



**Regionalization as the Pillar of the EU Foreign Policy:
Exploring the EU's Policy Practices of Regionalization towards the South Caucasus**

A Dissertation Presented

to

the Institute for European Studies of Tbilisi State University

by

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In Partial Fulfilment of the
Requirements for the Degree of the
Doctor of Philosophy in European Studies

Tbilisi, Georgia
July, 2023

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Table 1: Economic Support instruments of EU's practices of Regionalization towards South Caucasus over time

Financial Instrument	Beneficiaries	Duration	Budget
TACIS	12 CIS Members: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan.	1991-2007	€ 7.3 billion
ENPI	17 Countries of Eastern and Southern borders of the Union: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine (referred to by the European Union as the West Bank and Gaza Strip), Syria (Cooperation with Syria is currently suspended due to the political situation in the country) and Tunisia	2007-2013	€ 11.2 billion
ENI	16 Countries of the Eastern and Southern borders of the Union: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine (referred to by the European Union as the West Bank and Gaza Strip), Syria (cooperation with Syria is currently suspended due to the political situation), Tunisia	2014 - 2020	€ 15.43 billion
NDICI	Third countries in the Neighbourhood (including Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia), Sub-Saharan	2021 - 2027	€ 79.5 billion • Geographic Programmes: €60.3 bn

	<p>Africa; Asia and Pacific; Americas and the Caribbean.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Geographic Programmes: All third countries except for candidates and potential candidates as defined in the IPA III Regulation and overseas countries and territories • Thematic Programmes: All third countries as well as overseas countries and territories • Rapid Response Actions: All third countries as well as overseas countries and territories 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thematic Programmes: €6.358 bn • Rapid Response: €3.182 bn • “Cushion”: €9.53 bn
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Table 2. ENPI assistance through the regional programme East; Source: (European Commission Directorate General Development and Cooperation - EuropeAid, 2014)









Regional Indicative Programme (RIP) 2007-2010	Programmed	Committed
Networks (transport, energy, SME)	25-35%	28%
Environment protection and forestry	25-35%	20%
Border and migration management, fight against organised transnational crime, customs	20-30%	30%
People to people activities, information and support	10-15%	19%
Landmines, explosive remnants, small arms and light weapons	5-10%	3%
Total RIP 2007-2010	223.5 EUR M	EUR 140 M
Regional Indicative Programme (RIP) 2010-2013*	Programmed	Committed
Democracy, good governance and stability	30.7%	24%
Economic development	20.7%	17%
Climate change, energy and environment	25.8%	13%
Advancing integration with the EU and regional cooperation, including civil society facility	22.8%	38%
Total RIP 2010-2013	EUR 348.57M	EUR 432 M
Grand total Regional East 2007-2013	EUR 572.07M	EUR 572 M

Table 3. ENPI Allocations to Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia.

Source: Author, based on European Commission Directorate General Development and Cooperation - EuropeAid, 2014.

2007-2010	2011-2013	Grand Total 2007-2013
National Indicative Programme (NIP) Armenia		
Programmed		
EUR 98.4M	EUR 157.3M	EUR 255.7M
Committed		
EUR 97.4M	EUR 144.1M	EUR 281.5M
National Indicative Programme (NIP) Azerbaijan		
Programmed		
EUR 92M	EUR 122.5M	EUR 214.5M
Committed		
EUR 68M	EUR 75M	EUR 143.5M
National Indicative Programme (NIP) Georgia		
Programmed		
EUR 120.4M	EUR 180.3M	EUR 300.7M
Committed		
EUR 117.4M + Special Measures for IDPS 2008-2009 - EUR 105M	EUR 180.7 M	EUR 403.1M

Table 4. Prominence and Dominance of EU's Instruments of Regionalization in the South Caucasus

EU's Instruments of Regionalization in the South Caucasus				
Milestones	Economic Assistance	Cooperation Agreements	Political Dialogue	Conditionality
TACIS 1991-2006	✓ Dominant			 ✓ Implicit
PCAs 1996; 1999	✓	✓ Dominant	✓ Dominant	 ✓ Implicit
ENPI 2007-2013	✓ Dominant	✓	✓	 ✓ Implicit
ENP AP 2006	✓	✓ Prominent	✓ Prominent	 ✓ Implicit
ENI (EaP) 2014- 2020	✓ Dominant	✓	✓	 ✓ Implicit
ENP PP's 2018	✓	✓ Prominent	✓ Dominant	 ✓ Implicit
AA/DCFTA 2014	✓	✓ Prominent	✓ Dominant	 ✓ Implicit
CEPA 2017	✓	✓ Prominent	✓ Dominant	 ✓ Implicit

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- AA - Association Agreement
- ACP - African, Caribbean, and Pacific Group of States
- AISBL - Association Internationale Sans But Lucratif (International Non-Profit Association)
- APA - Eastern Partnership Integration and Cooperation
- APs - Action Plans
- ASEAN - Association of Southeast Asian Nations
- ASEM - Asia–Europe Meeting
- AU - African Union
- BSS - Black Sea Synergy
- BSEC - Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organisation
- BRICS - Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa group
- CBDN - South Caucasus Business and Development Network
- CEER - Council of European Energy Regulators
- CEPA - Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement
- CEE - Central and Eastern Europe
- CFSP - Common Foreign and Security Policy
- CIB - Comprehensive Institution-Building
- CIS - Commonwealth of Independent States
- COM - Communication
- CORLEAP - Conference of the Regional and Local Authorities for the Eastern Partnership
- DCFTAs - Deep and Comprehensive Free-Trade Areas
- DCI - Development Cooperation Instrument
- DG NEAR - Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations
- EaP - Eastern Partnership
- EaPIC - Eastern Partnership Integration and Cooperation

- EAEU - Eurasian Economic Union
- EC - European Commission (Inferred from the context)
- ECHO - European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
- EDF - European Development Fund
- EEA - European External Action Service
- EIB - European Investment Bank
- EIDHR - European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights
- EIP - Eastern Partnership Integration and Cooperation
- ENI - European Neighbourhood Instrument
- ENP - European Neighbourhood Policy
- ENPI - European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument
- ENP APs - European Neighbourhood Policy Action Plans
- ENUF - Energy and Urban Fuels
- EPC - Eastern Partnership Cooperation
- EPRS - European Parliamentary Research Service
- ERASMUS - European Union's program for education, training, youth, and sports
- ES - Eastern Partnership Integration and Cooperation
- ESDP - European Security and Defence Policy
- EUR - Euro (currency)
- EUR-Lex - European Union law and publications portal
- Euronest - Euronest Parliamentary Assembly
- FLEG - Forest Law Enforcement and Governance
- FSP - Food Security Programme
- GDP - Gross Domestic Product
- HLTF - High-Level Task Force
- IASC - Integrated Assistance Strategy for the South Caucasus
- IBM - Integrated Border Management
- IBP - Integrated Border Management
- IBSA - India, Brazil, and South Africa forum

- IGC - Intergovernmental Commission
- INOGATE - Interstate Oil and Gas Transport to Europe
- INSC - Instrument for Nuclear Safety Cooperation
- IPA III - Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance III
- LAFTA - Latin American Free Trade Association
- LDC - Least Developed Country
- MERCOSUR - Mercado Común del Sur
- MLA - Basic Multilateral Agreement on International Transport for Development of the Corridor Europe-the Caucasus-Asia
- MFF - Multiannual Financial Framework
- MEDA - Mediterranean region (context specific)
- MIP - Multiannual Indicative Programme
- MLA - Basic Multilateral Agreement on International Transport for Development of the Corridor Europe-the Caucasus-Asia
- MLF - Medium Long-term Financial Resources
- MNC - Multinational Corporation
- MP - Multiannual Programme
- NIF - Neighbourhood Investment Fund
- NIS - Newly Independent States
- NRA - New Regionalism Approach
- NRF - Neighbourhood and Regional Financing
- OSCE - Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
- OSF - Office of the Special Facilitator for the Transnistrian Settlement Process
- PAC - Pan-African Congress
- PCAs - Partnership and Cooperation Agreements
- PCD - Policy Coherence for Development
- PDCS - Project Development and Co-financing Scheme
- Ph.D. - Doctor of Philosophy
- PHARE - Poland and Hungary: Assistance for Restructuring their Economies

- PM - Programme Management
- PS - Permanent Secretariat
- PTAs - Preferential Trade Agreements
- REC - Regional Environmental Centre (for the Caucasus)
- REC-C - Regional Environmental Centre for the Caucasus
- RBA - Region-Building Approach
- REI - Resource Efficiency Initiative
- RSP - Regional Strategy Paper
- SADCC - Southern African Development Coordination Conference
- SAP - Strategic Partnership Agreement
- SC - South Caucasus
- SCPI - South Caucasus Parliamentary Initiative
- SME - Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
- SOMs - Senior Officials Meetings
- SPARK - Support to SME Development in the South Caucasus
- SWD - Staff Working Document
- TACIS - Technical Aid to the Commonwealth of Independent States
- TENs - Trans-European Networks
- TIF - Trade and Investment Facility
- TRACECA - Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia
- TTIP - Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership
- UK - United Kingdom
- UN - United Nations
- USA - United States of America
- VSP - Vilnius Summit Process
- WBC - Western Balkan Countries
- WBIF - Western Balkans Investment Framework
- € - Euro (currency)
- *ibid.*: Latin abbreviation meaning "in the same place" or "in the same source"

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to my parents, who have always believed in my potential and supported my academic pursuits. Their unwavering encouragement and faith in my abilities have been a pillar of strength throughout this journey.

I must acknowledge my daughter, Taia, whose understanding and patience throughout the long hours and days devoted to this research has been a beacon of resilience, inspiring me to forge ahead.

My esteemed supervisors, Prof. Dr. Sergi Kapanadze and Prof. Dr. Matteo Fumagalli, deserve heartfelt thanks. Their invaluable guidance, expert criticism, and readiness to accommodate my exigencies have indubitably contributed to the caliber of this doctoral dissertation.

Special recognition must be accorded to renowned scholars, Prof. Dr. Suyzanna Vasilyan and Prof. Dr. Tracey German. Their prolific work in this field has been a source of academic inspiration, and our personal interactions have been instrumental in the conception of this thesis.

I extend my appreciation to the administration of the Institute for European Studies of Tbilisi State University for their unwavering support throughout the entirety of the PhD program. I also wish to acknowledge the generosity of the European Union for funding the project under which this PhD programme was established.

Finally, I express gratitude to myself for the perseverance exhibited during this demanding journey. The process was strenuous, and at times the finish line seemed elusive. Nonetheless, through sustained effort and relentless determination, I managed to navigate through the challenges.

ABSTRACT

This doctoral dissertation addresses a significant gap in academic literature by scrutinizing the European Union's (EU) role as a regionalizing actor, specifically in regions where the geopolitical climate might hinder cooperation or those predominantly defined by their relationship with the EU. The South Caucasus, a region marked by intricate intra and inter-state conflicts and lacking a clear regional identity, serves as an illustrative case study.

The research methodology employs both content analysis and process tracing, leveraging a vast dataset of primary sources. These sources encompass, but are not limited to, regulations, agreements, strategic papers, declarations, and communications from the European Commission. This comprehensive collection provides an extensive view of the EU's regionalization practices in the South Caucasus, tracing its evolution from the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the ensuing independence of these states to the present day.

Informed by the analytical framework proposed by Karen E. Smith (2003), the study explores the four key instruments of foreign policy regionalization. An exhaustive investigation reveals the dominant instruments in the EU's regionalization strategy being economic assistance and political dialogue, while bilateral cooperation agreements also emerge as prominent, and the conditionality is mostly implicit.

Further, the research illuminates two critical facets of the EU's regionalization strategy: standardization of policies for efficiency and promotion of regional cooperation. Five significant patterns emerge from the EU's regionalization practices, namely: an adaptive attitude, a multi-faceted approach, inclusive differentiation, alignment with the EU's core values, and integration of global considerations.

These research findings are subsequently corroborated using Lenz's (2008) framework, which places the study at the intersection of constructivist and institutionalist schools of thought. This approach underscores the EU's dual role as an actor and a model in its foreign policy, exhibiting both strategic and routinized behavior and pursuing possessive and milieu goals. These traits harmoniously align with the dual-faceted regionalization strategy and the five key patterns of behavior, as identified in this thesis.

Ambitiously, the dissertation claims to present a novel conceptual framework that could significantly enhance understanding of the EU's foreign policy practices in regions with similar geopolitical contexts. Consequently, it not only enriches the scholarly discourse on the EU's regionalization policy, but also encourages further application and validation of its findings.

INTRODUCTION

Bridging the Academic Divide: Unearthing the Gap in Scholarship on EU's External Regionalization Strategy and Justifying Case Selection

The European Union (EU) holds a unique position as a model of regional cooperation, showcasing extraordinary leadership in the meticulous integration of regionalization strategy within its foreign policy apparatus (Smith, 2003; De Lombaerde and Schultz 2009; Babayan, 2012). The EU's dedication to regionalization extends beyond a founding principle embedded in its identity and history, as well as beyond its borders, moulding its interactions with diverse regions and countries in the pursuit of common goals and global welfare. It operates as a powerful engine that drives its foreign policy, acting as a catalyst for peace, economic growth, and prosperity (Vasilyan, 2020; Seco, 2011).

The EU's journey into external regionalization in its foreign policy commenced in the 1960s, with Africa serving as inaugural focus (Commission of the European Communities, 1995). This point marks the beginning of the EU's exploration of external regionalization, mostly demand-driven, in a response to the nations around the world turning to the EU with an increased expectation for it to contribute - a responsibility the EU had self-professed (European Commission, 1995). Over subsequent decades, the EU has cultivated relationships with an array of regions globally, including the Middle East, the Mediterranean, Asia, Latin America, and eventually, Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) (Smith, 2003; Pietrangeli, 2009),

Engagement with the latter region was initiated by the EU in the 1990s as a response to a significant geopolitical shift - the dissolution of the Soviet Union. On the one hand, the EU aimed to regionalize the Central and Eastern European countries with

the ultimate objective of integrating them through the Eastern Enlargement (e.g., through PHARE, Europe Agreements, Membership candidacy, membership). On the other hand, regionalization emerged as an alternative to enlargement for those post-Soviet states that the EU did not see as potential candidates (e.g., through TACIS, PCA, ENP, EaP) (Dolidze, 2022). The latter approach was applied to the sub-region under focus in this PhD thesis - the South Caucasus, where the EU has utilized several regionalization instruments to cluster Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, and to develop a fitting institutional framework under shared regional strategies, thereby encouraging them to collaboratively address common challenges.

The aftermath of the Cold War thus marked a pivotal moment for the European Union (EU) as a global power, suggesting its transition from being a role model to becoming a regionalizing actor. In this evolving landscape, as Kagan (2003) contends, external regionalization has emerged as "Europe's new mission civilisatrice" paving the way for inter-regionalism, a novel pattern in the literature on regionalism, studying EU-to-region relations, in contrast to the comparative regionalism, which meant to compare the EU with other emerging regions. Yet, even though the EU's dedication to promoting regional integration has become a cornerstone of its foreign policy, as acknowledged by the EU itself (European Commission, 1995), scholars broadly agree that regionalization as the specific facet of EU's foreign policy practices, still forms a conspicuous gap in the academic literature even under the inter-regionalist accounts that study EU's bloc-to-bloc relations (De Lombaerde and Schultz, 2009).

Currently, the predominant sources of information on the topic of EU as a regionalizing actor are media articles, opinion pieces, and other online content. While they offer some insights, these sources often lack the rigorous methodological standards inherent in academic research. This PhD thesis, therefore, presents a significant opportunity to fill this void by conducting a methodologically sound exploration of this overlooked domain.

Having emphasized the overall lack of in-depth research in the literature concerning the EU as a regionalizing actor, it is crucial to underscore the existence of yet another critical gap within this already underexplored domain. This specific void pertains to the EU's regionalization practices in the context of the non-traditional regions that lack a well-established regional identity outside of the EU's involvement, and regions where geopolitical realities and inherent constraints make the regionalization endeavour politically daunting.

To expound on this, the academic discourse diverges significantly when it comes to defining and characterizing 'region' as a label, resulting in a multi-layered understanding of the EU's region-to-region interactions. On one end of this spectrum, 'region' in inter-regionalism could signify relationships between well-established regional blocs, such as the relationship between the European Union (EU) and the African Union (AU), Mercado Común del Sur (Mercosur), or the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Conversely, at the other end of this continuum, inter-regionalism could encapsulate relations between a formally recognized regional entity like the EU and a collection of countries that lack a conventional regional identity, but are externally labelled as such. This includes, for example, the Eastern Partnership (EaP), an EU initiative that is relevant to this PhD thesis given its focus on the South Caucasus.

Further justifying this research focus is the peculiarity that comes with the study of the regions where political circumstances hinder the usual paths to integration, resulting in a distinct model of the EU's region-to-region relations. In such scenarios, the EU tends to advance what Pietrangeli (2009) designates 'functional cooperation', a concept referring to the development of collective capabilities to address common concerns. These may include enhancing transportation networks, modernizing communication infrastructures, or formulating shared economic policies. Such a focus

becomes vital in understanding the EU's regionalization strategies within the context of politically complex regions, such as the South Caucasus. This region is plagued by significant political instability due to interstate conflicts (e.g., the separatist challenges in Abkhazia and so-called South Ossetia of Georgia) and intra-regional disputes (e.g., the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia), with the latter representing the main hinderance for regional cooperation, thus shifting the nature of EU's region-to-region relations towards 'functional cooperation'.

Consequently, the recognition of a twofold deficiency in the current academic literature—pertaining, in particular, to inter-regionalism with an emphasis on the EU as a regionalizing actor, and its regionalization endeavours directed at regions, where geopolitical context is not conducive to cooperation, and/or which only exist in the context of their relationship with the EU—presents a persuasive rationale for initiating research in this under-researched area with the South Caucasus as a pertinent case study.

Articulating the Research Question and Elucidating the Methodological Framework

As per the analysis of Karen E. Smith (2003), in her seminal book "European Union Foreign Policy in a Changing World", the European Union (EU) employs a multi-pronged strategy to stimulate regional cooperation. This strategy encompasses instruments such as (a) economic assistance b) cooperation agreements c) political dialogues and d) conditionality.

Applying this analytical framework, this thesis embarks on a comprehensive exploration of the European Union's strategic regionalization practices towards the

South Caucasus, examining the different instruments of influence and their evolution over time in order to answer the pivotal research inquiry:

“In what ways has the application of the regionalization strategy in the EU's foreign policy towards the South Caucasus been demonstrated in policy practices, which foreign policy instruments have become prominent, and what overarching patterns can be discerned in their implementation over time?”

This question facilitates an all-encompassing exploration of the EU's regionalization practices towards the South Caucasus, spanning from the emergence of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia as independent nations after the breakup of the Soviet Union to the present day.

To navigate the complexities embedded in this question, the thesis employs a two-pronged methodological approach. Firstly, process tracing is used to map the chronological evolution and transformation of the EU's policy practices over time. This method excavates the substratum of policy implementation, revealing the pivotal shifts, discerning underlying trends, and providing crucial context to the temporal dynamics of the EU's regional cooperation strategies.

Secondly, content analysis is harnessed to critically examine an array of policy instruments. This methodological tool enables the parsing of both explicit and implicit manifestations of the regionalization strategy within the chosen primary sources, offering an in-depth understanding of how these practices have been operationalized by the EU.

A unique attribute of this thesis is its staunch commitment to an exhaustive examination of primary sources. This approach lends considerable credibility to the research and safeguards the authenticity of the findings. The exploration remains

tethered to the original documents, offering a viewpoint untainted by secondary interpretations.

The corpus of primary sources at the centre of this exploration includes, but is not limited to, regulations, agreements, declarations, strategy papers, action plans, and communications from the European Commission. This diverse array of primary sources serves as the bedrock of the EU's regionalization strategy, testifying to the substantial volume of work undertaken in this research.

Within this vast collection, the thesis conducts a meticulous examination of each economic support mechanism and cooperation agreement. It chronicles the trajectory of the EU's economic assistance from the early TACIS initiative, progressing through regional cooperation programs like TRACECA and INOGATE, extending to ENPI and ENI, and finally culminating in the current NDICI-Global Europe instrument.

The thesis also methodically dissects various bilateral and multilateral accords between the EU and the South Caucasus, along with their respective policy frameworks and initiatives. This exploration spans from the initial Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs), moving to Action Plans and Partnership Priorities under the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) umbrella. It places particular emphasis on initiatives such as the Eastern Partnership (EaP), related Association Agreement (AA) with Georgia, Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with Armenia, and the Black Sea Synergy (BSS) initiative.

By committing to the exhaustive analysis of primary sources and tracing the regionalization strategies from the breakup of the Soviet Union to the present day, this thesis not only attests to the authenticity of its findings but also unveils the considerable magnitude of the research undertaken. The interpretation of countless documents testifies to the depth and breadth of the analysis performed.

Exploring Research Findings and Establishing the Thesis Statement

This comprehensive research has sought answers to three vital elements encapsulated within the research question: understanding the application of the EU's regionalization strategy towards the South Caucasus; identifying the foremost foreign policy instruments employed in this strategy; and discerning the overarching patterns in the implementation of these instruments over time. Through meticulous research undertaken, it has arrived at several illuminating conclusions:

1. Application of Regionalization Strategy:

In response to the first element, the research identifies dual practices in the application of the EU's regionalization strategy. The first practice reflects a pragmatic approach aiming to group Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia of within a cohesive institutional framework, simplifying EU-to-region interactions. The second practice is strategic, focused on promoting regional cooperation as an effective tool for addressing shared challenges and advancing broader EU foreign policy objectives. These dual practices are analyzed in detail through the lens of economic instruments and cooperation agreements in the 'Findings' chapter.

2. Principal Foreign Policy Instruments:

The second element of the research question is addressed by analyzing the comparative prominence and dominance of the four primary instruments used by the EU: economic assistance, cooperation agreements, political dialogue, and conditionality. Through content analysis and process tracing, economic assistance

emerges as the most dominant instrument, beginning with the TACIS program and persisting thereafter. Political dialogue, introduced later, has played a substantial role in shaping the EU's regionalization strategy. Bilateral cooperation agreements, though initially absent, have found their place over time. Lastly, conditionality, while a consistent feature, does not explicitly relate to regional cooperation. Instead, it is tied to respect for democratic values, human rights, and market economy reforms. The dominance and prominence of these instruments are illustrated in Table 4.

3. Overarching Patterns in the Implementation:

Finally, the research unearths five overarching patterns evident in the EU's regionalization strategy:

- 1) **Adaptive Attitude:** This refers to the EU's dynamic and responsive approach, enabling it to customize its policies to the unique geopolitical, economic, and social circumstances of the South Caucasus;*
- 2) **Multi-Faceted Approach:** The EU adopts an approach that extends beyond conventional frameworks, addressing multiple sectors, not limited to economic and political factors but also including social, infrastructural, environmental, and security aspects;*
- 3) **Inclusivity combined with Differentiation:** This characterizes the EU's approach of broad inclusion combined with strategic differentiation, recognizing collective implications of policy actions while respecting unique circumstances of individual states;*
- 4) **Alignment with EU's Core Values:** The EU ensures that its core values guide their policies and partnerships, aiming to steer South Caucasus states towards shared principles like human rights, rule of law, democratic principles, and market economy endorsement;*

5) *Integration of Global Considerations*: This signifies the EU's broader vision that extends beyond regional issues, incorporating transnational implications of their strategic undertakings and accounting for broader geopolitical contexts.

