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**European integration in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine:
assessing the role and strategies of the European Union in
the Eastern Neighbours compared with the Western
Balkans**

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

AA	Association Agreements
AP	Action Plan
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CEE	Central and Eastern Europe
CEFTA	Central European Free Trade Agreement
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
DCFTA	Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area
EaEU	Eurasian Economic Union
EaP	Eastern Partnership
EEA	European Economic Area
EFTA	European Free Trade Association
EIM	External Incentive Model
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
EU	European Union
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FTA	Free Trade Area
ICTY	International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PCA	Partnership and Cooperation Agreement
SAA	Stability and Association Agreement
SEE	South-Eastern Europe
USA	United States of America
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WB	Western Balkans

Introduction

Between the years 1989 and 1991 the European equilibrium inherited from the Cold War, with in the West the liberal-capitalistic democracies and in the East, separated by the Iron Curtain, the communist dictatorships under the domination of the USSR, (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) collapsed. With the dissolution of the USSR, the dual equilibrium of powers in Europe was reshaped into a unique centre of attraction in terms of political and economic development embodied by the European Union (EU). If all of the post-communist states of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) that were considered Soviet satellites quickly embarked on a rapprochement with the EU with a view to membership, two regions of post-communist Europe lagged in this path. Firstly, the dissolution of the USSR brought about the creation of fifteen new States in Eastern Europe, Southern Caucasus and Central Asia. Most of these new states were lacking the historical experience of independent statehood and hence represented a greater challenge in terms of consolidation of the new state's foundations while economically transitioning from a planned economy system to a free-market system. Secondly, the Western Balkans (WB), where the end of the Yugoslav socialist regime happened not only because of the unsustainability of the economic system but also because of inter-ethnic tensions which erupted in the Yugoslav Wars. While the EU has been fast to invest in the CEE countries, and in the resolution of post-Yugoslav conflicts, the new post-Soviet countries of Eastern Europe have remained on the margin of Brussels' attention (apart from the three Baltic States: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania).

Indeed, the Republic of Belarus (hereafter Belarus), the Republic of Moldova (hereafter Moldova) and Ukraine, have been secondary priorities for the EU, at least until the 2004 and 2007 Eastern enlargement, which brought them to the very borders of the EU. While other countries that bordered the EU already enjoyed a particular status due to their position, i.e. the Republic of Türkiye (hereafter Türkiye) was already a candidate state, and all post-Yugoslav countries were granted (potential-)candidate status after the settlement of the conflicts, the three Eastern neighbours did not enjoy such a special treatment. In fact, after 2004, Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine were included in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) among the countries of Northern Africa and the Middle East, a policy that was initially designed only for the EU's Southern neighbours. It is only in 2009, that a specific branch of the ENP was designed to tackle the specificities of the post-Soviet region with the Eastern Partnership (EaP), aimed that Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. However, one thing stands out from the treatment of this region by the EU compared to CEE and the WB: if the goal in all these regions is the same, namely fostering as far as possible European integration, the Eastern neighbours are continuously denied the possibility of an EU perspective and promise of potential membership, even in the long term.

On June 17th of 2022, the President of the European Commission, Ursula Von Der Leyen, ended her speech about the application for EU membership of Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine in the following manner: “*We all know that Ukrainians are ready to die for the European perspective. We want them to live with us the European dream*”¹. Earlier the same year, in a visit to war-torn Kyiv, President Von Der Leyen already stated that Ukraine “*belongs to the European family*”². Even if the President's June speech recommends granting Moldova and Ukraine the status of candidate countries to the EU, it nonetheless shows the difference in treatment the EU has continuously given to the Eastern neighbours. They are only granted the possibility to get candidate status more than thirty years after independence and almost twenty years after the first post-communist countries officially became EU member states (entailing that they were granted candidate status even earlier). Moreover, this possibility was only granted to both countries after an event as significant as the invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation (hereafter Russia) happened.

¹ European Commission, ‘Statement by President von Der Leyen on the Commission's Opinions on the EU Membership Applications by Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia’, 17 June 2022, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/STATEMENT_22_3822.

² Natalia Drozdak and Daryna Krasnolutska, ‘Ukraine Belongs in the “European Family,” EU Chief Says on Kyiv Trip’, *Bloomberg.Com*, 8 April 2022, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-04-08/ukraine-belongs-in-european-family-eu-chief-says-on-kyiv-trip>.

With the end of the Cold War and the EU finding itself as the sole centre of power and attractiveness in Europe for at least two decades, there has been a monopolisation of the terms 'Europe' and 'European' by the EU. While it is almost undeniable that Ukraine is effectively European, some elements of the two quotes from the European Commission's president stand out particularly. The appropriation of the terms 'Europe' and 'European' as synonymous with the EU is still present, as the President does not mention that we want Ukraine in the EU, but that we want Ukraine in Europe. The second element that follows from this is the EU's self-proclaimed ability to define what is European and what is not. This second element is not only specific to Ukraine nor the three Eastern neighbours, but can be traced back to the early 1990s, with the agreements signed between the EU and CEE countries named 'European Agreements' for instance³. The two waves of the EU's Eastern enlargement of 2004 and 2007 are every so often referred to as the greatest success of the EU and the narratives accompanying these enlargements in CEE were ones of 'Return to Europe', the idea that these countries have always been part of Europe and that being part of Europe meant ultimately joining the EU. The terminologies of the different EU policies treating Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine are also telling, as the European Neighbourhood Policy reduces them to the status of a mere neighbour of Europe, and the Eastern Partnership directly - though possibly not voluntarily - takes up the East-West terminology inherited from the Cold War.

Moreover, one of the first reflections leading to this thesis was around the systemic separation that is made in the academic field between European studies and the study of Central Eastern Europe which includes heterogenous regions from Czechia to Russia⁴. This systemic separation continues despite the fall of the Iron Curtain more than thirty years ago, the commitment to a European path (understood as a EU path) by the majority of post-communist countries in CEE, the WB and the Eastern Neighbours and the accession to the EU of eleven of CEE post-communist states⁵. While European studies mostly focus on the study of the EU, hence excluding a large part of the European continent, they often propose a particular view on Central Eastern European countries, even these which have joined the EU. If it can be argued that the history and background of the region require so, it is very much less systematic when it comes to countries such as Portugal and Spain, which have also been under dictatorships until the 1970s for instance.

These two paradoxes of the EU treating with Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine as third countries as well as the systematic separation of Western Europe and Central Eastern Europe led us to wonder what justified such a specific treatment of the two sides of the European continent by the EU and by extension by scholars and studies. Geographically, historically or culturally, there are no arguments that would justify treating Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine as non-Europeans – i.e. unworthy of EU membership – by the EU. Even the idea that these three countries deserved a specific treatment because they are post-Soviet states does not hold, since the EU has been engaged in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, all three post-Soviet states as well, since their independence in 1990-1991. Politically and economically, however, it is possible to argue that Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine did not represent an attractive enough region for the EU due to political and economic instability. But here again, it is relatively straightforward to argue that neither did the WB region, which in some way could be considered as even more unstable politically and economically than the Eastern neighbours in the considered period.

In a centre-periphery vision of Europe, as the EU seems to have adopted, the CEE countries have been lucky enough to be granted the right by the EU to call themselves 'Europeans' forming the first layer around the centre, while the WB are granted the guarantee to one day being able to do so as well, would be a second layer. Hence, within this vision, the Eastern neighbours find themselves in the last layer of the model, as they are Europeans, but not completely Europeans as for the EU's standards and policies. Likewise, in a purely economic rationale, the EU also has interests to see its direct neighbours economically thriving and

³ Bartłomiej Kaminski, '17. The Europe Agreements and Transition: Unique Returns from Integrating into the European Union', in *Between Past and Future: The Revolutions of 1989 and Their Aftermath*, by Sorin Antohi, CEUP Collection (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2013), pp. 306–11.

⁴ As a matter of illustration, the Global Studies Institute of the University of Geneva proposes two different Master's degrees: a Master on European studies and a Master on Russian and East Central European studies. Both masters share no common lectures as of June 2022 with the exception of optional lectures provided by the faculties of economics and law without direct relation to the geographical areas of each Master's degree.

⁵ Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia.

legally adopting similar bodies of legislation to make trade and relations easier⁶. Meaning that the EU benefits not only from the WB and Türkiye to advance in European integration, but also from the Eastern Neighbours. This logic leads to more inconsistency in the EU's policy towards its Eastern neighbours, which are treated differently than the CEE countries and the WB.

European integration, here understood as closer economic cooperation with the EU and approximation with EU norms and values, matters for the Eastern neighbours further than in the simple theoretical sake. The economic development European integration can bring to the countries of the European continent is often times more than not beneficial than economic cooperation with any other international organisation or state. Moreover, the adoption of EU norms and values, can bring about a better adoption and implementation of Human rights, respect for democratic foundations and bring anti-discrimination rights for minorities. Hence, it is not only a question of foreign policy and theories but also a phenomenon that may impact the lives of thousands of people and it is, therefore, essential to assess and propose coherent policies in this regard.

Having a consistent and satisfying policy towards the Eastern neighbours for all parties involved is crucial for several reasons. First, an unbalanced policy for the region that fails to deliver, coupled with the absence of EU membership prospects could lead to stagnation or even disinterest in either European integration or any kind of further cooperation with the EU. A phenomenon already witnessed in long-standing EU candidate countries in the WB. Secondly, and related, there is a risk of further sliding away from the EU rather than getting closer, most notably when considering that the EU is not anymore, the sole international player trying to foster its influence in the region. Especially granting that the risk to see countries such as Russia, Türkiye or China undermine the EaP through different means such as disinformation, hybrid war, or economic pressure is already high. In other words, if the EU fails to bring any tangible results, political salience or concrete perspective, these countries may find themselves turning to other source of political and economic development, that are less demanding in terms of human rights or democracy, and thus stray further away from EU values and norms. Another phenomenon also observed in the Western Balkans. Thirdly, in some cases (especially Georgia, Moldova & Ukraine), the need to make the EaP evolve towards possible candidate status would be a response to the democratic demands of the people of these countries, expressed both through elections of pro-UE governments and pro-EU protests. Finally, the need to rethink a better policy to foster European integration is essential, on the one hand for the EU to be clear on how it considers each of its neighbours – are they worthy of EU membership like the WB and Türkiye or not “*Europeanisable*” enough - and on the other hand for both groups of countries, those who ask for EU membership (Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine), and those who are just looking for minor cooperation with the EU on certain issues (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus), to have a potentially different ground of collaboration with the EU.

For the purposes of this thesis, we have chosen to focus primarily on the three Eastern European countries that are direct neighbours of the EU and are the least contentiously "European", meaning: Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine. Even though the South Caucasus countries are also included in the EaP, their European identity remains contested and by extension their possible membership in the EU⁷. The choice of Belarus, which we only have briefly mentioned in this introduction compared to Moldova and Ukraine, stands in the fact that the EU encompasses Minsk in the same group as Kyiv and Chişinău, despite Belarus's position very much less in favour of European integration, making it a thought-provoking element of comparison. Furthermore, the assessment of European integration of the three Eastern neighbours will be compared with the level of European integration of the Western Balkans countries, so as to have an as complete as possible assessment. The details reasons for this choice will be further developed in the first chapter of this essay.

⁶ Frank Schimmelfennig, 'Europeanization beyond Europe', *Living Reviews in European Governance*, 1 January 2009, p. 10.

⁷ Jorge Liboreiro, 'Georgia's EU Bid Raises Existential Question: Where Does Europe End?', *Euronews*, 4 March 2022, <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2022/03/04/georgia-s-eu-bid-raises-existential-question-what-is-europe-and-where-does-it-end>; Davit Kekenadze and Joshua Askew, "'Heartbreaking': Brussels Dashes Georgia's EU Hopes", *Euronews*, 18 June 2022; Thomas de Waal, 'A Brief Guide to Understanding the Countries of the South Caucasus', *Carnegie Europe*, 11 February 2019, <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2019/02/11/brief-guide-to-understanding-countries-of-south-caucasus-pub-78306>.

The objective of this thesis is therefore to answer the following question: To what extent do the current strategies of the European Union foster European integration in its Eastern Neighbours?

For the sake of clarity, we will refer to Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine as the Eastern neighbours. The group of states comprising Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Kosovo and Serbia, will be referred to as the Western Balkans or the WB. And finally, all of the post-communist states in Central and Eastern Europe that have joined the EU, namely: Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia, will be referred to as Central and Eastern Europe, the CEE countries or the EU-11.

This thesis, akin to the master's degree for which it is presented, takes an interdisciplinary approach to the subject. While the dissertation is primarily based on theories of European integration, the aim is also to place each element in its historical and political context and to provide a critical and broader view of these theories. The main theory guiding this assessment is the theory of Europeanisation, developed by Ulrich Sedelmeier and Franck Schimmelfennig, and their External Incentives Model (EIM) a rational cost-benefit calculation, which is considered as the main explanatory theory for the successful European integration of CEE. Their main conclusion is that EU membership is the sole greatest tool of foreign policy at the disposal of the EU to effectively foster European integration on the European continent. Drawing on their conclusions on CEE and the WB⁸, as well as the literature on European integration of third countries, our hypotheses are the following:

1. Despite good economic integration, the EU fails to foster legal and value integration in the Eastern neighbours.
2. Without EU membership perspective the current EU strategies are not efficient tool to foster European Integration in the Eastern neighbour.

From a methodological point of view, the present analysis is essentially based on Sedelmeier and Schimmelfennig theoretical framework of European integration, as well as relevant scientific articles and books. The data we use is collected through scientific articles, official documents produced by the EU or governments of interest, statistical and survey institutions, newspapers, think tank analyses and any other sources deemed relevant.

A certain limit that this thesis encountered and that could not be taken into consideration during the preparatory work was the invasion of Ukraine by the Russian forces on the 24th of February 2022. This ongoing event entails substantial consequences and implications for the subject of this thesis. As for the analysis, we have decided to mostly focus on the period between the three countries' independence and December 2021, when the last Eastern Partnership summit was held. However, we may from time to time refer to events of 2022 only when it is relevant to the analysis. In effect, the current war in Ukraine has turned European integration of the region but also more broadly EU enlargement, back to the forefront of the EU's priorities, making it hard to ignore in the development of this work⁹.

As a first step, it will be necessary to review in-depth the theories of European integration, in particular the theory of Europeanisation. This will allow us to assess precisely how to evaluate European policies towards the Eastern neighbours. Then, we will expose the reasons and limits of the comparison between the Eastern neighbours and the Western Balkans, as well as a brief evaluation of the level of European integration of the WB to allow us to better compare in the continuation of our analysis.

⁸ Frank Schimmelfennig and Ulrich Sedelmeier, 'The Europeanization of Eastern Europe: The External Incentives Model Revisited', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 27, no. 6 (2020), pp. 814–33, Ulrich Sedelmeier, 'Europeanisation in New Member and Candidate States', *European Community Studies Association Austria (ECSA-A), Living Reviews in European Governance (LREG)* 1 (2006).

⁹ Alexandra Brzozowski, 'Global Europe Brief: A "new Dawn" for EU Enlargement?', *www.Euractiv.Com*, 12 June 2022, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/global-europe-brief-a-new-dawn-for-eu-enlargement/>.

In a second step, after outlining the history of Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine's relations with the EU, from the 1990s until 2021, we will move on to a more in-complex assessment of the Europeanisation of the three countries. The European policy of the Eastern Partnership towards the Eastern neighbours will be examined through the different criteria of the EIM: credibility, rewards, determinacy and costs. Eventually, the conclusion of the implications of the analysis will be drawn as well as the different issues they raise.

Eventually, in a last step, the different implications of the EIM analysis will be further developed. Primarily, the necessity of EU membership as a final reward for an efficient European integration policy will be discussed. Then, a further reflection on the involvement of the EU in its Eastern neighbours will be addressed, if this involvement is made in the name of European integration or simply for the sake of stability. Moreover, we will tackle the greatest limit of EIM, by exposing the changing international context and the consequence of foreign meddling in both regions of interest, by Russia, Türkiye and the People's Republic of China (hereafter China). Finally, a last section will be dedicated to a reflection around a different European integration which would not be only EU-centred.

I. European Integration in Central and Eastern Europe: a theoretical framework

European Integration as a theory was first developed as a mean to understand how the construction of the European Union happened and keeps on happening. In other words, how the EU comes to develop itself internally and the influence it can have on its member states and vice versa. Borrowing heavily from theories of international relations, European integration theories have also developed their own peculiarities in order to adapt to the unique status of the EU, between an international organisation and a federal regime. In the 1990s, with the fall of communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe, scholars have started to extend European integration to the process of rapprochement and accession of the countries of the region to the EU. Europeanisation is the main theory that follows from this development, with its Model of External Incentives (EIM) explaining integration of CEE countries and further used as a model for integration of other regions such as South-eastern Europe (SEE). In this chapter we will first discuss the evolution of Europeanisation as a theory and define the different terms we need for our analysis, then further explain the concept of the EIM, and eventually consider the case of Europeanisation of the WB as a basis for comparison with the Eastern European countries of interest.

A. Europeanisation as a theory of European Integration

1. European Integration and development of Europeanisation

In order to understand better the subject we ought to tackle, a brief discussion about what European integration means is necessary to begin with. European integration is a “*catch-all term*” which implies greater cooperation between European sovereign countries¹⁰. This cooperation can be in the form of informal cooperation such as the Visegrád Group, or formal and institutional cooperation such as the Council of Europe. It can also take a variety of sizes, for instance the Lublin Triangle only comprises three European States (Ukraine, Poland and Lithuania) whereas the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) comprises fifty-seven member states. As well as a varied range of sectors, from Human Rights to energy or military cooperation and so on. However, the term European integration has been increasingly linked with the EU. This is reflected in the particular attention given to the EU in European integration studies. In other words, European integration became a synonym for EU-isation¹¹. In the case of the EU, European integration is achieved first and foremost through economic cooperation, including through the single market and the single currency. With the aim to sustain economic integration the EU has developed over time a heavy and complex legal apparatus, making integration not only economic but also legal. This is illustrated with the adoption of the quasi-constitutional treaties of Maastricht (1992) and Lisbon (2007)¹². And eventually with economic and legal integration also comes political integration, or in other words, integration through values. While the EU is not the sole body to promote and deepen European integration, it remains nonetheless the largest and most advanced institutional integration body, not only in Europe but in the world, and is “*by far the most powerful, important, and successful manifestation of European integration*”¹³. Hence, as a consequence of further and deepened economic, legal and political integration, European integration is described as a transfer of sovereignty to the EU by European states¹⁴. Thus, in this thesis we will consider European integration as closer economic,

¹⁰ UK in a changing Europe, ‘What Is European Integration?’, accessed 31 March 2022, <https://ukandeu.ac.uk/the-facts/what-is-european-integration/>.

¹¹ Mike Mannin, ‘Europeanisation as a Past and Present Narrative’, in *The European Union and Its Eastern Neighbourhood Europeanisation and Its Twenty-First-Century Contradictions* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), pp. 11–13.

¹² Policy Departments and Economic Governance Support Unit of the European Parliament, ‘The Historical Development of European Integration - Fact Sheets on the European Union’. European Parliament, June 2018.

¹³ J. Peterson, ‘European Integration’, in *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, ed. Neil J. Smelser and Paul B. Baltes (Oxford: Pergamon, 2001), p. 4923.

¹⁴ René Schwok, *Théories de l'intégration européenne : approches, concepts et débats*, Clefs (Paris: Montchrétien, 2005), 13; Alan S Milward, *The European Rescue of the Nation-State*, Routledge (New York: Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2000), p. 8.

legal and value (understood as liberal democracy, human rights and rule of law) cooperation with the EU which can lead to a transfer of sovereignty (understood as potential EU accession).

The theories of European integration thus attempted to explain and understand why and how sovereign countries accepted to transfer part of their national sovereignty to the supranational entity that the EU is. In the 1950s, integration theories were dominated by neo-functionalists, who argued that integration was driven by non-state actors (e.g. European Commission, interest groups) pushing for integration in technical sectors to boost the economy. This push would entail spillovers into other sectors and press integration forward¹⁵. By the 1980s, the debate over European integration was shared between the liberal intergovernmentalists and the institutionalists. For the former, it is national interests and/or pressure from economic lobbies that drive further integration, while for the latter, EU institutions created some path dependency and unwanted results which made it difficult for member states' governments to control the pace of integration led by the supranational EU institutions they themselves created¹⁶. Eventually, in the early 2010s, it is post-functionalism that became the theory in vogue. Drawing on the numerous crises the EU has had to go through in the twenty-first century (i.e. Euro crisis, migration crisis, Brexit), post-functionalists argue that the way the EU handled these crises polarised EU societies (e.g. rise of radical political parties across the EU) and eventually undermines further integration¹⁷.

With post-functionalism we can observe a shift in European integration theories: from the study of the development of integration to its impact on member states. This shift happened already in the 1990s with the development of the theory of Europeanisation, which was willing to analyse, rather than the process of integration per se, the 'consequences' of this integration. Scholars who worked on Europeanisation, have focused mainly on three aspects: firstly, the development of community institutions specifically made for governance. Secondly, the progressive integration of the European dimension into domestic policies. And thirdly, on the interaction between the EU level and the member states level. Simply put, Europeanisation focuses on how the process of downloading and uploading of policies and preferences takes place between the EU and the national levels¹⁸. Building on that, Claudio Radaelli's identified three domains on which the EU has an impact domestically: on the polity, namely the political structures (institutions, administration, judicial) and the representative structures (political parties, interest groups). The second domain is public policies, the EU has an impact on actors, political issues, political style, instruments and resources. And finally, the EU affects cognitive and normative domestic structures, such as discourses, norms and values, political legitimacy and identities¹⁹. Finally, Saurugger observes among Europeanisation scholars, four distinct possible results of Europeanisation. Either the actors absorb (1) and incorporate policies or ideas from the EU into the national institutions, or they are adapted (2) through domestic political processes without changing the essential characteristics of the initial policy or idea. Other possibilities include transformation (3) of EU policies and replacement with new policies substantially different from the initial one, or finally inertia (4), where no change whatsoever is observed²⁰.

Europeanisation has thus been studied first as an internal process of its own. While Europeanisation was focused on the consequences of integration on member states, it became increasingly obvious that integration had an impact on third countries as well. Hence, the need for Europeanisation studies to extend

¹⁵ For further details see: Ernst B. Haas, *The Uniting of Europe: Political, Social, and Economic Forces, 1950-1957*, Contemporary European Politics and Society (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004).

¹⁶ For further details see: Andrew Moravcsik, *The Choice for Europe: Social Purpose and State Power from Messina to Maastricht*, Cornell Studies in Political Economy (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1998); James G. March and Johan P. Olsen, *Rediscovering Institutions: The Organizational Basis of Politics* (New-York: Free Press, 1989).

¹⁷ For further details on post-functionalism see: Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks, 'Grand Theories of European Integration in the Twenty-First Century', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 26, no. 8 (3 August 2019), pp. 1113–1133; For further details on European Integration theories see: Schwok (2005), *Théories de l'intégration européenne*, Sabine Saurugger, *Théories et concepts de l'intégration européenne* (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2020); Antje Wiener, Tanja A. Börzel, and Thomas Risse, *European Integration Theory, European Integration Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

¹⁸ Sabine Saurugger, 'Européanisation et transfert des politiques publiques', in *Théories et concepts de l'intégration européenne*, vol. 2e éd., Références (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2020), pp. 256–260.

¹⁹ Quoted in: Saurugger (2020), pp. 263-265.

²⁰ Saurugger (2020), pp. 270.

beyond the EU's member states arose from the changing geopolitical context of the 1990s. First, from the fact that the EU did not encompass all countries of Western Europe, namely the countries forming the European Free Trade Association (EFTA): Norway, Switzerland, Iceland and Lichtenstein. And despite their lack of formal membership and strong domestic opposition to it, these countries still demanded participation in the EU single market, acknowledging their economic interdependence with the EU. Europeanisation in this situation hence happened through conditionality and the creation of a regime where in exchange of access to the single market, these countries were to adopt EU legislation (single market related policies). Two forms of integration have emerged, a formal and institutional one with the creation of the European Economic Area (EEA) in 1992, comprising Norway, Iceland and Lichtenstein, granting them participation in the informal preparation of EU legislation, and obligation to adopt all EU law relating to the single market. On the other side, Switzerland opted for a bilateral integration and negotiated each policy-specific agreement of interest and/or unilaterally adopted some EU policies. The Swiss model of Europeanisation is a way to de jure conserve sovereignty but de facto having the same alignment as for the EEA countries²¹.

However, the adoption of EU legislation by the EFTA countries in the 1990s was not the sole important change in Europe. The fall of the Berlin Wall and subsequent dismantlement of communist regimes in Central Eastern Europe remained the biggest event that upset the European equilibrium. Many of these countries made public and clear their will to join the European Union as early as possible, Europeanisation of non-member states thus became a relevant field of study.

2. *Europeanisation in Central and Eastern Europe: the origin of a framework*

The potential impact of the EU on post-communist countries that were going through political and economic transition was a major subject of interest in the 1990s onward. Indeed, if we consider the EU as an economic, legal, and value-based integration institution and European integration as the transfer of sovereignty from states to the EU, then the question of Europeanisation in CEE, the impact of the EU on these countries, takes another direction than the study of Europeanisation of member-states and quasi-members²². In the case of CEE, analysis of Europeanisation differs for three reasons: firstly, this is not the study of the impact of the EU on already existing states but the impact on states that were going through transition from a political and economic regime to another, entailing a larger window of influence for the EU to impose its preferences. Secondly, since these states were in a weakened position due to the transition period, they lacked the bargaining power states such as those part of the EFTA had to negotiate integration *à la carte* with the EU. And thirdly, CEE differs from the previous enlargement rounds of the EU because of the size and number of states willing to join the EU²³. The challenge here was not to try to see why and how countries were willing to give up part of their sovereignty to the EU, but rather how the EU influenced the process of founding new institutions, of shaping the polity, and influence politics and policies in order to prepare for the transfer of sovereignty entailed by EU membership.

In 2006, following the Eastern Enlargement, Ulrich Sedelmeier²⁴ proceeded to examine and compile the most important studies made on Europeanisation of CEE countries and outlined the theoretical framework and the general conclusions that can be drawn from the empirical results. Thus, in order to study the Europeanisation of new member states, scholars relied first on characteristics of previous Europeanisation studies. Such as, the extent of EU monitoring of adjustment of adoption of EU legislation and the general nature of adjustment at the national level to cover the entirety of the *acquis communautaire*. In addition to that, characteristics specific to the status of CEE which can have an impact on the choice of tools of influence the EU can use (e.g. the fact that they are not member states changes the tools) as well as the asymmetry of power in the advantage of the EU which can impose rules to countries who are in no position

²¹ Frank Schimmelfennig, 'Europeanisation Beyond the Member States', *Zeitschrift Für Staats- Und Europawissenschaften (ZSE) / Journal for Comparative Government and European Policy*, 8, no. 3 (2010), pp. 329–330; Sedelmeier (2006), 'Europeanisation in New Member and Candidate States', p. 4.

²² This is how Schimmelfennig refers to the EFTA countries in 'Europeanisation Beyond the Member States' (2010).

²³ By way of comparison, at the time of the 1986 enlargement to the Iberian Peninsula, Spain and Portugal had 48.5 million inhabitants for two governments. In the case of the 2004 enlargement, including Cyprus and Malta to the eight CEECs, this represented a population of 74.7 million for ten different governments at the moment of their accession.

²⁴ Sedelmeier (2006), 'Europeanisation in New Member and Candidate States'.

to negotiate. The important characteristics of the CEE countries to consider in the assessment of Europeanisation, lie in their high adjustment costs due to communist apparatus legacy as well as high adjustment pressure from the EU to adopt rules and adapt to reinforced accession criteria (i.e. the Copenhagen Criteria)²⁵. This specific situation of countries of CEE made it a particularly appealing period to judge the effectiveness of the EU's influence on non-member states.

The theoretical framework Sedelmeier drew was based on classical Europeanisation studies, most importantly on Radaelli's framework: the assessment of the EU's impact on countries' polity, politics and policies. But also, on two version of institutionalism: rational institutionalism, which relies on the use of conditionality by the EU, and constructivism, which relies on socialisation of actors by the EU. By putting these two concepts at the international (EU) level and at the domestic level, Sedelmeier was able to identify facilitating factors for Europeanisation. Hence, on the one hand, in the rational institutionalism framework, the use of conditionality as an influence strategy at the EU level implied credibility, clarity, monitoring capacity and sizeable rewards as facilitating factors, while at the domestic level it implied the presence of liberal governments, quality of political competition and dominance of liberal preferences in parliament for the polity dimension, and a low density of opposition as well as the absence of institutional legacies for the policy dimension as facilitating factors. On the other hand, in constructivism, the EU strategy for Europeanisation is socialisation, facilitating factor at EU level are identification with EU and legitimacy of EU demands, while facilitating factors at the domestic level included a positive normative resonance with domestic rules and the presence of transnational networks²⁶.

Empirical findings tended to give more credits to rational institutionalism as an explanatory framework for Europeanisation in CEE. About the impact of the EU on the polity, assessing the EU's promotion of democracy, human rights and minority rights, scholars find that the EU has a greater impact promoting these on the CEE candidate states than it did on member states. However, the impact remains significantly minor. Indeed, searchers find that conditionality pushing for the adoption of democracy, or these particular rights were useless in the case of countries which already adopted liberal governments (such as Poland, Hungary or Czechia), while in the case of countries who found themselves with authoritarian or nationalist governments (such as Slovakia or Slovenia) impact was negligible. On the impact on politics, this is the part where scholars have been the most critical of the EU's influence. Most studies judged the political parties and party systems of the region not consolidated enough yet to resist influence by the EU, hence this situation permitted the EU to push for depoliticization of the accession process, a fact still to this day criticised,²⁷ a process that also led to the reinforcement of the executive power over the legislative branch. Finally, the EU's impact was the strongest when it came to the policy dimension. Once conditions were clearly stated and legitimacy of EU accession was deemed credible, then adjustment was quickly made. Nonetheless, it does not mean that domestic politics and veto players were absent, scholars rather explain that these domestic obstacles account for the heterogeneity of EU impact across countries of CEE and across policies²⁸.

Finally, Sedelmeier concluded from the study of CEE Europeanisation analyses that rational institutionalism was the most explanatory concept, and above all that conditionality coupled with credibility of accession were the most effective instruments of the EU to impact CEE states. However, he also underlines that conditionality works best if accompanied by concrete, credible, reachable conditions and sizeable rewards such as credible membership perspective. Nonetheless, Sedelmeier invites us to clearly distinguish between conditionality as a strategy by the EU and conditionality as an explanatory model and suggests referring to conditionality as an explanatory model as 'external incentives model'²⁹.

²⁵ 'The European Council [Copenhagen Summit 1993], Copenhagen, 21-22 June 1993', n.d., p. 13, aei-dev.library.pitt.edu/1443/1/Copenhagen_june_1993.pdf.

²⁶ Sedelmeier (2006), 'Europeanisation in New Member and Candidate States', pp. 10–11.

²⁷ For instance see: Jacques Rupnik, 'The Crisis of Liberalism', *Journal of Democracy*, 29, no. 3 (2018), pp. 24–38.

²⁸ Sedelmeier (2006), pp. 14–18.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

3. Critics and limits of Europeanisation of CEE countries

Europeanisation through conditionality, i.e. the External Incentives Model, rapidly became the main explanatory theory of the successful European integration of CEE. But despite its comprehensive model taking into account the factors facilitating Europeanisation, hence in the meantime the factors hampering Europeanisation, the theory was not exempt from criticisms. The first critic of the Europeanisation theory made by Sedelmeier himself, was the fact that most studies focused almost exclusively on post-communist countries. He advocated for more similar analyses of previous enlargement round in order to grasp the extent of EU influence in the process of accession³⁰. While we acknowledge the addition further studies on previous enlargement rounds would represent for the assessment of Europeanisation, we however argue that the focus on post-communist countries is justified when it comes to Europeanisation of non-member states. In fact, almost all countries that are considered candidate states or in the process of becoming one are states which inherited a communist past, whether it is the Western Balkan region (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia), or in the Associated Trio (Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine). Only Türkiye falls out of the communist heritage, but its accession prospect and overall European integration seem for now if not in a stalemate, not improving³¹. Hence, a thorough focus on post-communist countries can bring better assessment for the use of conditionality in the remaining parts of Europe striving for European integration.

Furthermore, following the two rounds of enlargement of 2004 and 2007, the conditionality strategy used by the EU was considered a successful strategy. Visegrád countries (Czechia, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia) were presented as success stories of political and economic transition, but also frontrunners and examples of triumphant European integration. Nonetheless, despite the model's initial success in the short-term, some reservation remained concerning the possible long-term effects. The main critics of Europeanisation through conditionality stayed on the doubt of continuity of compliance post-accession. A question that joined the already existing study of compliance with EU rules³².

