownership and joint stock ownership" (Gooding, 1990). Also, instead of getting rid of the inefficiencies of a planned economy, Gorbachev established Gosagropom (State Ministry for Agriculture and Industry), which actually strengthened the central planning structure (Guriev, 2019). The bureaucrats of this institution monopolised decision-making power in the agricultural sector and, as a consequence, this key sector of the USSR stagnated (Martin, 1990).

In the second half of the 20th century, political and cultural institutions in the South Caucasus were ruled mainly by the nationalities of this region. This has formed local political elites in the South Caucasus, so-called Soviet feudal government (J. W. R.

Parsons, 1982), which was led for a long time by local party leaders: Vasil Mzhavanadze (1953-1972) and Eduard Shevardnadze (1972-1985) in Georgia, Karen Damirchian (1972-1988) in Armenia and Haidar Aliyev (1969-1982) in Azerbaijan. In the late 1980s, the South Caucasus became one of the most independent regions of the Soviet Union. Native languages dominated culture and media. This region with its Black Sea coast and mountain resorts was the tourist centre of the Soviet Union. The South Caucasus also became the Soviet Union's orchard and wine supplier. There was free space for culture. Azerbaijan's capital Baku had become the jazz metropolis of the Soviet Union (Allahverdiyeva, 2019). Many feature films were released in Georgia, which did not take into account the dogmas of communism. The film "Repentance", which was created by director Tengiz Abuladze in 1986, erected a cinematic monument of the perestroika era. The film was an impressive attempt to present and critique of the Stalinist past. In the late Soviet era, economically free spaces also emerged in the South Caucasus, in which the Soviet socialist planned economy coexisted with the shadow economy and private utility zones (Sampson, 1987). Under such circumstances, in the 1970s-80s, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia were in the middle position in terms of economic and industrial growth among the Soviet republics. They were well ahead of some Central Asian republics, such as Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, but lagged behind the Baltic states, Ukraine and Russia (see Table 2).

Table 2 National Income Produced Per Capita by Soviet Republics (rubles), 1970-1988

Year	USSR	Estonia	Latvia	Lithuania	Russia	Ukraine	Belarus	Kazakhstan	Armenia
1970	1194	1586	1575	1336	1332	1158	1095	980	922
1980	1741	2178	2285	1709	1975	1549	1908	1376	1663
1985	2084	2518	2643	2108	2386	1897	2356	1596	1937
1988	2210	2614	2619	2420	2624	1987	2576	1634	1749

Year	Turkmenistan	Georgia	Kirghizstan	Azerbaijan	Uzbekistan	Moldova	Tajikistan
1970	888	871	789	736	727	696	691
1980	1223	1592	1028	1472	1096	1484	936
1985	1393	2064	1219	1723	1201	1707	1071
1988	1346	1888	1175	1563	1052	1790	993

Source: (A. Bond et al., 1990, p. 712)

As shown in Table 2, by 1985 the South Caucasus countries, particularly Georgia, were able to significantly accelerate their economic growth and bring their NIP very close to the USSR average (and well above that in the central Asian republics). This increase reflected the implementation of a variety of development programmes, some of which were unique to the respective republics. The increase in NIP in the South Caucasus was due to oil development in Azerbaijan and irrigation and metallurgical/chemical production associated with multipurpose water management projects in the South Caucasus (Bond et al., 1990; Karimov, 2015). However, the South Caucasus countries experienced a sharp decline of economic growth in the years of Gorbachev's reforms from 1985 to 1988. Moreover, Table 2 shows that the three Baltic republics and Russia consistently have ranked above all other Soviet republics, whereas all four Central Asian republics were below.

There are a number of factors that explain such uneven per capita distribution. The South Caucasus countries focused on their own local capital, which were relatively small - wine, fruit, vegetable and tobacco industries in all three republics - and petrochemicals and light industries in Azerbaijan and the electrical industry in Armenia (Korganashvili et al., 2017). Moreover, in general, the South Caucasus region was characterised by a low level of economic and industrial complexity, with imports and exports accounting for up to 55-65 percent of its material capital (Tedstrom, 2019). If the majority of state industrial investment was in sectors (e.g., electric power, metallurgy, fuel extraction) that produce a relatively low economic return due to undervalued prices (e.g., Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia), then a region's or republic's intrinsic productivity could be substantially

underestimated compared to areas where higher-value goods were produced (e.g., the Baltic republics) (Åslund, 2010). Gorbachev's economic reforms embodied key principles of new economic thinking such as “uskoreniye” (scientific-technical progress acceleration), the “intensification” of factor inputs, and the concentration of investment resources in economic sectors with the best returns (Bond et al., 1990). It should be noted that NIP growth in Russia and Lithuania over the 1980s undoubtedly reflects such policy, taking into account their “intensive” sectors (high value goods), such as machine-building and metal working (Åslund, 2010; Bond et al., 1990). In addition to the above-mentioned economic factors (lack of concentration of investment resources, republic's intrinsic productivity, low economic return), a sharp decline (see Table 2) of the NIPs of the South Caucasus were also related to general economic disarray, accompanied by actual physical destruction and strikes in some cases (e.g. the beginning of the ethnic conflicts in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia in 1988 and also the devastating Spitak earthquake in Armenia in 1988) (Bond et al., 1990). Table 2 shows that the South Caucasian republics went from above average growth in 1980–85 to negative growth in 1985–88, largely reflecting the effects of the ethnic clashes that began to flare in 1988-99 (Noren & Kurtzweg, 1993).

Thanks to such devastating economic effects of Gorbachev’s reforms in the three South Caucasus countries, their rich history which created a strong sense of national identity and the memory of the first independent republic of 1918-21, the South Caucasus republics were among the first which tried to escape from the USSR. The democratic demonstrations were held in Tbilisi (April 9, 1989) and Baku (January 20, 1990) (Hornsby, 2010). After the collapse of the USSR in 1991, all the three South Caucasus countries gained independence and became the members of the United Nations (UN) in 1992 (Azerbaijan - March 2, Armenia - March 22, Georgia - July 31). From the beginning, they defined themselves as part of Europe. Georgians and Armenians believed that they were historically part of European civilisation and entitled to cultivate these roots. Similarly, many Azerbaijanis, proud of establishing the first Muslim democracy in 1918–20, also believed in their essentially Western affiliation (Mchedlishvili, 2016, p. 2).

3.2 General political and socio-economic conditions and developments in the South Caucasus states in the early 1990s

In the early years of their independence, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia have suffered from the poor governance, corruption and challenges of a fragile statehood. The South Caucasus countries have stalled in terms of democratic transition and experienced an authoritarian “rollback” (Lebanidze, 2014). During 1990-92, all three countries made some efforts to introduce democratic systems and were able to hold relatively free elections (S. E. Cornell et al., 2002). However, they all backtracked in mid-1990s to increased authoritarian rule, due to the consequences of wars, the economic collapse and the lack of knowledge of participatory politics.

Following Armenia's independence, Levon Ter-Petrossian, the leader of the Armenian National Movement, won the Presidential election in November 1991 and led Armenia through the war with Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh region (the Nagorno-Karabakh war is discussed in section 3.3.2). Armenia's first constitution was adopted in 1995 based on the French model, which established broad presidential power. In 1996, President Ter-Petrossian was re-elected in elections marred by widespread fraud and irregularities. The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) (for more details about this organisation see section 3.4) which observed the elections reported ballot box stuffing, discrepancies in vote counts and a number of unauthorised persons in polling stations (US Department of State, 2000). Later, in the fall of 1997, Ter-Petrossian accepted a proposal by the OSCE for a “step by step” solution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The OSCE plan called for the withdrawal of Armenian military forces from the occupied territories, the re-establishment of economic and trade ties between Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey, as well as the postponement of a decision on the status of the Nagorno-Karabakh region (for more details about the OSCE plan see: Abilov, 2018). The decision of Ter-Petrossian to approve the OSCE proposal caused dissatisfaction and anger among the nationalist wing of his government, led by Prime Minister Robert Kocharian (Stefes, 2008). Kocharian, along with Defence Minister Vazgen Sarkisian and National Security Minister Serzh Sarkisian, organised a “velvet coup” in February 1998, forcing President Ter-Petrossian to resign. As a result, in the second round of presidential elections, Kocharian was elected as a President. Prior to the 1999 Parliamentary elections,

Sarkisian formed a political bloc called “Miasnutiun” (Unity) with former Communist leader Karen Demirchian's People's Party. The Miasnutiun party soon grew in popularity and won a majority of seats in the National Assembly (S. E. Cornell et al., 2002). Sarkisian was appointed as a Prime Minister and Demirchian was elected as a Speaker of Parliament (Astourian, 2000). Political stability in Armenia, however, was shattered on October 27, 1999, when six gunmen stormed the Parliament, killing Demirchian, Sarkisian, and six other deputies. The chain of command and political hierarchy was broken, and Armenia had plunged into political turmoil, with President Kocharian being accused of orchestrating the crime and obstructing the prosecutor's investigation (Grigoryan, 2018). Despite this, Kocharian was able to break the Miasnutiun bloc and form a pro-presidential majority in Parliament, bolstering his political power.

Azerbaijan's political establishment tried to develop a secular democracy with a market economy after the country gained independence in August 1991. In May 1992, the anti-communist Popular Front political party seized power, forcing Azerbaijan's communist leader, Ayaz Mutalibov, to resign. Abulfaz Elchibey, the leader of the Popular Front, was elected as a President in June elections. His administration took measures towards democratisation based on the Turkish model. However, mismanagement, heavy military defeats in the war with Armenia over the Nagorno-Karabakh region and economic collapse, all contributed to the failure of reforms (S. E. Cornell et al., 2002). Moreover, separatist movements among the Lezgin and Talysh minorities in the North and South, respectively, threatened to further divide Azerbaijan (Tokluoglu, 2005). Instability and chaos within the country paved the way to the reconsolidation of the old ruling elite under the leadership of Heydar Aliyev, who was Azerbaijan's former communist leader and Politburo member (Ergun, 2010b). In June 1993, Elchibey was forced to leave his office after an armed insurrection (Nichol, 2013). He was ousted from power by parliament following a military coup and, as a result, Heydar Aliyev took over as president. In order to bring peace, Aliyev established a pragmatic approach to both foreign and domestic policy. He was able to suppress separatism in the Lezgin and Talysh regions, negotiate a cease-fire with Armenia in 1994, and attract foreign investment into the oil and gas industry (Guliyev, 2009). This, however, came at the cost of democracy and freedom of expression, as well as the consolidation of Aliyev's presidential power. In 1995, Azerbaijan

adopted its first constitution. In 1995 and 2000, there were parliamentary elections, presidential elections were held in 1998, and the first local municipal elections in 1999. Aliyev's ruling New Azerbaijan Party and its candidates won all of these elections at all stages (La Porte, 2015).

In April 1991, Georgia declared independence, led by democratically elected President Zviad Gamsakhurdia. Back in 1987, Gamsakhurdia was among other Georgian intellectuals who formed the Society of Saint Ilia the Righteous - amalgamation of religious society and political party which was against the Soviet Union (Gugushvili et al., 2017). The political party was named after the famous canonised writer by the Georgian orthodox church, Ilia Chavchavadze, to whom the national identity came down to the creed - "Language, Fatherland, Faith" (S. E. Cornell et al., 2002). This pre-eminence of language in the structure of Georgian identity has been a real obstacle to cultural integration and policy of national minorities in Georgia. Gamsakhurdia's popularity deteriorated and at the beginning, newly independent Georgia was riven by a civil war. In parallel, in 1992 the situation escalated in the two regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia between secessionists, who were supported by Russia (both conflicts are assessed in section 3.3.1).

The Georgian Civil War of 1991-1993 was a violent military coup d'état between the supporters of the president Gamsakhurdia and the Military Council (Mitchneck et al., 2009; Shesterinina, 2016). On 6 January 1992, President Gamsakhurdia was forced to flee the capital and escape to neighbouring Chechnya. After the successful coup, an interim government, the Military Council, was formed in Georgia, which was chaired by Eduard Shevardnadze, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Soviet Union, who returned to Tbilisi in March 1992. The 1992 elections established Shevardnadze as the Chairman of the Parliament and the head of the state. Later on, Gamsakhurdia returned to Georgia in an attempt to bring down Shevardnadze. However, Russia, Azerbaijan and Armenia supported Shevardnadze, who in turn agreed to join the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) (Matveeva, 2002). Furthermore, Russia sent 2000 troops to Georgia to protect railroads and support Shevardnadze's government forces against Gamsakhurdia's militias. The uprising of Gamsakhurdia soon collapsed (Fairbanks & Gugushvili, 2013). On 31 December 1993, he died in a small village of Western Georgia

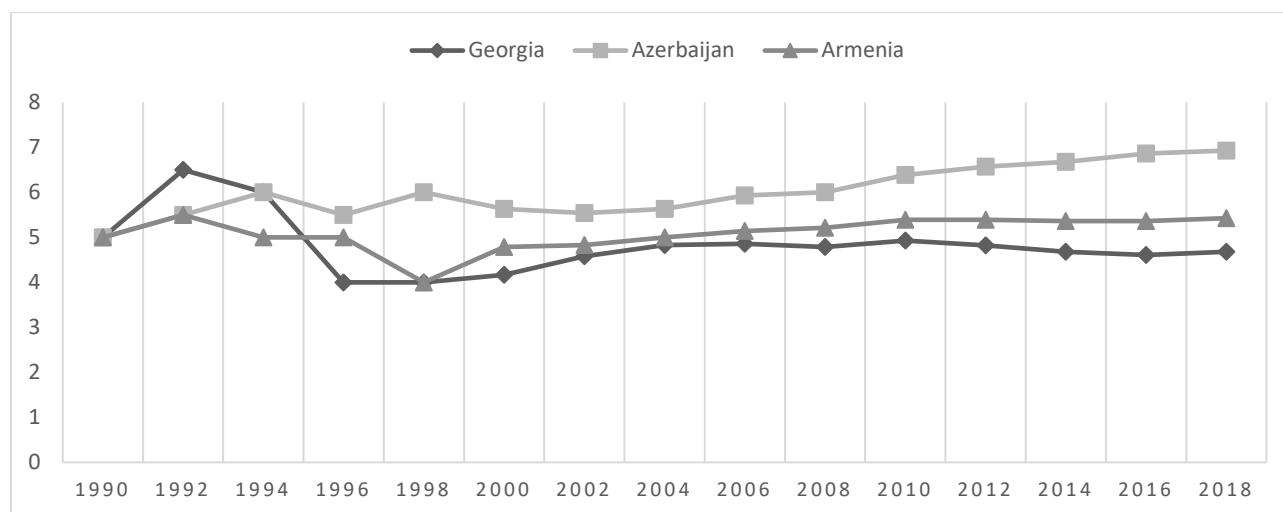
in circumstances that are still unclear.⁹ While the rebellion of Gamsakhurdia was eventually defeated, the South Ossetia and Abkhazia conflicts resulted in the de facto secession of both regions from Georgia. Shevardnadze was overwhelmingly elected as a president in both the 1995 and 2000 presidential elections. Similarly, in the 1995 and 1999 legislative elections, Shevardnadze's party, the Citizens' Union of Georgia (CUG), won the most seats. Shevardnadze was able to gradually restore some stability in Georgia. However, he became largely dependent on the Ministries of Internal Affairs and State Security to maintain his power, especially after two assassination attempts in 1995 and 1998 (Goltz, 2014)

3.2.1 Attempts for post- Soviet democratisation

According to Freedom House (see Figure 2), in the 1990s the democracy scores for the South Caucasus countries were far behind the CEE and the countries remained home to the clan-based politics typical of the Soviet period (Freedom House, 1996, p. 27).

⁹ It is known that the first president of Georgia Zviad Gamsakhurdia died in the village of the Samegrelo region of western Georgia. His body was found with a single bullet wound to the head. The reasons of assassination or suicide have been given for his death, which is still controversial and remains unresolved (for more details: .Goltz, 2015)

Figure 2 Freedom House Nations in Transit Democracy Scores for the South Caucasus (1990-2018)



Source: Freedom House: FH Nations in Transit’s democracy scores are published annually in June. As such, they show the state of play in the respective countries during the previous year, which means that the democracy scores given in the above table for the years are actually published in the NIT publication for the following year. The democracy scores and regime ratings are based on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 representing the highest level of democratic progress and 7 the lowest.

Table 3 Indicators of Democratisation in Post-communist Georgia 1997 - 2004

NIT Ratings	1997	1998	1999	2001	2002	2003	2004
Electoral Process	5.00	4.50	4.00	4.50	5.00	5.25	5.25
Civil Society	4.50	4.25	3.75	4.00	4.00	4.00	3.50
Independent Media	4.50	4.25	3.75	3.50	3.75	4.00	4.00
Governance	4.50	5.00	4.50	4.75	5.00	5.50	5.75
Constitutional, Legislative, and Judicial Framework	5.00	4.75	4.00	4.00	4.25	4.50	4.50

Corruption	N/A	N/A	5.00	5.25	5.50	5.75	6.00
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Source; Refworld, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/>

Table 4 Indicators of Democratisation in Post-communist Azerbaijan 1997 - 2004

NIT Ratings	1997	1998	1999	2001	2002	2003	2004
Electoral Process	5.75	5.50	5.50	5.75	5.75	5.75	6.00
Civil Society	5.00	5.00	4.75	4.50	4.50	4.25	4.50
Independent Media	5.50	5.50	5.50	5.75	5.50	5.50	5.75
Governance	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.00	5.75	5.75
Constitutional, Legislative, and Judicial Framework	5.50	5.50	5.50	5.25	5.25	5.25	5.50
Corruption	N/A	N/A	6.00	6.25	6.25	6.25	6.25

Source; Refworld, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/>

Table 5 Indicators of Democratisation in Post-communist Armenia 1997 - 2004

NIT Ratings	1997	1998	1999	2001	2002	2003	2004
Electoral Process	5.50	5.75	5.25	5.50	5.50	5.50	5.75
Civil Society	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50
Independent Media	5.25	5.25	4.75	4.75	4.75	5.00	5.25
Governance	4.50	4.50	4.50	4.50	4.50	4.75	4.75

Constitutional, Legislative, and Judicial Framework	4.75	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00	5.00
Corruption	N/A	N/A	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75	5.75

Source; Refworld, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/>

Dilapidated economies, corruption, “old-boy networks” and former Communist apparatchiks fused into closed networks of elites, with an interest in maintaining a status quo that enabled them to live off society while enjoying the perquisites of power (Freedom House, 1996). The decades of Soviet rule in the South Caucasus, followed by the fall of communism in the early 1990s, not only left the region embroiled in armed conflicts ignited by the rise of nationalism, but it also had an impact on the political and social networks (MacFarlane, 1997). Economic difficulties, wars and political instabilities could lead to the establishment of informal activities. These shadow traditions came from the Soviet period, which were based on paternalistic patron-client relationships and a steadfast reliance on kinship and clan networks (Aliyev, 2013).

There was no democratic political culture in any of the three South Caucasus countries. Although formally democratic institutions were created, attitudes of the ruling class and society at large often reflected decades of life in a closed authoritarian structure. Also, many former communist bureaucrats from the South Caucasus joined the new ruling elites. As already mentioned, Shevardnadze served as the First Secretary of the Georgian Communist Party in 1972–85 and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Soviet Union in 1985–91. Similarly, Aliyev was the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Azerbaijan Communist Party in 1969-82 and the head of the KGB in Azerbaijan in 1964-67. Last of all, Ter-Petrossian served as a deputy of the Supreme Soviet of the Armenian SSR in 1989-90. The new rulers' lack of familiarity with the democratic political processes meant that, despite their reformist backgrounds, they frequently adopted long-established authoritarian and paternalistic government practices, whether consciously or unconsciously (Erler & Jobelius, 2009). The general public in the South Caucasus had no prior experience of living in a democratic society. Cultural specificities of the Caucasus region also contributed to the development of clan networks and corruption. In the

Caucasus there has always been the traditions of hospitality, the exchange of gifts and services, the preference given to and support to family and friends, expressions of gratitude. Corrupters, regardless of their nationality, have no concern for their social obligations; on the contrary, they rather obtain personal advantages at the expense of others, while often using cultural traditions and local mentalities as an excuse (Aliyev, 2013; T. A. Börzel & Pamuk, 2012b).

In June 2000, the President of Azerbaijan, Heydar Aliyev, gave the government the task to implement a national programme and an anti-corruption bill (Michael & Mishyna, 2007). The bill was passed at first reading in December 2001, then was "forgotten". The texts of national programme and anti-corruption bill were not officially published, although the Azerbaijani authorities presented both documents at the 10th International Anti-Corruption Conference in Prague in October 2001 (A. Kostanyan, 2003). The anti-corruption law was finally adopted, only after 4 years (13 January 2004).

In July 2000, Georgian president Shevardnadze signed a decree setting up a working group intended to implement a national programme, which was completed in October 2000. Shortly after the final version was finalised, in April 2001, it was decided to create an Anti-Corruption Coordination Committee under the authority of the President (World Bank, 2012). In March 2001, the president signed another decree, entitled "Anti-corruption measures of prime importance" listing the concrete missions assigned to high-ranking national and local officials (2012, p. 4). However, these laws were not implemented in practice, since Georgia remained corrupt (see Table 3; also: Börzel & Pamuk, 2012b).

In Armenia, the State Anti-Corruption Commission, under the supervision of the Prime Minister Markarian, was formed in December 2000. In early 2002, at the request of the government, a group of Armenian and foreign consultants was formed. The group was responsible for drafting a national anti-corruption strategy, with the support of the Institutional Development Fund of the World Bank. A progress report was presented and discussed in July 2002 (A. Kostanyan, 2003). However, the final version was never released, although it had been repeatedly announced that the government would shortly endorse this strategy.

Despite these specific initiatives and all these efforts to establish better governance, all three countries of the South Caucasus have steadily derailed and stalled the fight against corruption. Tables 3, 4 and 5 show that corruption indicators were not improved in either of three countries, whereas Georgia's corruption ranking deteriorated from 5.00 in 1999 to 5.75 in 2003.

According to the Freedom House categorisation, from 1990 to 2003, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia were "Partly Free" countries. Some scholars argued that the failure of democratisation in the post-Soviet states has been due to the structural conditions (Hale, 2005a), while some ascribe it to the procedural variable, namely mechanism of interaction or preferences of elites (Fish, 1999). However, the interaction of both factors and importance of combined approach is necessary (Ekiert and Hanson, 2003; Petrovic, 2013), namely, both structural factors and the medium and short-term political and policy actions of communist leaders and/or their opposition¹⁰ (Petrovic, 2013, p. 56). Moreover, the influence of counter- hegemonic forces such as Russia, has been another factor hindering democracy in the South Caucasus (Lebanidze, 2014; Levitsky & Way, 2010). After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia continued to be extremely present in the region, and kept the region in its sphere of influence. The breakup of the Soviet political and economic systems opened up a political, economic and military vacuum in the Caucasian states. Started in the mid-1990s, the "Monroeski Doctrine"¹¹, which was Yeltsin's foreign policy strategy in the "near abroad", affirmed Russia's passion as the dominant power in the former Soviet Union (Kubicek, 2013). The Russian presence in the South Caucasus was effected through four major aspects: the strong economic links of the South Caucasus countries with Russia, the Russian military presence in the region, the lack of administrative reforms and ecological disasters. During the 1990s, economic ties with Russia became more distant; however, they were not eliminated and are still important. Russia has remained the main trading partner for Georgia. In 1996 and 1998, Georgia's exports to Russia amounted to \$57 million and \$55 million respectively, with a

¹⁰ For more detailed analysis about the different structural and agency explanations on the impacts of different communist and pre-communist legacies see (Ekiert and Hanson, 2003; Petrovic, 2013 Ch. 2).

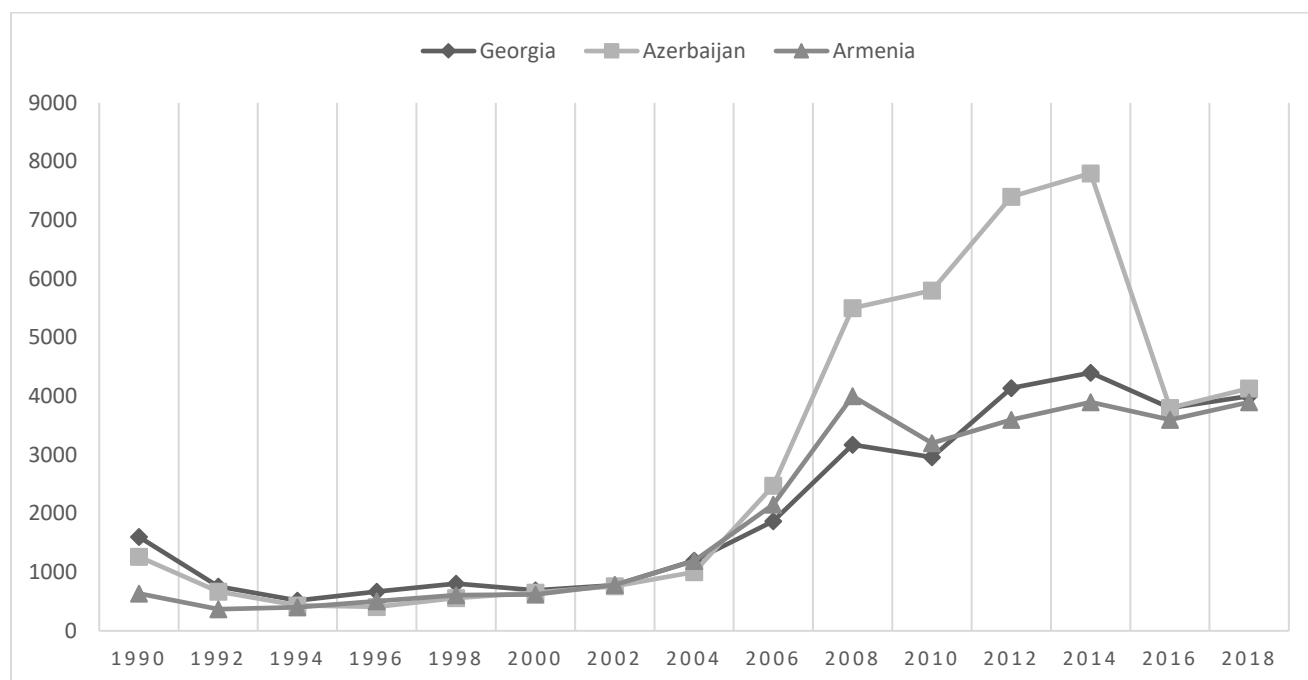
¹¹ The "Monroeski Doctrine" was similar to the "Monroe Doctrine" of the United States' in 19th century which prohibited European colonization of the newly independent Latin American republics. For more details see: (Kubicek, 2013)

total partner share of 29%. For Azerbaijan, Russia was a second trading partner after Iran during the same period, with a partner share of 17%. As in the case of Georgia, Russia remained to be the main trading partner for Armenia, with exports amounting to \$50 million in 1997, and with a partner share of 23% (World Bank, 2000). Any Western and European involvement in the production or distribution of goods (raw materials or consumer goods) had to consider the Soviet grid. The permanence of a Caucasian dependency on the Russian economy was illustrated during the Russian financial crisis which affected the entire CIS (Pastor & Damjanovic, 2003).

3.2.2 Economic conditions in the South Caucasus in the first post-Soviet years

At the beginning of the 1990s, all the South Caucasus countries experienced a sharp decline in GDP growth (Figure 3). Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia found themselves in a catastrophic economic recession. The most complicated periods were the years 1990-1995 when the GDP per capita was the lowest (see Figure 3, also Table 6). The collapse of the Soviet Union led to the cessation of fiscal transfers from Moscow to the republics and the dismantling of the inter-republic trade and payments system on which the Soviet bloc had previously relied. This shock was felt more acutely by those smaller, more geographically isolated and resource-poor countries of the CIS which had previously been more dependent on Russia (Robson, 2006). After a prolonged period of economic contraction, the rate of decline slowed, and growth resumed towards the end of the 1990s (see Figure 3 and Table 6). Due to the hard socio-economic position of the South Caucasus countries, anti-crisis programmes of macroeconomic stabilisation and systems transformation had been developed, under which the radical changes were initiated such as: transformation of the fiscal and monetary and credit sphere, privatisation of the state property, reforming of the health care, education, social sphere, etc. (Robson, 2006). The transformation processes with a transition to market relations in all the South Caucasus countries proceeded under the recommendations of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), on the basis of the liberal economic policy (Korganashvili et al., 2017).

Figure 3 GDP per capita (US\$) of the South Caucasus Countries (1990-2018)



Source: World Bank

Table 6 GDP growth and GDP per capita in the South Caucasus, years 1990-2004

№	Year	GDP (USD)			GDP growth (annual %)			GDP per capita (USD)		
		Armenia	Azerbaijan	Georgia	Ar	Az	Ge	Ar	Az	Ge
1	1990	2,256,838,858	8,858,006,036	7,737,994,864	-	-	-14.8	637	1,237	1,611
2	1991	2,068,526,522	8,792,365,811	6,337,314,652	-11.7	-0.7	-21.1	589	1,209	1,310
3	1992	1,272,577,522	4,991,350,458	3,691,110,628	-41.8	-22.6	-44.9	369	676	757
4	1993	1,201,313,196	3,973,027,397	2,701,180,604	-8.8	-23.1	-29.3	357	530	550
5	1994	1,315,158,670	3,313,739,674	2,513,870,709	5.4	-19.7	-10.4	400	436	517

6	1995	1,468,317,350	3,052,467,522	2,693,731,880	6.9	-11.8	2.6	456	397	569
7	1996	1,596,968,913	3,176,749,593	3,094,915,506	5.9	1.3	11.2	503	409	670
8	1997	1,639,492,424	3,962,710,163	3,510,540,844	3.3	5.8	10.5	523	506	775
9	1998	1,893,726,437	4,446,396,218	3,613,500,142	7.3	10.0	3.1	608	562	805
10	1999	1,845,482,181	4,581,222,442	2,800,024,342	3.3	7.4	2.9	597	574	629
11	2000	1,911,563,665	5,272,617,196	3,057,453,461	5.9	11.1	1.8	621	655	692
12	2001	2,118,467,913	5,707,618,247	3,219,487,823	9.6	9.9	4.8	692	704	734
13	2002	2,376,335,048	6,236,024,951	3,395,778,661	13.2	10.6	5.5	780	763	779
14	2003	2,807,061,009	7,275,766,111	3,991,374,540	14.0	11.2	11.1	925	884	922
15	2004	3,576,615,240	8,680,511,918	5,125,273,877	10.5	10.2	5.9	1,182	1,045	1,187

Source: (Korganashvili et al., 2017)

The economy of Azerbaijan is the largest and most dynamically developing among the economies of the South Caucasus states (see Table 6). It is primarily based on the systematic expansion of the exploitation of oil and gas reserves, as well as the flexible adaptation of the volume of export of raw materials (for more information about the European energy security and the role of Azerbaijanian resources see section 3.6). Moreover, Azerbaijan is an industrial-agrarian country with a highly developed industry, diversified agriculture and a developed export-oriented mining sector (Pomfret, 2012). From 1991 to 1995, the country's GDP decreased by almost 60% of the 1991 level, and only in 1996–1997 the economic situation began to stabilise. And if in 1995 the fall in GDP amounted to 11.8%, then in 1996 the dynamics improved and GDP growth amounted to 1.3% (see Table 6). In 1997 the situation was finally stabilised - GDP growth was 5.8% and further continued to increase. The exploitation of hydrocarbon resources and IMF loans were largely responsible for the country's rapid economic growth. In 1996, SOCAR, the Azerbaijan state oil company, signed production sharing agreements (PSAs) with foreign

oil companies for exploration and production, which brought billions of dollars into the country. The first big project was the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, the construction of which began in 2003 and completed in 2005 (Sovacool, 2012) (for more details see section 3.6). The IMF loan to Azerbaijan was made in 1999 at \$112 million to support Azerbaijan's economic and financial programme and compensate for a shortfall in exports (IMF, 1999).

In parallel, before gaining independence in 1991, the Armenian economy was largely based on industry such as chemical, mechanical engineering, light and non-ferrous metallurgy (K. Johnson, 2007). Moreover, agriculture accounted for about 20% of the economy. After the collapse of the USSR, most of the industrial enterprises ceased to function, since they were associated with servicing the military-industrial complex of the former Soviet Union (Melkonyan, 2014). Therefore, there was a sharp decline in GDP in Armenia during 1990-1993 (by more than 53% of level of 1991) (see Table 6). This was due to the blockade of railways, the rupture of economic ties between enterprises due to the collapse of the USSR and a deep energy crisis (K. Johnson, 2007). In 1994, Armenia was the first among the South Caucasus countries to move to positive growth dynamics (5.4 %), rates which increased significantly in the period of 2000-2004 (see Table 6). Average annual GDP growth in the period 2002-2003 amounted to almost 14%. Hyperinflation in Armenia had been tamed by the middle of the 1990s, thanks to the IMF loans and close cooperation between the government and the Central Bank of Armenia (CBA) in implementing strong monetary and fiscal policies (Erkam & Cavusoglu, 2008). The first IMF loan to Armenia was made in 1994 at \$210 million (Odling-Smee, 2001). Armenia achieved fundamental price stability from 1996 to 1999 (average inflation fell from 175 percent in 1995 to less than 1 percent in 1999), and the economy grew at a rate of around 5% per year (Odling-Smee, 2001).

Of all the South Caucasus states, Georgia suffered from the deepest drop in GDP in the early 1990s. From 1992 to 1994, there was a sharp decline in the index of the physical volume of GDP from 55.1% to 34.9% of the volume of GDP in 1991 (see table 6). In 1995, the government began to bring the economy out of the crisis, knocking down inflation and directing stabilisation of the financial sector, with the help of the IMF loans (Papava, 2006). The introduction of a new monetary unit, the Lari, in October 1995 and a relatively

balanced state budget had a beneficial effect on the economy (Stefes, 2008). In 1995 the decisive measures were taken to regulate the banking system, including restructuring accounting systems in accordance with international standards (Korganashvili et al., 2017). As a result, there was a qualitative growth in GDP, which in 1996 reached 11.2% (see Table 6). However, the Georgian economy started to grow more rapidly only in 2001. The government managed to overcome the budgetary crisis, to arrange the payment of salaries and pensions, and also to take a number of anti-corruption measures. Already in 2004, the foreign exchange reserves of the National Bank of Georgia doubled (Abesadze, 2015). Budget revenues increased 5 times, although taxes were sharply cut. The GDP growth of Georgia in the 2000s is related to the oil pipeline project - the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan. Georgia became an important transit country through whose territory was used to connect Azerbaijan with the Black Sea ports of Georgia and Turkey and, through Turkey to the Mediterranean coast.

3.3 Conflicts over South Ossetia, Abkhazia and Nagorno-Karabakh

In addition to the political and economic challenges, the South Caucasus has also experienced armed conflicts after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The causes of the conflicts reach far back the Soviet times; however, the Soviet Union, with its centrally organised communist party, was able to keep more or less the stability of the Caucasus as a place of harmony between the various ethnicities (Erler and Jobelius 2009). In addition to the conflicts in the North Caucasus (two Chechen wars, the conflict between Ingushetia and North Ossetia in 1992), the South Caucasus has been suffering from the three conflicts: the Georgian conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia. This is the worst legacy that Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia have inherited from the Soviet era. As long as these conflicts are not settled by mutual agreement, the South Caucasus region will remain in a condition of latent instability (Erler & Jobelius, 2009, p. 124).

3.3.1 Wars in Abkhazia and South Ossetia

The roots of the Georgian - Abkhaz¹² and Georgian - South Ossetian¹³ conflicts date back to the pre-Soviet period of 1918-1921. The Ossetians, refusing to be separated from Russia, conflicted with the Georgian Menshevik government, whereas the Abkhazians denied the Abkhazia's subordination to Georgia in the name of its status under the Russian Empire and its 1920s constitutional texts, which they claim to be violated by the Georgian and Soviet governments (Gerrits & Bader, 2016). The claims were repeated several times under the USSR, particularly in 1956, 1967 and 1978 (Sammut & Cvetkovski, 1996). Ethno-political tensions between Georgians, Abkhazians and Ossetians were largely quashed during the Soviet Union (Tocci, 2008). The tensions escalated between the South Ossetians and Georgian nationalists from 1989 to 1990. Ossetia claimed the status of an autonomous republic and then its attachment to North Ossetia and thus to the Russian Federation (Lynch, 2002). The clashes between Georgians and South Ossetians (supported by the North Ossetians) intensified in 1991 (the Georgian government under the first President Gamsakhurdia used military force to amend the South Ossetian status of autonomy) which led to ethnic war (N. Popescu, 2007). About 100,000 Georgians and Ossetians were displaced or became refugees, while the Ossetians leaving Georgia for Russia or North Ossetia (N. Popescu, 2009a). The South Ossetians were supported militarily by Russia, ultimately gained de facto control of the territory and rose the prospects of a separatist outcome to the conflict (Tocci, 2008).

In parallel to the conflict in Ossetia, the tensions between the Georgian and Abkhaz communities erupted in the summer of 1992. The Georgian troops of Kitovani, then Georgian defence minister, entered Abkhazia claiming to release the Georgian hostages held in Abkhaz territory (German & Bloch, 2006). They attacked the Parliament of Abkhazia and took over the capital Sukhumi. In the summer of 1993, Abkhaz forces, backed by Russian soldiers and North Caucasian fighters attacked Sukhumi and a large part of the territory of Abkhazia (notably the high Enguri valley, strategic for its

¹² Abkhazia is located on the eastern coast of the Black Sea, south of the Greater Caucasus mountains and in north-western part of Georgia.

¹³ Settled on both sides of the Caucasian massif, the South Ossetia provides the link between the North and the South Caucasus.

hydroelectric installations). Nearly 250,000 Georgian civilians were expelled from Abkhazia to the Georgian regions (Lynch, 2002).

A cease-fire between Georgians and Ossetians was signed on 24 June 1992 in Sochi by a four-party peacekeeping force (Russian-Georgian-North and South Ossetians) under Russian leadership (Cvetkovski, 1999). Following the agreement, a Joint Control Commission for Georgian–Ossetian Conflict Resolution (JCC) was created to oversee the joint peacekeeping forces in South Ossetia. The UN quickly became engaged in Georgian conflicts as far as Georgia was already the member of the UN (Hewitt, 2013a). Following the ceasefire agreement in 1992, the UN's special mission to Georgia was established on the basis of the Security Council's resolution 858 on 24 August 1993 (Security Council United Nations, 1993). UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros - Ghali appointed Swiss Ambassador Eduard Brunner as a special representative to Georgia. Moreover, in 1992, Georgia asked the CSCE¹⁴ to send observers and, consequently, in December 1992 the CSCE Mission to Georgia was established in response to armed conflicts in the country. In 1993 the UN took the leading role in Abkhazia and the OSCE - in South Ossetia (Hewitt, 2013a). From 1993 onwards, the peace process was mounted from the UN, Russia and the Group of Friends of Georgia (Russia, the US, France, Germany and the UK). Thus far, an internationalisation of the Georgian conflicts has therefore taken place since a group of major Western nations (Germany, France, the UK, the US) together with Russia became involved in peace efforts under the aegis of the UN (Kereselidze, 2015).

In July 1993, the UN proposed to deploy an international observer mission on the front line. An agreement took place on 4 April 1994 that led to the cease-fire and withdrawal of forces on 14 May 1994 (Ambrosio & Lange, 2016). The fundamental obstacle to the political resolution of the conflicts has been the refusal of Abkhaz and Ossetian leaders to recognise the territorial integrity of Georgia, while Georgia categorically refuses all options that would imply recognition of the sovereignty of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

In the absence of substantial progress, since 1997, the so-called Geneva Process has been established through the creation of a coordinating council chaired by the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General, the OSCE and the group of friends of the

¹⁴ The CSCE (Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe) was renamed to the OSCE on 1 January 1995.

Secretary-General for Georgia (composed of France, the UK, Germany, the US and Russia). The Coordination Council comprised three working groups: security and non-resumption of hostilities, refugees and displaced persons, economic and social issues (Vasilyan, 2014). There was a serious absence of strong EU political engagement in conflict-resolution in Georgia; however, the EU, through its large member states was, therefore, at the heart of conflict resolution.

There were no military clashes since the 1992 ceasefire agreement, except a couple of confrontations between the Georgian and the South Ossetian and Abkhazian forces. However, the situation was dramatically changed after the “Rose Revolution” in Georgia (for more detailed analysis of the Rose Revolution see section 4.2). When a pro-Western government headed by Mikhail Saakashvili came into power in 2003, the new Georgian government declared its strong aspiration to become the member of the EU and the NATO, which caused an interest conflict with Russia (N. Popescu, 2009b). Soon the Georgian and Russian relations were intermingled like a chessboard. The increase in defence spending in Georgia was perceived as a direct threat in Russia, which in response carried out large-scale military exercises with 8,000 troops and 700 armoured vehicles at the border with Georgia in July 2008 (Kereselidze, 2015, p. 110). In March 2008, Georgia left the peacekeeping force demanding a new 2+2+2 formula, including the EU, the OSCE and the Provisional Administrative Entity of South Ossetia. Tensions between Georgia and Russia began escalating that led to the war between Georgia and Russia in August 2008.

At this time, the development and signing of a ceasefire document between Russian and Georgia took place with the direct mediation of French President Nicolas Sarkozy. The ceasefire document¹⁵ created two main mechanisms for managing the conflict and its aftermath. The first mechanism was the “Geneva Talks”, which included the conflicting parties, as well as the UN, the US, the EU and the OSCE. The second was an unarmed, civilian monitoring mission, the EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM) (Lewington, 2013). The EUMM is strictly impartial between the parties to the 2008 conflict (M. Freire & Simão,

¹⁵ For more details see: Six Point Peace Plan, Communique of the President of France. The six-point ceasefire agreement agreed on August 12 as a result of the meeting of President Nicolas Sarkozy with President Dimitri Medvedev. This letter was sent to President Saakashvili on August 14, 2008. See: <http://smr.gov.ge/Uploads/9bbbc7.pdf>

2013). The EUMM started its operations on the 1st of October 2008, with a formal mandate from the European Council of Ministers which sets out EUMM tasks and objectives. In broad terms, the task of the EUMM is to prevent a renewal of the armed conflict, to make the boundary/border between the break-away regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and Georgia itself, and adjacent areas, safe for local populations (Hoffmeister, 2012). Day-to-day EUMM activity focuses on stabilisation, normalisation and confidence-building (Lewington, 2013, p. 52).