A more nuanced understanding/ definitions of each pattern is represented in the Findings section of this thesis.

These findings culminate in the following **thesis statement**:

*The EU's regionalization strategy in its foreign policy towards the South Caucasus has been demonstrated through two major facets. Firstly, it's manifested in the instigation of policies, programs, and initiatives that group countries together for the sake of standardization and efficiency. Secondly, it's demonstrated in the advocacy for fostering regional cooperation among Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia using **predominant instruments such as economic aid and political dialogue**. The implementation of these instruments has exhibited five overarching patterns over time, specifically: 1. **adaptive attitude** - that reflects a dynamic, responsive strategy; 2. **multi-faceted approach** - acknowledging regionalization as a multi-sector endeavour; 3. **inclusive differentiation** - demonstrating a commitment to embrace all states within the region while acknowledging their unique circumstances and needs for customized initiatives; 4. **an alignment with the EU's core values** - promoting shared principles such as respect for human rights, rule of law, and endorsement of a market economy; and 5. **integration of global considerations** - accounting for broader geopolitical contexts in the regional strategy*

Conceptual Framework for Theorizing the Findings

This doctoral dissertation utilizes Lenz's (2008) conceptual framework to interpret the research findings, situating the analysis at the intersection of constructivism and

institutionalism. The framework, as originally proposed in the paper titled "Problematizing the EU's Model Export to MERCOSUR: Strategies and Motivations," provides an insightful lens through which the EU's regionalization approach in the South Caucasus can be theoretically examined.

Lenz's (2008) conceptual framework, which differentiates between the type of EU behavior, the EU's role, and the EU's objectives, serves as the sole basis for interpreting the findings of this research.

Dichotomy between Routinized and Strategic Actor Behaviour:

Applying Lenz's concepts to the research findings, the EU's adaptive attitude in its regionalization practices towards the South Caucasus fits within the explanation of strategic actor behavior. Conversely, the EU's reliance on routinized behavior is evidenced by its implementation of standardized policies, programs, and initiatives aimed at promoting regional cooperation.

Differentiation between the EU's Role as an Actor and Model:

The research confirms the EU's dual role as an actor and model in its foreign policy towards the South Caucasus, as outlined in Lenz's framework. The EU's firm adherence to its foundational core values reflects its role as a model, while its active promotion of regional cooperation through foreign policy measures underscores its dynamic role as an actor shaping regional dynamics.

Possession vs Milieu Goals:

Lenz's framework highlights the differentiation between possession and milieu goals, and the research findings further substantiate this differentiation in the context of the EU's engagement with the South Caucasus. The EU's pursuit of economic and geopolitical interests aligns with possession goals, while its commitment to aligning

regional strategy with core values and global considerations resonates with milieu goals.

The striking harmony between the research findings of this PhD thesis and Lenz's (2008) conceptual framework reinforces the robustness of the research and render credibility to the findings. This congruence highlights the potential generalizability of the conclusions drawn in this study and strengthens its academic contribution.

In conclusion, the PhD thesis harnesses the power of Lenz's (2008) conceptual framework to unveil the dynamics of the EU's regionalization practices in the South Caucasus. The successful alignment of the research findings with this framework underscores the validity of the thesis findings, thus further implying strong potential for generalizability.

Contributions to Scholarship

Often undervalued in the domain of inter-regionalism studies is the characterization of the European Union (EU) as a pivotal regionalizing actor. This thesis provides a careful exploration of this premise, underscoring the EU's regionalization strategies with the South Caucasus as a case study. This enriches the understanding of an area that hasn't received enough scholarly attention.

The selection of the South Caucasus addresses two key knowledge gaps in this lesser-explored area of study. The first pertains to the EU's unique approach to engaging with non-traditional regions — regions where identities are not solidly established outside of their relations with the EU. This particular attribute comes to the forefront when discussing the South Caucasus.

The South Caucasus is an intriguing case with its contested regional identity, sparking debates among scholars and the nations within it. The term 'region' is often considered an external construct that does not accurately reflect the area's complex internal dynamics, suggesting a regional identity bound mainly by geographic closeness.

A noteworthy aspect of EU-region relations emerges when considering the South Caucasus' interactions with the EU. These interactions play a pivotal role in the region's recognition. The conventional understanding of a 'region' is redefined by the EU through its political discourse and policy measures. The Eastern Partnership, a region defined by the EU that incorporates the South Caucasus, exemplifies this dynamic, defining a politically constructed region that includes the South Caucasus as a sub-region.

The second knowledge gap delves into the EU's regionalization attempts in areas where geopolitical intricacies hinder cooperation. Established regionalization strategies often falter in regions marred by unstable internal and external factors that disrupt smooth cooperation. This issue, closely tied to the first, echoes profoundly in the South Caucasus, a region shaped by intra and inter-state conflicts, and a volatile political climate leading to severed diplomatic ties between two out of the three nations.

The decision to scrutinize the EU's regionalization approach towards the South Caucasus is a calculated attempt to address these gaps in academic discourse. While a small number of scholars have traversed this research landscape, most existing literature predominantly assesses the success of the EU's regionalization efforts in the South Caucasus, often adopting a critical viewpoint and proposing policy amendments. This study identified a need for a more comprehensive exploration of the EU's regionalization policy, its application mechanisms, and patterns, moving beyond conventional success-oriented evaluations.

By refocusing attention on comprehending the operationalization of the EU's strategy — the nature, evolution, and common practices of the EU's regionalization tool deployment, this thesis refrains from merely evaluating their success or failure. It provides meaningful contributions to the vast interregionalism literature, casting the EU as a regionalizing actor, particularly in regions that are contested, lack regional identity, or present a challenging geopolitical environment for cooperation. Consequently, this research contributes to the specific literature on EU-South Caucasus relations by delving deeper into the implementation of the EU's regionalization in the South Caucasus, concentrating on exploring the mechanisms and common patterns of applicability rather than assessing policy outcomes.

Finally, with the identification of two distinct strategies used in the EU's regionalization practices application and five broad behavioral patterns, this doctoral thesis presents an ambitious endeavour to construct a conceptual framework for interpreting the EU's foreign policy approaches towards regions where cooperation is challenged by geopolitical factors, or regions whose identities are contested and whose existence is contextual to their relationship with the EU.

Thesis Structure

Upon conclusion of the introduction, this doctoral thesis embarks on an analytical journey through 4 sections, each designed to elucidate a distinct aspect of the overarching research narrative.

SECTION 1. "Comprehensive Literature Review"

The thesis commences with a two-part literature review designed to establish a robust theoretical and empirical foundation. The first part, spread across two distinct

chapters, explores the conceptual evolution of regionalism literature, focusing particularly on the EU's shift from being a model of regionalism to an active regionalizing actor. The second part scrutinizes the EU's regionalization of the South Caucasus, with eight sub-chapters examining an assortment of works spanning various formats, authors, and perspectives, followed by an overall concluding chapter. Literature review sets the tone for the forthcoming research analysis, identifies gaps in existing studies, and constructs a solid foundation for the entire doctoral thesis by providing a comprehensive understanding of the scholarship on EU's regionalization practices.

SECTION 2. "Instruments of the EU's Policy Practices of Regionalization in the South Caucasus: Process Tracing and Content Analysis"

The second section delves into the heart of the research, deploying process tracing and content analysis as the principal methodological tools. This section, through its four distinct parts, guides the reader through an exploration of the EU's policy practices of regionalization in the South Caucasus by undertaking a detailed content analysis and process tracing of the application of the following critical policy instruments – Economic Assistance, Cooperation Agreement, Political Dialogue, and Conditionality.

SECTION 3. "Findings – An Ambitious Attempt of Generating a Conceptual Framework for Understanding the EU's Practices of Regionalization"

This section elucidates the findings of the research. It is divided into three distinct parts. The first part explores the twofold application of regionalization practices through two primary chapters, one elucidating the application through economic support instruments and the other through cooperation agreements. Each chapter is further divided into two sub-chapters, which delve into two different dimensions of regionalization practices: I. Grouping together and Standardizing, and II. Promoting

Regional Cooperation. The next part identifies five overarching patterns in the EU's regionalization practices in the South Caucasus. Each pattern is examined in separate dedicated chapters with four subchapters, each emphasizing the prominence of the pattern in the application of the four regionalization instruments - Economic Assistance, Cooperation Agreement, Political Dialogue, and Conditionality. The third and final part of this section substantiates the prominence and dominance of the EU's instruments of regionalization in the South Caucasus and provides a table to illustrate this. The section concludes with a chapter that presents a final thesis statement.

SECTION 4. "Conceptualizing and Theorizing"

This section comprises of two chapters. First chapter introduces a theoretical and conceptual framework for analysing the findings on the application of the EU's regionalization strategy towards the South Caucasus. The second chapter applies the identified conceptual framework to theorize the research findings. Following these sections, there is a concluding chapter that encapsulates the entirety of the thesis.

Please note that the introduction and the conclusion of the overall thesis are not included in the section counts.

SECTION 1

COMPREHENSIVE LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter Introduction

The objective of the literature review within this doctoral thesis is to align the study both theoretically and practically within the existing scholarship. Consequently, the review is structured in two distinct sections. The first focuses on the conceptual progression of the concentrates on regionalization, providing a comprehensive overview, while the second evaluates the EU's Regionalization Policy in the South Caucasus, forming an integrative review.

The initial part, focusing on the conceptual evolution of regionalism literature, is structured in two chapters. The first chapter appraises the European Union as a model of regional integration, thereby surveying pertinent literature on comparative regionalism. Conversely, the second chapter discusses the European Union as a regionalizing actor, thus examining key literature on inter-regionalism. These chapters track the progression of regionalism literature from its inception through comparative regionalism and onwards to inter-regionalism. Simultaneously, they chronicle the EU's evolution from a model of regionalism to a regionalizing actor, assisting in understanding the genesis of scholarship on EU's regionalizing practices. This progression also aids in locating the narrow and specific subject of my research, the EU's Policy Practices of Regionalization in the South Caucasus, within this existing scholarship, taking into account the identified research gaps.

This thesis particularly emphasizes the under-researched area of inter-regionalism, with a specific focus on the EU's unique practices of bloc-to-bloc relations, which consist of the EU forming relationships with 'blocs' that it has created, rather than

with conventional blocs. This focus is particularly relevant for this thesis, given its examination of EU-South Caucasus relations¹.

After reviewing the literature on regionalism and pinpointing to the lacunas withing the sub-field of inter-regionalism as per relations between the EU and EU-constructed blocs, the second part of the literature review undertakes an integrative evaluation of literature examining the EU's regionalization policy in the South Caucasus. This section emphasizes an empirical focus, moving beyond theoretical analysis. It is divided into eight sub-chapters, each providing a review and concluding observations on specific publications.

Works by Vasilyan (2020), Babayan (2012), German (2012), Boonstra and Delcour (2015), Delcour and Duhot (2011), Simao (2013), Van den Boom (2017), and Ohanyan (2015) are scrutinized to understand the current state of scholarship on the EU's regionalization practices towards the South Caucasus. The selected literature, chosen for their depth, represents what is primarily available in the academic realm, given the scant scientific research beyond media articles, op-eds, and other online publications lacking a rigorous research methodology. The chosen works encompass a variety of formats—books, book chapters, peer-reviewed articles, research papers, and policy papers—and are authored by both eminent and lesser-known academics. Their inclusion was deliberate, intended to represent the broad spectrum of perspectives on the subject matter, including assessments, critiques, informative pieces, and studies of policy perceptions from the South Caucasus region or analyses of successes and failures. Consequently, this selection provides a comprehensive picture of the scholarship, including the form and content of the available

¹ The South Caucasus is a sub-region of the Eastern Partnership region politically constructed by the European Union. What is more, the South Caucasus itself could be understood as an externally-generated label for Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia whose geographical proximity is the sole qualifying attribute for them being considered a region.

publications, and importantly, positions them in the academic discourse vis-à-vis this PhD thesis.

PART 1. Reviewing Conceptual Progression of the Literature on Regionalization

(1.1) European Union as a Model of Regional Integration: Comparative Regionalism

The original theories pertinent to the discussion in this thesis were ambitious, with a goal to develop a holistic 'theory of regional integration' largely based on European experiences. Later, these theories expanded to include other regional integration instances, birthing 'comparative regionalism'.

Two pioneering theories, Transactionalism and Neo-functionalism, were at the forefront. Transactionalism, formulated by Karl Deutsch (1957), explored the implications of increasing intra-regional transactions on integration. On the other hand, Neo-functionalism, developed by Ernst B. Haas (1958), viewed regional integration as a cascade of 'spillovers' from interrelated policy fields, creating a pathway towards intensified regional integration and political unity.

These are exactly the theories whose venture beyond Europe gave birth to the 'comparative regionalism'. The term 'comparative regionalism' denotes the examination of regions and regionalism from a comparative point of view. Originating in the 1960s and 70s, the discipline was predominantly influenced by the theory and implementation of European integration, with regional integration being the focal point. During the initial discussions, often labeled as the 'old regionalism', comparison was deemed important.

However, it was eventually acknowledged that the regionalization practices in other parts of the world strayed from the European model.

“Yet the emerging regionalism is markedly different from that in Europe...”, - 1995 Communication from the Commission reads.

Söderbaum (2015) in his work, "Early, Old, New and Comparative Regionalism: The Scholarly Development of the Field", outlines how in the developing world, particularly in Latin America, Africa, and to an extent Asia, the concept of regionalism has been closely linked to the struggle against colonialism and the drive for economic development in newly independent states. Influenced by structuralist economic development ideas, the focus of regionalism in these regions was not so much on integration, as in Europe, but more on development, state-driven industrialization, and nation-building through protectionism and import-substitution.

Latin America's strategy, led by the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America, sought to create a broader economic space to boost regional import substitution when national capacity was exhausted. This strategy aimed for industrialization, economic growth, and investment. However, initiatives like the Latin American Free Trade Association (LAFTA) failed to make significant impact due to internal conflicts, political instability, and dependence on other structures.

The African regionalism debate was influenced by both European and Latin American intellectual discussions. Despite creating several state-led regional frameworks after independence, most of the ambitious plans did not materialize. The Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC) aimed to work against apartheid and external dependence but was primarily a project coordination and implementation scheme funded by European donors.

In Asia, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was established as a joint effort to consolidate nation-states and enhance stability. Despite policy declarations and attempts to create joint industrial ventures and trading schemes, their impact was relatively low. However, ASEAN has significantly consolidated over time, warranting further analysis under the new regionalism.

Against this empirical background, the application of the theories of European integration outside the European context resulted in the revelation that integration processes didn't consistently follow the same linear or inevitable path as proved true in the case of Europe. This instigated an examination of the prerequisites for profound and successful integration. These prerequisites were largely determined by elements intrinsic to each integration process such as the countries' size and symmetry, the style of decision-making, the flexibility of the actors involved, the role and sway of regional institutions, and the belief systems of regional policy-makers (See, e.g. Haas & Schmitter, 1964; Nye, 1965;). Interestingly, these researchers, mainly neo-functionalists, did not consider external elements in their assumptions on regional integration dynamics. Even when such elements were incorporated in their works, they were usually not fully conceptualized or systematically utilized (See, e.g., (Schmitter, 1969; Nye, 1968).

Among some exceptions William Avery (1973) should be mentioned with his work on “the Extra-Regional Transfer of Integrative Behavior”, though this kind of research did not progress beyond the preliminary formation of hypotheses as the waning interest in regionalism towards the end of the 1970s at the same time resulted in decreased focus on this field of study. Thus, the initial efforts to examine the EC as an external actor in regionalization have been halted.

Following the downturn of the concept of regionalism in the 70s and 80s, it regained momentum following the end of the Cold War.

During the 1990s, a significant expansion of regionalism-focused literature marked the dawn of the "new regionalism" era. This period saw a recognition of the global, complex, and multi-dimensional nature of regionalism, encompassing an array of policy areas and engaging a diverse set of state and non-state actors across varied institutional frameworks.

The research environment during this time, however, was typified by theoretical discrepancies, diverse methodological approaches, and segregated disciplines based on regional and thematic specializations.

Heated discussions were happening on the definitions and nuances of "old" and "new" regionalism, as detailed by Väyrynen (2003). Scholars from this era often spotlighted Europe as the model case of regionalism, a reflection of the lingering influences of old regionalism, as discussed by Laursen (2010). Yet, advocates of "new regionalism" contested this Eurocentric stance, advocating for diverse theoretical perspectives that focused equally on state and non-state actors within both formal and informal institutions, as laid out by Shaw et al. (2012).

These changes unfolded against a backdrop of global shifts, including the end of the Cold War, intensification of economic globalization, concerns about multilateral trading order's stability, and the restructuring of nation-states. In response to these changes, scholars sought to reevaluate existing theories, leading to the emergence of a spectrum of new perspectives.

The study of regionalism during this period was dominated by rationalist theories, centered on the origins, shape, and consequences of regional organizations and arrangements. (See, e.g., Laursen, 2003; Mansfield and Milner, 1997; Mattli, 1999; Moravcsik, 1993). However, the field also saw the emergence of constructivist and reflectivist approaches to regionalism, questioning the core assumptions of rationalist theories and putting a spotlight on the role of norms, identities, and non-state actors in regionalism (e.g., Neumann, 1994; Hettne and Söderbaum, 2000).

Söderbaum's (2004) "new regionalism approach" (NRA), and Iver B. Neumann's "region-building approach" (RBA) are particularly noteworthy. The former posits that

regions are social constructs and there are no given regionalist interests. According to NRA, regions are fluid, subject to change and shaped by interaction and shared understanding. The latter emphasizes the role of region-builders in defining regions. Neumann (2003) asserted that regions are constructed by region-builders as part of a political project, thus making the act of defining a region inherently political.

Furthermore, a tension emerged between structural, macro-oriented approaches and those emphasizing micro-level specifics of agencies and processes. Yet, this was seen more as complementary rather than conflicting, with each perspective illuminating different aspects of regional politics (Neumann, 2003).

Overall, the study of "new regionalism" marked a period of intellectual growth but was also characterized by some confusion and rivalry. These emerging theories mirrored a changing world order, offering a richer and more nuanced understanding of regionalism in a global context.

This fragmented academic landscape underwent a significant transformation in the late 2000s, which laid the groundwork for the emergence of comparative regionalism as a well-defined field of study. The transformation was marked by a growing acceptance of a spectrum of theories and methodologies, fostering a wider comparative perspective across different regions and policy spheres. This evolution led to the disassembly of the previous Eurocentric focus, replacing it with a broader, more inclusive global purview.

As a forerunner in the new regionalism school of thought, Hettne (2005) asserted that the contrast often drawn between old and new regionalism was usually overstated or misinterpreted. He suggested that after a twenty-year period of new regionalism discourse, it was crucial to shift towards a more comparative approach that appreciated insights from both European-centric and global perspectives.

Echoing Hettne's (2005) perspective, notable scholars made substantial contributions, demonstrating a blend of European and non-European viewpoints. For instance, Telò's (2009) work stands out for its global scrutiny of various regionalism models and the interplay with the European Union. His work features a broad spectrum of thought leadership from premier academics in the realm of European studies and global regionalism.

Warleigh's, Robinson's and Rosamond's (2011) effort made strides in bridging the intellectual gap between EU and non-EU experts. Their comprehensive work provided not only an inclusive introduction and conceptual framework but also included a series of case studies encapsulating the essence of regionalism across diverse geographical landscapes. This compendium, featuring expert analyses from Africa to North America, showcased the synergy between acclaimed academics representing a spectrum of regional studies.

By the mid-2010s, comparative regionalism had firmly established itself as a distinct field of study, a fact underscored by the significant contributions of several esteemed scholars. Acharya (2012), influential in setting the research agenda during this period, effectively differentiated the prevailing interest in regions and regionalism from earlier methodologies and trends. Börzel and Risse (2016), meanwhile, provided one of the most comprehensive analyses in the field of comparative regionalism. Their work, divided into four primary themes: approaches, regional orders, policy fields, and regional institutions, serves as an authoritative source for scholars and students alike. In their respective research, Engel et al. (2017) scrutinized how regional configurations worldwide politically adapt to the shifting global order.

Their approach challenges Eurocentrism and investigates regionalism beyond its stated objectives, with a specific emphasis on how regionalism redefines spaces and

asserts sovereignties amidst the dynamics of globalization. Söderbaum (2016), another prominent figure in the field, made significant strides in addressing the intellectual, theoretical, and methodological disagreements within the field. His insights on the evolution and consolidation of regionalism, its comparability, and its relevance across various policy fields have proven valuable, becoming a crucial part of the educational discourse on the subject.

The body of research on regionalism has thus grown significantly since the early 1990s. Much of the current literature focuses on the internal factors that contribute to regionalism, such as the interests, institutions, and identities within a region.

For instance, theories founded on interest-based perspectives interpret regionalism as an outcome derived from negotiation processes among influential actors within a region, based on their distinct interests (see, e.g., Moravcsik, 1998). On the other hand, institutional theories emphasize the role national or regional institutions play in steering these interests (see, e.g., Pierson, 1996), while constructivist theories stress the influence of ideas and cultural traditions (Parsons, 2003). Although these theories differ, they predominantly explain regionalism using factors internal to the regions. Certain scholars such as Duina (2006), and Shaw (2000) debate the feasibility of replicating the EU model, suggesting that regional creation relies primarily on internal factors.

While they acknowledge external influences and global trends, these are often interpreted as being impactful only through the lens of domestic actors and institutions. Some literature, notably from the economic domain, has addressed the influence of external factors. Economists have analyzed regionalism in light of globalization, perceiving it as a rational response to shifts in the global economy (Grugel & Hout, 1998; Gamble & Payne, 1996; Lawrence, 1996). They propose that countries resort to regional integration as a strategy to mitigate impacts of

globalization, such as economic liberalization, cultural homogenization, and increased competition, by pooling resources to form stronger regional entities. Nevertheless, these analyses often regard different trajectories of regionalism as independent responses to analogous global changes.

A smaller set of literature has provided a more comprehensive exploration of the impact of external factors. From this viewpoint, regionalism is heavily influenced by external powers who employ it to advance their strategic interests (Hancock, 2009; Spektor, 2010). These theories scrutinize how global powers like the US, EU, or China have shaped regionalism in different parts of the world. While such a perspective captures a crucial aspect of external influence, it's not the only one, and the EU's role, in particular, necessitates a more nuanced understanding.

Consequently, to further the study of regionalism, there is a demand for a more thorough understanding of the role of the EU as a regionalizing actor.

(1.2) European Union as a Regionalization Actor: Inter-Regionalism

In the aftermath of the Cold War, the European Union (EU) found itself on the brink of new opportunities and challenges as a global power. Nations around the world turned to the EU with an increased expectation for it to financially contribute - a responsibility the EU had self-professed in the 1974 "Resolution on regional integration among developing countries" by stating the Community would "*respond favourably to requests for assistance coming from developing countries or groups of developing countries that are in the process of carrying out the creation or consolidation of economic cooperation or regional integration, in cases where it is anticipated that it can make an efficient contribution.*"

In fact, the European Community (EC) advocated for regional cooperation, beginning in Africa in the 1960s (European Commission, 1995). Before the end of the cold war, the European Union (EU) had already established key engagements in different regions, most notably in Africa, Latin America, and Asia. The EC recognized and supported their efforts towards regional arrangements. This is documented in a significant publication titled "European Community support for regional economic integration efforts among developing countries," issued by the commission in 1995.

