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Abstract

Europe's peace and security are challenged by the events taking place in the Eastern Partnership region. Amid growing tensions between the European Union (EU) and Russia, the fate of countries in the common neighbourhood and their progress towards democracy are increasingly at stake. This paper tries to understand to what extent Russia is undermining EU democracy promotion in the Union's eastern neighbourhood. By focusing on the cases of Armenia and Moldova, EU democracy promotion is analysed in light of the triangular relationship between the countries under scrutiny, the EU and Russia. It argues that domestic conditions and external pressures, linked through the filter of problems of 'stateness', are both crucial and mutually reinforcing for democratisation. The paper shows that Russia can undermine EU democracy promotion to the extent that it strengthens the aversion of domestic political forces to democracy-oriented reforms.

Introduction

"Encouraging economic and political reform [...] cannot substitute for a serious effort to counter Russia's long-standing expansionism and its present desire to recapture its great-power status at the expense of its neighbors."¹

When the European Union (EU) launched its Eastern Partnership (EaP) in 2009, the project was supposed to bring democracy, stability and security to the post-Soviet countries it targeted. The current outcome is stalling reforms, growing instability and violence. The emergence of tensions in the EaP area coincided with the return of Russia as a power with regional and global ambitions. Through the Russian-led Customs Union (CU) and the planned Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), Moscow has actively advocated for the re-launch of regional integration plans in the post-Soviet space, including countries that are involved in the Union's European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). The rising confrontation between two competing models of regional integration combines with growing insecurity and the lack of progress in democratisation in the EaP area.

This paper aims to shed light on EU democracy promotion in the eastern neighbourhood and to evaluate the impact of Russia's proactive regional and foreign policy in this regard. Specifically, it focuses on the cases of Armenia and Moldova. The two countries are both located in Russia's and the EU's common neighbourhood, they are confronted with 'frozen conflicts' – respectively in Nagorno-Karabakh and in Transnistria – and have been targets of EU democracy promotion. However, they have made different choices in both their domestic and foreign policies. Based on the two case studies, this paper aims to give an answer to a crucial and topical question: to what extent is Russia undermining EU democracy promotion in the eastern neighbourhood?

I argue that EU democracy promotion in the eastern neighbourhood is shaped by a triangular relationship between the EaP country, the EU and Russia, whereby the country under scrutiny is not a mere object but an active and decisive subject. The form and impact of EU democracy promotion depend on the mutually reinforcing blend of the objectives pursued by the third country and the influence exerted by both the EU and Russia. Specifically, concerns related to national security and

¹ Y. Tymoshenko, "Containing Russia", *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 86, no. 3, 2007, p. 70.

contested statehood in Armenia and Moldova have given rise to diverging attitudes towards EU democracy promotion.

The following section introduces the theoretical concepts and tools relevant for the analysis. The paper then examines the Armenian and Moldovan cases by focusing on three levels of analysis – the domestic structures, the EU's and Russia's policies – in order to draw conclusions on the triangular set of relations influencing EU democracy promotion.

Conceptualising EU democracy promotion in the EaP

The existing literature on EU democracy promotion in the post-Soviet space offers important suggestions on the triangular relationship between the domestic context of EaP countries, the EU and Russia. However, the connections between these three sets of factors, and the corresponding levels of analysis, are left underexplored.

As far as the domestic structures are concerned, their centrality in determining the success of democratisation is emphasised by Sasse,² as well as by Tolstrup, who conceives the domestic ruling actors as “gatekeepers”³ that are able to upgrade or downgrade the external pressure for democratisation.

With regard to the EU's policies – the second variable – Lavenex and Schimmelfennig offer a categorisation of the modes of EU democracy promotion: leverage, linkage and governance.⁴ Leverage refers to a top-down model of democracy promotion targeting foreign governments, typically by means of political conditionality; linkage denotes transnational exchanges (for instance in civil society or in the economic field); and governance involves sectoral trans-governmental cooperation, leading to the adoption of transparent, accountable and participatory rules in administrative practices.⁵ According to the authors, the ENP is characterised by governance, as the absence of a membership perspective for its neighbours reduces the Union's possibilities to successfully resort to leverage. However, an important *caveat* is that effective external democratic governance may not necessarily lead to democratisation because sectoral and administrative

² G. Sasse, “Linkages and the promotion of democracy: the EU's eastern neighbourhood”, *Democratization*, vol. 20, no. 4, 2013, p. 553.

³ J. Tolstrup, “When can external actors influence democratization? Leverage, linkages, and gatekeeper elites”, *Democratization*, vol. 20, no. 4, 2013, pp. 716-742.

⁴ S. Lavenex & F. Schimmelfennig, “EU democracy promotion in the neighbourhood: from leverage to governance?”, *Democratization*, vol. 18, no. 4, 2011, pp. 885-909.

⁶ Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, *op. cit.*, p. 896.

reforms may well coexist with overall non-democratic institutions.⁶ Moreover, the main focus of these conceptualisations are the EU and its institutions as disseminators of democratisation, thus losing sight of the role played in the process by the domestic structures.⁷ Hence, there is a need to look in more depth at the links between internal and external factors when examining the promotion of democracy by the EU.

Way and Levitsky's notion of "Western leverage"⁸ and linkages is relevant to the present paper not only for its reference to such links, but also because the authors consider the role played by alternative international factors impacting on EU democracy promotion – what they call "black knights",⁹ that is, competing external powers. This notion can be applied to Russia – the third variable in the present study – as an actor seeking to project its influence in the post-Soviet space. Sasse and Tolstrup investigate Russia's role and repercussions on democratisation in the region.¹⁰ These analyses are also helpful in determining how and when the domestic political setting activates a triangular interaction impacting on democratisation and involving both the EU and Russia as international players.

Sasse argues that one of the filters producing an interplay between internal and external factors are "stateness issues",¹¹ that is, unresolved political and ethnic conflicts, which have a destabilising potential and concern the very existence of the state.¹² The inclusion of problems of stateness in the analysis of the domestic context is particularly relevant when looking at the cases of Armenia and Moldova, whose statehood must deal with 'frozen conflicts' in respectively Nagorno-Karabakh and Transnistria.

⁶ Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, *op. cit.*, p. 896.

⁷ R. Youngs, "Democracy promotion as external governance?", *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol. 16, no. 6, 2009, pp. 895-915.

⁸ L. Way & S. Levitsky, "Linkage, Leverage and the Post-Communist Divide", *East European Politics and Societies*, vol. 21, no. 1, 2007, pp. 48-66.

⁹ G.C. Hufbauer, J.J. Schott & K.A. Elliott, *Economic Sanctions Reconsidered: History and Current Policy*, Washington, DC, Institute for International Economics, 1990, p. 12, quoted in Way & Levitsky, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

¹⁰ G. Sasse, "Who cares about Transnistria? Linkage and Leverage: External actors and conflicts in the post-Soviet space", *Politics In Spires*, 24 October 2012; Tolstrup, "Studying a negative external actor: Russia's management of stability and instability in the 'Near Abroad'", *Democratization*, vol. 16, no. 5, 2009, pp. 922-944; Sasse, "Linkages", *op. cit.*

¹¹ Sasse, "Linkages", *op. cit.*, p. 554.

¹² See also J.J. Linz & A. Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation – Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe*, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996, p. 16.

Although Sasse's study focuses on linkages, this paper will take stateness into account also in the analysis of the leverage and governance dimensions of EU democracy promotion. A focus on this issue in Armenia and Moldova can reveal insights on the role of a 'black knight' Russia and on the extent to which EU democracy promotion is shaped by competing external factors.

In sum, the variables that guide the present analysis are identified at the intersection of international and domestic political factors. In the case of the ENP – and specifically of the EaP – EU democracy promotion is shaped by a triangular relationship between the third country, the EU and Russia as an alternative pole of attraction. These variables are explored by using different sources such as official documents, literature and nine semi-structured interviews with officials and experts based in Brussels, Chisinau, Paris, and Yerevan.