The August war of 2008 significantly changed the dynamics of the conflicts in Georgia. After the war, Russia recognised the de facto independence of Ossetia and Abkhazia¹⁶, the previously existing legal framework for resolving the conflict disappeared and, accordingly, the institutions responsible for the transformation of the conflict and the non-resumption of fire were terminated (Kereselidze, 2015). This process also affected international missions. Russia used its veto power at the UN and the OSCE to end their missions to Georgia (Kirova, 2012). Hence, the EU is today (as of 2020) one of the main international players involved in the conflict resolution process in Georgia. The EUMM activity focuses on stabilisation, normalisation and confidence-building; therefore, the EU uses soft power as its primary instrument for conflict resolution in Georgia. In its relations with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the EU has defined a policy of engagement that aims to increase the EU's footprint and leverage, providing an alternative to ties with Russia and broadening the space and venues for conflict resolution (Kirova, 2012). According to the former EU Special Representative (EUSR) to the South Caucasus in 2006–2011, Peter Semneby, what the EU does best, namely, to use its soft power “to nudge societies in the direction of Europe while fostering a stronger European identity”.¹⁷

The EU has a longstanding record of supporting confidence building and people-to-people initiatives in Georgia. Before August 2008, the European Commission was the largest donor supporting rehabilitation and civil society projects in Abkhazia and South Ossetia (European Commission, 2009b). At the same time, before the 2008 war, the EU

¹⁶ As for 2020, those UN member states, which formally recognise Abkhazia or South Ossetia as independent countries are: Russia (2008), Nicaragua(2009/2010), Venezuela (2010), Nauru (2009), Syria (2018). Tuvalu and Vanuatu have withdrawn their recognition after the diplomatic negotiations with Georgia.

¹⁷ For more details see: Statement by the EUSR for the South Caucasus Peter Semneby. OSCE Permanent Council, Vienna. 10 February 2011. P. 5

did not have much of a security and political profile in the region (Lewington, 2013; Pashayeva, 2015). Projecting only soft and no hard power, the EU has been a weaker player in the shared neighbourhood with Russia, but on the other hand, maintained a degree of impartiality in the eyes of the conflict parties (Kirova, 2012).

While working on the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the EU has tended to adopt a centric logic, bottom-up and non-politicised initiatives (Lewington, 2013; Paul, 2015a). Particularly, before the 2008 war, this approach was derived from a strong emphasis on improving living conditions for the IDPs, rehabilitation of essential infrastructure and socio-housing support (European Commission, 2009b). Some initiatives targeted the root causes of conflict more directly and aimed to build ties between the communities on both sides (Georgia and Ossetia and Abkhazia) through joint economic and infrastructure development, information and culture sharing programmes and dialogue platforms that addressed competing narratives (ibid 2009b, p. 4). In Abkhazia, which offered a more open environment, a number of public diplomacy initiatives were launched in civil society capacity building, inter-community dialogue, and support for inter-ethnic youth and women's networks (Kirova, 2012; Skrypnyk, 2019).

3.3.2 The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia

The roots of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, similar to the Georgian - Abkhaz and Georgian - South Ossetian conflicts, date back to the 1920s. After the Russian Revolution of 1917, Nagorno - Karabakh was a self-governed territory with all the specification of the de facto statehood. However, in 1921 Stalin put the Nagorno – Karabakh region (which had the major population of Armenians) under the jurisdiction of Soviet Azerbaijan. For the next 70 years, Karabakh Armenians did not have opportunity to study in their native Armenian language, have national symbols or some economic relations with Armenia. Many Karabakh Armenians perceived this as an anti- Armenian policy of Azerbaijan (Zurcher, 2007). After the Stalin era, Karabakh Armenians where the first national groups in the Soviet Union to make public their discontent, signed petition (in 1963) and organised large demonstrations (in 1965 and 1977) to demand the unification of Karabakh with Armenia (ibid 2007, p. 154). Later, Gorbachev's policies of "Glasnost" and

“Perestroika” gave the Karabakh Armenians the opportunity for the self-determination after decades of ignorance (Demirel, 2012). Furthermore, “Perestroika” and “Glasnost” were an opportunity for them to freely display their claims hitherto ignored by the central Soviet authorities (Arkhireyskyi & Ivashkina, 2018). An unofficial referendum¹⁸ in February 1988 called for the Nagorno- Karabakh region to become the part of Armenia. However, Azerbaijan ignored the petition (Muth, 2014). During these political struggles, Nagorno-Karabakh became an issue for a multitude of rivalries between Armenians and Azerbaijanis. Moreover, different actors of the USSR had different interests towards the Nagorno-Karabakh issue and this affair was beyond the reach of Western actors. 1988 saw an explosion of tensions. The rise of nationalist movements in Azerbaijan and Armenia led to strained positions and mass demonstrations to which the Soviet authorities responded with successive waves of repressions¹⁹.

At the end of 1991, Azerbaijan, with Nagorno-Karabakh in its jurisdiction, declared independence, leading to legal and political deadlock with Armenia. As soon as Azerbaijan declared its independence, the Armenian majority voted to break away from Azerbaijan and proclaimed the Republic (unrecognised) of Nagorno-Karabakh (Kolstø & Blakkisrud, 2008). Full scale fighting erupted in the late 1992. International mediation by several groups, including the OSCE, could not escalate the conflict. By the end of 1993, Armenians were already in full control over the Nagorno-Karabakh. The replacement of the first president of Azerbaijan, Abulfaz Elchibey, by Heydar Aliyev in 1993 brought Azerbaijan closer to Russia and made it possible to sign the Bishkek Protocol²⁰ to cease hostilities on the frontline (Mooradian & Druckman, 1999). Following the handling of the problem in July 1993 by Russia - and in particular by President Yeltsin's special envoy - a ceasefire was signed on 27 May 1994. It was decided that Russia would have been jointly responsible for the ad hoc group of states set up in 1992 to mediate the OSCE Minsk Group, co-chaired by France, Russia and the United States (King, 2001). As for the OSCE Intervention Force, the technical conditions for its deployment were specified in

¹⁸ This petition was signed by about 80,000 people (Sherr, 2017).

¹⁹ Bloody intervention in Baku on January 20, 1990, terror and deportation of the operation "ring" under President Moutalibov in Nagorno-Karabakh in the months leading up to the August 1991 coup (Cornell, 1997).

²⁰ The Bishkek Protocol is a ceasefire agreement which was signed by the representatives of Azerbaijan, Armenia, Nagorno-Karabakh and Russia's representative in OSCE, on May 5, 1994 in Bishkek.

December 1995 at a ministerial meeting. Since 1992, several peace plan proposals have been launched by the mediators, but without success. The principle of an exchange of territories between Armenia and Azerbaijan was suggested as early as in 1992 by the American diplomatic adviser, Paul Goble, and resumed in 1999 by American diplomats (Gillespie, 1994). At the 1996 OSCE Summit in Lisbon, a unanimously adopted resolution (excluding Armenia) recognised the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan (Kolstø & Blakkisrud, 2008). The president of Armenia, Ter Petrosian rejected the text proposing to give Nagorno-Karabakh a "broad autonomy" (Lynch, 2002). Armenians of the self-proclaimed republic prefer a comprehensive settlement that would guarantee them from the outset the political status they wanted without running the risk of abandoning the occupied territories. In 1998, the Minsk group proposed, based on a Russian idea, a wide autonomy for Nagorno-Karabakh in the framework of a common state, but it suffered a new refusal by Azerbaijan (Güneylioğlu, 2017).

Every proposal to end the conflict has been doomed to fail, since both parties have been raising the question of the legitimacy of borders and administrative statuses. The Nagorno-Karabakh dispute is linked to the question of "who was the first to settle in the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh" (Zurcher, 2009). These claims to ethnically defined ownership of the land goes back to the colonial powers, to the last century backward via pre-Russian, pre-Ottoman, pre-Persian empires, which cuts through the futile debates and brings all the conflict solution efforts to a deadlock. In the end, according to Zurcher (2007) "even zoological evidence needs to be consulted to prove a point" (p. 155).

Another factor that played a role in the genesis of the Nagorno- Karabakh conflict has been related to the "Armenian question" and in particular the already discussed genocide of the Ottoman Armenians in 1915 (see section 3.1). This past trauma is still present in the mass psychology of the conflicting parties and is a fundamental data for understanding the arguments of Azerbaijan and Armenia (Cheterian, 2018).

The early escalations of 1992 and 1994 formed two broad alliances: Armenia, a member of the CIS and directly supported by Russia and its troops on the spot, and Azerbaijan, an independent, pro-Turkish, militarily aided by Turkey (Mikhelidze, 2010). Along with Georgia, Nagorno-Karabakh is the South Caucasus point where the Russian-Turkish power struggle is indirectly focused. The region is of strategic importance for the Russian

armed forces since it is the direct border with Turkey and therefore NATO. The South Caucasus issue has been often considered an internal affair in Russia despite the new international borders and at the individual level, the South Caucasus question remains for many Russian leaders internal (see also: Fierman, 2012; German, 2009; Sonnleitner, 2016).

The EU has been having the opportunity to offer the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict some alternatives to its resolution. While the Soviet Union was crumbling and the conflicts in the South Caucasus erupting, Europe came together in Paris²¹ in November 1990 to transform the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE)²² in managing the conflicts in the post-Cold war Europe and its neighbourhood (Zacha, 2018). The conflicts in the South Caucasus, and particularly the Nagorno- Karabakh conflict, were one of the first real challenges for the organisation to test its ambitious mission. However, the EU's involvement in the Nagorno-Karabakh was limited because EU foreign policy was in the making after the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, and the newly established CFSP did not focus much on the South Caucasus either (ibid 2018, p. 5). Only after the Lisbon Treaty in 2007, the EU began to act in the international arena as a more consolidated political actor and expanded its ability to influence international events, including conflicts in the South Caucasus (Pollack, 2000; M. Smith, 2012). Moreover, the EU's relations with the South Caucasus have been accelerating since the 2003 enlargement and the creation of the ENP (this topic is analysed in the next chapter). Nevertheless, the EU is still considered to be a late comer (and a new player) to this region and is still forming its foreign policy towards the South Caucasus (see also: Cornell, 2017; Zacha, 2018).

Unlike the intra-state conflicts (separatist) in Georgia as analysed in the previous section, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has been an inter-state conflict between the two internationally recognised states – Armenia and Azerbaijan – each having its own relationships with the EU. This has increased the pressure on the EU to maintain neutrality in Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. As a result, any understanding of EU policy on

²¹ Charter of Paris for New Europe. Paris 1990. Available at: <https://www.osce.org/mc/39516?download=true> delete this footnote; its purpose is not clear at all; if you need to say something about 'Paris in 1990' say it within the next, footnote 16

²² On 1st January 1995, the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) Heads of State and Government, determined to give the CSCE new political impetus, agreed to change the name to Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).

Nagorno-Karabakh conflict must be understood in the context of EU relations with both Azerbaijan and Armenia (N. Popescu, 2010).

The clashes between the two parties have been occurring since the 1994 ceasefire. The most recent heavy fighting, which broke out along the border in late September 2020, has changed the status quo of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. On both sides, over a thousand soldiers and civilians were killed, with hundreds more injured (Kolosov & Zotova, 2020). The UN, the US and Russia urged Armenia and Azerbaijan to hold talks and end hostilities, but they refused, vowing to fight on. When both sides turned from cross-border bombing to longer-range artillery and other heavy weapons, tensions rose even higher. Russia negotiated a cease-fire in early October 2020, which was breached. France negotiated two more cease-fires in conjunction with Russia and the US, and then the US directly. These cease-fires were also quickly broken, with both Armenia and Azerbaijan committing violations (Kazaryan et al., 2021). As the clashes continued, Azerbaijani forces were successful in taking over some strategic locations such as city of Shusha and soon, as a result, all Armenian-controlled territories surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh were ceded back to Azerbaijan by the 1st of December 2020. Moreover, Azerbaijan gained control over the strategic land situated in its Nakhichevan exclave by way of the corridor through Armenia and therefore given direct access to Turkey. Following the capture of Shusha, Azerbaijani President Aliyev, Armenian Prime Minister Pashinyan and Russian President Putin signed a ceasefire agreement, which terminated all hostilities in the region on November 10, 2020 (Yavuz & Huseynov, 2020). Armenia and Azerbaijan retained control of their captured areas in Nagorno-Karabakh under the terms of the agreement, while Armenia returned all the territories it seized in 1994 back to Azerbaijan. Last of all, for at least five years, about 2,000 Russian soldiers were stationed along the Lachin corridor between Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh as peacekeeping forces (Modebadze, 2021). The ceasefire agreement signed by Russia, Armenia and Azerbaijan on November 10 to end the Nagorno-Karabakh war seems to be a temporary solution to the problem, because the agreement does not address the key issues of peace settlement, the most important of which is the status of Nagorno-Karabakh. The deal was described by Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan as "incredibly painful", while Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev has stated that the Nagorno-Karabakh region is entering a new

era of restoration, reconstruction and development (Gauthier-Villars & Simmons, 2020). While Azerbaijanis proudly celebrate this historic victory, Armenians see the ceasefire agreement as a defeat (Losh & Roth, 2020). The Russian and French foreign ministers have both called for more negotiations on the future status of the Nagorno – Karabakh. However, Azerbaijan, which had previously discussed various forms of autonomy for the Nagorno-Karabakh under its control, now appears to reject everything except perhaps giving the right to local schools to speak Armenian language. Meanwhile, under enormous pressure as a result of both military defeat and the deeply unpopular ceasefire agreement, Armenia's government risks a total collapse (for more details see: Crisis Group, 2020). Following the outbreak of the war, the EU became marginalised (N. Popescu, 2020), which was only limited to a few statements asking all parties to return to the negotiating table. Josep Borrell, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, urged conflicting sides to restart the peace process under the auspices of the OSCE, which has been unable to resolve the conflict for the past three decades. French President Emmanuel Macron blamed Turkey over supporting Azerbaijan militarily, while German Chancellor Angela Merkel made phone calls to Baku and Yerevan to urge a ceasefire (Grgic, 2020; Racz, 2020). Despite the EU's attempts at brokering a ceasefire, it was Russia which could seal an agreement that confirmed Azerbaijan's battlefield success and a painful concession on Armenia, which at the end, gave Russian troops the opportunity to deploy in Nagorno-Karabakh as peacekeeping forces.

3.4 The early stage of EU relations with the South Caucasus: Cooperation via the OSCE and the Council of Europe

Throughout the 1990s, the South Caucasus was a *terra incognita* to the EU and consequently kept a low profile in this remote region (Delcour, 2011). Moreover, the EU was largely absorbed with the bloody events in the Western Balkans following the collapse of the former Yugoslavia. Of the fifteen-member states of the EU, only six, namely the UK, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, opened embassies in Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia. The delegation of the European Commission was opened in

Tbilisi in 1995, which was responsible for all three countries, mainly related to the humanitarian aid and assistance (Sierra, 2011; Simão, 2012). However, cooperation between the three South Caucasus countries and the EU primarily was through the activities of the earlier mentioned OSCE (see sections 3.2 and 3.3) and the Council of Europe.

Despite the dominance of the Anglo-American project to entrust an enlarged NATO the security of the European continent, some EU member states have continued to look at the OSCE as a vehicle for transmitting their diplomatic influence in the former USSR in the 1990s (Waeber, 2006). The OSCE is an intergovernmental organisation which was established in 1975. It includes 57 member countries and its mandate covers issues such as arms control, human rights promotion, freedom of press and fair elections. All member countries of the EU have been also participating states of the OSCE and contributions from the EU member states account for more than two-thirds of the OSCE budget (Paunov, 2014). The Council of Europe is a pan-European organisation which was found in 1949. It includes 47 member states, including all EU member states and its mandate covers issues such as human rights, democracy and the rule of law in Europe (Bond, 2010).

The OSCE became active in a wave of euphoria following the breakdown of the former Soviet bloc and has played an important role in state building and democratisation of many countries from Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union (Warkotsch, 2007). The statehood problems of the post-Soviet South Caucasus region, remarkably similar to those in the post-Yugoslav Western Balkans, have resulted from the inability of disputing parties and the ethnic groups to find a peaceful solution without foreign assistance (Petrovic, 2013; Pickering, 2010). In this sense, the OSCE served as a multiplier of involvement for the European assistance and diplomacy in the South Caucasus.

The OSCE umbrella has also consistently played a moderating role in relations with Russia, both collectively and bilaterally (German, 2007). Moreover, the OSCE has always been a testing ground for the EU foreign policy (Paunov, 2014). Through the 1990s both the OSCE and the EU were undergoing fundamental institutional changes and the wars in the Balkans and the South Caucasus came as a burden and both were slow to react to

intervene in the settlement of these conflicts (Paunov, 2014). There was a formal division of labour regarding their engagement in the conflict regions between the OSCE and the UN in the 1990s. According to the Resolution 50/87 (Cooperation between the UN and the CSCE) the UN would retain the lead in peace-making efforts in Tajikistan, Abkhazia and Bosnia, while the OSCE would be involved in conflict resolution processes in Nagorno-Karabakh, Moldova, South Ossetia and Macedonia.²³ However, in Abkhazia, the OSCE remained active despite the leadership of the UN (Stober, 2011; section 3.3).

In the 1990s, the OSCE and the EU worked together on ad hoc projects which were conducted by on-site missions on behalf of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)²⁴ (Paunov, 2014). The cooperation between the OSCE and the EU was broadened during the developments of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) after the Maastricht Treaty when the EU became more actively involved in civilian crisis management. Furthermore, the Amsterdam Treaty, which was signed in 1997 and entered into force in 1999 (two years is a standard time frame as all the member states need to ratify those treaties), recognised, for the first time, the possibility of the EU to have a comprehensive role in the area of crisis management (German, 2007). EU member states, which tend to co-finance ad hoc projects, were those who were already contributing the most to the OSCE's general budget in all the three South Caucasian countries. Germany was collaborating with the mission in Armenia, the British, the Belgians, the Swedes and the Dutch were closely following and occasionally supporting the activities in the Georgian office (Stober, 2011). These collaborations were carried out through national cooperation agencies or NGOs which were very close to national governments or diplomatic centres, such as the Netherlands Helsinki Committee (NHC).²⁵

²³ For more details see: United Nations General Assembly. A/51/489. 14 October 1996. Available at: <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/docs/51/plenary/a51-489.htm>

²⁴ The ODIHR is the principal institution of the OSCE dealing with the "human dimension" of security. It provides support, assistance and expertise to participating States and civil society to promote democracy, rule of law, human rights and tolerance and non-discrimination. The ODIHR observes elections, reviews legislation and advises governments on how to develop and sustain democratic institutions. Further refer to: <https://www.osce.org/odihr>

²⁵ The Netherlands Helsinki Committee (NHC) is a non-governmental organisation which promotes human rights, democracy and the rule of law in the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) region. For more details see: The Hague Justice Portal. Netherlands Helsinki Committee. Available at: <http://www.haguejusticeportal.net/index.php?id=2131>

However, the choice to devote resources to the OSCE therefore did not correspond to a collective agreement in the EU. Rather, it reflected the choice of multilateral action of the most influential states of the EU which preferred to delegate some of their power to an intergovernmental organisation rather than to supranational community structures (Hill, 1998). Because of its reliance on a decision-making process based on consensus and the lack of coercive means at its disposal, the OSCE has been having a role of insider third party, enjoying a certain margin of initiatives and relative independence (Biscop, 2006), and developing an alternative approach to conflict management based on persuasion and not coercion (Scheffer, 2003).

In such complexity, the engagement of European organisations was not well coordinated in the South Caucasus. The EU and the OSCE are comprised of many member states, and have complex institutional structures with multiple sub-divisions, which all have at times quite contradictory interests (Axyonova & Gawrich, 2018, p. 4). However, the institutional complexity and contradictory interests of the actors have not been the only problems on the ground. The OSCE actions, have also been lacking continuity, suffering from short contract practices that prevent longer-term project development (Knill et al., 2016) whereas, unlike the European Commission, the OSCE Secretariat was small and many staff had to deal with many coordinative activities (interview 4; Biscop, 2006).

The degree of cooperation between the OSCE missions in Baku and Yerevan and the EU remained very limited in the early 2000s since they had officially started their activities only in 2000 (16 February in Armenia and 18 July in Azerbaijan). One of the former OSCE representatives stated that "there was no specific coordination" between the EU and the OSCE and both organisations "avoided falling into the trap of lack of coordination" (interview 5). In Armenia and Azerbaijan, it was ultimately the OSCE and the Council of Europe which occupied the main place in the division of tasks between the regional organisations. Following the membership of both countries into the Council of Europe, the organisation followed a standard list of normative reforms to be undertaken by the new members (Bond, 2010). In contrast, the EU and its member states have maintained rather distant relations with the Council of Europe to handle South Caucasus cases (Vasilyan, 2011). Their interactions were preceded by the concerns related to the admission of the South Caucasian states to the Council of Europe: in this process, the EU

member states played a significant role. Only after the accession of Georgia in 1999 and Azerbaijan and Armenia in 2001, the coordination between the programmes of the EU and the Council of Europe began to take shape (Biscop, 2006).

The South Caucasus political and intellectual elites perceived the Council of Europe as the European family; therefore, their membership to this organisation was a political priority goal (Jordan, 2003; Zhvania, 2009). Zurab Zhvania, the chairman of the parliament of Georgia from 1995 to 2001, in his book (2009) remembers that when Georgia started the process of joining the Council of Europe in 1994, a formal discussion was held in the Parliamentary Assembly as to whether the South Caucasus was actually part of Europe. As Zhvania puts it, “after lengthy debates, it was decided that indeed, the Caucasus is part of Europe” (2009, p. 104). Moreover, the milestone statement - “I am Georgian and therefore I am European” (Zhvania, 2009) made on behalf of Georgia by Zhvania in Strasbourg in 1999, when Georgia became the 41st member state of the Council of Europe, has altered the post-Soviet architecture in the Caucasus region and constructed the momentum of Europeanism (see also: Mestvirishvili & Mestvirishvili, 2014). Such attitudes and arguments of Georgia’s political elite at the time clearly fit in to March & Olsen’s *homo sociologicus* and logic of appropriateness explanation when human actors follow rules that associate particular identities (see section 2.2.2). On the other side, it was the Council of Europe which served as a privileged political interlocutor for promoting European values, democratisation and human rights in the South Caucasus (N. Mestvirishvili & Mestvirishvili, 2014). The EU-15, which enjoyed considerable political weight in the Council of Europe, has therefore chosen to effectively mortgage the role of the EU in this area (Bond, 2010). Georgian leadership tried to show the readiness to accept EU norms as primarily related to their European identity.

Meanwhile, the decision of the Council of Europe to accept Azerbaijan as a member was not easy to make. The member states of the Council of Europe were particularly concerned regarding widespread criticism by the OSCE over controversial parliamentary elections held in Azerbaijan in November 2000 (see: Council of Europe, 2001). An electoral re-run held in January 2001 in 11 Azerbaijani constituencies failed to meet OSCE requirements

for free and fair elections.²⁶ The admission of Georgia and Armenia was also problematic due to political instability and human rights violations as discussed in section 3.2, although the Council of Europe members accepted their accession - Georgia in 1999 and Armenia in 2001 (Jordan, 2003). The Parliamentary Assembly debates of the Council of Europe regarding the accession of Azerbaijan highlighted cleavages between the EU Member States. Two groups of states opposed each other diplomatically, some being in favour of the simultaneous entry of Azerbaijan and Armenia, while the others preferred to delay the entry of Azerbaijan because of the irregularities noted during the November elections (Council of Europe, 2001). Supporters of simultaneous and rapid accession gathered around France, Italy and Austria (Vasilyan, 2011). The first group emphasised their arguments regarding the progressive nature of the process of democratisation and the risks of nationalist reaction that would cause the rejection by the Council of Europe. In addition to this political and ideological cleavage on the context of democratisation, the religious divide has come into play (Guliyeva, 2005). Proponents of Azerbaijan's accession feared that a refusal would be interpreted as religious discrimination and the imposition of a dividing line between Christian and Muslim countries of the Caucasus (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 701). The opponents of this view, led by the UK and the Netherlands, advocated, with the support of the US, a democratic deficit in Azerbaijan (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 760). Germany initially stated that it would have been unfair for Armenia to be penalised because of the poor democratic performance of its neighbour (Council of Europe, 2001, p. xxi). In June 2000, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe adopted Opinion 222 (2000), finding that Azerbaijan was "able and willing to fulfil the provisions of Article 3 (the principles of the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms)²⁷ and Azerbaijan became the 43rd member of the Council of Europe on 25 January 2001.

Since 1999, co-ordination between the EU and the Council of Europe was beginning and there have been approximately 180 European Commission/Council of Europe joint

²⁶ See Radio Free Europe. Caucasus: Armenia And Azerbaijan Join Council of Europe. January 25, 2001. Available at: <https://www.rferl.org/a/1095594.html>

²⁷ Parliamentary Assembly Opinion 222(2000). Azerbaijan's application for membership of the Council of Europe. Available at: <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=16816&lang=en>

programmes of co-operation and joint actions in Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan.²⁸ The similar joint programmes have been implementing relatively early in Ukraine (since 1995), Moldova (since 1997) and Russia (since 1996), which illustrates the fact that the EU and the Council of Europe retained a low-profile in the South Caucasus in the 1990s (see also: Baev et al., 2003). When the EuropeAid (the development agency of the EU) was established in 2001, the European Commission took the initiative to propose to the Council of Europe an agreement which aimed to strengthen relations between the two organisations to implement more joint programmes in the South Caucasus (European Commission, 2001c; Joris & Vandenberghe, 2008).

3.5 Early economic cooperation: The Partnership and Cooperation Agreements and Technical Aid

Following independence, the South Caucasus countries began to receive a humanitarian aid from the EU through the Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States (TACIS). The TACIS programme was one of the key instruments of the EU to develop cooperation with the new independent states to contribute to the building up of a market economy (European Commission, 1999). It started in 1991 and had been extended to over thirteen countries of Eastern Europe and Central Asia (Azerbaijan, Belarus, Turkmenistan, Moldova, Mongolia, Russia, Georgia, Armenia, Tajikistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan). The legal basis of the programme was the regulations of the European Council which focused on issues such as institutional, legal and administrative reforms, private sector development, environmental protection, infrastructure development, agriculture and nuclear security. The TACIS financing was implemented according to national programmes developed for each country. From 1991 to 2000, these programmes defined the priorities and key trends of cooperation in five sectors,²⁹ which were:

²⁸ See Council of Europe. Joint Programmes between the Council of Europe and The European Union. Available at: <http://www.jp.coe.int/>

²⁹ For more details see: Commission of the European Communities. TACIS 1992. Operational Guide. Available at: <http://aei.pitt.edu/36320/1/A2436.pdf>

- training in the public and private sector
- energy
- transport
- financial services
- food distribution.

The EU's technical and financial assistance was based on continuity and innovation (European Commission, 1999, p. 3). Continuity in reconfirming the European Commission's commitment to providing expertise and funding - to help the countries in the region through the difficulties of transition; and innovation in gearing the approach more precisely than ever before towards the evolving needs of partner countries (ibid 1999, p. 3).

The TACIS operated in the South Caucasus from 1991 to 2007 (in 2007, the TACIS was replaced by the European Neighbourhood Policy Instrument (ENPI)). For the period of 1991-1999 (see Table 7), the EU committed €212.1 million in funding to the South Caucasus countries through the TACIS programme. The money allocations envisioned contribution to the transitional reforms of the countries. In Armenia, the TACIS worked on energy efficiency policy and investment promotion (national energy security and diversification and structural reforms) and agricultural sector by training and finance private farmers. Furthermore, the TACIS programme provided policy advice and consultancy (included projects on post-privatisation, inter-institutional education information system, the reform of the health system and etc.), supported the development of human resources and improving nuclear safety. For this reason, the EU demanded Armenia close down the Medzamor Nuclear Power Plant³⁰ (European Commission, 1999, pp. 10–11). As expected, the TACIS worked closely with the energy sector in Azerbaijan, due to its high energy potential (European Commission, 1999, p. 12). Furthermore, as shown in Table 7, the European Commission granted additional aid of €26.8 million in 1998 for Azerbaijan to “fund key projects with a social and environmental impact” (ibid 1999, p. 13). Other technical and financial assistance through the TACIS in Azerbaijan

³⁰ The service life of the only operating power unit (the second was closed after the Spitak earthquake in 1988) was extended by the Armenian government until 2026 (Andersson, 1999).

included: agriculture and enterprise, human resources and rehabilitation.³¹ In Georgia, the TACIS supported energy, transport and telecommunications sector (electricity distribution companies were privatised with the TACIS assistance). Moreover, in business development, the TACIS projects included assistance for smaller firm support centres and business communication centres and a post-privatisation managerial support centre. Last of all, like in Azerbaijan and Armenia, the TACIS supported farmers and agriculture sector in Georgia as well.

One of the most important infrastructural projects, but with the modest budget supported by the TACIS (particularly via the TRACECA) in Georgia, was the investment of €2 million to build the new bridge in 1998 near the 12th century "Red Bridge", which links Georgian and Azerbaijan territories (European Commission, 1999, p. 20).

Table 7 The TACIS funds committed by country in 1991-1999 (in million euro)

	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	Total
Armenia	2.3	9.6	17.0	0.0	6.0	14.0	0.0	10.0	0.0	58.9
Azerbaijan	0.4	12.5	8.0	8.0	6.0	16.0	0.0	26.8	9.5	87.2
Georgia	5.0	9.0	6.0	8.0	6.0	16.0	0.0	16.0	0.0	66.0

Source: (European Commission, 2003b)

In addition to the TACIS national programmes, the EU supported the South Caucasus countries through other instruments. Since 1992 the EU have provided assistance in grants through the following main instruments: the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO), the Food Security Programme, the Exceptional Financial Assistance, the European Initiative for Democracy and Human rights (EIDHR) and the CFSP joint actions (European Commission, 2001a, 2003c, 2013a). In parallel to

³¹ The TACIS programme was involved in the rehabilitation of the Fizuli district, partially destroyed in the Nagomo - Karabakh conflict, and largely deserted by its former population (European Commission, 1999, p. 14).

the TACIS programme, the EU promoted other technical assistance programmes, under the TACIS umbrella, particularly TRACECA and INOGATE. TRACECA (Transport Corridor Europe Caucasus Asia) was launched in 1993 to help to develop a transport/trade corridor on an East-West axis from Central Asia, across the Caspian Sea, through the Caucasus and across the Black Sea to Europe (European Commission, 1999). The TRACECA is a cooperation programme, a regional transport policy. By mixing commercial, customs, infrastructure and cross-border issues, it has served as a foreign policy and influence vector for an external action network agglomerated around the European Commission. It was constituted in two stages. Between 1992 and 1995, the first public policy community laid the foundations for the programme, which then ran out of steam because of the lack of political support. From 1995, the TRACECA became the instrument of a solid network for the Caucasus leaders. The interstate programmes (the TRACECA and the INOGATE) demonstrated their ability to effect regional cooperation as well as to improve transport links with such breakthrough events as the Baku summit in September 1999 (Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2013). Attended by senior government figures from all three South Caucasus countries to sign a Multilateral Transport Agreement, the summit also had an important political dimension in that it was attended by Armenian Prime Minister Darbinian. This was the first visit by the Armenian head of the government to Azerbaijan since the outbreak of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh.³² Similarly, the already mentioned ceremonial opening in June 1999 of the Red Bridge on the Georgia-Azerbaijan border brought together different senior representatives from the regions of both sides of the border, to inaugurate a project of common interest (Nasibov, 2018).

The EU was an important aid donor in the South Caucasus region through its interstate programmes and the TACIS as shown in Table 7. However, the TACIS programme did not pursue any specific strategy (Helly, 2002a). Furthermore, despite its variety and significance, EU assistance was overshadowed by the magnitude of US assistance. Between 1991 and 1999, Georgia received 301.28 million euro in aid from the EU (European Commission, 2003). 66 million euro came from the TACIS (see Table 7), while

³²For more details see: European Commission Press Release Database. EU grants Armenia an exceptional financial assistance. Brussels, 22 December 1998. Available at: http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-98-1160_en.htm

the rest of the funds were covered by other grants, which were already discussed above (ECHO; Food Security Programme; CFSP Assistance; Exceptional Financial Assistance) (European Commission, 2003b, p. 28).

In contrast, the US government allocated \$986 million to Georgia via the Freedom Support Act between 1992 and 2001 (USAID Georgia, 2003). These grants targeted economic reforms, including rural credit, micro-finance, land privatisation and land market development programme, as well as energy sector, rule of law, local governance and civil society development programmes. During the same period and for the same purpose, Armenia received \$1.4 billion in assistance from the US, while Azerbaijan received a modest grant compared to its neighbours, the amount of \$165.92 million (Olcott, 2002). The reason of the limited US assistance to Azerbaijan was related to the sanctions, which were imposed by the US Congress on Azerbaijan in 1992. Section 907 of the US Freedom Support Act banned US aid to Azerbaijan due to Azerbaijan's blockade of Armenia during the Nagorno-Karabakh war (Baev et al., 2003). The strong Armenian-American community and the active Armenian lobby had a significant impact on US policy in the South Caucasus, which was manifested in the amount of assistance provided to Armenia (\$1.4 billion) and sanctions on Azerbaijan (Baev et al., 2003; Olcott, 2002). Despite the fact that both Presidents - Clinton and George W. Bush - opposed the Section 907 sanctions against Azerbaijan, neither could persuade Congress to lift them (Zarifian, 2015). Following the terrorist attacks of September 11 in 2001, US priorities had shifted, giving the President the political power to waive Section 907 (Baban & Shiriyev, 2010). The US also began to value Azerbaijan and the greater Caspian region as important contributors to global oil supply diversification and effective tool for lowering oil prices (see also: Baev et al., 2003; Helly, 2002b; section 3.6).

In the early 1990s, European involvement in the South Caucasus region was limited mainly to technical and financial assistance and mediation in the negotiations to resolve the conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia via OSCE initiatives as discussed in section 3.4. Therefore, the EU needed new agreements with the new independent states to take account of new economic and political realities.

The Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs), which were signed by the South Caucasian republics and the EU in Luxembourg on 22 April 1996, marked the start of a

new phase of relations between both parties.³³ The new PCAs replaced the TCA³⁴ (Trade and Cooperation Agreement) which was signed with the Soviet Union in 1989 (European Commission, 1999). However, the fact that these PCAs came into force later in all three South Caucasus countries (July 1999) than in Russia (December 1997) or in Ukraine (March 1998) reflects the EU's priorities in the South Caucasus at that time.

All the PCAs were the basic framework for the EU relations with the South Caucasus and had a common core (MacFarlane, 2003). The PCAs incorporated laws, rules and norms such as: Human Rights, Democracy and Rule of Law, Economic Liberty and Responsibility, Security, Unity etc., as defined in the Helsinki Final Act and the Charter of Paris for a New Europe (Delcour, 2011b). Each PCA was not only an agreement between the EU and the partner countries, but also between the member states of the EU and the partners bilaterally. However, bilateral relations remained rather modest until the launch of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in 2004 and the Eastern Partnership (EaP) in 2009 (Paul, 2015a). The PCAs initiated political and security relationships via mechanisms to enhance stability, security and economic development to address regional conflicts and interstate tensions (European Commission, 1999, p. 53). However, while the PCA articles dealt with political dialogue and called for closer ties to resolve the region's conflicts and tensions, the main focus of the PCAs still remained economic and technical (Ghazaryan, 2010b).

For further analysis, 36 pages long, the PCAs contain 105 articles (for Armenia 102). The articles range from political dialogue, trade, business and investment, economic cooperation and other sectoral issues. The documents set four objectives for cooperation (Article 1) (European Council, 1999b, 1999a, 1999c) :

- 1) an appropriate framework for the political dialogue between the parties allowing the development of political relations
- 2) to support a partner country's efforts to consolidate its democracy and to develop its economy and to complete the transition into a market economy

³³ The Partnership and Cooperation Agreements entered into force in 1999.

³⁴ The TCA continued to provide the legal basis for the European Communities' relations with the New Independent States, before the PCAs entered into force in July 1999.

- 3) to promote trade and investment and harmonious economic relations between the parties and so to foster their sustainable economic development
- 4) to provide a basis for legislative, economic, social, financial, civil scientific, technological and cultural cooperation

The conflicts and their resolution are mentioned only once in Article 5, which deals with political dialogue with a view to “contributing towards the resolution of regional conflicts and tensions” (European Council, 1999b, p. 6, 1999a, p. 6, 1999c, p. 6). Moreover, “shared values” (in constructivist terms) are mentioned only once, in the first page, where it is stated that the European Council considers the links between the Community, its member states and the partner countries and the “common values that they share”. (European Council, 1999b, 1999a, 1999c). Whereas the “mutual interests” (in rationalist terms) are mentioned three times on page 1 (establishing and developing regular political dialogue on bilateral, regional and international issues of mutual interest), page 22 (member states may be the subject of cooperation and further activities of mutual interest may be developed) and page 23 (any other bilateral or international issues of mutual interest for). Furthermore, the initial approach, embodied in the PCAs that were reached with all South Caucasus countries, used the term “former Soviet Union” as the regional category of reference (Article 32) (European Council, 1999b, 1999a, 1999c). The TACIS programme reflected this vision as well (see: Commission of the European Communities, 1999). Despite the fact that, the PCAs were considered to be very diverse and country tailored, differentiation in the EU thinking about the former Soviet Union has been slow and the South Caucasus has come last on this list (see also: Baev et al., 2003). There have been calls for the formulation of the new EU strategy on the South Caucasus since 1990s, however the region has not benefited from a specific regional focus until the European Parliament’s call on the Council to work on a long-term and comprehensive “swift” common strategy (European Parliament, 2002). The EU commission agreed in October 2002 on a “Strategy Paper on a Wider Europe” which contains a heavy focus on a new category in EU thinking.

After signing the PCAs with all three partner countries (European Council, 1999b, 1999a, 1999c), the European Parliament adopted the resolution on the Communication from the Commission on the EU’s relations with the South Caucasus, under the Partnership and

Cooperation Agreements (European Commission, 2002). The document identified the conflicts as the root causes of the region's political, economic and humanitarian problems and, therefore, asked the Council to consider the possibilities to appoint an EU Special Envoy for the South Caucasus who would operate on behalf of the Council and Commission in order to "increase the effectiveness of the EU's action in the region and contribute to the peaceful solution of ongoing conflicts, in collaboration with the UN and the OSCE (European Parliament, 2002, p. 98). Furthermore, the European Parliament called on the neighbouring countries - Russia, Iran and Turkey - to contribute constructively to the peaceful development in the South Caucasus region, especially Russia to fulfil commitments to downgrade its military presence in this region (ibid 2002, p. 99). Similarly, in the Commission's view, EU assistance could be effective if conflicts were settled and if the regional cooperation became possible (European Commission, 2001a). However, the member states of the EU considered the PCAs to be the satisfactory and (for the time being) the best framework for the transformation and there would be no strategy other than that offered by the PCA framework (Lynch, 2001). Therefore, the EU had entered a vicious circle, where the right assessment was being made but without a political will to its implementation and the PCAs mainly served as a "modest political profile" of the EU in this region (see also: Baev et al., 2003; Lynch, 2001; Poghosyan, 2018).

3.6 Strategic significance of the South Caucasus in the context of EU energy policy

Energy security is one of the most important policies for the EU which has become the primary objective of the EU's climate and energy policy since 2007 and 2008. This was the beginning of the creation of a fully comprehensive EU strategy in the field of energy and climate policy (Cicerescu et al., 2018, p. 264; Umbach, 2010; Winzer, 2012).

The EU's interest towards the South Caucasus region has increased significantly after the emergence of real prospects for the utilisation of large-scale oil and gas reserves in offshore fields from the Caspian Sea (Nuriyev, 2007). From 1996 to 2007, 26 international contracts were concluded in the Caucasus with the participation of about 40

companies, including BP, Exxon, Shell, Total of France, as well as the Russian company Lukoil, which received 10% in the development of the gas-condensate project Shah-Deniz (N. Popescu & Wilson, 2009). Armenia was significantly “cut off” from the energy projects in the Caucasus due to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict with Azerbaijan (Aleksanyan & Gavrilova, 2019). At the same time, Turkey has become one of the important players in energy relations in so far as the territories of Georgia and Turkey have been used as a transit routes for the transportation of energy resources to the EU countries. The most important projects were: the ITGI (Turkey, Greece, Italy), the AGRI (Azerbaijan, Georgia, Romania) and the Nabucco-TAP (Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkey, Greece, Albania, Italy) (Najman et al., 2007). These projects, in terms of their implementation, could diversify the EU’s energy security and balance/decrease the influence on the Russian pipeline systems. However, the prospects for the South Caucasus to become a transport route for Caspian energy resources have been complicated due to the presence of unresolved conflicts in the region (Zhiltsov et al., 2017). During the Russian-Georgian war of 2008, almost all energy and communication systems passing through the territory of Georgia have stopped functioning (Grigoryan, 2016).

Some analysts look at the three South Caucasus states through the lens of an integrated Caspian region which includes five states bordering the Caspian Sea and a wider circle of international actors in Central Asia, the Caucasus and the Middle East (Chufrin, 2002). Moreover, the region comprises the five Caspian littoral states (Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Russia and Turkmenistan) and their immediate neighbours in the South Caucasus (Armenia and Georgia) and Central Asia (Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan) (ibid 2002, p. 1). Other authors (Haghayeghi et al., 2003) distinguish four levels of analysis of the geopolitics of the Caspian region: the micro-societal level of riparian states which encompasses the heterogeneity of sub-national clan, tribal, religious and linguistic relations, the national level of the five riparian states (Russia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan), the level of the periphery of riparian states (Georgia, Turkey, Armenia, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan) and the level of actors outside the region (states or non-state actors).

After the fall of the USSR, the Caspian Sea region emerged as a new international energy source in the oil and gas markets. The EU and its member states are among the actors of

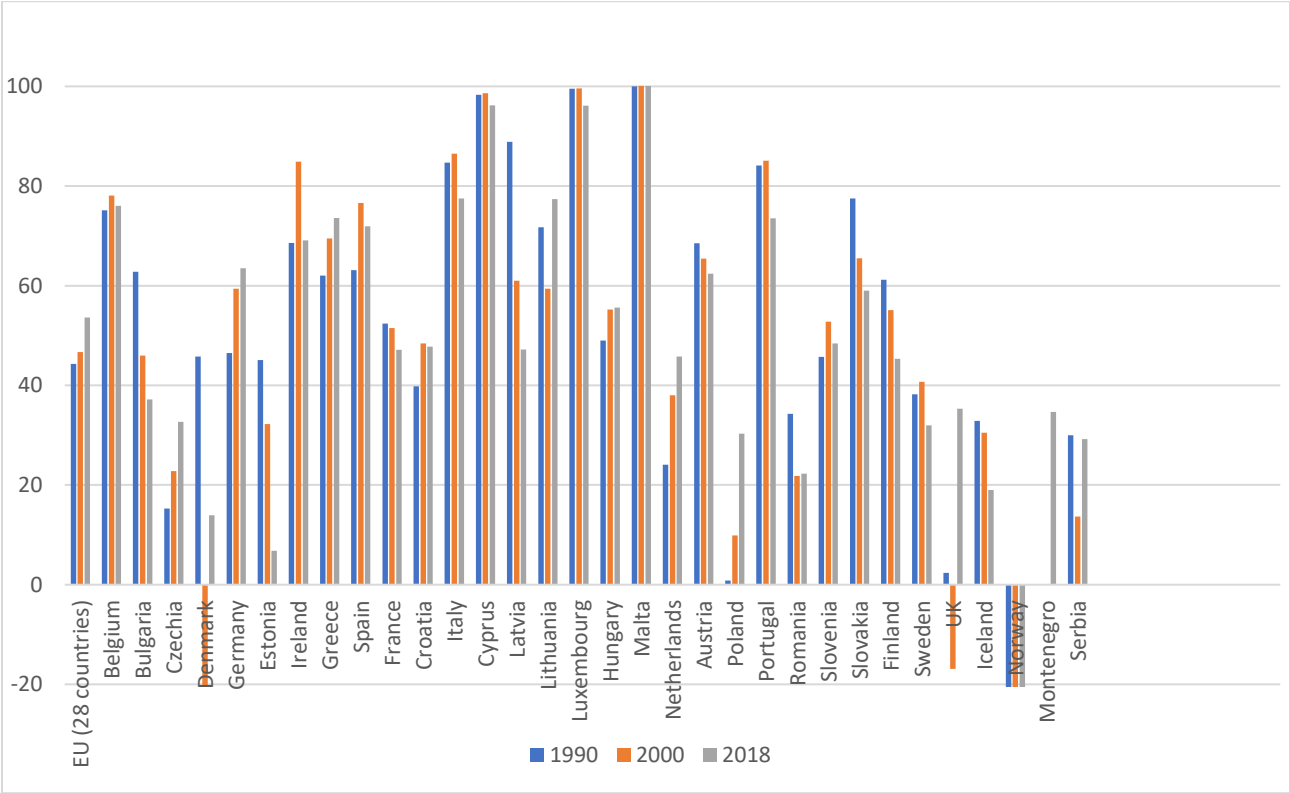
a new "energy geopolitics" which concerns three major issues: the utilisation/exploitation and transportation of hydrocarbon resources to the world markets, the regulation of the legal status of the Caspian Sea and the link between energy interests and regional conflicts (Coppieters, 2003). The Caspian Sea has significant oil and natural gas reserves but the oil market is very volatile, and prices are dominantly dictated by the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) which produces 81% of the total of world oil production (Ratti & Vespignani, 2014; Ulatowski, 2020).