Among scholars who have tested the robustness of the conditionality strategy, the effectiveness of the model remains debated. On the one hand, promoters of Europeanisation through conditionality observe no decrease in level of compliance with EU law nor economic integration, in new member states, and attribute this high level of compliance to the efficiency of pre-accession conditionality³³. On the other hand, decrease of compliance with pre-accession engagement was also observed, most notably in the countries that were considered the most successful in European integration. Taking the example of accession to the Euro-zone, Johnson observes that while all eight post-communist CEE countries that joined the EU in 2004 had planned a swift entry in the Euro-zone, the three biggest economies (Poland, Hungary and Czechia) have become laggards in the matter, and now do not seem to be in hurry to comply to this engagement. For Johnson, this shows that conditionality pre-accession was stronger than conditionality post-accession, where pressure on member states over compliance is more flexible and the size of the reward less significant and less attractive as well,³⁴ a conclusion also observed by other scholars more recently³⁵.

However, the greatest failure associated with the conditionality model, is the backsliding and/or the lack of democratic consolidation of the CEE countries that joined the EU. A process especially observed in countries that were frontrunner of democratic transition and European integration (most notably Hungary

³⁰ Sedelmeier (2006), pp. 19–20.

³¹ 'Turkey Condemns European Parliament Committee Call to Suspend Accession', *Reuters*, 21 February 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-eu-idUSKCN1QA0MJ>.

³² Sedelmeier (2006), 'Europeanisation in New Member and Candidate States', p. 21.

³³ Tanja A. Börzel and Ulrich Sedelmeier, 'Larger and More Law Abiding? The Impact of Enlargement on Compliance in the European Union', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 24, no. 2 (4 February 2017), pp. 197–215; Dimiter Toshkov, 'Compliance with EU Law in Central and Eastern Europe: The Disaster that Didn't Happen (Yet)', *L'Europe en Formation*, 364, no. 2 (2012), p. 91.

³⁴ Juliet Johnson, 'The Remains of Conditionality: The Faltering Enlargement of the Euro Zone', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 15, no. 6 (1 September 2008), pp. 826–41.

³⁵ Matúš Mišík, 'When the Accession Legacy Fades Away: Central and Eastern European Countries and the EU Renewables Targets', *The International Spectator* 56, no. 3 (3 July 2021), pp. 57–58.

and Poland), and explained either because of the weakness of the conditionality model post-accession,³⁶ or because of the imposed consensus and lack of political debate around European integration in CEE.³⁷ While part of the democratic backsliding in some CEE countries can be explained by the weakness of the conditionality model post-accession, we argue that it is not the sole factor explaining it. First, the deficit in compliance of pre-accession engagement happens in the field where the EU has no formal power whatsoever, namely the democratic field, and for which an ad hoc system was created (i.e. Copenhagen Criteria). Secondly, many authors, not only political scientists, advocate to take a look at the bigger picture, to better grasp the process and reasons for democratic backsliding, that cannot all be explained by European integration theories³⁸.

A further limit of the EIM, is the fact that the model was thought and built in the 1990s, at a time where most regional and international powers, excepted for the EU and the USA (United States of America), were less prone and/or unable to interfere with transition in CEE and the European integration process. A context contestable today more than thirty years after the end of communist regimes in Europe, where we can see regional powers such as Türkiye and Russia, and international power like China, show great interest and interfere in Eastern and South-eastern Europe. While the model takes into account veto players, both political and institutional, adding the foreign meddling in the model seems now necessary for it not to lose its explanatory capacity.

B. Europeanisation and the Eastern Neighbours

1. Which framework for Europeanisation in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine

The three countries we ought to tackle in this thesis hold a particular situation when it comes to Europeanisation. Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine, are neither fully third countries nor fully candidate (or quasi-member) countries. While the EU acknowledges the special place these countries hold, their position in a grey area, this in-betweenness, makes policymaking and policy-analysis a bit different than with third countries or candidate countries. The question is then, *how to properly assess Europeanisation in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine?* We argue that a comparison between the Eastern neighbours and a similar group of countries also pursuing a form of European integration is a way to better understand and analyse the extent of the EU's impact in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine. In order to do so, a brief look into the different categorisation the three countries might fall into, and frameworks associated is necessary to determine which group of countries the Eastern neighbours fall best into as a mean of comparison. In this part, we will hence discuss the status of non-member states, i.e. third countries, and finally the place of the Eastern neighbours in the European Neighbourhood Policy.

Let us begin by considering the three Eastern neighbours as simply non-member states, therefore third countries and see if they fit into the existing Europeanisation beyond the EU framework. Literature on Europeanisation of third countries is scarce but deserves our attention. To identify the impact of the EU on third countries, it first implies to identify what are the goals the EU pursue in the world. For Schimmelfennig, there are three goals: the EU promotes its own model of regionalism (i.e. economic and market integration), in the same logic the EU disseminates an economic model which reflects its commitment to market-building and economic liberalisation, and lastly the EU promotes its own constitutional norms, (i.e. Human Rights, rule of law and democracy)³⁹. Hence, in the words of Lavenex,

³⁶ Ulrich Sedelmeier, 'Anchoring Democracy from Above? The European Union and Democratic Backsliding in Hungary and Romania after Accession: Anchoring Democracy from Above?', *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 52, no. 1 (January 2014), pp. 105–21.

³⁷ Licia Cianetti, James Dawson, and Seán Hanley, 'Rethinking "Democratic Backsliding" in Central and Eastern Europe – Looking beyond Hungary and Poland', *East European Politics*, 34, no. 3 (3 July 2018), pp. 243–56; Eltion Meka, 'European Integration, Democratic Consolidation, and Democratic Regression in CEE: An Institutional Assessment', *Journal of European Integration*, 38, no. 2 (23 February 2016), pp. 179–94.

³⁸ Juraj Buzalka, 'Europeanisation and Post-Peasant Populism in Eastern Europe', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 60, no. 5 (2008), pp. 757–71; Roman Krakovský, *Le populisme en Europe centrale et orientale : un avertissement pour le monde ?*, Fayard Histoire (Paris: Fayard, 2019).

³⁹ Schimmelfennig (2009), 'Europeanization beyond Europe', p. 9.

§Europeanisation in this case is an external projection of internal solutions⁴⁰. These goals can be observed since the 1990s and its geopolitical turn which marked a change in the EU's external policy. It passed from an apolitical policy with non-interference in domestic policy to the systematic use of conditionality, and promotion of democracy, human rights and rule of law in all EU agreements. When Schimmelfennig raised the question of Europeanisation of the countries that were not eligible for membership, he identified six possible mechanisms the EU could use to have an impact beyond its member states. These mechanisms are themselves encompassed into three dimensions: firstly, the logic, whether it be a logic of consequences (sanctions and rewards) or appropriateness (social-learning and lesson-drawing). Secondly, whether the impact of the EU is direct, i.e. EU-driven, or indirect, i.e. domestically driven. And thirdly, through which channels the EU's impact passes through (e.g. intergovernmentally, civil societies, transnationally etc.):

Mechanisms of the logic of consequences include:

1. *Conditionality*: intergovernmental incentives bringing direct impact. The EU uses the carrot and stick model (compulsory and compliance impact), with concrete measure such as a coercive mechanism triggered by legally binding EU rules and sanctions.
2. *Lesson-drawing*: through intergovernmental channels, but here the impact is indirect, as it is driven by governments rather than the EU itself, under communication. Hence, change is brought thanks to voluntary information exchange and mutual learning.
3. *Domestic empowerment*: transnational impacts such as connective impact (e.g. financial measures) or competition provides direct incentives through social actors and anonymous markets, which changes the cost-benefit assessment in direction of Europeanisation.
4. *Societal lesson-drawing*: indirect transnational impact through communication.

Mechanism of the logic of appropriateness include:

1. *Socialisation*: intergovernmental direct impact, where communication and social learning sponsored by the EU triggers processes of persuasion and learning in governments.
2. *Imitation*: intergovernmental indirect impact, draws from lesson-drawing but with a constructive impact resulting from a fundamental reconstruction of identities because of exposure to European integration with an enabling impact where use of EU and EU policies adds external legitimacy to governmental actors in their own political agenda.
3. *Transnational socialisation*: impact here is directly driven by societal actors (transnational social learning).
4. *Societal imitation*: impact is indirect, driven through transnational external societal actors with an enabling impact where use of EU and EU policies adds external legitimacy to societal actors to their own political agenda⁴¹.

Conditions for these mechanisms to work differ greatly if it is used on member states or third countries with no membership perspective. Moreover, it is important to note that the EU is not the sole international organisation to promote human rights, democracy or market economy in the world⁴². The EU often uses the carrot but not the stick (it delivers rewards but no sanctions) when it comes to external countries, and also uses other strategies such as support of civil societies⁴³. But overall, the literature denotes a low impact of the EU on third countries when it comes to democracy, promotion of regionalism and human rights. While Europeanisation beyond the EU literature gives us a range of templates of mechanisms to analyse

⁴⁰ Quoted in: Schimmelfennig (2009), p. 9.

⁴¹ Schimmelfennig (2009), pp. 7–8.

⁴² For instance the United Nation Human Rights Council work to promote human rights across the world, and the World Trade Organisation promotes free trade.

⁴³ Schimmelfennig (2009), 'Europeanization beyond Europe', pp. 8–10.

the EU's impact in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine, these countries ought to be dealt with differently than with the rest of the world, granting that they do share a substantial physical border with the EU, and the EU has an interest in developing strong links with its direct neighbours.

The fact that Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine are to be treated differently due to their geographical position is illustrated by the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) to which they are parties. The ENP was from the beginning, neither an alternative to enlargement nor a policy designed to lead to candidacy or potential candidacy to the EU. The ENP proposed all integration possible, except for integration into the EU polity. As Schimmelfennig exposed, this deliberate choice reflects both the EU's reluctance to commit to further expansion and the need to deal with new neighbours following Eastern enlargement rounds⁴⁴. While the ENP is officially designed to create a 'ring of friends' and zones of stability around the EU, it was built on the experience of the Eastern enlargement and hence carries with it its limitation and path dependency⁴⁵. For the analysis of the ENP, scholars have mostly focused on differentiated integration, external governance and Europeanisation.

Differentiated integration arose from the dichotomy between member states and non-member states, drawing on the fact that the different paces of integration could be measured in member states, the EEA and candidate countries but there was no quantitative assessment for the ENP. However, it turns out the ENP is in itself differentiated, as each country negotiates in the framework of the ENP an Action Plan (AP) specific to their needs and interests, making assessments to be also specific to each country regarding the content of their own AP. Another limitation of differentiated integration assessment is the fact that the ENP compromises countries that are not interested in further integration such as Belarus as well as countries that were denied further integration, such as Moldova and Ukraine, pushing further the need to consider the ENP on a case-by-case basis, rather than as a general and coherent policy.

External governance is the main theory used to analyse the external policy of the EU, among which the ENP⁴⁶. Despite being traditionally used on member states, it relies on the assumption that there are institutionalised forms of coordination aimed at the production of collectively binding agreements outside and beyond the state⁴⁷. Scholars have characterised the ENP as based partially on the transfer of the *acquis communautaire* instead of harmonisation and political (instead of judicial) supervision, differing from the hierarchical governance with the EEA and candidate countries⁴⁸. However, here again, this framework reaches its limits when it comes to the analysis of at least two of the Eastern countries of interests in this thesis. Indeed, while external governance might explain the ENP strategy towards Belarus, on the other side Moldova and Ukraine have both signed Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTAs) agreements, entailing a form of hierarchical governance and regulatory approximation.

Finally, Europeanisation is considered limited, in the case of the countries of the ENP, to the downloading from the EU, and scholars have mostly focused on the EU's impact on democracy and human rights. Conditionality is the main strategy used by the EU for Europeanisation in the case of the ENP, which brings us back to the mechanisms exposed in the Europeanisation of third countries or candidate states. Here again, in the ENP too many obstacles undermine conditionality efficiency: the lack of membership perspective, the size of incentives insufficiently credible, and the principle of joint ownership. Moreover, EU and domestic factors played a role in the weakness of Europeanisation in the ENP countries, the EU has been inconsistent and incoherent, and the ENP was met with weak resonance with promoted EU norms (human rights, European identity) in targeted countries, a weak civil society and resistance by regional veto players⁴⁹.

The ENP fails to entail any further integration and the heterogeneity of the countries compromised in the policy does not permit a good categorisation of Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine for our analysis. The Eastern

⁴⁴ Frank Schimmelfennig, 'Beyond Enlargement: Conceptualizing the Study of the European Neighbourhood Policy', in *The Routledge Handbook on the European Neighbourhood Policy*, (London, New York: Routledge, 2017), p. 17.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 19–20.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 20–21.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

neighbours cannot be considered third countries with no links whatsoever with the EU, nor treated the same way as other ENP countries (such as Algeria or Lebanon). This is the reason why, in 2009 was launched the Eastern Partnership (EaP), comprising six post-Soviet states: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. This new policy which was aimed at better considering the particularities of the region, was based on the principles of conditionality, differentiation and joint ownership. Henceforth, principles and strategies used by the EU towards either third countries, close neighbourhoods or candidate states. This does not help to find a suitable framework to analyse Europeanisation in the three Eastern states. We argue that, since Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine can be considered as the least controversially ‘European’ countries out of the ENP and EaP countries in the light of the shared history, culture and borders with the EU,⁵⁰ and the fact that both Ukraine and Moldova are on their way to becoming candidate states,⁵¹ hence the European policy towards the three Eastern neighbours ought to be analysed the same way as CEE and Western Balkans countries, in other words, through the original framework of the external incentive model.

2. *The research design: the external incentive model*

Now that we have reviewed and understood what European integration is, the development of Europeanisation as a theory, as well as the different frameworks possible to analyse it, we will develop our research design. Europeanisation, as mentioned before has several definitions possible. In this thesis we saw Europeanisation first, as the study of the consequences of integration on member states on the three political dimensions (polity, politics and policies). Then as the study of the impact of the EU on candidate states in CEE. And lastly as an external projection of the EU’s internal solution to third countries. For the analysis of the Eastern neighbours, we will use the term Europeanisation as defined by Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier in 2020 in their analysis of Europeanisation of SEE, thus as a “*process in which states adopt EU rules accompanied their democratic and market-economic transitions*”⁵². We consider this definition for the Eastern Neighbours as it takes into account the post-communist heritage and the transition that followed. In addition to that this definition is in line with our definition of European integration, in the sense of economic, legal and political cooperation.

In their analysis of the Europeanisation of SEE, Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier⁵³ revisited the external incentive model (EIM) born out of the analysis of Europeanisation in CEE and tested if the model was still as relevant. They define the EIM as the main theoretical framework that explains when the EU conditionality strategy leads to domestic change. The conditionality strategy through sanctions and rewards is assumed to alter the cost-benefit calculation of targeted governments. More precisely, the EU sets the adoption of norms and rules (both political and regulatory) as conditions to receive a reward (ranging from financial and technical assistance to membership). On the side of the targeted government, they are free to accept or refuse the EU’s conditions. The model provides that conditions are accepted if the benefit is perceived as higher than the costs of compliance, and underlines that this cost-benefit assessment is subject to domestic politics (governments are constrained by veto players, pressure groups, opposition parties etc.), a dimension on which the EU has no power⁵⁴.

Hence, the EIM attempts to identify the conditions, the facilitating factors for the adoption of EU rules in targeted countries, or in other words, which conditions alter the cost-benefit calculation. They identify four pillars:

1. *Rewards*: the effectiveness of conditionality relies heavily on the size of the rewards and its tangibility and distance. For instance, membership entails bigger financial assistance and unconditional access to the single market, making it a sizeable reward.

⁵⁰ ‘Briefing No 23 - Legal Questions of Enlargement’, accessed 12 April 2022. See Part III. Conditions of Accession a) The European State, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/enlargement/briefings/23a2_en.htm.

⁵¹ Agence Europe, ‘European Commission Has Submitted Questionnaires for EU Membership to Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova’, <https://agenceurope.eu/en/bulletin/article/12930/6>, accessed 12 April 2022.

⁵² Frank Schimmelfennig and Ulrich Sedelmeier, ‘The Europeanization of Eastern Europe: The External Incentives Model Revisited’, *Journal of European Public Policy*, 27, no. 6 (2 June 2020), p. 814.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 814-816.

2. *Determinacy* comprises three facets: precision, obligation and consistency. Precision means that actions that need to be taken in order to meet with conditions to get the rewards must be clear and reachable for the targeted governments. Obligations reveal the binding character of the conditions and can be enhanced if the EU points at the most salient specific conditions to be met. And consistency refers to the homogeneity of requirements for all candidates and that these requirements do not change for individual states⁵⁵.

3. *Credibility* refers to the ability of the EU to withhold and deliver the reward. Since conditionality suffers from time-inconsistency (need to meet conditions before getting the reward), it can be harmed by perceived weak internal consensus within the EU about the reward (among member states or in public opinion). But credibility is also boosted by the asymmetrical bargaining power in the advantage of the EU, which can withhold the reward. Eventually, credibility also suffers from cross-conditionality, i.e. the targeted government is already engaged in an incompatible conditional model sets by other international organisations or the other organisation can offer the same reward but at a lower cost.

4. *Costs*: the costs of meeting the conditions are the same as mentioned earlier, and are subject to domestic politics, an arena where the EU is powerless. The model provides three costly sources that can undermine conditionality. Targeted governments are unwilling to meet conditions because the political cost is too high (e.g. loss of elections), or conditions threaten the institutional or societal veto players, or they simply lack financial or administrative capacities to meet conditions⁵⁶.

Eventually, the EIM does not explain the success of the EU's conditionality but rather seeks to explain the reasons why it is efficient and the reasons why it isn't. In other words, we are looking to know if the reasons why conditionality works or fails are reasons that are specified by the model⁵⁷.

In order to grasp the extent of European integration entailed by the EU in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine, we will hence analyse the main policy of the EU towards these countries, i.e. the Eastern Partnership, and each countries' progress regarding the EaP's goals through the lens of the EIM. More precisely, we will identify the rewards and conditionality model of the EaP policy, and analyse the determinacy, credibility of the policy and finally the costs that compliance entails in the three countries.

C. The case of the Western Balkans

1. *The comparison case*

We have come to the conclusion in a previous section, that the Eastern neighbours countries were better to be compared with the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans. However, this WB region has already itself been compared with the CEE countries, for a number of reasons. First of all, unlike for Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine, the WB countries received a promise of membership very quickly following the end of dictatorships in CEE and end of ethnic conflicts in the WB. But it is also interesting to note that they also have many differences. The most important is related to the narrative linked to the EU and the place of each of these nations in Europe. In the CEE countries in the 1990s the dominant narrative was one of the 'Return to Europe', aimed at legitimising the accession of these countries to the EU and NATO⁵⁸. A narrative that was also used in post-Soviet countries such as the three Baltic states⁵⁹. On the other side, in the WB region, the question of the European identity found itself intertwined in the already complex identity building of the region, the question was not how to recreate a sense of European

⁵⁵ Asya Zhelyazkova et al., 'European Union Conditionality in the Western Balkans: External Incentives and Europeanisation', in *The Europeanisation of the Western Balkans: A Failure of EU Conditionality?*, ed. Jelena Džankić, Soeren Keil, and Marko Kmezić (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019), p. 19.

⁵⁶ Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier (2020), pp. 817–818.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 814.

⁵⁸ Milan Kundera, 'Un Occident kidnappé', *Le Débat*, 27, no. 5 (1983), pp. 3–23; Aliaksei Kazharski, 'The End of "Central Europe"? The Rise of the Radical Right and the Contestation of Identities in Slovakia and the Visegrad Four', *Geopolitics*, 23, no. 4 (2 October 2018), pp. 758–61.

⁵⁹ Maria Mälksoo, *The Politics of Becoming European: A Study of Polish and Baltic Post-Cold War Security Imaginaries* (London: Routledge, 2009).

identity, but rather how to create one⁶⁰. On a more concrete aspect of Europeanisation, another big difference between the integration of CEE and the integration of the WB relies on the conditions imposed by the EU. While, we mentioned earlier that CEE had been subject to ad hoc conditions on the strengthening of democracy and market economy in their accession process (i.e. the Copenhagen criteria), the EU learnt from this experience and imposed to the WB a Copenhagen Plus criteria. These reinforced criteria compromise the original criteria imposed to CEE, but also a strong emphasis on the rule of law and democratic consolidation, as well as specific criteria related to the region, among which cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY)⁶¹. Finally, the WB finds itself in a much different context for accession than the CEE countries did. Following the two rounds of Eastern enlargement in 2004 and 2007, the EU, its member states and public opinions, were struck by ‘enlargement fatigue’ which was soon followed by doubt around the capacities of the EU ever being able to reproduce such an enlargement. In addition to that, the WB started from a much lower level of fit with EU conditions, they have less experience with democracy, lower level of governance capacities, contested statehood and unresolved ethnic problems were less salient, if not absent characteristics in CEE⁶².

Many of these distinctions between the CEE countries and the WB makes us argue that the WB could also be compared with the three Eastern Neighbours of interests. First, the issue of the weakness of statehood, as both regions of the WB and Eastern neighbourhood, unlike CEE countries⁶³, were born out of the dissolution of a bigger state (Yugoslavia and the USSR) and did not enjoy statehood by themselves during the Cold War period, hence lack the very experience of statehood. Another similarity between the Eastern neighbours and the WB that makes them different from CEE is the presence of internal conflicts (with the sole exception of Belarus). While this point of comparison can be discussed, as the nature and sources of the internal conflicts in the two regions are different⁶⁴, we argue that the fact that these regions have had, and/or still must deal with these internal conflicts, makes it a point of comparison more salient than with the CEE countries who did not have such conflicts and/or were resolved peacefully and promptly⁶⁵. Impeding even further the weakness of statehood and democratic consolidation in both regions, the legacy of organised crimes and endemic corruption problems are other points of similarities.

Moreover, and linked to the weakness of statehood, the question of identity remains more salient in both the WB and the Eastern neighbours. Both regions are perceived as backward and with a sense of Orientalism from the Western European standpoint⁶⁶. Both suffers from a difficulty to renegotiate the new states’ identities, with countries like Croatia who manages to rebuild a state identity around a European perspective, while other countries are still attached ethno-nationalistic identities like Serbia⁶⁷. Likewise in Moldova and Ukraine, where identities are struggling between a post-Soviet legacy and the political affirmation of their willingness to follow a European path⁶⁸. While Belarus at the same time has a very

⁶⁰ Monika Eriksen, ‘Value-Oriented Aspects of EU-Isation: The Case of the Balkans’, in *The European Union and It’s Eastern Neighbourhood: Europeanisation and It’s Twenty-First-Century Contradictions*, ed. Paul Flenley and Michael L. Mannin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), pp. 114–125.

⁶¹ Zhelyazkova et al. (2019), ‘European Union Conditionality in the Western Balkans’, p. 16.

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 16–17.

⁶³ With the exception of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, former USSR Republics and Slovenia former part of Yugoslavia.

⁶⁴ In the WB conflicts are interethnic conflicts between the states of the region, while in the Eastern neighbours conflicts are fuelled by foreign a foreign state (i.e. the Russian Federation).

⁶⁵ See for instance the dissolution of Czechoslovakia: Jiří Musil, ed., *The End of Czechoslovakia* (Budapest ; New York : Central European University Press ; Distributed in the U.S. by Oxford University Press, 1995).

⁶⁶ Eriksen (2018), ‘Value-Oriented Aspects of EU-Isation: The Case of the Balkans’, pp. 118–121; Artur Kozłowski and Myron Yankiv, ‘Ukraine’s Gradual Westernization - the Eastern Dimension of the European Integration’, *WVB Journal of Business and Finance*, 55 (1 January 2021), p. 5; ‘Moldova Most EU-Friendly Eastern Country, Survey Reveals’, www.euractiv.com, 14 June 2010.

⁶⁷ Eriksen (2018), ‘Value-Oriented Aspects of EU-Isation: The Case of the Balkans’, pp. 121–122.

⁶⁸ David Rotman and Natalia Veremeeva, ‘Belarus in the Context of the Neighbourhood Policy: Between the EU and Russia’, *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, 27, no. 1 (1 March 2011), pp. 73–98; Elena Korosteleva, ‘Moldova’s European Choice: “Between Two Stools”’, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 62 (1 October 2010), pp. 1267–1289; Kozłowski and Yankiv (2021), ‘Ukraine’s Gradual Westernization - the Eastern Dimension of the European Integration’.

different perception of its European identity linked with the idea of 'Wider Europe' rather than the European identity promoted by the EU⁶⁹.

Drawing on these tensions over identities, that are often more important than economic and political issues for the populations and local elites, both the WB and the Eastern Neighbours find themselves in the tangle of foreign influence, other than the EU's. This is especially the case with Russia in both regions, and particularly being at the centre of ethnic tensions in Moldova and Ukraine, and threatening Belarus' sovereignty. In the WB, Russia plays on Slavic and Orthodox history especially among the Serbian population across the region. But, while Russia has not directly threatened the WB countries about their prospective EU membership, it has been consistent on threat regarding NATO membership in both region and through this tries to promote an alternative to Euro-Atlanticism. Türkiye also plays an important role, especially among Muslim populations in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Albania and relying on the shared history of the Ottoman Empire,⁷⁰ whereas in Moldova it is through the Gagauz minority⁷¹ that Türkiye exercises influence⁷². Finally, another big player in both regions is China, who appears as a partner for economic development easier to deal with than the EU and Russia, because of the lighter conditions it imposes on countries⁷³. China's influence has been greater in countries that are less close to the EU's norms and values and who need a leverage possibility with Russia, such as Serbia or Belarus.

Along with identities issue and foreign influence, both regions also suffer in their relations with the EU because of bilateral issues with some member states. In the WB such issues are well illustrated by North Macedonia which for a long time got into a conflict over its name with Greece,⁷⁴ and now is still struggling in its EU accession talks because of Bulgaria's veto, over the name of the country again, but also around the language and other historical claims⁷⁵. In addition to that, five member states still to this day do not recognise Kosovo's independence among which Spain, Greece, Slovakia, Cyprus and Romania⁷⁶. In the Eastern Neighbours, the recent staged migration crisis at the borders between Belarus, Poland and Lithuania has further stained already complicated relations between the EU and Belarus⁷⁷. Whereas, in Ukraine for example, it is the situation of the Hungarian minority that poses problems with the current Hungarian government⁷⁸. The EU has little incentives to solve these tensions since the economic interests of the WB and Eastern countries are much less important than it was with CEE. This makes another point

⁶⁹ Kiryl Kascian, 'Belarus: Does Europeanisation Require a Geopolitical Choice?', in *The European Union and Its Eastern Neighbourhood: Europeanisation and Its Twenty-First-Century Contradictions*, ed. Paul Flenley and Michael L. Mannin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), pp. 96–97.

⁷⁰ Marek Dabrowski and Yana Myachenkova, 'The Western Balkans on the Road to the European Union', *Bruegel Policy Contribution*, no. 2018/04, (2018), pp. 11–12.

⁷¹ A Christian Orthodox ethnically Turkic minority of Southern Moldova.

⁷² Busra Nur Bilgic Cakmak, "'Turkey Wants Strong Gagauzia within Strong Moldova'", *AA*, 27 August 2020, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/politics/-turkey-wants-strong-gagauzia-within-strong-moldova-/1955214>.

⁷³ Dabrowski and Myachenkova (2018), 'The Western Balkans on the Road to the European Union', pp. 11–12.

⁷⁴ Chris Harris, 'Explained: The Contentious Name Dispute between Greece & FYR Macedonia', *Euronews*, 24 January 2019, <https://www.euronews.com/2019/01/24/explained-the-controversial-name-dispute-between-greece-and-fyr-macedonia>.

⁷⁵ 'Bulgaria Blocks EU Accession Talks for North Macedonia', *RFI*, 18 November 2020, <https://www.rfi.fr/en/europe/20201118-bulgaria-blocks-eu-accession-talks-for-north-macedonia-albania-balkans-wwii>.

⁷⁶ Ian Traynor, 'Spain Exposes EU Split as US Leads Recognition', *The Guardian*, 19 February 2008, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/feb/19/kosovo.serbia>; Marian Chiriac, 'Romania Sticks to Its Tough Line on Kosovo', *Balkan Insight* (blog), 28 October 2015, <https://balkaninsight.com/2015/10/28/romania-continues-not-to-recognize-kosovo-10-28-2015/>; Zeljko Trkanjec, 'Greece Will Not Change Position on Kosovo', *Www.Euractiv.Com*, 17 February 2022, https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short_news/greece-will-not-change-position-on-kosovo/.

⁷⁷ Reis Thebault and Robyn Dixon, 'Why Are so Many Migrants Coming to One of Europe's Smallest Countries? Blame Belarus, Officials Say.', *Washington Post*, 1 August 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/08/01/lithuania-belarus-migrants/>.

⁷⁸ Eva S. Balogh, 'Russia, Hungary, and the Hungarian Minority in Ukraine', *Hungarian Spectrum* (blog), 11 February 2015, <https://hungarianspectrum.org/2015/02/11/russia-hungary-and-the-hungarian-minority-in-ukraine/>; Yaroslava Bukhta, 'Hungarians of Ukraine. Who Are They? • Ukraïner', *Ukraïner* (blog), 21 August 2020, <https://ukraïner.net/hungarians-of-ukraine/>.

of similarity between the WB and the Eastern neighbours, the focus of the EU on stability in its borders rather than on enlargement, integration and promotion of democracy.

Despite all these similarities, there remains some significant differences between the WB countries and Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine that needs to be taken into consideration in this analysis. Two main points of difference can be identified: the socialist legacy and the favoured treatment from the EU. First, the legacy of the decentralised market socialism system of Yugoslavia permitted the creation of quasi-market institutions and market-oriented behaviour before the start of the economic transition in post-Yugoslav states⁷⁹. On the contrary in Albania, which followed an orthodox model of centrally planned and closed economy,⁸⁰ and in post-Soviet states such as Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine, economic transition resulted in heavier costs. Especially in post-Soviet countries, where dependence on Russia because of the former Soviet system, became a substantial issue weighting on foreign policy decisions⁸¹.

The second point of dissensus, is the favoured treatment of the WB by the EU. All Western Balkans countries have been offered prospective of NATO and EU membership as soon as 1999, while EU membership, or even candidacy status prospective have been denied for the Eastern Neighbours until very recently and the start of the war in Ukraine, when the European Commission handed over the questionnaires for the purpose of candidate status to Moldova and Ukraine (as well as Georgia) in April 2022. While a military conflict had to be triggered for the EU to eventually step further in the Eastern Neighbours, the WB have had several reaffirmations of the EU's commitment for their future as a member states, despite slow progress towards integration and full membership, as illustrated with the 2003 Thessaloniki Summit and the Berlin Process launched in 2014. It is also important to mention that the EU treats with each country of the WB on an individual basis when it comes to conditions of integration and accession to the EU and rewards, while in the Eastern Neighbourhood, the EU treats with heterogeneous countries such as Azerbaijan and Moldova within the same framework, the Eastern Partnership, offering the same conditions and rewards. The difference of treatment and salience of the two regions shows how the EU perceives both. On the one hand, the WB are locked within the EU already whether it is on land or on the sea (with the Adriatic Sea shared with Italy) and represent since 2015 a security challenge as many migration routes pass through the region. On the other hand, the Eastern neighbours are rather considered periphery and a buffer zone between the EU and Russia where security challenges rely on sectors that can be more easily dealt with (e.g. in the energy sector when Germany decided to bypass Ukraine for its gas supply through direct delivery through the Baltic Sea).

In conclusion, we argue that comparison of the Eastern Neighbours with the Western Balkans countries appears to be the best option at our disposal, since both regions share enough similarities to be compared and points of differences are lesser than with third countries, ENP countries or CEE countries. Now, that we have identified our research framework with the EIM and the region we ought to compare Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine with, the last part will present the analysis of the WB through the EIM.

2. *Extent of European integration in the Western Balkans*

In order to test the robustness of the EIM, scholars have further tried to assess the extent of Europeanisation through conditionality in South-Eastern Europe. Excluding Türkiye from our analysis, because of the difference in size, economic development and bargaining power it holds over its negotiation process with the EU compared to the WB and the Eastern Neighbours, in this section we will explore the results of the Europeanisation of the Western Balkans in the light of the EIM, through the four factors identified by the model: rewards, credibility, determinacy, and costs. The scholars on which this section relies, Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, Mirel, and Zhelyazkova et al. have put the focus on democracy and rule of law consolidation and the implementation of the *acquis communautaire*. Dabrowski and Myachenkova

⁷⁹ Pierre Mirel, 'The Western Balkans: Between Stabilisation and Integration in the European Union', *Fondation Robert Schuman*, European Issues, 459 (23 January 2018), pp. 2–3.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ See for instance the case of Belarus: Ryhor Nizhnikau and Arkady Moshes, 'Belarus in Search of a New Foreign Policy: Why Is It so Difficult?', ed. Kristian Fischer, Hans Mouritzen, and DIIS: Danish Institute for International Studies, *Danish Foreign Policy Review 2020*, (2020), pp. 48–72.

as well as Mirel, have put further emphasis on economic integration, that we will mention after our sum up of the EIM assessment of Europeanisation in the WB.