Armenia's *volte face*

*"A 'captured' state"*¹³

Freedom House ranks Armenia as a "semi-consolidated authoritarian regime".¹⁴ The country is governed by a strong executive power which supersedes both the judiciary and the parliament.¹⁵ It faces serious economic difficulties, with nearly one third of the population living below the poverty line.¹⁶ Armenia's political, security and economic challenges have shaped its participation in the ENP and in the EaP.

In the Armenian case, Sasse's notion of 'stateness' problems points directly to the unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as the major issue affecting the country's state building and security.¹⁷ This conflict has impacted significantly on political competition in Armenia. On the one hand, restrictions on political liberalisation can be explained by the fact that, since the country's independence, the domestic political spectrum has converged around the need to preserve the country's borders and security. Keeping a firm and uncompromising stance *vis-à-vis*

¹³ F.L. Altmann, J. Deimel & A. García Schmidt, "Democracy and Good Governance in the Black Sea Region", *Commission on the Black Sea Policy Reports*, no. 4, 2010, p. 37, quoted in N. Mikhelidze, "Juggling Security, Democracy and Development in the Caucasus: What Role for the EU?", *IAI Working Papers*, vol. 13, no. 22, Rome, IAI, July 2013, p. 5.

¹⁴ Freedom House, "Nations in Transit. Armenia", 2014, retrieved 15 October 2014, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2014/armenia#.VD4wtdJWG70>.

¹⁵ Bertelsmann Stiftung, "Armenia Country Report", in *Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI) 2014*, Gütersloh, Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2014, p. 31;

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹⁷ Sasse, "Linkages", *op. cit.*, pp. 553, 574-576.

Azerbaijan became an essential requirement of political credibility, particularly for those aspiring to the highest government offices.¹⁸

On the other hand, there is a perception that democratisation can engender threats to state security because it can pave the way to cleavages and divisions, thus weakening the state and its effective control on borders and territory.¹⁹ Hence, the unresolved nature of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict reinforced the centralisation of power in Armenia.²⁰ According to an Armenian expert, incumbent governments have exploited the Nagorno-Karabakh issue not only to undermine the electoral process but also to suppress recurrent post-election demonstrations.²¹ In such cases, the government's discourse framed the limitations to competition and the repression of protests as dictated by the need to maintain stability and unity, for the sake of state security.²²

The prominence of security needs permeated also the country's economic structure and favoured military spending, rather than investments leading to social welfare and development.²³ In 2010, Yerevan's military expenditure accounted for \$395 million or 4.2% of the country's GDP.²⁴ In the last few years, moves to reduce the defence budget were criticised²⁵ in light of Azerbaijan's almost thirtyfold increase in military spending in the last decade²⁶ – nearly \$2.8 billion in 2010 –²⁷ and claims that Baku's military budget is worth as much as Armenia's GDP.²⁸ In addition, Armenia has faced difficulties in international trade and cross-border flows: the country is landlocked and it has closed borders with Turkey and Azerbaijan. A “no

¹⁸ T. Mkrtychyan, “Democratization and the Conflict of Nagorno-Karabakh”, *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, vol. 6, no. 3, 2007, pp. 6-7.

¹⁹ Mikhelidze, *op. cit.*, p. 8. Mkrtychyan argues against this view and states that the key to Armenia's security and to conflict resolution rests on steady democratisation. See Mkrtychyan, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

²⁰ M.R. Freire & L. Simão, “From words to deeds: European Union democracy promotion in Armenia”, *East European Politics*, vol. 29, no. 2, 2013, p. 181.

²¹ Interview with Hrant Kostanyan, Associate Research Fellow, Centre for European Policy Studies, Brussels, via Skype, 25 April 2014.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Mikhelidze, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

²⁴ “Armenia – The SIPRI Military Expenditure Database”, *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)*, retrieved 19 October 2014, <http://milexdata.sipri.org/result.php4>.

²⁵ S. Harutyunyan, “Ex-Official Concerned Over Actual Military Budget Cut”, *RFE/RL*, 7 October 2009.

²⁶ Z. Agayev, “Azeri-Russian Arms Trade \$4 Billion amid Tension with Armenia”, *Bloomberg*, 13 August 2013.

²⁷ “Azerbaijan – The SIPRI Military Expenditure Database”, *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)*, retrieved 17 October 2014, <http://milexdata.sipri.org/result.php4>.

²⁸ A. Eberhardt, “Countries Briefing on Armenia and Azerbaijan”, *European Parliament*, 12 June 2012.

peace, no war”²⁹ stalemate and unfriendly relations with two of its neighbours have had a significant impact on the economy and contributed to make Armenia the poorest country in the South Caucasus.³⁰

Economic hardship went along with concentration of wealth and economic power in the hands of few oligarchs, the so-called ‘Karabakh clan’.³¹ The ‘clan’ includes individuals and families that moved to Armenia from Nagorno-Karabakh and seized control of key economic sectors by taking advantage of their close relations with Karabakh-native political elites.³²

The need to enhance Armenia’s economic development was a major driver behind its participation in the ENP and the EaP.³³ The reason that led Yerevan to join a partnership with the EU was, in the first place, economic integration, coupled with an expectation that this, in turn, would result in the lift of the border blockade by Turkey.³⁴ The role attributed by the Armenian government to the EU as a provider of prosperity and economic opportunities is crucial in examining the Union’s promotion of democracy, especially in light of Armenia’s priorities and the country’s foreign policy strategy.³⁵

At the top of the government’s agenda is the preservation of security and a pledge to economic development, with democratisation being a second-order aim.³⁶ Armenia has transposed the pursuit of these priorities at the level of its foreign policy of “complementarity”,³⁷ whereby the country seeks to carefully balance the interaction with external actors that can support the achievement of national objectives.³⁸

²⁹ Mkrtychyan, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

³⁰ “Armenia”, *Eastern Partnership Community*, 2010, retrieved 26 April 2014, <http://www.easternpartnership.org/partner-states/armenia>.

³¹ Freire & Simão, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

³² M. Duffy Toft, “The irony of Nagorno-Karabakh: formal institutions versus informal politics”, in J. Hughes & G. Sasse (eds.), *Ethnicity and Territory in the Former Soviet Union: Regions in Conflict*, New York, Frank Cass, 2002, pp. 155-157.

³³ Freire & Simão, *op. cit.*, p. 183; interview with Kostanyan, *op. cit.*

³⁴ “Armenia’s President expects Eastern Partnership to deblockade closed border with Turkey”, *Armenpress*, 25 April 2014, retrieved 26 April 2014, <http://armenpress.am/eng/news/759627/armenia-s-president-expects-eastern-partnership-to-deblockade-closed-border-with-turkey.html>.

³⁵ N. Babayan & N. Shapovalova, “Armenia: the Eastern Partnership’s unrequited suitor”, *FRIDE Policy Brief*, no. 94, Madrid, FRIDE, September 2011.

³⁶ Mikhelidze, *op. cit.*, pp. 7-8.

³⁷ Vartan Oskanyan, quoted in Freire & Simão, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

³⁸ K. DerGhoughassian, “Farewell to Complementarity: Armenia’s Foreign Policy at a Crossroad”, *The Armenian Weekly*, 1 April 2014.

If seen through the prism of complementarity, Armenia's relations with the EU are based on what the EU is able to offer in economic and security terms, and as a complement to the other main external actor, Russia. The EU is Armenia's first trade partner, with a total trade share of 27.9%.³⁹ The incentives of enhanced market access and assistance to modernisation offered by the ENP/EaP are therefore attractive. On the contrary, as far as security is concerned, the EU's contribution is essentially reduced to the prospect of long-term stabilisation and pacification through democratisation.⁴⁰

Armenia's engagement with the EU is hence mostly underpinned by an economic and commercial rationale. Accordingly, the adoption and implementation of reforms, including political reforms, has followed an instrumental logic. The government focused on those EU-promoted reforms that could overall bring modernisation and improve administrative and economic performance. On the other hand, it resisted more politically sensitive reforms – for instance ensuring the independence of the judiciary – that would question the existing power structure.⁴¹ According to Simão, the Armenian government introduced formal rules of political liberalisation in order to establish an "imitation of democracy"⁴² and ensure the flow of funding that the EU made conditional on democratic progress.