Compared with oil, gas is more difficult to transport. Hence, the EU has focused mainly on the provision of natural gas because the security of supply of natural gas requires more policy attention than the supply of oil and coal due to its expensive and complex transportation (Kakachia, Meister, et al., 2018). This specification makes the gas market, far from being as globalised as that of oil, and is rather built on a regional scale. The transport of gas requires sustainable infrastructure that involves heavy investment in long-term contracts (at least fifteen years). Unlike oil, which is more flexible, the transport of gas cannot be satisfied with temporary solutions such as rail or navigation (Kalicki, 2001). It, therefore, implies a high degree of certainty and stability concerning transit countries, which is far from being achieved in the southern periphery of the former USSR. More than half of the world's gas reserves are in Russia and Iran, giving these two countries more relative weight than the Middle East in the Eurasian oil market.³⁵ Since 1985 the EU has reduced its dependence on oil by diversifying into gas and electricity. In 1999, Russian gas accounted for 40% of EU gas imports, and it was expected that European consumption would increase until 2030 (European Commission, 2001b, p. 68). Moreover, in 2018, the Russian pipeline supplies remained the main source of EU imports, covering 46% of extra-EU imports (European Commission, 2018c, p. 3). After the so-called "big-bang" enlargement to Central and Eastern European countries in 2004, the EU has become even more dependent on the outside sources for its energy supply. The EU countries, majority of which are importers of gas and oil, account for 1.7 trillion cubic meters of global gas reserves, which is less than 1% of the world's proven reserves and only 6.8 trillion barrels proven oil reserves (0.4% of the world's confirmed reserve)

³⁵ For more details see: CIA. The World Factbook. Natural gas - proved reserves compares the stock of proved reserves of natural gas in cubic meters (cu m). Available at: <https://www.cia.gov/LIBRARY/publications/the-world-factbook/rankorder/2253rank.html>

(Eurostat 2018). This causes a significant European energy security dependence on Russia and other exporters. Thus, Europe’s energy dependence increased from 46.7% in 2000 to 53.6% in 2018 (Figure 4).

Figure 4 Europe’s energy dependency rates in 1990, 2000 and 2018 years

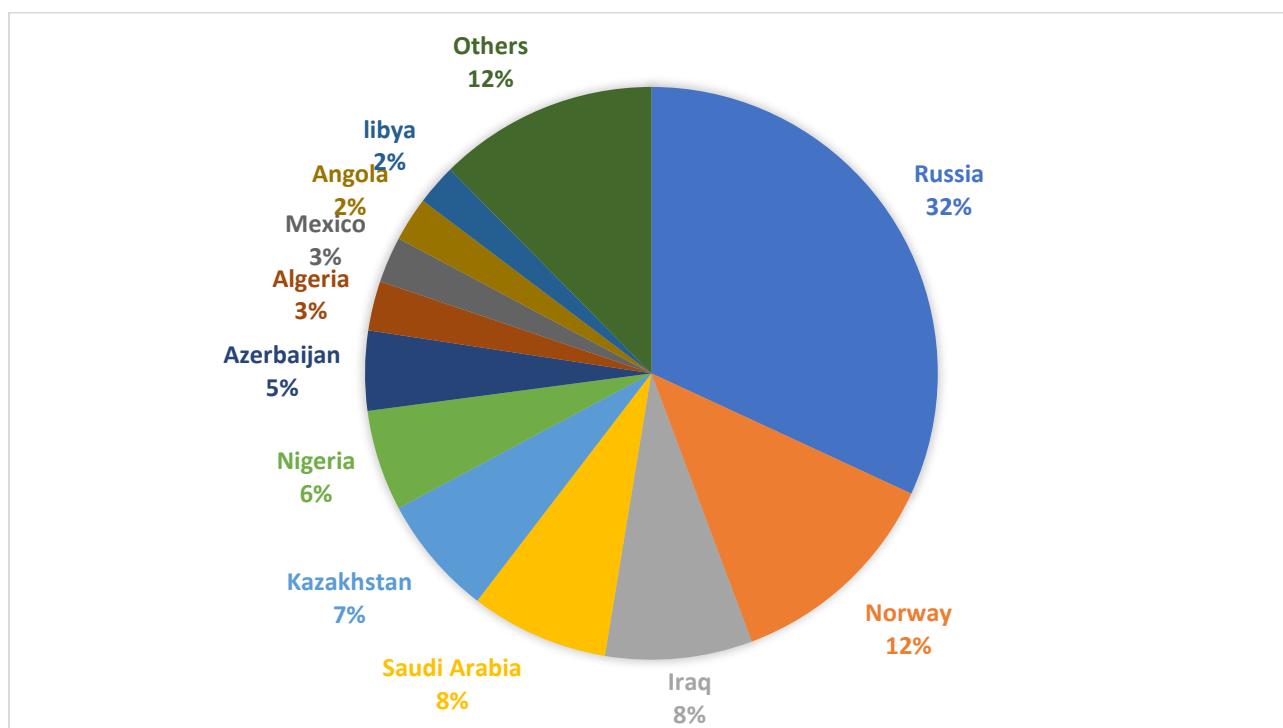


Source: Eurostat

The energy dependency rate shows the proportion of energy that an economy must import. It is defined as net energy imports (imports minus exports) divided by gross inland energy consumption plus fuel supplied to international maritime bunkers, expressed as a percentage. A negative dependency rate indicates a net exporter of energy while a dependency rate in excess of 100 % indicates that energy products have been stocked.

In 1999, the Green Paper of the European Commission on security of supply (European Commission, 2001b) estimated that, by 2020-2030, the EU's energy dependence at 70% for oil and 90% for gas, given the exhaustion of existing reserves. In 2018, the main imported energy product to the EU was petroleum products (Eurostat 2018). The dependency rate (see Figure 5) in the EU in 2018 was equal to 54 %, which means that more than half of the EU's energy needs were met by net imports. This rate ranges from over 90 % in Malta, Luxembourg and Cyprus to below 20 % in Estonia and Denmark (see Figure 5). The dependency rate on energy imports has increased since 2000, when it was 47 %. Moreover, gas will probably be increasingly used to produce electricity, especially in countries that have decided to abandon nuclear power (H. Kostanyan, 2017). Russia is the main EU supplier of crude oil, natural gas and solid fuels. In 2018, EU's crude oil imports came from Russia (32 %), Norway (12 %), Nigeria and Saudi Arabia (both 8 %) and Kazakhstan (7 %) (see Figure 5). A similar analysis shows that more than three quarters of the EU's imports of natural gas came from Russia (40 %), Norway (25 %) and Algeria (12 %), while almost three quarters of solid fuel (mostly coal) imports originated from Russia (30 %), Colombia (23 %) and Australia (15 %) (Eurostat 2018). Therefore, the EU mainly depends on Russia for imports of crude oil, natural gas and solid fuels, followed by Norway for crude oil and natural gas.

Figure 5 EU imports of crude oil by partners 2018



Source: Eurostat

The need for diversification of energy became a priority to the European states during the late 1990s, which justified the attention given to the South Caucasus region as an alternative source (see also: Aleksanyan & Gavrilova, 2019; Nuriyev, 2009; Strimbovschi, 2016). Azerbaijan's oil and gas fields are important for the EU for diversification their energy and decreasing its dependency on Russia, which is high as analysed above.

To transit the gas and oil to its member states, the EU is dependent on neighbouring countries through which hydrocarbons are likely to be transited. This situation of interdependence, mixed with competition between producers, transitory and consumer states, has also involved actors (states and companies) outside the region. For its diversification efforts, the EU has focused on the establishment of gas supply routes from the South Caucasus. These efforts, together with the commercial interests of companies and the parallel desire of Azerbaijan and the transit countries (Georgia, Turkey), led to the establishment of the South Gas Corridor (Kakachia, Meister, et al., 2018). Regardless of the existing level of economic relations between the EU and the South Caucasus, the

Southern Gas Corridor will also create the infrastructure link which will require further development of the EU's policies toward the South Caucasus region (Boonstra, 2015; Stimbovischi, 2015). Therefore, Europe's energy security of gas supplies will face several new challenges. The first challenge is related to the above-mentioned EU's dependency on Russian oil and gas. Until 2011, Russia annually increased its presence in the European natural gas and, at the end of 2011, its share in total imports reached 44.1% (Richter & Holz, 2015). In the past few years, there has been a decline in this indicator to 39.3% by 2019 (Eurostat, 2019b). This is mostly due to diversification policies, but also with the advent of new options for gas supply, including submarine pipelines from the North Africa and the LNG (Liquefied natural gas terminal) from Qatar. The European countries which are the most dependent on Russian gas are located in Eastern and Central Europe and do not have LNG terminals (because they are landlocked countries).³⁶ Furthermore, the most important connotation of the energy security is determined by the level of dependence of countries on external supplies and transit countries (Chen et al., 2008; Winzer, 2012). The EU countries are the major importers of Russian gas and the bulk of Russian gas has been supplied to Europe through the territory of Ukraine. The Ukrainian gas crisis in January 2009, which escalated from disagreements about debts, prices, and transit tariffs to the point where supplies to Europe (especially south-east European countries) were completely cut off for two weeks in the middle of winter (Pirani et al., 2009). This crisis led to reduce Ukrainian transit dependence by building the Nord Stream and South Stream pipelines, which transits Russian gas to Europe bypassing Ukraine (Munteanu & Sarno, 2016). These projects diversified delivery routes away from Ukraine. However, it did not diversify suppliers of natural gas to the EU and its dependency on Russia (Himmelreich, 2020).

³⁶ One of the most successful countries in the EU, which diversified its energy via LNG have been Poland. Poland has signed a 20-year agreement with the US, under which the Polish energy firm will receive 2 million tons of U.S. liquefied natural gas (LNG) every year beginning in 2022, in what is the latest move by Poland to reduce its reliance on Russian gas and oil imports. For more details see: Paraskova (2018). Poland Turns Back on Russia In Favor Of US LNG In 20-Yr Deal. Available at: <https://oilprice.com/Latest-Energy-News/World-News/Poland-Turns-Back-on-Russia-In-Favor-Of-US-LNG-In-20-Yr-Deal.html>

3.7 Conclusions to chapter 3

In the 1990s the EU faced three dilemmas in the South Caucasus: regional conflicts, the post-Soviet transition and energy security. Due to a crisis-ridden accumulation of internal conflict situations in Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia and the EU's preoccupation, first with the adoption and signing of the Maastricht treaty and the post-Yugoslav wars in the Western Balkans and then with its mega enlargement of 2004, the development of close relations between the South Caucasus and the EU was virtually impossible during the early years of the latter's post-communist transition. Internal political power struggles, civil wars, ethno-territorial conflicts, as well as a dramatic decline of economic growth and people's living standards, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan turned into failing states. Moreover, the limitations of the EU's policy towards these countries were also linked to exogenous factors, in particular the synthesis of the interests and strategies of Russia to occupy the "political vacuum" in this region caused by the fall of the Soviet Union.

The bilateral relations between the EU and the South Caucasus states were thus complemented by strategically priority actions with a multilateral focus. In the 1990s, the EU was a normative actor guided by its already pre-established norms and values. The PCAs remained mainly economic and technical and had a common core for all three countries with limited capabilities and resources. The EU-15 promoted the European values and identity in the South Caucasus via the Council of Europe. This was well demonstrated during the accession negotiations of Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia into the Council of Europe.

Chapter 4. The European Neighbourhood Policy and the South Caucasus: Unfolding new patterns of relations

This chapter analyses the relations between the EU and the South Caucasus countries in the context of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). The first part of the chapter examines the process of creation of the ENP, its objectives, prospects and instruments. The second part of the chapter analyses the content and implementation of Action Plans (APs) which the EU signed with Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan as the basic instrument for achieving its aims and objectives towards the three countries.

4.1 The rationale behind the ENP in the EU agenda

In the early 2000s, the EU's fifth enlargement has shifted the geopolitical pivot of the EU eastwards. The new members of the EU were ten Central and Eastern European states, three of which were part of the former Soviet Union (Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia), four countries were from the so-called Visegrad Group (the Czech Republic (now Czechia), Hungary, Slovakia, Poland), one country from the former Yugoslavia (Slovenia) and two were Mediterranean islands and former British colonies (Cyprus and Malta). The accession of Romania and Bulgaria in 2007 marked the end of the fifth enlargement of the EU. Following this historic event, the EU has started to rethink its external relations with regional borderlands. It was clear that the eastward expansion would bring relationships between the EU and its neighbours to a new level. However, it was also clear that there was no longer any scope for the previous procedure of stabilising the “periphery” through promises of accession (Popescu, 2013). The EU had reached the limits of its previous dynamic of development, the mutual reinforcement of integration and enlargement (Cadier, 2014). After the so called “Big Bang” enlargement in 2004, the number of EU member countries had increased so much and the heterogeneity of the members had, according to some analysts, reached such an extent that it overwhelmed the cultural, organisational, and financial integration potential of the EU (Kelley, 2006). The EU's immediate neighbours to the East became Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Russia and the South Caucasus region was geographically brought closer to the EU, especially

after the accession of Romania and Bulgaria in 2007. Therefore, finding new ways to engage the EU's Southern and Eastern neighbours became one of the major challenges for the EU (Jakubowski et al., 2016). The main challenge was the EU's desire to capitalise on its most visible foreign policy success - enlargement and the political and economic transformation that came with it (Tocci, 2005). The EU wished to avoid the exclusion effects that could result from new dividing lines in Europe (Bechev & Nicolaïdis, 2010). These, if poorly managed, could deprive countries further South and East of the peace, stability, and prosperity dividends of European integration (Sasse, 2008). Finally, the EU was becoming more aware of the global threats, such as terrorism, illegal migration and drug trafficking, which could not be adequately tackled through isolation (Tocci, 2005).

The starting point of the intra-European policy debate on relations with future neighbours is considered to be the summit of the European Council in Helsinki in December 1999 (Barreiro-Pereira, 2012; Grimeaud, 2000). The Millennium Declaration which was adopted during the summit clearly showed that by 2004, at least 10 new members were going to join the EU and, accordingly, a significant expansion of boundaries of the EU to the East was going to happen.³⁷ Both processes - EU enlargement and the formation of the new policies towards neighbouring countries - developed almost simultaneously and ended in May 2004. The ENP strategy paper was published just a few days after the 2004 EU enlargement (see: European Commission, 2004) and was mostly written by the same experts who participated in the enlargement preparations (Kelley, 2006, p. 32). Such organisational adaptation led to some direct mechanical borrowing from enlargement experiences which were evident not only in individual positions, but also in the evolution of the key documents and the final policy's similarities to enlargement (Delcour, 2007; Kelley, 2006; Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2008; Lightfoot et al., 2016).

The active phase of the formulation and preparation of the ENP began in 2001 with the development of intra-European discussion about the need for a new strategy for the future of the EU's neighbours in the form of letters and non-papers³⁸ (Comelli, 2004). It is

³⁷ For more details see: Helsinki European Council 10 and 11 December 1999. Presidency conclusion. Available at: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/hel1_en.htm

³⁸ The key documents of this period, scholars called the letter of the British Foreign Minister Straw, as well as a joint letter from the Swedish Minister of Foreign Affairs Lind and Minister of Trade Pagrotsky addressed to Pic, Minister Foreign Affairs of Spain, which chaired the EU Council at that time (for more details see: Comelli, 2004).

noteworthy that in June 2001, Poland, which at that time was not the member of the EU, submitted a document entitled: "The Eastern policy of the EU in the run-up to the EU's enlargement to include the countries of Central and Eastern Europe" (Government of Poland, 2001). The document (2001, p. 3) outlined the Eastern European strategy objectives for the EU to develop good neighbourly relations with Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and their integration into the European economic and social area. In April 2002, the European Council in Luxembourg discussed the prospects for policies regarding EU's future Eastern neighbours and encouraged the European Commission and High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy, Javier Solana, to make their proposals on this matter. The members of the European Council also recommended consideration of the different relationships between the EU with its future neighbours following the enlargement and their heterogeneity in terms of political and economic developments.³⁹ Since then, the ENP had become a regular topic of discussion at the meetings of the European Council.

The European Commission was also actively involved in the process of formation of the ENP in 2002. In the second half of 2002 (more precisely, in August and December) the first outline of the future ENP was presented in a joint letter of Javier Solana and European Commissioner for External Relations Chris Patten, called "Wider Europe" and then, in a more expanded form, in the speech of the president of the European Commission, Romano Prodi, at a conference of the European Community of Scientists Associations. Both documents and to a greater extent the speech of Prodi are important, primarily because they formulate the essence and objectives of the ENP which contain language that retain relevance to this day. The letter of Solana and Patten placed the main accents on the priorities of the future neighbourhood policy: economic cooperation, development of trade relations and regulatory convergence. The topic of security was central in the Polish document of 2001 and particularly concerned cross-border cooperation and problems of illegal migration (see: Government of Poland, 2001). Last of all, the speech of Prodi formulated the main hypothesis for the future neighbourhood

³⁹ For more details see: European Council. General Affairs. Letter addressed by Mr Jack Straw, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs of the United Kingdom to Mr Josep Pique I Camps, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Spain 28 January 2002. Available at: <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-7703-2002-INIT/en/pdf>

policy, which is - “the accession is not the only one game in town” (see: Prodi, 2002). This implies the close integration of the neighbouring countries with the EU, but without a membership perspective. The essence of this integration was that the neighbouring countries should adopt the complete set of EU principles, norms and values. Furthermore, the main purpose of this process was set to create the “ring of friends” with good governance and the single market covering the EU and partner countries (Gstohl & Lannon, 2016). At the beginning, the recipients of the future members of the ENP were only the Eastern European neighbouring countries: Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus and Russia. However, already at the beginning of 2002, Sweden proposed to expand the geographical ENP and include the Mediterranean neighbours of the EU (Kourtelis, 2015). Until the end of 2002, in the main documents of the EU as well as the letter of Solana and Patten, the neighbourhood policy was limited to the Eastern context. As a result, in the speech of Prodi and in the decision of the European Council the list of participants of Neighbourhood Policy were extended to the Middle East (see: European Council, 2003c, p. 13).

4.2 The key objectives and principles of the ENP

The ENP was formulated in two documents of the European Commission which were published in March 2003 (European Commission, 2003a) and May 2004 (European Commission, 2004). The main objectives of the ENP were formulated in the 2003 document which was broadly consistent with the concepts presented in the 2002 speech of Prodi and the letter of Solana and Patten.

The key objectives of the ENP were defined as the following (European Commission, 2003e, 2011a):

- 1) The creation of a common economic space, which implied expanding the EU’s internal market and the inclusion of neighbouring countries (Dimitrova & Dragneva, 2009). If a partner country harmonised its laws with the *acquis communautaire*, the EU opened up its economy and provided access to the free movement of goods, services, resources and people (Börzel et al., 2017). The first

step defined in the ENP was to achieve trade impacts, economies of scale and productivity with the liberalisation of trade flows with partner countries (Gnedina & Popescu, 2012). However, participation in the EU internal market included the introduction of regulations in the fields of competition, environment, social goods and quality specifications (Emerson et al., 2007). The EU market has been demanding and difficult for third countries, because the free movement of goods, services, people and resources needed the introduction of high-cost reforms (Börzel & Sedelmeier, 2017).

- 2) The EU proposed cooperation in the fields of migration, visas and asylum, terrorism, crime prevention and money laundering, cocaine and weapons trafficking (Gänzle, 2009). Special attention was paid to energy security in the context of engaging the partner countries (the South Caucasus in particular) in the ENP and strengthening the energy partnership with neighbouring countries was presented as an essential element of the European Policy Strategy Paper (European Commission, 2004).
- 3) The ENP enhanced the EU's role in conflict prevention and crisis management. The goal of the EU was to integrate the partner countries into some aspects of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), and create a mechanism to share regional security and stability responsibilities (Helwig, 2016).
- 4) The political stabilisation of neighbouring countries, promotion and improvement of human rights, justice and internal affairs has been one of the main concerns for the EU to look at in order to achieve stability (Baev et al., 2003; Koenig, 2016). For the most advanced countries included in the framework, which would download EU policies and implement them into their national politics (see section 2.1), the EU offered the prospects of participation in its internal market, as well as the possibility to gradually join some certain community programmes in the cultural, educational, environmental, technical and scientific fields (Schumacher, 2015). This European "generosity" can be explained by the fact that, in the absence of accession (as in the case of the enlargement strategy), the offered award for cooperation through the ENP had to be attractive enough to push the partner countries to take the necessary measures to develop a secured and stabilised area,

or as Prodi puts it: "to share everything with the Union but institutions" (Prodi, 2002).

There were four defining elements of the ENP which were identified in the original document of the European Commission (2003e, p. 16) and were based on the above discussed objectives of the EU (see also: Delcour, 2018):

a) The Strategy Paper.

b) The Action Plans.

c) The Monitoring Reports.

d) The European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument.

a) The ENP orientation document (correspondence) from the European Commission is considered to be the Strategy Paper (for more details see: Baracani, 2005; Kostadinova, 2009). It specified the goals, main elements, strategies, concepts, financial instruments, geographical cover, fields of action and the regional cooperation (Melo, 2014). The ENP sought close cooperation in politics, economy, security and culture in order to avoid new dividing lines between the EU and its new neighbours (European Commission, 2004). Moreover, the Strategy Paper outlined that the EU's objective was to promote and maintain the "sharing" ties with the neighbours, to promote and to uphold "shared values," particularly in the areas of the rule of law, good governance, human rights, minority rights, market economy implementation and sustainable development (Baracani, 2005; European Commission, 2004).

b) The APs were meant to be country-tailored documents with concrete proposals which described the key priorities: respect for shared values; political dialogue; economic and social growth (including promoting a favourable business and foreign investment environment); and industry, internal market and legislative reforms (fostering trade and supporting the international trading system of partner countries (Emerson et al., 2007). To outline the actual stage of relationship between the EU and the neighbouring country, as well as the unique needs and capacity for the partner countries to implement various reform

initiatives, the APs should vary from country to country (Börzel & van Hüllen, 2014). The APs were drawn up by the European Commission for 3 to 5 years and were approved by the European Council in partnership with the partner countries (European Commission, 2006d, 2006e, 2006c).

- c) The monitoring (progress) reports constitute an analysis paper on the partner countries' bilateral ties, political, institutional, economic and social status and progress in the priority fields as defined in APs (Baltag & Bosse, 2014). The European Commission and the High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy publish progress reports for each of the ENP countries once a year to assess how far the Action Plans and Association Agendas have progressed toward their goals (Buşcaneanu, 2015).
- d) The European Commission communication of 01 July 2003, "Paving the Way to a New Neighbourhood Instrument" (European Commission, 2003d), adopted the new financial instrument to replace the instruments such as INTERREG, PHARE, TACIS, CARDS and MEDA (see chapter 3). An initial phase from 2004-2006 focused on improving coordination between the various financing instruments concerned within the existing legislative and financial framework. In a second phase, for the period after 2006, the European Commission created a new instrument known as the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) (European Commission, 2013a).

Given the above discussed objectives and elements, the ENP has been based on the principles of joint ownership and conditionality and a differentiation strategy.

The basic premise of the principle of joint ownership was that partner countries should have been consulted and involved in policy changes, especially regarding the objectives of the APs, therefore the European Commission held exploratory talks with the country before proposing an AP (Haglund-Morrissey, 2006). The joint ownership principle with "shared values" and "common interests" gave the ENP multilateral policy characteristics (Eisele & Wiesbrock, 2011). However, the unilateralism (top-down approach (Lavenexa & Schimmelfennig, 2011)) was also reflected in the ENP and in particular in the principle of conditionality. As already discussed in section 2.1.1, the principle of conditionality has

been one of the main instruments of Europeanisation process for its effectiveness. The principle of conditionality made its appearance, from the first official text establishing the ENP (European Commission, 2003e, p. 16). To make this new policy more attractive for its neighbours, the EU referred to economic and political criteria and measured progress, so that the ENP could have been consistent and strong compared to other European external policies. Unlike the principle of joint ownership, conditionality created a model of vertically oriented hierarchical relations between the EU and the partner countries (Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2011). More precisely, these relationships were based on non-negotiable norms, which were monitored, and incentives (positive conditionality) or sanctions (negative conditionality) which were applied as measures of influence (so-called carrots and sticks) (Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2007). Even though in the 2004 document the European Commission tried to veil the provisions on political conditionality as much as possible, in practice this tool has taken a central place in the ENP (see also: Kelley, 2006, p. 30; Lavenex, 2004; Theuns, 2017).

Schimmelfennig, along with the prospect of membership, highlighted two additional factors to the success of conditionality (Schimmelfennig, 2008). The first is regulatory: the main sequence of EU enlargement decisions is that partner countries must be sure that they will be rewarded if Europeanisation conditions are met. An impact of democratisation in the neighbouring countries is directly proportional to the size and credibility of the rewards which are offered in return for democratisation (Schimmelfennig & Scholtz, 2008b). The second factor is the price for fulfilment of conditions (or "compliance") for local political elites which should be relatively low. In this perspective, the overall process associated with the ENP creates restrictions and opportunities to the local political elites and counter-elites (Börzel & Pamuk, 2011). Sometimes successful democratic transitions in countries encourage the democratic opposition and counter-elites to push for democratisation and win the elections (Schimmelfennig & Scholtz, 2008b). Indeed, the introduction of the ENP, through increased mutual contacts, economic cooperation, and the presence of EU leaders and officials in Eastern neighbourhood countries, has contributed to strengthening social links with Europe, consolidating or raising the question of national identity and, in some ways, weakening traditional ties with Russia (Petrovic & Klatt, 2015).

These political preconditions have pushed the EU to develop the differentiation strategy and to pursue tailor-made policies that distinguish between the political, socio-economic, regional, geo-political and cultural specificities and needs of the political elites and societies of the partner countries (Schumacher, 2016). Therefore, the differentiation strategy was the cornerstone of the ENP and as claimed by José Manuel Barroso in a speech given on September 3, 2007, “we will see a more and more varied landscape, with as many different types of relationship developing as we have partners” (2007, 3). This approach was adapted “according to the political situation of each partner, their level of ambition towards the EU, their reform programme and achievements, and the level of their socio-economic development (Emerson et al., 2007).

The differentiation strategy has created a division between “good and bad students of the ENP” (Börzel, 2011). The good students were those ENP countries who wished to enforce their APs as best and as quickly as possible by transferring whole sections of the *acquis communautaire* in their respective legislations. The bad students were those partner countries which, on the contrary, were less motivated by the implementation of their APs and were less eager to move towards more integration with the EU. Therefore, the gaps have been gradually widening because the bad students did not progress on the path of integration as they “entered a deepening phase of free trade and legislative harmonisation” (Gstohl & Lannon, 2016, p. 6).

The ENP brought together various countries which had a common past and similarities in terms of the post-Communist transition and democratisation process (as in the case of the South Caucasus analysed in Chapter 3), but different interests and aspirations towards the EU. The EU's proposal for all participants was the same: the development of strong and deep relationships with all participating countries, without a single mechanism for all.⁴⁰ This means that cooperation with each partner country started at the same point and targeted similar goals, without favouring certain countries because of

⁴⁰ The first political step of differentiation of the ENP can be considered the categorisation of the partner countries into the South and the East. Commissioner Patten and the High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the EU Solana realised that an identical approach cannot exist for all countries (so-called one size fits all approach) (Comelli, 2004).

their specificities and without separating them from the countries which were advanced or not (Paul, 2015b).

An important novelty of the ENP was the EU's value-based approach (homosociologicus). This approach transferred the relationship between the EU and the partner countries into a different, more normative level, compared to the one in the early 1990s as described in chapter 3, when the EU policies towards the South Caucasus countries were in the process of formation. However, the EU's value-based approach developed in the 1970s, way before the creation of the ENP, the EU as a soft or "civilian power" and a normative power (Manners, 2006, 2010). As described by Haglund-Morrissey(2006), the "articulation and validation of norms and values at the EU level is a particularly important aspect of EU identity formation" (p.39). These core values are: liberty, democracy, the rule of law, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms(Haglund-Morrissey, 2006; Manners, 2006). This EU value diffusion strategy towards the neighbouring countries exchanged the membership prospects and institutionalised the relationships between the EU and the ENP countries.

The European Commission (2003a) in its communication "Wider Europe" initiative proposed that relations with the neighbouring countries should cover not only political, economic and institutional reforms to align with the *acquis communautaire*, but also the "concrete progress in realising common values"(p. 4). Furthermore, the European Parliament resolution on the ENP states that the development of the ENP depends on the will of the "neighbouring states and their peoples to share the same values as those on which the EU is based" (European Parliamentary Assembly, 2005, p. 4). The key policy makers of the ENP often refer to the importance of values as most crucial in the European Integration process (see also: Delcour, 2015; Kostanyan, 2017; Valiyeva, 2016).

Despite the high importance of values as such, the novelty of the ENP, compared to the previous agreements (for example the PCAs discussed in section 3.5), was not necessarily in its normative component, because democracy, human rights and the rule of law were already the part of EU foreign policy before the ENP. The originality of the ENP (along with the values) was in terms of introducing conditionality. The problem of uncertainty of "final destination" and arising crisis of conditionality remain one of the main topics of discussion on the issues related to the ENP (see also: Ágh, 2010; Lavenex &

Schimmelfennig, 2007; Popescu, 2009; Theuns, 2017). In fact, besides financial support and vague prospects for "further integration", the EU had not much to offer to neighbouring countries as a prize for their pro-European course (see also: Delcour, 2008; Emerson, 2004).

As already shown, the ENP has evolved substantially since the letters of High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana and European Commissioner for External Relations Chris Patten. The aim of these letters (including Romano Prodi's speech) was to promote and support a series of political, economic and social reforms and create an arc of countries with good governance and democracy in the EU's neighbourhood. In this perspective, the ENP can be compared to practices relating to the states of the European economic area or to the enlargement experiences. However, the ENP countries constitute a rather heterogeneous group which, in terms of membership, have no prospects. Moreover, they have neither the same interest nor the same expectations/ possibilities. Recognising the fact that "the EU cannot grow indefinitely" (Prodi, 2002), the ENP has become the EU programme with extremely diverse countries.

4.3 General political and socio-economic conditions and developments in the South Caucasus states in the early 2000s

In the early 2000s, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia faced governance challenges including: democratic deficit and Soviet style political system, corruption and human rights abuses. Moreover, in the early 2000s, the South Caucasus countries' political systems were characterised by clan politics, fraud elections and weak parliaments (as already discussed in Chapter 3). In 2001, the presidential and parliamentary elections which were held in all three countries were divergent in their outcomes. The elections in Armenia in February 2001 culminated in the re-election of President Kocharyan who had consolidated power in his hands (Freedom House, 2005). Both Presidential elections and parliamentary elections were criticised by international organisations for not meeting democratic standards (see section 3.2, also: OSCE, 2001). In Georgia, during the

parliamentary elections of 2 November 2003, widespread allegations of fraud and falsified elections resulted in the mass public protests that led to the resignation of President Shevardnadze, who had ruled the country from 1995 to 2003.

Georgia's Rose Revolution of 2003 was the first bloodless change of power in the South Caucasus that resulted in the first session of the newly—and fraudulently—elected Georgian parliament (Mitchell, 2008). The triumvirate of opposition leaders - Mikhail Saakashvili, Zurab Zhvania and Nino Burjanadze - used the indignation of the population to organise mass demonstrations. The authorities did not want to, or could not, use force to quell widening protests and, on November 23, 2003, President Shevardnadze was forced to resign. These events, dubbed the "Rose Revolution", shook the very foundations of the post-Soviet establishment in Georgia. The main symbol – the rose – was without any particular connotation. Rather symbolically it aimed to echo earlier European peaceful movements. A few months before November 2003, the participants in a meeting at the Freedom Institute addressed the question of symbolism (S. F. Jones, 2006): the Portuguese carnations were mentioned, then rejected because they had communist overtones. In the end, it was the rose that was chosen, despite their price and their symbolic emptiness. On January 4, 2004, Saakashvili, who was Minister of Justice for the government of President Shevardnadze from 12 October 2000 to 19 September 2001⁴¹ was elected as a president.

In the following parliamentary elections held on March 28 of the same year, the party coalition of triumvirs - United National Movement (UNM), together with junior coalition partners, won an absolute majority of parliamentary places. Moreover, Zhvania became the prime minister and Burjanadze - the chairman of the newly elected parliament. In his inaugural speech on January 25, 2004, the new Georgian President outlined his determination to fight corruption as priority issue (Shatirishvili, 2009). Having symbolically hoisted the European flag next to the Georgian one, Saakashvili sent a clear message to the EU that Georgia's European integration was the priority objective for the new Georgian government. Saakashvili raised the EU flag at the Georgian Parliament building and, in his inaugural speech in January 2004 said that Georgians are “not just

⁴¹ On September 5, 2001, Saakashvili resigned. He claimed that corruption had infiltrated the Georgian government's very core, and that Shevardnadze lacked the will to tackle it (Tracy et al., 2004).

old Europeans, but the very first Europeans, and therefore Georgia has a special place in European civilisation” (J. Johnson & Forest, 2019). He formed a government composed of young reformers, not burdened by the Soviet legacy, and often better speakers of English than of Russian (S. F. Jones, 2006). Moreover, President Saakashvili created the Office of the State Ministry for Euro-Atlantic Integration in 2004 (Delcour & Wolczuk, 2015).

The new authorities have made significant progress in strengthening the statehood and the international authority of Georgia (Kandelaki, 2006). An unambiguously pro-Western orientation accelerated reforms and orientation to democratic values and a free market economy (Mitchell, 2008). At the same time, relations with its northern neighbour, Russia, have sharply deteriorated, but Russia did agree to withdraw its military bases from Georgia (Shatirishvili, 2009). In the spring of 2005, the Georgian parliament passed a new resolution stating that if a withdrawal agreement with Russia was not reached by May 15, 2005, and the withdrawal was not completed by January 1, 2006, Russian bases would be effectively sieged (Sokov, 2005). Georgia would refuse to issue visas to military personnel, provide no water or electricity to the base, and impose a ban on the movement of all military equipment and training outside of the base (ibid). Russia agreed to start the withdrawal process of its military units from Georgia in 2005 and by the end of November 2007 the last group of Russian officers left Georgian territory (Antidze, 2007). Despite this achievement regarding the withdrawal of Russian bases, the events unfolded dramatically in the Georgia's Adjara Autonomous Republic, where confrontation between local authoritarian leader Aslan Abashidze and the Saakashvili government reached a tipping point by mid-spring in 2004 after Abashidze refused to obey the central authorities following President Shevardnadze's resignation during the Rose Revolution (Welt, 2009). Aslan Abashidze ,the leader of the Adjara Autonomous Republic from 1991 to 2004, was a corrupt authoritarian known for his subservience to Russia (Fairbanks, 2004). Despite the fact that Abashidze armed the militia and police, and hoped for the support of the Russian military, intending at any cost to retain power, on May 5, he agreed to resign and, according to an already well-developed scenario, flew to Moscow. On June 20, 2004, new elections were held in Adjara, and Saakashvili's party secured 28 of the 30 parliamentary seats. The remaining 2 seats went to the opposition

after these elections, and before that to the coalition partner - the Republican Party (Strakes, 2013). The victory in Adjara greatly strengthened Saakashvili's position/reputation, both politically and economically. After all, through Adjara (a customs point on the border with Turkey and Batumi port) came the main flow of cargo and transit (Papava, 2006). Later, changes in legislation actually abolished the Adjara autonomy, making it a mere formality.

The following year, the Georgian political establishment and population witnessed an overly dramatic event. In fact, on February 3, 2005, Prime Minister Zhvania died under very suspicious circumstances. He was found dead in an apartment following an apparent gas leak from a heater (Brennan, 2005). As already mentioned, Zhvania played a prominent role in the Rose Revolution.

Whereas Georgia was making a decisive move towards democratisation at the end of 2003-early 2004, neighbouring Azerbaijan took the opposite direction. Since 1993, after the military coup (see section 3.2), the country was governed by Heydar Aliyev, who withdrew his candidacy in favour of his son, Ilham Aliyev just a few days before the presidential election of October 2003 (Paul, 2016). This political trend has shown that Azerbaijan was heading towards a Middle Eastern model of dynastic rule. Moreover, the transfer of power from Heydar Aliyev to his son Ilham Aliyev raised concerns not only about the further deterioration of the democratic transition, but also about the possibility of an oil-rich nation ~~was~~ becoming a monarchy in an age of the promotion of democracy (Ergun, 2010a). Ilham Aliyev inherited the discourse of his father as well as his loyal administrative cadres in order to ensure that his rule would not be challenged (Chiragov & Paul, 2015).

The Rose Revolution in Georgia jeopardised the regimes in Azerbaijan and in Armenia as well. The victory of the opposition party in Georgia, where all the bodies of the state have sworn loyalty to the interim power, opened the window of opportunity to the Armenian and Azerbaijanian opposition, who respectively contested during the electoral victory of Kocharyan in the presidential election of March 2003 in Armenia and that of Aliyev in the October 2003 ballot in Azerbaijan. In Armenia, the democratic transition had scored some points (the formation of a coalition government following the legislative elections of May 2003; the abolition of the death penalty in 2003). However, it seemed that

Armenian political elites feared that the Rose Revolution in Georgia could have a possible domino effect for the whole region, including their own country. Therefore, to avoid such a scenario, the government of Armenia announced, after an earlier attempt to amend the Constitution through a referendum in 2003 which failed due to insufficient voter turnout, that the draft constitutional reforms according to European standards could not take place before 2005, whereas the Council of Europe expected a referendum to take place in spring 2004 (Council of Europe, 2005). The point is that the revision of the Constitution was a prerequisite for Armenia to fulfil some of the important commitments it made when joining the Council of Europe in 2001 (Council of Europe, 2005, p. 2). These included judicial reform, local self-government reform, the appointment of an independent ombudsman, the establishment of independent media regulatory bodies, and improvements to the power of the Constitutional Court. However, at the expense of heavy pressure from the Council of Europe and its Parliamentary Assembly, the constitutional referendum in Armenia in the end did take place on 27 November 2005 and permitted the adoption of the constitutional reform (Council of Europe, 2007).

Meanwhile in Azerbaijan, the opposition was reduced to a few personalities – the others were either in jail or in exile. On 15 October 2003, the fragmented opposition tried in vain to expose Aliyev's election as rigged, but the police repressed protestors effectively (Ismailzade, 2003). However, the Rose Revolution in Georgia and regime change seemed to draw attention of the Azerbaijanian leadership. Just a few hours prior to Shevardnadze's resignation, President Aliyev phoned and supported Shevardnadze's position during the post-election events in Georgia and urged him to stand firm (Ismailzade, 2003). The political elites of Azerbaijan denounced Aliyev's support for President Shevardnadze, associating this friendly gesture with the inexperience of the young head of state (Karumize & Wertsch, 2005).

In fact, it was clear that the Aliyev regime had the same fear as their Armenian counterparts – the anxiety of the domino effect and the possibility that the Rose Revolution could provide a blueprint for Azerbaijan's established opposition. All in all, it is evident that in the early 2000s, Georgia became the laboratory of democratic changes throughout the South Caucasus.

4.4 The South Caucasus in the context of the ENP

In March 2003, the “Wider Europe – Neighbourhood” document, which was analysed in section 4.2, did not include Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia in the neighbourhood policy besides the fact that the South Caucasus countries had begun active negotiations to deepen relations with European countries after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Interview 3). Such exclusion was justified by the geographical scope (Interview 3; European Commission, 2003d, p. 4). Back in 2000, the European Parliament called for the creation of a “Southern dimension” of the ENP around the Black Sea due to security reasons (Delcour & Duhot, 2011). While determining the EU’s strategy in the South Caucasus, the various EU institutions had a series of debates about how to best approach the region. The discussion had been particularly intense when the PCAs came into force in 1999 (European Council, 1999c). During their presidency of the European Council, some member states of the EU such as Sweden, Greece and Italy tried to shift the focus of EU foreign policy towards the South Caucasus region (Delcour, 2015b). The UK also campaigned for stronger EU policy towards the South Caucasus (Youngs, 2011). In 2002, the UK appointed Brian Fall, its former Russian ambassador as Britain's special envoy to Georgia and later enlarged his remit to the whole South Caucasus in 2003 (Baev et al., 2003). Other EU member states were not in favour of an active EU participation in the political and economic processes in the region. This opinion was based on the assertion that the conflict management processes were stagnated, and the South Caucasus was already overcrowded with external actors (Popescu, 2010).