Scholars such as Smith (2003), and more recently Pietrangeli (2009) have studied these developments, tracking the EU's initial and principal engagements as an external regionalizing actor. The EU embraced the wave of regionalism that swept across the world after the end of the Cold War and has since provided considerable support to such initiatives.

Notably, the EU's support for moves towards regional integration in the world has been unanimously agreed objective within the Community (European Commission, 1995), which helped further endorse the EU's global persona, as underscored in the Treaty of the European Union (TEU), i.e. the Maastricht Treaty:

"The Union's action on the international scene shall be guided by the principles which have inspired its own creation, development and enlargement, and which it seeks to advance in the wider world: democracy, the rule of law, the universality and indivisibility of human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for human dignity, the principles of equality and solidarity, and respect for the principles of the United Nations Charter and international law" – Article 21 of TEU stipulates.

In this area, the EU has possessed a competitive edge over other global players, stemming from its own structure as a successful regional entity, its wealth of experience, and its commitment to the principles of regional integration. Moreover, in the context of the original passage from the TEU, the EU's emphasis on liberal

democratic values also gave it an advantage during a time when these values were being widely adopted and promoted globally.

Over the past decades, the European Union (EU) has made significant strides towards fostering a more interconnected global environment. It has successfully established bi-regional relationships with numerous regions and regional groupings across the globe, thereby facilitating diplomatic and political dialogues, coordinating shared agendas, and fostering mutual understanding. As part of this endeavor, the EU has been an active participant in negotiating and signing a substantial number of free trade agreements with various economic blocs globally. This strategy has not only bolstered the EU's economic relationships but also facilitated the smooth exchange of goods, services, and ideas. Furthermore, reflecting its commitment to regional integration, the EU has devoted a significant portion of its funding to regional cooperation and integration initiatives (Seco, 2011). Although the precise proportion may vary over time and between regions, the EU's dedication to these projects remains steadfast, highlighting its role as a key global player in promoting regional integration.

Over time, the external regionalization, as Kagan (2003) puts it, has become “Europe’s new mission civilisatrice.” Indeed, the advocacy for regional integration formed a pivotal part of the EU's foreign policy, paving the way for inter-regionalism, a novel pattern in the literature on regionalism, studying cooperation between different regions, rather than comparing them, as in the ‘comparative regionalism’ reviewed in the previous sub-chapter.

As articulated by Rüland (2010), inter-regionalism refers to a formalized relationship among two or more regions, frequently institutionalized through dialogue. This notion has become increasingly pertinent owing to the European Union's (EU) proactive endeavors to foster such relationships starting with Africa (African Union (AU)), and extending to Latin America (Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR)),

Asia Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and almost every other part of the world (see, e.g., Smith, 2003; Warleigh-Lack, 2010; Pietrangeli, 2009).

The EU represents more than just an instance of profound integration. Over time, it has gradually transformed into a global and inter-regional entity, actively supporting the process of regional integration in various corners of the world. Presently, the EU maintains external relations with nearly every nation and most regions globally. It has integrated the principles of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law into its agreements with external partners (See, e.g., Börzel et al., 2008). Especially after the breakup of the Soviet Union, in immediate vicinity, the EU has sought seeks to export a governance package that includes the promotion of regional integration. Inter-regionalism, aimed at stimulating socio-economic development, democracy, and good governance through dialogue and mutual cooperation, has evolved into one of the cornerstones of its foreign policy (See, e.g., Smith, 2003; Telò, Fawcett, & Ponjaert, 2016, De Lombaerde & Schulz, 2009). This is the scholarship that constitutes an umbrella framework within which this PhD thesis is embedded as a concrete case study (Smith, 2003; Telò, Fawcett, & Ponjaert, 2016).

Within this scholarship, the most pivotal work to consider among the monographs is Kren E. Smith's seminal book titled "European Union Foreign Policy in a Changing World" (2003, 2008, 2014). Smith investigates how the EU strives to attain its 5 key foreign policy goals, one of which is fostering regional collaboration, with other four being the promotion of human rights, the promotion of democracy and good governance, the prevention of violent conflicts and the fight against international crime. Pertinent to the PhD thesis is primarily the aspect of regional cooperation, which portrays the EU as an external regionalizing actor. Karen E. Smith (2003) offers case studies of EU's involvement in different regions to exemplify this, and attempts to answer the question of why the EU is adopting a regionalizing approach. This could be due to demands from the regions themselves, as observed in the early stages of

regionalism described in this chapter, or a combination of both altruistic and self-interested motives. According to Smith (2003 2008, 2014) altruistic reasons involve promoting peace and stability, while self-interested could include minimizing the administrative burden of interacting with numerous individual entities and reducing transaction costs by dealing with groups. These dual aspects of regionalization strategies are also examined in this PhD thesis. Furthermore, Karen Smith identifies four main tools used by the EU in its regionalization strategy, which are: 1) economic assistance, 2) cooperation agreements, 3) economic and political dialogue, and 4) conditionality. Smith's conceptualization of each instrument provides a valuable framework for this PhD thesis when analyzing the EU's regionalization practices towards the South Caucasus.

The most recent collective volume "Interregionalism and the European Union: A Post-Revisionist Approach to Europe's Place in a Changing World," edited by Mario Telò, Louise Fawcett, and Frederik Ponjaert (2016), volume investigates the influences and outcomes of the EU's interregional policies, considering the various drivers of regional cooperation. It provides a comprehensive look at the EU's role and the implications of its policies on other regions, providing a detailed analysis and a broad perspective on the topic of interregionalism. Essential to this literature review is the volume's diverse compilation of theoretical viewpoints and empirical studies. Together, these form historical chapters revealing three primary stages of interregional policy-making within the EU and globally. Each stage aligns with a specific wave of regionalism, as identified in the 'New Regionalism' literature, and reflects wider systemic changes in the international order examined by mainstream International Relations.

Another collection of significant work in this area worth highlighting is by De Lombaerde and Schultz (2009). Their work was an earlier effort to emphasize the EU's long-standing policy of promoting regional cooperation and integration. They pointed

out the lack of available literature on the EU's role as a regionalizing actor and underlined the necessity to explore more deeply the EU's active role in fostering regionalization. They argued that scholarly resources on this topic were scarce to the point of being virtually nonexistent. Their edited volume, "The EU and World Regionalism - The Makability of Regions in the 21st Century", was an attempt to fill this gap. The book is a compilation of academic work conducted in this area up until its publication in 2009. It explores how the EU has actively 'pushed' for global regionalization through its inter-regional relations.

Notably, the EU's strategies and activities in the Southern Caucasus, the specific regional focus of this thesis, are also key part of these case studies, authored by Suyzanna Vasilyan (2009). This particular article was later updated and incorporated in Vasilyan's monograph "Moral Power of the European Union in the South Caucasus" as a separate chapter entitled "Moral Power of the EU through its Regionalization Policy in the South Caucasus", which will be reviewed within the next subchapter of the literature review (Vasilyan, 2020). However, prior to that examination, it's crucial to lay a conceptual context with two significant insights from the first chapter of the De Lombaerde and Schultz's (2009) compilation, authored by Giulia Pietrangeli (2009), and entitled 'Supporting Regional Integration and Cooperation Worldwide: An Overview of the European Union Approach'.

Pietrangeli (2009) outlines the ways in which the EU has championed and facilitated global regional integration and cooperation, while highlighting shared characteristics. The analysis reveals that various forms of regionalism, levels of integration, instruments, and objectives coexist under the diverse frameworks of EU external policy. However, the relationships between these elements aren't always transparent, and this lack of clarity has, in some instances, hindered the development of a consistent and effective approach (Pietrangeli, 2009).

Pertaining to the research topic of this thesis, Pietrangeli (2009) in her analysis, delineates the European Union's approach towards regions where political circumstances do not readily lend themselves to integration. In these instances, she argues that the EU has a propensity to enhance functional cooperation, a term which encapsulates the development of collective capabilities to tackle issues of common interest. These issues can be as varied as enhancing transportation networks, modernizing communication infrastructures, or strategizing economic policies. This aspect of the EU's approach is crucial in understanding the organization's regionalization strategies, especially in the context of the South Caucasus region, an area marred by significant political volatility due to interstate conflicts (such as the separatist challenges in Abkhazia and so-called South Ossetia of Georgia) and intra-regional disputes (like the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia). Such regional instabilities inherently complicate comprehensive political integration, thus necessitating a focus on fostering functional cooperation.

Further, Pietrangeli (2009) illuminates the proactive role of the EU in encouraging integration within regions that are not conventionally defined but exist in terms of their affiliations with the Community and its Member States only, citing an example of the ACP (African, Caribbean, and Pacific) group and its sub-regions negotiating Economic Partnership Agreements, as well as the Mediterranean (MEDA) region. Another apt and pertinent to this thesis instance would be the Eastern Partnership region, - a geopolitical construct that is non-existent independently. This partnership encompasses six Eastern European nations – the three South Caucasus countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia) plus Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova. These countries, despite their diverse political landscapes, are united under the umbrella of the European Neighbourhood Policy and Eastern Partnership.

Inter-regionalism is, therefore, a multifaceted concept. Hänggi (2000) identifies three types of inter-regionalism. First, Bi-regionalism or pure inter-regionalism, which

describes group-to-group dialogues organized around the European Union (EU). Examples include EU's dialogues with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and Mercosur. Second, Transregionalism, involving diverse members from more than two regions, often with some organizational infrastructure. Instances include the Asia–Europe Meeting (ASEM) and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). Lastly, Hybrid Inter-regionalism, including intercontinental forums and strategic partnerships between a regional organization and a state. Examples are the Europe–Latin America relations and EU's strategic partnerships with various countries. Recently, a new concept has been introduced within this category, labeled as 'inter-regionalism without regions'. This term is applied to scenarios such as those involving the IBSA forum (including India, Brazil, and South Africa), or BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa). This refers to situations where regional powerhouses engage with each other on the pretense of voicing their regions' interests, but do so without involving their respective regional partners in the discussion (Lehoczki, 2020).

Accordingly, inter-regionalism at one end of the spectrum, it can thus involve cooperation between well-established regional blocs, exemplified by the collaboration between the EU and the African Union (AU), as an example. On the other end, inter-regionalism can signify collaboration between a formal regional entity such as the EU and a group of nations that lack a formal regional identity, akin to the South Caucasus region in the context of this thesis.

Herein lies a significant gap in scholarship on EU's interregional interactions, especially in the context of two unique aspects identified by Pietrangeli (2009), such as the EU's promotion of functional cooperation in politically challenging regions and its proactive role in encouraging integration within unconventional regions. This under-researched area becomes particularly evident in studies on the South Caucasus region, where only a few scholars have made significant contributions.

PART 2. Reviewing Literature on the EU's Regionalization of the South Caucasus

(2.1) Revisiting and Enriching Vasilyan's (2020) Work on the EU's Regionalization Endeavour in the South Caucasus

As depicted in the preceding chapter, there is a consensus among scholars and within the European Union (EU) itself that the promotion of regional cooperation represents a distinctive characteristic of the EU's foreign policy. This particular stance is primarily examined from a normative standpoint by scholars adhering to the constructivist approach. Abundant empirical and theoretical research substantiates that the EU, being the most advanced regional integration organization, assumes a role model status for other regional integration entities. Consequently, the EU indirectly facilitates regional integration processes on a global scale through various mechanisms of diffusion and targeted incentives (See, e.g., Börzel & Risse, 2015; Fawcett, 2015).

Book Review

Syuzanna Vasilyan's (2020) monograph, "Moral Power of the European Union in the South Caucasus," constitutes an integral component of this academic discourse, making a substantial contribution to the realm of normative studies concerning the EU's foreign policy making. Specifically, within the literature review of the given thesis, the chapter titled "Moral Power of the EU through its Regionalization Policy in the South Caucasus" is subject to examination.

Vasilyan (2020) offers a thorough examination of the European Union's (EU) endeavors to enhance regional cooperation in the South Caucasus. The EU, in conjunction with entities such as the UN, OSCE, CoE, and the USA, has deployed numerous strategies for promoting regionalization in the South Caucasus. Vasilyan

(2020) characterizes the EU's intricate approach as a form of moral power, advocating for regional cooperation and peace.

Vasilyan (2020) outlines how, through a myriad of initiatives like the TACIS program, TRACECA program, INOGATE, and EU4Energy initiative, the EU has emphasized the establishment of a market economy and democracy, the enhancement of trade and economic relations, the attraction of investors, the security of Europe's energy supply, diversification of energy sources, and the improvement of energy data collection and cooperation. However, Vasilyan (2020) also highlights some inconsistencies between the EU's declared intentions and the actual distribution of resources for these projects.

Vasilyan (2020) discusses how the EU has made substantial investments in the region via different projects and even increased funding progressively to cater to the rising energy demands of the neighbouring regions. Despite this, Vasilyan (2020) points out instances where the allocated funding did not mirror the EU's stated objectives, such as the declining funding for the TACIS projects.

Vasilyan (2020) also emphasizes the role of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), the European Neighbourhood Policy Instrument (ENPI), and the ENPI Cross-Border Cooperation program as critical mechanisms in cultivating cooperation, economic integration, sustainable development, environmental protection, and enhancing security and governance between the EU and its neighbouring countries.

Vasilyan (2020) observes a shift in the EU's policies from a principle or value-based approach to a more pragmatic one. This shift is exemplified in the EU's stance on the Kars-Akhalkalaki-Tbilisi-Baku railway project, which initially faced opposition from the EU due to its bypassing of Armenia, but later gained support due to the EU's escalating energy needs and reliance on Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey.

Vasilyan (2020) further underscores how varying geopolitical considerations among South Caucasian countries impact their relationships with the EU and their participation in different regional cooperation initiatives. For instance, due to Armenia's close ties with Russia, it has shown more commitment to Russian-led institutions, while Georgia gravitates towards Western alliances, and Azerbaijan favors bilateral interactions.

Overall, Vasilyan (2020) concludes that while the EU has been able to exercise tangible power through consequentialism, coherence, and inclusiveness, its approach to consistency, normative steadiness, and external legitimacy remains largely potential, indicating a gap between the EU's intentions and its practical impact on the ground.

According to Vasilyan (2020), in terms of consequentialism, the EU has managed to exert some influence in the South Caucasus region, albeit indirectly and inconsistently in reaching its goals. Despite the region's political tensions and conflict, the EU has instigated policy changes and transformation through various policy tools, such as conditionality and aid.

In her analysis of coherence, Vasilyan (2020) posits that the EU's approach has been relatively consistent. EU institutions have demonstrated significant unity and coordination in policy implementation, despite their distinct competences. Various programs and initiatives have adhered to a common strategy and framework, as demonstrated by the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the Eastern Partnership (EaP).

When discussing inclusiveness, Vasilyan (2020) points out that the EU's regionalization policy has shown a high degree of inclusivity. The EU has engaged a

broad spectrum of stakeholders in its policy process, ranging from the governments of the South Caucasus countries to civil society organizations and local authorities. A blend of top-down and bottom-up approaches has been utilized by the EU to involve as many actors as possible and ensure representation of various interests.

In terms of normative steadiness, Vasilyan (2020) observes that the EU has shown flexibility, which can be interpreted as a lack of steadiness. For instance, the Euroregion cooperation model was only mentioned in the EU-Armenia Action Plan, and not in the plans with Azerbaijan or Georgia, indicating the EU's approach has been influenced by bilateral interests expressed during negotiations. The EU's initial opposition to the Kars-Akhalkalaki-Tbilisi-Baku railway project, due to it bypassing Armenia, but then later shifting its position due to growing energy transit dependencies, is another exemplification of this normative unsteadiness.

Regarding external legitimacy, Vasilyan (2020) suggests that the EU's regionalization policy in the South Caucasus has struggled to gain complete legitimacy. The region's political tensions, particularly between Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey, have undermined the effectiveness and legitimacy of the EU's regional cooperation efforts. Moreover, the EU's disregard for existing regional groupings when formulating policies like the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and Eastern Partnership (EaP) has further eroded its external legitimacy.

Overall, Vasilyan's (2020) work contributes significantly to an otherwise understudied area. Her study, based on her rigorous doctoral work back in 2010 and further refined in subsequent articles (Vasilyan, 2006; 2009; 2011, 2018), has provided invaluable insights into the EU's regionalization practices in this complex region. Her broad examination across diverse elements and programs provides an invaluable overview of the field. However, it also opens up space for more concentrated studies, which is where my research fits.

Concluding Observations

Complementing Vasilyan's (2020) work, this dissertation takes a more focused approach, delving deeply into economic assistance, cooperation agreements and respective policies, political dialogue, and conditionality as instruments. Instead of assessing effectiveness, as Vasilyan (2020) does, the goal of this thesis is to elucidate the nature and pattern of their application, thereby presenting a distinct, but complementary, perspective on EU's regionalization practices towards the South Caucasus.

This thesis uncovers five key patterns in EU's practices—adaptive attitude, multi-faceted approach, inclusivity combined with differentiation, alignment with EU's core values, and integration of global considerations. These findings could potentially be applied to other regions with similar geopolitical contexts, as suggested in the previous chapter, drawing from the work of Pietrangeli (2009).

Furthermore, this research takes a deeper dive into the nature of these policies' application, unravelling the ways in which regionalization permeates EU's foreign policy towards the South Caucasus. The primary focus lies in understanding the EU's *modus operandi*—what means are employed for which ends, rather than evaluating their effectiveness. By analyzing if these practices are ad-hoc, sporadic, or characterized by specific features, the thesis aims to enhance our understanding of these regionalization practices as they occur in reality.

Thus, this PhD research, while rooted in Vasilyan's pioneering work, contributes to the academic discourse by offering potentially generalizable findings and an enriched understanding of the EU's regionalization practices. It brings forth a complementary lens, focusing on the nature of policy application, which could add valuable insights to the scholarship on regionalization as a pillar of EU's foreign policy.

(2.2) Reflecting on and Contextualizing Babayan's (2012) Criticism on EU's Regionalization Practices in the South Caucasus

Article Review

Nelli Babayan, akin to Suyzanna Vasilyan and myself, is a scholar hailing from the South Caucasus region. Her academic pursuits are primarily concentrated on investigating the South Caucasus geopolitics, Russian foreign policy, and the European Union's strategies within the region. Principal themes in her work encapsulate the Eastern Partnership, the EU's approach to promoting human rights and democracy, and the dynamic interaction of significant regional powers.

In the context of this doctoral dissertation, the key research interest lies in the European Union's regionalization practices within the South Caucasus. While Nelli Babayan has devoted only a single study to this intricate subject, as opposed to the remarkable 10-year dedication shown by Suyzanna Vasilyan, her insightful contribution to this area is still undeniable and warrants a thorough review here presented.

Nelli Babayan's (2012) academic paper titled *"Fear or Love Thy Neighbour"? The EU Framework for Promoting Regional Cooperation in the South Caucasus* critically analyzes the European Union's (EU) strategy for promoting regional cooperation through the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) and Eastern Partnership (EaP), with a focus on the South Caucasus region.

Babayan (2012) notes that while the EU has successfully transferred its norms to new members, its role in fostering regional cooperation sometimes conflicts with objectives like human rights and good governance. The South Caucasus region, despite its strategic importance and being a part of the EU's external relations for over

a decade by the time of writing, as per Babayan (2012) suffers from a lack of cooperation and interstate disputes.

She critiques both the ENP and EaP for lacking attractive membership perspectives and failing to transform target countries due to insufficient funding and weak engagement tools. This is especially evident in conflicts like the Nagorno-Karabakh between Armenia and Azerbaijan, which has transformed from a secessionist movement into a regional war.

The paper employs theoretical perspectives, particularly game-theoretical cooperation frameworks, to understand the potentials and pitfalls of the EU's regional cooperation efforts. It underscores that shared norms and values between the EU and regional states can increase the likelihood of cooperation. However, the success rate could be improved with clearer long-term strategies, regular rewards, and consequences for partner countries' actions.

Babayan asserts that the EU's promotion of regional cooperation is unique and driven by materialistic and idealistic motives. Its tools include conflict prevention, crisis management, cooperation agreements, financial aid for cross-border projects, political and economic dialogues, and conditionality. However, the language used by the ENP is often vague, and its simplistic treatment of diverse South Caucasus countries could diminish its effectiveness.

Despite the South Caucasus nations' strategic position, as per Babayan's (2012) assessment, they have been underrepresented in the EU's attention. The region faces several "frozen conflicts" that disrupt economic cooperation and strain international relations. While the EU's ENP seeks to promote regional cooperation in the South Caucasus, its methods of conditionality, according to Babayan (2012) lack of sanctions

for non-compliance, and vague definition of regional cooperation limit its effectiveness.

The paper concludes by urging the EU to play a more proactive role in policy implementation, develop clear objectives and concrete actions, and actively monitor both regional and country-level implementations. Increased involvement in international initiatives like the OSCE Minsk Group is suggested to improve EU's visibility and stability in the region.

Concluding Observations

In juxtaposition to the work of Nelli Babayan, this PhD thesis steers clear from assessments and critical analysis of the EU's regionalization practices. While Babayan's work provides invaluable insights into the shortcomings of the EU's policy, it primarily functions as a critical policy paper, strongly advocating for the EU to adopt a more proactive stance in conflict resolution in the South Caucasus region.

Just as Vasilyan's research does, Babayan's study unveils a nuanced assessment of the EU's regionalization strategies, yet it does so with a discernible skew towards critiquing the existing policy framework in the specific field of conflict management. Particularly, she zeroes in on the lack of conflict resolution as an inherent flaw in the EU's approach, articulating the belief that regional cooperation cannot solely act as an end in itself. Rather, it must also serve as a medium for conflict resolution, moving beyond the promotion of democracy and stability. One could definitely argue that the South Caucasus region can't truly achieve stability without successful conflict resolution. Therefore, Babayan's point of view points out a deficiency in the current EU's regionalization approach that should not be dismissed lightly.

While the two researches, one presented in this PhD thesis and the other one that of Babayan (2012) intersect at the subject of the EU's regionalization practices in the South Caucasus, they diverge significantly in terms of focus and approach. This doctoral dissertation rather than dwelling on policy critiques or the issue of conflict resolution, primarily aims to comprehend the nature of the EU's regionalization practices, its evolution over time, and the common patterns in the deployment of tools such as economic assistance, cooperation agreements, political dialogue, and conditionality. Babayan's mention of these tools serves merely as contextual background for her critiques. Nevertheless, her research contributes to a broader understanding of the deficiencies of the EU policy and the complex geopolitical situation in the South Caucasus, being fundamental for tracing EU's adaptive application of EU regionalization within my study as well.

Of noteworthy mention is Babayan's effort to theorize her study within the framework of game theory, which adds another layer of value to her work, akin to Vasilyan's approach of viewing the relations through the lens of 'moral power Europe' perspective. This attempt to underpin the analysis with theoretical constructs is commendable and much-needed within this field of study, which is often dominated by op-eds, commentaries, and policy papers filled with speculative assessments, as opposed to peer-reviewed articles and monographs, employing rigorous research methods and theoretical frameworks as in this PhD thesis.

In sum, while the overarching objective of this dissertation contrasts with Babayan's policy-oriented critique, her contribution provides a rich context and perspective, aiding in comprehending the EU's regionalization policy's shortcomings and hinderances within the South Caucasus, as I trace the policy process and conduct my concurrent content analysis.