In sum, Armenia counted on cooperation with the EU to advance its economic aims. It was willing to reform and improve its governance practices and institutions, yet not to the extent of jeopardising the prevailing centralised state structures. In this sense, the country's commitment to democratise was half-hearted.

EU democracy promotion in Armenia

Until the launch of the ENP in 2004, the bulk of cooperation between Brussels and Yerevan was mostly centred on technical and sectoral assistance, specifically in economic matters.⁴³ Although the 1996 Partnership and Cooperation Agreement

³⁹ European Commission, "Countries and Regions – Armenia", *DG Trade*, 27 August 2014, p. 9, retrieved 15 October 2014, <http://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/countries/armenia>.

⁴⁰ Interview with Kostanyan, *op. cit.*; see also Mkrtychyan, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

⁴¹ Interview with an official, EEAS, Brussels, 3 April 2014.

⁴² L. Simão, "The problematic role of EU democracy promotion in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh", *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, vol. 45, nos. 1-2, 2012, p. 197.

⁴³ I. Solonenko and B. Jarabik, "Ukraine", in R. Youngs (ed.), *Is the European Union supporting democracy in its Neighbourhood?*, Madrid, FRIDE, 2008, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

(PCA) defined respect for the principle of democracy an “essential element”⁴⁴ of the treaty, political conditionality remained vague.⁴⁵

With the ENP, the EU aimed to develop a more solid engagement with its neighbours, including in the field of democracy support. The 2006 EU-Armenia Action Plan, the non-binding document guiding Armenia’s participation in the policy, links the reform and legal approximation process to the attainment of “a stake in the EU’s Internal Market” and the gradual participation “in key aspects of EU policies and programmes”.⁴⁶ Moreover, the EU committed to contribute to solving the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, both through supporting the existing instruments deployed by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and, if necessary, by deeper and further engagement.⁴⁷

Democracy support figures in the document as the number one priority, involving primarily a focus on constitutional reform, the separation of powers, a strengthening of rule of law and the judiciary, and the fight against corruption. The Action Plan lists also other “general objectives and actions”⁴⁸ destined to complement the priority areas for cooperation, including the empowerment of local self-government, pluralism and the party system. However, in spite of the pivotal importance of such matters for the emergence of democracy, their attainment has been given only complementary relevance.⁴⁹ Hence, even from a declaratory standpoint, the EU’s commitment to promote democracy in Armenia in the framework of the ENP exposed a series of shortcomings: the Action Plan did not specify how crucial issues like the development of political pluralism would be supported and how the distinction between priorities and complementary objectives would translate in concrete terms.⁵⁰

The limitations of the Action Plan were reproduced in the 2007-2013 Country Strategy Paper, that is, the basis for allocating funding and assistance at the country

⁴⁴ European Union, “Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the European Communities and their Member States, of the one part, and the Republic of Armenia, of the other part”, *Official Journal of the European Union*, L239, 9 September 1999, Art. 2.

⁴⁵ R. Balfour, *Human Rights and Democracy in EU Foreign Policy: The cases of Ukraine and Egypt*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2012, pp. 39-47.

⁴⁶ European Commission, *EU / Armenia Action Plan*, 14 November 2006, p. 2.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5, 10.

⁵⁰ N. Ghazaryan, *The European Neighbourhood Policy and the Democratic Values of the EU: A Legal Analysis*, Oxford, Hart Publishing, 2014, pp. 131-132.

level,⁵¹ and the National Indicative Programmes⁵² (NIP) for 2007-2010 and 2011-2013, which guided the distribution of funds under the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI).⁵³

Hence, although the ENP tried to establish a link between a declaratory commitment to the promotion of democracy and effective democracy support, the allocation of funds did not prioritise assistance in pivotal areas like political pluralism and civil society participation. In addition, while largely drawing on the enlargement experience, the incentives proposed by the ENP to favour reforms were considerably weaker than the prospect of membership. This reduced the EU's leverage and resulted mainly in the use of positive conditionality (that is, the offer of rewards).⁵⁴

The launch of the EaP in 2009 partly addressed these shortcomings, notably by linking the conclusion of an Association Agreement (AA), a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) and the visa facilitation process to progress on the objectives outlined in the Action Plan, including democracy-related reforms. Besides introducing new sources of leverage, the EaP also strengthened the linkage dimension of the ENP through regional dialogue initiatives – ranging from parliamentary exchanges (EURONEST) and an Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum to a Business Forum and a Conference of Regional and Local Authorities.⁵⁵ The establishment in 2012 of the European Endowment for Democracy (EED) further signalled the readiness to create linkages with pro-democracy non-state actors in the neighbourhood.⁵⁶ The conditional engagement leading to the conclusion of an AA/DCFTA and the parallel intensification of regional linkages was integrated by

⁵¹ European Commission, *European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument. Armenia. Country Strategy Paper 2007-2013*, 2007, retrieved on 15 October 2014, http://eeas.europa.eu/enp/pdf/pdf/country/enpi_csp_armenia_en.pdf

⁵² European Commission, *European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument. Armenia. National Indicative Programme 2007-2010*, 2007, retrieved 15 October 2014, http://eeas.europa.eu/enp/pdf/pdf/country/enpi_csp_nip_armenia_en.pdf; European Commission, *European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument. Armenia. National Indicative Programme 2011-2013*, 2010, retrieved 15 October 2014, http://eeas.europa.eu/enp/pdf/pdf/country/2011_enpi_nip_armenia_en.pdf

⁵³ The ENPI has been replaced by the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI). See European Union, "Regulation (EU) No 232/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 March 2014 establishing a European Neighbourhood Instrument", *Official Journal of the European Union*, L77, 15 March 2014, pp. 27-43.

⁵⁴ Ghazaryan, *op. cit.*, pp. 131-132.

⁵⁵ See H. Kostanyan & B. Vandecasteele "Towards 'EuroNest 2.0': What should the next European Parliament learn from its predecessor?", *CEPS Policy Briefs*, no. 300, 2013.

⁵⁶ Council of the European Union, *Declaration on the Establishment of a European Endowment for Democracy*, 18764/1, Brussels, 20 December 2011, p. 4.

assistance to reforms in functional and administrative fields, hence relying on the governance approach to democracy promotion.⁵⁷

After the 2011 revision of the ENP, Armenia received additional funding in 2012 and 2013 as a reward “for [its] efforts in democratic transition and [its] commitment to fundamental values”.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, such extra funding, assigned under the ‘more for more’ logic, was allocated despite the persistent shortcomings in judiciary independence, media freedom and minority rights as well as vote manipulation and the use of administrative resources for electoral purposes, which were acknowledged both by the European Commission and non-governmental organisations.⁵⁹

When read in conjunction with the allocation of funding under the ENPI and the related priority areas, this application of the ‘more for more’ approach indicates that, while focusing on important areas like the elections, administrative reform and judiciary independence, the EU struggled to tackle additional systemic-level measures, notably the enhancement of executive-legislative accountability, political liberalisation, freedom of the press and civil rights.⁶⁰

Drawing from the conceptualisations of democracy promotion previously outlined, the analysis of the EU’s engagement with Armenia points mostly to an instance of governance. In spite of the economic and trade incentives it proposed, the EU lacked effective leverage to induce overall democratisation in Armenia. Progress in the adoption of reforms was limited to specific sectors, while the broader picture was overlooked. According to an EU official, the Union has promoted democracy in Armenia by “acting in watertight compartments”.⁶¹

When, in September 2013, President Sargsyan announced that Armenia would join the CU with Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia, it appeared as a country “sticking to

⁵⁷ European Commission, *2007-2010 National Indicative Programme*, *op. cit.*; European Commission, *2011-2013 National Indicative Programme*, *op. cit.*

⁵⁸ European Commission, *Eastern Partnership: progress in deep democracy and human rights rewarded with additional funding*, IP/13/1245, Brussels, 12 December 2013.