4.4.1: The incorporation of the South Caucasus into the ENP

Besides the geographical argument, the political reasons appeared more convincing to explain the first decision of the European Council to exclude the South Caucasus from the ENP. With this decision, the EU has apparently taken note of the fact that the assistance provided to the three states had not delivered the desired results. Progress in the implementation of the PCAs, including the respect for democracy, the rule of law and human rights were limited. On different occasions, the EU has expressed its dissatisfaction with the progress of the reforms (see: European Commission, 2003c). In

Armenia and Azerbaijan, the EU lamented the non-compliance - to varying degrees - of electoral processes to international standards (Baev et al., 2003). In addition, the EU has found that GDP growth did not have a substantial impact on poverty or employment. Regarding Georgia, the EU expressed concerns about the general deterioration of the local situation before the Rose Revolution (Lynch, 2002). In the security area, the EU called on the Georgian government to find a solution to the kidnappings of European citizens in the country (on December 9, 2001, Günther Beuchel, German diplomat, member of the European Commission delegation in Tbilisi, was assassinated; in June 2002, Peter Shaw, British expert advising the Agribusiness Bank in Georgia, was kidnapped (Human Rights Watch, 2003)). The national strategy document, revised on September 23, 2003, was particularly critical of the Georgian authorities: it outlined "serious governance problems" and "persistent weakness of the rule of law, including a high degree of corruption" (European Commission, 2003b, p. 3). Finally, the persistence of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict remained an obstacle to regional cooperation, between Armenia and Azerbaijan. On July 7, 2003, the European Council declared itself ready to play a more active political role in the region and created the post of Special Representative of the EU for the South Caucasus. The European Council appointed the Finnish ambassador Heikki Talvitie to this position (European Council, 2003a). His mandate included not only helping Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia to implement political and economic reforms, but also to contribute to the resolution of conflicts and to prepare for the peace process (European Council, 2003a). Heikki Talvitie also had the responsibility to establish constructive contacts with neighbouring states in the region and to encourage strengthening regional cooperation (Lussac, 2010). A few months later, the EU recognised the growing importance of the South Caucasus in not only political and energy terms but also security. Within the framework of the European Security Strategy (European Council, 2003b), which was adopted by the Security Council on December 12, 2003, the members of the EU declared their interest to have a greater and more active role in the South Caucasus (Baev et al., 2003). Moreover, the Rose Revolution in Georgia fostered the process of upgrading political and economic cooperation between the EU and Georgia and reinforced European interest in the South Caucasus (Efe, 2012).

Indeed, the Rose Revolution was one of the key factors that pushed the EU, under the impetus of the European Parliament, to integrate Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan into the ENP in 2004 (see also: Delcour & Duhot, 2011; Hale, 2005; Zhvania, 2009). The arrival of a new pro-Western political establishment in Georgia, headed by Saakashvili, had opened, according to Brussels, "new horizons" for the country as well as for all the states of the South Caucasus (Paul, 2016). At the end of the Rose Revolution, the EU welcomed the "considerable progress" with regard to the democratic nature of developments in Georgia. After declaring itself determined to support the reform process in Georgia, the EU expressed the need to clarify its relations with the South Caucasus in the context of the ENP. On February 26, 2004, the European Council invited the European Commission to present recommendations in this regard (European Council, 2004). The following month, the European Parliament adopted the report by Per Garhton on the "proposal for a European Parliament recommendation to the Council on EU policy towards the South Caucasus" (European Parliament, 2004) and proposed to award a "clear status" to the region within the framework of the ENP, in accordance with the principle to avoid the creation of new dividing lines in Europe (European Commission, 2003e).

Considering the stability and development of the South Caucasus being deemed "essential" for the EU, the European Commission has explicitly recommended to the European Council to include Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia in the ENP. The decision of the European Council of 14 June 2004 to include the South Caucasus countries in the ENP was a crucial step in the history of relations between the EU and the South Caucasus. It represents a strong political signal: that of a reciprocal commitment for closer cooperation, which is based on "common values" (Interview 2; Cadier, 2013). It created a new momentum in relations between the EU and the South Caucasus states. However, this momentum was still in need of the adoption of concrete and long-lasting measures in this unstable geopolitical area.

4.4.2 Action Plans for Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia

As already discussed, the EU developed relations with each of the ENP countries according to the individual APs signed with those countries. The APs served as a primary agenda setting and benchmarking instrument for progressing EU relations with partner countries. Thus, some early drafts of the APs were directly modelled on the Association Agreements used for the recent accessions, although the APs were not legal documents (Ghazaryan, 2010a). This factor is an illustration of the above discussed mechanical borrowing of the ENP from the enlargement experiences (see section 4.1).

After a year of ministerial-level talks, seven drafts of the APs came out in December 2004. The drafts covered relations with the following seven countries: Ukraine, Tunisia, Morocco, Moldova, Jordan, Israel and Palestine. The APs with Ukraine and Moldova were the first to be approved in February 2005 and, in April 2005, the European Council announced its intentions to develop APs for Egypt, Lebanon, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. Each AP was set for three to five years. Although about 80% of the APs concentrated on topics other than political circumstances, the vast emphasis of these initial “priorities for action” was on policy changes similar to those targeted at previous accession countries (Eisele & Wiesbrock, 2011). These documents mostly focused on improving the stability and effectiveness of institutions that guarantee democracy and the rule of law and discussed the conduct of upcoming elections. Moreover, the APs concentrated on freedom of speech and freedom of the media. The detailed “value” language (in constructivism terms – homo-sociologicus, see chapter 2) of the APs underlined that the normative improvements were central to the ENP, while the European Commission strategy paper stressed that “this will be established by popular consent and the values mentioned are obviously those that are fundamental to the EU” (European Commission, 2004, p. 8). As Prodi (2002) put it: “the aim is to expand a collection of EU ideals, values and standards to this neighbouring region”.

The APs which were signed with the ENP countries were neither a substitute for bilateral agreements nor new legal arrangements. They were rather a replenishment for the mutual goals and priorities of partners' actions, based on EU and participating countries' shared values (Puppo, 2005). Moreover, the ENP APs were based on the political, geographic and economic conditions of each country. These documents were divided into eight principal

areas: 1) Strengthening the rule of law; 2) Strengthening democratic structures; 3) Improving the Business climate and modernisation of administration; 4) Reforming tax and customs administration and Fight against corruption; 5) Creating transparency in the privatisation process; 6) Working in poverty reduction, sustainable development, environmental protection; 7) Conflict management and increased regional cooperation; 8) Maintaining Economic policy to support the APs.

The release of the country reports in March 2005, along with the recommendation by the European Commission to prepare the APs, contributed to the first step in implementing the ENP in the South Caucasus countries. The reports explained the situation (at the time) in the main neighbourhood policy fields (democracy, the rule of law, human rights, cooperation in justice and home affairs, economic and social reforms, free trade and regional) and identified key points in the APs. However, preliminary negotiations on the APs between the South Caucasus and the EU were hampered by a dispute between Azerbaijan and the Republic of Cyprus (Harzl, 2010). Azerbaijan, which had been a strategic partner of Turkey (due to its historical ties as described in chapter 3), tried to build relations with the secessionist (de facto) Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus. In mid-2005, an Azerbaijani airline flew a single charter flight to Northern Cyprus, which raised concerns in the Republic of Cyprus about the possibility that Azerbaijan would recognise the Northern Cyprus passports (Popescu, 2010). This jeopardised the internationally recognised borders and territorial integrity of the Republic of Cyprus (Papadimitriou & Petrov, 2012). From mid-2005 to early-spring 2006, the Republic of Cyprus, as an EU member state, was in a position to block the EU–Azerbaijan negotiations on the AP. It scrutinised the AP negotiations by lobbying the EU institutions to include respect for "territorial integrity" as a key principle of EU-Azerbaijan relations (Popescu, 2009b). The Azerbaijani blockade jeopardised the ENP process in this region because the EU was taking a regional approach towards the South Caucasus and the EU avoided initiating talks with Georgia and/or Armenia so as to not differentiate them from Azerbaijan (Popescu, 2009). As a result, a single EU member state's preference has put a halt to the development of a key EU policy instrument (AP) for the South Caucasus. The Republic of Cyprus has had a stifling effect on the development of EU policy toward the South Caucasus, and has tainted the EU's credibility as an actor capable of achieving its

stated goals in ENP (see also: Delcour & Duhot, 2011; Harzl, 2010). The APs for all three South Caucasus countries were finally signed on November 14, 2006.

The overall assessment of the APs for Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia shows that in all three documents the language is vague and neutral. However, the vagueness offered some opportunities as part of the process. The APs were 40 pages long and contained sections entitled Introduction, New Partnership Perspectives, Priorities for Action, General objectives and actions and Monitoring. The accent in all three documents was on the need for closer economic integration and political cooperation “beyond cooperation” to enhance security, stability and welfare.

Table 8 ENP for Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia: Priorities for Action

Georgia	Azerbaijan	Armenia
Priority 1: Strengthen rule of law, by reforming the judiciary. Strengthen democratic institutions, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.	Priority 1: Contribute to a peaceful solution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict;	Priority 1: Strengthening democratic structures, the rule of law, including judicial reform and the fight against fraud and corruption;
Priority 2: Improve the business and investment environment, including a transparent process of privatisation, and continue fighting corruption	Priority 2: Strengthen democracy in accordance with international requirements, including through fair and transparent elections	Priority 2: Enhancing human rights and freedoms in line with Armenia’s international obligations (UN; OSCE; CoE; PCA).
Priority 3: Promoting economic growth and strengthen poverty reduction	Priority 3: Enhancing human rights and freedoms in line with Azerbaijan’s	Priority 3: Promoting further economic development, enhancing

<p>initiatives and social stability, promoting sustainable development and environmental protection; further integration of economic and administrative legislation.</p>	<p>international obligations (UN; OSCE; CoE; PCA).</p>	<p>efforts to reduce poverty and social cohesion; contributing to the long-term sustainable development including environmental protection;</p>
<p>Priority 4: Increase cooperation in the areas of justice, democracy and defence, including border management.</p>	<p>Priority 4: Improving the business and investment climate, by reducing corruption.</p>	<p>Priority 4: Strengthening the investment climate and private sector (business climate, Tax administration, Customs ethics).</p>
<p>Priority 5: Strengthen regional cooperation (regional cooperation initiatives in the Black Sea region, including the Southern Caucasus)</p>	<p>Priority 5: Improve functioning of customs (Strengthen the overall administrative capacity in compliance with international and EU standards).</p>	<p>Priority 5: Additional convergence of economic and administrative legislation</p>
<p>Priority 6: Promote peaceful resolution of conflicts (Abkhazia and South Ossetia)</p>	<p>Priority 6: Promote balanced and efficient economic development focusing on economic diversification, rural development, poverty reduction and social / territorial cohesion; promote sustainable</p>	<p>Priority 6: Energy strategy development, including early demolition of the Medzamor Nuclear Power Plant (MNPP).</p>

	development, including environmental protection.	
Priority 7: Cooperation on Foreign and Security Policy (including European Security and Defence Policy).	Priority 7: Additional convergence of economic and administrative legislation	Priority 7: Contribute to a peaceful solution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict;
Priority 8: Cooperation in Transport and Energy (Further support TRACECA and INOGATE processes).	Priority 8: Strengthen bilateral cooperation on energy and transport between the EU and Azerbaijan	Priority 8: Strengthen regional cooperation efforts
	Priority 9: Enhance cooperation in the field of justice, freedom and security, including border management	
	Priority 10: Strengthen regional cooperation	

Source: (European Commission, 2006d)

The APs for Georgia stressed the need for judicial reforms in the country. Moreover, the EU was not ready for an active involvement in conflict resolution in Abkhazia and South Ossetia; however, the APs stated that the sides would discuss an EU involvement mechanism. The most far reaching novelty of this document was on “new partnership

perspectives”, in particular in terms of EU education programmes and prospects for an EU-Georgia Free Trade Agreement (European Commission, 2006d). The APs for Armenia addressed problems such as the rule of law, judicial reform, anti-corruption initiatives and human rights. The document was very neutral in general; however, the document proposed to democratise the dysfunctional political structure of Armenia (European Commission, 2006e). And no special recommendations were given to Armenia for the forthcoming elections. However, the document stated in general that Armenian government would be encouraged to deliver on its commitments, particularly on monitoring the elections (European Commission, 2006e, p. 4). Meanwhile, the AP for Azerbaijan was rather weak / neutral in nature and there was no strong wording for human rights and democracy (European Commission, 2006c). Regarding the main issue of media freedom / freedom of speech, the need was stated, but little was mentioned on the establishment of an independent public service.

The common provisions in all three documents were conditionality on commitments and values. There was a reference in each introduction to “ambitious objectives based on commitments to “shared values” or “common values””. All three APs had soft conditionality (identical language) referring to the ambition of relationship and peace and progress based on "efforts and concrete achievements in meeting those commitments" (European Commission, 2006d, 2006e, 2006c). Furthermore, all APs had a standard paragraph on “shared responsibility” in conflict prevention and resolution. In addition, the Strategy Paper of the EU also described the “values on which the extended relationships with neighbours are based on” (European Commission, 2004, p. 4). It initially stated that: “the privileged partnership with the neighbours is based on a mutual obligation based on common values primarily in the areas of rule of law, respect for human rights, including minority rights, promotion good neighbourly relations and the principles of market economy and sustainable development” (European Commission, 2004, p. 5). The “commitment to common values” was also emphasised in the introduction in the APs for Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia which outlined that the progress of the neighbouring states and deepening of the relations with the EU depends on the achievement of these values. For example, the EU Georgia APs stated that the

future of the relationship between the EU and Georgia would depend on how much Georgia was committed to shared values (European Commission, 2004b, p. 1).

Besides the common provisions, there were also some differences in the individual APs. The Azerbaijan AP included reference on the political dialogue to "security issues affecting the interests of both sides" (European Commission, 2006c) which was related to energy (in particular energy security of oil and gas). Moreover, only the AP for Azerbaijan mentioned respect for "territorial integrity" (European Commission, 2006c, p. 1) as a result of the above discussed active involvement and lobbying of the Republic of Cyprus. Such a sensitive issue of "high politics" as "territorial integrity" was not mentioned either in EU/Georgia or in EU/Armenia APs. Armenia's AP referred here to the possibility of dialogue on readmission and visas (European Commission, 2006e). However, Georgia's AP had more detailed provisions in the new partnership perspectives with an addition on "gradual extension of four freedoms to Georgia" which are freedom of goods, services, capital and people (European Commission, 2006d).

4.4.3 Financial aspects of the ENP

There were three fundamental documents that created the financial instrument for the ENP: European Commission, "Towards a New Neighbourhood Instrument" dated July 1, 2003; European Commission Plan for the European Parliament and Council of the EU, "Establishing general provisions for the creation of a European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument" dated September 29, 2004 and Regulation of the European Council and the Council No. 1638/2006 on the creation of the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument of October 24, 2006 (Benc, 2008b; Canciani, 2004; Nawrot, 2015).

The ENP was financially divided into several periods: from 2004 to 2006, from 2007 to 2013 and 2014-2020.

The budget for ENP for the period of 2004-2006 under external assistance programmes was €255 million (European Commission, 2004, p. 24). As already discussed in section 3.5, TACIS (which covered 12 countries of Eastern Europe and Central Asia) and MEDA (10 countries of North Africa and the Middle East), as well as thematic programmes such

as the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR), provided EU assistance to the countries of the ENP until December 31, 2006. Through TACIS, from 2004 to 2006 the total amount for three years for the South Caucasus was €88 million, out of which Georgia received €28 million, Armenia - €20 million and Azerbaijan – €40 million (Benc, 2008b, p. 79), which was a modest budget compared to the objectives pursued by the ENP.

In 2007 an independent single financing instrument – the ENP Instrument (ENPI) – was created, which replaced TACIS and MEDA. From 2007 to 2013, financing was set to be €11.181 billion for the ENP (European Commission, 2013a). This amount was intended for seventeen recipient countries and was designed for seven years. The ENPI made available for the South Caucasus countries the sum of €310.8 million for the period of 2007-2010. The ENPI country allocations still seem inadequate in comparison to the ENP's goals and insufficient for ENP countries to implement major reforms. The allocated funds had to cover a large area of activities, such as: supporting the democratisation process and good governance, the implementation of reforms to improve administration, the development of infrastructure and poverty reduction.

Table 9 ENPI country allocations in 2007 – 2013 (million euros)

ENPI	2007-2010	2011-2013
GEORGIA	120.4	180.3
ARMENIA	98.4	157.3
AZERBAIJAN	92	122.5
UKRAINE	494	470.1
BELARUS	46.1	56.7
MOLDOVA	209.7	273.1

MOROCCO	654	580.5
ALGERIA	220	172
TUNISIA	300	240
EGYPT	558	449
JORDAN	265	223
LEBANON	187	150

Source: (Vasilyan, 2014, p. 77)

The ENPI for the period 2011-2013 (see Table 9) was increased for Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia. From Eastern European countries Ukraine was the country which received the largest share (€470 million). Then came Moldova (€273 million), Georgia (€180 million), Armenia (€157 million), Azerbaijan (€122.5 million) and Belarus (€56.7 million) (European Commission, 2013a; Table 9). The 2011-2013 allocations had more substantial funding because this period was characterised by new priorities. Indeed, negotiations concerning the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) (this topic will be discussed in next chapter) started between the EU and Armenia in 2010 and the same negotiation between the EU and Georgia – in 2009. Therefore, the EU paid more attention on economic reforms, such as: support for trade and investment and regulatory approximation given the prospect of the DCFTAs. Negotiations on the DCFTA did not start with Azerbaijan because Azerbaijan was not a member of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), which is a pre-condition for the start of DCFTA negotiations (European Commission, 2012a, p. 2).

All in all, after the adoption of the APs for Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia on November 14, 2006, the Europeanisation in the South Caucasus has become much more coordinated and integrated. However, at the same time, the ENP has shown a number of serious deficiencies that largely predetermined the weakness of European policy towards the South Caucasus. Most importantly, it was the structural weakness of the ENP which

included both Southern and Eastern neighbours of the EU. Such a broad geographic framework eroded the ENP's ability to find the necessary differentiated approaches and created conflict within the EU itself (as already seen in section 4.1; see also: Börzel & Pamuk, 2011).

4.5 Implementation and results of the ENP in the South Caucasus

The inclusion of the South Caucasus countries in the ENP was supposed to call for significant economic and democratic reforms which the EU would support through Financial and Technical Assistance, by opening its markets and providing access, where possible to community programmes (Delcour & Duhot, 2011). In 2004 Freedom House gave a score of 4 each (out of 7) for political and civil rights in Georgia and Armenia due to defective presidential elections of 2003, whereas Azerbaijan was rated as "not-free" with a ranking score of 6 in human rights and 5 in civil freedoms (Freedom House, 2004, p. 218). Moreover, in all three countries corruption was rampant: Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan ranked 82, 133 and 140 respectively in Transparency International 2004 Corruption Perception Index (out of 145 countries) (Transparency International, 2004).

The APs recommend Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia accede to, ratify and enforce international conventions related to the fight against corruption, including the UN Convention on Corruption, the Council of Europe Conventions on Criminal and Civil Law and the OECD Convention on the Fight against Bribery of Public Officials in International Business Transactions (European Commission, 2006d, 2006c, 2006e). Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia have agreed to join international anti-corruption networks, such as the Group of States Against Corruption (GRECO), which is the Council of Europe's anti-corruption monitoring body, and to adopt their recommendations. Last of all, each country has had several additional regulations that mainly focused on supporting anti-corruption programmes within the government and/or law enforcement authorities to strengthen the legislative system for investigating corruption-related crimes. These activities were very similar for all three countries and differed only marginally with respect to the specificity of certain measures (see Table 10; also: Börzel & Pamuk, 2012).

Table 10 Anti-Corruption Measures in the South Caucasus

Agency	Georgia	Azerbaijan	Armenia
Policy Formulation	Anti-Corruption Coordination Council (2001) National Security Council (2005)	Inter-Agency Commission For Fighting Corruption (2004)	Anti-Corruption Council (2004) Expert Group (2008)
Policy Implementation	Department for Coordinating Anti-Corruption Policies (2001) State Minister of Reform (2005) Inter-Agency Coordination Council of Combating Corruption (2008)	Inter-Agency Commission for Combating Corruption (2004)	Anti-Corruption Strategy Monitoring Commission (2004)

<p>Policy Investigation</p>	<p>Prosecutor General's Office (2005)</p> <p>Inter-Agency Coordination Council of Combating Corruption (2008)</p>	<p>Anti-Corruption Department in Prosecutor General's Office (2005)</p>	<p>Anti-Corruption Department in Prosecutor General's Office (2004)</p>
<p>Legal Changes/State Programs</p>	<p>Amendment of the Criminal Code (2006)</p> <p>Law on Chamber of Control (2008)</p> <p>Amendments to Law on Conflicts of Interest and Corruption in Public Services (2009)</p>	<p>Law on Access to Information (2005)</p> <p>Law on Combating Corruption (2005)</p> <p>State Program on Combating Corruption, including Implementation APs (2004-2006)</p> <p>National Strategy on</p>	<p>Law on the Office of the Public Prosecutor (2007)</p> <p>Law on Operational Investigative Activities (2007)</p> <p>Law on the Declaration of Property and Income of Physical Person (2007)</p> <p>Anti-Corruption Strategy, including Implementation</p>

	National Anti-Corruption Strategy (2005 and 2010)	Increasing Transparency and Combating Corruption, including Implementation APs (2007-2011)	APs (2003-2007 and 2009-2012)
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Source: (Council of Europe, 2011; GRECO, 2010, 2011; Transparency International, 2011)

Before the Rose Revolution in Georgia, the anti-corruption policies of the South Caucasus countries were characterised by a lack of political will as was shown in chapter 3. Reducing corruption had also been consistently described as a priority under the ENP (European Commission, 2005). Progress had been tangible but still inconsistent in all three countries. Since 2004, the South Caucasus countries have ranged among the most corrupt countries in the world (see Table 4); however, scope and form of corruption differ (Börzel, 2010). Corruption in the South Caucasus was institutionalised and it was used as a tool by ruling elites to control political rivals or rival economic elites (Puppo, 2005). Corruption was organised in the form of a pyramid, with income distributed from the bottom to the top (Cremona, 2004). In Soviet times, the war against corruption was used as a political weapon to discredit or blackmail political rivals. As a result, there was no cross-party agreement on the need to combat corruption, which is a major roadblock to implementing reforms (Puppo, 2005). Such Soviet style approach was very well manifested following opposition protests in Azerbaijan during the November 2005 elections. In fact, some businessmen with links to opposition leaders were detained on bribery and racketeering charges (Ismayilov, 2005).

Despite the fact that the Armenian authorities released a list of corporations who were accused of tax evasion, the only businessmen detained in 2005 were the ones who publicly denounced the corruption of the Armenian customs (Danielyan, 2005). In contrast,

Saakashvili's government was more successful in combating corruption. Georgia had taken a variety of measures, including downsizing the state administration, increasing wages for key officials and reforming the licensing system (Kakachia & O'Shea, 2012). Moreover, high-ranking officials from the previous government had been arrested, and 15000 police officers had been fired in order to train and reform the police institution (Light, 2014). However, the ex-Foreign Minister Salome Zurbishvili, who was dismissed on 18 October 2005, had cited the persistence of patronage networks in state institutions. Her attempts to reshuffle the staff of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs by recalling ambassadors encountered fierce resistance from Saakashvili (Puppo, 2005).

In March 2005 the European Commission recommended that the EU should intensify relations with the South Caucasus, based on the reports it made on each of three countries (European Commission, 2005). These country reports provided a factual analysis of the political, economic and institutional reforms undertaken in Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan, focusing on the areas: strengthening democracy, good governance, human rights, business and investment, support for trade, cooperation in the field of justice, migration issues, infrastructure networks, education, culture and research. In the Country Reports prepared by the European Commission throughout 2005, political, rule of law and human rights issues were highlighted as areas where reforms needed to be strengthened and where cooperation with the EU should have been developed (European Commission, 2005). These areas were subsequently identified as primary goals in the APs, which were signed with the South Caucasus countries in 2006.

The first five-year progress in the ENP implementation in the South Caucasus shows that, compared to 2004, when Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia were included in the ENP, none of them improved their democratic scores sustainably by 2011 and Armenia even worsened its scores in 2010 (see Table 11). Georgia had the best results, although still with several shortcomings in the top political power holders. According to Transparency International, two particularly problematic areas in Georgia were media financing and the reserve funds for the president and the mayor of Tbilisi, which were largely not transparent (Aprasidze, 2011). Political developments in Georgia in 2004-2005 confirmed progress towards democratisation: the elections that were held in Georgia in the wake of the Rose Revolution (presidential elections in January 2004 and

parliamentary elections in March 2004) were evaluated by international observers as mainly fair as well as free (European Commission, 2005). Therefore, the APs for Georgia signed with the EU placed the focus on consolidating such progress and also concentrated on the areas that stayed problematic (e.g. the rule of law) (European Commission, 2006d). While the APs signed with Georgia reflected the country's progress towards democratisation, the document concluded with Azerbaijan and Armenia incorporated far more fundamental and common priorities, therefore reflecting the countries' reduced progress in democratisation and their problematic political system (European Commission, 2006c) (see Tables 3;4;5; also Table 10;11;12).

Table 11 Nations in Transit Ratings and Average Scores for the South Caucasus 2005-2009

	2005			2007			2009		
	GE	AR	AZ	GE	AR	AZ	GE	AR	AZ
Electoral Process	4.75	5.75	6.25	4.75	5.75	6.50	4.75	5.75	6.75
Civil Society	3.50	3.50	4.75	3.50	3.50	5.25	3.75	3.75	5.50
Independent Media	4.25	5.50	6.00	4.00	5.75	6.25	4.25	6.00	6.75
Governance	5.50	5.00	6.00	5.75	5.75	6.00	6.00	5.75	6.25
Constitutional, Legislative, and Judicial Framework	5.00	5.25	5.75	4.75	5.00	5.75	4.75	5.50	5.75
Corruption	5.75	5.75	6.25	5.00	5.75	6.25	5.00	5.50	6.50
Democracy Rating	4.96	5.18	5.86	4.68	5.21	6.00	4.93	5.39	6.25

Source: (Aprasidze, 2010; Grono, 2010; Iskandaryan, 2010).

Table 12 Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (TICPI)⁴² in the South Caucasus 2004-2019

Year	Georgia	Azerbaijan	Armenia
2004 (out of 146 countries)	2.0 (133)	1.9 (140)	3.1 (82)
2006 (out of 163 countries)	2.8 (99)	2.4 (130)	2.9 (93)
2008 (out of 180 countries)	3.9 (67)	1.9 (158)	2.9 (109)
2010 (out of 178 countries)	3.8 (68)	2.4 (134)	2.6 (123)
2012* (out of 198 countries)	<i>52 (51)</i>	<i>27 (139)</i>	<i>34 (105)</i>
2014* (out of 198 countries)	<i>52 (51)</i>	<i>29 (126)</i>	<i>37 (94)</i>
2017* (out of 198 countries)	<i>56 (46)</i>	<i>31 (122)</i>	<i>35 (107)</i>
2019* (out of 198 countries)	<i>56 (44)</i>	<i>30 (126)</i>	<i>42 (77)</i>

Source: Transparency International.

Overall, the effect of the ENP on good governance, democratisation and the rule of law can be viewed as being contrasted in the South Caucasus, with some achievements or limited progress on key issues. This is illustrated both by sectoral examples and by general country statistics and data: specifically, the reports presented by the international organisations and watchdogs such as GRECO, Transparency International and Open Society Foundations, although it must be stated that the number of sources on the ENP implementation in the South Caucasus countries are limited in contrast to the other countries from the ENP and Ukraine in particular (Delcour & Duhot, 2011; Popescu, 2013). The report of the European Court of Auditors (ECA) on the ENP implementation

⁴² Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (TICPI) is published annually in December and gives information about the corruption level in each country of the world for that calendar year. Data between 1995-2011 has ranged from 10 (very clean) to 0 (highly corrupt). *Since 2012 the TICPI has changed its methodology ranging from 100 (very clean) to 0 (highly corrupt). For more details see: Transparency International, available at: <https://www.transparency.org/en/>

in the South Caucasus, which was published in 2011, is one of the limited examples of such assessment.

The ECA is the EU's independent external auditor which protects the interests of EU taxpayers. Its role includes providing financial reports on EU finances (for more details: Brenninkmeijer et al., 2018). The ECA report (2011b) evaluated the first results of the ENP in Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia and focused on the implementation of the very first APs. It stated that the poor progress in the ENP implementation of the South Caucasus countries was related to the lack of the guidelines and expertise they received from the EU (European Court of Auditors, 2011b, p. 21). Indeed, in the first years of the ENP, the European Commission had a small presence on the ground in Armenia and Azerbaijan (Stawarz, 2020). The regional delegation to Yerevan did not transform into a fully operational delegation until 2008, whereas the delegation to Baku was established in February 2008 but only became fully operational in 2009 (Tartes, 2015). In contrast, the delegation of the European Commission to Tbilisi was opened in 1995 (which, as already discussed in section 3.4, was responsible for all three South Caucasus countries).

In addition to the lack of guidelines and financial assistance from the EU on the ground, another reason why the ENP failed to reach full potential in the South Caucasus is ~~considered the fact~~ that it did not sufficiently reflect the interests of individual countries. Azerbaijan had major differences from the other two South Caucasus countries in its relationship with the EU, and therefore these differences have played a significant role in the context of the implementation of the ENP which was more or less similarly designed for all three countries as shown in section 4.4.2.

4.5.1 Implementation and results of the ENP in Azerbaijan

As discussed in chapter 3 (section 3.6) Azerbaijan, unlike Armenia and Georgia, relies on generous natural resources particularly oil and gas, which make the relationship with the EU less asymmetric than in the case of other two neighbouring countries (Delcour & Duhot, 2011). At the same time, the foreign policy of Azerbaijan is primarily based on balanced politics between different powers, e.g. Russia, Turkey, the US and the EU (Stimbovischi, 2015). In contrast to Georgia's and Armenia's political elites, Aliyev does

not want Azerbaijan to become a member of the EU; therefore, has fewer incentives to cooperate (even though the ENP doesn't include a membership perspective (van Gils, 2019). Financial aid was also less attractive to Azerbaijan, considering its already mentioned economic performance and resources (Franke et al., 2010) (for GDP comparison see Table 6). Therefore, the ENP for Azerbaijan was seen as a means of maintaining a balanced diplomacy (Nuriyev, 2011). These factors were well reflected in the implementation of the ENP which may be described as unsatisfactory. There was no or only limited progress in those areas where the EU paid more attention. This applies to the rule of law, to good governance and human rights, but also to areas such as judiciary and corruption (Delcour & Duhot, 2011; European Court of Auditors, 2011a). Judicial reform was listed as a sub-priority under the 2007-2010 indicative programme for Azerbaijan. The country benefited from €16 million through the ENP (European Commission, 2013a).

There was some progress on the technical and administrative aspects of reform, e.g., the implementation of court decisions or procedures for selection of judges. However, this institution remained controlled and highly influenced by the local political elites. In fact, judges on the Constitutional Court, including those on the Supreme Court and the Appellate Court, were appointed by the president and should have been approved by the National Assembly of Azerbaijan (so-called Milli Majlis) (Grono, 2010). Moreover, several judges on the Constitutional Court had their terms of office unilaterally extended, and no new judges were confirmed in 2009. The judiciary had been highly dependent on the executive (see also: Grono, 2011, p. 86) allowing for widespread unfair trials and infringements in this country. The arrest of a 20-year-old student and member of the opposition Popular Front Party (PFP) on 4 February 2011 is a case worthy of mention. In fact, he was arrested straight after he called for protests against the government from his Facebook post (Amnesty International, 2011).

Based on the above discussed developments, by 2010 Azerbaijan had worsened its democracy scores (see Table 11). While President Aliyev was re-elected at the end of 2008, (getting more than 89% of the votes) constitutional amendments adopted by the March 2009 referendum removed the limits of the presidential term of the office, which means that he strengthened his authoritarian rule. Moreover, elections were not considered fair

and free by the international observers (Gahramanova, 2009). Freedom of expression and freedom of the press had also deteriorated and according to the Freedom House, by 2011, the Judiciary in Azerbaijan was assessed as corrupt and inefficient (GRECO, 2012). Corruption has also been an extensive problem in Azerbaijan. In 2004, the country ratified the Council of Europe Convention on Criminal Law and became a member of the GRECO (Gomolka, 2015). Since then, judicial reforms in Azerbaijan have included the Penal Code to bring national law into the line with penal law on corruption (Delcour & Duhot, 2011). These changes included the redefinition of active and passive bribery requirements, the extension in active and passive bribery penalties and criminalisation of trading in influence⁴³ (GRECO, 2010, 2012). However, regarding the regulatory system itself, bribery of all categories of public officials was not addressed at central and local levels in Azerbaijan (Michael & Mishyna, 2007). The offer and the promise of a bribe as well as the acceptance of an offer or a promise did not constitute “*actual*” crimes in Azerbaijan (Delcour & Duhot, 2011; GRECO, 2012). The greatest challenge was the compliance and the implementation of the law. Therefore, Azerbaijan ranked 134th in Transparency International’s 2010 Corruption Perception Index with a score of 2.4 and 139th in 2012 with a score of 27 (see Table 12).

4.5.2 Implementation and results of the ENP in Armenia

Before it was included in the ENP, Armenia adopted an anti-corruption strategy and joined the GRECO in 2003. Moreover, in 2004 the Armenian government created a Council to tackle corruption (Delcour & Duhot, 2011). Nevertheless, even though the administrative and institutional instruments were in place, the fight against corruption suffered from shortcomings. The difficulties of implementing GRECO’s recommendations were due to the considerable delay in the adoption of the Law on Public Service, which would unify state and local municipal services controlled by separate legislation (Danielyan, 2005).

⁴³ Trading in Influence is a type of corruption that is hard to catch and comprehend. This is a situation where a person misuses his / her power over a third party's decision-making process (person, organisation or government) in exchange for his allegiance, money or some other material or immaterial undue benefit. For more information: Association of Accredited Public Policy Advocates to the EU. Available at: <http://www.aalep.eu/trading-influence>

Armenia ranked 93rd in Transparency International's 2006 Corruption Perception Index with a score of 2.9 (Table 12). In general, Armenia was associated with the Soviet style political system. Armenia's local political elites, like those in most post-Soviet countries, have gained political and economic influence, which had direct consequences for the decision-making process, including issues of participation and representation, which are critical to democratic change (Freire & Simão, 2013). In fact, since 1998, Armenia had been governed by the so-called Karabakh-clan, including former Presidents Robert Kocharyan and Serzh Sargsyan. Those who came into power and occupied key positions in the executive branch after Armenia gained independence came from Nagorno - Karabakh region (for more details see section 3.2). These people dominated Armenia's political and economic life, prioritised close ties with Russia, and thus pursued a conventional approach to power maintenance (Freire & Simão, 2013).

In 2008 Sargsyan won the elections and became the third President of Armenia, from 2008 to 2018. The 2008 Presidential election in Armenia was tumultuous. Supporters of Ter-Petrosyan, Armenia's first president and unsuccessful presidential candidate in this election, demonstrated against alleged electoral fraud. On March 1, after nine days of peaceful protests in Freedom Square, national police and military forces attempted to disperse the demonstrators, using truncheons and electric shock devices, killing ten people (Hess, 2010). President Kocharyan declared a 20-day state of emergency with the approval of the Armenian parliament, prohibiting future demonstrations and censoring the media from broadcasting any political news other than the ones issued by official state press releases (Bunce & Wolchik, 2012). With the state of emergency in place, Ter-Petrosyan called protesters to leave, effectively ending the demonstrations (Amaryan, 2011).

The political and social aftermath from the tumultuous February 2008 presidential election, which was won by Sargsyan, was discussed extensively in all three progress reports which were released by the EU (European Commission, 2007, 2008b, 2009a). The conduct of the February 2008 presidential elections raised questions, in particular the state of emergency that was imposed in their aftermath (European Commission, 2008b). Furthermore, annual progress reports, which were published by the EU in 2007, 2008 and 2009 reviewed and criticised the ENP implementation in Armenia, especially

those related to the AP. Examining the three progress reports released for Armenia (European Commission, 2007, 2008b, 2009a) reveals a scenario in which democratic change had stalled in the implementation stage, with some significant shortcomings in line with the AP's original goals, which were discussed in section 4.4.2. Despite these obvious challenges to Armenia's democratisation during the ENP's implementation (in particular 2007-09 years) the overall tone of the ENP progress reports has remained surprisingly positive and constructive. The 2007 and 2008 progress reports noted significant progress in judicial reform, election administration, and the ombudsman institution, while the 2009 report added that some measures had been taken to strengthen the legislative system in the field of anti-corruption as well as changes in civil society participation (see: European Commission, 2009). Freedom of the press and ill-treatment of prisoners in detention remained the areas of concern (European Commission, 2011b, p. 5).

Some progress was achieved in 2009 and 2010 in reforming the justice sector and the fight against corruption in Armenia, albeit major challenges still needed to be addressed (GRECO, 2011). As already analysed, Armenia was evolving slowly and unevenly towards good governance, the rule of law and democracy. However, Armenia developed a system to coordinate implementation of the ENP. The Coordinating Committee led by the President of Armenia was established in 2006 to organise the activities of the different ministries and government agencies with EU institutions (N. Smith, 2011). This factor illustrates that traditionally Russia-oriented Armenia was becoming more involved in the ENP implementation, at least at a coordination level. Moreover, it is noteworthy that according to EU negotiators and officials involved in the ENP process, the easiest negotiation of the AP was in the case of Armenia, which showed the "most technocratic approach" to the goals expressed in the APs (Alieva, 2006).

In addition to the scarce resources and landlocked location that have shaped Armenia's negotiating actions towards greater flexibility, the historically strong relations between the European states and Armenia through the vast Armenian diaspora and the awareness of its security interests and the EU's historical context have undoubtedly facilitated this phase for Armenia (Alieva, 2006, p. 11; M. R. Freire & Simão, 2013). It seems the EU was largely focused on the implementation process of the ENP in Armenia in the long run.

The EU reports treat democratisation in an ambiguous and vague manner. Despite the fact that the APs (see section 4.4.1) presented a list of more concrete democratisation goals, the objectives lacked policy-operational information such as a clear implementation structure, precise timetable, or a clear link between the incentives offered and the political and social reforms required (see also: Ghazaryan, 2010; Smith, 2011).

4.5.3 Implementation and results of the ENP in Georgia

Since the European Commission published the first progress report on the implementation of the ENP, Georgia remained the frontrunner among the South Caucasus countries. Elections were generally considered to be free and to have been held at international standards (European Commission, 2011b). Georgia also showed a radically different picture from Armenia and Azerbaijan in the fight against corruption. Since the Rose revolution in 2003, new authorities have shown strong political will to eliminate corruption. Several anti-corruption campaigns have been carried out, including the prosecution of a number of high-ranking senior government officials, the creation of a new patrol police force which replaced corrupt, Soviet-style police institutions (Kakachia & O'Shea, 2012) and the optimisation of licence and warrant regulations (Kukhianidze, 2009).

Since 2004, Georgia has made commendable efforts to improve the provisions on bribery and trading in influence in its Criminal Code (Council of Europe, 2011). Some key policy papers were adopted by the Georgian government including the Anti-Corruption Strategy and its implementation APs of 2005 (Kukhianidze, 2009). On 18 January 2005 the President of Georgia set up a working group of government and three NGO members (TI Georgia, Young Lawyers' Association and Young Economists' Association) to establish a National Anti-Corruption Policy and APs. The National Anti-Corruption Strategy defined the prevention of corruption, institutional reform, the liberalisation of the business climate, the ratification and enforcement of international anti-corruption conventions and the promotion of public involvement in anti-corruption activities as the key objectives of the government's anti-corruption campaign (Karosanidze, 2007).

Georgia also signed a Cooperation Arrangement with the G8 to encourage accountability to fight against corruption and show the commitment to implement the recommendations that were obtained from the GRECO (Council of Europe, 2011). Moreover, Georgia has introduced an effective tool to deprive officials of the benefits of corruption by introducing administrative confiscation scheme to target unproved wealth of government officials (Delcour & Duhot, 2011). All these measures have contributed to improving Georgia's rankings in the Transparency International from the score of 2.0 in 2004 to 3.8 in 2010 and from the 133rd place to 68th respectively (see Table 12) and have restored public confidence in the anti-corruption government efforts (Light, 2014). Georgia was also arguably the most successful country among all the three South Caucasus states in sectoral reforms including Judiciary in 2007-2011. This was mainly done under the Rapid Reaction Mechanism (RRM) to reform the Ministry of Justice (Light, 2014). Since 2004, the TACIS and the ENPI interventions made a big contribution to capacity growth in the Justice system in Georgia, (European Court of Auditors, 2011a, p. 67). However, the report published by the European Court of Audits showed that monitoring of this process was needed. Some shortcoming have been identified in this regard, such as frequent organisational changes within key institutions and staff turnover at all levels (European Court of Auditors, 2011a, p. 61). Furthermore, the report on Georgia states that Georgia's judiciary remained plagued with weak institutional organisation, and lack of independence (Aprasidze, 2011).

The Georgian government's strategy of Europeanisation has been pushed forward along with the domestic reforms on economy and democratisation (Kukhianidze, 2009). However, the overall progress of ENP implementation in the country can be assessed as uneven. Developments since 2007 also highlighted the need for strengthening the process of democratic reforms, in particular the need to establish a system of checks and balances between the branches of power (Council of Europe, 2011). The repression of the opposition mass demonstration against the government in Tbilisi at the end of 2007 was considered to be a serious event, which affected the democratisation process in Georgia and tainted respect for human rights (European Commission, 2011b; Welt, 2009). Georgia has undergone a period of political instability caused by the increasing tensions between the authorities and the opposition, which culminated in major crises in the

autumn of 2007. Crisis was provoked by the detention of Georgian politician Irakli Okruashvili, who served as Georgia's defence minister from December 2004 to November 2006, on charges of extortion, money laundering, and abuse of office. (Sulaberidze, 2007). Okruashvili advocated for a military solution to the de facto republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Fuller, 2006). In November 2006, Saakashvili assigned Okruashvili's defence portfolio to the Minister of the Economy. This was likely related to Okruashvili's hostile position on secessionist conflicts. Later on, Okruashvili resigned from his position and announced the founding of a new opposition party - Movement for United Georgia on September 25, 2007. Moreover, he launched a barrage of criticism against President Saakashvili, accusing him of corruption, incompetence, and human rights abuses (Sulaberidze, 2007). He also raised some questions about Zhvania's death (Civil.ge, 2007). These preliminary political confrontations were intensified, which became apparent during the November 2007 events. The massive demonstration took place followed by disproportionate use of force by authorities and later the closure of independent TV Imedi (Welt, 2009). The TV Imedi was attacked and occupied by heavily-armed special forces, and a large amount of equipment was damaged or destroyed (Human Rights Watch, 2007a). The reasons for such developments could have been found in the fact that the post-revolutionary government of Georgia had faced contradictions since 2007. The changes made to the constitution in February 2004 guaranteed the increase of the presidential power over all other branches of government (Nakashidze, 2016).

As a result, a structure of ineffective and unbalanced power had been created in Georgia, where the president had a "superpower", which in fact jeopardised the development of democratic processes. Thus, this contributed to the creation of what Silitsky (2009) calls a "preemptive authoritarianism", or the ability of post-Soviet regimes to anticipate popular challenge. After the death of Zhvania, the triumvirate of the Rose revolution (Saakashvili - Zhvania - Burjanadze) collapsed. This eventually contributed to the split of the political post-revolutionary elite. Moreover, opponents accused Saakashvili of authoritarian rule, claiming that the authorities selectively applied the law to marginalise political opponents (International Crisis Group, 2007; Tudoroiu, 2007). The government has also been lambasted for using excessive force against inmates during the 2006 prison

riot (S. F. Jones, 2012). Saakashvili, under pressure from demonstrations and western partners (the US; the EU; the UN), decided to raise the legitimacy of the government and announced snap presidential elections in January 2008. With 53.7% of the vote, Saakashvili was declared the winner. International observers praised the elections for being truly competitive and, despite some violations, it met democratic standards in general (Nichol, 2008). The events of November 2007 can be considered a significant trauma in Georgian politics because they signalled the end of political dialogue, radicalised the schism between the country's political forces, and significantly lowered public trust in the government and the political process (see also: Cornell & Nilsson, 2009).