(2.3). Advancing the Discourse: A Review of German's (2012) Work and its Role in Informing Further Research

Book Review

In her book “Good Neighbours or Distant Relatives”, Tracey German (2012) provides a detailed and nuanced case study of the EU's regionalization practices in the South Caucasus, focusing on both the successes and the challenges of these efforts.

German (2012) identifies several key drivers behind the EU's interest in the region, such as energy security, strategic location, and the potential for regional conflicts. She outlines a variety of initiatives and strategies pursued by the EU, ranging from policies aimed at fostering good neighborly relations and regional cooperation, such as the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), to more targeted projects like the Integrated Border Management (IBM) program and the Regional Environmental Centre for the Caucasus (REC-C).

German (2012) argues that these initiatives, while well-intentioned, often face considerable challenges in practice, largely stemming from unresolved conflicts in the region and the complexity of the political landscape in the South Caucasus. She further contends that the resolution of existing conflicts is seen as a crucial step for establishing effective cross-border collaboration, which suggests that conflict resolution should precede or go hand-in-hand with regionalization efforts.

German's (2012) analysis includes both successful instances of regional cooperation, such as the REC-C and the strategic partnership between Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey in export pipeline projects, and areas where progress has been slow, such as the Eastern Partnership (EaP) and the Black Sea Synergy (BSS) under the ENP. She argues that a key challenge facing the ENP is its lack of significant incentives for

partner countries and the difficulty of promoting cross-border cooperation before resolving existing conflicts.

Her work also discusses the role of differentiation within the ENP, which tailors approaches to individual countries' interests, but also leads to inconsistencies and incoherence in the EU's approach to regional cooperation.

In her discussion of the Integrated Border Management (IBM) program and the Regional Environmental Centre for the Caucasus (REC-C), German (2012) provides detailed examples of EU-led regional cooperation initiatives that aim to strengthen regional cooperation and address transnational security challenges in the South Caucasus. However, she also highlights that these programs reflect the complex intra-regional relations among the South Caucasus states and are not without their own challenges.

Finally, German (2012) discusses the role of the South Caucasus as a vital transit route for hydrocarbons from the Caspian Sea region to international markets, a fact which has led the EU to invest heavily in the region's pipeline infrastructure in order to diversify energy supplies and enhance energy security. However, she notes that political realities and unresolved conflicts in the region have influenced pipeline projects, leading to the exclusion of certain countries from these initiatives.

In conclusion, German (2012) provides a comprehensive analysis of the EU's regionalization practices in the South Caucasus, emphasizing the multifaceted nature of the EU's approach, the significant challenges posed by unresolved conflicts and complex political relations, and the role of differentiation within the ENP. Her work underscores that while the EU has made strides in promoting regional cooperation and addressing transnational security challenges in the South Caucasus, substantial challenges remain and much work is still to be done.

Concluding Observations:

Tracey German's (2012) book "Good Neighbours or Distant Relatives" has significantly contributed to the body of literature analyzing the EU's regionalization efforts in the South Caucasus. Her work offers a holistic overview of the geopolitical and sociopolitical landscape of the region and underlines the EU as a principal actor in its regionalization. German's analysis lays the groundwork for further examination of the EU's role and paves the way for more intricate studies.

In this scholarly ecosystem, my research can be understood as an extension of German's. Although German's (2012) work is not a direct foundation upon which my study is built, the context and contemplation it offers are acknowledged and appreciated. German (2012) provides a bird's eye view of the EU's influence, while my study delves into the intricacies of the EU's regionalization strategies, investigating the content of the EU's policies and identifying recurrent themes and patterns.

In particular, I utilize a detailed content analysis of primary sources to shed light on the EU's regionalization strategy, investigating the application of specific instruments such as economic support, cooperation agreements, political dialogue, and conditionality. Through this, I aim to further our understanding of the EU's regionalization practices and illuminate the operational intricacies that lie beneath the broad narratives.

In this sense, German's (2012) work serves as a thought-provoking backdrop to the field of study. Her work, while not directly employed in my research, provides the broader context that informs the discourse within which my study operates. The detailed examination in my work thus takes the narrative a step further, deepening our understanding of the EU's practical strategies within the South Caucasus.

In conclusion, German's (2012) study and mine exist in the same scholarly sphere, each with its own unique approach and contribution to understanding the EU's regionalization practices in the South Caucasus. German's (2012) broad contextual analysis and my detailed investigation of policy application complement each other, offering a more comprehensive, multifaceted understanding of the EU's efforts in the region.

(2.4) Reflections on Think-Tank Contributions: Considering Boonstra and Delcour's (2015) Critique on EU's Policies in the SC

Policy Paper Review

In their policy paper titled "A Broken Region: Evaluating EU Policies in the South Caucasus," authors Jos Boonstra and Laure Delcour (2015) delve into the complexities and challenges that the European Union (EU) confronts within the South Caucasus region. Boonstra and Delcour highlight that the nations of this region have pursued different paths for their political and economic evolution, thereby creating a region fragmented in many ways that the EU finds challenging to handle. The authors also note the significant role played by regional powers such as Russia and Turkey in contributing to the region's tensions.

According to Boonstra and Delcour (2015), the EU's strategies toward the South Caucasus have not been entirely effective, primarily due to the difficulties the EU has encountered in adapting its technocratic and government-oriented policies to match the region's diverse political, economic, and social contexts. The authors highlight the complications introduced by the concurrent existence of the EU's Deep and Comprehensive Free-Trade Areas (DCFTAs) and Russia's Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), which have intensified regional disparities.

Boonstra and Delcour (2015) specifically delve into the cases of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. The authors note that Georgia has expressed interest in forging closer ties with the EU. Still, this ambition is obstructed by the ongoing conflict with Russia over Abkhazia and South Ossetia. They posit that the EU's Eastern Partnership (EaP) offers some support but fails to address Georgia's security concerns or the possibility of EU membership. Turning to Armenia, Boonstra and Delcour (2015) point out that the country, under pressure from Russia, has joined the Russian-led EEU, thus limiting its engagement with the EU. However, the authors note that Armenian authorities are still eager to preserve connections with the EU to the best extent possible. In contrast, Boonstra and Delcour (2015) state that Azerbaijan, rich in oil, has opted for a path of limited alignment with either the EU or Russia. They explain that the country maintains a strict authoritarian regime domestically while projecting its economic progress abroad, an independence largely facilitated by its abundant oil and gas reserves. The authors also point out the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia as a considerable security risk to the region and, indirectly, to Europe.

Boonstra and Delcour (2015) argue that the EU must devise strategies to accommodate these differences in its bilateral and multilateral policies to positively impact the region's stability and democratic development. They also delve into the varying levels of EU influence within the region and highlight the challenges posed by the EaP's multilateral approach due to the growing differences between the South Caucasus countries and their relationships with the EU.

In conclusion, Boonstra and Delcour (2015) suggest that the EU should focus on societal integration and encourage people-to-people contacts and cooperation among civil societies. They argue that the EU should play a more active role in the region's security and maintain a clear long-term vision while employing a flexible bilateral approach. Ultimately, they contend that despite the fragility and fragmentation of the

South Caucasus, the EU can positively influence its development with a more active security role and a renewed multilateral cooperation through the EaP, supplemented by an emphasis on societies and people-to-people contacts.

Concluding Observations

The specific piece by Boonstra and Delcour (2015) has been selected for review within the framework of this thesis due to its characteristic representation of the prevailing body of literature on the EU's regionalization practices in the South Caucasus. Its selection has also been influenced by the stature of its authors, notably Laure Delcour, a renowned scholar actively researching EU-South Caucasus relations.

An interesting feature of this article is its format as a policy paper or brief, primarily intended for a think tank. Such documents inherently aim to assess, critique, and advise on policies, objectives fulfilled proficiently by Boonstra and Delcour. However, this format also unintentionally highlights certain deficiencies in the existing literature on this topic, as many think tank publications verge on speculative, mainly due to the lack of rigorous research methods or theories applied.

In this article, the authors expertly delineate the divergent foreign policy trajectories adopted by the South Caucasus countries. However, these discussions often retread familiar paths, restating the obvious and not offering new insights or perspectives. Furthermore, the criticisms and recommendations for the EU's policies tend to be somewhat general, abstract, or vague. Although the need for the EU to better adapt to diverse interests and needs of these countries and assume a more active security role is highlighted, specifics on how such changes could be actualized are noticeably absent. This omission, while understandable due to the complexity of the issues, still leaves room for improvement.

The article by Boonstra and Delcour (2015) thus underlines the challenges that were anticipated and consciously avoided in this thesis - particularly the tendency towards superficial and speculative assessments. My endeavor has been to veer away from the more traditional think tank style of work, such as this one, despite its high-quality content.

Instead, concerted efforts were made to incorporate rigorous methodology and theory in this PhD research, inspired by the value derived from such approaches in previous contributions. This path, although more demanding, holds the promise of generating substantial insights and advancing the understanding of the EU's regionalization practices in the South Caucasus

(2.5) Multilateralism and Bilateralism in EU's Regionalization of the South Caucasus:

A Dive into Delcour and Duhot's (2011) Analysis

Research Paper Review

In their comprehensive study of the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), Laure Delcour and Hubert Duhot (2011) evaluate the policy's implementation and its subsequent impact on the South Caucasus countries – Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. The paper “Bringing South Caucasus Closer to Europe: Achievements and Challenges in ENP Implementation” provides a historical perspective on the EU's involvement in the region, initiated in the 1990s through assistance programs aimed at addressing political and economic transitions post the Soviet Union collapse. The EU's initial engagement relied on programs like TACIS, although its involvement in conflict resolution was limited due to external factors such as Russia and the UN's presence.

Delcour and Duhot (2011) also underline the role of other international players in the region, including the United States, Russia, Iran, and Turkey. The EU's regional

approach towards the South Caucasus aims to promote regional cooperation while differentiating between countries based on their reform progress. However, achieving effective regional cooperation is complicated by the divergent objectives and conflicting interests of the partner countries.

The authors address the EU's ENP's role amidst the region's "frozen conflicts" such as the 2008 war in Georgia and tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh. Although conflict resolution is a challenge, the ENP has achieved some positive results through sector-based approaches and regional programs, although promoting inter-state cooperation remains difficult due to ongoing tensions.

The study highlights the EU's focus on promoting good governance, human rights, democracy, and the rule of law in the South Caucasus. Despite the shared challenges, each of these countries has followed different paths, with Georgia moving towards democratization post the "Rose Revolution," while Azerbaijan continued with authoritarian rule. The EU's support through financial and technical assistance is clear at the policy level, but the implementation and evaluation processes could benefit from improvements.

In their assessment, Delcour and Duhot (2011) show mixed results for the ENP's impact on good governance, democratization, and the rule of law in the South Caucasus. They point to the complexity of EU procedures, a lengthy programming process, and a lack of consensus with partner countries as potential hindrances to policy effectiveness.

Finally, the authors propose recommendations for improving the ENP, emphasizing the importance of tailoring the approach to each country's specific political, economic, social, and diplomatic context, while maintaining a consistent policy framework under the Eastern Partnership initiative. This balance between individualized

approach and policy consistency, they argue, can enhance the effectiveness of the ENP in the region.

Concluding Observations

Building on the preceding exploration of the literature on the EU's regionalization practices in the South Caucasus, Delcour and Duhot's comprehensive study (2011) on the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) was specifically chosen for review for several reasons. Primarily, the focus of their work centering on EU-ENP relations with a particular emphasis on South Caucasus countries is important as an illustration of Pietrangeli's (2009) distinction between conventional regional groups (such as, e.g., Mercosur and ASEAN), and groups that exist as a region solely in the context of their relations with the EU, (such as the ENP and the Eastern Partnership (EaP) in this case).

What is more, Delcour and Duhot's (2011) paper is notable in its approach as it straddles the divide between a think tank article and a peer-reviewed paper. As such, it represents an important exploration of the middle ground in academic discourse, with its extensive, methodologically grounded exploration. It offers an assessment that is both reflective of the broader literature on the EU's regionalization practices and also grounded in the EU's own assessments. This is achieved through the effective use of country reports, providing a factual basis to examine achievements and challenges.

The paper does not shy away from the inherent complexities in the EU's approach to the South Caucasus, recommending a mix of bilateral and multilateral formats. The authors essentially endorse the EU's strategy of tailoring its approach to individual countries while also encouraging regional cooperation. Crucially, Delcour and Duhot (2011) warn against the potential contradictions inherent in this strategy though. They point out, for example, to the case when the principle of self-determination and territorial integrity were emphasized simultaneously in the Action Plans with

Armenia and Azerbaijan, respectively. The authors argue that the existence of mutually exclusive clauses as an example of contradictory policies in the context of the Karabakh conflict only hinder promotion of regional cooperation.

The paper's assessment of the EU-ENP relations, based on EU's country reports, offers a factual overview of the progress and challenges within the region, reflecting much of the literature on the EU's regionalization practices towards the South Caucasus. This grounded evaluation and the subsequent recommendations provide valuable insights, cautioning the EU against inconsistencies between bilateral and multilateral tactics, a note of significant interest to this research.

The theme 'Regional Approach vs. Differentiation' is interesting in that it is recurrent in the empirical part of this thesis, revealing patterns that for the purposes of this PhD thesis have been named an adaptive attitude as well as inclusivity combined with differentiation. The insights from Delcour and Duhot's (2011) work promise to augment the understanding of EU's bilateral and multilateral engagement in the South Caucasus both in their own way promoting regional cooperation, as obvious from the content analysis undertaken in the next chapters.

(2.6) From Simão's (2013) Assessment to Today: A Review suggesting the Evolution of EU's South Caucasus Regionalization Approach

Article Review

According to Licinia Simão's (2013) article "Region-building in the eastern neighbourhood: assessing EU regional policies in the South Caucasus", the European Union's (EU) approach to fostering regional cooperation and region-building in the South Caucasus has room for improvement. Through her critical review of the EU's strategies, notably the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership (EaP), Simão (2013) outlines several limitations.

Simão (2013) contends that the EU has been relying on artificial regional labels that fail to reflect the complexity of the area. The EU's rigid adherence to conditionality-based approaches rather than seeking a balance between multilateral and bilateral strategies has been problematic. Moreover, Simão (2013) points out that there has been a lack of local ownership in the identity-building processes.

According to Simão (2013), region-building is a purposeful process based on practical cooperation and the formation of shared identities through social interactions and practices. However, cooperation within the South Caucasus has been challenging, primarily due to historical and geopolitical factors, each state's focus on domestic challenges, and their engagement with external powers.

Simão (2013) discusses the EU's region-building practices in the South Caucasus, which aimed to promote integration into the Euro-Atlantic community and boost regional cooperation. However, these efforts have been met with obstacles due to the intricate geopolitical context of the region and the EU's limited resources. She further notes that the EaP's multilateral approach has been unsuccessful in addressing hard security issues related to regional conflicts.

Simão (2013) suggests a "variable-geometry" approach within the EaP, which would allow the EU to tailor its practices to the unique realities of the South Caucasus. Rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all strategy, Simão (2013) recommends that the EU deal with each South Caucasus country based on its distinct circumstances, needs, and progress. This variable-geometry approach could facilitate management of the complexities and diverse realities in the South Caucasus region. Simão (2013) implies that EU practices should be adapted to address the specific needs and conditions of each South Caucasus state, acknowledging challenges such as protracted conflicts and unstable relations with neighboring countries.

Moreover, Simão (2013) believes that the variable-geometry approach could be applied to the multilateral platforms within the EaP. This would promote more horizontal interactions between the EU and its neighbors and provide room for civil society input. Such an approach could also involve inviting other interested parties to participate in specific projects, which would reflect the individual preferences and interests of the South Caucasus states.

In summary, according to Licínia Simão (2013), the EU's current methods to foster regional cooperation in the South Caucasus have limitations. She proposes a variable-geometry approach that customizes EU practices to each country's unique circumstances. Simão (2013) believes that by adopting a more flexible and issue-based strategy, the EU could potentially achieve more effective and inclusive region-building in the South Caucasus.

Concluding Observations

In light of the literature on the European Union's regionalization practices towards the South Caucasus, Simão's (2013) work provides a comprehensive critique, thereby positioning itself as an authoritative assessment of EU's strategies. Her elucidation of the limitations of EU's approach, along with her policy recommendations, resonates with the broader scholarly trends that I have previously noted in this literature review.

Her proposition of the "variable-geometry" approach advocates for a more nuanced, adaptable, and context-sensitive approach to regionalization - a recurrent theme that I've identified in my own research, which I refer to as adaptive regionalization.

In her criticism of the EU's approach, Simão (2013) notably takes issue with the strict conditionality that was initially prominent in the EU's strategies. This practice, she argues, lacks the flexibility necessary for the complex geopolitical realities of the region. Her analysis reinforces my own research findings on the evolution of EU's

conditionality approach, which has notably moved towards being more encouraging rather than punitive. The "less for less" conditionality, as suggested by Simão (2013), has largely faded into the background, as my research clearly demonstrates through process tracing and content analysis.

Although Simão's (2013) criticism may seem slightly outdated, given the strides the EU has made in terms of adopting bilateral breakthroughs after the publication of her work, her perspective remains relevant. It offers valuable insights into the importance of adaptability in EU's regionalization approaches towards the South Caucasus, underscoring the necessity of differentiated, yet inclusive strategies, which echo the patterns I've identified in my study.

Moreover, Simão's (2013) assertion of the EU's creation of artificial regions is particularly intriguing. It provides an dimension to EU's regionalization practices that strategically groups states, not necessarily due to their geographic proximity, but due to their geopolitical relevance to the EU's foreign policy. This is a phenomenon that I examine in my own research, substantiating the importance of this pattern in my content analysis and process tracing.

In conclusion, despite some of her criticism appearing outdated in today's context, Simão's (2013) insights remain valuable. Her contributions underscore the importance of differentiation and adaptability in EU's regionalization strategies – elements that are central to my own analysis and understanding of the EU's approach towards the South Caucasus. Therefore, her work is a significant and informative addition to this literature review. By including her perspective, I am able to strengthen my research's alignment with the current scholarly trends, while also examining the evolving practices of the EU in the region.

(2.7) Between Mechanisms and Contributors: Van den Boom's (2017) Study of EU's Region-Building via the Eastern Partnership

Research Paper Review

Benedikt van den Boom's (2017) research, entitled "EU Region-Building in the Neighbourhood: The Eastern Partnership's Contribution in the South Caucasus" delves into the EU's influence on region-building in the South Caucasus through the Eastern Partnership (EaP) program. According to van den Boom, the study adopts a constructivist approach to analyze the program's impacts on economic interdependence, political ideology, security cooperation, and cultural exchanges in the region.

Van den Boom (2017) finds the trade dynamics within the South Caucasus, comprised of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, to be focused primarily on external partners. However, the EaP's goal is to intensify regional trade by harmonizing rules and fostering infrastructure projects.

According to the author, Georgia's strategic position as a regional trade hub and Armenia's role as a link to the Eurasian Economic Union are important for enhancing economic ties in the region. Van den Boom (2017) argues that the EaP, through initiatives like the EU-Georgia Association Agreement, works to improve transportation and energy infrastructures for better economic interconnectivity.

However, the author notes that the South Caucasus's political complexities pose challenges to region-building. For instance, Armenia's decision to join the EEU has significant implications for regional dynamics and its cooperation with the EU.

In the section on "Political Teleology," van den Boom (2017) examines the varying perceptions of regional cooperation under the EaP among political leaders in the South Caucasus. He points out that while Georgia consistently frames itself within the

South Caucasus region, Armenia and Azerbaijan present multifaceted identities, suggesting a lack of focus on regional cooperation.

Van den Boom (2017) finds that the EaP encourages bottom-up political linkages through regulatory convergence and socialization of administrators. However, a common political vision or 'teleology' is absent, posing challenges to region-building.

In terms of security cooperation, van den Boom highlights the EaP's work in areas such as Cross-Border Management (CBM). He also notes the potential of technical projects and cultural exchange programs but acknowledges that prevailing distrust among nations hinders progress.

Finally, van den Boom proposes three hypotheses on external region-building mechanisms: combining bilateral and multilateral elements, potential spill-overs from technical cooperation to political levels, and the limited influence of non-state actors. He also recognizes the limitations of his research, including a possible 'inside-out' bias and a weak link between data and hypotheses. Despite these, van den Boom (2017) argues that his findings could enhance the literature on the South Caucasus and offer insights for other EU region-building efforts.

Concluding Observations

The comprehensive review of the EU's regionalization practices, as part of this PhD thesis, has included the work of several distinguished scholars, noted for their immense contribution to the field. Amongst these established researchers, Benedikt van den Boom (2017) stands out not for his prominence, but for the niche focus and distinctive objectives of his research. His 2017 work, examining the Eastern Partnership (EaP) program in the South Caucasus, aligns with the broader thematic inquiry of this thesis—unravelling the mechanisms behind the EU's regionalization practices.

Van den Boom's (2017) analysis of the EaP through the prism of economic, political, security, and cultural cooperation in the region offers invaluable insights and allows the development of three hypothesis about conditions contributing to region-building, such as merging bilateral and multilateral approaches, potential spill-overs from technical cooperation to political levels, and to a lesser extent, influence of non-state actors.

It must be noted that while Van den Boom (2017) explores the region-building mechanisms through a field-specific lens (politics, economics, culture, security) within the EaP, this Phd thesis focuses more on toolbox, studying the application of strategic instruments such as economic assistance, cooperation agreements, political dialogue, and conditionality. This perspective encompasses a broader range of regional programmes and initiatives beyond EaP. Despite the differences in the research objectives and methodological focus, it can be argued that both this research thesis and Van den Boom's (2017) work intend to enhance knowledge of the regionalization mechanisms.

Yet, Van den Boom's (2017) study is not without its shortcomings. Though the research initially aims to identify the mechanisms of region-building, it ends up discussing potential contributing elements to the EaP's success. This gap between the declared objective and the actual performance could be perceived as a weakness.

Nevertheless, despite this minor limitation and Van den Boom's less prominent academic stature in comparison to other scholars whose work has been reviewed, Van den Boom's earnest attempt to comprehend the nature of the EU's foreign policy practices, specifically the regionalization, is praiseworthy. His work offers a noteworthy exploration of the Eastern Partnership program's influence on region-building in the South Caucasus, making it a significant contribution to the field.

(2.8) The Paradox of EU-Driven Regionalization in South Caucasus: Reviewing Ohanyan's (2015) Critical Perspective

Book Chapter Review

According to Ohanyan's (2015), the South Caucasus region is characterized by weak states, inefficient resource utilization, and limited autonomy in foreign policy, largely due to internal discord and external influences. In her monograph "Networked Regionalism as Conflict Management", Ohanyan (2015) has dedicated a chapter to "The South Caucasus: Weak States or a Broken Region?" where she suggests that enhancing regional cooperation could potentially address these issues.

Drawing a comparison to the Western Balkans, Ohanyan (2015) advocates for a network-centric strategy aimed at fostering peace-building infrastructure to bolster cooperation. She cites the Regional Environmental Centre for the Caucasus (REC) and the South Caucasus Business and Development Network (CBDN) as case studies of potential successful cooperative efforts. Ohanyan (2015) also delves into the topic of energy transport and regional integration, particularly focusing on Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia, and Turkey. She points out the limitations of the energy transport alliance between these nations and underlines the need for regional integration.