⁵⁹ European Commission, *ENP Country Progress Report 2013 – Armenia*, MEMO/14/220, Brussels, 27 March 2014, European Commission, *ENP Country Progress Report 2012 – Armenia*, MEMO/13/242, Brussels, 20 March 2013; “Country analysis – Armenia”, *European Integration Index for Eastern Partnership Countries*, 2013.

⁶⁰ H. Kostanyan, “Neither Integrated nor Comprehensive in Substance: Armenia and Georgia”, in J. Orbie & A. Wetzel (eds.), *The Substance of EU Democracy Promotion. Concepts and Cases*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015 (forthcoming).

⁶¹ Interview with official 2, European Parliament, Office for the Promotion of Parliamentary Democracy, Brussels, 24 March 2014.

the sticks without wanting the carrot".⁶² Nonetheless, this decision made clear that Armenia's economic needs, as well as its willingness to reform, were superseded by the imperative of protecting national security from the threats originating from Nagorno-Karabakh. As acknowledged by an EU diplomat, "the core issue was not economic but a security one, related to Nagorno-Karabakh."⁶³ Interestingly, the decision to enter the Eurasian CU followed a sale of weapons worth \$1 billion to Azerbaijan by Russia.⁶⁴

From a security standpoint, what characterises the ENP and the EaP is a long-term approach to regional security and conflict resolution, based on cooperation with the EU and democratisation. The Union declared its support for the peace negotiations carried out under the OSCE auspices.⁶⁵ However, the EU is not directly represented in the so-called OSCE Minsk Group which *inter alia* comprises several EU countries and is co-chaired by France, Russia and the US. Moreover, the engagement of the EU Special Representative for the Southern Caucasus with the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was limited.⁶⁶ An EU official stated that the conflict "has been disregarded in dealing with Armenia".⁶⁷ He also admitted that the European External Action Service (EEAS) was convinced that Armenia could be a sort of hybrid model, whereby it could rely on the Russian-centred Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) for hard security. Since the Armenian government knew that Russia could not offer much in terms of economic modernisation, this task would be conferred upon the EU.⁶⁸ Hence, EU-Armenia relations, and democracy promotion more specifically, had to come to grips with the 'complementarity' strategy pursued by Armenia, which implied that the priority aim remained the avoidance of threats to national security as a result of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. This situation, based on a 'complementary' foreign policy engagement, mirrored the triangular relations between Armenia, the Union and Russia, with the latter playing the role of a security provider for Armenia.

⁶² Interview with an official, EU Delegation to Armenia, Yerevan, 17 April 2014, via telephone.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ "Russia starts delivering \$1 billion arms package to Azerbaijan", *Reuters*, Moscow, 18 June 2013.

⁶⁵ European Commission, *EU / Armenia Action Plan*, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

⁶⁶ Freire & Simão, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

⁶⁷ Interview with an official, Human Rights Policy Guidelines Division, EEAS, Brussels, 20 March 2014.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

The Russian factor

As far as Russian-Armenian relations are concerned, Yerevan was included in Russian-sponsored, post-Soviet regional policies since the very beginning. The country is a member of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and in 1992 it was among the founding signatories of the CSTO, the treaty establishing the CIS' security alliance. Interestingly, Armenia's positioning under the Russian security umbrella proceeded along with escalation in Nagorno-Karabakh, hence ensuring Moscow's support in the conduct of military operations against Azerbaijan. Armenia's reliance on Russian military power allowed Moscow to keep a foot in the Caucasus region, where it actively engaged in the management of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, leading the negotiations that brought about a ceasefire in 1994 and deploying troops to guard the Armenian border.⁶⁹ The security bond between the two countries was sealed by the 1997 Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance, which established mutual defence obligations and reinforced synergies between the foreign policies of the parties.⁷⁰

Russian-Armenian relations are not circumscribed to security cooperation. Russia maintains an extensive and deep set of linkages with its Caucasian partner, ranging from economic activities to energy and forms of 'soft power'.⁷¹ Russia is Armenia's second trade partner, accounting for 24.3% of total trade – which is comparable to the EU's share of 27.9%.⁷² Following Yerevan's decision to join the Russian-led CU, trade relations with Moscow could intensify,⁷³ while trade volumes with non-CU partners might worsen in light of the expected rise in tariffs that Armenia will experience to adjust to CU levels.⁷⁴ In addition, Russian business holds far-reaching control of key Armenian enterprises and monopolies. Russia accounts for more than

⁶⁹ R. Krikorian & J. Masih, *Armenia: At the Crossroads*, Amsterdam, Harwood Academic Publishers, 1999, pp. 104-109.

⁷⁰ R. Allison, "Russia, Regional Conflict and the Use of Military Power", in S. E. Miller & D. Trenin (eds.), *The Russian Military. Power and Policy*, Cambridge, American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2004, pp. 141-142; H. Tamrazian, Armenia/Russia: Landmark Treaty Includes Provision for Mutual Defense, RFE/RL, 29 August 1997, retrieved 15 October 2014, <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1086156.html>.

⁷¹ Popescu, "Russia's soft power ambitions", *op. cit.*

⁷² European Commission, "Countries and Regions - Armenia", *op. cit.*, p. 9.

⁷³ M. Hovhannisyanyan, "Armenia Before and After Vilnius", *Caucasus Analytical Digest*, no. 58, 18 December 2013, pp. 2-4.

⁷⁴ N. Popescu, "Eurasian Union: the real, the imaginary and the likely", *EUISS Chaillot Paper*, no. 132, 2014, pp. 11-13.

20% of foreign direct investment (FDI) in Armenia⁷⁵ and for more than 50% of gross capital flows.⁷⁶ In the energy sector, Russia owns Armenia's hydropower and nuclear plants, while Gazprom bought the country's gas monopoly and controls the pipeline connecting Armenia with Iran. Russian companies control the telecommunications sector and have significant stakes in the infrastructures, while the Armenian banking system is also tied to Russia.⁷⁷

With regard to the linkages that may be used as levers by Russia, a pivotal source of influence is the amount of remittances sent by Armenian migrants from Russia. Remittances represent 16% of the country's GDP, with 89% coming from Russia.⁷⁸ Migration issues have been used both in a positive and negative fashion by Moscow: on the one hand, Russian authorities can allow for visa free travel, yet on the other hand, they can put pressure on Armenian migrant workers, whose earnings are essential to Armenia's economy.⁷⁹

The robust economic component in Russia-Armenia relations has influenced also domestic political dynamics. The proximity of the country's political elite to the 'clan' of oligarchs controlling the economy exposes it to Russian interests.⁸⁰ Coupled with the security guarantees offered by Moscow, this translates into a general complacency *vis-à-vis* Russia's policies and, according to an EU official, it led the government to look at Russia as a governance model to restrict political competition and liberalisation.⁸¹ Russian political influence rests also on the fact that the mostly Russian-speaking Armenian population has free access to Russian media. According to a representative of Armenia's press and civil society, Russian television channels have been spreading pro-Kremlin messages around the country and garnered support for closer integration between Yerevan and Moscow.⁸²

⁷⁵ The Ministry of Economy of the Republic of Armenia, "Foreign Investment Inflows to the Real Sector by Countries", December 2013, retrieved 27 April 2014, <http://mineconomy.am/uploads/20142504175601736.pdf>.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Nixey, *op. cit.*, pp. 4-5, S. Markedonov, "The 2013 Electoral Cycle in the South Caucasus and the Russia Factor", *Russian Analytical Digest*, no. 142, 6 February 2014, pp. 8-11.

⁷⁸ International Monetary Fund, *Remittances in Armenia: Dynamics and Patterns*, June 2012, p. 1.

⁷⁹ Nixey, *op. cit.*, p. 6; Hovhannisyan, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

⁸⁰ Freire & Simão, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

⁸¹ Interview with an official, EEAS, Human Rights Policy Guidelines Division, *op. cit.*

⁸² Boris Navasardian, Armenian National Platform of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum & Yervan Press Club, "Security Challenges for the Countries of the Eastern Partnership in the New Geopolitical Context: civil society perspective", conference, Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, European Parliament, Brussels, 10 April 2014.