The *reward* for the compliance with the EU's conditions in the WB is the highest reward the EU can offer: full EU membership. Hence, the same reward as in CEE, however with a slight difference in the case of the WB, as some intermediate rewards are also delivered. The *credibility* of the reward is high for the WB countries for a couple of reasons. First, the EU has the credibility to withhold rewards in case of non-compliance and the asymmetrical bargaining power works in the favour of the EU, which are prerequisites for a successful Europeanisation⁸². Good examples of this includes the accession of Croatia to the EU in 2013 and the delivery of the lift of visa obligations for travel in 2009 – 2010 for Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia following the successful implementation of the visa facilitation and readmission agreements⁸³. In addition to that, the treatment of each country of the region on an individual basis, guaranteeing that laggards in reforms cannot hide behind best performers, and the fact that the EU has a strong interest in stability in the region, guaranteeing interest towards more integration, both reinforce the credibility factor⁸⁴. However, the credibility factor is impeded in the WB for several reasons as well. As already mentioned above, the WB do not benefit from the same positive context for their accession process. Firstly, as shown by Eurobarometers, public opinion in member states about further enlargement of the EU remains low over the years⁸⁵. Secondly, some member states, among which some of the most powerful such as France,⁸⁶ remain unfavourable to further enlargement, accompanied with important intergovernmental conflicts among member states making some of them bigger veto players than others. Thirdly, even within the EU institutions themselves, activism for enlargement to the WB has tremendously decreased compared to the involvement of the European Commission for prompt enlargement to CEE. We can see in this lesser involvement and resistance from EU actors a realisation and consideration of the public opinion. All these reasons have been referred to as 'enlargement fatigue'. But notwithstanding enlargement fatigue, the EU has also been faced with internal and external crisis (e.g. Euro crisis, Migration crisis, Brexit) which indirectly obstructed the credibility of WB accession.⁸⁷ Ultimately, despite the EU's strong interest in the stability of the region, the WB remains less attractive in terms of size and economic development than the CEE were in the early 2000s⁸⁸. As a result of the pessimistic context, low credibility of accession affects the perceptions of domestic actors of having the reward delivered and/or the size of the rewards diminished. And the focus on stability rather than on democratic consolidation and progress towards accession, has led the EU to give external support and legitimacy to 'stabilitocracies'⁸⁹, a fact criticised by Serbian scholars⁹⁰.

On *determinacy*, here again, it is harder for the WB than it has been for the CEE. As already mentioned, stricter rules concerning rule of law and democracy stabilisation were introduced for the WB (i.e. Copenhagen Plus Criteria) including full cooperation with the ICTY, implementation of peace agreements and resolution of bilateral conflicts are required before full membership can be delivered. Stricter conditions supervised by a more coherent monitoring system of compliance by the European Commission. The EU, drawing on its experience with the CEE enlargement, is also more demanding in terms of content, scope and implementation of reforms before accession and would rather give maximum time to establish legislation, institutions and track the record of implementation before accession. Furthermore, the European Commission in the case of WB enlargement has the right to, on its own initiative or following the request of at least one third of member states, close or open negotiation chapters with WB countries⁹¹. Overall, with a more determinate and demanding conditionality, but still lacking clarity especially over state-

⁸² Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier (2020), 'The Europeanization of Eastern Europe', p. 823.

⁸³ Dabrowski and Myachenkova (2018), 'The Western Balkans on the Road to the European Union', p. 3.

⁸⁴ Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier (2020), 'The Europeanization of Eastern Europe', p. 823.

⁸⁵ Zhelyazkova et al. (2019), 'European Union Conditionality in the Western Balkans', p. 26; Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier (2020), 'The Europeanization of Eastern Europe', pp. 824–825.

⁸⁶ Dimitar Bechev, 'Did Macron Kill the EU Enlargement Dream?', *Al Jazeera*, 23 October 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2019/10/23/did-macron-kill-the-eu-enlargement-dream>.

⁸⁷ Zhelyazkova et al. (2019), 'European Union Conditionality in the Western Balkans', p. 27.

⁸⁸ Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier (2020), 'The Europeanization of Eastern Europe', pp. 824–825.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 823.

⁹⁰ Dabrowski and Myachenkova (2018), 'The Western Balkans on the Road to the European Union', p. 10.

⁹¹ Zhelyazkova et al. (2019), 'European Union Conditionality in the Western Balkans', pp. 24–25.

building conditions, determinacy increases, making adoption costs rise and reduce the chances of successful Europeanisation⁹².

Lastly, *costs* of adoption of EU rules and compliance with EU conditions, as just stated are high for WB countries. Alike in CEE, the prospect of EU accession was popular in the WB at the beginning of the process. But the popularity suffers with time, and the WB have been in the waiting room of the EU for now twice as long as it took for CEE countries to achieve full membership, hence hamper popularity and motivation⁹³ as well as creating room for opposition to accession and resistance to compliance. Since the WB countries are starting from a lower fit in terms of statehood and state transformation (political and administrative institutions) than in the CEE, enhanced EU conditions entail logically higher costs⁹⁴. Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier identifies three reasons why domestic costs to compliance with EU conditions are higher in the WB:⁹⁵ first, the conditions demand local political elites to give up on more power and rent-seeking opportunities and accept EU constraints (e.g. rule of law). However, in practice, state capture has become more and more prevalent in the region and local elites are more concerned about keeping power than leading reforms (that may damage them politically and/or electorally)⁹⁶. Despite the absence of Eurosceptic parties in WB countries, even pro-EU governments may not be willing to pursue EU conditions related reforms because of electoral interests or/and end up pursuing superficial reforms. Secondly, the enhanced Copenhagen criteria relate to sensitive issues de facto entailing high political costs. Even if the most nationalistic parties of the WB gradually became more positive towards EU accession, the ethno-nationalistic issue remains on top of priorities in the region above political and economic issues. Moreover, and related, in some cases, it is institutional actors who become veto players, for instance in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with its decentralised political system⁹⁷. Thirdly, EU political conditions dominate all other conditions, which as demonstrated entails higher domestic costs of adoption.

In a nutshell, despite excellent economic integration results, European integration of the Western Balkans continues to stagnate if not retreat. On the economic integration side, scholars show that the trade agreements with the EU were the most effective, indeed export from the WB to the EU increased by 89% between 2007 and 2016, while export from the EU to the WB increased by 42% in the same period⁹⁸. Import and export from and to the EU represents a high share WB countries' GDP, despite being volatile and running under deficit, it is partially compensated by remittances, which accounts for approximately 10% of GDP in the region. And the majority of the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and development aid that the region receives come from the EU. If Russia remains an important partner when it comes to import of energy sources, its importance gradually diminishes over time. While for the role of China and Türkiye, if they hold a limited place in the export sector, their importance in the import sector has been steadily growing⁹⁹. Nonetheless, the EU remains the first and most important economic partner for the region. But as the EIM demonstrated, the old idea that economic integration entails further political integration is challenged in the case of the WB.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁹³ It took approximately 10 years for the countries of the 2004 enlargement to become full members of the EU (1993-2004), while in the WB, the closest countries to join the EU, Serbia and Montenegro, if they indeed join the EU in 2025, would have waited 26 years (1999-2025)

⁹⁴ Mirel (2018), 'The Western Balkans: Between Stabilisation and Integration in the European Union', p. 19.

⁹⁵ Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier (2020), 'The Europeanization of Eastern Europe', pp. 825–826.

⁹⁶ Dabrowski and Myachenkova (2018), 'The Western Balkans on the Road to the European Union', p. 3.

⁹⁷ Zhelyazkova et al. (2019), 'European Union Conditionality in the Western Balkans', pp. 29–30.

⁹⁸ Dabrowski and Myachenkova (2018), 'The Western Balkans on the Road to the European Union', p. 3.

⁹⁹ Mirel (2018), 'The Western Balkans: Between Stabilisation and Integration in the European Union', pp. 12–17.

II. Analysis of Europeanisation in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine

In order to best assess the extent of European integration in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine, and the efficiency of the strategies used by the EU to foster it, an overview of the relations between the EU and these countries since their independence appears necessary to grasp the current state of play. After reviewing the evolution of the relations between the Eastern neighbours and the EU, we will proceed with the analysis of the Eastern Partnership policy through the External Incentives Model.

A. The Eastern neighbours and the European Union: the beginning of relations

1. *The collapse of the USSR and independence: new challenges*

Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine all formally gained independence from the Soviet Union (USSR) in 1991. As part of the USSR, Belarus represented slightly less than 1% of the Soviet Union's total land area, while Moldova represented 0.2% and Ukraine ranked 3rd biggest, with 2.7% of the total land area behind Russia and Kazakhstan. In 1991 in terms of GDP, Ukraine was amongst the best performers and accounted for 6.4% of the Soviet Union's total GDP, Belarus 2.3% while Moldova ranked amongst the worst performer providing only 0.3%¹⁰⁰. Unlike in Central and Eastern Europe, where countries had been already reforming the communist regimes since the 1980s, and in the Western Balkans, where the end of the social state happened because of the internal ethnic tensions and subsequent wars, post-Soviet countries gained an independence that was almost not asked for. This "surprise" independence was accompanied by a sense of unpreparedness in terms of economic reforms, governance and democratic transition.

When it comes to economic reforms, the new post-Soviet states inherited the fact that the USSR was the greatest laggard in terms of reform from the whole Eastern bloc. As a consequence of the dissolution of a highly integrated union of Republics, new post-Soviet independent states were faced with a strong interdependence with Russia and more generally with all post-Soviet states, especially in terms of access to raw materials and export. Trade between Soviet Republics was heavily linked with advanced technologies and interdependent on input from different Republics, independence hence entailing a loss in production or a greater cost of production, especially in Belarus and Ukraine, being ones of the most advanced republics in terms of technology, industry and development. While CEE countries had developed import and export relations with Western countries during the Cold War period (experience on which they could rely during the transition period), the USSR on the other side worked almost entirely in a kind of autarky. Most exports from the USSR were going to the Eastern bloc countries, for instance the percentage share in total export of machinery and transport equipment from the USSR accounted for 16.4% among which only 0.8% was destined to be sent outside the Eastern bloc¹⁰¹. In addition to that, the international context and inherited internal economic apparatus made it difficult for new independent states to find new markets to compensate for the loss of internal demand and the costs of breaking links with former Soviet Republics, as well as to replace the collapse of central authorities who subsidized and managed industries and trade across the Soviet Union¹⁰².

These economic challenges greatly hampered the democratic transition of Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine. Unlike in CEE countries, where more or less comprehensive economic and democratic reforms were pursued by non-communist actors, post-Soviet states struggled to delegitimise the Soviet nomenklatura. Despite the presence of non-communist elites, keen to challenge the Soviet nomenklatura and pursue pro-democratic and nationalistic political agendas, the electorates preferred the nomenklatura who continued to symbolise stability and moderation. Although the nomenklatura was pursuing democratic reforms,

¹⁰⁰ NationMaster, 'Stats for Country Grouping: Former Soviet Republics', accessed 27 April 2022, <http://www.nationmaster.com/country-info/groups/Former-Soviet-republics>.

¹⁰¹ M. R. Myant and Jan Drahekoupil, *Transition Economies: Political Economy in Russia, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2011), p. 44.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, pp. 39–44.

structural and societal obstacles remained: habits of overdependence on the state, weak civil society, lack of education about democratic institutions, and the beginning of a cleavage between nationalists and the former soviet nomenklatura, obstacles that are still to this day problems for the democratic consolidation of post-Soviet republics. The continuity of the elite from the Soviet period and the reforms-resistant state apparatus hampered democratisation and led to the creation of plutocratic/oligarchic regimes as many of the pre-existing administration-owned-and-managed resources were transferred to a small group of individuals¹⁰³. However, it is worth mentioning that formally all constitutions adopted by the three Eastern neighbours are European-style-democracy-friendly constitutions. Belarus and Moldova adopted their new constitutions in 1994 and Ukraine in 1996, all three constitutions include principles of democracy, rule of law, protection of minority rights, principles of international law, separation of power, pluralism, individual rights and fundamental freedoms.

These economic dependences on former Soviet Republics, especially on Russia, consequently had an impact on the newly independent states' foreign policies, in other words on whom to deal with in the future. What is remarkable is that Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine have all three chosen different kinds of foreign policy directions as soon as the 1990s. Belarus chose the option of maximal integration with Russia, while Moldova declared its main foreign policy priority integration with the EU, and Ukraine tried to pursue a balanced policy between the two centres of power of the continent, Russia and the EU.

Belarus' 1990s foreign policy was driven by a rather pragmatic approach. As the country had lost its main source of economic success - i.e. guaranteed access to raw material - with independence, its foreign policy choices so as to keep the economy on track were understandably to maintain close ties with neighbouring Russia i.e. the main source of the raw material needed for the Belarusian industry. Consequently, a series of agreements were signed between Belarus and Russia: Treaty of Friendship, Neighbourliness and Mutual Assistance (1995), Commonwealth of Russia and Belarus (1996), Union Treaty (1997), Treaty on the Creation of a Union State of Belarus and Russia (1999). This last treaty implying the creation of a Union State between the two former Soviet Republics was the most far-reaching treaty, including the creation of a single economic space, the promotion of human rights under the principles of international law, a single democratic system, coordinated social policy, a single customs union, a single currency and a common budget¹⁰⁴. The new relations between the two countries were clear, in exchange for a legal commitment from Belarus, Russia was to provide economic support. Along with economic dependence on Russia, two other factors justified this choice of foreign policy priority for the new Belarusian state. Firstly, following the 1996 referendum aiming to modify the barely two-year-old constitution, the EU imposed economic sanctions on Belarus and restrictions on travel for officials, after the referendum was deemed to fall far short of democratic standards according to the OSCE¹⁰⁵. Secondly, the cultural proximity of Belarus with Russia made it the most obvious partner for Belarus once isolated by Western countries¹⁰⁶. Belarus is the only post-Soviet Republic (with the exception of Russia) to have made Russian an official state language (Art. 17 of the Constitution). This shows the cultural proximity the new independent state aims to sustain with Russia, while the Moldovan (Art.13(2)) and Ukrainian (Art.10) constitutions only mention Russian as a minority language.

Moldova, as one of the poorest republics of the USSR and one of the poorest new states in Europe in 1991, was heavily reliant on Russia especially for energy supply but also for trade, Moldova was sending to Russia 80% of its overall export. Moreover, the country was, from its independence, divided between a determined Moldovan-Romanian majority and a vociferous Russian-speaking minority in Transnistria, the easternmost region of Moldova. In 1992 an armed conflict erupted between the Russian-backed Transnistrian region and the Moldovan authorities, which ended up in a frozen conflict, making Transnistria a hot hub for organised crimes, weapon dealing, smuggling, human trafficking and most importantly deprived Moldova

¹⁰³ Ghia Nodia, 'Democracy and Its Deficits: The Path towards Becoming European-Style Democracies in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine', *3DCTAs - Understanding the EU's Association Agreements and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas with Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia*, 1 December 2017, pp. 3–4.

¹⁰⁴ Rotman and Veremeeva (2011), 'Belarus in the Context of the Neighbourhood Policy', pp. 76–77.

¹⁰⁵ Roland Eggleston, 'OSCE Summit: Belarus' President Lukashenka Rejects Criticism', *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 1 December 1996, sec. Archive, <https://www.rferl.org/a/1082609.html>.

¹⁰⁶ Nizhnikau and Moshes (2020), 'Belarus in Search of a New Foreign Policy: Why Is It so Difficult?', p. 58.

of its main resources¹⁰⁷. All of these coupled with a structural Soviet legacy, the natural foreign policy choice for Moldova would have been closer ties with Russia and other post-Soviet states, such as Belarus did. Only, Moldovan authorities chose the absolute opposite and turned to the EU as early as 1994 and later on declared European integration as its official main foreign policy priority in 1999. Although, Chişinău struggled to attract the attention of the EU, as it was perceived by Brussels as politically and economically backwards and dominated by Russia. Besides, the EU was more concerned about other problems, such as the conflicts in the Western Balkans and the European integration of Central and Eastern Europe. The Moldovan government, after considerable effort to push for negotiations in 1992-1993, got to sign a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with the EU in 1994, with provisions on trade being applied even before the full implementation of the agreement¹⁰⁸.

Ukraine very quickly adopted a pluralistic and relatively free political system in the early 1990s. But the legacy of the Soviet apparatus continued to hamper the foundations of democratic institutions¹⁰⁹. For that reason, the EU appeared as the perfect partner to help stabilise and further develop democratic institutions in Ukraine. On the other hand, Ukraine, alike its neighbours Belarus and Moldova, was still heavily economically dependent on Russia, and the economic crises triggered by the collapse of the USSR entailed a strong need for rapid economic stabilisation. Although, instead of making the either/or decision, the new Ukrainian independent state sought to pursue a multi-vector foreign policy, seeking good relations with both the EU and Russia¹¹⁰. In 1993, the Decree on the Main Direction of Ukraine's Foreign Policy is adopted, officially giving Ukraine's foreign policy a Western orientation as the top national priority. But at the same time, the Ukrainian political elite agreed that this had to be done in good relation with Russia. This is the reason why in 1997, the Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership with Russia is signed which guaranteed security and inviolability of borders, each party's territorial integrity and mutual commitment not to use each party's territory to harm the security of the other¹¹¹.

2. The European Union's early commitment to the Eastern Neighbours: from PCA to ENP

From the European perspective, Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine represent a much bigger share of land area. Excluding Russia and Greenland, Ukraine is the biggest country of the European continent, accounting for 10% of the total land area. Belarus also ranked among the biggest states of Europe, the 13th biggest accounting for 3,5% of total land area, while Moldova finds itself performing relatively well amongst the smaller states of Europe, being slightly bigger than Belgium, representing 0.6% of the total land area¹¹². In terms of GDP, in 1990, while the average GDP from the twenty-nine Western European countries¹¹³ was 15966\$/capita, Belarus' GDP was of 7184\$/capita, Moldova's of 6165\$/capita and Ukraine's 6023\$/capita¹¹⁴. Despite good performance on the paper, especially if compared with the seven Eastern

¹⁰⁷ Korosteleva (2010), 'Moldova's European Choice', pp. 1267–1268.

¹⁰⁸ Kamil Calus and Marcin Kosienkowski, 'Relations between Moldova and the European Union', in *The European Union and Its Eastern Neighbourhood Europeanisation and Its Twenty-First-Century Contradictions*, ed. Mike Mannin and Paul Flenley (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), p. 101.

¹⁰⁹ Mikhail Minakov, 'Democratisation and Europeanisation in 21st Century Ukraine', *3DCTAs - Understanding the EU's Association Agreements and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas with Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia*, 9 June 2020, p. 2.

¹¹⁰ Steven Pifer, 'Ukraine's Foreign Policy: Losing Its Balance', *Brookings* (blog), 11 June 2012.

¹¹¹ Nadia Bureiko and Teodor Lucian Moga, "'Bounded Europeanisation": The Case of Ukraine', in *The European Union and Its Eastern Neighbourhood Europeanisation and Its Twenty-First-Century Contradictions*, ed. Mike Mannin and Paul Flenley (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), p. 75.

¹¹² The author's own calculations is based on the World Bank Data on Land Area (sq. km) of 1997. Percentage made including data from Ukraine, France, Spain, Sweden, Norway, Germany, Poland, Finland, Italy, United Kingdom, Romania, Belarus, Greece, Bulgaria, Iceland, Portugal, Hungary, Serbia, Austria, Czech Republic, Ireland, Lithuania, Latvia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovak Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Switzerland, Netherlands, Moldova, Belgium, Armenia, Albania, North Macedonia, Slovenia, Montenegro, Kosovo, Cyprus, Faroe Islands, Isle of Man, Andorra, Channel Islands, Liechtenstein, San Marino, Gibraltar and Monaco. Excluding Luxembourg for which no data was available, and Russia, Türkiye and Greenland from calculations.

¹¹³ Andorra, Austria, Belgium, Channel Islands, Cyprus, Denmark, Faeroe Islands, Finland, France, Germany, Gibraltar, Greece, Greenland, Iceland, Ireland, Isle of Man, Italy, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta, Monaco, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, San Marino, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

¹¹⁴ Myant and Drahokoupil (2011), *Transition Economies*, p. 14.

European countries¹¹⁵ which on average had a GDP per capita in 1990 of 5450\$,¹¹⁶ the EU still preferred to invest time, energy and money in Central and Eastern Europe. Economically speaking, as already mentioned the strong interdependence inherited from the highly integrated Soviet Union, as well as the vastly uncompetitive production from these countries, impeded the EU's interests in the post-Soviet region.

If the EU's involvement in the Eastern neighbours in the 1990s was not as important as it was in CEE, that does not mean that it was completely void. Out of the three possible trade agreements, the EU can provide to third countries (Customs Unions; Association Agreement and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area; Partnership and Cooperation Agreement), it provided a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) for most of the post-Soviet states¹¹⁷. PCAs only offered a very basic level of economic integration, they are legally binding and aim to support democratic and economic development, more precisely support the building of a free-market economy, a healthy climate for business and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), provides aid, cooperation in the fields of culture, science and technology as well as administrative capacity¹¹⁸. PCAs were signed with Moldova and Ukraine in 1994¹¹⁹ and with Belarus in 1995. But the extensive ratification procedure made the agreement enter into force on average two years after their initial signature. This lengthy schedule coupled with the light integration promise of the agreements, that were set to last for only ten years, gave room for other choices in terms of economic integration, as all three countries joined the post-Soviet project of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in 1994 as well¹²⁰. Moreover, the 1996 referendum and subsequent sanctions against Belarus prevented the ratification of the PCA between the EU and Belarus. Despite the critics of the PCA from Moldova and Ukraine regarding the depth and reach of the agreements, it nonetheless served to establish relations with countries which had no relations whatsoever previously with the EU. PCAs with both Moldova and Ukraine came into force in 1998 and were the sole comprehensive agreement governing their relationship with the EU until 2004¹²¹. The perception of the PCAs in both countries was different, while in Ukraine it was expected to put relations and negotiations on an equal basis between the two parties,¹²² Moldovan elites drew similarities between the PCA and the European Agreements offered to the CEE countries which in turn inflated hope for further European integration in Moldova¹²³.

The 2004 and 2007 EU enlargements to Central and Eastern European countries redefined the perception of Brussels towards Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine, which officially became direct neighbours within the EU's new borders. There was thus a need for a new and revised policy towards the new Eastern Neighbours. The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) was launched in 2004 with the objectives of “*avoiding the emergence of new dividing lines between the new EU member states and the new EU neighbourhood*”¹²⁴ and strengthening prosperity, stability and security. In other words, the ENP aims at creating a ‘ring of friends’ and a ‘stability arc’ from Morocco to Russia¹²⁵. The shift of the EU towards a more politically tinged foreign policy strategy

¹¹⁵ Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Yugoslavia.

¹¹⁶ Myant and Drahokoupil (2011), *Transition Economies*, p. 13.

¹¹⁷ European Commission, ‘Negotiations and Agreements - Trade’, <https://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/negotiations-and-agreements/>, accessed 17 April 2022.

¹¹⁸ EU Monitor, ‘Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA)’, <https://www.eumonitor.eu/9353000/1/j9vvik7m1c3gyxp/vh7gkuhng0wh>, accessed 17 April 2022.

¹¹⁹ Moldova and Ukraine's PCAs available at: ‘Partnership and Cooperation Agreements – EUBAM’, accessed 17 April 2022, <https://eubam.org/publications/partnership-and-cooperation-agreements/>.

¹²⁰ Vsevolod Samokhvalov, ‘The New Eurasia: Post-Soviet Space between Russia, Europe and China’, *European Politics and Society*, 17, no. sup1 (15 June 2016), pp. 2–3, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23745118.2016.1171285>.

¹²¹ Gunnar Wiegand and Evelina Schulz, ‘The EU and Its Eastern Partnership: Political Association and Economic Integration in a Rough Neighbourhood’, in *Trade Policy between Law, Diplomacy and Scholarship: Liber Amicorum in Memoriam Horst G. Krenzler*, ed. Christoph Herrmann, Bruno Simma, and Rudolf Streinz, European Yearbook of International Economic Law (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2015), pp. 326–327.

¹²² Oleksandr Stegnyy, ‘Ukraine and the Eastern Partnership: “Lost in Translation”?’’, *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, 27, no. 1 (1 March 2011), p.51, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13523279.2011.544383>.

¹²³ Korosteleva (2010), ‘Moldova's European Choice’, p. 1273.

¹²⁴ European Commission, ‘European Neighbourhood Policy - What Is It?’, accessed 17 April 2022, https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/european-neighbourhood-policy_en.

¹²⁵ Wiegand and Schulz (2015), ‘The EU and Its Eastern Partnership’, pp. 328–329. The ENP comprises Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, Tunisia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

can be felt, as the ENP is based on values defended by the EU and deemed 'European' such as democracy, rule of law and respect for human rights. Initially, the ENP was a response to the critics of the EU's asymmetrical enlargement strategy as well as the unilateral character of the EU's relations with third countries¹²⁶ and relied on principles such as joint ownership to avoid such criticism. In addition to that, as already mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis, the ENP was everything but a promise for candidacy and/or eventual full membership in the EU, instead, it is designed to offer a two-track approach, with both bilateral and multilateral opportunities, such as contractual agreements, joint policy platforms, flagship initiatives and supportive technical and financial instruments¹²⁷. The ENP initiative has been greatly criticised by the Eastern neighbours themselves and scholars for the lack of respect of the 'partnership' promise. Instead of addressing the main critics of asymmetrical relations of the EU with its neighbours, the ENP failed to provide a more equal relation, mutually beneficial and differentiated framework to the targeted countries. The EU has continuously pursued its own agenda while relying on principles of conditionality and incentive-based relations, hence the same principles that governed the enlargement strategy, however this time with a lack of EU membership promise and instead a vague end goal¹²⁸.

For countries such as Moldova and Ukraine, who have been motivated to show their willingness towards further integration with the EU, the ENP and its lack of membership perspective represented an outright frustration. In 1998 Ukraine published its Strategy for Ukraine's integration into the EU, in 2000 the Programme was revised, and a National Programme for the Adaptation of Ukraine's Legislation with EU law was launched, in 2002 President Kuchma in its address to the Verkhovna Rada¹²⁹ put EU integration as Ukraine's core priority. In 1999, Moldova declared European integration the country's official main foreign policy priority. In 2001 the government managed to get Moldova added to the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe, the only post-Soviet state which managed to do so, with the hope to get the same guarantee as the WB countries and a possible membership promise (which was not delivered to Moldova). Despite a lack of grandiose accomplishments in terms of European integration and a mainly declarative engagement in both countries in the 1990s and early 2000s, Moldovan and Ukrainian critics of the ENP deplore the fact that they were treated the same way as Middle Eastern and North African countries i.e. countries with no chance to join the EU in the short nor very long-term. Ukrainian elite's positions can be summarised with the following quote:

"There is a strongly held opinion within the Ukrainian political elite that the country, geographically situated in the centre of the European continent, should not participate in the ENP; her aspirations are more ambitious than merely subscribing to partnership with the EU: it desires and deserves EU membership, once it has fully complied with the EU acquis. This position was emotively voiced by the former minister of foreign affairs, and now head of the People's Movement of Ukraine, Borys Tarasyuk: We do not see ourselves as Europe's neighbours, we are in the centre of Europe. Thus, we believe, a more correct name for EU policy would be the Neighbourhood Policy of the EU but in no way the European Neighbourhood Policy. Furthermore, we do not consider the European Neighbourhood Policy an alternative to the prospect of Ukraine's eventual accession to the European Union"¹³⁰.

Moldovan elites were however critically more aware of their own internal weakness. Contrary to the Ukrainian elites who were seeking both a more equal relationship with the EU as well as a promise of membership, Moldovan elites were seeking anything but an equal relation and were ready to accept the EU's authority to engage in much-needed reforms and to welcome the EU's clear guidance in order to eventually get a membership promise¹³¹. Put simply, Moldova wanted to be treated the same way as CEE

¹²⁶ Korosteleva (2010), 'Moldova's European Choice', p. 1271.

¹²⁷ Elena A. Korosteleva, Michal Natorski, and Licinia Simão, 'The Eastern Dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy: Practices, Instruments and Social Structures', *East European Politics*, 29, no. 3 (1 September 2013), p. 257, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21599165.2013.807801>.

¹²⁸ Korosteleva (2010), 'Moldova's European Choice', 1271; Elena Korosteleva, 'The Eastern Partnership Initiative: A New Opportunity for Neighbours?', *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, 27 (1 March 2011), p. 6; Korosteleva, Natorski, and Simão (2013), 'The Eastern Dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy', pp. 257–258.

¹²⁹ Ukraine's national parliament.

¹³⁰ Stegny (2011), 'Ukraine and the Eastern Partnership', p. 54.

¹³¹ Korosteleva (2011), 'The Eastern Partnership Initiative', p. 12.

countries, with strong involvement of the EU in both political and economic reforms. However, Moldovan elites welcomed the ENP with the same disappointment as Ukrainians:

“Therefore, the inclusion of Moldova in the ENP meant explicit nonrecognition by the EU of a European perspective for Moldova. Given that by then considerable progress had been made to adjust to the EU’s rules, this alternative clearly came as bitter disappointment to the country. The inclusion of Moldova in the same group as the countries that have no European aspirations, under the new EaP initiative, was seen by many as a slap in the face, precipitating among the national elite a rather sceptical attitude towards the entire course of European integration. From this perspective, the main concerns in relation to EU policies are not those that would question Moldova’s capacity to implement reform: what is more at stake is the future certainty of EU–Moldova relations and knowing the final destination of the efforts being undertaken. This certainty and commitment are lacking on both sides at present, and are in need of urgent revisiting”¹³².

Despite the fact that the ENP was launched at a sensible moment in the political life of both Moldova and Ukraine, as 2001 marked the return of the Kremlin-backed Communist Party to power in Chişinău, and the Orange Revolution erupted in Ukraine at the very beginning of the ENP negotiation, it nonetheless represented a dissatisfaction. Belarus on the other side has been less engaged in the ENP despite its formal involvement, notably because of its policy choice of maximal integration with Russia. Moreover, as the country slide back into a form of dictatorship in the late 1990s, early 2000s, the Belarus elite was not interested in an EU policy that mostly relied on principles and norms of democracy and human rights as well as on conditionality, hence the imposition of the EU’s preferences rather than an equal and mutually beneficial relation¹³³.

B. The Eastern Partnership: new opportunities?

1. The genesis and birth of the Eastern Partnership

Recurrent criticism of the lack of differentiation of treatment regarding the countries encompassed by the ENP has eventually been heard by the EU. In early 2008, Poland and Sweden jointly proposed the European Council to launch the Eastern Partnership (EaP) as part of the ENP, a policy that would be more focused on the needs and specificities of the six post-Soviet states it encompassed (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine).

The proposal came in as the PCAs with Ukraine and Moldova were coming to an end (1998-2008) and delegations had been already negotiating the after-PCAs. Ukrainian diplomats in Brussels were pushing for a significant update in their relations with the EU, more concretely they sought a new more far-reaching and as ambitious as possible agreement, in terms of scope, goals, political ambition, in the same spirit as the Agreements offered to CEE (European Agreements) and the WB (Stabilisation and Agreement Association). Put simply, Ukraine was seeking a new step toward possible EU accession negotiations¹³⁴. The same desire was expressed by the Moldovan government at the same time¹³⁵, but the EU was reluctant to give both countries promise of new agreements and would rather extend the PCA engagements for one more year. In other words, the EU expected Ukraine and Moldova to meet with their previous engagements, especially in terms of democratic reforms (independence of judiciary, freedom of media, respect for human rights, anti-corruption and improvement of business climate) before offering anything more and new to the region. Pressed by the event of August 2008 in Georgia¹³⁶ and by CEE member states keen to see fast

¹³² Olga Daniu and Mariana Mascauteanu, ‘Moldova Under the European Neighbourhood Policy: “Falling Between Stools”’, *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, 27, no. 1 (1 March 2011), pp. 114–115.

¹³³ Fatih Ekinci, ‘Why Belarus Has a Distinctive Position in the ENP’, *Ukraine Analytica*, 3, (13), 1 January 2018, pp. 46–47.

¹³⁴ Wiegand and Schulz (2015), ‘The EU and Its Eastern Partnership’, p. 333.

¹³⁵ Korosteleva (2010), ‘Moldova’s European Choice’, p. 1274.

¹³⁶ Jean-Rodrigue Paré, ‘The Conflict Between Russia and Georgia / PRB 08-36E’, Parliament of Canada, 2 January 2016.

rapprochement with their Eastern neighbours¹³⁷, the EU eventually developed the Polish-Swedish EaP proposal.

However, the new policy fell far short of Moldovan and Ukrainian expectations again. Launched in Prague in 2009, the EaP's main goals were to promote closer ties with the EU and based commitment on strict conditionality especially on democratic reforms. The European Commission underlined in their communication of December 2008 that the EU's involvement would depend on the ambition of each country and the extent to which the EU-set-up conditions would be respected and implemented¹³⁸. The EaP offers the possibility to negotiate: an Association Agreement (AA), including a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DFCTA), integration into the EU economy and gradual visa liberalisation. It also covers political and value-based engagements and aims at promoting democracy, economic and social development and increasing stability¹³⁹. To do so, the policy relies, just like the ENP, on tailor-made bilateral and regional multilateral cooperation, as beyond bilateral agreements with the EU, EaP countries are expected to cooperate together on EU-related issues. Overall, the EaP meets all of the EU's goals in the world mentioned in the first chapter: promotion of regionalism (cooperation between the six post-Soviet states), promotion of free-market economy (integration in the EU economy which requires liberalisation of market), and promotion of democracy (and related values such as rule of law).