Ohanyan (2015) identifies several challenges to regional integration. Economic factors, such as the presence of oligarchic and monopolized economies, and political factors like differing threat perceptions and security needs are key issues. These are further compounded by domestic issues, including economic disparities, high poverty rates, and large refugee populations. Despite these challenges, Ohanyan (2015) suggests that the global economy could stimulate regionalism, with regional blocs serving as stepping stones to larger-scale integration. She recommends overcoming geopolitical interests and enhancing administrative capacities to establish effective regional governance and cooperation.

Ohanyan (2015) also scrutinizes the role of the European Union (EU) in the region. She criticizes the EU for fostering a paradoxical scenario where promises of integration end up undermining regionalism. She points out that while the EU's involvement can be significant, it can also hinder effective peace-building efforts if the models imposed don't align with local needs. Furthermore, she identifies the EU as an institutional hegemon within peace-building networks. According to her, while these entities provide financial support, their influence can make the network susceptible to political pressures.

Finally, Ohanyan (2015) highlights a notable disparity between the South Caucasus and the Western Balkans: unlike the support the Western Balkans receive from European institutions to build administrative capacities, the South Caucasus lacks such institutional support. In Ohanyan's view, the discourse on regional politics in the South Caucasus is overly focused on the EU experience, thus limiting the understanding of diverse pathways and possibilities for regional cooperation, and in turn, impeding the prospects for more effective problem-solving in domestic politics through regional arrangements.

In her conclusion, Ohanyan (2015) asserts that peace-building initiatives in the South Caucasus should pivot towards more diverse and stretched networks to enhance sustainability and resilience.

Concluding Observations

It must be noted that Ohanyan's (2015) study does not concentrate specifically on the EU's regionalization strategies, but rather provides a different perspective, focusing on the need to stimulate regionalism from within the South Caucasus. Despite seeming a bit peripheral to the primary focus of this PhD thesis, her work enriches the scope by presenting an alternate viewpoint that criticizes the EU's practices.

Ohanyan (2015) argues that the South Caucasus countries' weak states, inefficient resource utilization, and limited autonomy in foreign policy are predominantly due to internal discord and external influences. She proposes that fostering regional cooperation could potentially mitigate these issues. However, she locates the potential for region-building not so much in the actions of an external actor, such as the EU, but in the internal capacities and possibilities of the South Caucasus countries themselves.

Ohanyan's (2015) criticizes EU's regionalization practices, which she claims have resulted in a paradoxical situation. According to Ohanyan (2015), while the EU promises integration, its attempts at enforcing region-building could inadvertently undermine the internal dynamics of regionalism. Ohanyan (2015) posits that the EU's top-down approach may not necessarily align with local needs and, as a result, could hinder effective peace-building and cooperation efforts. Therefore, Ohanyan (2015) provides an alternative perspective, inviting further exploration of indigenous models for regional integration. For instance, she points to the Caucasus Business and Development Network (CBDN) and the Regional Environmental Center for the Caucasus (REC) as potential frameworks for enhancing regional engagement.

In conclusion, while Ohanyan's (2015) perspective may initially seem somewhat tangential to the primary focus of this PhD thesis, it indeed offers valuable insights. It enriches the understanding of the South Caucasus region's dynamics, underlining the importance of considering local realities and needs in advancing regional cooperation and integration. The recognition of such alternative models for regional cooperation complements the exploration of EU-driven regionalization practices in the South Caucasus, thus presenting a more holistic view of the mechanisms of regional cooperation.

Chapter Conclusion: Consolidating Insights

In concluding this comprehensive literature review section of the doctoral dissertation, it is critical to reiterate and consolidate the scholarly journey that has been undertaken. This review's primary objective was to position the thesis, both theoretically and practically, within the existing body of literature, focusing particularly on the conceptual evolution of regionalism and the European Union's regionalization policies in the South Caucasus.

The initial segment of the literature review mapped the conceptual trajectory of regionalism, tracing its development from its inception, through comparative regionalism, and finally to inter-regionalism. The chapters provided a thorough examination of the European Union as both a model of regional integration and a regionalizing actor, engaging substantively with comparative regionalism and inter-regionalism literature. This comprehensive exploration of the literature has offered an in-depth understanding of the topic and successfully situated the specific research subject—the EU's Policy Practices of Regionalization in the South Caucasus—within the broader academic discourse.

Moreover, attention was given to the under-researched area of inter-regionalism, specifically concerning the EU's unique practices of bloc-to-bloc relations. This focus was significant given the research emphasis on EU-South Caucasus relations, especially considering the EU's interactions with blocs of its own creation. This elucidation of the EU's regionalizing practices further underscores the value of this study within the academic sphere.

The second part of the literature review conducted an integrative examination of the current literature on the EU's regionalization policy in the South Caucasus, transitioning from a purely theoretical to a more empirical focus. Eight sub-chapters

were developed, each evaluating a specific publication. Works of eminent scholars, including Vasilyan (2020), Babayan (2012), German (2012), Boonstra and Delcour (2015), Delcour and Duhot (2011), Simao (2013), Van den Boom (2017), and Ohanyan (2015), were analyzed in-depth to comprehend the present state of scholarship on the EU's regionalization practices towards the South Caucasus.

The selection of literature was strategic, encompassing a variety of perspectives on the subject matter, from assessments and critiques to informative pieces and policy analyses. This selection offered a comprehensive exploration of the scholarship, elucidating the forms and content of the available publications and positioning them in the academic discourse in relation to this doctoral research.

In conclusion, the first part of the literature review has successfully navigated through the theoretical origins of the existing scholarship on the EU's regionalization policies and their conceptual evolution. It has identified the research gap with regards to the under-researched area of inter-regionalism, focusing on the EU's unique practices of bloc-to-bloc relations. In the second part, the rigorous review of the existing literature has provided valuable insights into the EU's regionalization policy in the South Caucasus, underlining the importance of empirical focus in the analysis. This detailed exploration has further broadened the understanding of the subject and reinforced its positioning within the academic discourse.

The findings of this review have the potential to serve as a springboard for further research into the operational intricacies of the EU's strategies, particularly with the aim of understanding how these strategies could be beneficially adapted to similar geopolitical contexts.

As we move forward, it becomes clear that the study of the EU's practices in the South Caucasus remains a fruitful field for further academic exploration.

SECTION 2

INSTRUMENTS OF THE EU'S POLICY PRACTICES OF REGIONALIZATION IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS:

Process Tracing and Content Analysis

INTRODUCING THE ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY for Studying the Application of the EU's Regionalization Strategy Towards the South Caucasus

As per the analysis of Karen E. Smith (2003), in her seminal book “European Union Foreign Policy in a Changing World”, the European Union (EU) employs a multi-pronged strategy to stimulate regional cooperation. This strategy encompasses: (a) economic assistance given for cross-border initiatives, regional cooperation schemes and the functioning of regional groupings; b) formalizing cooperation agreements with regional groupings; c) fostering economic and political dialogues with these groupings; and d) applying conditionality on agreements, financial aid, and even potential membership, basing these on the demonstrated willingness of neighbouring states to pursue regional cooperation. Applying this analytical framework, this chapter embarks on a comprehensive exploration of the European Union's strategic regionalization practices towards the South Caucasus, examining the different instruments of influence and their evolution over time.

The inquiry begins by dissecting the strategic role of economic assistance, one of the crucial mechanisms that according to Smith (2003) the EU employs to shape regional dynamics. The study chronicles the evolution of EU's economic assistance, tracing its journey from the early TACIS initiative and its regional cooperation programs like TRACECA and INOGATE, extending to ENPI and ENI up to the present NDICI-Global Europe instrument. These economic instruments and their legal frameworks

are meticulously scrutinized through a thorough content analysis, to reveal the nuances of the application of the EU's regionalization practices towards the South Caucasus.

Next, the investigation shifts to cooperation agreements, the second strategy within the framework proposed by Smith (2003). Here, the focus is on various bilateral and multilateral accords between the EU and the South Caucasus and their respective policy frameworks and initiatives within. The examination spans from the initial PCAs, moving to Action Plans and Partnership Priorities under the ENP umbrella, with particular emphasis on initiatives such as Eastern Partnership (EaP), along with related Association Agreement (AA) with Georgia and Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with Armenia, as well as Black Sea Synergy (BSS) initiative. The evolution of these policies and the subsequent policy-making processes are traced to illuminate the dynamics of the EU's policy practices. In-depth content analysis is employed to identify the theme of regionalization within the official documents that regulate them.

Subsequently, the chapter delves into the third strategy tool - political dialogue, as suggested by Smith (2003). Two avenues of analysis are pursued in this regard. Firstly, the study examines references to political dialogue within the legal bases of previously studied economic support mechanisms and cooperation agreements. The aim here is to ascertain the nature of the political dialogue, its application, and how it connects to the EU's regionalization practices. Secondly, the institutionalized political dialogue formats related to regional cooperation are independently analyzed, investigating their legal bases to understand how regionalization practices work through these dialogue structures.

The exploration then segues to the fourth strategy tool, as proposed by Smith (2003) - conditionality. The study maps the evolution of conditionality as a policy process

from its inception to its present use, identified within policy practices and their legal frameworks, including economic assistance and cooperation agreements. A thorough content analysis is performed to reveal the underpinnings of this tool.

In the context of research methodology, a blend of process tracing and comparative content analysis is utilized. In the first case, EU's policy practices common to Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia are scrutinized under this perspective. This provides a detailed exploration of the parallels and variances in policy application across these countries, offering a comprehensive understanding of the region's dynamics. In the second case, the frequency and occurrence of the explicit and implicit references to regional cooperation is noted and their contextual interpretation is thoroughly studied, while process tracing further assists in pinpointing pivotal moments, discerning trends, or noting shifts in the EU's stance towards regional cooperation. Together, these two research methods allow for a comprehensive and holistic understanding of the EU's regionalization practices in the South Caucasus.

These methodological tools offer a direct path to answer the guiding research question: *In what ways has the application of the regionalization strategy in the EU's foreign policy towards the South Caucasus been demonstrated in policy practices, which foreign policy instruments have come to the forefront, and what overarching patterns can be discerned in their implementation over time?*

The content analysis allows us to dissect the explicit and implicit ways in which the regionalization strategy is reflected in various policy instruments. This helps mapping and understanding the implementation of the EU's regionalization strategy in practice. As the thesis investigated the specific policy practices - including economic support, cooperation agreements, political dialogue, and conditionality – it is effectively studying how regionalization is enacted on a policy level, a core component of the ensuing thesis statement.

Process tracing, on the other hand, sheds light on the dynamics and evolution of these policy practices. This aids us in understanding the patterns of the regionalization strategy applications in the South Caucasus and the factors that have influenced their development. Therefore, the process tracing aligns directly with the part of the research question that seeks to identify patterns and their application over time.

The detailed investigation of the EU's application and progression of Regionalization policy practices in the South Caucasus, utilizing content analysis and process tracing, significantly contributes to the formation of the thesis statement. As a result, the analysis executed in this chapter is inherently connected to both the research question and the thesis statement.

(a) Economic Assistance

In her book, "European Union foreign policy in a changing world, Karen Smith (2003) offers an incisive examination of the EU's financial commitments to regional cooperation as an integral part of its aid programs. Smith illustrates how, across a diverse range of initiatives, the EU strategically allocates roughly 10% of total aid to bolster regional collaboration. She brings into focus two cornerstone initiatives - the PHARE (Poland and Hungary: Assistance for Restructuring their Economies) and MEDA (EU's Euro-Mediterranean Partnership) programs. The former, operational since 1991, was instrumental in promoting dialogue and policy standardization amongst Central and Eastern European Countries, effectively serving as a regional catalyst. The MEDA program, on the other hand, channelled its resources towards fostering regional cooperation among Euro-Med partners. Overall, Smith's (2003) narrative effectively presents the EU's strategic use of financial aid programs to spur regional cooperation, demonstrating the Union's multi-faceted approach to foreign policy.

In case of the South Caucasus, since the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the European Union, as the world's most substantial aid contributor, has launched three substantial initiatives to streamline its support to the former Soviet States during their transformation towards democratic politics and market economies (Huseynov, 2018). An additional focal point of these financial tools has been the advancement of regional integration and cooperation. These initiatives include the Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States (TACIS) from 1991 to 2006, the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) from 2007 to 2013, and the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) from 2014 to 2020. The objectives of these funds have encompassed fostering economic growth, enhancing the capabilities of public institutions, advocating for democratic changes, and stimulating cross-border collaborations (European Commission, 1992). Additional EU initiatives that focused on the Newly Established States (NIS) of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia included support provided by the aid mechanisms outside of the TACIS framework, such as the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO), the Food Security Programme (FSP), and direct aid to NGOs under the auspices of the European Initiative (which was reformed as an Instrument in 2006) for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) (Börzel, 2010; Jafalian, 2016).

Launched in 1991, TACIS (Technical Assistance to Commonwealth of Independent States) marked the EU's initial engagement with 12 Eastern European and Central Asian nations, including Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia in the South Caucasus. It was specifically designed to deliver grant-financed technical assistance and support these countries in their transformation to democratic societies and market economies (European Commission, 1992). TACIS activities ranged from law drafting and human rights to economic reform.

The program's timeline can be bifurcated into two phases. The demand-driven phase (1991-1999), wherein the EU tailored its assistance in response to the needs

articulated by the partner countries' ministries (Frenz, 2008). The second phase, the dialogue-driven period (2000-2006), marked a shift in the EU's approach towards implementing conditionality in cooperation (ibid.). It required partner countries to show dedication commitment to policy reforms to continue cooperation and resource allocation. Over the duration of TACIS, from 1991 to 2006, the European Union allocated € 7.3 billion in aid to the Eastern Europe and Central Asian nations (Menkiszak, Konończuk, & Kaczmarek, 2008).

After the conclusion of TACIS in 2006, the European Union launched a successor program known as the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI). In a marked departure from TACIS, ENPI unified the EU's assistance strategies towards post-Soviet countries and Mediterranean countries, the latter previously addressed within the Mediterranean Development Assistance (MEDA) programme – TACIS's counterpart (European Commission, 2022). Operating from 2007 to 2013, ENPI aimed to enhance the synergy of EU's aid to these countries. During this period, the EU committed approximately €12 billion to neighbourhood countries through the ENPI budget (Delcour, 2012).

The ENPI consisted of several components, including bilateral assistance for reforms in partner countries and regional assistance programs. The regional assistance programs allocated specific funds for the ENPI South and ENPI East regions, including the South Caucasus, overall supporting EU initiatives such as the Eastern Partnership, Black Sea Synergy, Baku Initiative (Veebel, Kulu, & Siirak, 2014). The ENPI also included inter-regional support, cross-border cooperation, and a Governance Facility. Under ENPI, each country had a Country Strategy Paper (CSP) which set out the EU's strategy for cooperation with that country. The National Indicative Programme (NIP) then detailed the areas of cooperation objectives, expected results, and financial indications for a multi-year period (Delcour, 2012).

The CSPs were the primary strategy documents for the European Union's engagement with the ENPI Eastern Countries including the South Caucasus and were further supplemented with the Regional Strategy Paper (RSP), which was primarily concerned with assistance at the regional level (European Parliament and Council of the European Union, 2006). Finally, the Annual Action Programmes outlined the specific projects that were to receive funding, making them the pivotal documents for the actual allocation of the ENP programme funds (Saurenbach, 2013).

The European Union commenced the third phase of assistance to its neighbourhood countries in 2014 with the introduction of the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI). This program superseded ENPI for the period from 2014 to 2020, operating with a budget allocation of €15.4 billion (EU Neighbours South, 2023). A notable shift in this phase was the formation of aid to partner countries within Single Support Framework which has replaced the former NIPs and CSPs (Lannon, 2015). This was designed to provide a more structured and effective approach to support. The ENI prioritized a range of areas that sought to foster a more integrated and resilient neighbourhood. These included the promotion of small businesses, fostering civil society engagement, climate action, facilitation of people's mobility, energy cooperation, and gender equality. Furthermore, the instrument aimed to encourage gradual economic integration, boost people-to-people contacts, enhance transport connections, and address challenges related to youth and employment (European Union, 2023).

Currently, the EU's primary financing instrument for external action during the financial period of 2021-2027 is entitled the Neighbourhood, Development, and International Cooperation Instrument - Global Europe (the Global Europe Instrument). With a budget of nearly €79.5 billion, this instrument is allocated to three pillars (European Union, 2022). The geographic pillar, constituting 75% of the total instrument, includes financial envelopes for various regions worldwide (Bilquin,

2022). The EU Neighbourhood (East and South) is allocated €19.3 billion. Hence, even a globally-oriented financial instrument, such as the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) – Global Europe, incorporates a regionalization strategy in its operations.

Financial Instrument	Beneficiaries	Duration	Budget
TACIS	12 CIS Members: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan.	1991-2007	€ 7.3 billion
ENPI	17 Countries of Eastern and Southern borders of the Union: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine (referred to by the European Union as the West Bank and Gaza Strip), Syria (Cooperation with Syria is currently suspended due to the political situation in the country) and Tunisia	2007-2013	€ 11.2 billion
ENI	16 Countries of the Eastern and Southern borders of the Union: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine (referred to by the European Union as the West Bank and Gaza Strip), Syria (cooperation with Syria is currently suspended due to the political situation), Tunisia	2014 - 2020	€ 15.43 billion
NDICI	Third countries in the Neighbourhood (including	2021 - 2027	€ 79.5 billion

	<p>Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia), Sub-Saharan Africa; Asia and Pacific; Americas and the Caribbean.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Geographic Programmes: All third countries except for candidates and potential candidates as defined in the IPA III Regulation and overseas countries and territories • Thematic Programmes: All third countries as well as overseas countries and territories • Rapid Response Actions: All third countries as well as overseas countries and territories 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Geographic Programmes: €60.3 bn • Thematic Programmes: €6.358 bn • Rapid Response: €3.182 bn • “Cushion”: €9.53 bn
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Table 1: Economic Support instruments of EU’s practices of Regionalization towards South Caucasus over time

The evolution of the EU's economic support instruments reflects significant geopolitical and historical transitions and demonstrates its strategic approach towards its eastern neighbours. This journey began in response to the dissolution of the Soviet Union with the launch of the Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States (TACIS) program in 1991 (European Commission, 1992). The TACIS initiative was essentially a reactive strategy aiming to support the newly independent states in their transitions towards democracy and market economies. Notably, TACIS was an alternative to the Poland and Hungary Assistance for the Restructuring of the Economy (PHARE) program, designed for Central and Eastern European countries that were prospective EU members (Dolidze, 2022).

The process of the EU's enlargement, with its three stages between 2004-2013, but most importantly the 'Big Bang Enlargement' of 2004, had significant implications for the Union's policies. As the EU began incorporating the new member states from the East, and the Union's borders kept expanding to reach those countries in proximity (including South Caucasus) that it did not consider potential candidates for membership, a unique strategic framework was required (Council of the European Union, 2003). This awareness resulted in the formulation of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in 2004 (Commission of the European Communities 2003; 2004) and its corresponding financial arm, the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI), commencing in 2007 (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2006).

The geopolitical context was rapidly evolving. The Russia-Georgia war in 2008 and the ongoing Nagorno-Karabakh conflict contributed to instability in the South Caucasus region. These tensions, combined with the broader regional dynamics, intensified the complexity and urgency surrounding the EU's evolving neighbourhood policies. The outbreak of the Arab Spring in 2011 marked another significant turning point, leading to a substantial review of the ENP (European Commission & High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 2011). The revised ENP focused on fostering deep and sustainable democracy and promoted an approach based on 'more for more', thus influencing the EU's strategies under the ENPI.

The European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) replaced the ENPI in 2014, embodying the EU's commitment to effectively respond to the diverse needs of its neighbouring countries (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2014a). Despite launching before the second ENP review in 2015, ENI's priorities were influenced by the review's outcomes, driven by the challenges posed by Russia's annexation of Crimea, escalating tensions in eastern Ukraine, and the ongoing war in

Syria (European Commission & High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 2015). The principles of differentiation and mutual ownership, emphasized in this review, influenced the functioning of the ENI and the EU's strategy for regional stability and prosperity.

As of today, the EU's primary financing instrument for external action is the Neighbourhood, Development, and International Cooperation Instrument - Global Europe (NDICI - Global Europe) (European Commission, 2018). This instrument encapsulates the EU's ambition to strengthen its global role while simultaneously maintaining a regional focus.

The journey from TACIS to the Global Europe Instrument illuminates the EU's evolving approach towards the South Caucasus. The focus has shifted from providing broad-based, reactive assistance to implementing more tailored strategies and financial instruments that are responsive to evolving regional dynamics and the EU's geopolitical interests. The EU now employs differentiation as a complementary strategy to regionalization, tailoring its assistance to meet individual country needs.

The introduction of the Global Europe Instrument symbolizes the EU's ability to balance its global ambitions with regional considerations. It provides flexibility and responsiveness in fund allocation, enabling the EU to adapt to changing political dynamics and emerging needs in the South Caucasus. This adaptability in its regionalization practices amidst shifting geopolitical circumstances marks a significant evolution in the EU's approach to the South Caucasus, illustrating the EU's commitment to fostering stability and prosperity in its neighbourhood.

TACIS: *A Policy and Content Analysis of the European Community's Technical Assistance Initiative and its Regulatory Framework*
(Regulations No.2157/91, No 2053/93, No 1279/96, and No 99/2000)

Transitioning to a focused analysis of the European Community's Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States and Georgia (TACIS) initiative, it can be discerned that, since its inception in 1991, this venture has been an instrumental vehicle in stimulating economic transformation and democratic evolution within the spectrum of eleven CIS nations and Georgia, which was not part of the CIS until 1993.

TACIS was conceived with a principal objective to aid these former Soviet Union territories in their transition towards market economies and to stimulate the evolution of pluralistic democratic societies. This was achieved through a comprehensive approach that incorporated policy advice, institutional development, and the design of legal or regulatory frameworks, thereby serving as a medium for both technical assistance and information exchange (European Commission, 1992).

Throughout its operation, TACIS significantly influenced the region's macroeconomic and sector-specific policy transformation processes in transitional states. The development of TACIS National Indicative Programmes, which were structured in close consultation with national authorities, played a crucial role in this context. These Programmes assessed TACIS support needs against the country's development and other donors' contributions, also establishing a four-year budget for each country. Based on these Programmes, Action Programmes were developed for each partner country (European Commission, 1997).

Apart from its national focus, the TACIS program also emphasized inter-regional collaboration pertinent to this study (Dekanozishvili, 2004). Programmes that were

not specific to a single country were assembled under the category of Regional programmes, each having distinct budgets. These Regional programmes incorporated the Inter-State and Cross-border Cooperation programmes as well as the Nuclear Safety Programme (European Commission, 1997).

Curiously, the EC had to assist the newly independent states (NIS) in their pursuit of increased autonomy in the post-Soviet context, thus effectively promoting disintegration, but at the same time, encouraging regional cooperation. During the Soviet era the centralized system inherently ensured an integrated operational approach as the former Soviet Union functioned as an integrated entity. This pre-existing interconnectedness encompassed political, economic, and social aspects, fostering a sense of shared identity among the constituent republics. Yet, following the breakup of the Soviet Union, the newly-formed independent states were keen to demonstrate their individuality and sovereignty, often leading to friction and disconnection. Age-old regional conflicts resurfaced, particularly in areas like the Caucasus.