In sum, in terms of leverage and linkages, Russia could play the role of a 'black knight' based on its economic, political and security connections with Armenia. If in the economic sphere the EU's proposed DCFTA and related funding potentially provided Brussels with room to exert leverage – also to promote democratic reforms – this was not only offset by Russia's economic stakes but also, and to a larger extent, by Moscow's centrality in preserving the country's security and stance *vis-à-vis* Nagorno-Karabakh.

Nonetheless, the role of Russia in curbing EU democracy promotion should not be overstated, particularly in light of the Armenian government's limited will to open the political space to increased competition. On the one hand, EU democracy promotion took the form of governance, thus being in itself of limited impact. On the other hand, Russia's linkages and leverage had the effect of reinforcing, rather than engendering, the prevailing domestic aversion for political competition. In line with Armenia's foreign policy strategy of 'complementarity', Russia represented a source of external support for the government to pursue its own priorities, namely, the preservation of security and control over Nagorno-Karabakh.

Moldova, the 'good pupil'

*"Failed authoritarianism"*⁸³

According to Freedom House, Moldova is a "partially free"⁸⁴ country, where political competition is coupled with weak state structures, fragile political parties, and persistent corruption. When Moldova gained independence from the Soviet Union, the outbreak of a conflict with separatist Transnistria diverted much of the new country's efforts away from strengthening its structures and institutions.⁸⁵ In addition, political parties lacked organisational capacities and solid ideological bases, and tended to form unstable coalitions around single personalities.⁸⁶ The result was what Way called "pluralism by default",⁸⁷ a virtual impossibility to concentrate power in just one single pole.

⁸³ L. Way, "Weak States and Pluralism: the Case of Moldova", *East European Politics and Societies*, vol. 17, no. 3, 2003, p. 454.

⁸⁴ Freedom House, "Moldova", 2014, retrieved 17 October 2014, <http://freedomhouse.org/country/moldova#.VEERvNJWG70>.

⁸⁵ Bertelsmann Stiftung, "Moldova Country Report", *Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI) 2014*, Gütersloh, Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2014, p. 3.

⁸⁶ S. Levitsky & L. Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 230-232.

⁸⁷ Way, "Weak States", *op. cit.*, p. 455.

The diffusion of power was ultimately amplified when in 2000 Moldova became a parliamentary republic, which meant that the parliament could enhance its checks *vis-à-vis* the executive and elect the President. This constitutional transformation contributed to preserve the country's political competition even in the 2000s, after the well-organised and disciplined Communist Party (PCRM) had come to power in 2001. Endowed with a solid basis and a strong leadership – in the person of President Vladimir Voronin – the PCRM started to exert greater control over Moldovan media and state institutions, including the judiciary.⁸⁸ Nevertheless, the focal point of the political system being the parliament, any attempt at authoritarian drifts by the executive had to face the power of the legislative and the opposition.⁸⁹

The persistence of political competition also ensured that the elections favoured the turnover of different political forces in the country's government. Following the contested 2009-2010 series of early elections, the PCRM was ousted from power by an opposition coalition, the Alliance for European Integration (AIE), which in turn failed to consolidate its power basis in parliament. The coalition suffered from defection and it went through a nearly three-year stalemate to elect a new President, thus confirming the fragility of Moldova's democratic institutions.⁹⁰

Moldovan "pluralism by default"⁹¹ was hence determined by the fragility of political parties and a tension between the constitutional powers, above all the executive and the legislative, which effectively prevented the emergence of authoritarianism.⁹² According to Way, the competitive nature of the political arena can be further explained by the polarisation inherited from the dismantlement of the Soviet system,⁹³ which caused the country's "stateness issues".⁹⁴

The stateness problems with which Moldova is confronted concern two main questions: in the first place, there is the 'frozen' Transnistrian conflict, which deprived Chisinau of control over parts of its territory and has guaranteed Russia a foothold in the country, not only through its peacekeeping forces, but also by means of more

⁸⁸ Popescu & Wilson, "Moldova's Fragile Pluralism", *op. cit.*, pp. 93-96.

⁸⁹ L. March & G.P. Herd, "Moldova Between Europe and Russia: Inoculating Against the Colored Contagion?", *Post-Soviet Affairs*, vol. 22, no. 4, 2006, p. 360.

⁹⁰ S. Secieru, *Nations in Transit 2013 – Moldova*, Freedom House, 2013, p. 383, Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2014 - Moldova Country Report*, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-13.

⁹¹ L. Way, "Pluralism by Default", *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 13, no. 4, 2002, pp. 127-141.

⁹² Way, "Weak States", *op. cit.*, pp. 463-464.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 470-474.

⁹⁴ Sasse, "Linkages", *op. cit.*, pp. 567-568.

or less direct support to the *de facto* Transnistrian government.⁹⁵ Secondly, and of equal importance, the break-up of the Soviet system sparked a debate over Moldovan national identity, with parts of the population nurturing pro-Romanian aspirations or simply cultural affiliation, and the rest supporting the preservation of a separate Moldovan identity and independence. Among this latter portion of the population, which includes Russian-speaking groups, are those that are in favour of closer engagement with Russia, also in view of maintaining traditional ties to the post-Soviet space. On the other hand, besides a minority pushing categorically for unification with Romania, a significant share of the population favours a pro-Western and pro-EU stance.⁹⁶

These questions pertaining to statehood and national identity have the potential of triggering an entanglement between domestic political debates and international actors, notably the EU and Russia. To exemplify this, when the Communist government under President Voronin decided to reverse its previous support for Eurasian regional integration in favour of engagement with the EU, the trigger was tension with Russia over the fate of Transnistria.⁹⁷ In 2003 Voronin rejected the so-called Kozak memorandum, a Russian-sponsored proposal on the 'frozen conflict', which envisaged the creation of a federal state, whereby Transnistria could retain a veto power on virtually every national decision. Such a solution raised the government's scepticism over Moscow's commitment to meet Chisinau's demands on Transnistria and the preservation of national unity and independence. Voronin realised that "Moscow was a greater threat to [his] power than Europe",⁹⁸ and he opted for closer relations with the EU and its reform agenda.

Moreover, in the early-mid 2000s, the Communist government made instrumental use of the pro-EU/pro-Russia cleavage to anticipate and neutralise the risks connected with the 'colour revolutions' affecting neighbouring governments. The PCRM successfully prevented the opposition from growing in strength and cohesion on the wave of the massive uprisings in Ukraine, by hijacking an increasingly popular aspiration to reform through integration with the EU.⁹⁹ In fact, the commitment to

⁹⁵ March & Herd, *op. cit.*, pp. 372-373.

⁹⁶ Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2014 - Moldova Country Report*, *op. cit.*, pp. 11-12; Popescu & Wilson, "Moldova's Fragile Pluralism", *op. cit.*, pp. 97-98.

⁹⁷ Sasse, "Linkages", *op. cit.*, p. 566.

⁹⁸ March & Herd, *op. cit.*, p. 369.

⁹⁹ Popescu & Wilson, "Moldova's Fragile Pluralism", *op. cit.*, p. 100; March & Herd, *op. cit.*, p. 350.

undertake political reforms was more rhetorical than rooted in a firm will to democratise.¹⁰⁰

Being among the poorest countries in the EaP and highly dependent on external support,¹⁰¹ Moldova joined the ENP and subsequently the EaP in view of the promise of financial assistance and economic development. However, the two-term Communist government was able to resist the EU's pressures to further open the political system and democratise by avoiding to completely alienate Moscow, which was perceived as an alternative partner to meet the needs of the country. According to Popescu and Wilson, "in order to deflect EU pressures for democratisation, the Communist government has sought to play Russia against the EU".¹⁰²

Nevertheless, the inherent pluralism of the Moldovan political system meant not only that the strategies pursued by the government could be challenged by the opposition, but also that, differently from other post-Soviet countries, Moldova was more exposed to external pressures to democratise.¹⁰³ According to Popescu, "because Moldova is a much more open political system, the EU emphasised not only governance but also broader politics of democracy, whereas in Armenia it tended to focus more on technical matters".¹⁰⁴

EU democracy promotion in Moldova

Before the AA with the EU was signed in June 2014,¹⁰⁵ cooperation between Moldova and the EU was based on the 1994 PCA. Reproducing a template applied to the former Soviet Union countries, the PCA with Moldova included provisions on the respect of democratic principles and democratisation. In practice, before the launch of the ENP, this rhetorical commitment to democracy promotion was barely adhered to by the Union.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁰ Popescu & Wilson, "Moldova's Fragile Pluralism", *op. cit.*, pp. 94-96.