Belarus was invited to join the EaP, as they were already part of the ENP and in spite of the fact that the OSCE had continuously documented the lack of democratic standards in presidential and parliamentary elections in the country between 2001 and 2008¹⁴⁰. In fact, the EaP acknowledge Belarus as an integral part of the European heritage and community. But Belarus' participation in the EaP was nonetheless conditioned to steps taken by the Belarus government toward democratic reforms and observation of human rights, as stated in the 2009 Czech European Council's presidency statement and in the Polish-Swedish proposal which also advocates for an increase in level of integration in trade and legislation with Belarus¹⁴¹.

If the ENP was welcomed with frustration and criticism, the EaP, which does not stray from the path traced by the ENP, was rejected at first by Ukraine. For Kyiv, the EaP was not a policy per se, and did not offer the right path for the country, lacked a coordination process, lacked resources to reach its own proclaimed aims and goals and had no direction whatsoever¹⁴². Moreover, the whole bilateral aspect of the EaP policy was inspired by the already existing EU-Ukraine relations, providing no added value for Kyiv¹⁴³. For Chişinău, despite the numerous cooperation with the EU on various sectors before the EaP, the criticism of the new EU policy was the same as Ukraine's. Especially granting the fact that Moldova had been claiming a promise of membership for the longest time out of the six EaP countries. Moreover, Moldova had already successfully implemented and been a beneficiary of one of the EaP's possible path for further integration. Indeed, since 2007, Chişinău implemented the Visa Facilitation and Readmission Agreements with the EU and benefited from the opening of a common Visa Application Centre for access to the EU¹⁴⁴. In the end, the take-it-or-leave-it proposal of the EU regarding the EaP left no choice for Ukraine and Moldova but to join in without getting their demands met.

¹³⁷ Izabela Albrycht, ed., *The Eastern Partnership in the Context of the European Neighbourhood Policy and V4 Agenda* (Kraków: The Kosciuszko Institute, 2009).

¹³⁸ Wiegand and Schulz (2015), 'The EU and Its Eastern Partnership', p. 332.

¹³⁹ European Union - EEAS (European External Action Service), 'Eastern Partnership', accessed 1 May 2022, https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/delegations/ukraine/eu_ukraine/eastern_partnership/eastern_partnership_en.ht.

¹⁴⁰ OSCE, 'Elections in Belarus', accessed 1 May 2022, <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/belarus>.

¹⁴¹ Kiryl Kascian, 'Belarus: Does Europeanisation Require a Geopolitical Choice?', in *The European Union and Its Eastern Neighbourhood: Europeanisation and Its Twenty-First-Century Contradictions*, ed. Paul Flenley and Michael L. Mannin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), pp. 89-90.

¹⁴² Korosteleva (2011), 'The Eastern Partnership Initiative', p. 12.

¹⁴³ Stegnyy (2011), 'Ukraine and the Eastern Partnership', p. 55.

¹⁴⁴ Korosteleva (2010), 'Moldova's European Choice', p. 1275.

2. Visa liberalisation, Association Agreements, Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas and after

Despite the criticism brought by the Moldovan and Ukrainian elites, the EaP still marked a step further the ENP by proposing a series of far-reaching political and economic bilateral agreements which aimed at deepening integration with the EU.

The first agreement proposed by the EaP is the visa facilitation, which can be followed by a visa liberalisation, both conditioned to a legal change and implementation of effective border control. Visa facilitation permits facilitated procedures to issue visas for short stays, meaning simplification of required documents, reduced fees, faster processing and provisions on multiple entry visas¹⁴⁵. Visa facilitation was conditioned to the signature and implementation of Readmission Agreements, which provide for the safe and orderly return of people illegally residing in the EU or in the signatory country¹⁴⁶. Visa facilitation entered into force in Moldova in 2011, Ukraine in 2014 and Belarus in July 2020. However, visa facilitation was suspended for Belarus officials in November 2021, following the staged-migration crisis at the Belarus-EU borders¹⁴⁷. The next step after visa facilitation is visa liberalisation, which enables mutual visa-free travel for short stays for holders of biometric passports and required from demanding countries more legal change than simply the adoption of the Readmission Agreement. Visa liberalisation required sustainable implementation of the legal and institutional framework in sectors of asylum, anti-corruption, human trafficking and drugs¹⁴⁸. Visa liberalisation entered into force in Moldova and Ukraine in 2017.

The most important agreements proposed in the EaP are the Association Agreements (AA) which provide foundations for a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA). AA encompasses political association, economic integration and related legal approximation, and relies on the highest degree of mutual commitment. In terms of political integration, the AAs proposed to the EaP countries are, with the exception of the current agreements with the EEA and the WB, the most comprehensive and far-reaching agreements the EU has ever granted to third countries. Most notably in the opening of the EU's internal market and the depth and scope of legal approximation with the EU's *acquis communautaire*. The emphasis in the AAs is put on common and shared values and principles: democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, rule of law, sovereignty and territorial integrity, counter-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, but also free-market economy, good governance, fight against corruption, transnational organised crime and terrorism, promotion of sustainable development and effective multilateralism. In terms of economic integration, the DCFTA provided by the AA, inspired by the thirty-five negotiation chapters of the EU accession process, deepened the reach of the former PCAs in more than thirty policy areas reflecting the EU's *acquis communautaire*. The DCFTAs go beyond simple free trade areas, as it offers gradual integration with the EU single market and medium and long-term aims to base trade conditions with the signatory countries on the same conditions as trade between EU member states. Put simply, the EU grants large-scale market access to signatory states in exchange for approximation with EU norms and standards¹⁴⁹. Overall, with the AA/DCFTAs, the EU offers EaP countries the most far-reaching integration possible with the exception of membership. Both AAs and DCFTAs were signed with Ukraine and Moldova in 2014 and entered into force in 2016 and 2017.

Following the implementation of visa facilitation with all EaP countries, visa liberalisation as well as signature and ratification of AA/DCFTAs with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, and the start of negotiation for AA with Armenia and Azerbaijan in 2018 and 2017 respectively, but most importantly following the

¹⁴⁵ European Council, 'Visa Facilitation and Liberalisation', accessed 1 May 2022, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/infographics/visa-facilitation-liberalisation/>.

¹⁴⁶ European Council, 'Visa Facilitation and Readmission: The Agreements between the European Union and Belarus Enter into Force', accessed 1 May 2022, https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/news/visa-facilitation-and-readmission-agreements-between-european-union-and-belarus-enter-force-2020-07-01_en.

¹⁴⁷ European Council, 'Belarus: Council Suspends Visa Facilitation Provisions for Officials of the Belarus Regime', accessed 1 May 2022, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/11/09/belarus-council-suspends-visa-facilitation-provisions-for-officials-of-the-belarus-regime/>.

¹⁴⁸ European Commission, 'Commission Assesses the Implementation of Visa Liberalisation Action Plans by Ukraine and Georgia', Text, European Commission, accessed 1 May 2022, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_15_4949.

¹⁴⁹ Wiegand and Schulz (2015), 'The EU and Its Eastern Partnership', pp. 334–340.

turmoil created by the signature of the AA in Ukraine, i.e. the Euromaidan, the EU changed its approach to the EaP to make sure that it brings tangible results to the citizens, rather than solely legal engagement. That is the reason why, at the 2017 EaP summit in Brussels, was adopted the “20 deliverables for 2020” objectives, focusing on concrete results in terms of economy, governance, connectivity and society (people to people contact and civil society)¹⁵⁰. Objectives that were concluded by a failure, as in 2020 only one of the twenty deliverables had been implemented and completed, thirteen were on track and six made limited progress¹⁵¹.

3. *The critics of the Eastern Partnership*

Beyond political elites, scholars have also been among the fierce critics of the EaP. Several factors have been at the centre of the weakness of the policy for scholars, such as the lack of equality and the imposition of the EU’s preferences in the policy, the lack of legitimacy and concrete end goal in the absence of EU membership perspective, and the idea that the EaP was either too geopolitical or not enough.

The idea that the EaP proposed a “partnership” based on the principle of joint ownership and equality of the parties has been debunked and decried. Indeed, if the EaP tried to resolve the initial weakness of the ENP, it actually carried them within its new policy. Elena Korosteleva, a Belarusian scholar specialised in the Eastern neighbours and the EU’s policy towards the region, has deplored since the launch of the EaP, the lack of coherent definition of the term “partnership” on the EU’s side¹⁵². In fact, this ill-defined term has led, according to her, to more frustration and tensions and subsequent problems of legitimacy and effective realisation of the EaP. Moreover, the EU’s reliance on the conditionality strategy was at odds with the idea of partnership, and the principles of equality and joint ownership defended by the EaP¹⁵³. The ENP “one-size-fits-all” problem was still present in the EaP which encompassed a heterogeneous group of countries in terms of European integration ambition¹⁵⁴. In addition to that, the EU-centric and EU-interests based ideas of the EaP also hampered its legitimacy. All agreements of the EaP were written and phrased in a way to fit the EU’s interests, always leaving outside perspectives out of reports and other communication EU-produced about the EaP. This shows that the EaP involves a top-down approach, where EU elites are talking down and teaching local elites about what is “good” or not. And the priorities set by the EU, especially in terms of democracy and human rights, fail to meet any salience in the targeted countries which face other priorities, often linked with territorial integrity or state integrity (e.g. the frozen conflicts in Moldova and Ukraine), hence the EU is pushing forward its own rhetoric and own priorities to the expense of the targeted countries’ needs and priorities¹⁵⁵.

Finally, the legitimacy of the policy suffers from the EU’s own perception of itself. The EU sees itself as a normative power, and the attempt to push its own agenda to the expense of third countries’ interests, can be perceived as a way to assert moral superiority and treatment of the Eastern neighbours as ‘inferior others’¹⁵⁶. In other words, the EU aims at maintaining a hegemonic and hierarchical order with its Eastern neighbours, rather than a partnership based on equal terms¹⁵⁷.

¹⁵⁰ European Council, ‘20 Deliverables for 2020 - Consilium’, accessed 3 May 2022, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eastern-partnership/20-deliverables-for-2020/>.

¹⁵¹ European Parliament. Directorate General for Parliamentary Research Services., *Eastern Partnership Post-2020 Agenda: In Depth Analysis*. (LU: Publications Office, 2021), p. 1.

¹⁵² Elena Korosteleva, ‘Change or Continuity: Is the Eastern Partnership an Adequate Tool for the European Neighbourhood?’, *International Relations - INT RELAT*, 25 (22 June 2011), pp. 243–262, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047117811404446>; Korosteleva (2011), ‘The Eastern Partnership Initiative’; Korosteleva, Natorski, and Simão (2013), ‘The Eastern Dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy’.

¹⁵³ Korosteleva (2011), ‘Change or Continuity’; Korosteleva (2011), ‘The Eastern Partnership Initiative’, p. 6.

¹⁵⁴ Korosteleva (2011), ‘The Eastern Partnership Initiative’, p. 11.

¹⁵⁵ Paul Flenley, ‘The Limitations of the EU’s Strategies for Europeanisation of the Neighbours’, in *The European Union and Its Eastern Neighbourhood Europeanisation and Its Twenty-First-Century Contradictions*, ed. Mike Mannin and Paul Flenley (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), pp. 42–48.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 41–42.

¹⁵⁷ Licinia Simão, ‘Bringing “the Political” Back into European Security: Challenges to the EU’s Ordering of the Eastern Partnership’, *East European Politics*, 33, no. 3 (3 July 2017), pp. 338–354.

The absence of EU membership perspective has been the most recurrent critique in both political elites in Moldova and Ukraine, but also among scholars, who like the EU, rely on the successful integration of the CEE countries to assess the EaP¹⁵⁸. The fact that the EU uses the same approach, i.e. conditionality, although packaged with other principles such as joint ownership, than in CEE and the WB makes the comparison more salient. But it also enters into tension with the lack of final goal, such as accession to the EU¹⁵⁹. For Paul Flenley, this absence entails two weaknesses in the EaP: firstly, it expects targeted states to engage into painful and comprehensive reforms for in the end very little integration, secondly, despite the offer of tailor-made bilateral agreements, the end goal of the policy remains vague¹⁶⁰, and this becomes especially true once the engaged countries have reached and signed the three agreements provided for in the EaP.

However, the EaP has also been criticised for being too ambitious, which comes at odd with the idea that it lacks an EU membership perspective since it entails even more reforms and engagement from the candidate country. This critique appeared after the signature and ratification of the AA/DCFTAs with Moldova and Ukraine, most notably because it triggered the Euromaidan in Ukraine. Scholars have concluded that the AA/DCFTAs were too expensive both economically and politically for the targeted states, and hence too ambitious for the Eastern neighbours. Moreover, the EU does not provide the necessary funds and means for Moldova and Ukraine to fulfil their far-reaching obligations in approximation with EU law. But the conclusion remains the same for this limit, it is that EU membership is the single most powerful tool to overcome the resistance¹⁶¹.

If the EaP has been, rightly so, compared to the EU's strategy in CEE, this comparison reached its limit in 2014 and the Euromaidan events. The 2014 protests in Ukraine following the refusal of President Viktor Yanukovich to sign the AA/DCFTAs with the EU to prefer an agreement with Russia as well as the subsequent annexation of Crimea by Russia, suddenly brought in the EaP a geopolitical aspect that had been ignored by policymakers thus far and was a strong reminder that the context had changed between the Eastern enlargements and the Eastern Partnership. Following these events, many scholars pointed out the lack of geopolitical consideration of the EaP and it was accused of ignoring the security claims of countries of the region, namely these of Russia, but also those of the EaP countries themselves, which faced security issues related to their territorial integrity, threats mostly triggered by Russia itself (in the case of Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine)¹⁶². From that starting point, the idea that the EaP was a tool of soft power in the hands of the EU to lead a war against Russia in the European and Caucasus post-Soviet regions started to develop. The dangerous point being that Russia is not using soft power¹⁶³ but rather hard power to protect its interests and the fact that it was the first time since the end of the Cold War that the right of sovereign countries to choose freely which international organisation to join was challenged¹⁶⁴. Scholars have thus put the emphasis on the idea that the EaP failed to take into consideration other global actors that are also engaged in the region (such as Russia but also China or Türkiye)¹⁶⁵, and proposed an either/or choice impossible to make for the EaP countries (either integration with the EU or with Russia). The dilemma for the EU is then, to what extent should a third country be involved in its bilateral relationship with the Eastern neighbours¹⁶⁶. However, for David Cadier, if the EaP was really a tool of geopolitical confrontation with Russia, the EU would have simply proposed EU membership to the EaP countries, which it continuously refused to do. For him, even if geopolitical rhetoric was already present (although discreetly) among EU member states in CEE about the EaP, the use of the geopolitical rhetoric regarding

¹⁵⁸ Bureiko and Moga (2018), "Bounded Europeanisation": The Case of Ukraine'; Wiegand and Schulz (2015), 'The EU and Its Eastern Partnership'; Danii and Mascauteanu (2011), 'Moldova Under the European Neighbourhood Policy'; Korosteleva (2011), 'The Eastern Partnership Initiative'.

¹⁵⁹ Korosteleva (2011), 'The Eastern Partnership Initiative', p. 5.

¹⁶⁰ Flenley (2018), 'The Limitations of the EU's Strategies for Europeanisation of the Neighbours', pp. 39–40.

¹⁶¹ Wiegand and Schulz (2015), 'The EU and Its Eastern Partnership', pp. 350–353.

¹⁶² Simão (2017), 'Bringing "the Political" Back into European Security', pp. 346–347.

¹⁶³ The Eurasian Economic Union (EaEU) was barely set up in 2014, and Russia had already been using hard power in Georgia in 2008 and Moldova in 1992.

¹⁶⁴ Wiegand and Schulz (2015), 'The EU and Its Eastern Partnership', pp. 344–345.

¹⁶⁵ Elena Korosteleva, Irina Petrova, and Igor Merheim-Eyre, 'The Eastern Partnership 3.0: Change or Continuity?', *Kent Academic Repository*, 24 April 2020, p. 3, <https://kar.kent.ac.uk/81009/>.

¹⁶⁶ Flenley (2018), 'The Limitations of the EU's Strategies for Europeanisation of the Neighbours', pp. 44–45.

the policy remains a purely Russian reading of the policy. A Russian point of view that was later on adopted by the EU following the 2014 events¹⁶⁷.

C. Theoretical analysis: the Eastern Partnership in the light of the External Incentives Model

In spite of the critics, the EaP remained the sole instrument of Europeanisation in the Eastern neighbours and the sole policy aiming at fostering integration with the EU in the region. Hence, the EaP deserves to be analysed as such for us to assess if the conditionality strategy is best suited. In a similar manner as we presented the analysis of the WB compared to CEE through the EIM in the first chapter, we will conduct the analysis of the EaP in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine, with a comparison with the WB. First, we will explain why the EaP can be considered a tool of Europeanisation, and then evaluate the rewards, credibility, determinacy and costs of the EaP in the Eastern neighbours. Finally, we will conclude with a summary of the analysis and the broader reflections it carries with it.

1. The EaP as a tool of Europeanisation

Before analysing the extent of European integration through the EIM, it is necessary to determine the concrete reasons why the EaP can be considered a tool of Europeanisation. Firstly, the EaP through its agreements encompasses all three characteristics of our definition of European integration namely economic integration, legal approximation and shared values in terms of promotion of democracy and related sectors (such as rule of law and human rights). This is reflected in the DCFTAs which foster economic integration along with legal approximation especially in the economic and trade fields of the *acquis communautaire*. As well as with the AAs which promote democratic reforms and approximation with EU law in general.

Secondly, and more importantly, the EaP relies on conditionality, i.e. the most important and most studied strategy and explanatory model of Europeanisation. If the term ‘conditionality’ is only mentioned once in the 2009 joint declaration,¹⁶⁸ it is replaced by similar principles starting 2013 and in all following declarations such as ‘incentive based approach’¹⁶⁹ and the ‘more-for-more’ principle from 2015 onwards¹⁷⁰. The phrasing of the 2015 joint declaration about the conditionality of the EU’s engagement with the EaP countries mark the conditionality-based relation clearly: “The European Union’s incentive-based approach (“more-for-more”) will benefit those partners most engaged in reforms. EU financial support to all its partners will be conditioned by concrete reform steps”¹⁷¹. More remarkably, the 2021 phrasing, for the first time mentions the idea of possible negative conditionality with a ‘less-for-less’ idea added to conditionality, when all the previous declaration had only relied on positive conditionality: “The scope and depth of our cooperation are determined by our respective agreements and will continue to be shaped by the ambitions and needs of both the EU and the partners as well as by the pace and quality of reforms. We recognise that the EU’s conditionality and incentive-based approach (“more-for-more” and “less-for-less”) will continue to benefit those partners most engaged in implementing reforms”¹⁷².

¹⁶⁷ David Cadier, ‘The Geopoliticisation of the EU’s Eastern Partnership’, *Geopolitics*, 24, no. 1 (1 January 2019), pp. 71–72.

¹⁶⁸ European Council, ‘Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit, Prague, 7 May 2009’, 7 May 2009, 5(1), https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/31797/2009_eap_declaration.pdf.

¹⁶⁹ European Council, ‘Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit, Vilnius, 28-29 - November 2013 Eastern Partnership: The Way Ahead’, 28 November 2013, 7; European Council, ‘Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit (Riga, 21-22 May 2015)’, 21 May 2015, 5(10); European Council, ‘Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit (Brussels, 24 November 2017)’, 24 November 2017, 1; European Council, ‘Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit (Brussels, 15 December 2021)’, 15 December 2021, 2(1).

¹⁷⁰ European Council, ‘Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit (Riga, 21-22 May 2015)’, 5(10); European Council, ‘Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit (Brussels, 24 November 2017)’, 1; European Council, ‘Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit (Brussels, 15 December 2021)’, 2(1).

¹⁷¹ European Council, ‘Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit (Riga, 21-22 May 2015)’, 5(10), <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/21526/riga-declaration-220515-final.pdf>.

¹⁷² European Council, ‘Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit (Brussels, 15 December 2021)’, 4(5), <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/53527/20211215-eap-joint-declaration-en.pdf>.

Despite the recurring mention to the other principles governing the EaP and relations between the engaged parties, such as joint ownership and differentiation, our analysis aims at assessing the extent of the use of the conditionality strategy of the EU to foster European integration in the Eastern neighbours. We will, hence, consider that the EaP is effectively a tool of Europeanisation through conditionality, and proceed to evaluate its efficiency or lack thereof, by analysing it through conditionality as an explanatory model thus through the rewards, credibility, determinacy and cost of compliance of the EaP's conditions.

2. Rewards and credibility

The rewards for the Eastern neighbours' compliance with the EU's conditionality are less high than for the WB. While the WB have the highest reward possible promised (EU membership), the Eastern neighbours only have/had bilateral agreements as rewards. Despite the fact that the AAs granted to Ukraine and Moldova are the most far-reaching bilateral agreements the EU provided to any third country, the symbolism and determinacy for compliance and effective implementation still decrease with a lesser perceived reward, as the model expects.

Credibility is the same, as the EU can in both cases withhold the rewards by not delivering EU membership to the WB and not signing or ratifying bilateral agreements with the Eastern neighbours. Moreover, the procedures for both membership and the signature and ratification of AA are similar, as both agreements need to be ratified by the EU institutions and all EU member states through their constitutional provision to adopt international agreements. However, these legal and political procedures can decrease the credibility of the rewards being delivered. In the case of the WB, the introduction of a mandatory referendum regarding further EU enlargement in France represents a decrease in the credibility of the reward being delivered. While in the case of the AAs, the 2014 Dutch advisory referendum regarding the signature between the EU and Ukraine represented a high risk for the non-delivery of the reward. Over 60% of Dutch voters rejected the AA with Ukraine, with a 32% turnout, the Dutch government had to take it into account as the threshold for the validity of such referenda in the Netherlands is of 30%, which eventually obstructed the EU agreement to come into force¹⁷³. The conclusion of the turmoil created by the result of this referendum was an agreement between the different EU leaders not to commit the EU to grant membership or candidacy status to Ukraine, nor financial aid, military assistance and free movement to the EU¹⁷⁴. The Netherlands finally fully ratified the agreement with Ukraine in June 2017, three years after the initial signature. Credibility in both cases suffers the lengthy ratification procedures of the EU which require not only the approval of the EU institutions (Parliament and Council), but also must get the approval of more than sixty institutional bodies in all of the member states. Procedures which give EU member states on an individual basis an important veto power, as we mentioned in the first chapter with the different bilateral issues between EU member states and the WB as well as the Eastern neighbours.

In terms of asymmetry of bargaining power, in both cases, it works in the favour of the EU, with the exception of Belarus. The EU has a strong interest in the stability of both regions, hence will stay engaged but not necessarily to the extent of giving EU candidate status to Moldova and Ukraine which ask for it, nor push for democratic reforms further than in declaratory manners. In the same spirit, the economic interests in the WB and the Eastern neighbours are similarly weak for the EU. For the different reasons we mentioned earlier, the post-Soviet region is even less economically attractive. As a matter of comparison in 2019, the WB represented 1.4% of the overall EU trade, while for the WB the EU represented 70% of total trade¹⁷⁵. In the same year, Ukraine was the 18th most important trading partner for the EU only accounting for 1.1% of the EU's total trade, while the EU is Ukraine's largest trading partner accounting for 40% of its total trade¹⁷⁶. Moldova is almost insignificant for EU trade, as it is the 59th most important trading

¹⁷³ Guillaume Van der Loo, 'The Dutch Referendum on the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement: Legal Options for Navigating a Tricky and Awkward Situation', *CEPS*, 8 April 2016.

¹⁷⁴ Gabriela Baczyńska and Robert-Jan Bartunek, 'EU Agrees Dutch Demands on Ukraine Deal to Avoid "Present for Russia"', *Reuters*, 15 December 2016.

¹⁷⁵ European Commission, 'EU Trade Relations with Western Balkans', https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/countries-and-regions/western-balkans_en.

¹⁷⁶ European Commission, 'EU Trade Relations with Ukraine', https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/countries-and-regions/ukraine_en.

partner, while 54% of Moldovan total trade is destined to the EU¹⁷⁷. Only Belarus does not have an asymmetrical economic relation with the EU, the EU being its second largest trading partner with 19.3% of total trade, against Russia accounting for 47.9% of Belarus's total trade¹⁷⁸. Hence, the asymmetry works in the favour of the EU which can impose conditions to be met, because the economic interests of further integration rely mostly in the side of the WB countries and Eastern neighbours. An asymmetry that is a prerequisite for the model to be efficient.

In the WB, credibility increases with the EU's engagement to deal with each country's accession to the EU on an individual basis, and hence not treat the region as a single enlargement round. This fact is perfectly illustrated with the accession of Croatia to the EU in 2013, the sole country of the region this far to have met all conditions to get the final reward, and which did not have to wait for its neighbours to do the same. In the Eastern neighbours, the differentiated approach of the EaP can serve as a guarantor of credibility in the same spirit, as it guarantees the countries who seek further integration to advance faster than countries more reluctant. The fact that Moldova and Ukraine managed to meet the conditions to sign an AA with the EU, while Belarus has not, demonstrates this engagement. Nonetheless, the constant reluctance of the EU to grant membership perspective as a final reward in both the EaP framework as a whole or in different bilateral agreements such as the AA, remains a potential threat to credibility. Especially after the signature of AA/DCFTAs with Moldova and Ukraine, the EaP does not provide for further and most importantly greater rewards after these agreements. Instead after 2014 and the end of negotiations for the AAs with Moldova and Ukraine, the EaP only proposed further financial and technical assistance as future rewards.

Eventually, and this is especially the case for the Eastern neighbours, some EU member states' foreign policies harm the credibility of the EU's involvement in the Eastern neighbours. For instance, countries such as Germany, the Netherlands, Hungary or France's foreign policies toward Russia have been felt to be at the expense of Moldova and Ukraine's integration. The Dutch referendum which led to the refusal of granting membership perspective to Ukraine that we already mentioned was made in fear of triggering Russia, Germany's continuous rapprochement policy with Russia and increasing dependence on Russian gas¹⁷⁹, France's continuous talks with the Kremlin under President Macron¹⁸⁰ or Hungary's leading party Fidesz's close ties with the Kremlin¹⁸¹ have all impeded credibility of the EaP's goals. In addition to hamper perception of the EU's intention in the Eastern neighbours, this also creates internal conflicts between member states, with mostly Western member states advocating for greater cooperation with Russia when it comes to dealing with countries such as Moldova and Ukraine, and Eastern countries, mostly Poland and the three Baltic states, who advocate for greater integration of these neighbouring states and a stricter and firmer policy towards Russia regarding the region.

Another factor that can decrease the EU's conditions credibility taken into consideration by the EIM is participation or engagement in another conditional model set by another international organisation or the delivery of the same rewards but at a lower cost by another international organisation. This factor is especially relevant in the case of Belarus, but also to a certain extent for Moldova and Ukraine. Russia has

¹⁷⁷ European Commission, 'EU Trade Relations with Moldova', https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/countries-and-regions/moldova_en.

¹⁷⁸ European Commission, 'EU Trade Relations with Belarus', https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/countries-and-regions/belarus_en.

¹⁷⁹ Grzegorz Kuczyński, 'German-Russian Rapprochement: Gas and Common Enemies', *Warsaw Institute*, 22 October 2018, <https://warsawinstitute.org/german-russian-rapprochement-gas-common-enemies>.

¹⁸⁰ Jonathan Eyal, 'France, Germany and the "Russia Engagement" Game', *RUSI - Royal United Services Institute* (blog), 29 June 2021, <https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/france-germany-and-russia-engagement-game>; Dominique Moïsi, 'Why Is France Making Overtures towards Russia?', *The Strategist - ASPI Australian Strategic Policy Institute*, 1 October 2019, <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/why-is-france-making-overtures-towards-russia/>; Geir Moulson and Associated Press, 'France's Macron Urges Better Long-Term Relations with Russia', *ABC News*, 15 February 2020, <https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/frances-macron-urges-long-term-relations-russia-69003029>.

¹⁸¹ RFI, 'Hongrie: Viktor Orban en visite à Moscou pour renforcer la coopération avec Vladimir Poutine', *RFI*, 1 February 2022, <https://www.rfi.fr/fr/europe/20220201-hongrie-viktor-orban-en-visite-%C3%A0-moscou-pour-renforcer-la-coop%C3%A9ration-avec-vladimir-poutine>; Péter Krekó, 'Viktor Orban Is the West's Pro-Putin Outlier', *Foreign Policy*, 20 March 2022, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/03/20/viktor-orban-is-the-west-s-pro-putin-outlier/>.

launched a series of institutions offering the same possibilities as the EU. Namely economic, political and legal integration. For instance, the most important Russian-led institution was launched in 2014: the Eurasian Economic Union (EaEU), an integration institution greatly inspired by the EU's own development¹⁸², and to which Belarus is among the founding members. Furthermore, as we mentioned, Belarus has been since its independence engaged in a process of deep and far-reaching integration with Russia, a process which in turn prevents Belarus to join any other integration institution. With the EaEU, Russia has proposed to the whole post-Soviet region, not only the Eastern neighbours, an alternative to European integration with the EU, which is less regarding and demanding in terms of democratic reforms and consequently less costly than compliance with the EU's conditions. Put simply, the EaP's credibility decreases in the case of Belarus, which is not legally eligible for a large part of the rewards such as the AA/DCFTAs since it is already engaged in other similar contractual agreements and can thus only pretend to visa facilitation/liberalisation making conditions extremely costly for a relatively small reward. For Moldova and Ukraine, the existence of such competing institutions changes the cost-benefit calculations of engagement and compliance with EU conditions, even after the signature of AA/DCFTAs with the EU. In fact, in 2017 Moldovan President Igor Dodon, whose party is close to the Kremlin, declared his ambitions to stop Moldova's engagement with the EU in order to join the EaEU¹⁸³ and even managed to be granted observer status in the Eurasian Union¹⁸⁴.

In summary, because rewards granted to the Eastern neighbours are lesser than for the WB, the model expects fewer incentives to meet EU conditions. The EIM states that credibility increases with the capacities of the EU to withhold rewards and to have asymmetrical bargaining power over the targeted countries, which is the case in both the WB and the Eastern neighbours. However with the exception of Belarus, which is not as economically dependent on the EU and is not seeking greater integration with the EU unlike Moldova and Ukraine. In addition to that, the treatment on an individual basis of each country in both regions also increases credibility. On the other hand, credibility is harmed by the lengthy ratification procedures for the AA/DCFTAs and the possible rise of veto players among member states. Moreover, credibility decreases after conditions are met for all the rewards provided by the EaP, as Moldova and Ukraine have met conditions for all three rewards, visa liberalisation, AA and DCFTAs before 2014. After 2014, credibility hence declines with a lack of greater proposed reward(s). Finally, the existence of, and participation in for Belarus, competing integration institutions such as the EaEU also hamper the credibility of the conditions set by the EaP.

3. Determinacy

Determinacy includes three aspects: precision, obligations and consistency. Precision implies that the targeted government knows exactly what actions need to be taken to get the rewards. The delivery of the Visa liberalisation, AA and DCFTA to Moldova and Ukraine suggests that the conditions to be met to get these rewards were clear. In fact, even before the signature and ratification of the AA/DCFTAs, the EaP included specific and tailor-made agendas related to the future application of the agreements to be followed and implemented by interested countries¹⁸⁵. In terms of precision, the granted AA/DCFTAs are paradoxically more detailed and specific than the Stability and Association Agreements (SAA) granted to the WB set to govern their accession process. This is a paradox because, as we mentioned in the reward and credibility section, the EaP countries do not benefit from EU membership perspective unlike the WB, but it is still faced with high degree of determinacy and precision. Indeed, alike the agenda before ratification, the AA/DCFTAs after entry into force include another agenda with precise tailor-made timeframes conceived for each country's capacities and needs for approximation with EU norms and standards (time frame ranging from two to fifteen years for the AAs and from two to five years for the

¹⁸² M.V. Lapenko, *EAEU: Economic Integration Space*, ed. E.S. Chimiris and T.A. Makhmutov, Russian International Affairs Council, Studying and Teaching Material 8/2018 (Moscow, 2018), <http://russiancouncil.ru/en/umm8>.

¹⁸³ Neil Buckley, 'Moldova Leader Vows to Scrap EU Trade Deal for Moscow-Led Bloc', *Financial Times*, 17 January 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/52651bb6-dcd4-11e6-86ac-f253db7791c6>.

¹⁸⁴ Sam Morgan, 'Moldova Granted Observer Status in Eurasian Union', *www.Euractiv.Com*, 19 April 2017, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/europe-s-east/news/moldova-granted-observer-status-in-eurasian-union>.

¹⁸⁵ European Council, 'Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit (Brussels, 15 December 2021)', 3(4); European External Action Service, 'EU-Ukraine Association Agenda to Prepare and Facilitate the Implementaiton of the Association Agreement', 13 June 2013, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/enp-action-plans_en.