Promoting collaboration among post-Soviet nations within the CIS was challenging. This was partly due to the potential risk of inadvertently strengthening Russian influence over its so-called "near abroad" (Smith, 2003). The situation was further complicated by the existence of internal conflicts, such as those in Georgia (Russia-backed separatist challenge in the so-called South Ossetia and Abkhazia), and inter-country conflicts, like the one between Azerbaijan and Armenia (Nagorno-Karabakh war). Nevertheless, it was (and continues to be) a lengthy mutual learning process that despite the appeal of national independence, there were certain areas of concern that required regional cooperation (Frenz, 2008). Issues such as trade, environmental conservation, security, and economic stability transcend national boundaries and necessitate a collective approach. In this transformed context, TACIS Regional Cooperation Programmes played a significant role. Many cross-border programs,

customs projects, and policy initiatives were initiated (Zygierewicz, 2004). These programmes recognized the value of regional collaboration and sought to balance the pursuit of national independence with the advantages of coordinated regional action. In essence, the journey towards regional integration following the dissolution of the Soviet Union represented a complex navigation of past integrated systems, new national identities, regional conflicts, and the shared challenges that called for collective solutions. The role of initiatives like the TACIS regional cooperation programmes, most importantly TRACECA (Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia) and INOGATE (Interstate Oil and Gas Transport to Europe), discussed below, was pivotal in steering this journey towards a balanced and beneficial regional integration.

The adoption of Regulation (EEC, EURATOM) [No.2157/91](#) in 1991 provided the legal basis for the TACIS initiative (Council of the European Communities, 1991). This initiative was aimed at supporting economic reform and recovery in the Soviet Union. At that time, regional cooperation was not emphasized in the regulation, as the the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), which provided a regional framework, remained intact. Following the USSR's dissolution, regional cooperation among emerging independent states, including those in the South Caucasus, gained importance, as reflected in subsequent regulations [No 2053/93](#), [No 1279/96](#), and [No 99/2000](#).

Council Regulation (EURATOM, EEC) No 2053/93 of 19 July 1993 offered insight into the EU's regional approach to South Caucasus countries like Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia (Council of the European Communities, 1993). It aimed to provide technical assistance to these nations (and other former Soviet Union states), particularly in supporting their economic reform and recovery efforts. The regulation acknowledged the potential need for humanitarian aid alongside technical assistance. Regulation No 1279/96, adopted on 25 June 1996, replaced No 2053/93, signalling the EU's adaptive

strategy towards its assistance program (Council of the European Communities, 1996). It carried forward the principles set by the prior regulation, refining them with a more comprehensive framework. This regulation demonstrated an increased emphasis on beneficiary state collaboration, contract awarding transparency, and adaptability to the evolving needs of the involved states. Council Regulation No 99/2000, enacted on 29 December 1999, replaced the previous Council Regulation No 1279/96, active from 1 January 1996 to 31 December 1999 (Council of the European Union, 2000). This regulation was aimed at aiding partner states in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, with a key focus on economic reform, democratic societies, human rights, and market-oriented economic systems. Furthermore, the regulation highlighted the promotion of nuclear safety and the necessity for a multi-annual approach to various aspects of reform. Conditionality was gradually introduced to promote the quality of aid.

All these regulations aimed to support economic reform, while promoting regional cooperation, and TACIS implemented this through technical assistance, investment support, and multiannual programs, which involved consulting partner countries to address regional priorities. The program encouraged cooperation with EU and Central and Eastern Europe border regions, recognizing that regional cooperation could expedite economic transformation. Throughout the TACIS programme, the European Commission provided annual reports evaluating the effectiveness of regional cooperation and other initiatives (EUR-Lex, 2007).

Across all three countries of the South Caucasus, TACIS concentrated on reopening and improving communication links as a critical strategy for fostering regional cooperation. This effort was designed to unlock economic potential and facilitate better understanding among the different governments, even in the face of political instability. By aiding in the development of infrastructure, business acumen, and civil society, TACIS made significant strides towards bolstering regional cooperation in the Southern Caucasus (Commission of the European Communities, 2000).

Notably, these are TACIS Regional Cooperation Programmes such as TRACECA, launched in 1993, and INOGATE, initiated in 1996, subscribed to by all three South Caucasian nations - Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, - that can be considered European Union's first true regionalization attempt in the South Caucasus.

TRACECA aimed to develop a transport corridor from Europe to Central Asia through the Caucasus, which would not only foster regional connections but also strategically link these countries with the broader European and Asian markets. TRACECA focused on improving road, rail, cargo terminals, aviation, and telecommunications routes. Additionally, it aimed to establish a unified tariff system for railroad and sea transport through legal harmonization (Vasilyan, 2020). The ultimate objective was to create an interconnected network that would facilitate smoother trade and economic activities within the region.

INOGATE, on the other hand, sought to integrate the oil and gas sectors of these countries with the rest of Europe, facilitating energy security while promoting regional cooperation. INOGATE aimed to attract private investors and financial institutions while enhancing the security of Europe's energy supply and diversifying energy sources (Vasilyan, 2020). It primarily relied on funding from TACIS, supplemented by in-kind contributions from participating countries (Rakhmanova, 2007). The initiative encompassed INOGATE Oil and INOGATE Gas projects, which focused on specific aspects of energy development and cooperation.

It must be noted that the year 2007 saw the replacement of TACIS by the "European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument - ENPI," and the nuclear safety component of TACIS had already been substituted by the Instrument for Nuclear Safety Cooperation (INSC) in 2006 (Pla, Farrar, Duchac, & Bieth, 2012). While TACIS

concluded in 2006, TRACECA is still functional, and INOGATE transitioned into the EU4Energy initiative, which was launched in 2016.

Overall, TACIS can be partially considered as a regionalization and Europeanization endeavour primarily because of its emphasis on fostering cooperation and integration among these South Caucasian states and between these nations and the rest of Europe, thus facilitating a shift towards engagement with the European Union. By focusing on common sectors such as transport and energy (through TRACECA and INOGATE) and trying to address individual nation needs, TACIS promoted shared interests and interdependencies, trying to create a region that would be more coherent and connected.

TRACECA: EU's Vehicle for Regional Connectivity in the South Caucasus and Beyond – *Content Analysis of the Basic Multilateral Agreement*

Offering a more comprehensive analysis of the TACIS regional programmes, the subsequent focus will be directed towards a detailed examination of the Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia (TRACECA).

TRACECA represents a strategic initiative launched by the European Union (EU), with the ambitious goal of facilitating connectivity and bolstering regional integration in the South Caucasus, extending all the way to Central Asia. This multinational enterprise involves countries from Eastern Europe through the South Caucasus, reaching into Central Asia. Its member states include Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Romania, Tajikistan, Turkey, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan (TRACECA, 2018).

TRACECA's inception dates back to a conference convened in Brussels in May 1993. Ministers of Trade and Transport from eight countries - Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan - attended this gathering (TRACECA, 2022). Their common vision was to establish an EU-funded technical assistance program to construct a transport corridor linking Europe and Central Asia. Over time, Ukraine and Moldova were included, and at the first TRACECA Intergovernmental Commission (IGC) meeting held in Tbilisi in 2000, Bulgaria, Romania, and Turkey joined. Iran formally became a TRACECA member in 2009, and Lithuania secured observer status at the IGC. Currently, TRACECA consists of 13 full members from Europe, the South Caucasus, and Central Asia, each with distinct histories and socio-political contexts. Lithuania and the Hellenic Republic actively participate as observers (ibid.). The EU's efforts toward regionalization have translated into the rapid advancement of transport infrastructure in the TRACECA countries, underscoring their growing importance as crucial transit states.

In the period between 1995 and 1999, working groups were assembled and tasked with the creation of a comprehensive program strategy. This blueprint sought to streamline trade and enhance road, rail, and maritime transport. A conference in Tbilisi in 1997 probed into the synergies between TRACECA, the Black Sea region, and the Trans-European Networks (TENs). This gathering set the stage for the historic International Conference titled "TRACECA – Restoration of the Historic Silk Route," held in Baku, Azerbaijan, in 1998 (Ganjaliyev, 2012). This event marked a significant moment in the history of TRACECA as the Basic Multilateral Agreement on International Transport for Development of the Corridor Europe-the Caucasus-Asia (MLA) and its Technical Annexes were signed at the conference (TRACECA, 2022).

This international accord represented a meaningful step toward regional integration and collaboration, with the support of the TACIS-TRACECA program of the EU.

The MLA agreement, in its essence, outlined the primary objectives of regional transport cooperation among the participant nations (Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus Asia, 1998). It was designed to enhance economic relations, trade, and transport communication while prioritizing access to global markets, traffic safety, cargo security, environmental protection, and the harmonization of transport policies. A thorough content analysis of the Basic Multilateral Agreement on International Transport for Development of the Europe-the Caucasus-Asia Corridor (MLA) reveals an ambitious vision for increasing cooperation and stimulating economic ties, trade, and transportation across the geographic continuum of Europe, the Black Sea, the Caucasus, the Caspian Sea, and Asia. This vision, when evaluated through the lens of regionalization, exhibits the endeavour to weave an integrated tapestry of cooperation and economic activity that is wide in its geographic ambit, creating ties between diverse states and regions.

Regarding the institutional setup of TRACECA, the Intergovernmental Commission (IGC) plays a central role. Established in 2000, the IGC is responsible for supervising and monitoring the implementation of the TRACECA Basic Multilateral Agreement (MLA). It comprises representatives from key public transport authorities, with leadership rotating annually among the MLA parties. The IGC's main tasks encompass the formulation of annual action plans, election of the Secretary General, and decision-making based on consensus among its members. Additionally, the Permanent Secretariat (PS) of the IGC TRACECA, set up in 2001 and headquartered in Baku, Azerbaijan, serves as an executive body accountable to the IGC. The Secretary General, elected annually, manages the PS. It provides administrative and technical support to the IGC, maintains TRACECA's databases and archives, offers advisory services, and promotes MLA objectives and IGC decisions. Permanent representation in each MLA party is maintained by the PS (Egis International / Dornier Consulting, 2014).

The inherent ambitions of the MLA are reflected in its policy priorities and the institutional structures it seeks to put in place. The Agreement seeks to harmonize transport policies and laws across the participating countries, indicating an effort to create a seamless regulatory landscape that promotes fluid movement of goods, services, and people across these regions. It further seeks to ensure competitive conditions for all types of transport, a pursuit that aligns with the principles of liberal market economics prevalent in Europe, thereby indicating a subtle push towards economic integration. Moreover, the MLA's focus on traffic safety, security of goods, and environmental protection mirrors the European Union's core tenets of safeguarding its people and the environment, thereby showcasing its attempt to propagate these principles in the South Caucasus region and beyond. The establishment of an Inter-Governmental Commission and a Permanent Secretariat not only reflects the institutional structures often used by the EU to ensure effective policy implementation but also reveals an endeavour to foster institutional cooperation, essential for regional integration.

Despite these ambitious and integrative objectives, a critical examination of the MLA also reveals the challenges of regionalization in a geopolitically sensitive landscape. The provision in Article 14 that allows any State to accede to the Agreement indicates an attempt to be inclusive and broad-based. However, the reality of entrenched geopolitical tensions is underscored by the reservations made by the Republic of Azerbaijan, which stipulates the non-application of the Agreement's provisions to any transport involving the Republic of Armenia as an originating, transit, or destination territory.

This reservation serves as a reminder of the deep-seated conflicts in the South Caucasus region, particularly the unresolved tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan. It presents a contrast between the TRACECA aspirations for regional cooperation and the realities of geopolitical roadblocks that could hinder the full

realization of these ambitions. The content of the MLA thus underscores the intricate interplay between the ambition for regionalization and the constraints imposed by existing geopolitical realities. It illustrates the need for thoughtful consideration of these realities and the importance of conflict resolution in unlocking the full potential of regional cooperation initiatives like TRACECA.

The longstanding conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, particularly over Nagorno-Karabakh, still continues to impact the regionalization potential in the Caucasus region. Critical events, including the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War and the escalations in 2021 and 2022, culminated in EU-led peace talks (Dolidze, 2022b). As these talks progress, their implications for the Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia (TRACECA) could be significant. A successful peace deal could foster regional integration, economic cooperation, and potentially enable Armenia's full participation in TRACECA. Yet, ongoing regional tensions present a formidable challenge.

In sum, the MLA offers a revealing insight into the layered complexities of regionalization efforts in the South Caucasus region, where grand visions of cooperation and economic integration come face-to-face with the intricate web of geopolitical realities and historical conflicts. It serves as a crucial testament to the possibilities and challenges of regionalization in the South Caucasus, offering an invaluable roadmap for future engagements.

INOGATE: Facilitating Energy Cooperation - *A Content Analysis of the Umbrella Agreement and Astana Declaration*

The EU-funded INOGATE (Interstate Oil and Gas Transport to Europe) program played a crucial role in improving Europe's energy security by promoting the regional integration of oil and gas pipeline systems. Initially operating under the TACIS

program, INOGATE stood on an equivalent level to TRACECA (Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia) under TACIS.

While INOGATE followed a similar approach to other technical assistance programs, it distinguished itself by addressing energy issues from purely regional cooperation perspective. It transcended its traditional boundaries and expanded beyond its initial focus on TACIS countries. Through the legal basis of the Umbrella Agreement, INOGATE welcomed the participation of Central and Eastern European countries as well as MEDA (Mediterranean Dialogue) countries.

The principal objective of the program was to bolster the reliability of Europe's energy resources by encouraging regional consolidation of oil and gas pipeline networks. The initiative aimed to streamline the movement of energy commodities within the area and towards European export markets. With INOGATE functioning as a driving force, the intention was to draw the attention of private investors and global financial entities to pipeline ventures (Edmunds & O'Brien, 2003). The program had four main objectives. Firstly, it aimed to converge energy markets based on the principles of the EU internal energy market, while considering the specificities of partner countries. Secondly, it sought to enhance energy security by addressing issues such as energy exports/imports, supply diversification, energy transit, and energy demand. Thirdly, INOGATE supported sustainable energy development, including the promotion of energy efficiency, renewable energy, and demand-side management. Lastly, it aimed to attract investment towards energy projects of common and regional interest (Winrow, 2002).

INOGATE was a framework for political dialogue and technical assistance aiming to foster regional integration and cooperation in the energy sector. While the INOGATE program didn't directly fund or construct energy infrastructure, it played a crucial role in facilitating an environment conducive to such projects. INOGATE provided technical assistance, policy advice, and training to its partner countries, supporting their energy sector reforms, enhancing energy efficiency and renewable energy usage,

and promoting convergence of energy legislation and standards with those of the EU. Through these activities, the INOGATE programme indirectly contributed to the successful realisation of infrastructure projects in its partner countries by helping to establish more favourable policy, legal, and regulatory environments. Over the course of its implementation, INOGATE successfully carried out 70 projects with a total funding allocation of over EUR 150 million. The program's partner countries were divided into three geographical regions, each with its dedicated INOGATE Secretariat: Eastern Europe (including Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine, with the Secretariat in Kiev), the Caucasus (comprising Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, with the Secretariat in Tbilisi), and Central Asia (consisting of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, with the Secretariat in Tashkent) (INOGATE, n.d.).

Throughout its evolution, the INOGATE programme adapted to the changing energy landscape. At the INOGATE Kiev Summit in 1999, the INOGATE Umbrella Agreement was signed by thirteen countries, forming a formal process to streamline the development of interstate oil and gas transportation systems and attract investment. This agreement created a comprehensive institutional system shared by all signatory countries, reducing investment risks while maximizing commercial efficiency. It made a significant contribution to establishing international rules for oil and gas transit activities. Initially focused on the oil and gas sector, INOGATE then expanded its scope to include various aspects of energy cooperation.

The Baku Initiative, adopted in 2004, played a crucial role in this expansion by emphasizing the development of local energy markets, secure energy transportation, funding for infrastructure, energy efficiency policies, and integration with the EU energy market. This shift was further solidified by the Ministerial Conference held in Kazakhstan in 2006 and the signing of Astana Declaration, which identified priority areas for energy cooperation, including market convergence, energy transportation network safety, sustainable development, and investment support (ibid.).

The [Umbrella Agreement](#) on The Institutional Framework for the Establishment of Interstate Oil and Gas Transportation Systems (1999) highlights the importance of secure oil and gas access routes for the participating parties' future prosperity and energy security. It emphasizes the need to consider legal, technical, commercial, environmental, and financial factors in transportation decisions, promoting cooperation with other states and investment in hydrocarbon resources. The agreement also emphasizes adherence to market economy rules, aiming to harmonize regional policies with EU standards and regulations. It prioritizes the protection and treatment of foreign investments and investors, creating a favourable investment climate and fostering economic cooperation in the region. Also, the agreement focuses on establishing common rules and mechanisms for effective interstate oil and gas transportation systems, aligning them with international industry standards. This highlights the EU's objective of enhancing regional integration within the energy sector and aligning regional practices with international standards. These aspects reflect the EU's policy practices of regionalization, aiming to promote cooperation, economic development, and harmonization with EU standards in the region.

The adoption of the Astana Declaration during the 2nd Ministerial Conference held in Astana, Kazakhstan in 2006 marked another significant milestone in regional energy cooperation (INOGATE, 2006). It aimed to establish a roadmap for enhanced energy cooperation among the European Union, the Caspian and Black Sea regions, and participating partners. The Energy Road Map, a key outcome of the Astana Declaration, provided a strategic guide for collaboration and coordination in the energy sector, outlining objectives and indicative actions to achieve the long-term vision. The adoption of the Energy Road Map demonstrated a shared commitment to strengthen energy cooperation, promote sustainable development, and enhance energy security among participating nations. It provided a framework for joint initiatives, projects, and policies to facilitate the realization of common goals and foster closer ties in the energy sector.

The current EU4Energy program funded by the European Union builds upon the success of the INOGATE program and “follows the objectives for regional cooperation agreed between the EU and the beneficiary countries” (International Energy Agency, n.d.). It aims to support the aspirations of Eastern Partnership and Central Asia countries in implementing sustainable energy policies and fostering cooperative energy sector development at the regional level. The program began its first phase in July 2016 and ran through June 2022. It has since been renewed for a second phase starting from July 2021 until June 2025, with a specific focus on the six countries of the EU's Eastern Partnership: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine. This regional approach promotes collaboration, sharing of best practices, and the development of regional energy markets. In addition, EU4Energy provides technical assistance on legislative frameworks, regulatory frameworks, and key energy infrastructure investments to the Eastern Partnership countries through the Energy Community Secretariat and the Council of European Energy Regulators (CEER) (International Energy Agency, n.d.).

In conclusion, the INOGATE programme made significant contributions to regional energy cooperation by promoting the integration of oil and gas pipeline systems, enhancing energy security, and facilitating sustainable energy development. The Energy Ministerial Conferences in Baku and Astana played pivotal roles in shaping the programme's objectives and expanding regional energy cooperation. The EU's regionalization practices, as evidenced by the policy and content analysis, emphasized supporting regional energy markets, promoting sustainable development, integrating energy systems, and utilizing coordination mechanisms. The Astana Declaration and the Energy Road Map were crucial milestones, bringing together the EU and participating countries to address energy-related challenges and opportunities in a comprehensive and coordinated manner, and highlighting the EU's commitment to fostering regional energy collaboration and advancing the energy transition.

ENPI: Empowering Regional Cooperation and Driving Reforms in the Eastern Neighbourhood (2007-2013) - *A Content Analysis of Regulation (EC) No 1638/2006 and Regional Strategy Paper (RSP) 2007-2013 for the Eastern Region*

The TACIS program was superseded by the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI), which became the primary fiscal mechanism for the refreshed neighbourhood initiative from 2007 to 2013.

The European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) served as a key tool to foster shared values, stability, prosperity, cooperation, and economic integration in Southern and Eastern Neighbourhood countries. With a substantial budget of EUR 11.2 billion, a boost of 32% from the TACIS and MEDA programs, the ENPI provided robust support for meaningful sector reforms within these regions (Canciani, 2007). The ENPI was adept at promoting thorough policy dialogues and facilitating strategic planning at individual country levels, as well as at addressing intricate, cross-border challenges that spanned sectors such as transport, energy, environment, and border management.

The ENPI endeavoured to assist partners in the execution of their unique political, governance, economic, and social reform agendas. Notably, bilateral EU support for Eastern partners under the ENPI surpassed that during the TACIS program, with a total of approximately €4 billion as compared to €3.1 billion (Delcour, 2012). In the case of the South Caucasus, the support proffered by the EU played a pivotal role in furthering justice and economic reforms in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia.

In Armenia, EU assistance facilitated increased independence, transparency, and accessibility in the justice system, while modernizing the public finance system and enhancing vocational education. Despite Armenia's choice to join the Eurasian Customs Union, resulting in a EUR 53 million reduction in aid, the EU sustained its

support. In Azerbaijan, the EU drove energy policy reforms with a focus on energy efficiency and renewable energy and achieved progress in agriculture and rural development, consequently improving food security and diminishing import dependency. In Georgia, the EU's efforts concentrated on fortifying the rule of law, promoting respect for human rights, and advancing sustainable economic development. Post-conflict, additional resources were funnelled to support the substantial internally displaced population. The justice sector received significant focus, while agriculture was prioritized to augment food safety and bolster small farmers (European Commission Directorate General Development and Cooperation - EuropeAid, 2014).

At the same time, the ENPI played a significant role in providing regional assistance in line with the guidelines outlined in the Regional Strategy Paper (RSP) for the ENPI Eastern Region (2007-2013)(European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument, 2007). The strategy complemented the Country Strategy Papers (CSPs) for Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, focusing on enhancing cooperation within the region and with the EU. The ENPI's aid during this period prioritized support for five strategic categories: transport and energy networks, environment and forestry, border and migration management, people-to-people activities, and countering anti-personnel landmines, explosive remnants of war, and small arms and light weapons.

Various instruments and measures were used to support the achievement of these priorities. The main instrument was the ENPI, which included national allocations focused on the strategic priorities of beneficiary countries, cross-border cooperation (CBC), Neighbourhood and Partnership Programmes (NPP), and the Interregional Programme. Thematic programmes under new instruments were also utilized. Moreover, other instruments like the Democracy and Human Rights Instrument, the Nuclear Safety Instrument, and the Stability Instrument were also used. To boost investments by international financing institutions in the areas of the environment,

energy, and transport, the use of interest-rate subsidies was implemented (EUR-Lex, 2009).

The Regional Strategy Paper (European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument, 2007) explores the shared history, unique transitions, and common challenges of the countries in the ENPI Eastern Region, highlighting the need for comprehensive efforts to promote stability, security, prosperity, and regional cooperation. The EU aims to enhance cooperation among these countries and between these countries and the European Commission. The document posits that the EU's regional assistance will be most impactful in areas with clear regional advantages, like meeting outcomes, promoting regional cooperation, achieving economies of scale, and avoiding duplicated efforts. The strategy will concentrate on key areas chosen for their strategic importance, the EC's comparative donor advantage, their complementarity with other strategies, and coherence with other EU core policies.

The Regional Strategy Paper emphasizes the development of transport and energy networks, aligning with the priorities of the 2004 EU-Black Sea-Caspian Basin conferences and building on previous programs like TRACECA and INOGATE. The goal is to boost infrastructure development and policy alignment with EU standards in these sectors, promoting regional integration. The strategy also prioritizes environmental protection and forestry, recognizing that regional cooperation in these areas offers added value and opportunities for private sector and civil society engagement. Focus areas include multilateral environment agreements, water management, nature protection (including biodiversity conservation and land degradation), and the forestry sector, especially through the Forest Law Enforcement and Governance process (FLEG). Issues of climate change and industrial pollution are also tackled where a regional approach is warranted.