¹⁰¹ N. Ratzmann, "Moldova and the EU: Liberalizing or Securitising Migration?", *Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS) Report*, no. 4, 2013, p. 3.

¹⁰² Popescu & Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

¹⁰³ Sasse, "Linkages", *op. cit.*, pp. 567-568.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Nicu Popescu, Senior Analyst, European Institute for Security Studies (EUISS), Paris, 18 March 2014.

¹⁰⁵ "EU forges closer ties with Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova", *EEAS*, 27 June 2014.

¹⁰⁶ E. McDonagh, "Is democracy promotion effective in Moldova? The impact of European institutions on development of civil and political rights in Moldova", *Democratization*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2008, pp. 142-161.

A 'window of opportunity' appeared in the mid-2000s when the launch of the ENP coincided with the democratising wave of the 'colour revolutions' and the policy shift of the Communist government from a pro-Russian to a pro-Western stance. The ENP aimed to transform the Union's neighbours into prosperous, secure and democratic countries. Yet, the place of democracy within the ENP has not always been clear-cut. The Action Plan jointly agreed with the EU in 2005 listed comprehensive democratic reforms among the priority objectives, including support to democratic institutions, the rule of law, free and fair elections, media freedom and freedom of expression, besides strengthening the administrative and judiciary sectors.¹⁰⁷ However, the programming documents, including the NIP for the period 2007-2010, revealed that the actual focus of the Union was rather on sector-specific measures pertaining more to 'good governance' and less to democracy, particularly on public administration and judiciary reform.¹⁰⁸ Although the NIP stressed the need to prioritise support to human rights and civil society, the deeper institutional dimension of democratic reform, involving freedom of the press, freedom of expression, constitutional checks and balances, was neglected.¹⁰⁹ In addition, the document destined the bulk of funding to economic assistance and assigned €52.4-73.4 million (25-35% of total funds) to finance measures in the judiciary and public administration domains.¹¹⁰

Admittedly, the Commission's progress reports on the implementation of the Action Plan raised criticism on the deterioration of media pluralism and the separation of powers.¹¹¹ Moreover, in 2008, the EU Member States' ambassadors in Chisinau voiced their reservations over the democratic nature of the Moldovan government which was showing authoritarian tendencies.¹¹² Nevertheless, the Communist government resisted the pressure for democratic reforms, notably by hinting at the

¹⁰⁷ European Commission, *EU/Moldova Action Plan*, 2005, pp. 3-6.

¹⁰⁸ European Commission, *European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument. Republic of Moldova. National Indicative Programme 2007-2010*, 2007, p. 2, retrieved 16 October 2014, http://eeas.europa.eu/enp/pdf/pdf/country/enpi_nip_moldova_en.pdf.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹¹¹ European Commission, *Commission Staff Working Document Accompanying the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council. Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2008. Progress Report Republic of Moldova*, SEC(2009) 514/2, Brussels, 23 April 2009.

¹¹² Popescu & Wilson, "Moldova's Fragile Pluralism", *op. cit.*, p. 99.

prospect of re-orienting the country's relations towards Russia.¹¹³ Therefore, as long as the PCRM stayed in power, EU democracy promotion was mainly based on democratic governance, not only because of the Union's focus on rather administrative and sector-specific reforms, but also in light of the government's resistance to broader pressures for democratisation.

After 2009-2010, when an outspoken pro-EU alliance won the contested elections and the EU launched the EaP, the promotion of democratic governance was complemented with increased attention for more intense linkages – through transnational platforms like EURONEST and the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum as well as by supporting the EED – ¹¹⁴ and for systemic-level issues such as the empowerment of parliament and constitutional checks and balances. The Commission launched a “Support Package for Democracy”¹¹⁵ and established a joint programme with the Council of Europe tackling essential democracy-related domains, including the constitutional separation of powers and media freedom.¹¹⁶ Funding for democracy support under the 2011-2013 NIP increased to 35-40% out of a total of €273.14 million.¹¹⁷

The renewed commitment to promote democracy beyond a governance-specific approach went along with the Moldovan government's determination to advance further towards EU integration, boosted also by the incentives of the prospected DCFTA and visa liberalisation with the EU.¹¹⁸ In 2012 and 2013, under the ‘more for more’ approach, the progress on democratic reforms was rewarded with extra

¹¹³ M.R. Lupu, “External democracy promotion in Ukraine and Moldova: the impact of the European Union”, *Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS) Working Paper*, no. 21, Copenhagen, 2010, pp. 22-23.

¹¹⁴ J. Bousac et al., *Improving the EU support for the civil society in its neighbourhood: rethinking procedures, ensuring that practices evolve*, Study EXPO/B/AFET/2012/32, PE 433.639, Brussels, European Parliament Directorate-General for External Policies of the Union, July 2012, p. 9.

¹¹⁵ B. Ferrero-Waldner, Commissioner for External Relations and the ENP, “Address to Members of Parliament of the Republic of Moldova”, speech, Chisinau, 27 November 2009.

¹¹⁶ Council of Europe, “Council of Europe and European Union Joint Programme on Democracy Support in the Republic of Moldova”, 2010, Council of Europe, “Action Plan to support democratic reforms in the Republic of Moldova 2013-2016”, ODGProg/Inf(2013)17 final, 17 November 2013.

¹¹⁷ European Commission, *European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument. Republic of Moldova. National Indicative Programme 2011-2013*, 2011, pp. 12-13, retrieved 16 October 2014, http://eeas.europa.eu/enp/pdf/pdf/country/2011_enp_nip_moldova_en.pdf

¹¹⁸ “Country analysis – Moldova”, *European Integration Index for Eastern Partnership Countries*, 2013, retrieved 16 October 2014, <http://www.eap-index.eu/moldova2013>

funds of €28 million and €35 million respectively, thus rewarding Moldova as one of the best performers in the neighbourhood.¹¹⁹

Nevertheless, the Italian Ambassador to the Republic of Moldova acknowledged that “while significant results have been achieved, the process of democratisation is far from being complete”.¹²⁰ While the pro-EU government showed its intention to link political reforms to EU support, Moldova still needs stronger efforts to tackle corruption and ensure effective judiciary capacities.¹²¹ The government progressed on improving media freedom and it adopted anti-discrimination laws, however problems with their implementation persist. Moreover, the governing coalition suffered an internal crisis, which caused a loss of credibility.¹²²

On top of that, the European future of the country has been questioned by a strong Communist opposition, which is linking the domestic political battle to the increasing tension between the EU and Russia over the fate of the shared neighbourhood. This confrontation reflects the pro-EU/pro-Russia cleavage that constitutes one of Moldova’s issues of stateness, connecting domestic developments with external influence. In a country with 44% of the population supporting EU membership and 45% in favour of accession to the Eurasian CU,¹²³ “the PCRM has clearly opted for joining the CU with Russia”.¹²⁴

With the November 2014 elections approaching, the pro-Russian campaign of the PCRM sheds light on Russia’s role as a ‘black knight’, whose influence on Moldova’s politics can reduce the leverage and overall effectiveness of EU democracy promotion. Moscow’s ability to exert influence over the country derives also from another crucial problem of stateness faced by Moldova, the ‘frozen conflict’ with Transnistria.¹²⁵

In contrast to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the Transnistrian issue figures at the top of the priorities listed in the EU-Moldova Action Plan.¹²⁶ In addition, in

¹¹⁹ European Commission, *Eastern partnership: progress*, *op. cit.*

¹²⁰ Interview with H.E. Enrico Nunziata, Ambassador of Italy to the Republic of Moldova, Chisinau, 30 March 2014, via e-mail.