DCFTAs). While in the WB, the SAAs gives no such time schedule and only give general direction regarding the promotion of community standards¹⁸⁶. In addition to that, the EU has also set up monitoring reports to track the progress made in the implementation of the AA/DCFTAs in Moldova and Ukraine¹⁸⁷ in the same spirit as the monitoring the Commission does over the accession process of the WB, increasing the determinacy.

Obligation refers to the binding character of the conditions. Here again, the AA/DCFTAs brings with them more determinacy than the SAAs. The AA/DCFTAs are legally binding agreements, while the SAA are not and rely mostly on the will of the WB countries to advance in their accession process.

Consistency means that the conditions are homogenous for all states and do not change from states to states. In this case, the comparison between the WB and the EaP reach a limit, because of the different status of each country in the eyes of the EU. While, on the WB side, the conditions for accession have been repeatedly revised compared to previous enlargements (Copenhagen Plus Criteria and specific conditions related to the region with compliance with the ICTY and settle of bilateral disputes), on the EaP side, it is hard to mention accession process or enlargement strategy since the EU continuously refuses to give possibility to be considered potential candidates to the Eastern neighbours. However, as we have seen earlier, the AA/DCFTAs have a scope and reach encompassing all the different sector for approximation with EU norms and standards of the thirty-five negotiation chapters of the accession process. Hence, we argue that the AA/DCFTAs and the WB's accession process are still relevant to be compared. Thus, conditions here lack consistency, since the WB have had to go through the opening and closing procedures of each negotiation chapter which itself is conditioned to reaching some benchmarks¹⁸⁸, while the AA/DCFTAs countries had in some way de facto all chapters open once they signed the AA in 2014. Furthermore, consistency also suffers from the fact that the EU norms and standards that need to be approximated and adopted in both regions are often amended or replaced by EU legislators, adding to the process of integration an updating process, hence decreasing determinacy¹⁸⁹.

Precision, obligation and consistency of conditions are inapplicable in the case of Belarus. Since they are excluded from the possibility to get an AA and DCFTA, and that these agreements are the sole guarantor of precise, binding and consistent conditions. Belarus falls into the differentiation principle of the EaP but also the idea of more-for-more, meaning that since the Belarusian government is not willing and not eligible for further integration, the EaP conditionality are not imposed to Belarus. Or in the words of the model, the Belarusian government has refused the conditions of the EU.

Overall, determinacy in the WB and AA/DCFTAs countries is high. But paradoxically higher for Moldova and Ukraine than it is for the WB countries. Determinacy is higher because of the binding character of the AA/DCFTAs and their detailed agenda and scheduling for approximation and a monitoring report to track the implementation pace. It has already been concluded that determinacy was higher for the WB than for the CEE countries' accession process, and we've just concluded that determinacy was higher for the AA/DCFTA countries than the WB and we know that higher determinacy also means potential higher compliance costs. But the fact that the EU expect AA/DCFTAs signatory countries to approximate with EU norms as extensively as candidate countries without giving the same rewards i.e. membership is yet again another reason to expect high compliance costs in the model.

¹⁸⁶ Michael Emerson et al., 'Balkan and Eastern European Comparisons - Building a New Momentum for the European Integration of the Balkan and Eastern European Associated States', *CEPS*, 25 February 2021, p. 6.

¹⁸⁷ European External Action Service, 'Joint Staff Working Document - Association Implementation Report on the Republic of Moldova', 2021, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/joint-staff-working-document-association-implementation-report-republic-moldova_en; European External Action Service, 'Joint Staff Working Document - Association Implementation Report on the Republic of Moldova', 2017; European Commission, 'Ukraine: EU Report Notes Continued Implementation of the Reform Agenda Though Challenges Remain', 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/news/ukraine-eu-report-notes-continued-implementation-reform-agenda-though-challenges-remain-2020-12-01_en.

¹⁸⁸ Secretariat for European Affairs, 'Opening and Negotiation Process by Chapters', accessed 6 May 2022, <https://sep.gov.mk/en/post?id=12>.

¹⁸⁹ Guillaume Van der Loo and Tinatin Akhvlediani, 'Catch Me If You Can: Updating the Eastern Partnership Association Agreements and DCFTAs', *CEPS*, 18 May 2020.

4. Costs

Costs are the sole factors of the model on which the EU has no formal power whatsoever. The model identifies several facilitating factors to lower the costs of compliance in the targeted countries such as the presence of liberal governments, a quality political competition and dominance of liberal preferences in parliament at the domestic level and a low density of opposition veto players and absence of institutional legacies at the polity level.

Belarus, as an identified autocratic regime fall directly out of all the facilitating factors to reduce costs of compliance with the EU's conditions under the EaP. The regime in place since the independence of the country has no characteristic of a liberal government and even considers liberal western values as antagonistic with the Belarusian values and regime. As for the quality of political competition and presence of liberal preferences in parliament, the opposition in Belarus has been systematically suppressed since the beginning of the Lukashenka regime. On the polity side, we have already stated that the regime was antagonistic to the liberal values praised by the EU, making the whole polity itself a veto player to EU's conditions. But there is also the fact that Belarus is the only post-Soviet state which has not engaged in a comprehensive and drastic economic and democratic transition, hence the legacy of the Soviet past is the strongest of all the post-Soviet space. Moldova and Ukraine, despite some difficulties, notably the Soviet legacy and with it a high density of veto players, have balanced between periods of liberal dominance in political spheres (parliament, governments) and enjoyed a relatively better quality of political competition, at least if compared with the whole post-Soviet space, excluding the three Baltic states.

In domestic adoption costs, public opinion matters a lot as it tells about the cost for incumbent governments and competing political parties (no matter their political loyalty) of following and adopting a pro-EU rhetoric and comply with the EU's conditions. In the WB, the idea of EU integration was popular at the beginning of the accession process but suffered with time. In the Eastern neighbours, the idea of closer cooperation and subsequent integration with the EU has also enjoyed a fair share of popularity, but with a more fluctuating enthusiasm. In Ukraine, between 2000 and 2017 the attitude and support of the population towards EU integration has shown to be unstable and highly influenced by media propaganda and disillusionment with pro-EU political forces¹⁹⁰. In fact, scholars have argued that Ukraine was suffering a dichotomy in political and foreign policy choices between the East and the West of the country, mostly based on the mother tongue, perception of historical events and the way the Soviet legacy is understood, a dichotomy that was fuelled by political elites. But Ukrainians nonetheless positively associate the EU with values deemed important such as human rights, freedoms and democracy¹⁹¹ and identify their political elites and endemic corruption as the main obstacles to Ukraine's European integration¹⁹². In Moldova, in the 2000s the idea of EU membership was highly popular among the population with a support oscillating between 57% and 76%¹⁹³. While in Belarus, the population overall generally support close relation with the EU without supporting or envisioning membership, they are more interested in the possibilities of mobility, legal work opportunities and receiving education in EU member states. This observation shows how deeply attached the Belarussian population is to the idea of their country being 'neutral' and not making the either/or decision, but rather seek relation with both the EU and the EaEU¹⁹⁴. Moreover, as shown in Table 1 the EaP's own opinion surveys show that between 2016 and 2020, the population of the three Eastern neighbours' countries have consistently shown a greater level of trust in the EU, although stagnating.

¹⁹⁰ Igor Burakovskiy et al., 'Ukraine - EU Relations: Looking Beyond the Horizon. How Do We See the Future of European Integration? Position Paper' (Ukrainian Think Tanks Liaison Office in Brussels, 2018), p. 4.

¹⁹¹ Bureiko and Moga (2018), "Bounded Europeanisation": The Case of Ukraine', p. 77.

¹⁹² Burakovskiy et al. (2018), 'Ukraine - EU Relations: Looking Beyond the Horizon. How Do We See the Future of European Integration? Position Paper', p. 3.

¹⁹³ Calus and Kosienkowski (2018), 'Relations between Moldova and the European Union', p. 103.

¹⁹⁴ Rotman and Veremeeva (2011), 'Belarus in the Context of the Neighbourhood Policy', pp. 90–93.

	Moldova		Belarus		Ukraine	
	EU	EaEU	EU	EaEU	EU	EaEU
2016	59	34	50	57	61	16
2017	54	44	52	46	58	19
2018	64	44	47	47	66	29
2019	65	35	51	48	63	22
2020	63	33	45	39	66	26

Table 1. Trust in international institutions – in percentage¹⁹⁵

Such high levels of trust in the EU compared to the varying and low trust granted to the EaEU over the years, implies that the domestic cost of compliance and adoption of EU's conditions diminish. Especially in Moldova and Ukraine where the gap between the trust in the EU and the EaEU is greater than in Belarus. However, the stagnating character of trust in the EU in both Moldova and Ukraine also shows that the political salience of European integration is not necessarily increasing. The Belarusian population with these surveys once again illustrates the idea of not making the either/or choice, but we can still observe an interesting reverse in trend, where in 2016 the EaEU was more trusted than the EU, and after 2017, the EU becomes the most trusted international institution. The cost of compliance with the EU conditions to get the visa facilitation agreement hence became lower, in the model that may explain why the Belarus government had comply to sign the agreement in 2020 and answer to a demand from the population to get mobility access to the EU. However, since the Belarusian government does not rely on real electoral support, compliance with EU conditions on the visa facilitation should be interpreted in a mean to keep social support to the regime rather than playing on electoral gains.

In terms of political and administrative costs, with strong popular support, political parties have an incentive to adopt pro-EU rhetoric and subsequent pro-EU reform. In the WB, there is an absence of Eurosceptic parties, even the most nationalistic political parties have adopted a pro-EU rhetoric. However, that does not imply that pro-EU reforms are effectively adopted and implemented, because painful but needed reforms might harm future electoral gains. In Moldova and Ukraine, the political spectrum remains cleaved since independence between a pro-Western side and a pro-Russian side. This cleavage is expected to give more weight to pro-EU rhetoric and more incentives for pro-EU political parties who arrive in power to pursue reforms. In Moldova, the pro-EU rhetoric has lost its meaning over the years with successive elections. As pro-Russian and Kremlin-backed political parties (the communist party and later the socialist party) have both adopted pro-EU rhetoric to win elections or ensure popular support. When in 2001 the communist party returned to power in Chişinău, there was a fear about the European path of the country but excepted for a critic of the EaP in 2009 by the president in a Russian media, the communists have continued to pursue pro-EU rhetoric. It is the same with the socialist party who tried to hold on to power in 2017, with the declaration about the EU and EaEU by the president, that once again was not followed by concrete action, and to this day Moldova is still engaged in a European integration process. This strategic alignment with pro-EU rhetoric is explained by the fact that it can be used as geopolitical leverage with Russia, that it secures electoral popularity, boosts the Moldovan economy and because of the Transnistrian conflict, as Russia has been trying to impose a federalist solution to the conflict, while the EU is engaged in a confidence-building attempt between the two parties, which is more popular than the Russian proposed solution¹⁹⁶. In Ukraine, the pressure from Moscow has been stronger than in Moldova, on all political parties, whether pro-EU or pro-Russian. This is illustrated by the events that triggered the Euromaidan revolution, as a President Yanukovich, who tried to pursue a balanced foreign policy between Russia and the EU, still declared that EU integration was the country's main goal in 2009¹⁹⁷, but refused to sign the

¹⁹⁵ EU Neighbours East, 'Annual Survey - Belarus (Factsheet)': 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020; 'Annual Survey - Republic of Moldova (Factsheet)': 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020; 'Annual Survey - Ukraine (Factsheet)': 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020.

¹⁹⁶ Calus and Kosienkowski (2018), 'Relations between Moldova and the European Union', pp. 103–104.

¹⁹⁷ BBC News, 'Ukraine's Political Cat-Fight Leaves Voters Cold', 2 December 2009, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/8391317.stm>.

AA in 2013. The events of Euromaidan and subsequent dismissal of President Yanukovich shows that the cost for non-compliance with EU engagement in Ukraine is high not only because of potential electoral loss but also because of strong popular support for EU integration and more generally democratic reforms, which may translate into large-scale protests, such as the 2004 Orange revolution and the 2014 Euromaidan.

If the popular support decreases the cost of adoption of pro-EU rhetoric and henceforth pro-EU reforms, as we just demonstrated, European integration in both the WB and Moldova and Ukraine ought to be more advanced than it currently is. The model takes into consideration other factors that might explain the slow pace of pro-EU reforms in the Eastern neighbours, namely the high density of veto players and institutional legacies. If we saw that the WB had a lower level of fit with the EU's norms and standards than CEE which entailed a higher cost of compliance with EU conditions, then the Eastern neighbours have an even lower level of fit than the WB because of the inherited Soviet apparatus and the fact that economic transition had been continuously impeded by democratic instability, which brings even higher costs of compliance since it entails painful reforms. Compared to the CEE countries, these states have not engaged in radical and swift reforms, and this has permitted new systems and new kinds of regimes to be established, in the forms of state capture and competitive oligarchic regimes. Alike in the WB, EU's conditions imposed to the Eastern neighbours entails local political elites to give up on more power and more rent-seeking opportunities to accept EU constraint such as the rule of law. In Ukraine, the political system has been characterised to be balancing between periods of democracy and periods of competition between oligarchic clans, none being stable periods to engaged in far-reaching reforms. Moreover, EU's conditions have put an emphasis on fight against corruption, a condition that is not in the interests of the oligarchic clans, making them strong veto players to reforms. Besides, if post-revolution periods in Ukraine have lowered the cost of adoption of liberal democratic reforms, war, economic difficulties, corruption and division based on identity have remained strong societal veto players¹⁹⁸. In Moldova, state capture arrived relatively late compared to Ukraine's oligarchic system. Starting 2010 and his elections on a pro-EU campaign and programmes, Vladimir Plahotniuc, has taken over power over legislative, executive and judicial branches of Moldova, as well as on economic assets of the country, making him the sole oligarch of the country¹⁹⁹. In a nutshell, the pro-EU rhetoric has been hijacked in both regions by parties seeking electoral support, but which in reality are themselves veto players to pro-EU reforms. In addition to harm confidence in pro-EU parties, the presence of these political and societal veto players makes cost of compliance increase significantly.

Over and above, the presence of institutional veto players is also another factor to take into consideration. As we mentioned already, in Belarus, the whole regime is an institutional veto player to EU's conditions²⁰⁰. In the WB, the state organisation of Bosnia and Herzegovina gives constitutional power to its federal entities, most notably Republika Srpska, to block compliance with the EU's conditions²⁰¹. In Moldova, the sole existence of a secessionist region in Transnistria, which has been functioning with a parallel and competing state system to the one of Chişinău represents a de facto institutional veto player²⁰². A de jure institutional veto player in Moldova is the Gagauz community, which holds constitutional provisions to declare independence if Moldova were to surrender its independence. Constitutional provisions which the community reminded the Moldovan government at the moment of the AA/DCFTA signature with the EU, when they hold a referendum to reject close ties with the EU²⁰³.

¹⁹⁸ Minakov (2020), 'Democratisation and Europeanisation in 21st Century Ukraine'.

¹⁹⁹ See more in: Martin Sieg, 'Moldova in the EU's Eastern Partnership: Lessons of a Decade', *DGAP Analysis*, Berlin: Forschungsinstitut der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Auswärtige Politik e.V., 6 (2020), p. 23.

²⁰⁰ Rotman and Veremeeva (2011), 'Belarus in the Context of the Neighbourhood Policy', p. 59.

²⁰¹ Tija Mamisevic, *War Crimes, Conditionality and EU Integration in the Western Balkans*, ed. Judy Batt and Jelena Obradovic-Wochnik, Chaillot Papers 116 (Paris: Inst. for Security Studies, 2009), pp. 49–66.

²⁰² Wojciech Konończuk and Witold Rodkiewicz, 'Could Transnistria Block Moldova's Integration with the EU?', *OSW Centre for Eastern Studies* (blog), 23 October 2012.

²⁰³ RFE/RL's Moldovan Service, 'Gagauzia Voters Choose Russia Over EU', *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 3 February 2014, <https://www.rferl.org/a/moldova-gagauz-referendum-counting/25251251.html>; Valentina Ursu and Diana Raileanu, 'Gagauzia Votes On Europe', *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 31 January 2014, <https://www.rferl.org/a/moldova-gagauzia-eu-referendum/25249087.html>.

To summarise, the cost of compliance to EU conditions is high in both regions, because the EU sets the priority on democratic and human rights reforms, which are politically costly. While popular support for close ties with the EU is high, which according to the model decrease cost of compliance, the political and administrative costs of compliance in turn make costs grow higher. The hijack of pro-EU rhetoric by oligarchic parties who only pursued superficial reforms, the shape of the political regimes (autocratic or oligarchic), and the ensuing presence of strong veto players, institutional, political and societal, all make costs of compliance with EU conditions increase.

	Western Balkans	Eastern Neighbours
Reward	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - EU Membership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Visa facilitation/Visa liberalisation - Signature of AA and DCFTA - Financial and technical assistance
Credibility	<p>Positive:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - EU can withhold the reward - Asymmetrical interdependence in favour of the EU - Strong EU interest for stability in the region - No single enlargement round but case-by-case <p>Negative:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lengthy accession procedure and member state vetoes - Economically not attractive - Resistance from member states to enlargement 	<p>Positive:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - EU can withhold the reward - Asymmetrical interdependence in favour of the EU (exc. for Belarus) - Strong EU interest for stability in the region - Differentiated principle <p>Negative:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lengthy ratification procedure and EU member states vetoes - Economically not attractive - Member states' foreign policies towards Russia - Lack of greater rewards after AA/DCFTAs
Determinacy	<p>Negative:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enlargement strategy & membership conditions repeatedly revised - Stronger emphasis on rule of law - Perpetual changes in EU law 	<p>Positive:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Binding AA/DCFTA and strict scheduling <p>Negative:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of EU membership with high determinacy entails higher costs
Costs	<p>Positive:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Favourable public opinion <p>Negative:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - EU priority on democratic reforms - Start at a lower level of fit than CEE - Presence of institutional and political veto players and hijack of pro-EU rhetoric by political veto players 	<p>Positive:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Favourable public opinion (even in Belarus) <p>Negative:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - EU priority on democratic reforms - Start at a lower level of fit than the WB - State capture and oligarchic regimes - Presence of institutional and political veto players and hijack of pro-EU rhetoric by political veto players

Table 2. - The author's own summary table of the Western Balkans and Eastern neighbours through the EIM

5. Conclusion of the EIM analysis

The analysis shows that notwithstanding different rewards, the credibility is likely the same for both the WB and Eastern neighbours. Credibility suffers lengthy ratification procedures, the lack of economic interests by the EU and member states' possible vetoes. However, the Eastern neighbours see the credibility of EU conditions diminishing more because of the lack EU membership as a final reward. Determinacy is paradoxically higher for the Eastern Neighbours than it is for the WB, despite their candidate status. Eventually, the costs remain high for both regions, as the EU continues to prioritise conditions linked with democratic reforms and related sectors such as human rights or rule of law.

In their comparative analysis of the WB and CEE through the EIM, Sedelmeier and Schimmelfennig had concluded that "credibility was the only condition showing full correspondence with the pattern of compliance [...] the decline of credibility is the most important factor in the decline of the Europeanisation effects of the EU's enlargement policy"²⁰⁴. In our analysis, however, we see that the difference in the sizes of the reward weights considerably on all of the three other explanatory factors of the extent of Europeanisation. Indeed, credibility is hampered by the lack of further greater reward(s) following the AA/DCFTAs and the costs of compliance with these agreements become particularly high, especially granting their paradoxically high degree of determinacy because of their binding and far-reaching character for a relatively small or absent final reward. The EIM analysis hence corroborates our second hypothesis, that without an EU membership perspective, the EU's strategy in the Eastern neighbours is not efficient to foster European integration.

Moreover, if we open the model to the bigger picture, we find that the very prerequisites of the model to be efficient are among the characteristics that had been criticised in the EaP. Namely, the facts that the EU has an overwhelming asymmetrical power over the targeted states and imposes its own agenda (EU-centred interests), the absence of EU membership (high reward) and finally a limit that we have pointed out as well, the model does not account for the geopolitical context. Actually, in our analysis, we have seen Russia appearing several times and the emergence of new competing integration models in Eastern Europe as well which disturb the cost-benefit calculation of compliance with EU conditions.

Since EU membership remains an important part of the conditionality strategy and an important explanatory factor in the EIM, it seems essential to assess if this factor is the sole explanatory factor of the level of European integration in the Eastern neighbours. Granting that the WB have been in the waiting room of the EU for almost two decades and that at the same time Moldova and Ukraine have been granted an as far-reaching as the thirty-five accession negotiation chapters agreements and more detailed agenda to reach approximation, EU membership seems unnecessary to foster European integration. Besides, there remain European countries which do not seek to join the EU, but still demand closer relationship with the EU such as Belarus, and the EaP also fails to consider them. Furthermore, EU membership does not seem to have had a significant impact in the level of democratic development and convergence towards the eleven post-communist states that have already joined the EU, in the WB compared with the Eastern neighbours, as shown in Figure 1 below, despite the Copenhagen Plus Criteria and constant prioritisation of democratic reforms.

²⁰⁴ Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier (2020), 'The Europeanization of Eastern Europe', p.829.

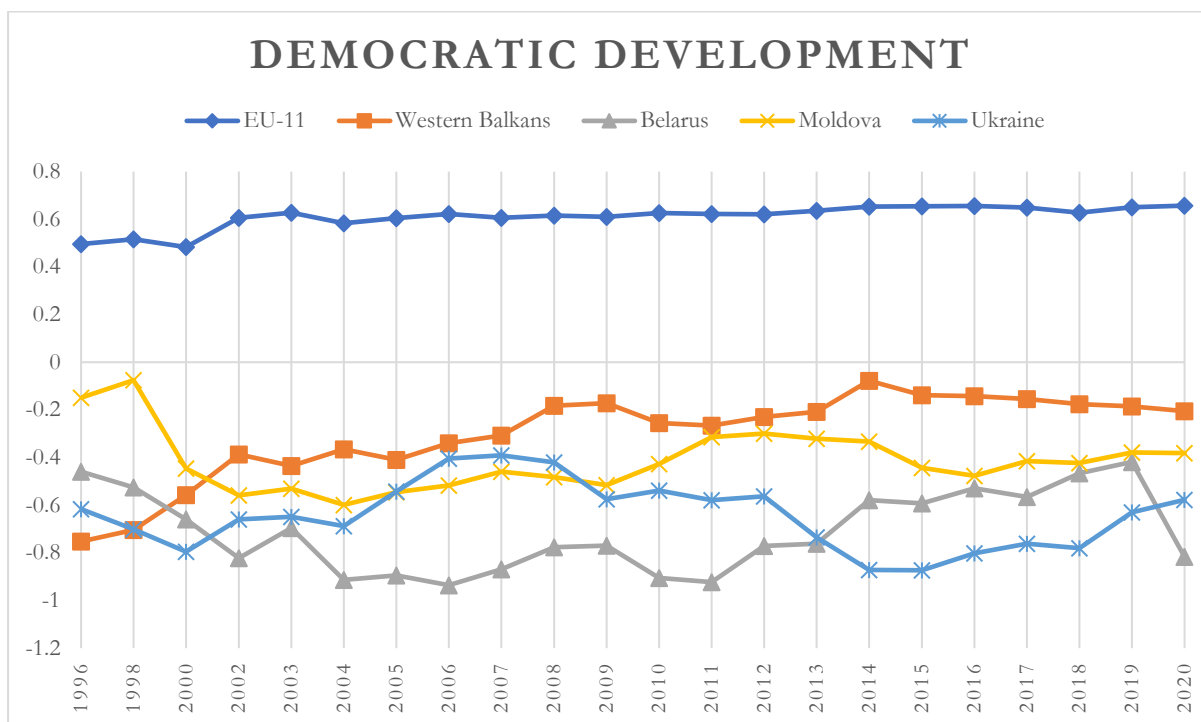


Figure 1 - Democratic Development through World Bank's Worldwide Governance indicators of EU-11, Western Balkans, Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine

Note: The author's own graphic based on World Bank's Worldwide Governance indicators. Mean of Worldwide Governance Indicators of 'Rule of Law', 'Voice and Accountability', 'Control of Corruption', 'Government Effectiveness' and 'Political Stability and Absence of Violence/Terrorism'; Indicators are expressed in estimates which give the country's or group of countries' scores on the aggregate indicator, in units of a standard normal distribution, i.e. ranging from approximately -2.5 to 2.5.

The need to recontextualise European integration into the current global environment appears as an essential factor to assess better the EU's strategies' shortcomings in the Eastern neighbours, but also in the WB. In fact, Russia has been an active player and other international powers have also engaged in both regions while the EU's strategies, despite slow and small attempts to update them, continue to rely on the same framework, namely the conditionality that led CEE to join the EU, regardless of the numerous critics and assessment of the limits of this framework, notably due to the changing international and wider European context. Thus, there is a need to discuss the implication of Russia and other geopolitical actors in the European integration process of the Eastern neighbours and WB, as well as to evaluate their relative importance in the process.

Aside from showing the slow progress in democratic development in the WB and Eastern neighbours, the Figure 1 also raises another question: if the EU has been incessantly putting the emphasis on democratic reforms, why do both regions show a very slow level of convergence with the EU-11's democratic development level? One of the critics of the conditionality strategy in the WB has rightly been the fact that the EU is hiding behind democratic development promises while in fact is economically supporting (semi-) authoritarian regimes for the sake of stability. We have raised in our analysis that credibility increased because of the EU's strong interests in the stability of both regions. This is a paradox that deserves to be tackled by the EU's policymakers, to avoid false hopes in targeted countries.

Eventually, the case of Belarus in our analysis, which has repeatedly required a separate paragraph due to the vast gap between its European integration ambition and compatibility with Moldova and Ukraine's ambition and compatibility, have led us to come to challenge the EU's hegemony over European integration. After all, all three of these countries are European, as well the WB, but as shown by the case

of Belarus, the ideas of 'Europeaness' and 'European identity' are not an exclusive EU privilege to define. The failure of the EaP to take into consideration the different European integration demands of a heterogeneous group of countries, and the subsequent attempt to impose what it means to be European, and values deemed 'European' by the EU on these countries lead us to wonder if another system of integration is possible. By taking into consideration the inherent diversity of the European continent in terms of values and the economic interdependence from Portugal to Russia, another system of European integration ought to be imagined, in order to avoid the hegemonic attempt of the EU to impose its ideas and connect all of the continent together.

We will attempt to develop all these reflections in the third and last chapter of our thesis.

III. A broader perspective for European integration in the Eastern neighbours

Taking into consideration the critics of the political elites of the Eastern neighbours, the critics of the scholars focusing on the EaP, as well as the EIM analysis of the EaP and historical process between the EU and the Eastern neighbours, it is necessary to reflect further on the EU's strategy to foster European integration. A series of reflections ought to be answered so as to tackle the shortcomings of the EaP and find a better more coherent policy to foster European integration. Firstly, review if the EaP should effectively offer EU membership as the ultimate reward, what would be the added value for Moldova and Ukraine, and what to do with a country such as Belarus which does not ask for such a reward. Secondly, the EU's interests in both regions need to be clarified, while the EaP's priorities remain democratic development, the EU's main interest stays on stability, hence we can wonder how to conciliate both priorities. Thirdly, a necessity arises in the EaP, but also more generally in the EU's foreign policy, to readapt strategies and priorities by taking into consideration other international players in both regions, such as Russia, China and Türkiye and stop relying on strategies no longer adapted to the geopolitical context. Finally, we will challenge European integration as a purely EU-centred idea and wonder if other forms of integration are possible in Europe, including the EU, the Western Balkans, the Eastern Neighbours, Russia and Türkiye altogether.

A. EU membership: a necessity for coherent and efficient European integration?

Should the EaP offer EU membership?

1. Same thing, different names: Moldova, Ukraine and the Western Balkans

The most recurrent explanatory factor of the shortcomings and failure of the EaP by scholars is the lack of EU membership perspective in the policy²⁰⁵. Likewise, in our comparative analysis of Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine with the Western Balkans through the conditionality explanatory model, we have found that the EU membership was the factor that outweighed all of the other explanatory factors impeding integration. The logical conclusion would be to say that EU membership is the sole missing promise in the EU's strategy to effectively foster European integration in its Eastern neighbourhood as stated by our second hypothesis. However, this conclusion does not resist the comparison between the level of democratic development, economic integration with the EU and approximation with EU law between

²⁰⁵ Wiegand and Schulz (2015), 'The EU and Its Eastern Partnership', p. 343; Bureiko and Moga (2018), "'Bounded Europeanisation": The Case of Ukraine', p. 74; Korosteleva (2011), 'The Eastern Partnership Initiative'; Tobias Schumacher, 'Uncertainty at the EU's Borders: Narratives of EU External Relations in the Revised European Neighbourhood Policy towards the Southern Borderlands', *European Security*, 24, no. 3 (3 July 2015), pp. 381–401; Simão (2017), 'Bringing "the Political" Back into European Security'; Mannin (2018), 'Europeanisation as a Past and Present Narrative'; Sieg (2020), 'Moldova in the EU's Eastern Partnership'.

Moldova and Ukraine with the Western Balkans²⁰⁶. The assessment of the democratic development of both regions as seen in Figure 1 in the second chapter of this thesis, shows that the WB, despite EU membership, continue to be closer to Moldova and Ukraine, than to the eleven post-communist states (EU-11) that have already joined the EU. Or, put differently, Moldova and Ukraine show a degree of democratic development over the years close to this of the WB countries, despite the lack of EU membership perspective. If we focus on the period between 2015 and 2022 for democratic development, it is to be expected to see a slow but steady convergence of the WB with the EU-11's level, as well as progress in both Moldova and Ukraine, since they are legally bound to engage in democratic reforms through the AAs with the EU. However, when we look at the democracy scores by Freedom House for each country (Figure 2), we found that the WB countries, Moldova and Ukraine are labelled in the same category, namely as 'transitional or hybrid regimes', and that convergence between the WB and EU-11 only happens because of democratic backslide from the side of the EU-11 countries. EU-11 countries continuously rank between the 'semi-consolidated democracy' or 'consolidated democracy' categories, with the sole exception of Hungary, which has seen its democracy score progressively fall over the years and is now categorised as a 'transitional or hybrid regime'.

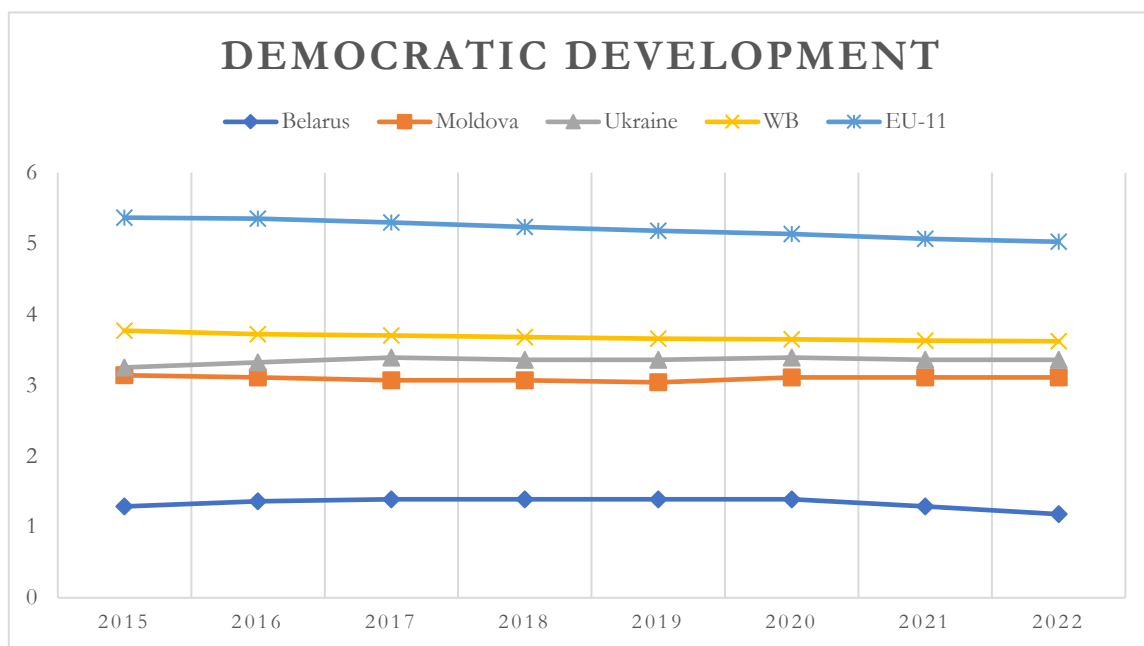


Figure 2 - Democratic development of Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine, the Western Balkan and the EU-11 countries through the Freedom House Index

Note: The author's own graphics based on the Freedom House's scale of Democracy score. Freedom House rates the democratic score of countries on a scale from 1 (Consolidated authoritarian regime) to 7 (Consolidated democracy).

Even by breaking down country by country the democratic score of the Western Balkans, we find that the best-performing countries of the region (Serbia, Montenegro and Albania), remain far away from the EU-11 average, and closer to the scores of Moldova and Ukraine. If compared with the worst EU-11 performer, namely Hungary, then Serbia, Montenegro and Albania manage to get a better democracy score, but it is mostly due to Hungary's own democratic backslide which has started well before 2015, rather than being caused by good performances by the Balkan countries themselves.