The Regional Strategy Paper also accentuates the need for cooperation in areas such as border and migration management, combating transnational organized crime, and customs, justifying these due to their cross-border nature, economies of scale, and need for reliable statistics. It underscores people-to-people activities and civil society support for comprehensive regional development and stability. The strategy also prioritizes addressing issues like landmines, explosive remnants of war, and small arms to promote safety and non-proliferation. The EU's goal, as illustrated in the paper, is to encourage cooperation, sustainable development, and stability in the Eastern Neighbourhood region through targeted support across various sectors and issues.

As a practical implementation of the priorities and objectives laid out in the Strategy Paper, the Regional Programme - East, implemented under the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI), led to several key outcomes. It facilitated policy dialogue on themes like democracy, economic integration, energy security, and interpersonal relations via multilateral platforms. Civil society was enhanced, becoming crucial for promoting reforms and democracy. The ENPI launched initiatives for integrated border management, SME development, regional gas and electricity markets, environmental governance, and disaster readiness. Other programs aimed to strengthen the rule of law, police cooperation, territorial cooperation, transport, youth, and culture. Environmental progress was notable, with partner countries adopting EU environmental standards. The program advanced transport cooperation, resulting in the approval of an Eastern Partnership (EaP) regional transport network and a master plan for transport infrastructure. Energy policies and regulations were refined, energy efficiency was promoted, and fossil fuel dependence was reduced. Facilities for energy efficiency and renewable energy projects were established. In total, the ENPI allocated EUR 572 million to this program, with an extra EUR 220 million from the Erasmus and Tempus programs. (European Commission Directorate General Development and Cooperation - EuropeAid, 2014.)

Regional Indicative Programme (RIP) 2007-2010	Programmed	Committed
Networks (transport, energy, SME)	25-35%	28%
Environment protection and forestry	25-35%	20%
Border and migration management, fight against organised transnational crime, customs	20-30%	30%
People to people activities, information and support	10-15%	19%
Landmines, explosive remnants, small arms and light weapons	5-10%	3%
Total RIP 2007-2010	223.5 EUR M	EUR 140 M
Regional Indicative Programme (RIP) 2010-2013*	Programmed	Committed
Democracy, good governance and stability	30.7%	24%
Economic development	20.7%	17%
Climate change, energy and environment	25.8%	13%
Advancing integration with the EU and regional cooperation, including civil society facility	22.8%	38%
Total RIP 2010-2013	EUR 348.57M	EUR 432 M
Grand total Regional East 2007-2013	EUR 572.07M	EUR 572 M

Table 2. ENPI assistance through the regional programme East; Source: (European Commission Directorate General Development and Cooperation - EuropeAid, 2014).

In summary, the Regional Programme East, as part of the ENPI, was pivotal force in boosting regional cooperation and actualizing shared objectives within the Eastern Partnership. Its influence was far-reaching, covering policy dialogue, civil society engagement, flagship initiatives, regional programs, environmental initiatives, transport collaboration, energy cooperation, and youth support. Its substantial contributions have significantly shaped the development and progress of the EaP and specifically, the South Caucasus region.

Going back to the legal base of the ENPI, it can be found in the *Regulation (EC) No 1638/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 October 2006 laying down general provisions establishing a European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument* content of which has been analyzed for the purpose of this study (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2006). 30 mentions of the word "regional" were identified and studied to discern the EU's regionalization practices.

The preamble of the regulation (Preamble, point 6) sets the stage by establishing the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements and the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership as the pillars of contractual relations in the region. In terms of cooperation, cross-border

collaboration emerges as a crucial aspect, as stated in Articles 1 and 2, referring to the subject matter and the scope of the community assistance. “*Community assistance shall be used for the benefit of partner countries. Community assistance may be used for the common benefit of Member States and partner countries and their regions, for the purpose of promoting cross-border and trans-regional cooperation*”- reads the second clause of the 1st Article. Community assistance is presented as a tool that benefits not only partner countries but also the Member States and their regions, aiming to pursue regional and local development efforts. Article 2 underlines the role of regional and sub-regional cooperation and integration in achieving these development goals. The principle of complementarity takes centre stage in Article 4, stressing that community assistance should complement national, regional, or local strategies. Article 5 pushes for coherence, compatibility, and coordination with multilateral and regional organizations, highlighting the crucial role of international cooperation in realizing the EU's regionalization policy. The implementation of community assistance is orchestrated through strategy papers and multi-annual indicative programs (Article 7), addressing regional and sub-regional cooperation between partner countries, signalling the EU's commitment to systematic regional cooperation. The regulation further introduces the concept of a joint managing authority involving different levels of governance (Article 10), emphasizing the importance of multi-level governance in achieving regional integration. Provisions like Article 14 and 15 elaborate on the role of international and regional organizations in the EU's regionalization efforts. Finally, the policy of regionalization is not limited to the EU and its Member States. As Article 17 and 21 suggest, the process involves a broader range of stakeholders, including international organizations, financial institutions, and non-European Union entities, indicating the EU's intention to create a wider network for regional integration.

Overall, the EU's Regulation (EC) No 1638/2006 places a strong focus on regionalization, promoting regional cooperation, cross-border integration, and

sustainable development. It unifies these goals through territorial integration and multi-stakeholder partnerships, involving international organizations. The regulation positions cross-border cooperation as a key mechanism for sustainable regional development and balanced territorial integration, guided by principles of complementarity, partnership, and co-financing. Implementation occurs via multi-country strategy papers and programs, with support from the European Regional Development Fund and joint managing authorities. The approach recognizes the role of international and local entities in regional cooperation and provides financial and technical assistance, administrative measures, and contributions to established funds and institutions. Thus, Regulation (EC) No 1638/2006 serves as a strategic framework for the EU's regionalization, centred on regional cooperation, sustainable development, and cross-border integration.

It must also be noted that, in the wake of substantial geopolitical shifts, including the Arab Spring and conflicts in Eastern Europe, the European Union re-evaluated its European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in 2011. This review prompted significant alterations to the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI). One important outcome of the 2011 ENP review was the establishment of the Eastern Partnership Integration and Cooperation (EaPIC) programme. Developed under the framework of the revised ENPI, the EaPIC program aimed to supplement the National Indicative Programmes (NIP) of selected countries with additional financial assistance. The EaPIC program, paralleling the SPRING initiative launched in the Southern Neighbourhood, combined additional financial support with a potent political stance on the progress - or absence thereof - in establishing a deep and sustainable democracy (European Commission Directorate General Development and Cooperation - EuropeAid, 2014). The pursuit of such democracy remains the paramount objective of cooperation in the Neighbourhood. EaPIC's primary goal was to support Eastern Partnership countries in their integration efforts with the EU, stimulating democratic reforms, and nurturing more stable and progressive

relationships between the EU and its eastern neighbours. The financial backing provided by the ENPI has been instrumental in enhancing EaPIC's capacity to achieve its objectives (European Commission, 2012).

ENI: *Examining Regionalization Efforts and their Significance for the South Caucasus within the Eastern Partnership - A Content Analysis of the Regulation (EU) No 232/2014 and Regional East Strategy Paper (2014-2020)*

Leading up to the subsequent review of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), slated for 2015, the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) was replaced by the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI), operational from 2014-2020. The ENI was meant to refine the EU's approach to funding its neighbourhood policy, seeking to deliver more effective support for its political objectives in the region and better respond to the changing dynamics of the EU Neighbourhood. With a budget of €15.433 billion, ENI incentivized top-performing partners, delivered faster and flexible assistance, and supported political initiatives shaping the ENP (EU Neighbours South, 2023). The purpose of the ENI was to foster a space of mutual prosperity and amicable relationships between EU Member States and partnering nations. It prioritized the promotion of human rights, the upholding of legal standards, the cultivation of sustainable democracy, and the active involvement of citizens. Moreover, considerations such as human rights, democracy, and good governance played significant roles in deciding the distribution of funds to partner nations. The ENI primarily allocated funding to the 16 countries that fall under the European Neighbourhood Policy, which includes Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Egypt, Georgia, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Moldova, Morocco, Palestine, Syria, Tunisia, and Ukraine. Due to Russian military incursion into Ukraine, cooperative initiatives involving Belarus have been put on hold since March 2022 (European Union, 2023).

The ENI followed a merit-based system, applying a conditionality referred to as the "more for more" principle, which promises enhanced support to those partners that demonstrate genuine commitment to nurturing a sustainable democracy. The focus of the ENI was to support cross-border collaboration schemes between Member States and partner countries, with the intention of solidifying connections between the EU and citizens of partner nations by involving them in EU internal initiatives like Horizon 2020 and Erasmus+. In addition, the ENI advocated for citizens' organizations and local authorities to have a say in the design, execution, and evaluation of EU assistance (ibid.).

“Regulation (EU) No 232/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 march 2014 establishing a European Neighbourhood Instrument” (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2014a), with around 20 references to regional cooperation, demonstrates the EU's strategic emphasis on fostering regionalization in the South Caucasus, as part of the Eastern Partnership.

The 4th point of preamble illustrates the EU's incentive-based approach to democratic reform in partner countries, emphasizing principles of 'more for more' and mutual accountability. The 5th point of preamble introduces the Eastern Partnership, highlighting it as a key political initiative for shaping relations with EU neighbours. The Partnership aims to deepen relations based on shared ownership and responsibility, underscoring the EU's commitment to fostering regional cooperation throughout the European Neighbourhood, which implicitly includes the South Caucasus. Cross-border cooperation and sustainable regional development are spotlighted in the 8th and 9th point of the preamble. These are of particular relevance to the South Caucasus, which is strategically located between Europe and Asia. The 11th point of the preamble encourages co-financing from various stakeholders, affirming the principle of shared ownership in regional initiatives. Further insights into the EU's regionalization strategy in the Eastern Partnership, including the South

Caucasus, can be drawn from the main text of the regulation itself. Article 3 emphasizes the Union's role in coordinating with diverse regional and international entities, highlighting a multi-stakeholder approach to regionalization. The concept of 'multi-country programmes' introduced in Article 6 is designed to tackle common challenges and priorities within the Eastern Partnership. Article 7 underlines the importance of aligning regionalization efforts with macro-regional strategies, while Article 16 provides for flexibility by extending eligibility for specific actions to a broader scope of countries and territories. In Annex II, Union support's priorities are outlined, spanning bilateral, multi-country, and cross-border cooperation levels. This multi-faceted approach offers a glimpse into the focus areas and potential impact of the EU's regionalization efforts in regions such as the South Caucasus.

The European Neighborhood Instrument (ENI) facilitated support in three distinct ways (EU Neighbours South, 2023). Firstly, through bilateral programs, it provided targeted assistance to individual partner countries, tailoring the support to their specific needs and circumstances. This approach allows for a more focused and personalized response to the unique challenges and opportunities faced by each country. Secondly, multi-country programs aimed to address shared challenges that span across multiple partner countries. By fostering regional and sub-regional cooperation, these programs promote collaborative efforts to tackle common issues, such as regional security, economic development, and environmental concerns. This approach recognizes the interconnectedness of neighboring countries and encourages them to work together towards mutual goals. Finally, cross-border cooperation programs facilitated collaboration between Member States of the European Union and partner countries along their shared external borders, even extending to countries like Russia. These initiatives foster exchanges and partnerships that aim to enhance cooperation, connectivity, and development in border regions, ultimately contributing to stability and prosperity on both sides of the border (ibid.). By employing these three complementary approaches, the ENI sought to support a

comprehensive and inclusive strategy, addressing various dimensions of development and cooperation within the European Neighbourhood. The flexibility and diversity of these programs enabled the European Union to tailor its assistance according to the specific context and needs of each partner country or region, ultimately fostering stronger partnerships and progress towards common objectives.

The Regulation (EU) No 232/2014 delineates the key priorities for Union support within each of these three modes of assistance. It highlights the specific areas and objectives that will be targeted through bilateral programs, multi-country programs, and cross-border cooperation initiatives. By identifying these priorities, the document provides a clear roadmap for the allocation and implementation of Union support in the European Neighbourhood, ensuring a focused and strategic approach to achieve the desired outcomes in each context. These priorities are aimed at achieving specific objectives, including human rights, good governance, economic development, social sectors, sustainable resource management, education, mobility and migration management, and conflict prevention. Cross-cutting issues such as democracy, human rights, gender equality, anti-corruption, and the environment will be addressed within these priorities. The financial allocations for each type of program are also specified. For bilateral programs, up to 80% of funding can be allocated, while for multi-country programs, up to 35%, and for cross-border cooperation, up to 5% (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2014a).

The analysis of the Regional East Strategy Paper (2014-2020) plays a crucial role in understanding multi-country programs in the context of the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood (European Commission & European External Action Service, 2018). This Strategy Paper lays out clear objectives for multi-country cooperation under the auspices of the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) during the 2014-2020 period. It sets forth the EU's priorities in the broader Eastern European region, detailing an indicative funding level for each priority. The legal underpinning of EU

cooperation in the Eastern Neighbourhood is anchored in Article 2 of the ENI Regulation. This includes the promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms, working towards economic integration, enhanced sector cooperation, fostering people-to-people interactions, supporting sustainable and inclusive development, boosting security and confidence-building, and strengthening regional, sub-regional, and cross-border cooperation. The text highlights the EU's goal to strengthen regional stability and progress. The focus on human rights, governance, and stability underscores the EU's commitment to democracy and peaceful conflict resolution. Additionally, the importance of economic growth, diversification, and inclusivity, essential for the region's sustainable progress, is highlighted. The Strategy emphasizes the significance of energy and transport cooperation to bolster market integration, enhance energy supply security, and improve transport connections. There is also a priority on environmental sustainability, advocating for alignment with EU environmental regulations and climate change strategies. The crucial role of civil society as a change agent is recognized, encouraging active participation in policy formulation and decision-making. The EU also emphasizes the indirect resolution of protracted conflicts through political association and economic integration to foster stability and confidence in the region.

The Strategy is built on several key principles to ensure its effectiveness and impact. It highlights the value of regional cooperation, fostering dialogue and collaboration between partner countries and the EU. Additionally, it promotes long-term aid effectiveness by ensuring consistency in sectoral approaches across the region. The Strategy implements various financial instruments, such as Single Support Frameworks for each partner country, the European Neighbourhood-wide program, and cross-border cooperation initiatives. These instruments address specific priorities like sustainable economic development, integration, capacity building, and cooperation between Member States and partner countries. Other EU external instruments, including the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights,

Instrument for Nuclear Safety Cooperation, and Development Cooperation Instrument, supplement support to the region. Moreover, internal EU programs with external cooperation windows contribute to the Strategy's goals, including Asylum, Migration and Integration funds, Internal Security, Connecting Europe, Creative Europe, and Erasmus+ for education, training, youth, and sports. These various instruments are coordinated and utilized to maximize the impact of EU financial cooperation in the Eastern Neighbourhood region.

Based on the content analysis, it is clear that the EU's approach to regionalization in the South Caucasus through the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) has been strategic, nuanced, and multifaceted. The "more for more" principle, as an integral part of ENI, reflects the EU's commitment to incentivize and stimulate democratic reforms. This not only provides leverage to the EU but also promotes good governance and democratic practices in partner countries. Furthermore, the analysis reveals a clear intent on the part of the EU to engage civil society and local authorities more directly in shaping regional policies.

This emphasis on a bottom-up approach represents a significant shift in the EU's foreign policy-making, towards more participative and inclusive decision-making. It is interesting to note here that the incentive-based approach does not extend to initiatives such as support for civil society, fostering person-to-person contacts, collaboration between local authorities, or enhancement of human rights and crisis-related assistance. In circumstances where serious or sustained regression occurs, the document highlights the possibility of even intensifying such support. The three distinct modes of assistance - bilateral programs, multi-country programs, and cross-border cooperation initiatives - highlight the EU's adaptability and flexibility. This implies a customized approach that acknowledges the unique needs of each country, thereby creating room for more targeted and efficient interventions.

Finally, the EU's strategic focus on regional cooperation is underscored in its legislative frameworks and the Regional East Strategy Paper. The prominence given to regional and sub-regional cooperation, including cross-border initiatives, indicates the EU's intent to foster interconnectedness and shared prosperity within the South Caucasus region. In conclusion, through the ENI, the EU has demonstrated a robust and flexible approach to regionalization, aiming at enhancing democratic governance, promoting active citizen participation, and encouraging regional cooperation in the South Caucasus. It has effectively utilized economic instruments to fulfill its strategic objectives and advance its foreign policy agenda in the region.

NDICI-Global Europe: *Transforming EU External Cooperation: Content Analysis of the Regulation (EU) 2021/947*

The European Union (EU) has recently undergone significant changes in its approach to external cooperation and spending. With the introduction of the Neighbourhood, Development, and International Cooperation Instrument - Global Europe (NDICI-Global Europe), the EU seeks to enhance its external action.

“Global Europe” replaced ENI for the current multiannual financial framework (MFF) period (2021-2027) and provides a budget of €79.5 billion (European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations [DG NEAR], n.d.). In fact, not only did it replace the ENI, but the NDICI-Global Europe has merged ten previous external financial instruments, streamlining the EU's external action. Apart from the the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI), notable instruments included in this integration are the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI), and the off-budget European Development Fund (EDF) (European Commission, n.d.). This consolidation ensures a more coherent approach to EU external cooperation.

There are three pillars to the NDICI- Global Europe. (1) The Geographic with a substantial allocation of at least 75% of the total envelope, focuses on fostering dialogue, cooperation, and strengthened partnerships with third countries and regions. Specific allocations include €19 323 million for the Neighbourhood, €29 181 million for sub-Saharan Africa, €8 489 million for Asia and the Pacific, and €3 395 million for the Americas and the Caribbean. (2) The Thematic Pillar addresses global challenges, human rights and democracy, civil society organizations, and peace, stability, and conflict prevention. Notably, 30% of the funding is dedicated to supporting climate and environment objectives, reflecting the EU's commitment to sustainability. (3) The Rapid Response Pillar enables swift action in crisis situations, instability and conflict, resilience challenges, humanitarian aid and development, and Union foreign policy needs and priorities (European Commission, 2018). This pillar ensures the EU's agility in addressing emerging challenges. A €9 534 million cushion is set aside to respond to unforeseen circumstances, address new needs or emerging challenges, and promote new EU or international initiatives. This flexible reserve supports actions across the geographic, thematic, and rapid response pillars.

In Regulation (EU) 2021/947 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 9 June 2021 establishing the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe, there are 93 references (including Annexes) to the term "regional" (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2021). These mentions highlight the European Union's global strategy while recognizing the importance of regional dynamics and cooperation within its approach.

The regulation outlines the EU's expertise in various fields, including regional integration and democratic transition, gained from its own history and successful policies. It also acknowledges the EU's reputation as a global actor in peace, conflict prevention, and the promotion of free elections and human rights. These elements form the foundation of the EU's global strategy. While the proposal emphasizes a

comprehensive and geographically inclusive approach, it simultaneously underscores the importance of regional cooperation. By recognizing the specific needs and opportunities within different regions, the EU aims to foster a trans-regional, multi-sectoral, and global approach that breaks down thematic and geographic silos. This approach facilitates coherent responses, synergies, and deeper engagement with partner countries.

The document unambiguously endorses the execution of the European Neighbourhood Policy and emphasizes the importance of frameworks for regional cooperation, cross-border collaboration, and the outward-facing components of strategies and policies related to macro-regions and sea basins. These regional initiatives provide political scaffolds for enhancing relationships among partnering nations, all built on the principles of mutual responsibility, collective ownership, and shared accountability (European Commission, 2018). Furthermore, the document emphasizes the EU's commitment to supporting bilateral, regional, and multilateral cooperation and dialogue, as well as partnership agreements and triangular cooperation. It also allows for flexibility in extending the scope of actions to countries and territories not covered by the regulation in order to ensure coherence and effectiveness of Union financing or to foster regional or trans-regional cooperation.

The NDICI-Global Europe marks a significant transformation in the EU's approach to external cooperation. By integrating financial instruments, adopting strategic pillars, and promoting flexibility and responsiveness, the EU aims to enhance its global positioning and effectively address emerging challenges (Thijssen, 2018). The programming cycle emphasizes shared interests, ownership, and tailored cooperation with partner countries, while the geographisation approach and broader programming approach foster pragmatic regional cooperation and interlinked responses. The transition from past programming exercises to the 'geographisation' strategy offers enhanced adaptability in regional and multi-country collaboration.

This shift now allows the EU to engage with various partners in diverse settings and levels, promoting pragmatic and flexible regional cooperation. Hence, regionalization continues to be a predominant theme, even within a globally focused financial tool such as NDICI Global Europe.

The inclusion of the South Caucasus in the broader context of the EU's neighbourhood and international development policy under NDICI, paired with a substantial focus on regional integration, suggest a nuanced approach to the EU's regionalization strategy. Specific influencing factors can be observed in the global challenges and human rights issues addressed in the Thematic Pillar, the EU's commitment to sustainability, and the need for rapid responses to crises. These factors reflect the broader geopolitical, economic, and societal dynamics that shape the EU's relations with this region. Methodologically, this analysis suggests that assessing the operationalization and outcomes of the EU's regionalization strategy in the South Caucasus requires taking into account both these broader factors and the specific regional contexts and dynamics.

Ultimately, the success of the EU's approach will depend on the extent to which it is able to align its regional strategy with these broader and local dynamics, and to respond flexibly and effectively to emerging challenges and opportunities.

(b) Cooperation Agreements

Transitioning to the second strategy, as delineated in the framework established by Karen Smith (2003) in her book "European Union Foreign Policy in a Changing World", this chapter aims to study EU – South Caucasus cooperation agreements as a manifestation of these practices.

In her insightful exploration of cooperation agreements, Karen Smith (2003) offers an in-depth analysis of the European Union's strategic engagements with regional blocs, emphasizing the crucial function of bilateral agreements with a regional emphasis. Smith reveals the EU's predilection for interacting with well-established blocs, evidenced by their dealings with ASEAN and Mercosur. Yet, in situations devoid of bloc-to-bloc relationships, she notes that the EU often institutes bilateral agreements that maintain uniformity across different countries within a specific region, thus a regional approach within a bilateral scheme. She cites the Euro-Med agreements and the Stabilization and Association Agreements (SAAs) with South-East European Countries as examples of this approach.

Applying Smith's perspective to the South Caucasus reveals that the EU effectively employs a “bloc-to-bloc” relations, while also interacting bilaterally with individual countries like Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia. These two strategies, working in tandem, serve to enhance regional cooperation. This chapter examines the various bilateral mechanisms the EU employs, such as Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs), European Neighbourhood Policy Action Plans and Partnership Priorities (ENP APs and PPs), Association Agreement (AA) and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) with Georgia under the Eastern Partnership, and the EU-Armenia Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA), which are identified as avenues for regionalization. These bilateral schemes are supported by multilateral initiatives, notably under the

European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), Eastern Partnership (EaP) and Black Sea Synergy (BSS).