¹²¹ O. Shumylo-Tapiola, “The EU and Moldova: Can Both Partners Get ‘More for More?’”, *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 16 June 2011.

¹²² “Country analysis – Moldova”, *op. cit.*

¹²³ “Barometrul de Opinie Publică”, Press release, *Institutul de Politici Publice (IPP)*, April 2014; “Country analysis – Moldova”, *op. cit.*; “Moldova Reality Check”, *Central European Policy Institute (CEPI)*, Bratislava, April-June 2013, p. 4.

¹²⁴ Interview with Nunziata, *op. cit.*

¹²⁵ “Moldova Reality Check”, *op. cit.*, pp. 4-6.

¹²⁶ European Commission, *EU/Moldova Action Plan*, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

comparison with Armenia, EU support to Moldova's democratisation is not framed as a threat to the survival of the state, but rather as leading to the re-composition of the country's unity. Hence, the EU's commitment to solve the Transnistrian stateness problem has provided it with room to promote democracy. With the ENP and the EaP, the EU has supported a long-term process of democratisation, which aims to make Moldova prosperous, stable, secure and ultimately more attractive to its breakaway region.¹²⁷

Hence, in spite of the geopolitical significance of the EaP, as declared by a Moldovan diplomat, the EU is perceived as behaving more "as a space of rules than as a geopolitical actor".¹²⁸ Mostly because of the Member States' reluctance to cause a clash with Moscow, the EU generally opted for a softer approach to the resolution of the 'frozen conflict'.¹²⁹ Besides joining in 2005 the '5+2' negotiations – gathering Moldova, Transnistria, Ukraine, the OSCE, Russia plus the United States and the EU as observers – and creating a Special Representative dealing with the matter,¹³⁰ the EU's approach included the promotion of democracy and aimed at "improving the attractiveness of right-bank Moldova to facilitate the resolution of the Transnistria issue".¹³¹

Hence, through the instruments of the ENP and the EaP – including the process leading to an AA and a DCFTA with the Union – the EU "focused on changing the context of the conflict".¹³² In 2005 the EU Border Assistance Mission to Moldova and Ukraine (EUBAM) was established in order to create incentives for the breakaway region to comply with Moldova's customs regulations.¹³³ This mission was coupled with an overall effort to support the economic development of the country and to make it a stable democracy. Such a "low-key"¹³⁴ EU approach to conflict resolution

¹²⁷ European Commission, *National Indicative Programme 2011-2013*, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-14.

¹²⁸ Interview with a diplomat, Mission of the Republic of Moldova to the European Union, Brussels, 24 March 2014.

¹²⁹ N. Popescu, *EU Foreign Policy and Post-Soviet Conflicts: Stealth intervention*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2011, pp. 47-49.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

¹³¹ European Commission, *National Indicative Programme 2011-2013*, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

¹³² Popescu, *EU Foreign Policy*, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

¹³³ European Union, *EU Border Assistance Mission to Moldova and Ukraine*, Factsheet, December 2007.

¹³⁴ G. Sasse, "The European neighbourhood policy and conflict management: a comparison of Moldova and the Caucasus", in J. Hughes (ed.), *EU Conflict Management*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2010, pp. 92-110.

based on democracy promotion rested on a “conditionality-lite”¹³⁵ democratic leverage as well as on instances of linkages and governance.

In comparison with the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh for Armenia, in the Moldovan case the promotion of democracy by the EU was not perceived as being in contrast with the resolution of the frozen conflict because the security situation between Moldova and Transnistria has not posed imminent threats: hence the possibility to experience a softer and long-term approach.¹³⁶ Moreover, in the Moldovan case, the EU could have a certain scope to promote democracy because Moldovans do not consider Transnistria to be a priority as important as EU integration.¹³⁷ Nevertheless, the Transnistrian problem of stateness has still the potential to amplify Russia’s influence in Moldovan politics, particularly in light of the pro-Eurasian rhetoric of the PCRM on the eve of the 2014 elections.

The Russian factor

The sources of Russian influence over Moldova are, in the first place, of an economic kind. Moldova is a member of the CIS and Russia is its second largest trade partner, accounting for 21.9% of total trade.¹³⁸ The figure compares with a 46.4% share of trade with the EU – the country’s first trade partner.¹³⁹ Russian investments account for 9%,¹⁴⁰ while approximately half of the FDI in Moldova originates from the EU.¹⁴¹ If Russia’s influence in Moldova’s economy has decreased over time,¹⁴² the country still relies on the Russian market for the export of crucial agricultural products – above all wine and fruit. Moldovan wine, which represents around 25% of the country’s agricultural exports,¹⁴³ was already banned from Russia in the past, as it has been the case also for fruit.

¹³⁵ Sasse, “The European”, *op. cit.*

¹³⁶ Interview with an official, EEAS, *op. cit.*, Popescu, *EU Foreign Policy, op. cit.*, p. 63.

¹³⁷ Interview with Popescu, *op. cit.*

¹³⁸ European Commission, “Countries and Regions – Moldova”, *DG Trade*, 27 August 2014, p. 9, retrieved 17 October 2014, http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2006/september/tradoc_113419.pdf.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ L. Isacov, M. Soloviova, D. Naderita, *FDI statistics in the Republic of Moldova: recent data and challenges*, National Bank of Moldova, Chisinau, 5 March 2013.

¹⁴¹ A. Fala, “Economic Cooperation with the EU. A prerequisite for Development of the Republic of Moldova”, *Moldova’s Foreign Policy Statewatch*, Issue 28, 2011, p. 6.

¹⁴² Sasse, “Linkages”, *op. cit.*, p. 565.

¹⁴³ T. Dunlop, “Why Russian wine ban is putting pressure on Moldova”, *BBC News Europe*, 21 November 2013.

A further lever that Russia can potentially use *vis-à-vis* Moldova is the significant number of migrant workers sending remittances from the Russian Federation. In 2012 remittances accounted for approximately \$1.6 million,¹⁴⁴ representing roughly 25% of Moldovan GDP,¹⁴⁵ with almost 70% coming from Russia.¹⁴⁶ In 2013 between 300.000 and 400.000 Moldovans were working in Russia.¹⁴⁷ As nearly half of them do not fulfil the legal criteria for permanent residence in the Russian Federation, a selective enforcement of migration laws could hit both Moldovan workers and their remittances significantly.¹⁴⁸ Admittedly, migratory outflows to the EU increased, also in light of the possibility for Moldovan citizens to obtain Romanian passports – in 2012 an estimated 400.000 people held double Moldovan-Romanian citizenship.¹⁴⁹ In addition, as of April 2014, Moldovans were allowed visa free travel to Schengen countries for periods up to 90 days.¹⁵⁰

Another crucial source of Russian influence is Moldova's dependence on Gazprom, which provides 100% of the country's gas supplies. In addition, Gazprom controls a majority share in the national gas company MoldovaGaz, giving the Russian exporter a say in the management of gas infrastructures.¹⁵¹ Gazprom has also demanded that the Moldovan government covers the \$4 billion debts owed by the Transnistrian territories for gas deliveries.¹⁵² Hence, the country is exposed to pressure coming from Gazprom, which has increased after Moldova joined the Energy Community in 2010, thus pledging to import the energy *acquis* of the EU.

The issues of stateness with which Moldova is faced – namely the Transnistrian 'frozen conflict' and the ethno-political split between the supporters of pro-EU or pro-Eurasian integration – give further scope to Russia to exert influence on domestic politics. While formally being a mediator in the resolution of the conflict, Russia in fact provides political and economic support to Tiraspol.¹⁵³ Russia maintains its own peacekeeping forces in the region, which are considered to

¹⁴⁴ "Almost 70% of remittances arrived in Moldova in 2013, originate in Russia", *Teleradio Moldova*, 24 February 2014.