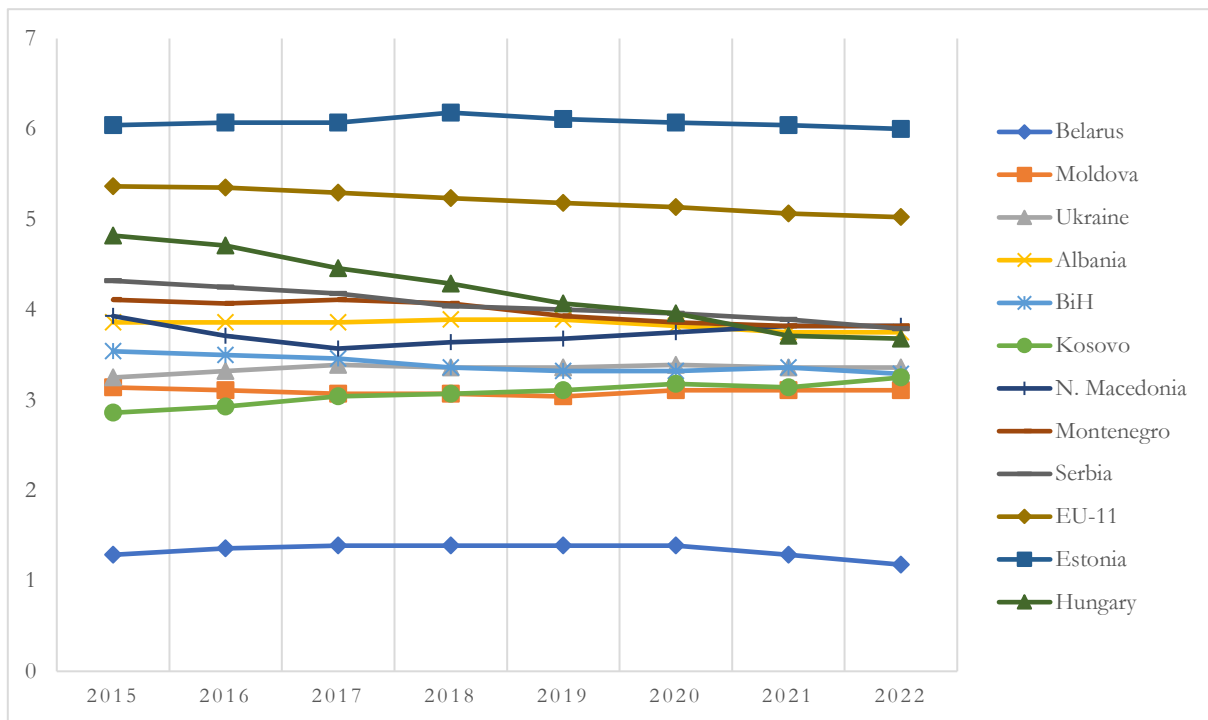


Figure 3 - Break down of democratic development through the Freedom House index - country by country

In Figure 3, we can also observe that Moldova and Ukraine find themselves performing at the same level as the worst performers of the WB, i.e. Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH in graphic) and Kosovo. While we explained earlier that the difference in the level of European integration in democratic development was due to a lower level of fit with the EU's standards, in the WB compared to CEE and in the Eastern neighbours compared to the WB, we can also conclude that EU membership promise did not have the expected impact in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo. Although it is relevant to find Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Moldova and Ukraine at the same level of democratic development, as all countries find themselves to be the most struggling states with statehood, it also impedes the idea that EU membership is the sole booster for democratic development. Similarly, it implies that the EU's choice to grant (potential-) candidacy status to a country is not only linked to its democratic development, otherwise there would be no reason for the EU to grant 'potential candidate' status to Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo and restrain from granting it to Moldova and Ukraine. Overall, the perspective of EU membership does not appear to be a determining factor for the democratic development of both regions as much as expected.

The legal treatment by the EU of both regions when it comes to approximation with EU law is also worth having a look at. As we concluded in our analysis, the AA/DCFTAs provided to Moldova and Ukraine and the SAAs to the WB are comparable in terms of scope for the approximation with EU law. The fact that the AA/DCFTAs provide a binding character for approximation with EU law while the SAAs do not, show that EU membership is not necessary for a country to accept to comply to mandatory approximation with EU norms and standards. In fact, scholars have recently found that Moldova and Ukraine have a better rate of approximation and compliance with EU trade policies, macro-economic stabilisation, and EU's *acquis communautaire*, than the weakest WB countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo)²⁰⁷. The fact that Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo are laggards in terms of approximation with EU law

²⁰⁷ Emerson et al. (2021), 'Balkan and Eastern European Comparisons', pp. 11–25.

can be explained by the fact that they have been granted an official status relatively late by the EU²⁰⁸. Albania became an official candidate country in 2014 and the SAAs with Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo entered into force respectively in 2015 and 2017²⁰⁹. However, on the Moldovan and Ukrainian sides, both AA/DCFTAs entered into force in 2016 and 2017, which means that both Eastern neighbours have been more efficient to approximate EU law than the weakest WB countries. It seems that the EU, in the same spirit as the change in strategy for integration of CEE and the WB, reinforcing democratic consolidation conditions, has also changed the strategy towards the Eastern neighbours. Learning from shortcomings of the strategy towards the WB, the EU might expect Moldova and Ukraine to secure a certain level of integration in terms of approximation and implementation of EU law before granting possible candidate status to both countries and avoid having two more countries in the waiting room of EU accession and possibly have the Eastern neighbours a shorter period of accession than the WB. Although, in both regions, if approximation remains a lesser source of problems, especially in technical and trade-related areas, the main issue stays the effective implementation of EU law. The WB, Moldova and Ukraine encounter the same issues: a highly politicised and subject to pressure and corruption from an oligarchic class judiciary system, lack of education of legislative, executive and judiciary elite about EU law and a high turnover of unexperimented staff²¹⁰. Moreover, the EU has continuously proposed and treated the same way with both regions for a series of initiatives, as Emerson et al. explain, the WB, Moldova and Ukraine are equally part of: the Central and South Eastern Europe Energy Connectivity, the Coal Regions in the Western Balkans and Ukraine, Transport Community (Common European Aviation Area and Single European Sky/Eurocontrol), the Covid-19 EU aids towards EU neighbours have been relatively the same, and economic and investment plans are similar between the two regions. They also find that in certain situations, the EU uses its experience with the EaP countries to subsequently modify the integration process of the WB²¹¹.

The trade-related policies of the *acquis communautaire* remain the most successfully adopted and implemented pieces of EU law in both regions. Fostering economic integration with the EU, is both politically cheap and economically beneficial for local governments, making economic integration with the EU the most advanced integration sector in both regions. Trade with the EU has been a source of economic growth and the whole Western-Europe economic area, comprising the EU, the EFTA and the UK have been by far the main trading partner for both Moldova and Ukraine.

²⁰⁸ Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina's EU integration was nonetheless guaranteed by the 2003 Thessaloniki summit declarations. Kosovo's situation remains complex, as five EU member states still do not recognise its independence.

²⁰⁹ European Parliament, 'The Western Balkans | Fact Sheets on the European Union', accessed 17 May 2022, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/168/the-western-balkans>.

²¹⁰ Roman Petrov, 'Legislative Approximation and Application of EU Law in Ukraine', in *Legislative Approximation and Application of EU Law in the Eastern Neighbourhood of the European Union: Towards a Common Regulatory Space?*, ed. Peter Van Elsuwege (London: Routledge, 2014), pp. 137–158; Anna Khvorostiankina, 'Legislative Approximation and Application of EU Law in Moldova', in *Legislative Approximation and Application of EU Law in the Eastern Neighbourhood of the European Union: Towards a Common Regulatory Space?*, ed. Peter Van Elsuwege and Roman Petrov (London: Routledge, 2014), pp. 175–166; Adam Łazowski and Steven Blockmans, 'Between Dream and Reality - Challenges to the Legal Rapprochement of the Western Balkans', in *Legislative Approximation and Application of EU Law in the Eastern Neighbourhood of the European Union: Towards a Common Regulatory Space?*, ed. Peter Van Elsuwege and Roman Petrov (London: Routledge, 2014), p. 132; Southeast European Leadership for Development and Integrity, 'Judiciary in the Western Balkans: The Long Road from Political Dependence toward EU Standards', policy brief, SELDI, December 2020.

²¹¹ Emerson et al. (2021), 'Balkan and Eastern European Comparisons', pp. 25–28.

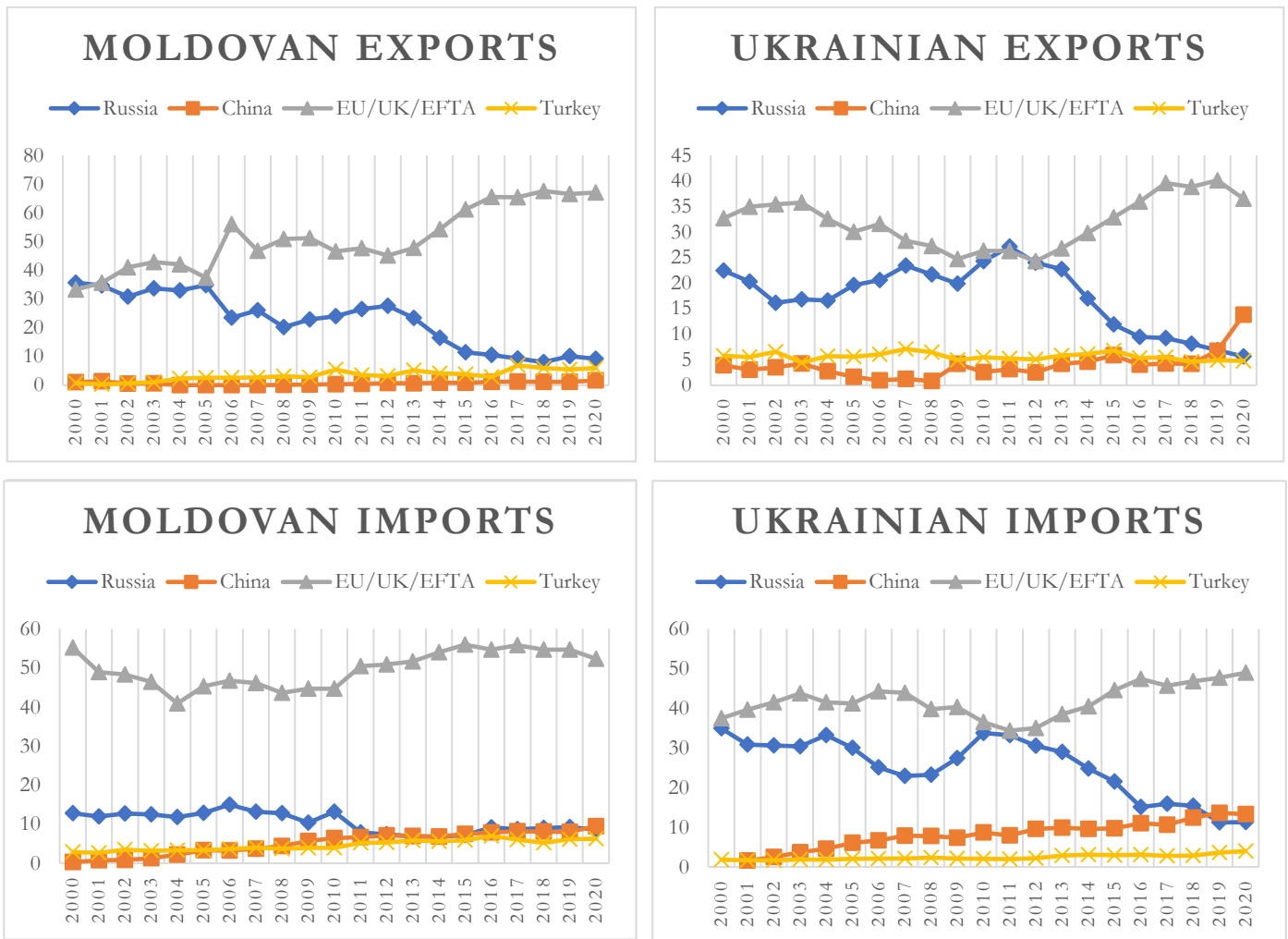


Figure 4 - Destinations of exports and imports of Moldova and Ukraine in % of total trade

Note: Author's own graphics, based on trade data from OEC.world

In figure 4, we can observe that while the EU, EFTA and UK were already the main destinations for exports from Moldova and Ukraine, the years leading to signature and implementation of the DCFTAs in 2016-17 are marked by a significant increase in trade while the following years mark the widening gap with the second-largest trading partner, Russia. As the share of total exports towards the EU, EFTA and UK rose from 48% in 2013 to 67,5% in 2017 for Moldova and from 27% in 2013 to 47% in 2016 for Ukraine, the share of Russia dropped in their total exports from 23% to 9% in Moldova and from 22,7% to 9% in Ukraine in the same period of time. While the share of the EU, EFTA and UK have stagnated in Moldova (between 65,5 and 67%) and Ukraine (between 39,5 and 36,5%) between 2016 and 2020, the share of Russia in exports has continuously decreased to reach an all-time low in 2020 in Ukraine and the second-worst year in Moldova, as it accounted respectively for 5,6% and 9,2%, becoming as important as partners such as China and Türkiye. Moldova shows a steady engagement with the EU, EFTA and UK in terms of imports, especially after 2014, as the group of countries represented between 52% and 55% of total imports. In Ukraine, the import situation has been more disputed, as Russia was able to compete with the EU, EFTA and UK as the first trading partner, almost reaching the same level in 2011, but following the 2014 Crimean annexation and hybrid war in Donbas, the share of Russia in importation significantly dropped to the expense of the EU, EFTA and UK. Russian share in Ukraine importation dropped from 33% in 2011-2012

to 11,9% in 2020, while in the same period the share of the EU, EFTA and UK increased from 34% to 49%.

In the Western Balkans, over the period 2011 – 2016 the EU has represented in terms of imports and exports an increasing share in all individual states of the region. As of 2016, the EU represented over 50% of the share for Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Serbia, while the main trading partner for Kosovo and Montenegro remained the Central European Free Trade Agreements (CEFTA) countries²¹². In 2021, the EU was the leading trading partner for all of WB countries, accounting for 67,6% of the region's total trade²¹³.

Alike the post-Soviet space, the WB did not attract much foreign direct investment (FDI), due to the unstable political and economic environment impeding businesses. However, in both regions, the EU has been the main source of FDI. Since 2001 firms from EU member states represent the main source of inward flow of FDI in the WB and during the period of 2009-2012, the share of EU FDI in the WB ranged from 50% in Albania to 90% in Serbia²¹⁴. In Moldova, the assessment of FDI lacks data to be compared, but in 2012 if FDI from individual EU member states investing in Moldova²¹⁵ are added together, then the share of the EU's FDI in Moldova was of 55%, outweighing the second-largest source of FDI, namely the Russian Federation accounting for a little less than 25%²¹⁶. For the same year, in Ukraine, the EU represented the most important investor in terms of inward flow of FDI, accounting for 73% of the total share²¹⁷.

Overall, in terms of the level of European integration, with the exception of the status granted to each individual state, it appears that the WB countries, Moldova and Ukraine are at the relatively same level of integration. This account of the economic dependence of the two regions on the EU also allows us to validate our first hypothesis. Indeed, we can clearly see that integration in the economic sector is still the most advanced in all the countries under discussion. In contrast, integration in the legal and value sectors continues to stagnate. In short, we can partially validate our first hypothesis, but it calls into question our second hypothesis. Though the importance of the involvement of the EU must not be underestimated in the democratic and economic development of both regions, EU membership does not appear to be the main leading factor fostering European integration. The spectacular reorganisation of trade in Moldova and Ukraine towards the EU²¹⁸ following Russia's attacks on Ukraine in 2014 has not been fostered by the EU's strategy itself but by exogenous factors. The revisited conditionality strategy of the EU in the WB and the Eastern neighbourhood seems to have reached a limit since the driving factor of integration is no longer EU membership, a promise that suffered from the lengthy accession process of the WB, but rather national economic and geopolitical interests from targeted countries. This in turn explains why economic integration has shown greater results than democratic convergence. Subsequently, other explanatory theoretical frameworks such as domestic empowerment and lesson-drawing come into play, since these countries, including the Eastern neighbours or even Russia, unilaterally adopted EU rules and standards in order to trade with EU countries, without the EU having to use conditionality to do so.

²¹² CEFTA = Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Kosovo and Moldova Milica Uvalić, 'Economic Integration of the Western Balkans into the European Union: The Role of EU Policies', in *The Europeanisation of the Western Balkans*, ed. Jelena Džankić, Soeren Keil, and Marko Kmezić (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019), pp. 6–7.

²¹³ European Commission, 'EU Trade Relations with Western Balkans'.

²¹⁴ Uvalić (2019), 'Economic Integration of the Western Balkans into the European Union', pp. 7–8.

²¹⁵ The Netherlands, France, Cyprus, Romania, Spain, Germany and Italy.

²¹⁶ Mario Damen, 'Foreign Direct Investment in the EU and the Eastern Partnership Countries' (Brussels: Publications Office, 2018), p. 22.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

²¹⁸ Pierre Mirel, 'The Eastern Partnership under the Test of War in Ukraine', *Fondation Robert Schuman*, European Issues, 624 (15 March 2022), pp. 2–4.

2. EU membership for Moldova and Ukraine: a sustainable perspective?

If EU membership is not the sole factor explaining the development toward European integration, the fact that Moldova and Ukraine have been as successful as the WB in a shorter period of time might also be explained by their ongoing desire to get EU membership. Hence, accepting a binding agreement to approximate with EU law, and foster economic dependence with the EU, ought to be perceived as a means to foster as far as possible European integration so that EU membership becomes the last possible perspective. Granting that pro-EU elites that have come into power in Chişinău and Kyiv have continuously restated their commitment to the European integration and eventually EU membership for the past three decades, an eventual official possibility for these countries to get EU membership must be considered in the EaP.

One of the first issue to consider when assessing the pros and cons of granting EU membership to Moldova and Ukraine is the fact that whether the EU does it or not, the Moldovan and Ukrainian populations will always find a way into the EU, notably with the help of the most supportive EU member states. For Ukraine, it is mainly Poland that has stepped in and granted a significant amount of working visas to Ukrainian citizens²¹⁹. During the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic in early 2020, the government's statistical agency estimated the amount of Ukrainians legally residing in Poland to be 1.3 million, accounting for 64.3% of the total foreign population, far ahead of Belarusians, Germans and Moldovans²²⁰. While the Polish government have been welcoming Ukrainian workers, other EU member states have followed that path, such as Czechia, Slovakia and Germany, opening their labour market to Ukrainian workers²²¹. For Moldova, which heavily relies on remittances, access to the EU labour market has been essential. In 2019 and 2020 on average 46,6% of the total remittances inflow in Moldova came from the EU against 23,5% from the CIS²²². The EU member state that has been the most active in supporting the European integration of Moldova is Romania, due to strong historical, cultural and linguistic ties. However, unlike Poland with Ukraine, Romania has gone a step further, not only granting easier access to working visas but directly granting Romanian citizenship to Moldovans²²³. As of 2021, the Romanian Justice Ministry stated that a quarter of the Moldovan population held a Romanian passport and that demands kept on growing²²⁴. When asked, Moldovan citizens who seek Romanian passports do not put forward their attachment to Romania but rather the fact that such a passport gives unlimited access to the EU and possibilities to work in the EU more easily²²⁵. The privileges granted by an EU passport are also put much forward by Romania, rather than the right to restore one's ancestry lost citizenship²²⁶.

Moreover, polls and electoral results show strong support from both populations to European integration and EU membership. In Ukraine, regardless of age and region of residence, over the period 2000-2017, integration with the EU has remained the most attractive integration perspective for Ukrainians. And after

²¹⁹ Kozłowski and Yankiv (2021), 'Ukraine's Gradual Westernization - the Eastern Dimension of the European Integration', pp. 9–10.

²²⁰ Statistics Poland, 'The Foreign Population in Poland during the COVID-19 Pandemic', stat.gov.pl, 29 June 2020, <https://stat.gov.pl/en/experimental-statistics/human-capital/the-foreign-population-in-poland-during-the-covid-19-pandemic,10,1.html>.

²²¹ Telewizja Polska S.A and mg/lw, 'Poland Becomes Less Attractive for Ukrainian Workers', 19 November 2018, <https://typworld.com/40022585/poland-becomes-less-attractive-for-ukrainian-workers>.

²²² Mihaela Golburean, 'The Impact of Personal Remittances in the Economy of the Republic of Moldova in the Current Conditions', *Simpozion Ştiinţific Internaţional al Tinerilor Cervetători*, 3, no. 19-a (10 November 2021), p. 271.

²²³ Benjamin Bidder, 'Romanian Passports For Moldovans: Entering the EU Through the Back Door', *Der Spiegel*, 13 July 2010, sec. International, <https://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/romanian-passports-for-moldovans-entering-the-eu-through-the-back-door-a-706338.html>.

²²⁴ Madalin Necsutu, 'Quarter of Moldovans Now Have Romanian Passports', *Balkan Insight*, 27 May 2021, <https://balkaninsight.com/2021/05/27/quarter-of-moldovans-now-have-romanian-passports/>.

²²⁵ Adrian Mogos and Vitalie Calugareanu, 'How to Buy EU Citizenship', *EUobserver*, 14 September 2012, sec. Rule of law, <https://euobserver.com/rule-of-law/117551>.

²²⁶ RomanianCitizenship.ro, 'Romanian Citizenship by Descent and Romanian EU Passport by Ancestry', <https://romaniancitizenship.ro/>.

2014, even in the most reluctant regions of the South and East of Ukraine, the share of citizens supporting EU integration has significantly exceeded the share of those supporting integration with the EaEU²²⁷. Constant public opinion polls in Moldova remain hard to find so as to draw the same comparison over time, however, in 2008 the share of the population supporting joining the EU was of 78.8%²²⁸, while the latest polls before the start of the war in Ukraine in February 2022, show that over 71% of Moldovans support EU membership²²⁹. In addition to that, electoral results in Moldova are a proof of the continuous support of the population toward the European idea, and the fact that even Kremlin-backed parties such as the Moldovan communist party and the socialist party have endorsed EU integration as part of their programs since independence demonstrates that European integration is an important value for the population that can be electorally costly for political parties²³⁰. The importance of EU engagement in both countries is essential, as for the population the EU is linked to values such as democracy, rule of law, human rights and freedoms, and is perceived as a guarantor of these very values²³¹. The 2004 Orange Revolution and 2009 Grape Revolution are illustrations of the attachment of Ukrainians and Moldovans to democracy. The 2014 Euromaidan and 2019 “Silent revolution”²³² are illustrations of the attachment to both democracy and EU integration. If the EU fails to deliver anything concrete and of significance such as a perspective of joining the EU, even in the long-term, to populations that have been over and over protesting and voting for EU integration over decades, then the risks are to see these states fall into more authoritarian and anti-EU sentiment grow. Despite strong support for the democratic ideal, populist and nationalist sentiments in Ukraine are still robust and have been strengthening post-Euromaidan²³³, while in Moldova media remain controlled by an oligarchic class and prone to disinformation, especially coming from Russia, discrediting the EU²³⁴. The rise of alternative integration systems and bilateral cooperation with other countries that are less attached to democratic values such as Russia, China and Türkiye puts also Moldova and Ukraine at a greater risk of falling into authoritarian regimes if the EU fails to further engage. Türkiye has been one example of this case, despite their candidate status, the government threaten the EU to engage in a China-led integration project if the EU continued to not deliver its promises²³⁵. Moreover, yet another reluctance from the EU not to grant EU membership perspective to Moldova and Ukraine would give the Kremlin, which has been the most engaged in preventing these countries to get closer to the EU, a certain victory²³⁶. Granting candidate status would mean greater involvement by the EU in Moldova and Ukraine in terms of technical and financial assistance, and a strengthened and/or renewed trust in the EU from Moldovans and Ukrainians.

Finally, EU membership is only the sole natural step after the full implementation of the AA/DCFTAs in Moldova and Ukraine. Once fully implemented, the DCFTA would bring both countries to the same level as the EEA countries, with the sole difference that Moldova and Ukraine will not be granted a say in the policymaking of EU laws while remaining bound to implement them, whereas the EEA countries are granted access to the informal preparation of these laws. The issue is similar with the AAs, though even more sensible since it touches upon democratic and political sectors. Overall, it appears unsustainable for the EU to keep on requiring Moldova and Ukraine to fully implement laws in which they did not participate to elaborate nor voted for without the perspective of one day being a full EU member state. The EU can

²²⁷ Burakovskiy et al. (2018), ‘Ukraine - EU Relations: Looking Beyond the Horizon. How Do We See the Future of European Integration? Position Paper’, pp. 2–3.

²²⁸ Korosteleva (2010), ‘Moldova’s European Choice’, p. 1281.

²²⁹ Interfax-Ukraine, ‘Poll: Over 70% Moldovans Favor EU Membership - KyivPost, 2 August 2021, <https://www.kyivpost.com/world/poll-over-70-moldovans-favor-eu-membership.html>.

²³⁰ For more details see: Sieg (2020), ‘Moldova in the EU’s Eastern Partnership’.

²³¹ Stegnyy (2011), ‘Ukraine and the Eastern Partnership’; Korosteleva (2010), ‘Moldova’s European Choice’.

²³² This is how Dimitru Alaiba, a Moldovan MP, refers to the 2019 parliamentary elections which brought to an end to the reign of Vladimir Plahotniuc, Moldova’s main oligarch: Dimitru Alaiba, ‘About Moldova’s “Silent Revolution”’, *Dumitru Alaiba* (blog), 26 June 2019, <https://alaiba.md/2019/06/26/about-moldovas-silent-revolution/>.

²³³ Minakov (2020), ‘Democratisation and Europeanisation in 21st Century Ukraine’.

²³⁴ Sieg (2020), ‘Moldova in the EU’s Eastern Partnership’, p. 15.

²³⁵ Özcan Yilmaz, ‘La Turquie républicaine, « déchirée » entre l’Orient et l’Occident?’, *Relations internationales*, 172, no. 4 (28 December 2017), p. 29.

²³⁶ Mirel (2022), ‘The Eastern Partnership under the Test of War in Ukraine’, p. 4.

require this kind of unilateral relationship with the WB, only because EU membership is a guaranteed perspective. Eventually, if the WB suffered negative public opinion from European citizens about EU enlargement, support for further enlargement of the EU became the majority opinion from 2019 onwards with, in 2020 46% of Europeans in favour, and stronger support in countries such as Lithuania, Croatia, Hungary and Poland²³⁷. And the most recent flash Eurobarometer shows that 66% of Europeans support Ukrainian accession to the EU²³⁸.

Although, the picture about EU membership for Moldova and Ukraine is not completely rosy. There remain robust arguments against granting membership to these countries within the EU but also locally. Firstly, technical and political issues are likely to be huge obstacles. If the EU was to effectively grant a membership promise to Moldova and Ukraine, it is most likely to impose Copenhagen Plus *Plus* criterion. Meaning that the democratic prerequisites for both countries to eventually become full member states might be even higher and harder to reach than those imposed on the WB because both countries start from a lower level of fit than the WB. This is in the case the EU does not change its enlargement strategy and it is hence expected to see Moldova and Ukraine to have an accession process probably as long, if not longer than the WB's. Political issues rely on the fact that powerful governments within the EU are against the possible accession of Moldova and Ukraine to the EU, most notably France and Germany. Ukraine represents a costly integration, as it is one of the biggest European countries with 44 million inhabitants while at the same time one of the poorest, with a GDP per capita in 2019 of \$3600. As a matter of comparison, the last country to join the EU, Croatia had a population of 4 million for a GDP per capita of \$13800²³⁹. The situation of Moldova is not better, even if its population is small, 2,6 million, its GDP per capita also ranks amongst the lowest in Europe, standing at \$4400 in 2019, slightly higher than Kosovo's²⁴⁰. Moldova and Ukraine's accession to the EU, granting their level of economic development would entail a huge transfer of funds from the wealthiest EU member states to both countries, while cohesion funds, which aim at developing regions that struggle the most with economic development (among which all EU-11 states), already represent one-third of the EU's total budget and has seen its funds decrease in the new 2021-2027 multiannual budget²⁴¹. Fund transfers are already something highly unpopular in countries that are net contributors to the EU budget, hence adding two more countries that are more than likely going to be net recipients of EU funds is certainly a big political obstacle to the possible EU membership of Moldova and Ukraine.

Secondly, Moldova and Ukraine would only be added to a group of countries that are already candidates and have been waiting for several decades to get into the EU, and the list of countries that managed to get into the EU after the two waves of the Eastern enlargement of 2004 and 2007 can be summed up to only one country: Croatia. Moreover, since the accession process of Moldova and Ukraine is likely to be as long, if not longer than the WB's accession, there is a great risk to observe the same loss of momentum in the Eastern neighbours hence extending further the accession process. If the WB, as it stands now already face very low credibility of fast accession to the EU, then Moldova and Ukraine which are poorer face even lower credibility to eventually join the EU within the next twenty years. Moreover, as observed in Türkiye, to be granted an EU candidate status does not reduce the attraction of cooperation with other integration, on the contrary, it can even become a way of leverage to pressure the EU to deliver²⁴².

²³⁷ European Commission. Directorate General for Communication. and Kantar., *Europeans' Opinions about the European Union's Priorities: Report*. (LU: Publications Office, 2021), p. 89, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2775/372422>.

²³⁸ European Commission, 'Eurobarometer on EU's Response to the War in Ukraine', Text, European Commission - European Commission, 5 May 2022, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_22_2784.

²³⁹ TLDR News EU, *Could Ukraine Join the European Union? - TLDR News*, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=02ebJPr0QbQ>.

²⁴⁰ IMF, 'Report for Selected Countries and Subjects', IMF, <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/weo-database/2021/October/weo-report>.

²⁴¹ European Committee of the Regions, 'EU Budget 2021-2027: Cuts to Regional Funds Will Weaken Europe', 4 May 2018, <https://cor.europa.eu/en/news/Pages/EU-Budget-2021-2027-cuts-to-regional-funds-will-weaken-Europes-future.aspx>.

²⁴² Yilmaz (2017), 'La Turquie républicaine, « déchirée » entre l'Orient et l'Occident?', p. 29.

Thirdly, another political issue hindering EU membership is ongoing territorial disputes and the presence of pro-Russian minorities. Granting EU membership might trigger stronger reactions from minorities which have already expressed their rejection of further EU integration. In Moldova, as we mentioned before, the Gagauz community remain fiercely opposed to European integration, politically leaning toward Russia and might trigger their constitutional right to secession considering that Moldova is putting its sovereignty at risk with EU membership. The Transnistrian region, which has been demanding independence and reunification with Russia since 1992, is also a strong opponent to EU membership. And it is expected that in the criteria of EU accession for Moldova, settlement of the territorial dispute to be a non-negotiable criterion for full membership. In Ukraine, the question of territorial integrity has taken another new direction with the start of the Russian invasion in February 2022. If the settlement of disputes in Crimea and Donbas would have been, such as Transnistria, criteria for accession, now it is rather linked to how the war will end, thus a series of 'ifs'. Despite the fact that visa facilitation has been a tool to normalise relations between governments in Chişinău and Kyiv with their separatist minorities²⁴³, EU membership remains a risk to strengthen internal conflicts in both countries, which have already been fuelled by the divide between pro-Western and pro-Russian forces since independence.

Eventually, the biggest obstacle is the EU's own internal issues. The chain of crises since 2007 (financial crisis, Euro crisis, Migration crisis, Brexit, Covid-19) has considerably weighted on enlargement, which was not at the top of the agenda. Moreover, this succession of crises has also revealed the weakness of the EU's post-accession compliance with democratic values in the eleven post-communist countries that joined the EU. The 2008 financial crisis brought to power Viktor Orbán's Fidesz party, which has not left power since and gradually attacked the foundations of liberal democracy in Hungary. In Poland, *Pravo i Sprawiedliwość* (Law and Justice Party), which also engaged in media and judiciary reforms contrary to the rule of law, came back to power following the 2015 migration crisis. The migration crisis was followed by a populist wave across Europe, but the effects and attacks on democratic principles and European integration were the most strongly felt in Central Eastern Europe. Even if the EU is now equipped with a rule of law mechanism, which permits to withholding EU funds in case of non-respect of EU fundamental values, doubts remain about the effective efficiency of the mechanism²⁴⁴. Moreover, such internal issues bring more doubt about the effectiveness of the EU's enlargement strategy and subsequently about the possibility and capacity of the EU to be the transformative power it intends to be. Thus, if the EU struggles to completely integrate its own member states and the WB have been in the waiting room for such a long time with little improvement towards the EU's democratic standards, it is hard to imagine how the EU would be willing to give EU membership perspective to countries such as Moldova and Ukraine representing even more hardship.

3. *The particular situation of Belarus*

For the case of Moldova and Ukraine, the main question about the coherence and efficiency of the EaP was to know if the policy had to propose EU membership as a final reward so as to better foster European integration since both countries have been asking for it. The case of Belarus in the EaP is peculiar, the question is rather how to foster European integration when EU membership is not the ultimate goal? If the EaP could rely on the fact that Moldova and Ukraine continuously proclaimed European integration as their top priority to foster European integration without promising EU membership, in the case of Belarus, the EaP relies on almost nothing.