After the war against Russia in August 2008 (see section 3.3.1), Georgians felt defeated at the hands of the Russian military in the immediate aftermath of the conflict but gained a sense of pride in having stood up and fought against a power that had tormented the country for two centuries (see section 3.1). Georgian polling data unequivocally show that public support for the government has grown since the conflict. This is particularly evident in polling data from late 2008, when the public was rallying around the president in the aftermath of the war (Cornell & Nilsson, 2009; Caucasus Resource Research Centers, 2009). These levels are almost certainly the result of Georgian society's strong consensus on how the 2008 war began. Only 7% of Georgians polled in late 2008 believed Georgia started the war, with 84% agreeing that Georgia reacted to Russian aggression (Light, 2010). The latter figure had fallen to 64% in February 2009, which was still quite high given that several opposition politicians blamed Saakashvili for the war (Esipova & Ray, 2009). Initially, the war created a strong sense of unity in Georgian society.

After being dismissed or voluntarily having left the government, several important members of the government and the UNM joined the opposition camp in 2008. The former prime minister, Zurab Noghaideli, was discharged soon after the November 2007 events, and former parliamentary speaker, Burjanadze, left the UNM shortly before the May 24 parliamentary elections due to disagreements over electoral candidate lists (Welt, 2009). Following the August war in 2008, Georgia's ambassador to Russia, Erosi Kitsmarishvili, resigned and slammed Saakashvili's government handling of the war as well as its overall relations with Russia (Petro, 2009). Irakli Alasania, Georgia's UN envoy,

resigned in December 2008 and formed his own team and, later, political party, Our Georgia – Free Democrats (Mitchell, 2013). Several high-ranking Georgian diplomats in foreign countries resigned to join Alasania (including chief negotiator in Abkhazia, deputy defence minister, and deputy national security minister (S. V. Cornell & Nilsson, 2009).

Overall, as can be seen, the implementing of the ENP in Georgia was not a very steady process. This process lagged behind in those areas that were not at the top of the government's reform agenda (Delcour & Duhot, 2011). Moreover, it could be said that the government of Georgia was prioritising more the creation of technical structures rather than implementing laws in practice. On 17 February 2004, the Georgian government founded the state ministry responsible for European and Euro-Atlantic integration and the overall monitoring of the ENP (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, 2004) which confirmed Georgia's general commitments to Europeanisation and the institutional structure of Georgia for European integration rated high (Boonstra, 2015). However, as already seen, the ENP have fallen short in times of implementation, e.g., shortcomings of electoral process, increase in the use of excessive force by the police, media freedom and political polarisation.

4.6 Conclusions to chapter 4

As chapter 4 demonstrated, the EU has been conceptualised as a transformative power, mobilising a diverse range of instruments towards the South Caucasus. Launched in 2003-04, the ENP intended to encourage the South Caucasus countries to strengthen democracy, the rule of law and fundamental freedoms which were the priorities of the APs, the key documents of the ENP signed with the partner countries in the mid-2000s. Within the ENP, the EU is a normative actor, and the first documents of the ENP, namely the “Wider Europe” (European Commission, 2003e) and the ENP Strategy Paper (European Commission, 2004) stressed more the role of common values and identity (normatively-oriented rhetoric (Kratochvíl & Tulmets, 2010)). Meanwhile, the South Caucasus case has shown a paradoxical image of Europeanisation process. The key factors which hampered EU's transformative ambition in the South Caucasus and overall

unsatisfactory progress in the ENP implementation were identified as follows: lack of guidelines and financial assistance on the ground, which includes ambiguity and vagueness of the general wording of the ENP progress reports, the lack of a differentiated approach regarding the APs for all three countries and the lack of democratic credentials of the political elites of the South Caucasus during the ENP implementation.

Chapter 5. The Eastern Partnership and the South Caucasus: Relations through differentiation

This chapter is devoted to relations between the South Caucasus countries and the EU in the context of the Eastern Partnership programme (EaP). The first part of the chapter examines the background of the creation of the EaP, as well as its concepts, aims and objectives. The second part of the chapter analyses the different ways of cooperation between the EU and the South Caucasus countries in three case studies.

5.1 The background of the creation of the EaP

The emergence of the EaP is associated with the process of reforming the ENP. In 2006-07, the European Commission decided to strengthen the ENP by reflecting on deeper economic integration with neighbouring countries. In the document (European Commission, 2006a) which was published in 2006, the European Commission outlined that the ENP should have been strengthened and particularly deep and comprehensive FTAs should have become a key element of EU/ENP relations, if genuinely “espoused by all stakeholders” (European Commission, 2006a, p. 2). The FTAs needed to be tailored and sequenced carefully to take account of each partner country’s economic circumstances and state of development. As already discussed in chapter 4, the implementation and results of the ENP in the South Caucasus were uneven and unsatisfactory, due to lack the of guidelines and financial assistance from the EU and also the lack of democratic credentials of the political elites of the South Caucasus. In addition, the partner countries have shown different interests and aspirations towards the EU. While Georgia’s political elites aspired to become a member of the EU and traditionally Russia-oriented Armenia was becoming more involved in the ENP implementation, Azerbaijan was mainly interested in economic cooperation with the EU and tried to maintain a balanced diplomacy towards the EU and Russia (see sections 4.4 and 4.5). All in all, the above mentioned document (European Commission, 2006a) reflected on the EU’s flexible vision of economic integration and the need for a differentiated approach of the ENP to take into account the specific context of each partner country (see also: Gstöhl, 2008).

The first step towards differentiating the ENP was the adoption of a proposal by French President Nicolas Sarkozy in 2007 to create a Union for the Mediterranean to restore France's *grandeur* and create a more *nostrum*⁴⁴. His aim was to enhance interaction with the countries of the Barcelona Process since the future of Europe, according to him, was located into the South (Koszel, 2014). Following this initiative, another proposal was suggested by the Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski to separate the Southern and the Eastern neighbours of the ENP (Adamczyk, 2010). According to Sikorski (2008), "in the South are the neighbours of Europe, and in the East are the European neighbours, who have a similar history and culture with Europe".

In 2006, Germany also tried to divide the ENP on a geographical basis, highlighting the importance of its Eastern direction. During the German presidency of the European Council, Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier put forward the project - ENP plus, proposing to strengthen the EU's policy towards the Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus (Emerson et al., 2007). The ENP plus proposed two-way regional and sectoral agreements (Coll, 2013). It was assumed that this new policy would have been just one of the components of the Wider Europe Initiative (see section 4.1), which also aspired to include Russia in order to prevent conflicts and enhance stability across Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus (European Commission, 2006b, p. 9). German policy-makers differentiated the terms "European neighbours" - referring to the countries in the Eastern neighbourhood of the EU, and "neighbours of the EU" - referring to countries in the Southern Mediterranean region, in order to justify the claim that the Eastern neighbourhood deserved greater attention, simply because they were geographically closer (Helwig, 2016, p. 73). Therefore, Germany, alongside with Poland, have become the main players which pursued the EU's Eastern policy (see also: Adamczyk, 2010). For many years Germany's foreign policy towards the East was based on the "Russia first" policy, which arose from personal relations between German and Russian leadership. Helmut Kohl had a very good personal relationship with both Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin in the late 1980s and 1990s, and later Gerhard Schröder and Vladimir Putin in the early 2000s (Marcinkowska, 2016). The same policy orientation was shown by

⁴⁴ The "policy of grandeur" was one of the main characteristics of French policy since Louis XIV. After World War II, France became a more modest state, but with de Gaulle and the Fifth Republic a new form of "policy of nostrum" was developed, based on nuclear deterrence. For more details see: (Fontanel & Hébert, 1997).

Angela Merkel towards Russia; however Chancellor Merkel has introduced “Ostpolitik” (more balanced approach) to the hard “Russia first” policy (Forsberg, 2016). Germany supported the idea to strengthen cooperation with Eastern neighbours; however, it has also been trying to prevent any confrontation with Russia by avoiding any type of declaration regarding the membership perspective for these countries (Kempe, 2010; H. Kostanyan, 2017; Yoder, 2018). The reason behind German-Russian good relations can be considered to arise from energy projects, in particular the Nord Stream pipeline project which exports gas from Russia to Germany across the Baltic Sea and which, according to Forsberg (2016), transforms the German “Ostpolitik” into “Frostpolitik” meaning a focus on energy cooperation between Germany and Russia including gas supply (see also: Fischer, 2016; Himmelreich, 2020; Lilkov & Freudenstein, 2018).

The Polish approach towards Eastern neighbours, including the South Caucasus and Russia differed from German approach. Poland wanted to shift the ineffective policy towards the Eastern neighbours, a policy mainly based on financial assistance (as described in chapters 3 and 4), to a more robust geopolitical structure (Cadier, 2013). Moreover, Poland’s intention to strengthen EU relations with its Eastern neighbours was to advocate their membership perspective once EU “enlargement fatigue” had passed (Devrim & Schulz, 2009, p. 38). The European Commission in its December document (2006) did not mention “membership” perspective for the neighbourhood at all. However, the European Commission considered some of the proposals which were presented by Poland in 2003 (see section 4.1), such as simplification of visa restrictions for neighbours, the intensification of political dialogue, support for cooperation in the Black Sea region and the necessity of additional funding (European Commission, 2006b, p. 14). Another Polish initiative which included the opportunity for partner countries to take part in the decision-making process in the European institutions was rejected by the EU (Lippert, 2007). The European Commission tried to avoid such a sensitive issue from being considered. This reaction of the European Commission was due to the opposite reaction from France and its support for intensifying relations towards the Southern direction of the ENP, which has already been discussed above. France agreed to strengthen the Eastern direction of the ENP only if a similar proposals were put forward for the Southern neighbours as well (Warntjen, 2008). Sarkozy was taking into account

the historical tradition of France and its long presence in North Africa (Koszel, 2014, p. 65). After Sarkozy launched his initiative, consultations between the German and Polish foreign ministers, namely Steinmeier and Sikorsky took place in early April 2008 (Gromadzki, 2010). At the same time, the EaP initiative received support in the Office of the Federal Chancellor and in the Bundestag (Gotkowska, 2010).

At the meeting of the EU foreign ministers on May 26, 2008, Poland and Sweden proposed the EaP, which included six post-Soviet countries, namely Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia. On June 19, 2008, the European Council decided to support the Polish-Swedish initiative (European Commission, 2008a). The EaP did not go beyond the ENP umbrella and did not require the creation of a special financing mechanism (European Commission, 2008a; Gnedina & Popescu, 2012). The countries of the Visegrad Group (Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary), three Baltic states (Lithuania, Latvia Estonia), as well as Germany, the Netherlands and the UK supported the EaP, whereas Romania and Bulgaria supported this initiative but with caution, fearing that it would, to some extent, compete with the EU's Black Sea projects (Bechev, 2009; Nitoiu & Moga, 2020). The Polish-Swedish proposal included Russia as a participate in certain projects of the EaP. However, this format of cooperation was unacceptable to the Russian leadership and the initiative was rejected (Schaper, 2016). Russia has long been suspicious of the EU's "messianic" project of exporting democracy (Gotev, 2015), and the EaP has undoubtedly exacerbated mutual tensions between the EU and Russia over their influence on the post-Soviet countries (H. Kostanyan & Delcour, 2014; Schaper, 2016). The EaP document, which was prepared by the European Commission on December 3, 2008, noted that relations with Russia would continue to develop in the format of a strategic partnership in parallel with the EaP (European Commission, 2008a, p. 3).

The European Commission submitted a ready draft in December 2008 (European Commission, 2008a) and the first summit of the EaP took place in Prague on 7 May 2009, which adopted a joint declaration (European Council, 2009). According to the Prague Declaration, the EaP involves political and socio-economic reforms, which must be implemented by partner countries (European Council, 2009). These reforms aim to approximate European standards which "serve a common commitment to stability,

security and prosperity of the EU, partner countries and the entire European continent” (European Council, 2009, p. 6).

The question of what factors determined the creation of the EaP still causes some controversy among policy analysts. Some argue that the emergence of the EaP was primarily associated with factors such as the disappointing results of the six-year operation of the ENP (2003-2008), which resulted in the absence of noticeable progress in building an effective market economy and sustainable democracy in neighbouring countries (see: Inayeh & Forbrig, 2015; Kochenov, 2011; Lehne, 2014). Other analysts claim that the creation of the EaP was triggered by the armed conflict between Georgia and Russia in August 2008 (see section 3.3.1) and Russia’s subsequent recognition of the independence of the breakaway regions of Georgia - South Ossetia and Abkhazia (see: Paul, 2016; Popescu & Wilson, 2009). There are also scholars who find the main reason for the creation of the EaP in the development of the Eastern dimension of the EU which was predetermined by the Polish proposals for revising relations with Ukraine and Belarus and the intermediary activity of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the Baltic countries (see: Copsey & Pomorska, 2014; Plachciak & Zielinska, 2015). Having recently joined the EU, these states felt solidarity towards the EaP countries with whom they shared a common Soviet past, and believed that the EU-dictated reforms and assistance (top-down approach) had the strongest success rate in terms of democratisation (Korosteleva, 2011b; Šukytė, 2016).

The above discussed developments and initiatives for the creation of the EaP actually suggest that all of the above factors, to one degree or another, contributed to the creation of the EaP (see also: Koenig, 2016).

5.2 The content, objectives and instruments of the EaP

The EaP, similar to the ENP, is based on commitment to the principles of international law and fundamental values such as democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including building a free market economy (European Council, 2009). The EaP, which was created under the ENP umbrella, remains within the

framework of the already proposed paradigm of relations between the EU and its neighbouring states (Kochenov, 2009; Scrinic, 2014).

In order to intensify relations with partnership countries, EU leaders have developed bilateral and multilateral cooperation formats. The development of bilateral relations was based on the principles which were already specified in the PCAs and in the ENP - the principles of differentiation and conditionality (see section 4.2; also: European Council, 2009, p. 5). To strengthen bilateral relations with partner countries, the EU planned to conclude the AAs with all the EaP countries, which envisaged the adoption of "far-reaching obligations to the EU" related to the adaptation of European legal norms and standards, the establishment of close political contacts and security cooperation (Monastiriotes et al., 2017). In addition, the EaP format involved the creation of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) (European Council, 2009, p. 7). The creation of a comprehensive free trade zone included the removal of customs barriers and trade quotas for all goods, as well as the harmonisation of the laws of partner countries with the EU (Kakachia et al., 2019). During the genesis of the DCFTAs and at the start of negotiations with partner countries, the European Commission made numerous references to international standards by underlining the relationship between the standards promoted by international organisations within the framework of the Codex Alimentarius of Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations and the content of the DCFTA. It has also made membership of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) a precondition for the opening of negotiations for the DCFTA (Gstöhl, 2008, p. 9). thus excluding their opening for Azerbaijan which was not member of the WTO (Carrion & Orujova, 2016). The WTO has grown into a major player in global trade between countries with free market economies. The goal of the organisation is to make international trade easier by lowering trade tariffs and increasing "fair competition" (Subramanian & Wei, 2007).

In June 1997, Azerbaijan expressed interest in joining the WTO. As of 2020, Azerbaijan is in the process of discussing bilateral access with existing members of the WTO. Azerbaijan does not see the benefit of joining the WTO because it can already export oil (Van Gils, 2018). Similarly, the prospect of a DCFTA does not entice the Azerbaijanian political elites to become a WTO member because the DCFTA, according to Azerbaijan,

is one-sided, primarily reflecting EU interests (Delcour & Hoffmann, 2018; Van Gils, 2018).

The certain novelty of the EaP, compared to the ENP, was the introduction of the multilateral format of cooperation. The formation of a multilateral cooperation mechanism involves business and civil society (Simão, 2013). Despite the differences between the EaP countries in terms of the opportunities, goals and priorities of foreign policy, the EU wanted to unite this group of states which had a common past and similar contemporary problems associated with the need to transform the political and social system, modernise the economy and in general boost the post-Communist transition process (Gylfason et al., 2015).

Table 13 Bilateral dimension of the EaP

Association Agreements	DCFTA	Visa Liberalisation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political dialogue and foreign and security policy • Justice, freedom and security • Economic and sectoral cooperation • DCFTA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lifting customs barriers • Harmonising trade related legislation • WTO membership as precondition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visa facilitation • Visa readmission • Visa free travel
<p>Comprehensive Institution Building (CIB)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening of selected institutions to implement AAs 	<p>Pilot Regional programmes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cohesion and the reduction of socio-economic disparities 	

Eastern Neighbourhood Civil Society	EaP Cultural Programmes	EaP Integration and Cooperation Programme
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting civil society projects • Capacity building and sectoral policy dialogue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional cultural links/networks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “More for more” principle

Source: (Korosteleva, 2011)

The main goal of the EaP, as already stated, is to create the necessary prerequisites for accelerating political association and further economic integration between the EU and the partner countries. An important aspect of the EaP initiative (and at the same time its main difference from the ENP) is the introduction of the new policy element – the so-called thematic platforms, which should in a certain way concretise the countries’ efforts to Europeanisation and their participation in the multilateral cooperation (European Commission, 2008; Korosteleva, 2011b). Within the framework of the EaP, four thematic platforms were created (European Council, 2009, p. 9):

1. On democratisation, good governance and stability (civil service reform, the fight against corruption, judicial and police cooperation, media freedom).
2. On economic integration and rapprochement with sectoral economic policies of the EU, including the creation of free trade zones.
3. On energy security issues (unification of energy policy and legal decisions in the EaP by the implementation of common practices and law of the EU, which includes development of renewable energy sources).
4. On the development of contacts between people (liberalisation of the visa regime, the fight against illegal migration, as well as cooperation in the field of education and culture).

In late 2009-early 2010, in addition to the thematic platforms, the EU launched the so-called flagship initiatives which aimed to deepen multilateral cooperation (European

Council, 2009, p. 9). These flagship initiatives included: The Integrated Border Management (IBM), The Energy Flagship Initiative (energy efficiency and renewable energy) and The Environmental Management (Environmental Governance) (European Commission, 2010). Cooperation in the field of energy security has become a topic of extreme relevance to the EU after a series of "gas conflicts" between Russia and some EU countries in 2008 (Boonstra, 2015). The other reasons that contributed to the important place of energy security in the EaP agenda can be found in the factors discussed in section 3.6 (such as: the EU's energy dependency on Russia and the Caspian Sea as an alternative source of energy to the EU). To address energy security challenges, a number of measures were also proposed by the EaP, including the inclusion of partner countries in the European Energy Community (EEC) as full participants or observers, as well as harmonisation of energy policy and legislation of partners with the EU *acquis communautaire* (European Commission, 2008a, p. 7; Schaper, 2016).

5.2.1 The EaP meetings and bodies

To control the implementation of the thematic platforms and flagship initiatives, the EaP process was divided at the following levels: the first level includes the establishment of regular meetings of heads of states and governments of the EaP once in every two years (Delcour, 2011a). These meetings are of a pragmatic nature and aim to identify priority areas for cooperation within the framework of the EaP (Lisnyak, 2016). In addition, annual meetings of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the partner states were also established at which the level of interaction on the developed thematic platforms are assessed (see: European Commission, 2010). The third level includes the establishment of regular (every six months) meetings of senior executives who are associated with the work of a particular platform (Korosteleva et al., 2013). The last level includes meetings of working groups within the platforms to discuss specific issues related to the implementation of specific tasks. There are seven working groups (Delcour, 2011a):

1. Integrated Border Management Group

2. Anti-corruption Team

3. Judicial Reform Team
4. Public Administration Reform Team
5. Trade Development Group
6. Group for the development of small and medium enterprises
7. Group on Environmental Protection and Climate Change

The EaP has also included the participation of the third parties through the Council's Working Party on Eastern Europe and Central Asia (COEST), which handles all aspects of EU relations and cooperation with countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia (H. Kostanyan & Orbie, 2013). Third parties primarily include Russia and Turkey, which are the leading regional powers in the region (H. Kostanyan, 2014). To facilitate the development of closer contacts between the civil society of the EaP countries, the leadership of these countries and the EU founded a Civil Society Forum (CSF) during the Prague EaP Summit in 2009 (Rommens, 2014). The European Commission believed that ongoing reforms in partner countries required more active participation of the civil society (NGOs) in order to strengthen supervision of reforms and strengthen public confidence (H. Kostanyan & Orbie, 2013). The forum aims to influence EU institutions and national governments with their recommendations during the decision-making process (Rommens, 2017). The CSF holds conferences at least once a year.

Another project which was supposed to contribute to the development of multilateral cooperation within the framework of the EaP has been the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly of the participating countries (Euronest), which was established in 2011 as a component of the EaP (European Council, 2013). The Euronest aims to develop dialogue between the parliamentarians of the participating countries and the European Parliament and consists of 60 members of the European Parliament and 10 deputies from each participating country (Petrova & Raube, 2016a). There are four standing committees of Euronest: Committee on Political Affairs, Human Rights and Democracy; Committee on Economic Integration, Harmonisation of Legislation and EU Standards; Committee on Energy Security; Committee on Social Affairs, Education, Culture and Civil Society. Sessions of the Euronest are held twice a year - once in a member country of the EaP and once in the European Parliament (Brussels, Luxembourg or Strasbourg) (European Council, 2013).

Disagreements between Armenia and Azerbaijan have frequently stymied the work of the Euronest (Paul, 2015a; Piskorska, 2018). The Azerbaijani delegation declined to attend a 2015 Euronest Parliamentary Assembly meeting in Yerevan and the first plenary session of the Euronest was unable to adopt a common statement (Delcour & Wolczuk, 2018). This demonstrates the limitations of the EaP's multilateral dimension in facilitating people-to-people contacts and socialisation. Conflicting political narratives tend to reaffirm rather than dispel regional distrust. Therefore, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has been a major impediment to the multilateral track of the EaP (see also: European Commission, 2015a; Boom, 2017). Moreover the plenary sessions of the Euronest are mostly EU - centric (the European Parliament has 60 delegates whereas the EaP countries have 10 representatives each). While the EU takes up the role of a “teacher” of norms and values (as a norm “uploader” – see section 2.1), the EaP countries are expected to learn and implement these norms and values (H. Kostanyan & Vandecasteele, 2015). Consequently, the EaP delegates have been focused more on parliamentary diplomacy functions, rather than on Euronest as a means for socialisation (Petrova & Raube, 2016b).

5.2.2. The EaP financial support

The EaP and all its initiatives have been financed from several sources. Most of the funds came from the European Neighbourhood Policy Instrument (ENPI), which was discussed in section 4.2. Considering the fact that the EaP, unlike the Union for the Mediterranean, which is an intergovernmental organisation of 42 member states from Europe and the Mediterranean Basin, does not have its own secretariat, the European Commission has financial responsibility for the funds (European Commission, 2013a). The allocated funds, depending on the nature of the funded projects, are distributed in three main areas which are: the Comprehensive Institutional Building Programme (CIB), the Regional Development Programmes (Pilot Regional Development Programmes), and the multilateral format (European Commission, 2013a). The CIB, which was created in 2011, aims to improve the administrative levers in the participating states with programmes such as Twinning and Technical Assistance and the Information Exchange instrument of the European Commission (TAIEX) (Delcour & Duhot, 2011). Twinning is an initiative of the European Commission, originally conceived to help partner countries acquire the

necessary qualifications and experience for the adoption and practical implementation of EU legislation (Roch, 2017). The TAIEX provides short-term assistance to organisations in introducing, adapting and applying the *acquis communautaire* (European Commission, 2012b). This programme covers students' exchange programmes, internships, business trips and scholarships for training. Moreover, the Pilot Regional Development programmes aim to eliminate economic and social differences between individual regions, taking into account the needs and territorial specifications of each of the EaP countries (Ferrari, 2012). Their implementation is carried out by supporting the development of local infrastructure, human capital, as well as small and medium enterprises in the least developed regions of partner countries (Sandu & Dragan, 2016). The EaP benefited from €2.5 billion in bilateral cooperation commitments from the ENPI during the period 2007-2013, with Armenia receiving €281.5 million, Azerbaijan €143.5 million, and Georgia €452.1 million (European Commission, 2013a). Georgia's increased funding compared to Azerbaijan's and Armenia's was due to targeted adjustments to the political context and different allocation priorities of the ENPI funds.

As already discussed in chapter 4, prior to the ENPI, the TACIS and MEDA programmes were primarily differentiated geographically (according to the Eastern and Southern neighbouring countries, respectively), whereas the ENPI was more focused on reform progress (Benc, 2008a). This reflects on the "more for more" principle as Georgia has been the most committed to reform and economic integration with the EU through the AA/DCFTA which was signed in 2014 (this topic will be analysed in the next section). Agriculture, regional and rural development received the majority of allocated funds to the South Caucasus countries (40% in Azerbaijan, 30% in Georgia), followed by private sector development (35% in Armenia), while complementary support for capacity development and civil society was a top priority in all three countries (Sandu & Dragan, 2016). In 2014 the ENPI was replaced by the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI). The ENI was a more tailor-made, flexible and responsive instrument to address the priorities established under the ENP and to react to the needs and challenges of partner countries (European Commission, 2020b). The term "flexibility" was very important in this regard because the EU's objective was to become capable of responding flexibly to changing situations in the neighbourhood, challenges, and crises while

maintaining its continuity and predictability (Lannon, 2015). The Joint Consultation Paper – “Towards a New European Neighbourhood Policy”, which was published on March 4, 2015, outlined the four priority areas that the future ENP review was seeking to address: “Differentiation”, “Focus” (on security, economic development and trade, good governance, migration, energy, and human rights), “Flexibility” and “Ownership and Visibility” and stated that a “revised ENP should take into account the EU's and its neighbours’ interests and needs, as well as the neighbours’ commitment to reforms, the partnership's level of ambition, as well as different challenges and the geopolitical environment” (European Commission, 2015a; Johansson-Nogués, 2018).

ENI had a total budget of €15.4 billion for the years 2014-2020 (Lannon, 2015). €5 billion were dedicated to the Eastern Partnership projects. This included both bilateral and multilateral financial envelope allocations (two South and East regional programmes, one Cross Border and one Wider Neighbourhood programme). The biggest share of these funds was distributed to the EaP countries through the ENI Single Support Framework. At the same time, the maximum available amounts for the EaP countries for the period 2014-2020 reflect the same distribution trend, with higher amounts going to the states that demonstrate the greatest commitment to reform. Georgia benefited from €746 million (European Commission, 2014d). 40% of total allocation was used for economic development and market opportunities, 20% for strengthening institutions and good governance and the rest for connectivity, energy efficiency, environment civil society development and strategic communication (European Commission, 2014d). Since 2010, the EU has implemented 9 Twinning projects in Georgia with the direct mediation and help of Lithuania, such as Support the Emergency Management Department in Development of Emergency Services in 2010, Strengthening Sustainable Management of Forests in Georgia in 2016 and Strengthening Blood Safety System in Georgia in 2019.⁴⁵ One of the most important flagship initiatives of the EU in Georgia, which included Azerbaijan as well, was the Eastern Partnership Integrated Border Management Flagship Initiative. This project was implemented between 2015 and 2019 and aimed to support the development of the Red Bridge Border crossing point between Georgia and Azerbaijan

⁴⁵ For more details see: Lithuanian Development Cooperation. Available at: <https://orangeprojects.lt/en/georgia/eu-twinning-projects-georgia>

(developing infrastructure, securing borders and facilitating the legal passing of persons and goods)⁴⁶. The indicative allocation for Armenia for 2014-2020 was €308 million (European Commission, 2014c). 35% of the total allocation was used for economic development and market opportunities, 15% for strengthening institutions and good governance and the rest for connectivity, energy efficiency, climate change, mobility and people-to-people contacts and civil society (European Commission, 2014c). EU financed and supported infrastructural projects in Armenia included 170km of road between Yerevan and Bavra, border crossings points and reconstruction of the Yerevan Metro system (European Commission, 2019b). From 2015 and 2017 the EU also implemented Twinning project to improve statistical production in Armenia by introducing new standards of statistics and improving existing ones in accordance with EU statistics standards (European Commission, 2017c).

Last of all, the indicative bilateral allocation for Azerbaijan for the period 2014-2020 was €139 million (European Commission, 2014b). 40% of total allocation was used for regional and rural development, 20% of Justice sector reform and the rest for education and skills development and civil society (European Commission, 2014b). As in Georgia, Lithuania was also actively involved in Twinning projects in Azerbaijan. In 2008 - 2017 Lithuania implemented 8 EU Twinning projects in Azerbaijan, such as Support for the Anti-Corruption Department with the Prosecutor General of the Republic of Azerbaijan in 2008, strengthening the capacity of the Department of Tourism in the Ministry for Culture and Tourism in 2012 and Support for strengthening the higher education system in Azerbaijan in 2017.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ For more details see: EU Neighbours East. Available at: <https://www.euneighbours.eu/en/east/stay-informed/projects/eastern-partnership-integrated-border-management-flagship-initiative-1>

⁴⁷ For more details see: Lithuanian Development Cooperation. Available at: <https://orangeprojects.lt/en/azerbaijan/eu-twinning-projects-azerbaijan>

5.3 The South Caucasus between the EU and Russia

The ENP was primarily motivated by geopolitical considerations at the time of its creation: stabilising Europe's peripheries and laying the groundwork for an EU foreign policy beyond enlargement (Kuus, 2011; section 4.1). The EaP also seemed to be shifting away from reforms towards differentiation and stabilisation, which yielded mixed results (Crombois, 2019). The EaP's range of possibilities in the South Caucasus was constrained not only by its small budget (see section 5.2.2) but also by the nature of its instruments, which were described in section 5.2. The EaP uses a combination of conditionality incentives and socialisation mechanisms to encourage domestic reforms that are closer to EU norms and standards (Laumulin, 2013). The so-called "three Ms" summarise the incentives offered by the EU to partners through bilateral contracts: money (financial aid and loans), markets (sectorial access to the EU internal market), and mobility (visa facilitation) (Cadier, 2014). The third aspect is the EU's most valuable "soft power" asset with regard to the populations of the countries involved, whereas the second aspect, which was meant to culminate in the signing of a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA), is the most important from the standpoint of economic development (H. Kostanyan, 2015a). Both, however, necessitate a significant amount of technical and legislative harmonisation with the EU *acquis communautaire*, which governments in the South Caucasus region were unwilling to undertake because the potential benefits were deemed insufficient (Cadier, 2019). Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia have taken different trajectories in their relations with the EU in the context of the EaP. Different perceptions of the EU of the political elites of Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia have gradually been increasing since these countries were included in the ENP in 2004. However, the divergent level of relationship has become more apparent since the EaP was created. As discussed in chapter 4, implementation of the ENP in Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia has not been steady and the results were mainly unsatisfactory. The presence of a comprehensive bilateral agreement with the EU that includes conditionality, EU financial assistance, and the level of linkage between the country and the EU are all factors which have affected the relationship between the South Caucasus countries and the EU in the context of the EaP (Bosse, 2019; Delcour, 2018a). However, there are specific domestic and external peculiarities and conditions for each South

Caucasus country to look at which shaped their stance towards the EaP (that will be further analysed in section 5.4). The influence of/relationship with Russia has been of particular importance in this regard.

While on June 27, 2014, Georgia signed - at the same time as Ukraine and Moldova - the Association Agreement (AA) with the EU, Azerbaijan chose the “balanced approach” between Russia and the EU and decided not to sign the AA. Armenia has been a frontrunner in negotiations for an AA (Bosse, 2019). It took three years to reach the final stages of the negotiations, but President Serzh Sargsyan decided not to sign the AA and during his visit to Moscow on September 3, 2013, announced that Armenia would join the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). The AA/DCFTA negotiations between Georgia and the EU began in 2010 and ended in 2014. Given the EU's original goal of making the start of negotiations on new bilateral agreements conditional on democratic reforms, a significant increase in reform progress would have been expected prior to the start of the negotiations (Bosse, 2019). However, as in the other EaP states, Georgia's democracy deteriorated between 2008 and 2010 (see Table 14). This was primarily related to the political crisis in Georgia in 2007-08 and its aftermath and political polarisation as discussed in section 4.5.3. As a result, EU conditionality on democratic reform progress prior to and during the AA/DCFTA negotiations had little impact (see also: Rinnert, 2012). The signing of the AA with the EU on June 27, 2014, which included the DCFTA, marked a significant turning point in Georgia's foreign and security policy. Given that Georgia's neighbours Azerbaijan and Armenia have been moving in opposite directions, the agreement not only brought Georgia closer to the EU, but it also reaffirmed Georgia's position as the "centre of gravity" for Western engagement in the South Caucasus (Kakachia, 2015).

Table 14 Democracy Scores of the EaP in 2008-2011*

EaP countries	2008	2009	2010	2011
Georgia	4.79	4.93	4.93	4.86
Azerbaijan	6.00	6.25	6.39	6.46
Armenia	5.21	5.39	5.39	5.43
Ukraine	4.25	4.39	4.39	4.61
Moldova	5.00	5.07	5.14	4.96
Belarus	6.71	6.57	6.50	6.57

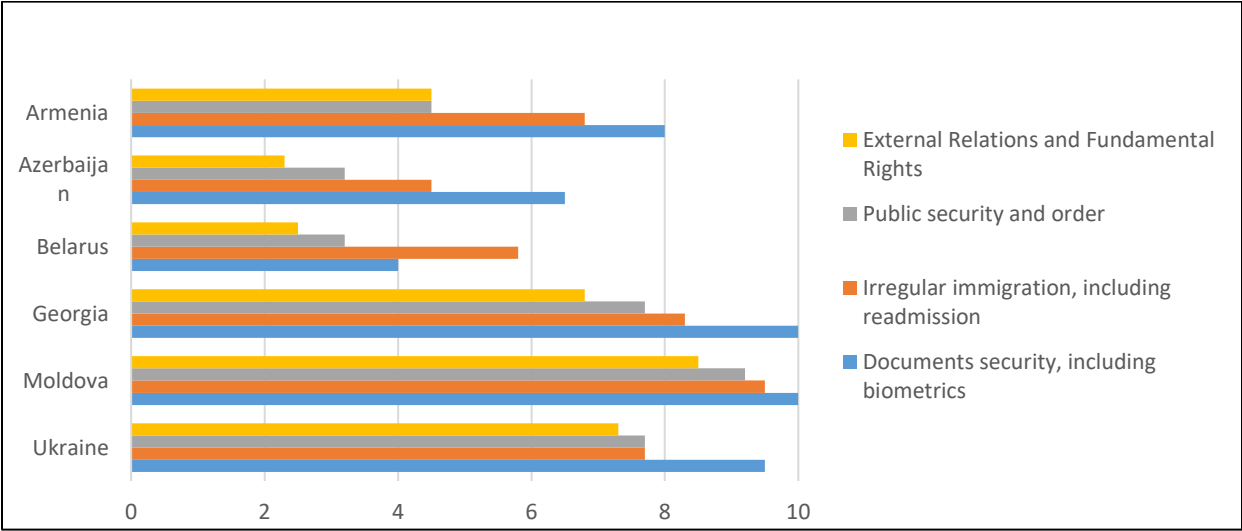
Source: (Nations in Transit, 2011)

*The ratings are based on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 representing the highest level of democratic progress and 7 the lowest.

Armenia's abrupt shift in foreign policy, and its decision to join the Russian-led EAEU, has harmed its credibility among the EU (Ter-Matevosyan et al., 2017a). Despite this radical decision, the Armenian government has reaffirmed its willingness to continue cooperating with the EU (Poghosyan, 2018b). The main reasons why Armenia wanted to maintain good relations with the EU were the importance of adhering to the complementarity principle (keep good relations with Russia and the EU at the same time), financial assistance from the EU, and the EU's involvement, however limited, in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (Badalyan & Vasilyan, 2020; Kirkham, 2016; Shirinyan & Ralchev, 2013). Finally, the main impediment to Azerbaijan's integration with the EU has been the regime of President Aliyev's unwillingness to implement the political part of the AA due to its objections on the human rights obligations required by the AA. The EU's overwhelming focus on human rights pushed Aliyev to skip the Riga EaP Summit in 2015 (Gurbanov, 2017; see also section 5.4.3). As an energy exporter, Azerbaijan has been offering the EU material initiatives (energy resources) that neither Armenia nor Georgia

can provide (see section 3.6), therefore material forces have had an enormous impact on EU-Azerbaijan relations in the context of the ENP, as well as the EaP. As discussed in section 5.2.2, the EU provided the most financial assistance between 2007 and 2019 to Georgia, followed by Armenia and Azerbaijan, because the level of financial assistance directly corresponded to the EaP countries' democratisation and Europeanisation due to the differentiation and more for more principles. Georgia has been the frontrunner compared to Azerbaijan and Armenia in terms of implementation of various reforms under the EaP, including public security, irregular immigration and document security (European Commission, 2015b). As a result, only Georgia from the South Caucasus countries could have fulfilled the required criteria (see Figure 6) and get the visa liberalisation regime with the EU (which is the EU's most valuable "soft power" asset as discussed above) and on March 28, 2017, Georgia was added to the list of third-country nationals (excluding the candidates for EU membership from the WB) who are not required to obtain a visa to travel to the Schengen zone for a short stay (Gogolashvili, 2017).

Figure 6 Visa Liberalisation Index of the EaP countries 2013-2015



Source: *EaP Visa Liberalisation Index 2012-2015, Independent assessment of visa facilitation/liberalisation process*, available at: <http://monitoring.visa-free-europe.eu/>

Within the South Caucasus countries, public attitudes toward the EU have fluctuated since these countries became the members of the EaP (Abbasov & Siroky, 2018; Mchedlishvili, 2016). According to the EU survey (EU Neighbours east, 2019), every second Georgian (50%) is positive about the EU, 43% are neutral; 4% are negative, while 3% has never heard of the EU. According to the same poll, 62% of Armenians have a positive attitude toward the EU, 29% have a neutral attitude, and only 6% have a negative attitude, with 3% having no information about the EU. Last of all, 46% of Azerbaijan's population are positive about the EU, 31% are neutral, 8% - negative and 15%, the highest among the South Caucasus countries, have never heard about the EU. The overall picture of the EU perception in the South Caucasus is rather positive; however, it can be said that it does not match the EU's ambition of role conception in the context of the EaP, at least in Georgia, which has been the most successful downloader of Europeanisation (see sections 3.4, 3.5 and 4.5.3). This gap can be explained by the fact that some EU norms and policies are thought to be incompatible with the conservative traditions and needs of the South Caucasus population (E. Berg & Kilp, 2018; Luciani, 2021).

Most Western Europeans, with their predominantly secular values, would recognise a different, backward-looking definition of what it means to be European (Katzenstein, 2006). The prohibition of discrimination, and the protection of human rights are important elements of the EU legal order (European Parliament, 2019; Kotzian et al., 2011). In contrast, Christian Georgia and Armenia, and Muslim Azerbaijan have conservative traditions and high religious values (Khutsishvili, 2014). As discussed in chapter 3, religious ethno-nationalism was strongly manifested in the formation of the first republics of the South Caucasus. Religiosity - Georgian Orthodox, Armenian Apostolic and Azerbaijanian Muslim – have been the grand narrative of religious identity, which has been incorporated into political discourses, culture and society (Kornilov & Makarychev, 2014). There is the stigma in the South Caucasus that Europeanisation, in some way, would jeopardise traditional values, customs, traditions, and culture (Punsmann et al., 2016). However, while culture and religion bind ordinary South Caucasus people (de Waal, 2012) and religion is routinely seen as part of cultural and national identity, this stigma has not (yet) played a major role in shaping the foreign policies of the South Caucasian states (Palonkorpi, 2015). The foreign policies of the South

Caucasus states are shaped, constructed and deconstructed by their political elites (Buzogány, 2019; Kakachia & Markarov, 2016). As it will be shown in country studies in the next section, the political elites and their ideas have been key drivers of change and continuity in the foreign policy of the South Caucasus' small states (see also: Gvalia et al., 2011; Kakachia et al., 2018; Sørensen, 2008).

Despite the fact that the majority of actors in the South Caucasus countries accept the EU's role conception (self-perception of itself as a “different great power” (Bengtsson & Elgström, 2012) , with the exception of Georgia, the EU is not seen as a driver of change in the region (Delcour & Wolczuk, 2021). It turns out that the EU's perceived role performance in the region does not bolster its role conception. The more the EU proclaims ambitious policy goals, the more it is perceived as either declaring them (as in the case of Azerbaijan's ruling elites) or failing to meet them, that is, for its poor perceived role performance (for example, former elites in Armenia) (Delcour, 2014; Tartes, 2015; see also sections: 5.4.2 and 5.4.3). Therefore, the EU's standing in the South Caucasus is significantly weakened by this mismatch between role expectations and perceived performance. Perceptions of the EU in the South Caucasus are also heavily influenced by perceptions of Russia's goals and strategies, because these countries see relations with the EU as a way of complementing and/or counterbalancing their ties with Russia (Gabrielyan et al., 2017; Vieira & Vasilyan, 2018b). Chapters 3 and 4 identified that in all three countries of the South Caucasus, domestic challenges to Europeanisation do exist. Inefficient Soviet-style social systems, weak state building traditions, a lack of political culture, and corruption are among the major challenges. However, these domestic challenges are also exacerbated by the interference of Russia (Mchedlishvili, 2016). Russia still wields significant soft power in the South Caucasus. A 2019 survey (see Table 15) found that the Russian language is better understood and spoken in all three countries.

Table 15 Language skills in the South Caucasus (% of correspondents)

Do you have intermediate knowledge of....?	...Russian?	...English?
Georgia	38	16
Armenia	55	13
Azerbaijan	28	7

Source: Caucasus Barometer.

The language factor has been used by Russia to imitate and criticise the EU in developing its version of soft power in the South Caucasus (Wilson & Popescu, 2009). Russia undervalues the importance of certain Western political values in the common neighbourhood, including the South Caucasus, by framing EU/Western soft power as a security threat (Kornilov & Makarychev, 2014). The effective use of Russian language (Habermasian “communicative power” see section 2.2.3) as a means of engaging the South Caucasus countries in long-term dialogues and influencing their discourses is the strongest aspect of Russian soft power (Klyueva & Mikhaylova, 2017; Mkhoyan, 2017a). Russia uses disinformation and propaganda to portray itself as a counter-narrative to Western liberal values, based on a shared cultural, common religion (for Georgia and Armenia) and historical identity (Rammer, 2019). The Eastern Partnership has also been portrayed negatively in both the Russian press and official government statements (Rotaru, 2019; Zagorski, 2011). Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov's statement is worth remembering, in which he equated the Eastern Partnership with the creation of an EU sphere of influence in eastern neighbourhood (Stewart, 2009).

Beyond the language factor, cultural/religious similarities (such as for example, conservative stances regarding the LGBTI rights) and common values inherited from the communist past (see section 3.2), Russia also competes with the EU economically in the South Caucasus. Trade with Russia and the CIS accounts for a large share of these states' exports and imports.