¹⁴⁵ "Moldova Reality Check", *op. cit.*, p.5.

¹⁴⁶ "Almost 70% of remittances", *op. cit.*

¹⁴⁷ Socor, *op. cit.*

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ S. Woehrel, "Moldova: Background and U.S. Policy", *Congressional Research Service*, 23 April 2014, p. 8, retrieved 17 October 2014, <http://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RS21981.pdf>

¹⁵⁰ A. Gardner, "Moldovans free to enter Schengen area", *European Voice*, 28 April 2014.

¹⁵¹ A. Sobják, "The Romania-Moldova Gas Pipeline: Does a Connection to the EU Mean a Disconnect from Russia?", *Polish Institute of International Affairs (PISM) Bulletin*, vol. 546, no. 93, 9 September 2013, p. 1.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ Popescu, "EU Foreign Policy", *op. cit.*, p. 39.

contribute to the survival of the breakaway government.¹⁵⁴ The Russian engagement with Transnistria has another political implication in a way that it upholds a non-democratic regime serving as an alternative model of governance, specifically a model inspired by the “sovereign democracy”¹⁵⁵ narrative and able to resist Western pressures.

The other issue of stateness, namely the cleavage involving the Romanian-speaking groups, on the one hand, and the Russian-speaking groups, on the other, is mirrored in the political competition between pro-EU and pro-Russian parties.¹⁵⁶ Currently, the opposition PCRM has resorted to a pro-Eurasian rhetoric and sought Moscow’s support not only to hinder the process of EU integration, but also to capitalise on the preference of nearly half of the population for the Russian-sponsored CU.¹⁵⁷ The emerging polarisation between those favouring EU integration and those advocating closer ties with Russia is further exacerbated by the vocal support for Eurasian integration coming from the ethnic minority living in Gagauzia – an autonomous region in southern Moldova and of Russian/Turkish language.¹⁵⁸

Therefore, although Moldova’s competitive political environment has meant increased exposure to EU democracy promotion, and in spite of the reform momentum triggered by the support of the incumbent government for EU integration, this process can be halted by rising anti-EU domestic politics with Russian backing. The possibility to resist EU democracy promotion through rapprochement with Moscow was already experienced when the PCRM was in power. Hence, given the Communist Party’s outspoken preference for Eurasian integration, the November 2014 elections could impact on EU democracy promotion to the extent that a future turn to Russia may reduce the Union’s leverage to support political reforms.

¹⁵⁴ Tolstrup, “Studying”, *op. cit.*, pp. 936-937.

¹⁵⁵ March & Herd, *op. cit.*, pp. 372-373.

¹⁵⁶ V. Socor, “Ethnic Factors Affecting Moldova’s Debate on Association with the European Union”, *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, vol. 11, no. 33, 20 February 2014.

¹⁵⁷ Socor, “Russia and the Moldovan Communists”, *op. cit.*

¹⁵⁸ R. Coalson, “Analysis: Pressure Mounts On Moldova As It Nears Long-Sought EU Accords”, *RFE/RL*, 8 February 2014.

Conclusion: “It’s not all Russia’s fault”¹⁵⁹

The recent annexation of Crimea and the conflict in Eastern Ukraine threaten Europe’s security and peace, with the relationships between Washington and Brussels, on the one hand, and Moscow, on the other, at a nadir. Russia is perceived with increasing wariness by Western capitals, amid talks about a “Cold War II”.¹⁶⁰ The risks generated by this volatile and explosive situation are enormous. The ENP and the EaP were expected to bring security, prosperity and stability to the eastern neighbourhood through a long-term strategy based also on democracy promotion. However, the news coming from Ukraine’s east bluntly contradict the rhetoric of the Union’s neighbourhood policy. In a region where hard security concerns have become of primary importance, the long-term promotion of democracy might be eclipsed.

This paper tried to understand to what extent EU democracy promotion in the eastern neighbourhood is undermined by Russia. I argued that Russia can act as a ‘black knight’, undermining EU democracy promotion by supporting domestic resistance to democratisation. The form and effectiveness of EU democracy promotion are shaped by a triangular relationship between the third country, the Union and Russia, whereby domestic actors are decisive players. External influence on domestic processes of democratisation is thereby activated through the filter of contested stateness in the form of unresolved conflicts or on-going ethno-political tensions.

In the case of Armenia, the EU succeeded in promoting external democratic governance, that is, reforms at the sectoral level, but failed to address systemic democratic flaws. The limited effectiveness of EU democracy promotion was due to the reduced influence exerted by the European Union over Armenia’s most sensitive needs, notably concerning the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and national security. The threats posed by the ‘frozen conflict’ engendered an aversion to potentially destabilising democratic openings. Russia’s influence undermined EU democracy promotion insofar as it strengthened the Armenian government’s resistance to democratisation.

¹⁵⁹ B. Jarabik, “It’s Not All Russia’s Fault. Eastern Ukraine is a mess. But Kremlin meddling is hardly the whole story”, *Politico Magazine*, 28 April 2014.

¹⁶⁰ D. Trenin, “Welcome to Cold War II: This is how it will look like”, *Foreign Policy*, 4 March 2014.

As far as Moldova is concerned, the country's "pluralism by default"¹⁶¹ significantly contributed to make it more open to external democracy promotion. Nevertheless, the country has been exposed to Russia's leverage, including in the economic and energy domains. Moreover, Russia is actively engaged in the Transnistrian issue, one of Moldova's problems of stateness together with the cleavage between, on the one hand, Moldovans that support Eurasian integration and, on the other hand, those that see the future of their country with, or even in, the EU. These are divisions that allow Russia's presence to crowd out the EU's leverage to promote political reforms. At the same time, Moldova's inherent political pluralism and the absence of hard security threats coming from Transnistria have provided the EU with room to promote democracy, notably as a way to favour conflict resolution in the long term. However, the EU's capacity to induce democracy-oriented reforms risks being reduced with the November 2014 elections, especially should tensions in Transnistria grow as a result of the Ukrainian crisis.

The form and effectiveness of EU democracy promotion in the eastern neighbourhood can be hindered by Russia's policies and actions in the area. But the 'black knight' Russia is not the only determinant of the limited impact of EU democracy promotion. As shown in the Armenian and Moldovan cases, Russia's influence strengthens and supports domestic aversion to democratisation and EU pressure. Therefore, it is necessary to stress the importance of the triangular interaction between domestic factors, the EU and Russia when evaluating EU democracy promotion in the EaP.

The triangular relation image is valuable to the analysis of political processes taking place in the shared neighbourhood. Faced with a growing Manichean discourse on the relations between the EU and Russia, the image allows for a nuanced appraisal of the dynamics and events that challenge security in the EaP region. Hard security concerns can take the priority over long-term democratic aspirations. This holds true also for the EU, which is now confronted with threats at its borders and must work to maintain peace. The difficult trade-off between democracy promotion and security interests in the short-term may reveal that the EU is no "white knight".¹⁶² Guaranteeing peace and security is a vital objective, and this requires coming to terms with an influential and assertive Russia. Moscow's readiness to make use of 'hard power' in order to preserve and enhance its influence in the post-Soviet

¹⁶¹ Way, "Weak States", *op. cit.*, p. 455.

¹⁶² Sasse, "Who cares about Transnistria?", *op. cit.*

space can be interpreted as a muscular way of responding to the EU's EaP, which is underpinned by a long-term strategic vision linking regional security to democratisation. Yet, while the need to address urgent security needs might reduce consistency in democracy promotion in the short term, the EU should not lose sight of the ultimate objectives of the EaP: turning a blind eye to the demands for democracy, governmental accountability and freedom coming from its neighbourhood would further complicate the attainment of long-lasting and sustainable security.

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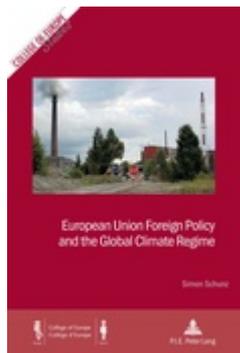
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