²⁴³ Stanislav Secieru, *The Visa-Free 3D Effect: Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine*, European Union Institute for Security Studies (LU: Publications Office, 2017).

²⁴⁴ Piotr Buras, 'Why the EU's Rule of Law Mechanism Won't Resolve Its Democratic Crisis', *European Council on Foreign Relations - ECFR*, 23 February 2022, <https://ecfr.eu/article/why-the-eus-rule-of-law-mechanism-wont-resolve-its-democratic-crisis>.

Neither the actual authoritarian regime of Alyaksandr Lukashenka²⁴⁵, the Belarusian population²⁴⁶ nor the democratic opposition of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya²⁴⁷ are advocating for possible accession to the EU of Belarus. The EaP's main goals to foster European integration with the EU and approximation of norms and values enter in contradiction with Belarus's own goals and interests. While the democratic opposition indeed advocates for greater cooperation with the EU, the idea of the multi-vector foreign policy, the idea that Belarus should not make the either/or choice between the EU and Russia seems to remain a strong value across all strata of the Belarusian society, even in the democratic opposition. The EaP's attempt to make countries position themselves in the either/or spectrum hence appears as an incoherent strategy toward Belarus. While the EU does not prevent the EaP countries from making their choice, for example when Armenia decided to join the EaEU rather than sign the planned AA with the EU, no opposition from the EU was raised, but it does not change the fact that it pushes states to make a choice that is often not in their best interests.

In addition to that, as we mentioned in the second chapter of this thesis, the EaP is ill-planned for the case of Belarus, which is already engaged in other integration organisations which makes the country only eligible for one of the rewards provided by the EaP: the visa facilitation. Despite Belarus suspending its participation in the EaP in June 2021²⁴⁸, the EU continues to expect Belarus to resume its participation²⁴⁹, instead of opting for another policy/strategy toward Minsk. Overall, the focus of the EU's EaP on democratic values and conditionality as a strategy hampers any further improvement of relations between the EU and Belarus. Indirect Europeanisation strategies such as societal empowerment, socialisation and societal lesson-drawing appear to be for both sides the only possibilities in the short-term to foster European integration.

Furthermore, the case of Belarus taken not only through the lens of the EaP, but also through the broader European idea, challenges the EU's self-proclaimed privilege to define what is European and what is not. The accumulation of the feeling of victory after the end of the Cold War and the Eastern enlargements considered the EU's greatest achievement comforted the EU in the self-projected image of being a transformational power and that its main values and goals were not to be challenged. The fact that 'European' has become synonymous with the European Union and by extension with EFTA countries who share Western-style democracies, economies and values, has led the EU to engage in a campaign to impose its own values on countries, whether it is CEE countries, the WB or the Eastern Neighbours, instead of engaging in necessary and healthy debate with them about what it means to be 'European', especially if it is the EU's unofficial goal through European integration to encompass all of the European continents under the same common and shared values and legal and economic system. Belarus is a European country by geography, population, history and culture and considers itself as such. In fact, 'Belarussianness' is strongly linked with the idea of 'Europeanness' in the country's own narrative²⁵⁰. However, Belarus's perception of the European identity strays away from the EU's perception of European identity which is inherently linked with political values. Belarus presents itself as a central European country, but also acknowledges its 'bridging' character between Europe and greater Eurasia, and this idea that some countries, especially peripheral countries represent bridges between values and identities is an idea that the EU still struggles to admit into its own narrative and perception.

²⁴⁵ UAWire, 'UAWire - Lukashenko: Belarus Does Not Need to Choose between Russia and the EU', *UAWire.org*, 23 March 2016, <https://uawire.org/news/lukashenko-belarus-does-not-need-to-choose-between-russia-and-the-eu>.

²⁴⁶ Rotman and Veremeeva (2011), 'Belarus in the Context of the Neighbourhood Policy', pp. 90–94.

²⁴⁷ Official website of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, 'Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya's Plan', Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, 19 November 2020, <https://tsikhanouskaya.org/en/plans/>.

²⁴⁸ European Council, 'EU Relations with Belarus - Consilium', accessed 26 February 2022, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eastern-partnership/belarus/>.

²⁴⁹ European Council, 'Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit (Brussels, 15 December 2021)', 15 December 2021, 5(11), <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/53527/20211215-eap-joint-declaration-en.pdf>.

²⁵⁰ Kascian (2018), 'Belarus: Does Europeanisation Require a Geopolitical Choice?', pp. 96–97.

B. The paradox of a value-based approach with a stability goal

The main aim of the Neighbourhood Policy and by extension of the Eastern Partnership is to create a zone of stability around the EU. The issue being that in order to reach that aim, the EU relies on conditionality and prioritises values over economic and legal cooperation. While stability is a short-term aim to be reached, value-based aims such as the development of stable democracies relying on the rule of law and respect for human rights is rather a medium to long-term aim²⁵¹. The question arises then, *how to conciliate the democratic development priority of the EaP with the desire for stability from the EU?*

It is possible to say that the EU overestimated and still overestimates its transformational capacities and soft power attractiveness. Or possibly too, is not putting enough means to meet its own proclaimed transformational aims. The shift from a focus on values to a focus on stability is perfectly illustrated in the Western Balkans. Scholars have found that the focus of the EU on fostering democratic development and other value-based incentives in the region is one of the main reasons for state capture and the rise of authoritarianism²⁵². Once state capture happens, the EU does not change its strategy and continues to rely on conditionality and value-based approach, hence the facto finances governments and regimes that are not working toward democratic development, or that are even impeding democratic development. Since the Eastern Neighbours show a strong similarity with the WB in terms of economic and democratic development in the 1990s and 2000s, i.e. state capture and privatisation of resources by small groups of individuals, it is possible to expect the same phenomenon to happen in the Eastern neighbours if the EaP continues to rely on conditionality. Put simply, since the EU through the EaP put forward a value-based approach with prioritisation of democratic development, in states that are even weaker and prone to neo-patrimonialism than the WB, the risk of financing semi-authoritarian regimes for the sake of stability is also higher. Moreover, the constant reluctance of the EU to grant EU membership perspective to Moldova and Ukraine can be interpreted as a way to guarantee stability, as candidatureship may trigger internal and external resistance. For instance, Germany, which is a heavyweight on the EU's final decisions, had strong interest in not triggering Russia in its direct neighbourhood, because of its dependence on Russian gas, hence pushing the EU to pursue a status quo for the sake of stability.

Consequently, the value-based approach with a stability goal also leads the EU to engage in a paradox in its policies. Indeed, the EU expects governing elites to voluntarily give up on more power and more rent-seeking opportunities to comply with democratic reforms imposed from the outside and that often goes against the elite's own personal interests. This leads to a situation where political elites adopt an EU rhetoric to gain electoral support and engage in superficial reforms to access financial support from the EU, while in practice employing authoritarian methods and seeking fast and unconditional economic support other than the EU's. This process is almost perfectly illustrated by the case of Moldova and the late state capture that happened in the country. With Vladimir Plahotniuc, being elected and re-elected under a pro-EU platform, but in practice engaging in privatising in his hands most of the country's economic assets, subordinating the Constitutional court to its will and damaging pluralism in the media²⁵³. In Ukraine, this is also illustrated with the EU's support of President Volodymyr Zelensky's government²⁵⁴, while he has

²⁵¹ Nicholas Ross Smith, Nina Markovic Khaze, and Maja Kovacevic, 'The EU's Stability-Democracy Dilemma in the Context of the Problematic Accession of the Western Balkan States', *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 29, no. 2 (3 April 2021), pp. 169–83.

²⁵² Florian Bieber, 'Patterns of Competitive Authoritarianism in the Western Balkans', *East European Politics*, 34, no. 3 (3 July 2018), pp. 337–354; Solveig Richter and Natasha Wunsch, 'Money, Power, Glory: The Linkages between EU Conditionality and State Capture in the Western Balkans', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 27, no. 1 (2 January 2020), pp. 41–62.

²⁵³ Sieg (2020), 'Moldova in the EU's Eastern Partnership'.

²⁵⁴ Nicolas Vigne, 'Ukraine: Bruxelles au secours de Zelensky', *Le Figaro*, 31 May 2019, <https://www.lefigaro.fr/international/ukraine-bruxelles-au-secours-de-zelensky-20190531>.

been engaging in practices that go against values prone by the EU²⁵⁵, for instance, the purge in the political opposition and in the media. In the WB it is mostly China that has stepped in as the new economic guarantor of the region²⁵⁶, alike in Ukraine where it has become a growing import and export partner (see figure 4). But Serbia serves as an illustrating example of the paradox the EU nourishes as it is set to become a full member state of the EU by 2025, despite growing concerns over the authoritarian shift of the government²⁵⁷.

C. The new international context and the European continent

The EaP was elaborated in the idea that the EU was the sole integration project available and the only and obvious choice for most European countries. Hence, with the same state of mind then the 1990s context for European integration of CEE. However, as we have exposed in this thesis, other countries come into play in the direct neighbourhood of the EU, and now even can compete with the EU's European integration project. Hence, we ought to question *to what extent the EaP requires to be readapted to the current geopolitical context?*

1. Russia: an overestimated or underestimated factor?

Many critics of the EaP consider that it fails to take into consideration the Russian factor. If it can be argued that Russia indeed has legitimate interests to defend in both the WB and the Eastern neighbours, it must not be forgotten that Russia had been invited to join the ENP in 2004 but refused to. Of course, there are rational explanations for Russia's refusal to participate in the EU's ENP: the Kremlin seeks a special relationship with the EU, refuses to be monitored by the EU's agenda on democratic and economic reforms and does not want to become an object of EU policy but rather seeks an equal relationship²⁵⁸. But then, *if Russia refused to be involved in the ENP, why scholars have focused so much on the lack of Russian consideration in the ENP-EaP, and should the EaP really take Russia into consideration?* To answer these questions, we need to assess Russia's position regarding EU membership in the WB and European integration in the Eastern neighbours, as well as the position of Russia as the main supplier of energy resources and finally Russian soft power in the fuelling of anti-EU sentiments in both regions.

On EU membership in the WB and European integration in the Eastern neighbours, Russia has been rather silent or even supportive in the 1990s and early 2000s. In the WB, Russia is among the five guarantors of the Dayton Accords and did not raise any opposition to the promise of EU membership for the new post-Yugoslav states. Russia officially pursues five foreign policy goals in the WB: maintain its historical presence in the region, prevent NATO enlargement, secure the interests of Russian businesses notably in the energy sector, preserve the region as a negotiation card with the EU and maintain the idea of Slavic brotherhood²⁵⁹. If Russia does not oppose EU membership, it strongly opposes NATO membership, especially after the 1999 NATO bombing campaign on Belgrade. In the post-Soviet space, Russia exposed a similar feeling, standing strong against NATO enlargement, but being rather supportive of EU membership, particularly for the three Baltic States²⁶⁰. While the EU did not pay any attention to the Eastern neighbours concerning

²⁵⁵ Marc Bennetts, 'Volodymyr Zelensky: Journalists Accuse Ukrainian President of Purge on Critics', *The Sunday Times*, 22 October 2021, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/volodymyr-zelensky-journalists-accuse-ukrainian-president-purge-critics-6wwx8jwnd>; Dan Peleschuk, 'Ukraine's President Finally Flexes His Muscles', *Foreign Policy* (blog), 12 February 2021; Minakov (2020), 'Democratisation and Europeanisation in 21st Century Ukraine', pp. 5–6.

²⁵⁶ Nina Markovic Khaze and Xiwen Wang, 'Is China's Rising Influence in the Western Balkans a Threat to European Integration?', *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 29, no. 2 (3 April 2021), pp. 234–250.

²⁵⁷ Max Brändle, 'Serbia's Authoritarian Turn', IPS, 14 July 2020, <https://www.ips-journal.eu/regions/europe/serbias-authoritarian-turn-4502/>; Richard Kraemer, 'Serbia's Authoritarian Trajectory Under Russian Influence - FPRI Events' (Foreign Policy Research Institute, 31 March 2022), <https://www.fpri.org/event/2022/serbias-authoritarian-trajectory/>.

²⁵⁸ Wiegand and Schulz (2015), 'The EU and Its Eastern Partnership', pp. 328–331.

²⁵⁹ Ritsa Panagiotou, 'The Western Balkans between Russia and the European Union: Perceptions, Reality, and Impact on Enlargement', *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 29, no. 2 (3 April 2021), pp. 221–222.

²⁶⁰ Laura Kauppila, 'The Baltic Puzzle: Russia's Policy toward Estonia and Latvia 1992-1997' (Helsinki: University of Helsinki, 1999), p. 53.

possible EU membership in the 1990s and early 2000s, Russia did not have to position itself yet. As a matter of fact, in 2004 the Russian president Vladimir Putin himself recognised that EU membership of Ukraine could also bring economic benefits to Russia and stressed that “*other countries’ plans to join the EU are not our [Russia’s] direct affair.*”²⁶¹. This relative positive or neutral position of Russia towards EU enlargement lasted even during the EU’s negotiations for AA/DCFTAs with both Moldova and Ukraine - during which Russia raised no formal concerns - until 2013 when their ratifications became more and more inevitable. If Russia had already reacted and used hard power to prevent Georgia to integrate NATO in 2008, with the European integration of Moldova and Ukraine, Russia’s reaction was slow and seemed to be out of surprise. This is evidenced by the reaction of the Kremlin to its failure to influence the Ukrainian foreign policy and subsequent Euromaidan with the annexation of Crimea and the start of the hybrid war in Donbas. But this is also illustrated by the late arrival of the EaEU in 2015 as an alternative to European integration well after the ratification of the AA/DCFTAs²⁶². While we have seen that the EU has rarely used the stick - out of its ‘stick and carrots’ strategy - in case of non-compliance in the Eastern Neighbours, Russia’s strategy has rather been one of punishment if no compliance and relative rewards in case of compliance. Russia’s ban on Moldovan wines in 2013²⁶³, constant pressure on Belarus since 2010²⁶⁴, and events in 2014 onwards in Ukraine can all be interpreted as punishments from the Kremlin for these countries’ non-compliance with Russia’s interests and demands and/or rapprochement with the EU. Paradoxically, this strategy by Russia has brought about the contrary it aimed at, namely an ever-growing desire from Moldova²⁶⁵ and Ukraine for European integration and the recurrent use of the EU as leverage in Belarusian foreign policy to temper Russia’s dictate²⁶⁶. If the ENP-EaP should have taken Russia into consideration earlier is a question with no answer, as Russia did not seem to pay attention to it until relatively late. The question now that Russia has launched its own integration institution with the EaEU is, how should the EaP deal and take into account this new competitor. As we mentioned already in this thesis, the idea that the EaP is a soft power tool against Russia is nothing but a Russian narrative that made its way inside Europe. Now if Russia wants to compete with the EU on the market of integration benefits, in accordance with the principle upheld by the EU that every sovereign states are free to choose which organisation to join, so be it, however, this competition can only take place if Russia also respects this very principle.

Another point often raised when mentioning Russia in the Eastern neighbours and the WB is their economic dependence on Russia. While for trade we have demonstrated that the trend in both regions was reversing (except for Belarus), the other economic issue relies on the fact that Russia is a great supplier of natural resources such as oil and gas. If in the WB, Russia represents 90% of natural gas import in Serbia, North Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, supply and investment in the Russian energy sector in the rest of the region is stagnating²⁶⁷. And it has been observed that Russia used the energy sector as leverage with the Eastern neighbours more than once²⁶⁸. However, the EU has no tool to tackle this issue and is even in a similar situation, as many EU member states are heavily reliant on Russian gas and oil, such as Germany, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Hungary, or the three Baltic states that were until recently still connected to the Russian electricity grid rather than the European one. In 2011, out of the €193.1 billion traded by the EU with Russia, €148 billion were spent in the sector of energy. In 2021, trade with Russia decreased but

²⁶¹ Team of the Official Website of the President of Russia, ‘Press Conference Following Talks with Spanish Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero’, President of Russia, 10 April 2004, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22742>.

²⁶² Wiegand and Schulz (2015), ‘The EU and Its Eastern Partnership’, pp. 345–348.

²⁶³ Euractiv.com with Reuters, ‘Russia Punishes Moldova by Banning Its Wines’, *Www.Euractiv.Com*, 11 September 2013, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/europe-s-east/news/russia-punishes-moldova-by-banning-its-wines/>.

²⁶⁴ Nizhnikau and Moshes (2020), ‘Belarus in Search of a New Foreign Policy: Why Is It so Difficult?’, pp. 54–58.

²⁶⁵ Euronews with AFP, ‘Moldovan Winemakers Look to EU after Sales to Russia, Ukraine Decline’, *Euronews*, 22 May 2022, sec. news_news, <https://www.euronews.com/2022/05/22/moldovan-winemakers-look-to-eu-after-sales-to-russia-and-ukraine-decline>.

²⁶⁶ Nizhnikau and Moshes (2020), ‘Belarus in Search of a New Foreign Policy: Why Is It so Difficult?’, pp. 54–58.

²⁶⁷ Panagiotou (2021), ‘The Western Balkans between Russia and the European Union’, p. 222.

²⁶⁸ Korosteleva (2010), ‘Moldova’s European Choice’, p.1279; Rotman and Veremeeva (2011), ‘Belarus in the Context of the Neighbourhood Policy’, p.79; Wiegand and Schulz (2015), ‘The EU and Its Eastern Partnership’, p.321; Nizhnikau and Moshes (2020), ‘Belarus in Search of a New Foreign Policy: Why Is It so Difficult?’, pp. 55–56.

the share of energy remained the biggest sector accounting for €99 billion out of the €158,5 billion of total trade²⁶⁹. The EU simply does not have the tool to step in and help these countries, except if it heavily invests in renewable energies produced by and within the EU to maybe become a supplier, but this is a rather medium to long-term solution. Even if the EaP includes an energy chapter, the EU can only step in by giving more financial means to these countries, which in the end does not prevent energy blackmail from Russia.

Eventually, if Russia cannot prevent both regions to get closer to the EU in terms of economic integration and general foreign policy preferences using hard power, it has nonetheless invested more than the EU into soft power. ‘*Russkiy Mir*’ (The Russian World) is a catch-all term, used by the Kremlin since 2007. It can in turn refer to the post-Soviet nostalgia (or more broadly the History of Russia), the Russian language, Christian Orthodoxy, culture, heritage, Slavic ethnicity and so on²⁷⁰. *The Economist* describes this concept as “an obscurantist anti-Western mixture of Orthodox dogma, nationalism, conspiracy theory and security-state Stalinism”²⁷¹. Overall, Russkiy Mir is a rather abstract and loosely defined term, which permits the Kremlin to find a reason or another to justify its involvement in sovereign states. In fact, this new ideology enjoys a fair societal base in the Russian societies, as it can heavily rely on the Russian Orthodox Church and the Patriarch Kirill, who is considered as one of the minds of the Russkiy Mir²⁷². If in the WB the term Russkiy Mir is not officially used, some of its characteristics are put forward to justify the Russian presence. The ideas of Slavic brotherhood and the promotion of Christian Orthodoxy is the main link governing the relationship between Serbia and Russia but is also used to attract other Serbian Orthodox populations living outside of Serbia, most notably in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The maintenance of this cultural proximity permits Russia to disseminate more easily media disinformation and fill the gap created by the EU’s lengthy accession process by maintaining the disillusion and frustration with the EU as well as fuelling anti-democratic and anti-Western sentiments²⁷³. And despite the EU’s obvious dominance in the region, the block struggles to connect with the populations, hence as long as EU accession appears far away, Russia will have room to disseminate its anti-EU campaigns. As Rista Panagiotou formulates it, the perception of the importance of Russia and its strength in the WB is greater than reality especially because the Kremlin invested in soft power and media disinformation and knows how to use it as leverage against the EU²⁷⁴.

In the Eastern neighbours, Russia can more easily play with its own concept of Russkiy Mir as the three countries had been part of the Russian Empire and the USSR, are Christian Orthodox and a relative share of their population still have the Russian language as their mother tongue. For Belarus and Ukraine, the situation is direr, as President Putin considers that all three nations are the same people and that if Belarusians, Russians and Ukrainians live in separate countries it is because of “*some villains*”²⁷⁵. The idea of the injustice of the separation of the Belarusian, Russian and Ukrainian states is not a new idea only carried by Vladimir Putin. Already in the 1990s it was possible to find this idea of the “Slavic tragedy” in Russian literature, as for example in the well-known Soviet dissident Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, who rejects any nationalistic temptation in Ukraine, the teaching of a Ukrainian history without mentioning Russia and argues that this separation between the three nations is artificially maintained by Western forces that wish to diminish Russia²⁷⁶. It was later on politically put into practice with for instance in 2002 Moscow’s

²⁶⁹ Eurostat, ‘Energy Represented 62% of EU Imports from Russia’, *Eurostat*, 7 March 2022, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/ddn-20220307-1>.

²⁷⁰ Hybrid Warfare Analytical Group, “‘Russkiy Mir’ as the Kremlin’s Quasi-Ideology”, *Uacrisis.org*, 28 May 2021, <https://uacrisis.org/en/russkiy-mir-as-the-kremlin-s-quasi-ideology>.

²⁷¹ The Economist, ‘The New Russian Cult of War’, *The Economist*, 26 March 2022, <https://www.economist.com/briefing/2022/03/26/the-new-russian-cult-of-war>.

²⁷² Ishaan Tharoor, ‘Analysis | The Christian Nationalism behind Putin’s War’, *Washington Post*, 19 April 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/04/19/patriarch-kirill-orthodox-church-russia-ukraine/>.

²⁷³ Panagiotou (2021), ‘The Western Balkans between Russia and the European Union’, pp. 220–224.

²⁷⁴ Panagiotou (2021), p. 229.

²⁷⁵ Max Seddon, “‘We Are One People’: Russia Bemoans Ukraine’s ‘Separate Path’”, *Financial Times*, 19 November 2021.

²⁷⁶ Alexandre Isaievitch Soljénitsyne, “12. La tragédie slave”, in *La Russie sous l’avalanche*, (Paris : Fayard, 1998), pp. 133-144. <https://www.fayard.fr/documents-temoignages/la-russie-sous-lavalanche-9782213602493>.

proposal to merge Belarus within the Russian Federation and be integrated as six separate subjects, denying the right to sovereignty to Belarus²⁷⁷.

If Moldova is spared by this ethnic-based idea from the Kremlin (as most of the population is either ethnically Romanian or ethnically Turkic in the case of the Gagauz people), it is not totally out of the Russkiy Mir. Moscow, even though it does not officially recognise the region, has been supporting the Transnistrian officials since 1992 and still holds a military base in the seceding territory. The reasons are linked with the maintenance of the Soviet nostalgia in the region but also the fact that Moscow had been distributing Russian passports to residents of Transnistria, hence providing a justification for the presence of the Russian military to defend and protect their citizens²⁷⁸. Russia also plays a role in the Gagauz community, as even though they are ethnically Turkic people speaking a Turkic language, their first language mostly remains Russian and are Christian Orthodox. Russia's grip over the minority is shown in the rejection of the AA through a referendum to prefer integration with Russia²⁷⁹. However, the Gagauz people seem to be more prone to seek good relations with the Moldovan government through mediation with Russia, Türkiye but also the EU than the Transnistrian region²⁸⁰. But they still remain a particularly targeted minority by Russian anti-EU and anti-Western disinformation campaigns. In Ukraine, it is the Russian-speaking population that is targeted by Russia's soft power, notably those in the Eastern regions bordering Russia in the Donbas and Luhansk regions, with the distribution of Russian passports alike in Transnistria²⁸¹. But the strongest weapon in the Russian soft power arsenal remains disinformation campaigns against the EaP and overall EU, not only targeted at the minorities that we mentioned but at all populations. As in Moldova where media had gradually been taken over by Russian disinformation between 2010 and 2021²⁸², in Ukraine disinformation regarding the war in Donbas and the EU's involvement is the strongest, in both Ukraine and the EU²⁸³. Against that, the EU struggles to get itself known to the local population for instance as of 2018 less than 5% of the population in targeted countries had heard about the EaP²⁸⁴.

In the end, Russia obviously ought to be taken into consideration in the EaP but more generally in the EU's foreign policy. But it is also false to admit that the EaP has not taken Russia in consideration thus far, the recurrent refusal of the EU to put EU membership as a possible final goal in the policy ought to be interpreted as a way to take into consideration Russian interests in the region. But the EaP must take Russia into consideration in a different way i.e. stop putting Russia's considerations above and before EaP countries' interests and demands. The main question the EU needs to settle is whether it wants to continue to deal with an unreliable partner such as Russia, which uses hard power when sovereign countries make

²⁷⁷ Chicago Tribune, 'Putin Proposes Timetable for Unification', *Chicago Tribune*, 15 August 2002, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/ct-xpm-2002-08-15-0208150274-story.html>.

²⁷⁸ Madalin Necsutu, 'Russia Rules Out "Magical" Withdrawal From Moldova Region', *Balkan Insight*, 10 July 2020, <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/07/10/russia-rules-out-magical-withdrawal-from-moldova-region/>; Jacob Levitan, 'Will Russian Influence in Moldova Decline as Country Heads for Snap Parliamentary Elections?', *International Conflict Resolution Center*, 30 March 2021, <https://icrcenter.org/will-russian-influence-in-moldova-decline-as-country-heads-for-snap-parliamentary-elections/>.

²⁷⁹ RFE/RL's Moldovan Service (2014), 'Gagauzia Voters Choose Russia Over EU'.

²⁸⁰ Al Jazeera English, *Why Moldova's Gagauzia Matters to Russia and Turkey*, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cLkAUN9qqqA>; Paul Goble, 'Gagauzia's Head Urges Russia, Turkey and Azerbaijan to Be Guarantors of Its Survival', *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 10, no. Issue 61 (2013), <https://jamestown.org/program/gagauzias-head-urges-russia-turkey-and-azerbaijan-to-be-guarantors-of-its-survival/>.

²⁸¹ AP, 'Russia Has Issued 720,000 Fast-Track Passports in Eastern Ukraine', *Euronews*, 17 February 2022, <https://www.euronews.com/2022/02/17/russia-has-issued-720-000-fast-track-passports-in-separatist-held-areas-of-eastern-ukraine>.

²⁸² Sieg (2020), 'Moldova in the EU's Eastern Partnership', p. 16.

²⁸³ European Parliament. Directorate General for Parliamentary Research Services, *Eastern Partnership Post-2020 Agenda*, 3; Naja Bentzen and Martin Russell, 'Russia's Disinformation on Ukraine and the EU's Response | Think Tank | European Parliament', Briefing (European Parliament, 2015).

²⁸⁴ James Nixey, 'The Eastern Partnership at 10 What Is There to Celebrate? - New Eastern Europe - A Bimonthly News Magazine Dedicated to Central and Eastern European Affairs', *New Eastern Europe*, 2 May 2019.

foreign policy choices and energy blackmail, and if not how to deal differently with its biggest neighbour. The EU needs to assert its soft power and not rest on its laurels, especially in these pro-Russian regions that are already prone to Russian disinformation.

2. China: a new opportunity for economic development

“*Always go west and you'll end up in Shanghai*” this is how Turkish President Erdogan refers to his conflictual and frustrating relationship with the EU²⁸⁵. In other words, this statement reflects the idea that the EU (and by extension the Western world) is so long to deliver and put so many conditions that most countries end up turning to the other economic superpower: China. China appears as a neutral player in the region, as the giant Asian country does not share long History with the WB and the Eastern neighbours, like Russia and Türkiye do, and is willing to invest huge sums of money under conditions relatively easier to meet and agree to than the EU's conditions (most notably human rights and democratic reforms are not required to get Chinese investments). But the Chinese involvement in the EU's neighbouring countries is not totally benevolent and philanthropic, but answers to a very Sinocentric capitalistic interest: the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). It is a Chinese-led project aiming at creating new roads between China and Europe through land and sea transportation, opening new opportunities for Chinese businesses and boosting demand for Chinese goods along the road²⁸⁶. In the end, turning Eurasia into the biggest market in the world in which China will be the largest supplier.

Unlike Russia, China does not choose its partners based on their membership in the EU or NATO, as illustrated with the 16 + 1 format which encompasses eleven EU member states and the five WB states, some of which are NATO member states and others not²⁸⁷. Since 2015, Chinese economic and financial ties with the WB are increasingly growing, for instance as of 2020 Chinese loans granted to the WB accounted for \$6 billion²⁸⁸. Mostly investing in strategic transport and energy infrastructures, some argue that the Chinese strategy in the WB relies upon the region's closeness with the EU. For instance, the 2009 China-Serbia partnership agreement gives Beijing access to the EU market but also the CEFTA and the EFTA²⁸⁹. For others, the WB's growing economic dependency on China actually complicates their EU accession by enhancing the geoeconomics divide between EU and non-EU states in Central and Eastern Europe²⁹⁰. But also impedes democratic development as Chinese investors are more willing to invest in countries with high political instability²⁹¹.

If Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine are not part of the 16 + 1 format, China's involvement in the region remains centred around its own interests with the BRI. Belarus has been seeking China's economic investments since the 2000s because it represents a viable alternative to Russia and the EU for Minsk, especially because China makes no political or economic demands on the Belarusian regime. But overall, trade and economic relations between Minsk and Beijing are unbalanced and do not suit Belarus completely as it is not always financially beneficial²⁹². Moldova and Ukraine became more attractive after they signed their DFCTAs with the EU, becoming like the WB, potential hubs opened to the EU market. Moldova at first did not have much to offer to China and hence did not attract the Asian giant attention, except when the Moldovan Communist Party came back in power between 2001 and 2009. After 2014 and the signature of the Moldova-EU DCFTA, China included Moldova in the BRI with three main projects: investment in

²⁸⁵ Yılmaz (2017), ‘La Turquie républicaine, « déchirée » entre l’Orient et l’Occident ?’, p. 29.

²⁸⁶ Plamen Tonchev, ‘China's Road: Into the Western Balkans’, (European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS), 2017), 1, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep06772>.

²⁸⁷ Gisela Grieger, ‘China, the 16+1 Format and the EU’, Briefing (EPRS | European Parliamentary Research Service, September 2018), [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI\(2018\)625173](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI(2018)625173).

²⁸⁸ Henrik Boesen Lindbo Larsen, ‘The Western Balkans between the EU, NATO, Russia and China’, *CSS Analyses in Security Policy*, 263 (May 2020), p. 3, <https://doi.org/10.3929/ethz-b-000412853>.

²⁸⁹ Mariya Hake and Alice Radzyner, ‘Western Balkans: Growing Economic Ties with Turkey, Russia and China’, *Bank of Finland - Institute for Economics in Transition (BOFIT)*, BOFIT Policy Brief, no. 1/2019 (2019), p. 8.

²⁹⁰ Larsen (2020), ‘The Western Balkans between the EU, NATO, Russia and China’, pp. 1–3.

²⁹¹ Hake and Radzyner (2019), ‘Western Balkans’, p. 8.

²⁹² Nizhnikau and Moshes (2020), ‘Belarus in Search of a New Foreign Policy: Why Is It so Difficult?’, p. 63.

a contained shipped service in Moldova's only port accessible to seagoing vessels in 2015, negotiation for a FTA between Moldova and China in 2017 and an infrastructure agreement in 2019 aiming at building two highways connecting Chişinău and Ukraine²⁹³. Ukraine draws the same interests for China's BRI with its geographical position, which allows China to bypass Russia on its way to the EU market. But one peculiarity makes Ukraine stand out from the WB and Moldova in its relation to China. Moldova and the WB in the eyes of China only represent a gateway to CEE and Western European markets but Ukraine is a non-negligible supplier of food products for China, as a matter of illustration in 2015 Kyiv overtook Washington's leading role as an exporter of corn to Beijing. In the same year, China became the main importer of Ukrainian agricultural products²⁹⁴.

If China brings much needed capital and investment in both regions, it is not without its risks and critics. The first main issue is that China's investments do not bring any economic benefits to the recipient countries, with maybe the sole exception of Ukraine with its exporter position. In fact, Beijing brings its own labour force from China on infrastructure sites to compensate for its own labour market overcapacity. Moreover, loans conditions to finance these infrastructure and energy projects require the contracting state to only buy Chinese equipment, work only with Chinese subcontractors and use Chinese resources (local resources are rarely used)²⁹⁵. Another issue is that Chinese investments often enter in contradiction with norms and principles the EU seeks to promote in both regions. More often than not, Chinese businesses do not respect neither EU law (for norms applicable in the region) nor national labour laws²⁹⁶. Chinese investments are surrounded by opacity, which goes against transparency promoted by the EU, and support corruption by giving bribes to get contracts²⁹⁷. But the greatest risk lies in the high default risk. These Chinese loans are added to already high levels of public debts in both regions, making these states more prone to debt defaults. And defaults in the case of Chinese loans mean the seizure of infrastructure projects by Chinese-led companies and by extension by the Chinese government²⁹⁸. Eventually, with economic dependency also comes political dependencies, and China has been using that tool to get some victories at the UN for instance, when it managed to have Ukraine withdraw its signature on human rights concerns in Xinjiang²⁹⁹.