Table 16 Exports of the South Caucasus countries to the EU, the CIS and Russia (million euros)

year	Georgia			Azerbaijan			Armenia		
	EU	CIS*	Russia	EU	CIS*	Russia	EU	CIS*	Russia
2011	599	1,052	37	15,337	2,073	1,260	321	240	226
2012	555	1,244	47	13,566	1,189	987	274	315	300
2013	640	1,621	191	14,155	1,106	1,087	258	356	334
2014	646	1,465	275	13,071	590	473	273	329	308
2015	703	841	163	10,575	476	422	304	249	231
2016	491	741	207	7,507	524	419	350	445	419
2017	652	1,194	398	9,322	691	623	387	594	571
2018	633	1,689	438	11,264	773	678	369	694	661
2019	655	2,043	497	10,597	824	733	403	772	734

Source: eurostat; geostat; OEC.

*The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) include Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and excludes Georgia (withdrawn after Russian-Georgian war in 2008) and Ukraine (withdrawn after the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014).

Table 17 Imports of the South Caucasus countries from the EU, the CIS and Russia (million euros)

year	Georgia			Azerbaijan			Armenia		
	EU	CIS*	Russia	EU	CIS*	Russia	EU	CIS*	Russia
2011	1,554	1,949	387	2,364	2,452	2,023	623	813	758
2012	2,004	2,060	476	2,391	2,623	2,084	665	962	917
2013	1,977	2,177	583	2,685	2,749	2,163	696	1,059	960
2014	1,840	2,127	573	2,771	2,782	2,174	698	962	927
2015	1,763	1,968	625	2,559	2,042	1,771	612	886	854
2016	1,842	1,986	680	1,402	1,968	1,796	588	1,089	1,001
2017	1,905	2,321	789	1,453	1,936	1,626	704	1,296	1,249
2018	2,045	2,695	934	1,597	2,324	1,889	846	1,375	1,278
2019	2,008	2,440	977	1,838	2,776	2,386	784	1,549	1,440

Source: eurostat; geostat; OEC.

*The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) include Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and excludes Georgia (withdrawn after Russian-Georgian war in 2008) and Ukraine (withdrawn after the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014).

Tables 16 and 17 illustrate that despite Georgia's economic diversification and signing the DCFTA with the EU, Russia still leverages considerable economic power in Georgia. Azerbaijan remains heavily reliant on oil revenues, with profits from the State Oil Fund of the Republic of Azerbaijan (SOFAZ) accounting for 80% of the country's budget revenue (Humbatova et al., 2019). Table 16 shows that there is a significant number of Azerbaijan's exports to the EU (€10.597 million in 2019), which primarily rely on the natural resources and only for minor percentage accounts in industrial and agricultural goods (Rzayev & Suleymanov, 2018). Russia is concerned about the possibility of a close energy relationship between the EU and Azerbaijan, as it jeopardises all of Russia's objectives in the region and the EU's dependency on Russia's energy (Kuzemko, 2014; Pick, 2012). Last of all, Armenia is arguably the most vulnerable country in the South Caucasus to Russia's economic dependency. Armenia's economy, like that of Azerbaijan's and Georgia's, has long been plagued by corruption and inefficiency (see sections 3.2.2 and 4.3). Armenia's ability to trade is further hampered by its landlocked location and closed borders with Turkey and Azerbaijan. Armenia's membership in the Russian-founded EAEU is a great manifestation of the country's economic and security needs, which led Armenia to treat Russia as an indispensable ally (Terzyan, 2017).

Russia's strong opposition to the EaP as discussed above must be understood in the context of a structural trend in Russian foreign policy thinking (Delcour, 2018a). Since the late 1990s, Russian political elites have increasingly viewed international relations as an arena of competition between value systems (Thorun, 2009). After the Rose Revolution in Georgia and the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, Russia has attempted to rebrand itself, pursuing a strategy of contesting, reformulating, and promoting international norms, while continuing to rely on traditional hard power levers (for example, war against Georgia in 2008, support to the rebellion in the Donbas region in Ukraine and annexation of Crimea in 2014) (Cadier, 2014; Falkowski, 2017). Dissatisfied with Western institutional expansion in the Eastern neighbourhood (creations of the ENP and later the EaP), the Putin and Medvedev administrations re-evaluated Russian geopolitical strategy, focusing on the country's economic, social, and territorial integrity, as well as the restoration of its regional leadership (Kirkham, 2016). The way Armenia

became a member of the EAEU⁴⁸ put strain on the EAEU's economic and multilateral nature and turns the Russian project into a foreign policy tool to counterbalance the EaP in the region (Korosteleva, 2016; Ter-Matevosyan et al., 2017b; Wilson & Popescu, 2009). The EU and Russia are both well aware of each other's presence and interests in the South Caucasus. However, despite the recognition of their interests, they continue to ignore, much less facilitate, the need for interface and dialogue across and with the region, treating it as a "background" for the extension of their respective "selves" and the advancement of their ambitions (Korosteleva, 2016). Both the EU and Russia have openly dismissed each other's rationales in relation to the South Caucasus. The EU was particularly focused on the assumption that exposing the South Caucasus to the EU's future benefits (for example, "well-governed ring of friends" and energy security and diversification of resources), would allow partner countries to unambiguously legitimise the European course. This was clearly a misjudgement, not only in terms of harvesting outcomes of the ENP implementation as discussed in chapter 4, but also in failing to take into account the Russian factor (see also: Delcour, 2018; Korosteleva, 2016).

The EU and Russia try to bring the South Caucasus countries into their orbits with competing projects (EaP and EAEU) and approaches, which prolongs the cycle of instability in the region (Nuriyev, 2015). Three factors influence the reception of the EU's EaP and Russia's EAEU in the South Caucasus: the resonance of the EU's and Russia's offers in terms of norms and identities; structural interdependencies and the resulting expected benefits or constraints in terms of choosing a regional project; and domestic actors' preferences, whether that be ruling elites, businesses, or civil society (Delcour, 2015a). The below country studies address all three factors.

⁴⁸ Namely, after successful negotiation rounds between the EU and Armenia regarding the AA and the DCFTA and also, in secretive formats between the Russian and Armenian presidents (Delcour, 2014).

5.4 Country Studies

The following section will analyse the internal and external conditions and developments of each of the South Caucasus countries which have caused the establishment of different levels of cooperation (and contractual relations) between the three countries and the EU.

5.4.1 EU - Georgia relations in the context of the EaP: The AA, DCFTA and Visa Facilitation between the EU and Georgia

When Georgia was included in the ENP, the Georgian political parties considered that the country did not have another alternative other than to seek accession to the EU (Beacháin & Coene, 2014). On November 11, 2005, the Georgian Parliament adopted the declaration of the “Agreement of the Foreign and Internal Policy Goals” (Parliament of Georgia, 2005). In this document, the political parties and parliamentary factions stressed that one of the main objectives of Georgia’s foreign policy was to strengthen relations with the EU and fully realise the ENP (Nodia & Scholtbach, 2006). The declaration was signed by the main (at that time) six political parties of Georgia: the United National Movement (UNM), the New Rights Party, the Industry Will Save Georgia, the Conservative Party of Georgia, the Republican Party of Georgia and the Georgian Labour Party (see: Parliament of Georgia, 2005). General pro-European policy consensus remained unchanged among the Georgian political parties during the subsequent years. In 2008, Georgian Think-Tank – The Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development (CIPDD) organised the round table called “The EU and Georgia in a New Reality: Views of the Leading Political Parties of Georgia” (see: Caucasus Institute for Peace, 2008). The round table was attended by the representatives of the Labour party, the United National Movement (UNM), the Conservative Party, the Republican Party and the Christian-Democratic Movement. During the round table discussion, the parties outlined their major views towards EU integration. The review of the discussion paper shows that all political parties agreed that Georgia has made its European choice which must remain unchanged. According to the labour Party representative, the party, whose ideological basis is Europeanism, believed that the EU and Georgia should deepen its political, economic, social and cultural relations (Caucasus Institute for Peace, 2008). According to the UNM,

Georgia should have carried the ENP provisions. From all five parties' perspective, the democratisation process was underway and there was the will in the country to democratic development.⁴⁹

The change of power which occurred in Georgia after the parliamentary elections on the 1st of October 2012, when the opposition Georgian Dream (GD) coalition of billionaire businessman Bidzina Ivanishvili won a majority of seats over President Saakashvili's UNM, affected the internal situation in the country (Papava, 2017). Since 2012, business elites have in fact come closer to political power in Georgia, while billionaire businessman Ivanishvili held the post of Prime Minister of Georgia from 25 October 2012 to 20 November 2013 (Gherasimov, 2019). Ivanishvili was surrounded by an "inner circle" of former employees in his businesses who were transferred into the government and took over key positions of power⁵⁰ (Aprasidze & Siroky, 2020). In November 2013 Ivanishvili officially left Georgian politics, although some politicians and scholars pointed to the continuation of his informal rule (Emerson & Kovziridze, 2016; Lebanidze & Kakachia, 2017). Ivanishvili has never truly given up control of his party or stepped down from power (Aprasidze, 2016; Machitidze & Temirov, 2020; Tsuladze, 2021). His power grew even more after the 2016 elections, when his GD party won a majority in parliament (115 seats out of 150) (Mukhanov & Skakov, 2018). His informal governance method included dictating major political decisions and, in effect, appointing and firing prime ministers (Berglund et al., 2020). President Margvelashvili would frequently find himself in conflict with parliament and, by extension, with Ivanishvili, despite the fact that he was also chosen as a candidate by Ivanishvili (Shahnazarian et al., 2020). President Margvelashvili used his veto power to encourage public debate over certain legislative changes, despite the fact that the parliament could easily overrule him. One such case occurred in 2016, when Margvelashvili rejected a referendum, which was proposed by PM Irakli Gharibashvili - Ivanishvili's loyal and private employee for many years (Lebanidze & Kakachia, 2017), that would have defined marriage in the constitution as the union of a

⁴⁹ For more details see: Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development, EU and Georgia in a New Reality: Views of the Leading Political Parties of Georgia, discussion paper 1, October 2008.

⁵⁰ Some of his closest confidants – Prime-minister Irakli Gharibashvili (2013-2015) and President Giorgi Kvirikashvili (2015-2018) – both have long time worked for Ivanishvili's business companies (Aprasidze, 2016).

man and a woman (Agenda.ge, 2016). Margvelashvili's term ended in December 2018 as he did not seek re-election in that year's presidential vote (S. F. Jones & MacFarlane, 2020). In the 2018 Georgian presidential election, Salome Zurbishvili (former French diplomat, former Minister of Foreign Affairs), who was an independent candidate but supported by the ruling GD party, defeated Grigol Vashadze (UNM candidate)⁵¹. The GD party introduced constitutional amendments in 2018, according to which the president would no longer be directly elected by the general electorate beginning in 2024 (Lavrelashvili, 2020). Instead, a 300-member electoral college was established, consisting of all members of the Georgian Parliament and the supreme representative bodies of the Autonomous Republics of Abkhazia and Adjara, as well as representative bodies of local self-governments nominated by their respective political parties (Parliament of Georgia, 2018 Article 50). Ivanishvili was re-elected as the party's chairman in 2018 and remained the most powerful figure in Georgian politics (Aprasidze & Siroky, 2020). As a result, the decision-making centre strayed far beyond legal boundaries towards oligarchic rule. Ivanishvili's meddling in political processes has been similar to that of oligarchs in other post-Soviet states (for example, Ukraine and Moldova). Ivanishvili has manipulated political processes from behind the scenes using his wealth and reputation (Lebanidze & Kakachia, 2017).

Despite this oligarchic tendency, in June 2013 Prime Minister Ivanishvili reaffirmed Georgia's commitment to a European destiny, saying that "Georgia's priority is NATO and Europe," with the goal of transforming the country into "a democracy and an economy of European type" (Arnoult, 2014). The foreign policy orientation of Georgia towards the EU was further confirmed by the Georgian leadership when the country signed the AA in June 2014.

Therefore, the European orientation of Georgia remained unchanged considering the foreign policy priorities of the new government headed by Ivanishvili. The new government priorities were outlined in the government programme - *For strong, democratic, united Georgia* (Government of Georgia, 2012). The analysis of the programme shows that the foreign policy vectors largely coincide with the directions

⁵¹ Salome Zurbishvili won just one percentage point ahead of Vashadze. For more details see: (S. F. Jones & MacFarlane, 2020).

outlined in the Foreign Policy Concept of Georgia which was renewed in 2011. Accordingly, the main priorities are indicated as pro-European foreign policy orientation and “the desire for integration to the EU and the NATO” (see: Government of Georgia, 2012, p. 5).

Georgia's constitution, which was adopted in 1995 laid the foundation for a democratic system in Georgia. The legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government were created in the 1995 constitution. The first major transition occurred in 2004, when the parliament passed the constitutional amendments which increased the president's power, while the parliament's constitutional and legislative authority was significantly reduced (Chedia, 2014). Six years later, in 2010, a new wave of constitutional amendments was adopted resulting in the transition from a presidential to a semi-parliamentary system, which came into force following the 2013 presidential elections (Borisov, 2015). The power of the prime minister and government were greatly expanded as a result of these changes, and both became accountable to the parliament (Blondel, 2012). These reforms have been widely discussed, with more civil society participation and close collaboration with the Venice Commission (advisory body of the Council of Europe), particularly because almost all of its recommendations have been adopted (Emerson & Kovziridze, 2016). However, one of the remaining problems has been the interinstitutional conflicts, which are linked to the new government's leadership style rather than the constitutional set-up. This issue is linked to the already mentioned Ivanishvili's continued influence over the country's political processes and his informal ruling style (see also: Gente, 2013; Lebanidze & Kakachia, 2017). The judiciary in Georgia has also been a target of criticism. Civil society and European and international organisations (Transparency International, Council of Europe, Human Rights Watch) expressed concerns about the political bias of the judiciary and the Prosecutor's Office's in Georgia (see: Transparency International Georgia, 2016). The majority of critics are focused on cases of political rivals being prosecuted, which has been a stated practice of the ruling GD party since 2012 (Berglund et al., 2020; Bolkvadze, 2020). More than 30 members of the previous (Saakashvili's) government have been charged with criminal offenses, and 14 have been convicted or placed in pre-trial custody since the GD party took power (Slade & Kupatadze, 2017) Despite this, no criminal charges have been filed

against any members of the UNM who have switched parties from the UNM to the GD since 2012 (Emerson & Kovziridze, 2016). The AA considers democracy, human rights and the rule of law to be "essential elements". Georgia has succeeded in building stronger political institutions as a young democracy, compared to those in the 1990s as already discussed in chapter 3. However, the above analysis shows that Georgia faces serious challenges in terms of democratisation (for example. judiciary, political polarisation, informal governance).

As already discussed, in July 2013, Georgia completed all negotiation rounds with the EU on the AA and the DCFTA. Later on, the AA was initialised at the Vilnius Summit in December 2013 (European Council, 2013) and signed in Brussels on June 27, 2014, and entered into force in July 2016 after ratification by all EU member states (European Commission, 2014a). Unlike the PCAs, which used the term "former Soviet Union" as the regional category of reference for the South Caucasus countries (see section 3.5), the AA is recognising Georgia to be an "Eastern European Country" (European Commission, 2014a, p. 2). The main objective of the agreement is a gradual rapprochement of Georgia and the EU on the basis of common values: essentially the rule of law, the market economy and the respect for human rights (European Commission, 2014a). The AA covers 28 areas including energy, transport, environmental protection and enhancement, industrial policy, agriculture, social policy, justice, civil society, public administration reform and education (Sydoruk & Tyshchenko, 2018). Strengthening institutions is a critical component of the AA. It includes ensuring the democratic elections, addressing any shortcomings in the legislative framework and election administration identified by the OSCE and ODIHR (Emerson & Kovziridze, 2016). The AA also identified the need to reform Georgia's Criminal Code and Criminal Procedure Code (transparency in criminal proceedings and strengthened oversight of law enforcement). Last of all, the AA also called for ensuring the effective implementation of European Court of Human Rights judgments, raising anti-discrimination awareness in the judiciary, administration, and law enforcement bodies, and involving civil society as watchdogs in the process (Kawecka-Wyrzykowska, 2015).

The will of the Georgian political elites to integrate the country into the EU has been accompanied by a generally positive assessment of the EU among the Georgian

population (Tsuladze, 2017). Numerous opinion polls on the perception of the EU have been carried out in Georgia in recent years, such as the “Knowledge and Attitudes towards the EU in Georgia” survey, which was commissioned by the Europe Foundation and carried out by the Caucasus Research Resource Centre (CRRC) (Europe Foundation, 2017). Alongside those of the Caucasus Barometer (2019) and the NDI (2019), the results of these polls have shown that the attitudes towards Europeanisation in Georgia are thoroughly and predominantly positive, but also require broader contextualisation.

The most important points that should be taken into account when analysing the perceptions of the EU in Georgia are:

- There is a sharp contrast between the high expectations of the EU (national security, restoration of territorial integrity, improved economic situation, especially among the political elites), and the assessment of ordinary Georgians who are primarily looking for material prosperity and employment (Europe Foundation, 2017, p. 6).
- The Georgians are to a greater extent positive about the EU but 59% think that Georgia is not ready for membership (Europe Foundation, 2017, p. 13).
- Besides the general view that EU support is particularly important to Georgia, it is not considered to be highly effective and the knowledge of the structure and functioning of the EU institutions tends to be zero. A third of the respondents say that Georgian officials in particular would benefit from EU support (Europe Foundation, 2017, p. 11).

The change in the Georgian public's perception of the country is also directly related to their perception of the governments and citizens of EU member states (Horbyk, 2016). In 2011, 41% of the Georgian population believed that the majority of EU member states would accept Georgia into the EU (Europe Foundation, 2017, p. 17). Four years later, only 32% gave the same answer, while the proportion of respondents who said no, doubled. What is important, in the 2011 survey, is that almost 50% of the population could not answer this question. Similarly, in 2015, 18% answered that a majority of European citizens would not like Georgia to join the EU, compared to 11% in 2011 (for more details see: Europe Foundation, 2017). Nevertheless, Georgians have continued to show

"resilient support" for the country's European and Euro-Atlantic goals, with 78 % expressing themselves to be in favour of membership of the EU (NDI, 2019). The positive attitudes of Georgians towards the EU have also been encouraged by the adoption of the visa free regime for Georgian citizens travelling to the 22 EU member states in the Schengen area.⁵² As discussed in section 5.3, the negotiations on visa liberalisation began in June 2012, and in February 2013 the Georgian government presented the Action Plan on visa liberalisation, which came into force in spring 2016 (European Commission, 2016). The purpose of this dialogue was to revise all relevant conditions for visa-free visits of Georgian citizens to EU countries.⁵³ Finally, on 9 March 2016 the European Commission proposed to allow visa-free travel to the Schengen area for Georgian citizens who hold a biometric passport. This comes after the successful implementation of all the benchmarks set in its Visa Liberalisation Action Plan for Georgia (see Figure 6; also: Ghvedashvili, 2017).

In short, the purpose of the visa policy aims to protect against unwanted and unlimited migration and transnational organised crime. From this perspective, visa-free regimes are given to the countries that are considered safe, well managed, provide security and public order and are not a potential source of economic migrants living without documents on the right of residence in another country or asylum seekers (Trauner & Kruse, 2008). Thus, the condition for the EU's liberalisation of visa regime includes the fulfilment of a number of criteria in several areas of public policy in partner countries (see Figure 6).

Starting from 2013, when the European Commission published its first report on the implementation of the AP for Georgia (European Commission, 2013b), the country has adopted a series of laws and legislative changes in areas ranging from document security and asylum and the fight against corruption and money laundering (Loda, 2019). Georgia also adopted a new law on the legal status of foreigners and persons without citizenship (Civil Georgia, 2013). In summer 2014, Georgia adopted anti-discrimination law in the legislation on personal data protection after the request of the European Commission

⁵² The Schengen Area is a zone in which 26 European countries have abolished their internal borders to allow for free and unrestricted movement of people, adhering to common rules for controlling external borders and combating criminality by bolstering the common judicial system and police cooperation.

⁵³ For more details: European Commission, press release, The EU starts a visa liberalisation dialogue with Georgia, Brussels, 4 June 2012

(Transparency International, 2014). The fourth and the final report of the European Commission about the anti-discrimination law, pointed out that “the European Commission hoped that the Georgian authorities would be able to continue their work in this area, and in the second phase to continue to monitor the implementation of new regulations” (European Commission, 2015b). From 2013 to 2015 Georgia was having a better migration balance of (- 0.7) and (-0.9) compared to early years, for instance, in 2007 (-23.4) and in 2011 (-36.0).⁵⁴ The rapid growth has led to the conclusion that the number of immigrants would further decrease (Loda, 2019). Moreover, the population of Georgia is so small (3.9 million as of 2020 according the Worldometer) that the flow of Georgian migrants has not been a threat to the EU (Ghvedashvili, 2017).

The most important Georgian actor which opposes the country’s Europeanisation (or as some would call it - Westernisation, for example, (S. F. Jones, 2006)) is the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Georgia which, in the name of a public morality, claims that Georgia would be threatened by the “adulterated values” of the EU (referencing LGBT, same-sex marriage, abortion) (Grdzeldze, 2010). The Georgian Orthodox Church remains suspicious of the West and the EU. The Patriarch and Catholicos of All Georgia – Ilia II⁵⁵ is the important figure in the country (Shatirishvili, 2009). During the 2008 war between Georgia and Russia, he personally travelled to the city of Gori, in the midst of a humanitarian crisis, and participated in a search campaign for the bodies of dead civilians and soldiers. In December 2008, Ilia II travelled to Moscow where he met with Russian Patriarch Alexey II and Russian President Medvedev (Gugushvili et al., 2017). In the aftermath of the Russian-Georgian August War in 2008, Russia lost many forms of influence in Georgia, but the two Orthodox churches provided one of the few remaining channels for direct communication between the two countries. Despite the fact that official relations between Russia and Georgia were frozen in 2008,

⁵⁴ For more details: Statistical Research Factfish, Georgia: Net migration rate, per 1000 people, 2010-2015 data, available at: <http://www.factfish.com/statistic-country/georgia/net+migration+rate>

⁵⁵ Patriarch ilia II was born on January 4, 1933 in North Ossetia to a Georgian family with family ties to the royal family of the Bagratids. He entered a seminary in Moscow. He was ordained deacon in 1957 then tonsured hieromonk in 1959, and this while the Russian Church was persecuted by the communist regime. In 1967 he became bishop of Sukhumi and Abkhazia and was elevated to the rank of metropolitan in 1969. He was elected Patriarch and Catholicos of Georgia on December 23, 1977. In the years before the fall of the Soviet Union, he was involved in Georgian social affairs. In April 1989, he took part in the demonstration against the communist regime. During the civil war and the crisis of the 1990s, he urged the various parties to find peaceful solutions. (For more information refer to: Pachuashvili, 2011).

the clergy of both churches maintained contact (Kornilov & Makarychev, 2014). In order to increase the birth rate, Patriarch Ilia II promised that he would personally baptise any third child in a family, which caused a baby boom (Shatirishvili, 2009). Furthermore, it was Ilia II who urged the Georgian authorities not to allow a rally for gay rights as part of the international day against homophobia, scheduled for Tbilisi on May 17, 2013. He said that rally was a "violation of rights of the majority and an insult to the Georgian nation" (Mos, 2020). Describing homosexuality as a disease, he compared it to drug addiction (M. Mestvirishvili et al., 2017). Thousands of Georgians followed his comments and took to the streets of Tbilisi to oppose the rally in support of gay rights. Due to the escalation of violence against the LGBT activists, the rally had to be abandoned and the activists had to be evacuated by the police for their safety (Mos, 2020). All in all, the Georgian church is an important political actor in the country. Their conservative positions and mistrust towards Western civilisation secular values has an influence on overall Georgia's European integration process (see also: Margvelashvili, 2018).

5.4.1.1 The DCFTA and its effects in Georgia

The DCFTA is one of the main parts of the AA, that involves several policy steps to liberalise and enhance trade between the EU and the signatory EaP country (Adarov & Havlik, 2016). Once fully implemented, the DCFTA is expected to make a major contribution to Georgia's economic growth by introducing three out of four core EU freedoms (so-called "the four freedoms of the EU" which were established in the 1957 Treaty of Rome, article 3) which are the movement of goods, services and capital between the EU and Georgia. The fourth freedom, which is the movement of people is covered under the Visa Facilitation (as already discussed in previous section).

The EU-Georgia DCFTA negotiations were followed by a preparatory process which began in 2009 (Khuntsaria, 2012). Before embarking on a new legislative programme in the context of the DCFTA, Georgia has implemented fundamental reforms (see below) to liberalise and deregulate the economy (Eteria, 2019). In general, the economic part of the AA can be divided into two. The first envisages the abolition of barriers to Georgia's exports into the EU; which should result in export growth (Kawecka-Wyrzykowska, 2015).

The second deals with legislative and regulatory convergence which, in turn, is a key factor in the growth of both exports and foreign investment (Gurova, 2018). This process involves implementation of EU norms and standards in Georgia's economy that would ensure consistent improvement of the degree of compatibility of the economies of Georgia and the EU, which, in parallel with other reforms, will help to increase the country's investment attractiveness (Adarov & Havlik, 2016). Moreover, it is assumed that the high compatibility of Georgia's economy with the EU would help to attract investment both from EU countries and beyond (Eteria, 2019). Consequently, the effect of stimulating foreign investment conditioned by the AA is no less significant than the effect of increasing trade, particularly exports.

As the progress report of the European Commission noted, Georgia made significant progress in the liberalisation of trade and trade-related issues by 2013 (European Commission, 2013c). Georgia continued to approximate with EU sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) standards, as well as progress in the implementation of secondary SPS legislation and capacity building on SPS border controls, that were carried out by the Revenue Service of Georgia (European Commission, 2013c, p. 11). Georgia also continued to introduce one of the fundamental reforms under the DCFTA which is a new customs policy and more capacity-building steps (that is, providing the right conditions for livestock in transit, veterinary border inspections) (Martuscelli & Varela, 2018). In this regard, Georgia has introduced tax and customs reforms including restoration the customs infrastructure at border crossing points (Martuscelli & Varela, 2018).

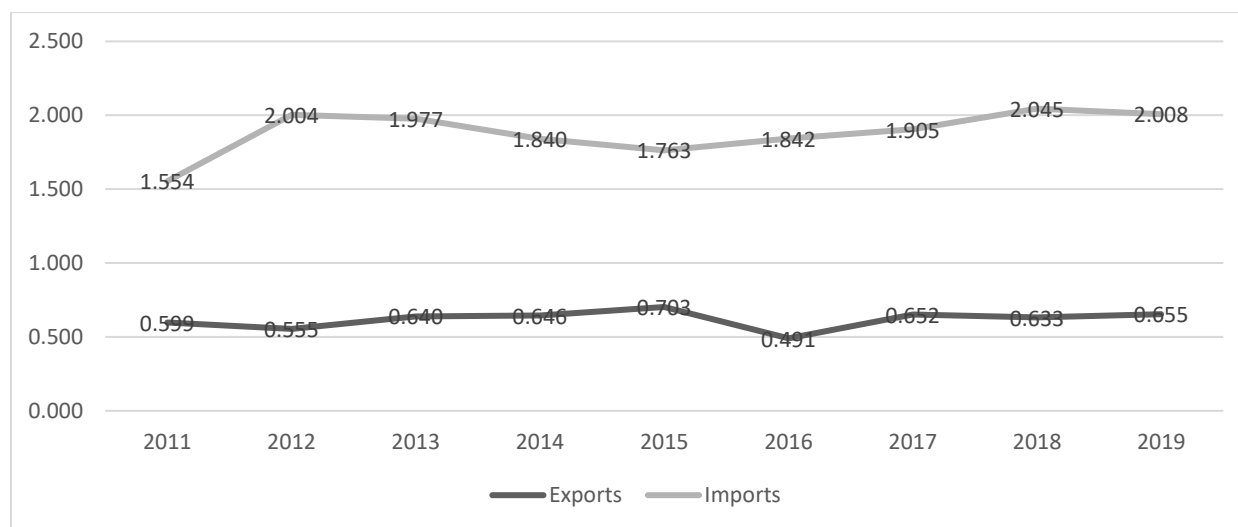
According to the Joint Staff Working Paper of the European Commission (2017a), Georgia has made a good progress in implementing the overall DCFTA agenda. Georgia eliminated all import duties on goods from the EU and both parties began exchanging information on the latest updates of the EU *acquis* covered by the reform process and planned the institutional aspects of the implementation of the AA / DCFTA. The Georgian customs authorities have finalised a plan for a new Customs Code in line with the provisions of the AA / DCFTA (European Commission, 2017a). In addition, important progress has also been made since the signing of the DCFTA in establishing the country's policy on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Two agencies for the development of entrepreneurship and innovation and technology have been set up in Georgia to

support entrepreneurship to meet EU standards (Dobrescu & Schumacher, 2020). The Georgian government also launched the “Produce in Georgia Programme” to support local agricultural processing and industrial production through concessional loans, infrastructure support and consulting services (Abuselidze & Beridze, 2018).

In addition, Georgia continued to strengthen its market environment. In the World Bank's “Doing Business 2014” annual report, Georgia moved up to 8th position in the ranking on the ease of doing business (World Bank, 2014). Georgia also moved up to 72nd position (out of 148) in the Global Competitiveness Report 2013-2014 of the World Economic Forum, with the macroeconomic climate, financial sector growth and market performance as the key contributors (World Economic Forum, 2015). And by 2015, according to the Heritage Foundation's Economic Freedom Index, Georgia's economic freedom score was 73, making its economy the 22nd freest economy in the world (Miller & Kim, 2015). By 2019, Georgia's economic freedom score reached 77, making its economy the 12th freest in the world (World Bank, 2020).

Since 1999, Georgia has already been the beneficiary of the EU General System of Preferences (GSP) which was replaced by the GSP+ since 2005. It allowed Georgia to export to the EU with non-reciprocal tariff reductions on duty-free access (Charaia et al., 2018). This means that no import duties were applied in the EU to 7,200 goods; in other words, Georgia faced zero duties on approximately 75% of all tariff lines (Gylfason et al., 2015). Compared to the GSP+ , the DCFTA is more advantageous to Georgia because it allows not only for the reciprocal elimination of all barriers to trade, but also for the harmonisation of economic laws and regulations with those in force in the EU (Adarov & Havlik, 2016). In addition, the DCFTA is concluded for an unspecified period of time and is permanent, while the GSP+ was renewed in every three years (Khuntsaria, 2012).

Figure 7 Georgia's Exports-Imports of Goods and Services with the EU in 2011-2019 (mil. Euro)



Source: eurostat.

In 2012 the Ecorys Netherlands published the report, which was financed by the European Commission, about the assessment of the potential economic, social and political impacts of the DCFTAs in Georgia and to provide policy recommendations (see:ECORYS, 2012). According to the report, the DCFTA would have had a significant effect on Georgia's economy. More precisely, it was assumed that Georgia's exports would have increased by 9% in the short term, and by 12% in the long term and imports by 4.4% and 7.5%, respectively (ECORYS, 2012, p. 37). However, the current economic indicators have not shown much trade increase between the EU and Georgia. In particular, in 2018, compared to 2014, Georgia's exports decreased from €646 to €633 million (see Figure 7). In 2019, Georgia's exports to EU countries slightly increased compared to the previous year and amounted to €655 million. Furthermore, imports from EU to Georgia in 2014 were €1,840 million, and in 2018 amounted to 2, 045 million. In 2019 the imports decreased again from €2,045 to €2,008 million (Figure 7). Hence, despite some positive trends in Georgia-EU trade, there has been no significant impact of the DCFTA on Georgia's trade relations.

The provisions of the DCFTA are covered by the second (economic) and the third (sectoral) sections of the AA, which involved convergence and cooperation in areas such as: trade and trade problems, national treatment and market access for goods, technical barriers to trade, sanitary and SPS steps, customs and trade facilitation, intellectual property rights and competition (European Commission, 2014a). Considering that Georgia is economically too weak to enforce its priorities on the EU (or to enforce a top down approach (Lavenexa & Schimmelfennig, 2011)) see section 2.1), the changes in these policy areas entail a unilateral adjustment of Georgian regulations to European standards. Consequently, due to the complicated nature of the DCFTA, there is a dispute among scholars as to whether or not these unilateral changes are beneficial to the Georgian economy (Tofan, 2016).

It should be noted that it is generally assumed among analysts that the economic effect of the DCFTA will not be immediate and that its adoption in the short term presents more challenges than benefits for Georgia (Eteria, 2019; Sepashvili, 2017). But in the long run, the convergence of European standards will make it easier for Georgian businesses to enter the European market which will result in the growth of its economy (Adarov & Havlik, 2016). In addition, some scholars assumed that the major challenges for Georgia, especially in the short term, would have been increased imports from the EU and additional pressure on domestic producers, and increased costs and prices for products and services due to severe compliance requirements with EU standards (Abuselidze & Beridze, 2018).

However, the above data (particularly those given in Table 16. and Figure 7) reveal that no significant increase of EU exports has occurred either (the highest increase occurred from 2011 to 2012, well before the DCFTA was signed). The top exported Georgia's goods to the EU in 2019 were those which were historically exported to EU markets: nuts, motor vehicles (Eteria, 2019). The exception is wine (an increase of about 6% in 2019) which was not part of the GSP+ scheme, but wine already meets the necessary requirements defined in the DCFTA provision, while other goods still need some time to meet EU standards (Abuselidze & Beridze, 2018). Georgian agricultural products are the largest source of export to the EU, particularly wine and alcoholic drinks. These goods are exported into the European markets annually, but seasonal products are also available

that are not very numerous on the international market such as hazelnuts and other nut types (Aroshidze & Mamuladze, 2017). Only those manufacturers are interesting for the EU market which guarantee continuity of supply, quality of production and quantity (Abuselidze & Beridze, 2018).

Moreover, food safety standards remain a challenge to Georgia. While Georgia has a relatively low incidence of severe foodborne illness, the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) recorded that there were 60 cases of anthrax (a rare but serious bacterial illness) in Georgia in 2017-2018.⁵⁶ Therefore, there are several major obstacles to Georgian products being exported to the EU single market, the majority of which are related to Georgian producers' inability to meet the EU's high standards, quality and heterogeneity of products. It is clear that the positive results of the DCFTA depend directly on the degree of legal and regulatory convergence and regulatory environment which, given the complex approximation of Georgia's legislation with that of the EU, are not a straightforward process.

Georgia has trade ties not only with the EU, but also with the CIS. It is noteworthy that the average annual growth rate of Georgia's exports to the EU and the CIS during 2011-2014 was almost the same (23.8% and 23.6%, respectively). During 2015-2018, the average annual growth rate of Georgia's exports to CIS countries also decreased, as in the case of the EU. However, it remained higher (11.8%) than the average annual growth rate of exports to the EU (4.6%) (see Table 18).

Table 18 Volume of trade of Georgia with CIS, EU countries and the rest of the world (% in total turnover)

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
EU	14.6	20.9	21.8	29.3	26.8	24.0	21.7	21.5
CIS	52.4	55.7	51.2	38.2	34.9	43.3	49.1	44.6

⁵⁶ For more details see Topuridze (2019). Georgia Struggles with Food Safety Standards. Global Voices Caucasus. available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y4fwhbhp>

Other	33.0	23.4	27.0	32.5	37.3	32.7	29.2	33.9
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Source: National Statistics Office of Georgia

It is evident that Georgia's exports to CIS countries are greater than those to the EU. According to Tables 16 and 17, the CIS countries are Georgia’s largest exporting destinations. Such distribution of export directions stems primarily from the fact that, despite the lack of diplomatic ties with Georgia, the Russian market remains important because it is in the historical memory of Georgia and appealing to local producers (Aroshidze & Mamuladze, 2017). Georgian products are also more popular in the post-Soviet countries than in the EU (Gogoberidze, 2019). Furthermore, Georgian businesses, particularly Small and Medium Size, continue to find it easier to export to the CIS market because of easy access and soft regulations, compared to the strict regulations of the DCFTA (Gogoberidze, 2019). Therefore, Russia still remains one of the most important trade partners to Georgia due to the easy access (fewer regulations) and historical ties (see sections 3.2.1 and 3.2.2) despite the strained political situation and bad economic experiences. In fact, on January 22, 2006, the main gas pipeline on the Georgian-Russian border, which delivered Russian gas to Georgia, exploded in the uncertain situation. Georgia, which was almost completely dependent on Russia for energy, was left without gas. Moreover, in a few months after the accident, Russia increased its gas tariff for Georgia by 100% (Zarkua, 2019). Russia's punitive measures did not end there and in the same year, Russia banned the sale of major Georgian wine and mineral water exports to Russia (Anderson, 2013). Therefore, Georgian businesses, which were mainly dependent on the Russian market, were left without the key market in one day (Papava, 2006).

Russia ended the 2006 “punitive operation” (Papava, 2006) with the mass deportation of Georgians from Russia. In the fall of 2006, about 5,000 Georgians were deported from Russia to Georgia by cargo planes (Human Rights Watch, 2007b). The pro-Western orientation of President Saakashvili, particularly his ambitions to join EU and NATO, irritated Russia, which was manifested in terms of the above mentioned economic consequences for Georgia (see also: Delcour, 2018b).

Economic ties between Russia and Georgia were restored in 2012, after Ivanishvili and his GD came into power. GD's main political promise during the 2012 pre-election campaign was to normalise relations with Russia and restore trade (Wilhelmsen, 2020). The intensified economic relations with Russia were GD's achievement as shown in terms of increased trade since 2011 (see export-imports in Tables 16 and 17). Russia began removing some of its punitive measures shortly after Saakashvili's departure. Since 2013, the bans on Georgian wines, mineral water, and fruits have been gradually lifted (Delcour, 2018c). Although renewed access to the Russian market benefits Georgian producers and the economy as a whole, it also strengthens Russia's ability to exert economic pressure on the country. Russia's consumer protection agency (Rospotrebnadzor) has threatened to block Georgian wine imports when Georgia in 2014 joined EU sanctions against imports from Crimea and Sevastopol (in response to the annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol by Russia), for which Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev threatened "response measures" (Nilsson, 2020). During public protests against a speech by a Russian Duma deputy in the Georgian parliament in June 2019, Russian authorities temporarily banned direct flights between Russia and Georgia, affecting a large number of Russian tourists⁵⁷. Therefore, the trade policy of the ruling GD party with Russia has been widely criticised by Georgia's political opposition, experts and civil society due to politicisation of trade by Russia and its consequences (see: Kakachia et al., 2014; Kapanadze, 2015; Silagadze & Atanelishvili, 2020).

5.4.1.2 Status Quo of the EaP in Georgia: Priorities and results

The majority of actors in Georgia associate the EU with democratisation and modernisation (Delcour, 2018c). However, as the above analysis has shown, some of its norms and policies are thought to be incompatible with the needs and expectations of Georgia (for example. LGBT rights). Similarly, the EU's focus on regulation and a trade-related *acquis communautaire* within the DCFTA has negatively affected trade between

⁵⁷ The Georgian crowd was provoked by the visit of a Russian legislator, Sergei Gavrilov, who addressed Georgian parliamentarians in the Russian language from the speaker's seat, which severely angered those who wish to keep Russia out of Georgian politics. For more details see (Mijalska & Kardaś, 2020).

the EU and Georgia. The above findings highlight that the disparity between EaP's expectations and objectives analysed in section 5.2 and EaP outcome in Georgia is not solely due to EU policies. Political developments in Georgia (political tensions, human rights, oligarchic rule) are also widening the gap between Georgia's declared integration choice and shifting elite perceptions of the country's political reforms.

Despite the unfavourable political and economic outcome of the 11-year participation of Georgia in the EaP, this project had some remarkable results in mobility and assistance programmes. In the field of higher education, under the Erasmus + programme, approximately 7,500 students and academic staff participated in exchange programmes, and more than 9,300 young people participated in various joint trainings, exchanges, and volunteer programmes since the entry into force of visa liberalisation on 28 March 2017 (see: European Commission, 2020b). The EU was involved in the process of agricultural modernisation of Georgia in terms of financial and technical assistance. Since 2009, 40,000 small and medium enterprises, micro-enterprises and farmers have received a total grant / loan of €130 million (European Commission, 2020c; Shiolashvili, 2020). Moreover, since 2015, the EU has helped Georgia to train 5000 judges, prosecutors, investigators and lawyers (European Commission, 2020c; Lomia & Lomia, 2020).

In the 2017 EaP Summit Declaration, the EU put an emphasis on the importance of strengthening the relations between the EU and the partner countries based on the differentiated approach in terms of bilateral relations (Schimmelfennig & Winzen, 2017). As discussed in section 4.2, this approach takes into account the ambitions and needs of the partner country, as well as the pace and quality of reforms. On December 5, 2019, the Foreign Ministers of Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova issued a joint statement reiterating the key importance of the principle of differentiation - the “more for more”, which enables each partner to act according to its interests (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, 2019). This fact emphasises that the political establishments of Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova urge the EU to drop the “one size fits all” model and to develop a more differentiated approach towards those EaP countries (Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova), which are interested in closer integration with the EU. Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova are aware of the principle of differentiation and they demand that the EU implement this in practice. In fact, despite the above-mentioned undemocratic tendencies and problems in terms of

democratisation, EU integration remains to be a stated priority of Georgia's foreign policy. According to the Foreign Policy Strategy for 2019-2022, EU membership is “a strategic goal of Georgia's foreign policy” (Government of Georgia, 2019). Moreover, one of the latest surveys shows that 82% of the Georgian population supports EU membership as a foreign policy priority (EU Neighbours East, 2020). According to the results of the 2019 annual survey, 77% of the population trust the EU (Tornton & Turmanidze, 2019b). At the same time, similar to the last year, about 70% of the Georgian population believes that EU integration will increase the country's security and stability (EU Neighbours East, 2020).

Since 2017, the EaP guideline for the partner countries has been the agenda which was adopted at the Brussels Summit in 2017 – “20 Deliverables for 2020” (Lebanidze, 2020). The policy covers 20 specific objectives, in accordance with 4 key areas. These key areas are:

- Stronger economy - economic development and market opportunities.
- Stronger connections - connections, energy efficiency, environment and climate change.
- Stronger governance - strengthening institutions and good governance.
- Stronger society - mobility and contacts between people.

In order to assist with these guidelines and support Georgia, the European Commission adopted the 2018 Annual Action Programme (AAP) which aimed to support the implementation of the EU-Georgia AA and Georgia's reform efforts (European Commission, 2018a). The AAP is a “mirror analogy” of the Brussels Agenda “20 Deliverable for 2020”. The actions proposed under the 2018 AAP are in line with both Georgia's political and development priorities, as well as those set in the AA. These areas are also in line with the Georgian government's four-point plan, which was developed during the 2016 parliamentary elections by the ruling GD political party and includes: economic reform (focusing on the private sector), education reform, spatial planning (land use planning) and the reform of public governance (Papava, 2017). The timeframe for the implementation of the 4-point plan were the years 2018-2021. In line with AA/DCTFA, the Government of Georgia has developed overall policies to fix gaps in both

labour market and education reforms (European Commission, 2018a). Education and economic growth are prioritised in the GD programme, which describes "enhancing skills" as one of the three key priorities of the country's socio-economic development (Dobrescu & Schumacher, 2020). This is further specified in the above 4-Point Government Programme, where education and economic development are defined as priority areas (points 1 and 2). Finally, the three main actions of the AAP for Georgia include security, accountability and the fight against crime (European Commission, 2018a). These actions aim to increase the security of Georgian citizens by strengthening good governance and the rule of law in Georgia through capacity building of relevant institutions so that they can tackle corruption more effectively at all levels (Papava, 2017). The same action will focus on what the EU likes to call "societal resilience"⁵⁸ (Juncos, 2017) and will strengthen the fight against organised crime, in particular human trafficking, drug trafficking, money laundering and terrorism.

The 4-Point government programme has not yet been fully implemented as of 2020, which is further confirmed by the Association Implementation Report on Georgia, which was published by the EU in February 2020 (European Commission, 2020a). The document mentions some important reforms, which were implemented by the Georgian government, for example on legislative approximation in the area of indirect taxation (excluding taxation of energy products) (European Commission, 2020a, p. 11) and a new education programme, with a declared increase of state funding to 6% of GDP by 2022 (European Commission, 2020a, p. 15). However, neither the obligation of the Georgian Government is mentioned nor the evidence of its implementation or recommendations for further developing the 4-Point government programme are further evaluated in the EU document. Moreover, the 4-Point plan was already lambasted by some scholars as being populist, not rational and overwhelmingly focusing on development of existing service sectors such as hotels, restaurants and expanding the network of credit institution, not on the so-called "future economies", in particular knowledge-based economics which could develop production sectors (see: Papava, 2017a; Pirveli et al., 2020).

⁵⁸ The EU Global Strategy (EUGS) refers to building state and societal resilience in its neighbourhood as one of the key strategic priorities of the EU. For more information refer to (Juncos, 2017).

Despite Georgia's gradual rapprochement with the EU, long-term challenges and barriers to further integration, the problems with the rule of law, lack of an independent judiciary, elite corruption and social hardship remain. All these issues continue to hamper further integration and, in some cases, have even become more severe. However, the Georgian government has been effective in combating corruption in the lower echelons of the administrative apparatus. Georgia ranks higher in international indexes than some EU member states. For example according to Transparency International, Georgia's score in 2019 was higher (56) than the scores for Italy (53), Greece (48) and Croatia (47) (Transparency International, 2019). Nevertheless, elite corruption remains a fundamental problem. Georgian civil society organisations have loudly expressed similar concerns and called on the authorities to investigate and tackle the corruption (see: Gherasimov, 2019; Transparency International, 2019). This issue was also mentioned in the European Parliament report adopted in October 2018 on the implementation of the AA between Georgia and the EU (European Parliament, 2018). The document (2018, p. 9) acknowledges Georgia's success in fighting low and middle-level corruption, but stresses that elite corruption remains a serious challenge. Another challenge that Georgia is facing is the lack of independence in the judiciary. The Georgian government has made several waves of judicial reform (see section 4.3), but serious shortcomings in the system remain unresolved. In its 2018 report on the implementation of the AA, the EU paid particular attention to the importance of transparency and accountability in the judicial appointment process (European Commission, 2018b). In a 2018 report on the state of human rights, the US Department of State stressed that judges in Georgia are vulnerable to political pressure both from within and outside the judiciary (U.S. Department of State, 2018, p. 12).

Domestic politics and poor economic performance, rather than weak institutions, are to blame for the lack of reform progress in Georgia. Even when Georgia has shown willingness to reform, oligarch and informal networks continued to “pull the strings behind the scenes” (Wolfschwenger, 2020). Informal politics sabotage the very institutions that an EU-led reform process was supposed to improve.

In addition to the shortcomings related to democratisation, Georgia is also experiencing severe socio-economic problems, its 11-year long membership in the EaP and six years

since signing of the DCTFA which have not been able to effectively address, let alone eradicate.

In 2019, Georgia ranked 140 in the world for their GDP per capita (4,697.7), just before Guatemala and Moldova, according to the World Bank (2019). Furthermore, the country has a very high level of unemployment (officially it was 17.6% in 2019; however, according to the NDI survey, 59% consider themselves to be unemployed (Tornton & Turmanidze, 2019a)). Unemployment in Georgia is especially high among Georgian youth (30.49%) (World Bank, 2019). This also increases the number of Georgian asylum seekers in EU member states. The number of asylum seekers from Georgia to the EU and Schengen countries increased from 8,835 (2016) to 17,980 (2019) (Eurostat, 2019a), which in fact jeopardises the visa free regime between Georgia and the EU (Loda, 2019; Matsaberidze, 2019). Moreover, many families in Georgia's rural population are almost entirely dependent on remittances from family members who have gone abroad to work (Sirkeci, 2020). Similar remittances reached a record high in 2019 (\$2 billion) when they accounted for 12.9% of the country's GDP (World Bank, 2019). Although the EU allocates approximately €120 million a year (€32 per capita per year, which is lower than the allocations in the WB candidates for EU membership – for example for Serbia under IPA II in 2014-2020 was €1.539,1 billion, hence approximately €256 million per year, slightly bigger than Albania's financial assistance, which amounted to €106 million per year⁵⁹) to Georgia to support public administration reform, agriculture and judicial reform, at least 41% of the population wants to see more EU involvement in health, education and unemployment (EU Neighbours East, 2019). Ordinary citizens are either less aware of the support provided by the EU and/or have not benefited from the EU assistance.

The desire of the Georgian population to see more EU financial assistance may also be related to ineffective policy planning and implementation of reforms by the Georgian government. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), agriculture still accounts for 52% of the country's workforce, although 98% of those employed in this field are still self-employed (FAO, 2019). This sector occupies a prominent place in the government's agenda, and the EU has spent significant amounts

⁵⁹ For more information about the financial assistance for the ENP and Enlargement see: European Commission. Neighbourhood/Enlargement. Funding by country.

of money on the European Neighbourhood Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development (ENPARD) to contribute to its development. The total budget of ENPARD for Georgia which is estimated for 2013-2022, is €179.5 million (Channon et al., 2017). Nevertheless, the share of agriculture in the country's GDP decreased from 8.1% (2013) to 6.6% (2019) (FAO, 2019). In addition, the share of agribusiness in the overall economy is declining - from 17.7% (2013) to 14.8% (2019) (Geostat, 2019). While the DCFTA allows Georgian producers to enter the EU market, Georgian agricultural products (especially animal products) still do not meet strict EU food safety standards and, as a result, despite minimal changes in trade diversification, Georgian rural exports of agricultural products to the EU decreased from €187 million (2015) to €116 million (2019) (Geostat, 2019).

Based on all of the above, Georgia and the EU need to review the effectiveness of EU support and address some of its shortcomings, including the introduction of more pronounced benchmarks and the establishment of more measurable indicators. Eleven years have passed since the initiation of the EaP but neither the EU nor Georgia seems to have clear ideas for further strengthening Georgia-EU relations, other than the current agenda for the implementation of the AA. In March 2017, the European Commission published a white paper on the future of the EU (European Commission, 2017d). The document defines the future development of the EU, which covers the period up to 2030. A closer look at the document reveals that it does not envisage any prospect of accession for the Eastern neighborhood. At the same time, as the President of Georgia Salome Zurbishvili stated, "it is time to define a new direction in relations between Georgia and the EU after ten years of successful partnership" (Zurbishvili, 2019). The President also offered EU leaders and EU heads of state to start accession talks with a non-standard approach out of necessity (Zurbishvili, 2019). However, the Georgian government's ambition to call for EU accession talks have come face to face with the EU's clear lack of appetite for enlargement. This is a clear indication of a mismatch of priorities. The EU's actorness and credibility to act in its eastern neighborhood is determined not only by its own assessment of its accomplishments but also by how partner countries view and value its actions. Differences in expectations between the EU and Georgia are problematic. Relations between Georgia and the EU may be strained not

only by the challenges of the EaP in Georgia as described above, but also by the credibility-expectation gap (see also: Dekanozishvili, 2020; Nielsen, 2013; Stewart, 2011).

5.4.2 Armenia in between the EaP and the Eurasian Economic Union

Armenia's membership to the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) turned out to be completely unexpected for leaders of the EU (Harzl & Mickonytė, 2019). The Eurasian Customs Union (EACU), which was established in 2007 by Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan, has become a fast-moving project in the post-Soviet space (Kirkham, 2016). The creation of the EACU allowed its members to increase mutual trade turnover by 72.8%, significantly reduce customs costs and form a common market for goods (Kirkham, 2016). Moreover, in January 2015, the EACU members decided to integrate further and established the EAEU with Kyrgyzstan and later Armenia joining as new members. The EAEU includes the basic principles of the EACU, which are the formation of a single economic space, the same type of mechanisms for regulating the economy, facilitating business, pursuing an agreed tax, monetary, trade and customs policy that ensure free movement of goods, services, capital and labour between the member states (Terzyan, 2017). On May 29, 2014, Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan signed an agreement to create the EAEU. On the same day, President Sargsyan appealed to the leaders of the EAEU founding states with a proposal to consider Armenia's accession to the Union. On October 10, 2014, an agreement on Armenia's accession to the EAEU was signed by the heads of the four states. On December 4, 2014 the Armenian Parliament ratified the agreement on Armenia's accession to the EAEU, and later the same agreement was ratified by the parliaments of Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia (Gabrielyan et al., 2017). Armenia joined the EAEU within the framework of its internationally recognised borders, thus the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict did not become an obstacle to its membership of the union (Grigoryan, 2016).

The “*volte-face*”⁶⁰ decision of the Armenian president to engage in Eurasian integration without any domestic deliberations took the Armenian political elites, society and the EU

⁶⁰ A total change of position

by surprise (Gabrielyan et al., 2017). Indeed, the decision to join the Russia-led organisation was widely portrayed as solely the choice of Armenia's president. Many in Armenia, including officials involved in the negotiations for an AA with the EU, stated that it was the decision of the Armenian president, not the decision of Armenia (Delcour, 2018b). In fact, during the EaP Summit in Vilnius in November 2013, the EU planned to sign the AA and the DCFTA with Armenia. Armenia's "European choice" was considered as a decided case not only in Brussels, but confidence in its reality was expressed by part of the scholar community in Armenia and Russia (Ter-Matevosyan et al., 2017a). As already mentioned, Armenia, similar to Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine, was engaged in negotiation process to sign the AA and the DCFTA (Vieira & Vasilyan, 2018a). On July 24, 2013, EU officials announced that since negotiations with Armenia had been completed successfully, Armenia was ready (along with Georgia) to sign the AA at the Eastern Partnership Vilnius summit on November 29, 2013 (Loda, 2017). These developments left no doubt that the AA, as well as the DCFTA, would be concluded at the Vilnius summit. However, on August 31, 2013, President Sargsyan informed the European Commissioner on Enlargement and ENP - Stefan Fule, about his decision on Armenia's accession to the EAEU (Gabrielyan et al., 2017).

The EaP, which opened up the possibility to sign the AA, was welcomed by the Armenian political elites. The European integration perspective was accepted by president Sargsyan as a new catalyst for Armenia's stable, sustainable and democratic growth (Interview 7; Aram Terzyan, 2017). Armenia's endeavour of European integration entered a new, hypothetically promising phase under Sargsyan's presidency. At the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in 2011, President Sargsyan compared European integration to "homecoming to the European civilisation" for Armenia. According to him, the Armenian population had made its historical and irreversible choice to move closer to Europe, which had a common cultural and civilisational platform of values and identity (see: The President of the Republic of Armenia, 2011). President Sargsyan has also repeatedly claimed that the legacy, traditions, cultures and idiosyncrasies make Armenia a partial part of Europe and a pillar of the European integration strategy in Armenia (Gabrielyan et al., 2017). Essentially, political elites of Armenia considered the EU to be a normative and liberal player with enough "soft" instruments to challenge the policies of

hard power (Russia) in the South Caucasus region (Shirinyan & Ralchev, 2013). Sargsyan has emphasised the importance of the EU's growing engagement with the volatile South Caucasus region. The EU's ground-breaking mission, as a normative actor, would play a critical role in breaking the deadlock in Armenian-Azerbaijani tense relations, particularly in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict settlement (Terzyan, 2017). In many ways, Armenia's European identification differs from that of Georgia. Armenia's sense of belonging to Europe, unlike Georgia's, is far from any desire to join the EU. In essence, Armenia has been asserting less its Europeanness than Georgia (Delcour, 2018b). This is due to a misalignment between the country's cultural and civilisational ties to Europe on the one hand and its security vulnerability on the other whereas in Georgia's case these two are intermingled, since Georgia is seeking Euro-Atlantic (EU and NATO) integration. As shown in chapter 3, the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh has shaped Armenia's foreign policy since it gained independence. The closed borders with Turkey and Azerbaijan and the ongoing risk of conflict recurrence (which was materialised in September 2020) have placed Armenia in a position of extreme regional vulnerability. The idea of "complementarity"⁶¹ in Armenian foreign policy, coined by then-Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanian in the early 2000s, emphasised the importance for Armenia to maintain equally balanced ties with all of its regional and international partners, preventing complete reliance on Russia (M. R. Freire & Simão, 2013). This viewpoint allowed Armenia to develop closer ties with the EU in the context of the ENP. According to the Armenian officials, the ENP was a welcomed change towards the South Caucasus in three key ways, which were: financial assistance and new economic opportunities, deep political relations and improved integration of EU instruments that would result in increased coherence in EU relations with Armenia (Rinna, 2014). Evidently, coherence of action and consistent political aims in terms of democracy promotion have been critical in the EU-neighbourhood relations (Casier & Bindi, 2010). However, as sections 3.2, 4.3 and 4.4 have shown, Armenian political elites had a lack of political will to steer the country towards the EU.

⁶¹ The complementarity policy implies that the country is establishing effective strategic partnerships with all those entities, that are interested in mutually beneficial cooperation (Markarov & Davtyan, 2018a).

After insisting on signing the AA and the DCFTA in 2013, Sargsyan tried to justify the U-turn and has specifically challenged the efficacy of the EaP with three main weaknesses, including ambiguous criterion of grouping partners, lack of strong stimulus for Azerbaijan to step beyond energy partnerships and irrelevant policies for the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (Terzyan, 2016; The President of the Republic of Armenia, 2014). In particular the President pointed out that there were huge differences between Eastern partners, their priorities and approaches which ultimately rendered the EaP component of regional cooperation unfeasible (H. Kostanyan, 2015b). Furthermore, Edward Nalbandian, who was Armenian Foreign Minister from 2008 to 2018, blamed the EU for limiting bilateral cooperation and for inducing Armenia to choose between the DCFTA and the EAEU. He pointed out that Armenia wanted to sign the AA without the DCFTA, but “they were advised that it was not possible” and that “the AA was incompatible with EAEU membership without DCFTA provision” (Terzyan, 2017).

There are a number of possible factors that led Armenia to change its integration vector from the EU towards the EAEU. Initially, Armenia's change of foreign policy in the direction of the EAEU was a result of complex factors that had coincided with the assertive expansion of Russian foreign policy in Armenia, including the strategic vulnerabilities and socio-political problems in Armenia, that have been accumulating in recent years (see also: Ter-Matevosyan et al., 2017). Remarkably, there has been a tendency to emphasise the hypothetical economic and political difficulties that Armenia would suffer in the event of a divergence from Russia's strategic partnership (Ademmer et al., 2020). Indeed, the policy pursued by Armenia in relations with the EU was increasingly irritating Russia, which was reflected in Russia's decision to raise the price of gas for Armenia in summer 2012 (Vasilyan, 2017). Ironically, the price of gas was reduced when Armenia agreed to join the EAEU, therefore the Eurasian integration shields Armenia from rises in gas prices (Zhiltsov et al., 2017).

The choice of the Armenian political elites to integrate their country into the EAEU would shield Armenia from unwelcome surprises and economic repercussions, given Armenia's huge economic and energy dependency on Russia, the main investor and trade and economic partner for Armenia. Table 16 showed that the Russian market has been the main destination for Armenia's exports which have been increasing since 2011, except in

2015, when Armenia's exports to Russia dropped down to €231 million (see Table 16). Armenia was suffering a severe drop in foreign trade in 2015, which was primarily caused by the spillover from Russia's recession, the worst since the 2008 financial crisis (Falkowski, 2017).

Indeed, Russia is Armenia's largest foreign trading partner with 27% of Armenian exports and 70% of remittances (see Worldbank, 2018). Russia also retains dominance in foreign investment in Armenia. Officially, there are approximately 1400 enterprises with Russian capital in Armenia, which is one fourth of all foreign capital entities in the country (Terzyan, 2018). The migration factor is crucial for Armenia since it is associated with the remittances of Armenian migrants from the Russian Federation which constitute up to 10% of the Armenia's GDP (Ter-Matevosyan et al., 2017a). Migrants are often working in non-tradable industries (construction, retail trade, hotels, and restaurants). As a result, shocks in Russia in 2015 were being transmitted to Armenia through remittances (Grinberg & Pylin, 2020). According to Armenia's Development Strategy 2014-2025, membership in the EACU is essential to facilitate export growth (Government of the Republic of Armenia, 2014, p. 25). However, the above analysis has shown that Armenia's EAEU membership makes the country much more economically dependent on Russia, making it less capable of handling domestic economic consequences independently and more vulnerable to Russian market fluctuations, which was manifested in 2015. Therefore, the benefits of joining the EAEU for Armenia are furthermore very hypothetical. The above discussed dependency (both economic and political) on Russia is significant; therefore in the EAEU Russia is "more equal than others," to paraphrase George Orwell in *Animal Farm*.

In addition, another reason that prompted the Armenian political elites to participate in the Eurasian integration process was to ensure the country's national security (Vieira & Vasilyan, 2018a). This links to the highly flammable Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Only the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) provided some security guarantees for Armenia both in the form of a Russian "Nuclear Umbrella" and through the supply of weapons (Spina, 2018). The CSTO is an intergovernmental military alliance which was signed on 15 May, 1992 by six post-Soviet states including Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Armenia and aggression against one signatory

would be perceived as an aggression against all (Deyermond, 2018). The core of this close relationship is the security guarantee of the Armenian state, which Russia has been implementing for many years, both on a bilateral basis and through the CSTO (Delcour, 2013). Nevertheless, such closeness did not prevent Armenia from building relations with Western countries, primarily with the EU, the result of which could have been a deeper rapprochement on the basis of political and economic association. All in all, despite all the desires of Armenian elites to diversify their foreign policy, “security at any cost”, on the contrary, made Armenia increasingly dependent on Russia (Boonstra, 2015). Gradually, this led to the loss of part of the sovereignty of the republic and choice to integrate in the EAEU that shields Armenia from unwelcome surprises and economic repercussions.

In the spring of 2018, Armenia was shaken by a "Velvet Revolution" which, under the leadership of opposition MP Nikol Pashinyan, ousted Serge Sarkisyan from power. After ten years as the head of state (2008-2018), Sarkisyan wanted to stay in power as Prime Minister thanks to a constitutional reform that he had adopted by referendum in 2015, transforming the Republic of Armenia from a semi-presidential to a parliamentary republic (Iskandaryan, 2018). Soon after Sarkisyan was elected Prime Minister he had immediately become the object of vast protests. People demanded his resignation, led by a small group of young Armenian citizens who organised mass demonstrations blocking the streets of the capital and other cities in Armenia (Terzyan, 2019). On the eve of April 24, 2018 during the anniversary of the commemoration of the Armenian genocide (see section 3.1), Prime Minister Sarkisyan resigned from his post (Giragosian, 2019). On May 8, Pashinyan, obtained the necessary votes in Parliament and became the Prime Minister.

The Armenian "Velvet Revolution" of 2018 has raised some questions about the country's domestic and foreign policy implications. There were some speculations that Pashinyan would restore close relations with the EU and possibly withdraw Armenia from the EAEU (Markarov & Davtyan, 2018b). On July 12, 2018, Prime Minister Pashinyan travelled to Brussels to attend the NATO summit. He met with EU and NATO officials, as well as French President Macron and US President Trump. Pashinyan's visit to Brussels sparked debate among Armenian and international experts who assumed that this was the first step towards deeper cooperation and integration with the NATO and the EU, which would

eventually cause problems in Armenia's relationship with Russia (Markarov & Davtyan, 2018a). However, Pashinyan denied plans to secede from the EAEU and emphasised the importance of the Armenian-Russian strategic partnership (Iskandaryan, 2018). Moreover, Pashinyan's first trip abroad was to Russia, where he attended the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council meeting in Sochi on May 14, 2018 (S. Roberts & Ziemer, 2018).

Pashinyan's discourse suggests that Armenia's power transition, unlike Georgia's Rose Revolution, has not resulted in a revision of Armenian-Russian relations or, more specifically, Armenia's membership in the Russia-led EAEU. This, in turn, highlights the core rationale behind Armenia's decision to join the EAEU. Given the political and economic conditions and dependency on Russia, the foreign policy of Armenia has largely remained unchanged (see also: Kakabadze, 2020; Aram Terzyan, 2019).

Armenia has been caught between Russia's and the EU's conditionalities (Delcour, 2014; Vieira & Vasilyan, 2018a). Armenia has been seeking to preserve some degree of comprehensiveness in terms of internal reforms and foreign policy even after its accession to the EAEU (Ghazaryan & Delcour, 2018). However, the possibilities for EU-Armenia cooperation, particularly in trade policy, are limited due to Armenia's membership of the EAEU. Following Armenia's membership of the EAEU, any bilateral interaction must conform to EAEU membership, thereby limiting trade and focusing on other areas of competence within the EU (Kakabadze, 2020). Russia has officially confirmed that a potential agreement beyond the DCFTA between Armenia and the EU would not be inconsistent with cooperation with the EAEU (Ghazaryan & Delcour, 2018). In response to President Sargsyan's decision to join the EAEU, the EU made it clear that, given the incompatibility between membership of the EAEU and the DCFTA, no AA could be concluded with Armenia (Gabrielyan et al., 2017).

5.4.2.1 Status Quo of the EaP in Armenia: Priorities and results

Despite the fact that Armenia's U-turn came as a result of increased Russian security pressure on the country, Armenia attempted to maintain some degree of autonomy by

seeking new arrangements with the EU (Delcour, 2018b). Meanwhile, a new “window of opportunity” has emerged in EU-Armenia relations that would consider Armenia's interests and commitments. Possible areas of cooperation between the EU and Armenia were therefore established in 2014-2015, following the end of Armenia's EAEU accession negotiations (Ghazaryan & Delcour, 2018). However, the new EU-Armenia cooperation umbrella proved to be more difficult than anticipated, given the complexity of changes within the EAEU and, as a result, the lack of clarification of the commitments made by Armenia (H. Kostanyan, 2015b). More broadly, and crucially for Armenia, the lack of precision in the definition of competences in a number of policy areas in the EAEU Treaty has resulted in insufficiently defined obligations for member states (Dragneva et al., 2017). In the EAEU, the specific nature of commitments, the progress of integration, and motivation for implementing any of the obligations undertaken are determined *ad hoc*, through inter-state bargaining (Delcour, 2018b). In this context, it is perhaps unsurprising that Armenia's interpretation of its obligations as an EAEU member, as well as its broader quest for complementarity, shaped the new agreement with the EU.

In December 2015, a new round of negotiations started between the European Commission and Armenia for a new legally binding agreement. These negotiations highlighted that Armenia wanted to have a balanced foreign policy and that the EU was able to step away from the initial EaP AA / DCFTA package and to create a country-tailored agreement that would adjust to the needs and interests of Armenia (Shirinyan & Ralchev, 2013).

The EU has chosen to follow the already existing blueprint of the Enhanced Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (EPCA) adopted with Kazakhstan in 2015 (Ghazaryan & Delcour, 2018). Similarly, during the EaP Summit on November 24, 2017 in Brussels, Armenia signed a Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with the EU (European Commission, 2017b). In light of the refusal of Armenia to sign an AA with the EU in November 2013, this event is a symbolic step. It is not symbolic only for Armenia, which has become persistent in the multi-vector tradition based on complementarity (Melikian, 2013), but also for the EU. The CEPA indicates that the EaP is no longer about creating a monotonous structured economic and political “arc of countries” around the EU itself. The EU now has to take into account the interests,

nuances and peculiarities of the situation in individual regions and countries. CEPA is the first of its kind, as it was signed with a partner country that is a member of the EAEU and the EaP at the same time (see also: Śledzińska-Simon, 2018).

The CEPA repeats the AA in its political part but excludes the provisions on a free trade zone between Armenia and the EU (European Commission, 2017b). By signing an agreement with the EU, Armenia, nevertheless, does not abandon the political model proposed by the EU, which includes a set of measures to ensure transparency of state institutions, independence of justice, stability of the electoral system, support for small and medium-size businesses (Śledzińska-Simon, 2018). The signing of the agreement before the implementation of its points is still declarative in nature, only formally indicating that the EU is ready to cooperate with Armenia and Armenia is ready to develop cooperation with the EU, without entering into conflict with their other obligations (Poghosyan, 2018a).

The CEPA covers a broad range of areas of cooperation in economy, trade, and political relations and sector policies. The agreement further expands these areas and offers a long-term foundation for improving ties between the EU and Armenia (Terzyan, 2019). It sets the basis for a more successful bilateral engagement with Armenia by strengthening political dialogue and enhancing cooperation in a number of areas. The CEPA covers six areas, which are: improving the investment climate, developing civil society, cooperation in the fight against crime, more transparent and fair public procurement procedures, changes in legislation in the field of food security and consumer protection and environmental protection (European Commission, 2017b; Ordukhanyan, 2019). The CEPA also covers liberalisation of mutual trade in the sphere of services that include rent, consulting, financial and transport services. Thus, Armenian entrepreneurs will be able to participate in tenders for public procurement in the EU (European Commission, 2017b article 286). The CEPA contains EU human rights policy provisions and deals with international criminal courts, weapons of mass destruction, small arms and light weapons and counterterrorism (Delcour, 2018b). In addition, it includes provisions on cooperation in the transport, energy, health, environment, climate change, fiscal policies, the education and culture sector, jobs and social affairs, banking and assurance policies. The CEPA also contains a separate chapter on economic dialogue (European Commission,

2017b, p. 30), that includes facilitating economic reforms to ensure the independence of the Central Bank of the country, price stability, maintaining the balance of payments, taxation, a favourable climate for the development of small and medium-sized businesses. To this end, the parties plan to conduct regular dialogue about the economic situation in the country and economic development strategy. The CEPA includes a substantive trade title and substantial obligations in many areas of trade policy. These would strengthen the conditions for bilateral trade between the EU and Armenia, thus taking full account of the commitments of Armenia as a member of the EAEU (European Commission, 2017b article 22). At this new stage of relations between the EU and Armenia, the EU seems to make more effort to connect to the Armenian people, partly to counter Russian-led informational campaigns (Spina, 2018). The public opinion of Armenia is split on the country's foreign policy status. According to one recent comprehensive survey results conducted in May 2017 in conjunction with the Vanadzor Bureau of the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly, 33% of the participants favoured Armenia 's membership of the EU and 32% favoured the EAEU membership (Helsinki Citizens' Assembly-Vanadzor, 2017).

The first Annual Action Plan under the CEPA for the Republic of Armenia was published in 2019 (European Commission, 2019c). At this new stage of the relationship with Armenia, the EU seemed to focus more on raising awareness on the CEPA. To do so, the EU began to allow non-state actors and people to access information on sector reform roadmaps, in order to promote active civil society involvement in CEPA-related reforms in Armenia. Thus, the EU wants to make sure that the Armenian population has the information about activities and EU-funded projects in Armenia. The CEPA Action Plan (European Commission, 2019c) included establishing the EU House(s) in Yerevan and Gyumri, which will serve as multi-purpose hubs for the Armenian people for a direct connection with the EU, its member states and their activities, as well as providing a venue for cultural events, debates, face-to-face meetings, and training courses. (Terzyan, 2019). The short-term result of the CEPA, which is most probable and beneficial for Armenia, is the possibility of starting a dialogue on visa liberalisation that can lead to Armenian people travelling without visa for up to two years. The future economic reforms, for which the EU provides both financial support and expertise, are long-term advantages (Poghosyan, 2018b). The CEPA came into force on 1 March, 2021, after it was ratified by

Armenia, all EU member states and the European Parliament (for more details: (European Commission - Press release, 2021).

Armenia failed to combine the Russian security umbrella with deep economic integration with the EU in September 2013, when President Sargsyan announced that his country would join the EAEU, abandoning the signing of an AA with the EU in response to increased Russian pressure. Overall, Armenia's deviation from the identity-based path has been largely justified in terms of the country's economic and, in particular, security needs, which arguably left Armenia with little room to achieve a Russian-European balance. After the Velvet Revolution in 2018 and the subsequent power transfer in Armenia, this choice is unlikely to change. At the same time, since joining the EAEU, Armenia has sought to retain (and even increase) complementarity by maintaining (and even expanding) relations with the EU, as seen by the CEPA's signing.

5.4.3 EU - Azerbaijan relations in the context of the EaP: Developments from the AA to the Strategic Modernisation/ Partnership Agreements

EU-Azerbaijan relations are currently being conducted within the framework of the EaP. However, the bilateral relationship has been based on the PCA which was signed in 1996. In 2004 and 2009, both sides debated potential follow-up agreements, which finally resulted in the inclusion of Azerbaijan into the ENP and later in the EaP. Despite the divergence in the interests and aspirations of the South Caucasus countries from the very beginning, and in particular since 2010, the EU initiated negotiations to conclude the AAs with each of the South Caucasus countries (Delcour, 2015b). As already seen in section 5.3, only in the case of Georgia, was the AA actually signed. The refusal of Armenia and Azerbaijan to sign the AA is directly linked to the principle of differentiation (see section 4.1.2, also: Shirinov, 2011).

In 2013 the Azerbaijanian government began talks with the EU regarding the AA and emphasised that it was wishing to have an adaptive and tailored agreement to meet their interests and priorities (Cicerescu et al., 2018). Azerbaijan suggested two alternative frameworks: first, in 2013 the Strategic Modernisation Partnership (SMP), which was

soon rejected by the EU, and secondly, the Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA), negotiated since 2017. Azerbaijan wanted to have close cooperation with the EU on its own terms and tried to transform negotiation methods with the EU from unilateral decision-making to a more dialogue-making phase (van Gils, 2018).

When the EU-Azerbaijan talks on the AA began in July 2010, first of all, the EU had a largely regional policy system in mind, while Azerbaijan needed a more distinct framework that better reflected its own interests (Nuriyev, 2011). In addition, as already discussed in section 5.2, the AAs had a clear transformative component to substantially change political and economic policies in partner countries. Azerbaijanian political elites perceived that the agenda was essentially arbitrarily set by the EU and did not adequately include Azerbaijan's interests (Delcour & Duhot, 2011). The political elites of Azerbaijan had repeatedly confirmed that although it sought to have in-depth cooperation with the EU, it had no interest in deep political integration and further institutionalisation of ties (Boonstra, 2015). This lack of interest in Europeanisation was mainly related to the country's economic independence, generous oil and gas reserves as described in chapter 3, its ties with Russia, and Azerbaijan's unwillingness to include the transition of values as part of the relationship (see also: Ghazaryan, 2010).

The political elites of Azerbaijan have shown interest to cooperate with the EU under three basic conditions: any integration should be on an equal footing, focusing on economic benefits and Azerbaijan should have had some clear control over bilateral decision-making processes (Sala, 2014). These conditions were not met in the AA negotiations, which led political elites to rethink Azerbaijan's relationship with the EU beyond the AA and to look for a "lighter" modification (van Gils, 2017). As a result, the Azerbaijanian government officials declared at the Eastern Partnership in Vilnius Summit in November 2013 that the signing of the AA would not take place (Boonstra, 2015). Instead, on 4th April 2013, Azerbaijan proposed the SMP as an alternative to the EU's AA. Azerbaijan created a precedent by proposing its own version of cooperation agreement with the EU when a partner country itself proposes a format of interaction (S. E. Cornell, 2017).

Previously, relations with the countries participating in the EaP assumed the uniformity of the contractual framework and a linear path of development towards increasing economic and political integration with the EU in the absence of the prospect of

membership in the EU. This is the so-called top-down Europeanisation (Lavenexa & Schimmelfennig, 2011), when a partner country is “downloading” EU practices and policies (see section 2.1). Azerbaijan tried to become an “uploader,” not a “downloader” of EU practices and initiated its own version of agreement. In terms of logic of consequences embodied in common interests in terms of relations between Azerbaijan and the EU, the logic of arguing (Risse, 2000) also can explain Azerbaijan’s initiative. Therefore, like in the Habermasian concept of “communicative action” (see section 2.2.3), Azerbaijan created an environment of equality between the third country and the EU. The SMP addressed above mentioned all three basic conditions which were highlighted by Azerbaijan; it was not legally binding (in contrast to the AA) and the PCA was supposed to remain the legal basis for ties (van Gils, 2018). In addition, the SMP would largely follow the EaP’s line but exclude its democratisation, human rights, and democracy parts (Strimbovschi, 2016). Moreover, the SMP would enable Azerbaijan to act selectively in areas of co-operative relations with the EU. In light of the halt to SMP talks, the EU rejected the SMP in 2015 (Stawarz, 2020).

The relations between the EU and Azerbaijan got a new impetus at the Riga EaP summit in May 2015, when the Azerbaijanian government proposed another agreement. At this time the second proposed alternative to the AA was the SPA (Gurbanov, 2017). The EU’s willingness to negotiate an agreement (the second time) proposed by the EU is a clear indicator of Azerbaijan's successful use of bargaining power. To elaborate on the halt to SMP talks, another document was apparently prepared by the EU until Azerbaijan "would clarify" what it wanted from either the AA or the PA (van Gils, 2019). In September 2015, the European Union External Action (EEAS) decided to send a mission to Baku to explore the SPA's options. A draught report was sent to the European Council by the EEAS following this mission, asking for a mandate to formally start negotiations (Rahimov, 2019). However, several days before the mission, a critical resolution on Azerbaijan (see below) was approved by the European Parliament and the government of Azerbaijan asked the EEAS to postpone the mission (van Gils, 2017). The EU expressed its willingness to conduct exploratory talks with the government of Azerbaijan, but was left waiting for months for an invitation from the Aliyev regime (Csabay, 2017).

In general, the effectiveness of the existing EU formats of relations between Azerbaijan and the EU has been criticised more than once by the Azerbaijani side. From 2012 to 2016, no meetings of the Euronest (see section 5.2) between the EU and Azerbaijan took place (Petrova & Raube, 2016a). At the very first meeting in 2017, after a 5-year break, the Azerbaijani deputies announced the ineffectiveness of the Euronest, the EU's prejudice towards Azerbaijan, and the EU's lack of awareness of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (see: EU-Azerbaijan Parliamentary Committee, 2016). During the committee meeting, the parties discussed possible ways of resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict: while the representatives of the EU insisted on a peaceful solution of the issue, the deputies from Azerbaijan expressed their readiness to resolve the conflict by military means due to the absence of other solutions (see: European Parliament, 2017). The Azerbaijani representatives mentioned several times that Azerbaijan “does not exclude the military resolution” (European Parliament, 2017, p. 14), which was basically materialised in September 2020 as already discussed in section 3.3.2.

The scepticism of the Azerbaijani side was preceded by the negative assessment from the European partners regarding the reforms undertaken by Azerbaijan and the general political situation. In 2016, the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe criticised the constitutional reform in Azerbaijan (Council of Europe, 2016). A preliminary commentary was prepared by the commission, based on an unofficial translation of the text of the constitutional amendments: the final document stated that the Azerbaijani side could not provide it, and the Commission also did not have the opportunity to consult with representatives of the Azerbaijani authorities (Council of Europe, 2016, p. 3). The conclusion also outlined that the constitutional amendments were not submitted for discussion to the country's parliament prior to voting in the referendum. Moreover, constitutional amendments which have strengthened and prolonged the power of the president were criticised the most (Council of Europe, 2016, p. 7).

In 2017, Azerbaijan found itself on the verge of exclusion from the Council of Europe due to the failure to comply with the decision of the ECHR on the release of the opposition leader - Ilgar Mammadov (see: European Court of Human Rights, 2014; Freedom House, 2018). Ilgar Mammadov, an opposition politician, was arrested in Baku in early February 2013. He was the director of the Baku Political Studies Programme, which was established

by the Council of Europe's secretariat to promote democracy. In March 2014, he was sentenced to seven years in prison for inciting a riot in Baku (Cooley et al., 2015). Anar Mammadli, chairman of the Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Centre in Baku, was up next in December 2013. His detention was described by Human Rights Watch as "a blatant and cynical act of political revenge" (see: Human Rights Watch, 2013). In May 2014 Mammadli was charged with illegal business activities and sentenced to over five years in prison (Knaus, 2015). He was released from prison in 2016 after receiving a presidential pardon. His conviction, however, has not been lifted, making him ineligible to run in elections (Geybullayeva, 2016).

Persistent criticism from the EU has only increased Azerbaijan's backlash, whose political elites questioned the quality of political processes in the EU itself, which includes the crisis of integration and the difficulties for the EU to interact with the Muslim world (Agayev, 2019). In several instances, Azerbaijanian officials believed that the EU was treating the country unfairly and applying "double standards": first, when it comes to criticism of the DHR, the government believed it was being targeted more harshly than the governments of Armenia and Georgia, and this is thought to be due to Azerbaijan's Muslim rather than Christian background (Gils, 2019). The political elites of Azerbaijan also used problems within the EU, such as migration and terrorism, to undermine the EU's credibility as a normative actor, questioning how the EU can criticise partners while internal issues like Islamophobia are at play (Gils, 2019).

In retrospect, the EU began to approach human rights issues in partner countries more seriously with the adoption of the EaP. But, in return, in 2010 the government of Azerbaijan began to put more pressure on the opposition and political activists (Mirhashimli, 2020). Freedom House (2014) indicates that Azerbaijan's ranking steadily declined between 2009 and 2014, dropping from 6.25 to 6.75. Moreover, as already discussed in section 4.3, a growing pattern of dynasty building in Azerbaijan has been noticeable and, therefore, the country was classified as a "Consolidated Authoritarian Regime" (Freedom House, 2020; Pearce et al., 2018). While looking at the freedom of expression, freedom of association, torture and ill-treatment of political activists and journalists in Amnesty International's annual reports on Azerbaijan, the indicators have been moving downwards since 2011 (Amnesty International, 2011, 2013, 2017, 2019). The

Azerbaijani government has been engaged in the EU institutions' main corruption scandal, named “caviar-diplomacy” (European Stability Initiative, 2012; Knaus, 2015). According to the watchdog organisations (e.g. European Stability Institute, Freedom Files Analytical Centre), between 2012 and 2014 the Azerbaijani government spent significant amounts of money and provided valuable gifts to representatives of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) to decrease the pressures on human rights violence in Azerbaijan (Freedom Files Analytical Centre, 2017). Trips to Azerbaijan were organised by many PACE members and money and expensive gifts were offered (see also: Council of Europe, 2018). What is more, the Organised Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) revealed an investigation in 2018, called “Azerbaijani Laundromat”, which reveals how, between 2012 and 2014, the Azerbaijani government laundered money in the UK (Council of Europe, 2018). It was reported that the \$2.9 billion ran between 2012 and 2014 (approx. \$3 million every day) from companies linked to Azerbaijan’s president and the International Bank of Azerbaijan into four offshore-managed UK companies (Walker & Aten, 2018). From there, it was spent in various countries, including Germany, the UK, France, Turkey, Iran, and Kazakhstan (Altstadt, 2017).

The publication of the Azerbaijani Laundromat shows long-standing suspicions that Azerbaijan had bribed European politicians and policymakers to maintain its good standing in international organisations—most notably the Council of Europe—and access to international finance (the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development) (see: Council of Europe, 2018). In 2017, one of the highlighted cases of politically motivated sentences was the case of Afgan Mukhtarli - the Azerbaijan investigative journalist – who was apparently kidnapped off the streets of Tbilisi, Georgia by Georgian security services and then transported to the Azerbaijani border and handed over to border guards (Amnesty International, 2019). Mukhtarli was investigating Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev’s business interests in Georgia (Csabay, 2017). An Azerbaijani court sentenced him to six years in prison in January 2018 (Mirhashimli, 2020). In April 2018, Ilham Aliyev was elected to a fourth term in a process that, according to the Freedom House , lacked genuine competition (Freedom House, 2018).

As discussed above, the EU has been regularly expressing negative assessments of Azerbaijan's democratic norms, the rule of law and democratic standards (see also: Börzel & Pamuk, 2012). In such circumstances, the future relationships between the EU and Azerbaijan would have meant the transformation of the Europeanisation process. In fact, prioritising stabilisation of the EU, which indicated the need to ensure, first of all, the economic and energy security of the EU member states themselves (Koenig, 2016),. Therefore, cooperation between Azerbaijan and the EU relates to the strategic interests of both, whereas Azerbaijan did not undertake to fully follow the political and economic development model proposed by the EU.

One of the main arguments put forward, as explained in chapter 3, is that the EU could not have a strong normative agenda in Azerbaijan due to the EU's reliance on Azerbaijanian oil, as well as other strategic interests (e.g. Csabay, 2017; Nuriyev, 2008). However, there could be practical reasons for the EU's inconsistent policies, forcing it to be "flexible" in its application of principles in foreign policy, because the EaP's "one size fits all" approach did not work. As a result, the EaP's values promotion effects on Azerbaijan have remained minimal. Despite its efforts, the EU's pro-activeness to promote "shared values" has its limits, which may be partly to blame for the EU's limited success in achieving its transformative goals in the South Caucasus. The EU lacks the capacity and expertise to monitor values-related reforms in its neighbourhood (Gils, 2019). Moreover, the argument of strategic interests explains the reason for not imposing any political conditionality on Azerbaijan to change the regime's treatment of opposition figures, human rights activists, or critical journalists (Interview 5). Also, the lack of political will has been attributed to a general lack of ambition in the EU's foreign policy, as well as the perception that Azerbaijan is far away, located in a region rife with undemocratic regimes where European values may never be adopted (Ahmed et al., 2016; Interview 5).

5.4.3.1 Status Quo of the EaP in Azerbaijan: Priorities and results

In July 2018, the EU and the government of Azerbaijan signed a document called Partnership Priorities, which replaced the ENP Action Plan (European Commission,

2006c) and can be viewed as a first step toward establishing a cooperation agenda until the legal basis for relations is updated (until the SPA is concluded) (Gurbanov, 2018). The Partnership Priorities have set shared policy priorities to direct and strengthen the partnership between the EU and Azerbaijan over the coming years. The agreement was signed by then High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini and Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov of Azerbaijan. Although this agreement is largely based on the concept of differentiation, four key areas of cooperation under the Partnership Priorities represent those defined under the framework of the EaP, namely:

- Strengthening of institutions and good governance. This includes fighting corruption, improving public administration, and building capacity to tackle crime and terrorism.
- Economic growth and market opportunities. This includes diversifying the economy, encouraging WTO membership, and improving the climate for business and investment.
- Connectivity, energy efficiency, climate, and environmental protection. This includes support for the capacity of Azerbaijan to serve as a trade, logistics and transport centre, regulatory assistance and sustainable resource management, the active cooperation on energy connectivity and the substantial progress made on the Southern Gas Corridor.
- Mobility and people-to-people contacts. This includes fostering education and human resources and creating more opportunities to interact and exchange experiences with EU and Azerbaijani people (for more details see: The EU-Azerbaijan Cooperation Council, 2018).