Thus far, the situation of the three Eastern neighbours does not appear as dire as the WB's. Chinese investments in Ukraine in the 2015-2019 period only accounted for 0.07% of total FDI and Kyiv seems to have learned from the lessons of the WB regarding the risky economic alliance with China³⁰⁰. Moldova's biggest creditors remain Russia, Türkiye and Romania³⁰¹, and Belarus is still heavily linked to Russia. But the EU appears to continue to struggle with China's involvement within the EU but also in its direct neighbourhood. Despite being an observer in the 16 + 1 format and re-enhancing the enlargement perspective for the WB³⁰², this has not been enough to stop the Chinese investment contagion that has

²⁹³ Eugénie Davi, 'Moldova's Unexpected Opening to China', *China Observers in Central and Eastern Europe (CHOICE)*, 22 September 2020, <https://chinaobservers.eu/moldovas-unexpected-opening-to-china/>.

²⁹⁴ Olena Mykal, 'Why China Is Interested in Ukraine', *The Diplomat*, 10 March 2016, <https://thediplomat.com/2016/03/why-china-is-interested-in-ukraine/>.

²⁹⁵ Tonchev (2017), 'China's Road', pp. 4–5.

²⁹⁶ Hake and Radzyner (2019), 'Western Balkans', p. 8.

²⁹⁷ Larsen (2020), 'The Western Balkans between the EU, NATO, Russia and China', p. 3.

²⁹⁸ Tim Fernholz, 'Eight Countries in Danger of Falling into China's "Debt Trap"', *Quartz*, 7 March 2018, <https://qz.com/1223768/china-debt-trap-these-eight-countries-are-in-danger-of-debt-overloads-from-chinas-belt-and-road-plans/>; Larsen (2020), 'The Western Balkans between the EU, NATO, Russia and China', p. 3.

²⁹⁹ Yevhen Solonyna and Reid Standish, 'China Used Vaccines, Trade To Get Ukraine To Drop Support For Xinjiang Scrutiny', *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 18 July 2021, <https://www.rferl.org/a/china-vaccines-ukraine-xinjiang/31382099.html>.

³⁰⁰ Yurii Poita, 'Is Ukraine Really Pivoting Towards China?', *China Observers in Central and Eastern Europe (CHOICE)*, 29 September 2021, <https://chinaobservers.eu/is-ukraine-really-pivoting-towards-china/>.

³⁰¹ Davi (2020), 'Moldova's Unexpected Opening to China'.

³⁰² Grieger (2018), 'China, the 16+1 Format and the EU'.

reached the Eastern neighbourhood as well. If the EU cannot stop, nor compete³⁰³ with the Chinese BRI project, it ought to step in and make sure that China at least plays by the rules the EU intends to promote on the European continent.

3. Türkiye: between European integration and neo-Ottoman inspiration

Türkiye unlike Russia and China has a special position in the EU's eyes and in the EU's neighbourhood because it is a NATO member state and an EU candidate country since 1987. But at the same time, it is also a regional power that seeks to compete with the EU, especially since EU adhesion became more and more unrealistic for Ankara. In the 1990s and early 2000s, Türkiye was an attractive country for Moldova and Ukraine, especially because it was in NATO and an EU candidate country. For Chişinău and Kyiv, getting closer to Ankara was a way to fix themselves further on the Western/European path of their foreign policy³⁰⁴. Likewise, in the spirit of its EU accession and enthusiasm, Türkiye framed its policies towards the WB and the Balkans in general in accordance with the EU's interests and to show how much of a reliable European country it was³⁰⁵. Türkiye was mostly involved in the Euro-Atlantic integration of Ukraine notably after the 2004 Orange Revolution and Ankara's interests in the stability of the Black Sea also played a role in the Ukrainian-Turkish relationship³⁰⁶.

Yet, after 2015 and with the possibility of EU membership becoming more and more remote, Türkiye has changed its policy toward the WB and Moldova and Ukraine. Ukraine dropped considerably in the foreign policy priorities of Ankara and is only mentioned when refereeing to relations with Russia and the West³⁰⁷. In Moldova, Türkiye stayed engaged economically³⁰⁸, in financing cultural and educational projects in Gagauzia³⁰⁹, but Chişinău remained far from the top priority for Ankara. Paradoxically, this mutual drop in interest followed the signature of FTAs and visa liberalisation between Türkiye with both Moldova and Ukraine in 2014 and as shown in Figure 4 trade between the two countries and Türkiye is rather stagnating. Ankara's change in policy toward the WB happened in the logic of Türkiye's own change in perceived identity. Because EU membership appeared more unrealistic, President Erdogan moved away from an EU-centred rhetoric and values preached by the EU to reinvigorate the nostalgia of the Ottoman Empire. This neo-ottomanism³¹⁰ can be somewhat compared with the Russian Russkiy Mir concept, drawing in historical, cultural but also religious ties to defend their interests abroad but also engage in strong anti-EU and anti-Western stances. Accordingly, in the WB, Türkiye is mostly engaged in populations where Islam is dominant, hence Albania, Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina³¹¹. Since 2008 trade between the WB and Türkiye has only been increasing, and Turkish FDI more than quadrupled since 2007³¹².

But overall, Türkiye's involvement in both regions has generally not been at the expense of EU's interests. It rather illustrates the complicated relationship between Türkiye and the EU and the Western world in general, as Ankara continues to struggle in its identity between the East and the West, to fight to be accepted

³⁰³ The Economist described it as 'a proof that bullshit reigns in Brussels' when the EU launched its "Global Gateway" project to rival the Chinese BRI, 'Why Bullshit Rules in Brussels', *The Economist*, 1 December 2021, <https://www.economist.com/europe/why-bullshit-rules-in-brussels/21806565>.

³⁰⁴ Ayşegül Aydıngün and Turgut Kerem Tuncel, 'Turkish-Ukrainian Relations Throughout History: Continuities and Strategic Requirements', in *25 Years of Turkey-Ukraine Diplomatic Relations: Regional Developments and Prospects for Enhanced Cooperation*, Center for Eurasian Studies, AVİM Conference Book 22 (Ankara, 2018), pp. 27–30.

³⁰⁵ Hake and Radzyner (2019), 'Western Balkans', p. 6.

³⁰⁶ Aydıngün and Tuncel, 'Turkish-Ukrainian Relations Throughout History: Continuities and Strategic Requirements', p. 27.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

³⁰⁸ Bestinigar Kara and Alexandru Gribincea, 'Economic Relations Between Republic Of Moldova And Turkey', *Economy and Sociology: Theoretical and Scientific Journal*, Socionet/Complexul Editorial 'INCE', issue 3 (2015), pp. 59–67.

³⁰⁹ Al Jazeera English (2020), *Why Moldova's Gagauzia Matters to Russia and Turkey*.

³¹⁰ Dorothee Schmid, 'Turkey: the Sèvres Syndrome, or the Interminable War', *Politique étrangère*, no. 1 (26 March 2014), pp. 199–213.

³¹¹ Larsen (2020), 'The Western Balkans between the EU, NATO, Russia and China', p. 1.

³¹² Hake and Radzyner (2019), 'Western Balkans', pp. 9–10.

as a Western country while preserving the Ottoman heritage and position as a bridge with the Middle East and far East. If Türkiye is an actor to watch in the European integration process in the WB for the EU, it rather appeared as a failed could-have-been partner in the Eastern Neighbours. In the logic of the EU's promotion of regionalism and granting the economic power of Türkiye, Ankara could have been a reliable example and partner for Ukraine and Moldova on their path to the EU, yet despite geographical proximity, both ends of the Black Sea continue to relatively ignore each other.

A few things may be remembered after reviewing the involvement of Russia, China and Türkiye in the WB and Eastern Neighbours. Firstly, the EU lacks soft power to be promoted to the populations, this is why, even if it clearly economically dominates both regions, the population's perceptions and leaning can oscillate toward Russia and Türkiye. Both Russia and Türkiye offer a narrative with a common history and culture and mostly a narrative relying on more than post-material norms and principles, such as the EU's is (e.g. democratic values, rule of law, human rights... big concepts that lack substance to which population can actually hold on to). And this is a critique that can be also held within the EU itself if EU integration is struggling in some CEE countries where populist, nationalist or ultra-conservative parties enjoy large popular support, the fact that they propose a societal to civilisational project to the people, while the EU struggles to find a similar coherent societal project to promote, can be an explicating factor. Secondly, the EU needs to be more involved in both regions to promote and defend its norms and principles. While the EU's conditions focus on democratic values, it is hard to understand how weak and struggling states can at the same time try to implement for instance anti-corruption reforms while they face internal resistance and international support, like Chinese's practices in the WB.

D. European integration outside of the EU: is another integration system possible?

The EU is the most advanced integration institution in the world. While this represents an undisputable success for Europe, it also implies that further enlargement will be harder and harder with time, as the EU is advancing toward further and closer integration. Having left behind the countries of Europe that were the hardest to integrate, makes it even trickier for these very countries to converge with the EU and finally get to full membership. Furthermore, as we have exposed in the first section of this chapter, granting EU candidacy status has pros but also significant cons. On the one hand, giving EU candidacy to Moldova and Ukraine is risking having them in the waiting room for more than twenty years turning them into the new Western Balkans while on the other hand, not giving candidacy status to them is impeding further European integration. In addition to that, the EU struggles to promote both stability and democratic values in its direct neighbourhood which in the end also impedes European integration. Finally, the rise of competitors to the EU's integration and/or assistance to development leads to challenging the EU's privilege to define and promote what European integration is and to wonder if another model of European integration is possible. Both the ENP-EaP and enlargement strategies are frustrating targeted countries, EU member states and Russia. Hence, a model which does not rely exclusively on the EU but includes the EU and also takes into consideration countries such as Belarus, Russia and Türkiye ought to be envisioned.

For Moldova, Türkiye, Ukraine and the Western Balkans, a system in which countries would be one step closer to the EU without seeking full membership already exists, as we mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis. The EFTA and EEA are both examples of closer European integration with the EU without seeking full EU membership. However, accession to the EFTA would imply the fulfilment of Copenhagen-like criteria and require the consent from EFTA member states as by their national constitutions entail³¹³. Seeking EFTA accession represents thus the same hardship as AA/DCFTAs and brings no added value for countries who already enjoy EU candidacy nor Moldova and Ukraine. Nevertheless, becoming part of the EEA agreement may in turn represent a step further toward European integration. The EEA guarantees the existence of a common market called the Internal Market governed by the same rules, put simply it guarantees the free movement of goods, services, capital and persons between EU member states and the EFTA countries. As part of the agreement, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein must adopt relevant EU law

³¹³ Burakovskiy et al. (2018), 'Ukraine - EU Relations: Looking Beyond the Horizon. How Do We See the Future of European Integration?', Position Paper', p. 21.

and are granted participation in the informal early process of law-making at the EU level (Switzerland as explained in the first chapter opted for a bilateral system of negotiation). Since the DCFTAs signed with Moldova and Ukraine will bring both countries to the same level as the EEA countries in terms of mandatory adoption of EU law regarding trade and granting the fact that new EU member states have to apply to the EEA agreement as well³¹⁴, a possible early accession to the EEA by Moldova and Ukraine but also by candidate countries could be envisioned so that to seal their EU path³¹⁵. For both the associated trio (Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine), which have (re)declared their EU ambitions³¹⁶ and candidate countries this solution would represent a step further in European integration as it would make them “shadow members” of the EU with access to the internal market as well as involvement in the decision-making process and unlimited access for their population to the EU³¹⁷.

However, this idea is not without its risks and obstacles. For starting, no country has joined the EEA agreement before it became a full EU member state or part of the EFTA, so that would mean creating an ad hoc protocol. Since the EU always comes up with ad hoc protocols such as the Copenhagen (plus) criteria, this situation is not completely impossible. Besides, the EEA would require candidate countries and AA/DCFTAs countries a one hundred per cent compliance with EU norms, while enlargement negotiation and AAs allow for some looser compliance³¹⁸, which means that expectation for effective adoption and implementation of EU law would significantly increase. Moreover, to adhere to the EEA agreement would not be synonym of no more value-based conditions. On the contrary, the EU might still expect democratic reforms in exchange for adhesion to the EEA, which in turn would push Moldova and Ukraine to stick with the AA/DCFTAs because it is less costly and bring no added value to candidate countries already subject to democratic reforms conditions. Finally, such a solution does not guarantee that neither political parties, governments nor populations would give up on their will to eventually integrate the EU as full-on member states.

The idea of a multispeed Europe gained some impetus in the last five years³¹⁹. Firstly, it was through the idea that EU member states could integrate at a different pace, leaving more eager countries to engage in further integration, while more struggling or less eager ones were not obliged to engage³²⁰. But more recently, the idea got expanded to wider Europe, as French President Emmanuel Macron proposed a multispeed “political community” which could include EU member states, candidate countries and neighbouring countries such as Russia, the UK or Belarus³²¹. Though, such a concept would clarify and institutionalise the different status regarding the EU across Europe, it already faced criticism when it was first proposed, notably by CEE member states who feared to be relegated as second tier EU members³²². But it also faces obstacles in its second proposal, the French President’s political community would recreate a centre-periphery model in Europe, where countries in Central Eastern Europe, South-Eastern Europe or

³¹⁴ ‘EEA Agreement | European Free Trade Association’, accessed 31 May 2022, <https://www.efta.int/eea/eea-agreement>.

³¹⁵ Burakovskiy et al. (2018), ‘Ukraine - EU Relations: Looking Beyond the Horizon. How Do We See the Future of European Integration?, Position Paper’, p. 20.

³¹⁶ Vlad Makszimov, ‘Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine Formalise Their Higher EU Ambition’, *Www.Euractiv.Com*, 18 May 2021, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/eastern-europe/news/georgia-moldova-ukraine-formalise-their-higher-eu-ambition/>.

³¹⁷ Burakovskiy et al. (2018), ‘Ukraine - EU Relations: Looking Beyond the Horizon. How Do We See the Future of European Integration?, Position Paper’, p. 21.

³¹⁸ Emerson et al. (2021), ‘Balkan and Eastern European Comparisons’, p. 9.

³¹⁹ De La Baume, Maïa. “Multispeed Europe: The EU’s ‘Loch Ness Monster’”, *POLITICO*, 10 March 2017. <https://www.politico.eu/article/multispeed-europe-the-eus-loch-ness-monster-future/>.

³²⁰ Sandro Gozi, ‘Europe 2030: enjeux et défis de l’avenir de l’UE’ (Séminaire, Université de Genève, 10-11 February 2022); Maïa De La Baume, ‘Multispeed Europe: The EU’s “Loch Ness Monster”’, *POLITICO*, 10 March 2017.

³²¹ Ido Vock, ‘Is Macron’s “Multispeed Europe” the Future of the EU?’, *New Statesman*, 10 May 2022, <https://www.newstatesman.com/world/europe/2022/05/is-macrons-multispeed-europe-the-future-of-the-eu>.

³²² David Martin, ‘What Does a Multi-Speed EU Mean for Central and Eastern Europe?’, *Dw.Com*, 24 March 2017, Deutsche Welle edition, <https://www.dw.com/en/what-does-a-multi-speed-eu-mean-for-central-and-eastern-europe/a-38016484https://www.dw.com/en/what-does-a-multi-speed-eu-mean-for-central-and-eastern-europe/a-38016484>.

Russia would be relegated to the periphery, while the centre would remain the EU-15, hence the founding members and wealthiest EU member states of Western and Northern Europe. A project that was already rejected by Russia in the 1980s when former French President François Mitterrand exposed such a vision³²³. The EU is engaged in its neighbourhood and tries to attract it into the bloc because the EU itself benefits from the economic prosperity and stability of these states. Engaging in a multispeed EU or a European political community would also give more argument to wealthier countries to engage less in much-needed fund transfer from them to the most struggling countries of Europe or impede convergence and integration of willing countries that lack capacities.

To conceive a parallel European integration model based on political values outside of the EU still remains very much EU-centred especially when it comes from EU leaders. But ideas for economic integration “from Lisbon to Vladivostok” was also presented by the Kremlin leader Vladimir Putin in 2001, then 2010 again and more recently in 2022³²⁴. It was also an idea positively welcomed by the EU in 2014³²⁵ and by some EU leaders especially in Germany under Chancellor Angela Merkel in 2015. This initially Russian idea gained some interest in the EU, particularly after the events in Ukraine in 2014 in Crimea and Donbas and the escalation of tension between Russia and the West. But mostly in 2017, when US President Donald J. Trump declared its will to initiate a rapprochement with Russia³²⁶. Politically speaking, there was the hope that a FTA mutually beneficial between the EU and the EaEU would ease tensions between the two blocs of the continent by building cooperation and trust, as well as avoiding the either/or choice for countries like Moldova and Ukraine. Economically, it was estimated in 2016, that a FTA between the EU and the EaEU would raise Russia’s export to the EU by €71 billion, as well as stimulate Russian export to the rest of the world thanks to access to EU machinery, and overall boost Russian competitiveness. It would also greatly benefit post-Soviet countries such as Kazakhstan and Belarus with an estimated growth in trade of 100% and 109% respectively. However, Moldova and Ukraine would see their trade growth only rise by 2% each because they would lose market to other more competitive post-Soviet states³²⁷. For the EU the long-term effect would be significant as well, especially for the three Baltic countries and CEE countries³²⁸. Eventually, reconsidering such an idea seems for now almost unrealistic. The current unprovoked and unjustified invasion of Ukraine by the Russian forces since February 2022 shows that the economic rationale does not work with the Kremlin. Economic interdependency does not bring peace and stability to the European continent, even if Russia had been partially cut off from the EU after 2014, interdependence remained high, especially in the field of natural resources and raw materials, and this still did not prevent the current war in Ukraine. In fact, Russia, but also Türkiye, have, rationally speaking, all reasons to get closer to the EU, yet as we have mentioned, entered into a competition in the sector of historical narratives and societal ideals with the EU. If the EU continues to refuse to arm itself with a narrative that taps into history and concrete societal ideals proposal that can better protect and defend its values (democracy, human rights, rule of law) and make the people of Europe understand that the EU and European integration is about them, from them and for them and not a foreign power imposing foreign values and norms on them, then it is going to struggle to foster European integration on its own terms. Refusing to compete with Türkiye and Russia on the ground of societal ideals, while Moscow and Ankara are already engaged in this competition with the EU means incurring the risk to wake up too late, as illustrated by the EU’s Global Gateway to counter the already developed Chinese’s BRI. If some EaP

³²³ Julie Newton, ‘The European Union and the Eurasian Economic Union: Understanding Them Together - and Apart’ (Séminaire, Moscow State University, December 2021).

³²⁴ Newsroom Infobae, ‘Former Russian President Dmitri Medvedev said Putin’s goal is to “build an open Eurasia, from Lisbon to Vladivostok”’, *infobae*, 5 April 2022, <https://www.infobae.com/en/2022/04/05/former-russian-president-dmitri-medvedev-said-putins-goal-is-to-build-an-open-eurasia-from-lisbon-to-vladivostok/>.

³²⁵ European Council, ‘FACTSHEET - EU-Russia Summit - Brussels, 28 January 2014’, 28 January 2014, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/140784.pdf.

³²⁶ Gabriel Felbermayr and Jasmin Katrin Gröschl, ‘Free Trade from Lisbon to Vladivostok: Who Gains, Who Loses from a Eurasian Trade Agreement?’, *CEISifo Forum*, 18, no. 2 (2017), p. 52.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 56–57.

³²⁸ Christian Bluth, ‘Focus Paper: Free Trade from Lisbon to Vladivostok - A Tool for Peace and Prosperity: The Effects of a Free Trade Area between the EU and the Eurasian Region’, *BertelsmannStiftung*, Global Economic Dynamics, 2016.

countries decide to join the EaEU instead of a possible AA/DCFTA with the EU, which would economically benefit them more than membership in the EaEU, it is not because of economic rationale but rather because it relies on societal ideals proposed by Russia.

Hence, the shortcomings of the EU's concrete policies such as the ENP-EaP, the enlargement strategy to the Balkans and its failed relationships with both Russia and Türkiye in fact reveal a greater issue. If we have demonstrated several times in this thesis that economic integration with the EU was the most beneficial integration possibility for all countries evaluated, we also see how political parties and part of the populations are also attracted by Russia and Türkiye's new proposed societal ideals. And this is an issue also the EU faces within its own borders, with populist-conservative parties challenging the EU's weakness in this area by themselves proposing another societal ideal.

Conclusion

This thesis aimed to assess the extent to which EU strategies foster European integration in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine. Moreover, the hypotheses supported were that despite successful economic integration, the EU was not able to transfer effectively its norms and values to the targeted countries. The second hypothesis, based on the literature of European integration, held that without the perspective of EU membership, the strategies of the EU to foster European integration were inefficient.

In order to answer this question and test our hypotheses, we firstly had to define what we meant by European integration, find the right theory to properly assess it and identify a region which could in turn be compared with the Eastern neighbours, on the same level as the WB had been compared to CEE countries. By putting the focus on the EU, European integration in this thesis was understood as closer economic, legal and political cooperation with the EU which ultimately entails a transfer of sovereignty from the state to the EU. The theory of Europeanisation as developed by Sedelmeier and Schimmelfennig was the theory used to analyse our subject and assess the extent of European integration, especially the External Incentives Model, a rational cost-benefit calculation, which relies on four criteria: rewards, credibility, determinacy and costs. Finally, the Western Balkans were identified as the best region to compare the extent of the EU's strategies to foster European integration with the Eastern neighbours, as both regions share a number of similarities in their post-communist heritage, their struggle with statehood and level of economic development.

Once all these elements needed for the analysis were defined and identified, the second chapter then moved into a more complex evaluation. A review of the development of the relations between the EU and the three Eastern neighbours since their independence was exposed. After a first decade of lack of acknowledgement towards the region by the EU, despite multiple attempts from local governments to get Brussels' attention, the two first decades of the 21st century only brought to the Eastern neighbours frustration and impatience from the EU. The European Neighbourhood Policy launched in 2004 and its sub-category the Eastern Partnership launched in 2009, continuously denied the possibility of EU membership and relied mostly on democratic reforms conditions. In fact, once passed through the External Incentives Model, the EaP shows that it is the very lack of possibility of obtaining a promise of EU membership that weighs on all factors of the model. Compared with the Western Balkans, where all states enjoy the status of either candidate country or potential candidate, it was the lack of EU membership that weight on the Eastern neighbours, making EU's conditions credibility decrease while costs for local governments increased and determinacy was paradoxically higher for the Eastern neighbours than for the WB. The analysis through the model also showed that the area of integration that was always the most developed was economic integration at the expense of legal integration (with the exception of laws providing for the trade necessary for economic integration) and value-based integration.

While the analysis of the second chapter supported both hypotheses put forward in this thesis, the comparison with the WB permitted us to raise further issues not taken into consideration in the EIM. Firstly, the fact that in a rational cost-benefit calculation as proposed by the EIM, the lack of EU membership is the sole factor impeding European integration in the Eastern neighbours. In fact, if compared, the level of democratic development in both regions show a similar pattern of evolution, and most importantly are closer to each other than to the EU-11 countries. Put simply, if EU membership was the main incentive to boost European integration, we would see the WB scoring closer to the EU-11 in terms of democratic development than to Moldova and Ukraine which is not the case. Moreover, the case of Belarus also shows that EU membership is not the sole possible factor, since Minsk is not eligible for EU accession due to engagement in another similar union (the EaEU). Another issue raised was the inherent contradiction between the EU's proclaim goal, to foster European integration, and the EU's main interest to foster stability, so much so that the EU ends up willing to fund governments that do not engage in the democratic reforms required and even use authoritarian practices. Furthermore, the main weakness of the model was raised: the lack of consideration of the changing European and international context

between the 1990s and the 2010s. If the rational cost-benefit calculation always favour integration with the EU rather than cooperation with any other similar organisation or country, both regions display an attraction for other international players. While China does not threaten European integration because it also benefits from it as they are only engaged in Europe for pure economic interests, the EU still has a role to play to make sure its legislation and values are respected not only by local governments but also by foreign investors. Russia and Türkiye, however, are pulling on a different string and investing in soft power and anti-Western and therefore anti-EU disinformation. Threats to which the EU has found itself unarmed. Eventually, we concluded this last chapter with a broader reflection on European integration, since rationally speaking European integration in its broader definition of close cooperation between European states, is beneficial for all parties involved, whether it is EU member states, candidate countries or European third countries. Nevertheless, we found that despite a few proposals from the EU and Russia, ideas and concepts remained under-developed.

Overall, the EU's strategies to foster European integration in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine but also in the Western Balkans are successful in the sector of economic integration as expected. However, integration in the sectors of legal approximation and values are not fostered by the EU's policies themselves. Consequently, if both regions are struggling in these sectors despite the WB being EU (potential-)candidates and the Eastern neighbours not, it is not possible to argue that EU membership is the sole missing factor to foster European integration in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine and by extension in the EU's EaP. We explain these results by the fact that the theory and model on which we rely, Europeanisation and the EIM, were developed to explain the European integration of the CEE countries in the 1990s and early 2000s. This theory showing as a success this process, the EU subsequently remained on the same strategy towards the WB and the Eastern neighbours without acknowledging the changing context.

The key to this conclusion lies in this thesis's main limit and weakness. Throughout the thesis, the analysis constantly balances between a purely foreign policy assessment and one that is more historical and societal so to say. This limit and difficulty are perfectly explained by the difference between the conclusion of the second chapter and the conclusions drawn by the third chapter. While chapter two focused on rational cost-benefit analysis, the rational conclusions in terms of policy analysis would entail advocating for EU membership for Moldova and Ukraine and a more tailor-suited EU policy toward Belarus. Nonetheless, the key to understanding the relatively low European integration process in terms of legal approximation and value in the Eastern neighbours (but also in the WB) might not entirely rely on a rational calculation. In the last two sections of the third chapter, when we refer to the Russian and Turkish soft power in both regions and raise the lack of EU's societal ideal, we have half-mentioned this irrational aspect which in a way also weighs on European integration and on the EU's strategies. Put simply, if the populations of the Eastern neighbours and the WB might be attracted more by Russia or Türkiye, it is not because of a rational economic cost-benefit calculation but rather attraction to an irrational but reassuring societal ideal. Thus, the limits and shortcomings of this thesis, but also possibly of the EU's policies, are to rely exclusively on rational thinking, while irrational elements also come into play, which invites us to explore a bigger picture.

In the introduction we mentioned the systemic separation between Western Europe and Central Eastern Europe, here taken in a larger term, and in the development of the thesis, especially in the third chapter, we also have observed a kind of revival, if not just a continuity of the East-West divide in Europe. European integration is not perceived as the choice to join the EU but a choice to join larger structure and a larger community not only compromising the EU but more generally the West, especially including the USA. For instance, it is no coincidence if CEE countries also joined NATO at the time of their accession to the EU. If the East-West divide appears as a very much Russian-led and sustained post-Cold War vision of the world and of the European continent, it remains nonetheless a heavy historical heritage on Europe and by extension also on the EU. Indeed, the line between what is the West, and what is the East has been historically in a state of perpetual negotiation, and hence bears with it a very trained idea. For a time, the East (or *l'Orient* in French), was the source of the European centre-periphery narrative, it was needed to define the civilised West different from an un-civilised East and beyond the East the wilderness. In this vision, the line between the East and the West was constantly renegotiated, the best illustrating example are the Balkans and Türkiye. If for a long time in History both regions were considered as the East, the post-

World War I period has shown a reconstruction of both regions towards a Western identity³²⁹. This negotiation to find itself on the “civilised” side of the East-West divide is a defining and significant element for countries of Central Eastern Europe. As we have seen in this thesis, Moldova and Ukraine have been trying to present themselves as truly “Western” countries, as “Europeans”, while Belarus is embracing the heritage of a bridging land between the East and the West.

Without legitimising the current Belarusian regime, it is essential to conduct a reflection about the position Belarus gives itself in Europe, which is rather telling, because it appears almost as the most rational one. While being stuck between two opposing and excluding forces of attraction, the idea not to make the either/or choice and assume a blurry in-between position, is more in line with the historical-cultural mix of Europe where the borders between nations and peoples were blurred, than the very recent western vision of the nation-state with very defined borders and almost non-existent minorities. Historically, Empires have struggled mostly with the population finding themselves at the very borders of the empires, and it is relevant, because these are the populations that find themselves in a blurred environment, constantly taken by an empire or retaken by another³³⁰. When looking at the History of the Balkan region and the Eastern neighbours, and the several empires of which they have been part, it is almost understandable that with such complex heritage, these new states are now struggling with statehood under the principle of the nation-state. The example of Ukraine has been the most studied, and the current East-West divide within the Ukrainian state itself is often times explained by this historical factor, with an Eastern and Southern Ukrainian region principally and historically dominated by the Russian Empire, while the Western regions have found themselves under the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. To bring this reflection closer to our subject, the constant push by the EU to make countries make the either/or choice obviously creates tensions in the self-induced identities and narratives of some Central Eastern European countries.

This problem of narrative, identity or societal ideal, does not touch upon only countries of the periphery in the WB and Eastern neighbours. As we mentioned in the introduction, the centre-periphery vision of Europe the EU seems to be embedded in, also touches the CEE countries that have joined the EU. The successful European integration of Central Europe, which was considered an example for all other European states willing to become EU member states has collapsed in a spectacular manner with the rise of “illiberal” forces to power. Political parties such as Fidesz in Hungary, PiS (*Pravo i Sprawiedliwość*) in Poland, which used to be rather moderate traditional right-wing political parties, have both come back to power in the last decade by using Eurosceptic rhetoric, rejecting the liberal societal ideal upheld by the EU, and embarrassing a global ultra-conservative and anti-gender movement. If the rise of populism endangering European integration in CEE has been explained by political scientists as consequences of the 2008 financial crisis or the 2015 migration crisis, the historical roots of populism in the region is often overlooked by social scientists³³¹. Moreover, this also gives us a hint in what can be expected if for instance Moldova and Ukraine were to adopt a Western identity for a while to finally join the UE. It is hard to imagine that the divide around which both societies have built themselves in last thirty years, disappear and the risk to see Kyiv and Chişinău fall into anti-EU populism will remain high. The power of attraction of populist powers also lies in the fact that they propose a social cohesion that reassures populations prone to existential crises. It is true for the CEE countries that we mentioned but also in the Eastern neighbours, where identities are still struggling between a Soviet past and a possible Euro-Western future. Overall, the Western liberal ideal does not bring any more answers adapted to appease the tensions and anxieties such as the fear for the existence of the nation, globalization, the geopolitical insecurity, the demographic crisis of the countries of Central Eastern Europe³³².

³²⁹ Christian Grataloup, ‘6 - Faire avec les héritages’, in *Vision(s) du monde: histoire critique des représentations de l’humanité*, Le temps des idées (Malakoff: Armand Colin, 2018), pp. 139–63.

³³⁰ Cecelia Walsh-Russo and Ernesto Castañeda, ‘Charles Tilly’, 25 September 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1093/OBO/9780199756384-0156>; Amiran Urushadze, Natalia Dmitrieva, and Oleg Grom, ‘The Russian Empire and the National Periphery: Between the Theory of Autocracy and Management Practices’, *QUAESTIO ROSSICA*, 6 (1 January 2018), pp. 835–853, <https://doi.org/10.15826/qr.2018.3.331>.

³³¹ See more in Krakovský (2019), *Le populisme en Europe centrale et orientale*.

³³² *Ibid.*, pp. 234–274.

The issue to be explored here, and which is linked with the Historical treatment of the Central Eastern European region by the Western powers, is the fact that European integration as it is right now is a concept thought, developed and imposed for and by the EU itself and by extension by its founding and wealthiest member states which used to historically find themselves in the “West” and “civilised” side of Europe. It is undeniable that the EU is the greatest achievement on the European continent in terms of peace and prosperity. But it is also undeniable that it is the pure product of the context in which it was created, meaning the Cold War and meaning that it was created by the West and for the West, and consciously excluding Central Eastern Europe³³³. Instead of reshuffling and debating its identity, its values and narrative when enlarging to Central and Eastern European countries in early 2000s, the EU has rather imposed its will to the region, tried to shape the polity and politics of the rebuilding states, and imposed a one-way European integration. It is this form of single-mindedness around European integration that needs to be challenged in the EU if its goal is to keep CEE, the WB and the Eastern neighbours closer to Brussels than to Moscow, Beijing or Ankara.

With the Conference on the Future of Europe, which presented its conclusion this year, there are some concrete hopes about possible in-depth reform of the EU, including reforms of the treaties³³⁴. If the EU is ready to embark itself in a much-needed reform of the institutions, it may also be ready to engage in much needed debate to settle if it is a Western-lining European Union or a *European* European Union.

³³³ Sandrine Kott, “European” Integration without or against Eastern Europe’, *Rivista Di Storia Dell’800 e Del ’900*, XXIII, no. 1 (2020), p. 112.

³³⁴ Valentin Ledroit, ‘Conférence sur l’avenir de l’Europe : les citoyens attendent désormais des actes de la part des institutions’, *Toutleurope.eu*, 10 May 2022, <https://www.toutleurope.eu/fonctionnement-de-l-ue/conference-sur-l-avenir-de-l-europe-les-citoyens-attendent-desormais-des-actes-de-la-part-des-institutions/>.

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