As outlined, the first priorities listed relate to good governance and strong institutions, the rule of law and human rights that might be of greater concern to the EU and less to Azerbaijan. At the same time, priorities that might be of greater interest to Azerbaijan are economic diversification and energy trade. However, the agreement did not mention the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict at all (see: The EU-Azerbaijan Cooperation Council, 2018). The Partnership Priorities are not legally binding and may be considered less significant to Azerbaijan (Abdullayeva, 2020). Thus, the Azerbaijanian side agreed to sign the

document without any references to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which has been the key policy goal of the government of Azerbaijan (Sherr, 2017; Spina, 2018). The Nagorno Karabakh conflict has been the main impediment why Azerbaijan and the EU could not conclude an agreement as of 2020.

The key factors explaining why Azerbaijan and the EU were not able to turn the Partnership Priorities into an actual agreement are in the content of this document itself. Two most important issues – for Azerbaijan, the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and for the EU, democratic reforms, including human rights and the democratisation agenda – have not been prioritised, but have only been discussed in general terms in the context of the July 2018 agreement (Rahimov, 2019). However, this did not prevent the parties from issuing their own statements with various interpretations on the day this agreement was signed. The statement of the Azerbaijanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs interpreted Partnership Priorities as renewing the commitment of both sides to the principles of territorial integrity and the inviolability of internationally recognised borders, as well as to the independence and sovereignty of Azerbaijan (Vieira & Vasilyan, 2018b). However, the Azerbaijanian Minister did not mention human rights, democratisation, or the rule of law (van Gils, 2019). In contrast, the European External Action Service's press release referred to respect for human rights, democracy, the rule of law and dialogue with civil society as part of the agenda set out by Baku and Brussels, without mentioning the principle of territorial integrity and related issues (Rahimov, 2019). The Azerbaijanian delegation vetoed the final statement of the summit, saying that the agreement did not respect the concept of territorial integrity (Delcour & Wolczuk, 2020). Thus, the final text was downgraded from "declaration" to "chair conclusions" and was signed only by the EU's High Representative of the Foreign Affairs, Federica Mogherini, instead of all participants (Rahimov, 2019).

On April 4, 2019, when Mogherini used the word "Inshallah" ("God willing" in Azerbaijanian language) to describe progress towards the end of the negotiations, optimism about the coming EU-Azerbaijan agreement peaked. Many in Azerbaijan regarded her remarks enthusiastically, if not naively, as a warning that the partnership agreement could have been signed imminently (Davtyan, 2019). However, as already mentioned, it has not materialised yet as of 2020.

The EU recognises the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and has already imprinted its role in various important documents (European Commission, 2012a, 2019a) and understands the situation in this area on a regional scale. However, the EU has evidently struggled with the wording of that position—notably in contrast to its more resolute statements of supporting territorial integrity in the previously concluded AA with Georgia. After meeting with EU Commissioner Johannes Hahn on June 13, 2019, Azerbaijani President Aliyev stated that his country was looking to "focus more on the economic matter" (Rahimov, 2019). Indeed, as already discussed in section 3.6, the key interest for both - Azerbaijan and the EU - remains energy cooperation. In 2013, Azerbaijan and the EU signed an agreement on the supply of gas to Europe from the Shah Deniz II field (Mirhashimli, 2020). In June 2018, the Trans-Anatolian gas pipeline was opened, which delivers Azerbaijani gas to Greece through Turkey (Mirhashimli, 2020). Despite these big energy projects between Azerbaijan and the EU, in 2017 the State Oil Company of the Republic of Azerbaijan signed an agreement with PJSC Gazprom for the supply of 1.6 billion m³ of Russian gas annually (Gazprom Export, 2017), thus reaffirming Azerbaijan's aspiration for a multi-vector approach in foreign policy and economic relations.

The ENP has always been described as a “transformative policy with normative characteristics (Horký-Hlucháň & Kratochvíl, 2014). However, the EU's normative foreign policy has been inconsistent with Azerbaijan because collaboration has only progressed in restricted areas linked to the economic and strategic interests of Azerbaijan, undermining the EU's normative commitment. Similar to Armenia, Azerbaijan does not want to disrupt its ties with Russia while strengthening its relationship with the EU. Azerbaijan urges the EU to take into account the key interests of Azerbaijan which are, on one hand, a descriptive approach to its territorial integrity, and, on the other hand, its unwillingness to jeopardise relations with Russia. The foreign policy of Azerbaijan is mainly focused on "balancing the interests" of various stakeholders in the region, which is considered a successful way of maintaining stability in the South Caucasus (Rahimov, 2019). The decision to take a "pragmatic" approach to the different superpowers in the region rather than aligning more closely with only one is explained by the generous natural resources of Azerbaijan (Stimbovischi, 2015). The decision to pursue closer cooperation with the EU is based on an assumption of Azerbaijani political elites that

an alliance with the EU is more economic and less political in nature (Cicerescu et al., 2018). Both the "balance of power approach" of Azerbaijan and the confrontation around Nagorno-Karabakh express themselves more than merely economic and security concerns. Therefore, in practice, Azerbaijan's foreign policy towards the EU appear to transcend logic of appropriateness and are closely intertwined with variables, which are better explained by rationalism. Based on the above analysis, one can expect the cooperation between Azerbaijan and the EU to continue with the focus on strategic interests. The Azerbaijanian government is likely to maintain its opposition to the EU's values promotion agenda, but whether it succeeds depends on its bargaining power (see also: Gils, 2019).

5.5 Conclusions to chapter 5

As chapter 5 demonstrated Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia have chosen different ways of integration with the EU in the context of the EaP. The South Caucasus countries have been caught between two major players in the region - Russia and the EU. The political elites of the South Caucasus see the EaP as a political opportunity structure that offers both opportunities and restrictions. Which side will ultimately prevail depends not only on the EU's ability to push for reforms, but also on the acceptance and willingness of political elites to implement them selectively in a targeted manner which is linked to internal political constraints such as: national elites' resistance to democratic transformation and unfavourable internal conditions for such democratic transformation. Economic and security factors tend to be more relevant in shaping all three countries' stance towards the EaP. In fact, Azerbaijan prefers cooperation with the EU over energy projects. Moreover, the SPA between Azerbaijan and the EU means the rationalisation of the EU's policy in the South Caucasus, its essential change, reflected in the predominance of strategic interests over the values agenda of the EU. The relationship between the EU and Georgia proved to be a multifaceted and complex issue. Even though Georgia is a frontrunner of the EaP, the country is still facing challenges in terms of democratisation and Europeanisation. Political polarisation and oligarchic structure in

Georgia jeopardise the very institutions that an EU-led reform process was supposed to improve. The chapter also showed that the membership goal remains as primarily related to Georgia's European identity and shared values. However, there is a mismatch between Georgia and the EU in this regard. Last of all, Armenia has demonstrated a move from the *homo sociologicus* to the *homo economicus* modes of action, considering Armenia's U-turn from the AA to the EAEU. Armenia became a member of the EAEU, due to strategic vulnerabilities and socio-political and economic problems, which were intermingled with Armenia's national interests, economic dependency and security.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The following chapter provides a brief overview of the research. It addresses the key empirical findings of the thesis as well as a discussion of the research questions and objectives as described in chapter 1. Last of all, the chapter presents the final remarks and recommendations.

6.1 Summary of the research

This thesis studied the relationship between the EU and the South Caucasus. Its theoretical framework was conceptualised in chapter 2. This chapter operationalised Europeanisation theories, narrowed them down, and identified key concepts and terms to study the relations between the EU and the South Caucasus. On these grounds the thesis developed the rationalism-constructivism approach as a complementary framework through pragmatism and eclecticism to study the relations between the EU and the South Caucasus from the perspective of different logics of action. This approach helped to provide important causal insights of the complex relations between the South Caucasus countries and the EU and to formulate alternative explanations. The aim of this model was to show that actors' actions, whether these be the EU and/or the South Caucasus countries, cannot be placed into purely constructivist or purely rationalist modes of action. In practice, both logic of consequences and logic of appropriateness can play a role to conduct a specific foreign policy initiative. The thesis showed that at times the EU indeed acted as a rational power and also remained committed to its values-based agenda towards external Europeanisation. At the same time, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia employed different modes of action at various times, depending on their social, political and economic realities.

Chapter 3 investigated the beginning of relations between the EU and the South Caucasus after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The thesis looked at the historical background of the South Caucasus countries and identified their similar political and socio-economic conditions and developments during the pre- and post-Communist eras. The developments during the first independent republics of 1918-1921 have also outlined a

similar pattern of institutional building in the South Caucasus. The analysis conducted in this chapter showed that the EU was a normative actor in the 1990s, which was guided by its pre-established norms and values. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the EU created the TACIS programme to develop cooperation with the new independent states. However, at the same time, the EU acted as a rational actor (*homo economicus*) whose goal was to spread its influence in its neighbourhood. Furthermore, the EU applied its normative instruments according to its *acquis communautaire* and also used the Council of Europe to promote European values and identity in the South Caucasus. Section 3.6 showed that the EU's interest towards the South Caucasus region was increased significantly after the emergence of real prospects for the utilisation of large-scale oil and gas reserves in offshore fields from the Caspian Sea. This goal of the EU was motivated by the prospects of balancing the energy dependency on Russian gas and diversification of resources. Given the catastrophic economic recession, conflicts, political destabilisation and general political and socio-economic conditions in the South Caucasus as shown in section 3.2, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia accepted Europeanisation for the opportunities that the EU had offered by providing humanitarian aid, technical assistance, and conflict resolution. However, the South Caucasus countries have stalled in terms of democratic transition due to weak institutions, illiberal elites, underdeveloped economies and protracted armed conflicts. Later on, these poor political transitional circumstances, besides the geographical argument, were used by the European Council as reasons to exclude the South Caucasus countries from the first ENP documents.

Chapter 4 analysed the ENP. The chapter showed that the creation of the ENP was guided by considerations, which fit into both rationalist and constructivist approaches. The ENP paid special attention to the energy security of the EU and material gains from the South Caucasus region, in particular Azerbaijan's energy resources. However, the ENP also promoted its values such as democracy, human rights, the rule of law and good governance in the South Caucasus. The values-based approach transferred the relationship between the EU and the South Caucasus countries into a different, more normative level. The EU's normative approach was further confirmed by the content analysis of the Action Plans (APs) of Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia in section 4.4.2. As a result, the ENP was remarkably balanced in terms of its attention/goals to interests and

values. The response of Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia towards the ENP highlight diverging trends of the three countries. They showed different interests and results during the ENP implementation. While the relations between Azerbaijan and the EU were based mostly on rational considerations, Georgia and Armenia were more involved in terms of the ENP implementation, advocated by their ruling elites based on the context of economy, security, identity and history. The chapter also identified the shortcoming of the EU's "one size fits all" approach and the initial signs of the diverging nature of the Europeanisation process in the South Caucasus.

Chapter 5 investigated the relations between the EU and the South Caucasus in the context of the EaP. The aim of the EaP was to consider the shortcomings of the ENP. However, the EU has kept the "one size fits all" approach and made clear its willingness to sign the Association Agreements (AAs) and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (DCFTA) with all participant countries, including all three countries of the South Caucasus. As a result, only Georgia from the South Caucasus was interested to sign the AA while the other two, namely Azerbaijan and Armenia, did not. This outcome illustrates the EU's attempt at the inclusiveness of the EaP and the lack of a differentiation approach. In the absence of an adequate set of tools and without proper differentiation of the EaP, a values-based agenda of the EaP was perceived by political elites of Azerbaijan as a major threat to their authority and consequently preferred to focus solely on energy, economic and trade relations. In addition, Azerbaijan proposed to the EU its own version of an agreement and used its bargaining power to demand being treated by the EU as an equal partner. Azerbaijan tried to become an "uploader", instead of "downloader", of EU practices and thus tried to transform the EaP relationship from top-down to bottom up. This case demonstrates the importance of a more differentiated approach to relations with the EaP countries. In parallel, Georgia - EU relations have been guided by the AA and the DCFTA. Considering the fact that Georgia is the only case in this case study research which is the most successful downloader of Europeanisation, the empirical analysis showed that the Europeanisation process in Georgia is a multifaceted and a complex issue. Even though Georgia is a frontrunner of the EaP, the country is still facing challenges in terms of democratisation. The chapter also showed that the membership goal remains as primarily related to Georgia's European identity and shared values (logic

of appropriateness). However, there is a mismatch between Georgia and the EU in this regard. Last of all, Armenia's case proved theoretical assumptions, which were made in section 2.2.3, that the actor can move from the homo sociologicus to the homo economicus modes of action. Indeed, Armenia's "U-turn" from the AA to the EAEU was guided by rational considerations, taking into account Russia's influence on Armenia. Therefore, the chapter addressed this issue and analysed the complex factors that determined Armenia's foreign policy change.

6.2 Review and discussion of the main conclusions

The thesis has addressed four research questions:

- What factors have determined the relations between the South Caucasus and the EU since the early 1990s?
- How did the ENP affect relations between the EU and the South Caucasus?
- Why and under what conditions have Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia established different relations with the EU through the EaP?
- What types of attitude/action have the EU and the South Caucasus countries been employing in relations to each other?

The answers to the first question, together with the corresponding conclusions are summarised in section 6.2.1. Sections 6.2.2 and 6.2.3 provide the answers to the second and the third questions, respectively. Last of all, the answers to the fourth question are on the part presented in all three sections of the conclusions.

6.2.1 Complex factors and obstacles to EU-South Caucasus relations since the 1990s

The EU can be considered a latecomer to the South Caucasus. During the early 1990s, the South Caucasus was barely on the EU's radar because the post-Soviet space was then still largely a *terra incognita* for the EU, focusing on its enlargement process to include the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and only having a diplomatic toolbox for the

South Caucasus countries. In the 1990s Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia suffered from weak statehood, poor governance and weak institutions, which were shown in terms of democracy scores, corruption indicators and the GDP in Figure 2 and Table 6, respectively. The EU's initial involvement in the South Caucasus was primarily in terms of financial assistance. The EU's humanitarian aid for the South Caucasus through the TACIS, the TRACECA and the INOGATE in the 1990s generally created precedents of the first relations between the EU and the South Caucasus countries and set up the first modes of action for the process of Europeanisation in the South Caucasus.

The EU's first move towards the South Caucasus region was not through sanctions but through persuasion, conviction and assistance. This type of relations has created the momentum of the EU as a soft power, which was trying to counterbalance Russia's hard power that has continued to dominate the South Caucasus region until the present date (with some exception of Georgia since the Rose Revolution in 2003). The PCAs, which the EU signed with the South Caucasus countries in 1996, established a political dialogue and human rights clauses to target democratisation in this region. This modest ambition on the part of the EU can be explained both by the way the EU looked at the former USSR at the time (e.g., *terra incognita*; Russia's backyard) and by the limits of European foreign policy in the 1990s. Four factors determined the relations between the South Caucasus and the EU in the 1990s:

- Low profile of the South Caucasus region in the EU agenda and the lack of experience and expertise of the EU's foreign policy in this region.
- Lack of cooperation between European institutions (EU, Council of Europe, OSCE) regarding the South Caucasus.
- Poor political, socio-economic and security conditions and developments of Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia.
- Russia's presence and interests in the South Caucasus region.

The bilateral relations between the EU and the South Caucasus countries were complemented by strategically priority actions with a multilateral focus. In the 1990s, the EU was guided by its pre-established norms and values while building the relations with the South Caucasus countries. As already discussed above, the PCAs were the basic

frameworks for EU's relations with Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia which remained mainly economic and technical and had a common core for all three countries. Based on these premises, the thesis has argued that in this early stage of relations the EU was a normative actor whose actions were based on its pre-established norms and values, without any specific framework for the South Caucasus. Through financial and technical aid, the EU acted as a norm-ruled community associated with soft power. Moreover, the members of the EU used the Council of Europe as a platform to spread the European values and norms in the South Caucasus. However, the thesis showed that the accession negotiations of Azerbaijan into the Council of Europe were based on the fixed target and material factors (logic of consequences), in particular energy security interests and economic considerations. The Council of Europe, including members of EU-15, prioritised energy security and stability over Azerbaijan's progress in democratisation. This example demonstrates the validity of the theoretical assumption, which was developed in section 2.2.3, that the actors can employ the homo economicus or homo sociologicus modes of action depending on their social and political roles and situations. Nevertheless, in the 1990s, the Europeanisation process in the South Caucasus (particularly in Azerbaijan) was guided by strategically priority action.

It was clear that one of reasons for the failure to build sovereignty and democracy in the South Caucasus was directly related to the will of the political elites and to the weakness of their democratic credentials. The economic and political instability and wars also laid the foundation for the extremely poor statehood that was characteristic of the South Caucasus. By signing the PCAs with the EU, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia declared their readiness to build political sovereignty and parliamentary democracy. However, they all failed to *download* Europeanisation effectively as shown in sections 3.2 and 4.3.

In the early 2000s, the EU has significantly increased its presence in the neighbourhood, including the South Caucasus. During the 2004 enlargement, the EU decided to develop more sustainable relations with neighbouring countries. Initially conceived as a mixed approach with an ambitious and yet ambiguous vision to see a "ring of friends" surrounding the EU, the EU's relations with its neighbours had evolved into a comprehensive European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) with a complex set of instruments and limited financial assistance.

Following the creation of the ENP in 2003, the EU simultaneously increased its engagement and interest in the South Caucasus region, which was accelerated by a number of factors. The Rose Revolution in Georgia in 2003 and President Saakashvili's active promotion of Euro-Atlantic integration strengthened the EU's interest in the South Caucasus, which until then had been excluded from the ENP because the region was considered geographically far from the EU. The Rose Revolution and democratic changes in Georgia were indeed one of the factors which drove the EU, under the impulse of the European Parliament, to integrate Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan into the ENP in 2004. The 2008 Russia-Georgia war was another significant turning point in this regard. With the deployment of the EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia following the war, the EU gained a new level of visibility in the region, becoming the security actor in Georgia, yet with limited capabilities. The desire to strengthen its energy security was another reason why the South Caucasus countries were included into the ENP. Initially, the first concept of the ENP noted that this programme did not extend to the South Caucasus because of their geographical location. But already in the EU Security Strategy of 2003, it was recommended to show a more active interest in problems of the South Caucasus countries and extend the benefits of economic and political cooperation. It cannot be said that the EU was interested in developing relations with the countries of the South Caucasus exclusively in the economic (energy) sphere, however, the EU's energy security considerations were rightly given a prominent place (see section 4.2).

The ENP sought to address two critical strategic issues: to avoid drawing new dividing lines in Europe and to promote stability and prosperity within and beyond the EU's new borders. Despite these remarkable goals, the ENP had a conflicting logic embedded in its rhetoric and actions from the start, which ultimately prevented its successful implementation in the South Caucasus. It was difficult for the policy to reconcile its "idealist" rhetoric of forming a "ring of friends" around Europe with its "realist" security-based need to protect its borders and surround itself with well governed countries. It also struggled to find effective ways to persuade the political elites of Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia to undertake painful and costly reforms in exchange for a less tangible promise of future economic integration and limited financial assistance.

The EU launched the ENP to ensure innovation and strategy in terms of relations with neighbours, however, it was dominated by the “mechanics” of enlargement (see section 4.1) which was guided by an incremental process, namely, the “top-down” transfer of the EU normative *acquis*. Given its EU-centric nature, this approach was bound to have limited appeal in the neighbourhood, instead eliciting widespread discontent and even resistance. As a result, the ENP was received with a mixed and delegitimising response from the South Caucasus countries, who were either hesitant to accept or rejective of Europeanisation.

In 2009, the ENP was split into two distinct regional initiatives, the Eastern Partnership (EaP) and the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), and had a more differentiated focus as well as a highly technocratic apparatus of expertise, budgetary, and legal instruments (see section 5.2). The Association Agreements (AAs), which included, in addition to the political *acquis*, Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (DCFTAs) and Mobility partnerships (people-to-people contacts), had become a reference framework for structuring EU relations with its neighbours. However, the policy has struggled to gain traction in the South Caucasus and has proven to be ineffective in stabilising the region and delivering the EU's transformative agenda. However, it could be argued that the EaP succeeded in loosening the “stranglehold” (but not eliminating) of EU's “top-down” approach by shifting the EU's relations with neighbouring countries to a more dialogical dimension, which was coined as “more for more”, “differentiation” and “joint ownership” approaches, that allowed neighbours to become “drivers” of their own reforms and get financial assistance based on adhering to the EU *acquis*. The EU-Azerbaijan relationship was one of the most instructive cases for examining the differentiation approach. Azerbaijan has expressed its dissatisfaction with the EU's policies, calling them “non-inclusive” and EU-centric. The Aliyev regime openly objected to the EU's unilateral stance and demanded more equal treatment. Armenia had an attempt to become the driver of their own reforms. The political costs of engaging with the EU were low, and Armenian political elites could gain economic benefits and modernise the country by having close relations with the EU. Armenian authorities, by promoting Armenia's European identity, successfully interacted with the EU during the negotiations for Association Agreements and DCFTAs, despite their non-democratic profile. While Russia did not initially

constrain Armenia's efforts to have close relations with the EU, this was abruptly changed in 2013. Russia became concerned about the EU's growing influence in the region, especially after launching its own economic integration project (EACU). Georgia's case study has shown the limits of "joint ownership". The lack of ownership of the reform process within Georgia is the consequence of the EU's "top down" governance. The EU limits the possibility of contestation for Georgia by defining and controlling the reform process, promoting an EU-driven normative agenda and ignoring practices. Slow progress in the DCFTA implementation and no tangible trade relations with the EU illustrates how Georgia is grappling with implementing reforms to meet trade related EU standards, while increasing trade relations with Russia and the CIS, due to the easy access (fewer regulations) and politics of normalisation by the ruling GD party. As a result, rather than attempting to create a space where the partner countries' dispositions can coexist with EU norms, the latter are frequently given supremacy. Thus, the EU-neighbourhood relations (EU-Georgia relations in particular) are defined more in asymmetry than as reciprocal alignment and/or "bottom up" Europeanisation.

6.2.2 Political conditionality and the South Caucasus countries' diverging patterns of persistence to the ENP

After the creation of the ENP in 2004, the Europeanisation process in the South Caucasus has become much more coordinated and integrated. As discussed, the ENP was a fusion of the EU's security-related concerns and normative identity and the EU used a normative agenda as a tool for spreading stability and security in its neighbourhood. In fact, the EU was still relying on its normative instruments according to its *acquis communautaire* yet the EU was aware of security goals it wanted to achieve in the South Caucasus. Thus, in the ENP, where geopolitical, economic and normative motives are discernible, rationalism and constructivism can be seen as complementary in explaining relations between the EU and the South Caucasus in the context of the ENP.

Having the similar prospects for political conditionality, the South Caucasus countries have shown different interests and results of the ENP implementation. The evolution and

development of the ENP in the South Caucasus has shown political, economic, social diverging patterns and persistence. Despite Georgia's and Armenia's similarities in general trajectory and coordinative approach towards the ENP, their overall results of the implementation of the ENP differ, which is related to political will of the ruling elites to push for reforms. Thus, the outcome of the ENP policy and the later developments of the EaP were greatly limited due to the internal context.

In chapters 3 and 4 it was shown that rational considerations primarily justify the ambitions of Azerbaijan towards the ENP. The country has been more interested in the energy and economic cooperation than in adopting EU rules and standards. This was confirmed by the AP for Azerbaijan, which exclusively included reference in the political dialogue to energy security issues. Azerbaijan saw the ENP as a means of maintaining a balanced diplomacy between the EU and Russia. The overall implementation of the ENP in Azerbaijan was unsatisfactory. While the EU has been successful in obtaining Azerbaijan's participation in its initiatives, such as twinning projects, it has not been able to effectively use this leverage in terms of implementation of reforms. Azerbaijan has been dissatisfied with the EU-centric decision-making process and felt unrecognised in terms of having its own interests and needs equally represented in bilateral relations. Azerbaijan appeared to have grown its confidence as an actor since the mid-2000s as the Aliyev regime consolidated during this time. While the Human Rights situation was deteriorating, with oppression of political opponents and an increasing number of political prisoners, the country's economic importance was increasing due to its energy resources which affected economic growth. This factor increased friction with the EU, as well as self-confidence and assertiveness of the Aliyev's regime, which in fact ignored EU's pressure to implement the ENP related reforms. The relationship between Azerbaijan and the EU has been becoming more symmetrical, not because of Azerbaijan's energy resources as such, but because of its political elites' ability to strategically apply those resources. The strategic use of "bargaining power", which was analysed in this country's case study (section 5.4.3), distinguishes Azerbaijan from Georgia and Armenia in terms of their relationships with the EU.

The cases of Georgia and Armenia indicate that the size of the economy and the presence of an intensified security dilemma lead to economic and security considerations. Despite

the fact that both countries have shown more interest in closer cooperation with the EU than has Azerbaijan, they have fallen short in terms of implementation of reforms.

Georgia has been the most successful downloader of Europeanisation because of its two main objectives. The first goal is related to the will of the political elites of Georgia to leave Russia's sphere of influence; the second - to integrate the country with the EU. Saakashvili's government believed that European integration would help Georgia achieve long-term political, economic, and social stability and prosperity. Russia has been the main threat to Georgia's security and territorial integrity, due to Russia-backed separatist conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia and the Russia-Georgia war in 2008. As a result, Georgia has been wishing to portray itself to the EU as a regional leader in democratic, economic, and institutional reforms. However, Georgia was still sliding toward nondemocratic tendencies under President Saakashvili as illustrated by shortcomings in electoral process, increase in the use of excessive force by the police, media freedom and political polarisation. As a result, Georgia's performance in implementing the ENP was mediocre: it was not as hesitant as Azerbaijan's, but it could not keep up its ambitions – to become the member of the EU.

Despite being portrayed as pro-Russian, Armenia has consistently asserted its European identity. This process began during the Kocharyan presidency, which also happened to coincide with the country's admission to the ENP. During the presidency of Serzh Sargsyan in the late 2000s, Armenia's sense of belonging to Europe was made more explicit and became more deeply entrenched in the elites' narrative. Armenia's Europeanness, like Georgia's, has been presented as a political choice as well as framed in historical, cultural, and civilisational terms. However, Armenia was a more hesitant partner for the EU in terms of ENP implementation (unlike Georgia), but successful in coordination level (similar to Georgia). Armenia has never expressed any membership aspirations to the EU. This was due to the fact that Armenia wanted to maintain cooperation with Russia. While the country saw a security partnership with Russia and the adoption of EU reform templates as compatible, it kept a low profile in the ENP, given Russia's growing irritation with EU policies.

6.2.3 Pragmatic differentiation and three perspectives of the EaP

The EU had an objective to play a more active role in the transitional process of the South Caucasus countries through the creation of the ENP. As discussed in the previous section, the EU's aspiration was guided by its normative order and strategic interests. Since 2009, the EaP has been envisaging the establishment of bilateral and multilateral relations with six participant countries, including the South Caucasus. These two fields of collaboration (bilateral and multilateral) were the key characteristics that differentiated the EaP from the ENP. Within the context of bilateral relations, the EU has launched new, more customised AAs, which have replaced the PCAs. Such strengthened bilateral arrangements were supposed to be clearly tailored to the needs of each partner country, designed to create a clear political connection between the EU and the partner countries and to facilitate further economic integration through the DCFTA. However, the EU could only succeed in signing the AA with Georgia, without membership perspective. The absence of future membership guarantees hinders the EU's normative power in the neighbourhood (at least among countries who are interested in membership such as Georgia) and on the other hand it causes the problem of mismatch of priorities/goals as shown in Georgia's case. Rational considerations have also been dominant in relations between Georgia and the EU. Georgia's security dilemma is more complicated than that of Azerbaijan and Armenia. The Georgian government, besides two secessionist conflicts, faced Russia's military interference, which was actually materialised in 2008 during the Russian-Georgian war. Georgia thus sees the "Russian element" as the root cause of its territories' frozen disputes and hopes that the EU would help to control and normalise these conflicts (see section 3.3.1 and 5.2.4). In addition to rational considerations, the thesis argued that ideational variables also need to be taken into account when discussing the current relations between Georgia and the EU. The European identity of the country is more or less taken for granted and there is no question of the European identity of Georgia. Section 5.2.1 has shown that Europeanisation of Georgia is supported by most of the actors in the country - government, political parties, population, and civil society. However, the Georgian Orthodox Church, which is the strong institution in Georgia, questions the EU's cultural compatibility with Georgia's conservative values and identity, which in fact affects the Europeanisation process in the country.

Azerbaijan's concerns over balancing the superpowers (Russia and the EU) and maintaining the stability of state fits in the logic of consequences - firstly, with respect for its generous resources, and secondly with the dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh. The decision to take a "pragmatic" approach to the different superpowers in the region rather than aligning more closely with only one is explained by the complicated geopolitical climate of Azerbaijan. Russia has been imposing political pressure on Azerbaijan through close military collaboration with Armenia. Both the "balance of power approach" of Azerbaijan and the confrontation over Nagorno-Karabakh prevail to be more than merely rationalist considerations. Economic cooperation with the EU, which has a less political and values-based agenda, is seen as more appropriate and beneficial for the country. However, Azerbaijan's foreign policy, besides economy and security, is also based on considerations that fit into the logic of appropriateness. As shown in section 5.4.2, Azerbaijan's political elites consider that it is difficult for the EU to interact with the Muslim world. In several instances, Azerbaijanian political elites blamed the EU in treating the country unfairly and applying "double standards" because of their religion. Therefore, the constructivist impediment to Azerbaijan's cooperation with the EU is related to identity (religion) as well. As a result, values promotion will continue to be contested unless both parties (Azerbaijan and the EU) can have an equal say in policymaking and see their norms represented. In other words, unless relations are elevated to a political level, progress in this area will be hampered. This discussion demonstrates that the boundaries between rationalist and constructivist approaches are not simple to distinguish, and materialist and ideational motives for action can actually be closely intertwined and intermingled with each other, which justifies the implementation of eclecticism in the theoretical framework of the thesis (as shown in section 2.2.3).

Armenia's political elites chose to strengthen ties with the EU by negotiating an AA and a DCFTA. The EU was seen as a legitimate model for Armenia's much-needed economic modernisation in a rapidly deteriorating regional context. However, Armenia's strategy to have close relations with the EU and become an association member of the EaP crumbled in 2013 when Russia increased pressure on the country to prevent it from signing an AA/ DCFTA with the EU. Armenia has moved from the logic of appropriateness

to the logic of consequences mode of action, considering Armenia's U-turn from the AA to the EAEU. As section 5.4.2 has shown, this move was guided by factors which are better explained by rationalism and includes dependency on Russia, the strategic vulnerabilities and socio-politic problems in Armenia. As suggested by the pragmatic, empirically grounded choice of rationalism and constructivism, such a move is quite possible among actors and they may employ a utilitarian or normative mode of reasoning and acting and/or move from one mode to another. While security considerations were certainly important in Armenia's decision to join the EAEU, the economic rationale has not been supported by evidence. As section 5.4.2 has analysed, apart from keeping Russian gas prices low, Armenia's membership in the EAEU has brought no clear economic benefits so far but rather has increased its dependency on Russia, which negatively affected Armenia's foreign trade in 2015 due to the spillover effect from Russia's recession (see also section 5.3).

As outlined in chapter 2, the process of transferring the EU *acquis communautaire* to third countries is an indispensable part of Europeanisation. This process could be quite perplexing because EU initiatives might be directed towards countries that do not identify with a common European space, and/or want to preserve their system of values, their individual ways of developing integration processes in ways different to those favoured by the EU. Armenia and Azerbaijan are the examples of such (ineffective) Europeanisation.

6.3 Final remarks and recommendations

This thesis contributes to the body of knowledge on the EU-neighbourhood relations. The thesis has demonstrated that the EU can act as a rational geopolitical power and, at the same time, remain committed to its norm-based reform agenda. The thesis has also shown that the South Caucasus countries' actions related to their relationships with the EU can not be placed into purely constructivist or purely rationalist modes of actions. This is because in practice both rational considerations and logic of appropriateness can play a role in conducting a certain foreign policy initiative. However, the dominant modes of

action in relations between actors do exist. This case study has shown that rationalist modes of action predominantly determine the relations between the EU and the South Caucasus countries.

Europeanisation through the EaP has not been effective in the South Caucasus due to a number of problematic issues which have had a negative impact on implementation of this programme.

Firstly, the thesis outlined that the priorities of the EaP are imposed on the partners and not merely negotiated. This was clearly demonstrated by Azerbaijan's attempt to employ a bottom-up approach towards the EU by initiating the Strategic Modernisation Partnership (SMP), which was rejected by the EU. It was evident that the SMP was rejected by the EU mainly due to the incompatible terms of the agreement imposed by Azerbaijan. However, it is worth noting that Azerbaijan, by using its bargaining power, tried to create an environment of equality between itself and the EU, even though it was not successful in finalising this objective.

Secondly, due to its relatively obscure character, the external Europeanisation process (whether it is the ENP or EaP) is often misinterpreted by partners who see it as an airlock to prepare for membership. However, the EU refuses irremediably to grant any future prospect of membership to the partner countries. Indeed, the EaP seeks to secure and stabilise the neighbourhood in order to benefit from an "arc of friends" with good governance at its borders. The EU has therefore to clearly define the (interim) finality of the EaP and redefine its borders. One of the reasons for excluding the South Caucasus from the ENP in 2003 was justified by geographical location, although the AA is already recognising Georgia to be an Eastern European country.

Thirdly, this thesis has made it possible to highlight the fact that political elites of the South Caucasus carry out cost-benefit calculations. This phenomenon is clearly sensitive in the context of Georgia which has invested heavily in the AA and the DCFTA despite all the contingencies imposed on it. Moreover, the significant differences in level of Europeanisation of the South Caucasus countries results from the different development models and uneven socio-political transformations of these countries. Such a complex,

multi-speed and multi-level Europeanisation process is complicated by the attempts of the South Caucasus countries to form their national and regional identity.

The South Caucasus countries proved to be a unique case study framework for the analysis of the EaP since these three countries have shown different developments and results of this programme. The cooperation frameworks promoted by the EU in the South Caucasus (AA with Georgia, CEPA with Armenia, SPA with Azerbaijan) are the consequence of the different stances of the political elites of the South Caucasus which complicates EaP's successful implementation in this region. The EU seems to hesitate between a pragmatic project-based approach, and a more ambitious involvement which has still to be defined. Therefore, the EU fails to come up with a precise strategy towards the South Caucasus.

It is clear that the success of the EaP in the South Caucasus is greatly determined by the following factors:

- Geopolitical context and Russia. Russia does not want to lose its stranglehold on the South Caucasus. Having the impression that the EU wants to interfere within its sphere of influence and that certain EU programmes, such as the EaP, are directed against it, Russia is trying to act as a soft power by creating the EAEU and have a closer economic cooperation with Georgia (“normalisation” politics by Georgia’s new government since 2012) and/or a hard power, which was materialised during the Russia-Georgia war in 2008. It is undeniable that the success of the EaP in the South Caucasus depends in part on the Russian factor.
- Differentiated approach. As the thesis has demonstrated, the EU kept the “one size fits all” approach until 2013, while initiating the AAs with all three countries of the South Caucasus, despite their already shown different preferences and aspirations. The EU continued to have a “top down” approach until partner country (Azerbaijan) used the bargaining power to change this asymmetry and push the boundaries toward further negotiation. It is critical that the EU recognizes and engages with changing power dynamics in the South Caucasus. A more inclusive form of differentiation is required instead of deviation. Differentiation should become a means of finding common ground with partner countries. The focus should be on gaining a better understanding of the domestic preferences (whether it be political regime, state–society relations, informal veto

players (for example, the Georgian Orthodox Church) and identifying the factors that shape them the most within the country's political and economic structures.

- Political elites' preferences. Within the EaP, the EU has emerged in the South Caucasus as an agent for domestic change, particularly in Georgia, and to some degree in Armenia until 2013. But EU inspired change has its limits, as the EU is only as influential as the political elites of the South Caucasus states allow it to be. Reforms often remain shallow and local elites carefully calculate the high short-term costs against longer-term benefits. Local elites' preferences of the South Caucasus countries and their strategic calculations were crucial in mediating compliance to EU demands and convergence with EU standards.
- Multilateral track. The alternative cooperation agreements have been developed for Azerbaijan and Armenia which seek relations with the EU beyond the AA and/or the DCFTA. The EaP's multilateral track is also in need of revision as it is incapable of handling the growing differences between South Caucasus countries in their relationships with the EU. The difficulty to finalise the agreement between the EU and Azerbaijan is a clear manifestation of this problem. At the political level, the work of the multilateral track is affected by regional tensions and conflicts. At the technical level, thematic groupings are mainly EU-driven and Azerbaijan has also criticised the ineffectiveness of the Euronest parliamentary assembly as shown in section 5.4.3.
- Economic cooperation. The EaP platform on economic integration has been another blatant example of the incompatibility of the EaP. The emphasis on approximation with EU trade regulations is relevant to Georgia, but less so to Armenia and Azerbaijan. Due to trade regulations and the EU acquis, the DCFTA between Georgia and the EU has not significantly progressed.
- Security and conflicts. The EaP aimed to help stabilise the South Caucasus but has been lacking a security component from the outset. Neither a harder security posture from the EU (EU as a hard power) nor success in settling protracted conflicts in the South Caucasus (without Russian involvement and agreement) is on the table. The current EU engagement in security matters is largely confined to the CSDP border monitoring mission in Georgia (EUMM) and the participation of

an EU Special Representative in the Geneva talks between Georgia and Russia after the 2008 war. Moreover, besides stepping up EU engagement through the OSCE at the Minsk talks concerning Nagorno-Karabakh, the EU does little more. The EU also became marginalised in Nagorno-Karabakh war in 2020, whereas the ceasefire agreement between Azerbaijan and Armenia was initiated by Russia whose soldiers were stationed in the conflicting region as peacekeeping forces.

This thesis has shown how focusing on actors' interests and values can provide a significant explanation in understanding a foreign policy. This thesis' theoretical framework suggests that framing empirical analysis in terms of different logics of action (logic of consequences and logic of appropriateness) is a useful way to uncover the interplay of material and ideational conditions that influence political decisions. The exploratory nature of the thesis' theoretical framework would necessitate further development of the theoretical underpinnings of various causal processes and their interactions. Such an endeavour has the potential to advance empirical research and understanding of the long-standing issue of how ideas and material factors interact.

The fact that this small corner of the world (the South Caucasus region) has sparked tensions between one of the great powers (EU and Russia) proves the importance of this research. This thesis has shown that external actors (Russia and the EU) play a critical role in shaping politics in the South Caucasus. The chain of events that unfolded in the South Caucasus for the past decade provides a vivid illustration of both the entanglement between EU policies in the South Caucasus and Russia's countermeasures. Which external actor will prevail depends on the political will of the elites of the South Caucasus, who make decisions considering material and ideational factors. The thesis suggests that the EU has to tailor its relations with South Caucasus countries, even if this necessitates rethinking the EU's transformative power, which has traditionally been based on the "top-down" approach.

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Appendix A. Publication in the thesis

05/02/2021

RE: Including publication in the thesis

RE: Including publication in the thesis

Bruno Mascitelli [bmascitelli@swin.edu.au]

Sent: Wednesday, January 06, 2021 4:41 PM

To: Daviti Mtchedlishvili; Bruno Mascitelli [bmascitelli@swinburne.edu.au]

Cc: peter.morgan@sydney.edu.au

Dear Daviti

The Editorial Committee of the Australia and New Zealand Journal of European Studies (ANZJES) duly agree and permit the use of the article "Theorising Europeanisation in European Literature: Conceptualisation and Operationalisation" published in ANZJES, Volume 10, issue 1 in your forthcoming publication/thesis.

We wish you all the best.

Regards

Professor Bruno Mascitelli
Editorial Board
ANZJES.

Appendix B. Interview questions

1. What were the motives/interests of the EU to build the relations with the South Caucasus region?
2. What were the South Caucasus countries' approach towards the EU in the 1990s? Did the politics of identity exceed the politics of pragmatism?
3. What were the main motives/interests behind inclusion the South Caucasus in the ENP? Were the motives normative, rational or both?
4. What are the main motives/interests of Georgia towards the Eastern Partnership?
5. What are the main motives/interests of Armenia towards the Eastern Partnership?
6. What are the main motives/interests of Azerbaijan towards the Eastern Partnership?

Appendix C. Information sheet

Daviti Mtchedlishvili



National Centre for Research on Europe
Telephone: +64 3 221221507
Email: daviti_mtchedlishvili@pg.canterbury.ac.nz
ERHEC Ref: [Enter when approval given for your study]

Dilemmas of Europeanisation: Foreign Policy of the European Union towards the South Caucasus

Information Sheet

I am Daviti Mtchedlishvili, a PhD student at the National Centre for Research on Europe, University of Canterbury, New Zealand. My project investigates the weaknesses and shortage of the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership in an attempt to democratise and Europeanise the countries of the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood which have expressed a very strong desire to adopt Western standards and norms but have regardless achieved very moderate results in their post-communist political and socio-economic transformation.

The research focuses on the role of domestic and foreign agents of Europeanisation in the South Caucasus countries (Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia) as well as on the scope and limits of the EU's attempts to promote its basic norms of democracy, human rights, the rule of law and economic marketization within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy and/or the Eastern Partnership. The role of Russia (as a major external opponents to the EU's presence in these countries) in the domestic institutional settings and major political and economic choices will also be investigated in greater detail.

You have been approached to take part in this study because *[give reason, if applicable]*. I have located your contact details through *[provide explanation]*.

If you choose to take part in this study, your involvement in this project will be to take part in the structured and semi-structured interview, which includes the questions about the European Neighbourhood Policy, future enlargement of the European Union and obstacles of transformation/European Integration of Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia.

Participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. You may ask for your raw data to be returned to you or destroyed at any point. If you withdraw, I will remove information relating to you. However, once analysis of raw data starts on 01/01/2019, it will become increasingly difficult to remove the influence of your data on the results.

The results of the project may be published, but you may be assured of the complete confidentiality of data gathered in this investigation: your identity will not be made public without your prior consent. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, interview data will be stored on a locked hard drive, with only the researcher, Daviti Mtchedlishvili, and his supervisors being able to access it. The data will be backed-up at secured UC servers and will be also password-protected. Participants will be given a code on the consent form which then will be used in transcripts and other forms. Therefore, interviewed participants' identified

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data will be stored separately from de-identified data. And all the data used in the analyses or discussion of this thesis or other publications will be de-identified. A thesis is a public document and will be available through the UCLibrary.

Please indicate to the researcher on the consent form if you would like to receive a copy of the summary of results of the project.

The project is being carried out as a field-work for the PhD thesis by Daviti Mtchedlishvili under the supervision of Dr. Milenko Petrovic and Prof. Martin Holland, who can be contacted at milenko.petrovic@canterbury.ac.nz and martin.holland@canterbury.ac.nz. They will be pleased to discuss any concerns you may have about participation in the project.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, and participants should address any complaints to The Chair, Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch (human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz).

If you agree to participate in the study, you are asked to complete the consent form and return via email to my address: daviti.mtchedlishvili@pg.canterbury.ac.nz or as a hard copy during the interview.

Daviti Mtchedlishvili