In the aftermath of the Soviet Union's dissolution in the late 1990s, the Newly Independent States (NIS) of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia sought to establish formal ties with the EU. In pursuit of stronger cooperation, the EU negotiated and signed Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs) with each of these nations (See European Communities & Republic of Armenia, 1999; European Communities & Republic of Azerbaijan, 1999; European Communities & Georgia, 1999). The PCAs took effect during the late 1990s, serving as foundational documents for cooperation in various domains, encompassing political dialogue, trade, economic development, and regional stability. These agreements, while primarily bilateral, also emphasized a regional approach, recognizing the importance of promoting cooperation and stability across the entire South Caucasus region.

Acknowledging the need for a more cohesive and integrated framework for cooperation with neighbouring countries, the EU launched the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in 2004 (See Commission of the European Communities, 2003 & 2004). The ENP aimed to enhance political dialogue and promote economic integration, human rights, and democratic reforms in countries neighbouring the EU, including the South Caucasus. Subsequently, in 2009, the Eastern Partnership (EaP) was introduced to build upon the ENP and deepen EU engagement with six Eastern European countries, including Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia (See Council of the European Union, 2009). Moreover, alongside the Eastern Partnership (EaP), the EU pursued a regional strategy called the Black Sea Synergy (BSS), launched in 2008, to enhance cooperation and stability in the Black Sea region, which includes the South Caucasus (See Commission of the European Communities, 2007). The Black Sea Synergy aimed to address common challenges and opportunities,

such as energy security, environmental protection, and transport connectivity, by fostering cooperation among the littoral and neighbouring countries.

Recognizing the need for a more ambitious and comprehensive framework, the EU initiated negotiations on Association Agreements (AAs) with its Eastern Partners, including the South Caucasus countries. The AAs aimed to elevate cooperation to new heights, promoting political association and economic integration based on shared values, such as democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and sustainable development. Eventually, in 2014, Georgia followed and signed the AA/DCFTA, aligning its standards and regulations more closely with the EU, and further promoting regionalization and cooperation (See European Union & European Atomic Energy Community, 2014).

Additionally, in 2017, the EU concluded the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) (European Union & European Atomic Energy Community, 2018). This agreement aimed to deepen and broaden EU-Armenia relations, building upon the achievements of the earlier PCA. The CEPA covered a wide range of areas, including political dialogue, economic cooperation, and sectoral integration. Notably, negotiations for the Strategic Partnership Agreement (SAP) were also launched that year and it is still pending between the European Union (EU) and Azerbaijan.

For Armenia and Azerbaijan, the EU also introduced the concept of Partnership Priorities, which were signed in 2018 (See EU-Azerbaijan Cooperation Council, 2018; European Union External Action, 2018). These documents were developed jointly between the EU and each partner country, outlining specific objectives and areas of focus for cooperation. Partnership Priorities provided a more nuanced and tailored approach, addressing the unique challenges and opportunities in each country and

setting out the shared objectives and mutual commitments of the EU and its South Caucasus partners, further promoting regionalization and cooperation.

The EU's cooperation agreements with the South Caucasus have thus undergone significant evolution, transitioning from Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs) to the comprehensive and ambitious framework of Association Agreement (AA) with Georgia, CEPA with Armenia and ongoing negotiations of SAP with Azerbaijan. The inclusion of Partnership Priorities and the implementation of the Black Sea Synergy further enrich the EU's regionalization strategy, addressing specific challenges and opportunities in the South Caucasus region and promoting stability and prosperity. By examining the specifics and objectives of these agreements, we gain a deeper understanding of the EU's commitment to fostering regional cooperation and its endeavour to strengthen ties with the South Caucasus countries.

Using a policy and content analysis approach, this chapter delves into the theme of regionalization embedded in the policies, and within these agreements, seeking to gauge the extent to which they foster regional cooperation. By examining the specifics and objectives in these agreements, the aim is to gain a more profound understanding of the EU's regionalization strategy through cooperation agreements with the South Caucasus.

PCAs: EU's Evolving Regionalization Strategy in the South Caucasus - *a content analysis of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements*

The year 1996 marked a pivotal moment in the relations between the European Union (EU) and the South Caucasus nations of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, with the signing of Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs). These PCAs, which formally came into effect on July 1, 1999, laid the legal groundwork for the

relationships, ushering in a new era in the EU's regional approach towards these countries (Aliyeva, 2022).

The PCAs embodied shared values and aspirations such as respect for human rights, commitment to democratic principles, and endorsement of a market economy. The intention behind these agreements, as articulated in a joint declaration by the presidents of the three South Caucasus nations in Luxembourg in 1996, was to bring these states into closer alignment with the wider area of cooperation in Europe and its neighbouring regions (European Commission, 1999). The agreements formalized the relationship between the EU and each South Caucasian country and set the stage for ongoing dialogue and collaboration across an extensive array of sectors. These sectors spanned from trade and investment to justice and home affairs, showcasing the comprehensive nature of these relationships.

The introductory segments of the PCAs for Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia emphasize the significance of "regional cooperation." Additionally, the ambition is to extend their existing trilateral collaboration by integrating it into a broader, trans-regional context.

"DESIROUS of encouraging the process of regional cooperation in the areas covered by this Agreement with neighbouring countries in order to promote the prosperity and stability of the region and in particular initiatives aimed at fostering cooperation and mutual confidence among Independent States of the transcaucasus region and other neighbouring States.", - The introductory statements of all three documents stated (European Communities & Republic of Armenia, 1999; European Communities & Republic of Azerbaijan, 1999; European Communities & Georgia, 1999).

The PCA preambles in all three cases highlighted the objectives of promoting regional cooperation, fostering mutual confidence among Transcaucasus, i.e. South Caucasus

countries and neighbouring states, and establishing a regular political dialogue on various issues of shared interest. These aspects demonstrate the intention to enhance stability, prosperity, and cooperation in the region.

“The Parties consider that it is essential for their future prosperity and stability that the newly independent states which have emerged from the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, hereinafter called Independent States, should maintain and develop cooperation among themselves in compliance with the principles of the Helsinki Final Act and with international law and in the spirit of good neighbourly relations and will make every effort to encourage this process.” – reads the article 4 of all three PCAs, emphasizing the essential role that the regional cooperation plays in ensuring the future prosperity and stability of the Newly Independent States (NIS) (European Communities & Republic of Armenia, 1999; European Communities & Republic of Azerbaijan, 1999; European Communities & Georgia, 1999).

Article 5 of all the PCAs highlights the pivotal role of regular political dialogue as a mechanism to foster regional cooperation in the South Caucasus. It underscores the value of such cooperation in enhancing regional stability, promoting development of independent states in the region, and potentially resolving conflicts and easing tensions in the region; Article 45 emphasizes the role of regional cooperation in the South Caucasus as an integral part of the broader economic cooperation measures within the PCA. It recognizes regional cooperation as a crucial tool for stimulating harmonious development in the region and ensures its position as a focus in implementing the economic cooperation policies of the agreement. The document additionally contains references to regional cooperation, suggesting a more expansive strategy that potentially extends beyond the geographical confines of the South Caucasus. This reinforces the pivotal emphasis that the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) places on the multivariate facets of regional cooperation.

Interestingly, an in-depth examination of these agreements reveals a notable lack of distinction concerning the individual countries involved. This aligns with Smith's observation that regionalization strategies often subtly manifest within bilateral cooperation agreements, largely devoid of individualized approaches based on differing national contexts and aspirations. However, this lack of differentiation is not the sole manifestation of regionalization strategies. In fact, the emphasis on regional cooperation in the PCAs, combined with the goals of fostering mutual confidence, enhancing regional stability, and promoting the development of independent states, underpins the EU's comprehensive regional approach. This focus on cooperation extends beyond the direct economic spheres to include political dialogue and potentially conflict resolution, further indicating a nuanced and broad-ranging regionalization strategy.

ENP SP and APs: The EU's Growing Commitment to the South Caucasus – *content analysis of the 2004 ENP Strategy Paper and Action Plans*

Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs) conveyed a political stance by championing regional cooperation. This tradition has been further strengthened by the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), which incorporated Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia in 2004.

The inception of ENP dates back to the release of a communication titled "The Wider Europe Neighbourhood, A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours" in 2003 (Commission of the European Communities, 2003). Notably, the initial iteration of this policy did not encompass the South Caucasus region, explicitly stating that Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia fell beyond the geographical scope of the initiative at that time. However, a year later, a subsequent communication titled "European Neighbourhood Policy Strategy Paper" (SP) introduced significant developments (Commission of the European Communities,

2004). The European Commission recommended the inclusion of the Southern Caucasus countries in the ENP, underscoring the European Union's strong interest in fostering stability and development in the region. Within this context, the Commission emphasized the imperative of fortifying democracy, upholding the rule of law, ensuring respect for human rights, and advancing progress towards a market economy in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. Moreover, the communication highlighted the necessity of concerted efforts to facilitate conflict resolution and cultivate harmonious relations among neighbouring states. In light of these considerations, the European Commission, following consultations with relevant stakeholders and taking into account proposals from the EU Special Representative and the European Parliament, advocated for the Council's inclusion of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia within the European Neighbourhood Policy framework, thereby affording each country an equitable opportunity to foster ties with the European Union.

Recognizing the need for intensified endeavours to facilitate conflict resolution and nurture amicable relations in the region, the EU called for concrete actions to be undertaken by each country to further advance the implementation of their respective Partnership and Cooperation Agreements, with particular emphasis placed on bolstering the rule of law and promoting conflict settlement. The European Neighbourhood Policy, as conceived, sought to reinforce the EU's contributions towards these overarching objectives. In order to support Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia in their preparations for enhanced cooperation with the EU, the European Union expressed its willingness to provide assistance through credible, tangible, and sustained reform efforts, with particular attention to the priority areas outlined in the document. Recognizing the Southern Caucasus region's importance in terms of energy production and transit, cooperation in the energy sector was deemed pivotal.

The inclusion of the South Caucasus states into the ENP was to some extent precipitated by the peaceful Rose Revolution in Georgia, marked by the popular uprising in 2003, which also played a significant role in capturing the EU's attention and further stimulating its engagement with the South Caucasus (Mkrtchyan, Huseynov, & Gogolashvili, 2009). The revolution demonstrated a strong commitment to democratic values and reform in Georgia, making it a focal point for EU engagement within the region. Six months later, the Commission, backed by the European Parliament, recommended the integration of the three South Caucasus countries into the ENP framework, a recommendation that was adopted by the Council in June 2004. Interestingly, the decision targeted all three countries and not Georgia alone, thus reflecting the EU's regionalization approach towards the South Caucasus (Delcour & Duhot, 2011). The incorporation of the South Caucasus nations into the ENP marked a significant advancement in bilateral ties and demonstrated the EU's readiness to foster more profound connections, extending beyond the partnership and cooperation agreements (PCAs) (Mkrtchyan, Huseynov, & Gogolashvili, 2009).

Another factor contributing to the integration of South Caucasus states into the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) in 2004 was the concurrent Eastern enlargement of the European Union (EU). This extension of the EU's territorial boundaries precipitated the South Caucasus's emergence as a newly adjacent region. Consequently, considerations of stability and democratic governance within the South Caucasus ascended in the EU's strategic priorities. This concern was prominently articulated in the 2003 European Security Strategy, 'A Secure Europe in a Better World,' spearheaded by Javier Solana. "*We should now take a stronger and more active interest in the problems of the Southern Caucasus, which will in due course also be a neighboring region.*"- the document reads (Council of the European Union, 2003).

The earlier policies of the European Union, as illustrated, placed considerable emphasis on regionalization, be it TACIS, TRACECA, INOGATE or the PCAs. Such focus was further intensified and sophisticatedly incorporated within the European Neighbourhood Policy Action Plans (ENP APs) in 2006.

The ENP Action Plans (ENP APs) for Armenia and Azerbaijan emphasized intra-regional relationships (priority area 7 and 1 Contribute to a peaceful solution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in ENP AP for Armenia and ENP AP for Azerbaijan, respectively), and Georgia's stressed the need for confidence-building with its separatist regions (Priority area 6: Promote peaceful resolution of internal conflicts) (European Union, 2006a; European Union, 2006b; European Union, 2006c). The ENP APs thus acknowledged the importance of engaging with de facto states like Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno-Karabakh, recognizing the complexity of the region and the need to address its geopolitical intricacies for sustainable regionalization, yet, doing so in a conflicting way. As an example, in the ENP Action Plan negotiated with Armenia, the right to self-determination was mentioned, while the EU-Azerbaijan Action Plan focused on territorial integrity.

All three states' Action Plans acknowledge the necessity for increased collaboration in various domains such as education, environment, transport, and border management. They also emphasize the importance of active involvement in law enforcement initiatives, extending support to the Caucasus Regional Environmental Centre, fostering intensified bilateral and multilateral cooperation, as well as promoting youth exchange programs. Furthermore, the Action Plans of Armenia and Georgia specifically highlight the significance of enhanced cooperation in the energy and transportation sectors. This aspect is notably viewed as a unique priority area within the Action Plan for Azerbaijan. Curiously, it is only in case of Armenia that the ENP AP suggests considering the possibility of introducing a Euroregion cooperation model in the Southern Caucasus.

Moreover, the 2006 “Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on Strengthening the European Neighbourhood Policy” offers further insights into the European Union's (EU) regionalization practices towards the South Caucasus, with a notable emphasis on regional cooperation (European Commission, 2006). One of the chapters in this document, entitled "Enhancing Regional Cooperation," underscores the significance of dialogue and collaboration at the regional level, particularly around the Black Sea region, where the South Caucasus countries, among others, intersect with the EU. The document cites the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) as a tool that provides immense potential for fostering regional dialogue and cooperation. The communication signals the importance of an inclusive EU approach that accommodates the specificities of its bilateral relations with the Black Sea partner countries. The communication identifies concrete sectoral issues for which different initiatives could be established. For instance, it suggests using the International Commission for the Protection of the Black Sea for dialogues backed by scientific cooperation.

It further outlines the concept of a "Black Sea Synergy" to amplify cooperation within the Black Sea region, with an intent to resolve long-standing regional conflicts. The Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organisation (BSEC) is recognized an important platform for fostering dialogue and cooperation, and there is a proposal to establish closer ties with BSEC, potentially including observer status for the EU. Furthermore, the document emphasizes the necessity of a regular Foreign Minister level dialogue with BSEC, which could be instrumental in furthering the Union's Black Sea regional policy. The Commission proposes the organization of meetings parallel to BSEC events, allowing ministers from EU and Eastern ENP countries to participate in political dialogue and converse on matters related to ENP. The communication suggests the integration of other regional initiatives, such as the Baku Initiative focusing on transport and energy, into the 'Black Sea Synergy'. Overall, the Communication from the Commission envisages an inclusive, sectoral, and synergistic

approach to enhancing regional cooperation under the European Neighbourhood Policy, incorporating the South Caucasus.

The strategy of endorsing regional collaboration in the South Caucasus was thus sustained through the ENP Action Plans. Additionally, the appointment of a European Union Special Representative (EUSR) for the South Caucasus, having a regional mandate, along with the utilization of the European Commission's delegation in Tbilisi as a regional hub for the South Caucasus trio in 2005, further bolstered this approach (Simão, 2013). Two additional Delegations simultaneously opened in Baku and Yerevan in 2008. These developments signified the EU's heightened presence and commitment to the region.

Notably, the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) underwent revisions in 2011 and 2015. The Joint Communication titled "A New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood" (COM(2011) 303 final), outlined regional cooperation as one of its four primary objectives, and accordingly, a separate chapter was dedicated to the aim of building effective regional partnerships within the European Neighbourhood Policy (European Commission & High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 2011). The Communication acknowledges the significance of sub-regional cooperation within the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), particularly within the Eastern Partnership region. It highlights the need to develop closer ties and specific collaborations among a smaller group of partners to address regional challenges effectively. Sub-regional cooperation aims to foster cooperation, dialogue, and joint initiatives among neighbouring countries that share geographical proximity and face similar issues. By focusing on a sub-region, the revised ENP recognized that countries within the same geographic area often have common interests and challenges that can be better addressed through targeted cooperation. The chapter suggests that sub-regional cooperation can contribute to regional stability, economic development, and the resolution of common problems. It

mentions the importance of sub-regional initiatives in areas such as transport infrastructure, energy cooperation, customs and law enforcement, rural development, employment, and social policies. Furthermore, the chapter highlights the potential benefits of sub-regional cooperation in promoting regional solidarity and fostering a sense of shared purpose and identity among neighbouring countries. By concentrating efforts within a sub-region, it becomes easier to coordinate actions, share experiences, and establish specialized programs and projects that cater to the specific needs and priorities of the sub-regional partners. Overall, the document recognizes sub-regional cooperation as an integral part of the ENP's approach to regionalization. It acknowledges that by focusing on sub-regions, the EU and its neighbouring countries can enhance collaboration, maximize resources, and address regional challenges more effectively, ultimately leading to greater stability, prosperity, and mutual benefits within the sub-regional context.

With regards to the latest ENP review in 2015, the Chapter on the regional dimension of the "Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, and the Committee of the Regions - Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy {SWD(2015) 500 final," highlights important considerations regarding regional cooperation and the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) (European Commission & High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 2015). The review acknowledges the significance of the regional dimension in shaping the ENP and recognizes the value of existing regional cooperation formats, while also expressing a strong interest in exploring new ways of engaging with the neighbours of the neighbours. One of the key proposals put forth in the review is the concept of new outreach initiatives beyond the boundaries of the ENP area. By extending cooperation and dialogue beyond ENP, the EU aims to enhance its regional approach and address shared challenges more effectively. Another notable aspect of the review is the introduction of thematic frameworks as a means to tackle common issues. These frameworks are designed to address specific

challenges such as migration, energy, security, and health. By adopting a thematic approach, the EU seeks to develop targeted strategies and policies that can yield tangible results in these areas of concern. As in the 2011 Review, the 2015 Review also emphasizes the importance of reinforcing relations between neighbouring countries themselves and promoting sub-regional cooperation both in the east and south. It recognizes the potential of EU macro-regional strategies and territorial cooperation programs to facilitate cooperation between neighbouring partners, EU member states, candidate countries, and potential candidate countries, thereby harnessing their full potential.

To conclude, the review of the European Neighbourhood Policy's regional dimension, as of the year 2015, highlights the importance of regional cooperation and the need to explore new approaches in engaging with neighbouring countries and regions. The introduction of new outreach initiatives, thematic frameworks, and a continued emphasis on regional cooperation through already existing platforms demonstrate the EU's commitment to strengthening regional ties and addressing shared challenges more effectively.

EaP Joint Declaration; AA/DCFTA and CEPA: Complementarity of Bilateral and Multilateral Strategies of Regionalization – *Content Analysis of the Prague EaP Summit Joint Declaration, the EU-Georgia AA/DCFTA and the EU-Armenia CEPA*

The establishment of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) in 2009 served as an integral dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and marked a major advancement in the European Union's (EU) approach to its relationships with post-Soviet states. The EaP created a distinct political region encompassing Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, and Belarus—six countries not typically regarded as a unified region. This development further epitomized the EU's strategy of regionalizing states with shared political relevance or geographic proximity to the Union, facilitating collective interactions and reducing transaction costs.

The Prague EaP Summit in 2009 brought together leaders from the EU and six Eastern European countries. The aim was to deepen cooperation, endorsing principles of rule of law, human rights, democracy, market economy, and sustainable development (External Action Service, 2022). The Eastern Partnership was envisioned as a platform for promoting political and socioeconomic reforms, and fostering EU integration, without necessarily indicating future EU membership.

The Joint Declaration of the Prague Summit, establishing the Eastern Partnership, emphasized peaceful conflict resolution, good governance, regional development, and the reduction of socioeconomic disparities (Council of the European Union, 2009). Strengthening energy security was another key point, encouraging cooperation for secure energy supply and transit. The EU also pledged to facilitate citizens' mobility, aiming for long-term full visa liberalization. The document suggested a multilateral framework, with regular meetings of Heads of State, Foreign Ministers, and discussions on thematic platforms covering democracy, stability, economic integration, and more. The Partnership was designed to complement other regional initiatives and involve various actors, including civil societies and private sectors. The declaration concluded with commitments to increase EU financial support and foster public awareness of the Partnership's principles and goals. It was hoped this Partnership would bring enduring benefits to all participating countries' citizens.

The Declaration proposed new Association Agreements for expansive free trade areas and regulatory approximation with EU standards. When signed, Association Agreements would replace the previous PCAs. These agreements sought to enhance political association, increase political dialogue, and deepen cooperation on justice and security issues, representing a plan to align partner countries' legislation and standards with the EU. Of the three South Caucasian countries offered Association Agreements (AAs) by the EU, only Georgia displayed resolute dedication. Armenia, pressured by

Russia, declined the AA and joined the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) in 2013. Azerbaijan has maintained a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) with the EU since 1999, though negotiations for an enhanced agreement started in 2017, usually referred to as Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) (Chkhihvadze, 2016). Despite challenges, Georgia has thus developed the strongest relationship with the EU among the South Caucasus nations.

The EU-Georgia Association Agreement has been in effect since July 2016, promoting significant alignment in legislation between Georgia and the EU. This led to visa waivers for short stays in the Schengen area from March 2017 and financial support from the EU of over €100 million annually (Press and information team of the Delegation to GEORGIA, 2021). Following Ukraine's plea to join the EU amidst a battle with Russia's invasion, Georgia applied for EU candidate status on March 3, 2022, under an accelerated procedure. However, only Georgia's 'European perspective' was recognized by the European Council on June 23, due to worrying democratic issues (European Council, 2022). Georgia, challenged by Russia's occupation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, is hoping to move closer to the EU and NATO. The EU has reiterated its support for Georgia's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity, and the annual EU-Georgia Strategic Security Dialogue reinforces this relationship. On June 9, 2022, the European Parliament appealed to the European Council to grant EU candidate status to Ukraine, Moldova, and to 'work towards granting the same status' to Georgia.

The references to regional cooperation in “the Association Agreement between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community and their Member States, of the one part, and Georgia, of the other part” indicate a broad and comprehensive scope of collaborative efforts both within and outside the South Caucasus region (European Union & European Atomic Energy Community, 2014). The preamble sets the tone by acknowledging the importance of the Parties' active

participation in various regional cooperation formats, which suggests engagement in both local (South Caucasus) and broader regional structures. This is aimed at strengthening political dialogue on bilateral and international issues, including regional aspects, in line with the European Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy. The agreement emphasizes the desire for peace, stability, and good neighbourly relations, which it seeks to foster through cross-border and inter-regional cooperation. The Parties commit to addressing sources of tension, enhancing border security, and promoting cross-border cooperation - all initiatives that directly relate to regional collaboration.

The agreement includes stipulations underscoring the importance of collaboration at a regional level. For instance, the promotion of governance principles (Article 2) recognizes the importance of the rule of law, good governance, and anti-corruption efforts in cultivating relations and cooperation between the Parties. The emphasis on "effective multilateralism" signifies a commitment to broader regional cooperation. Enhanced cooperation in foreign and security policy (Article 3) underscores the importance of addressing global and regional challenges and fostering regional cooperation in diverse formats. The framework for foreign and security policy dialogue (Article 5) establishes a basis for increased dialogue and cooperation, emphasizing conflict prevention, peaceful conflict resolution, and crisis management. This demonstrates a commitment to extensive cooperative efforts at bilateral, international, and regional levels. The Parties pledge to promote regional stability, security, and democratic development in Article 8, emphasizing the peaceful resolution of conflicts and engagement through the Eastern Partnership and other regional and international fora. The agreement also highlights the importance of bilateral, regional, and international cooperation in combating terrorism and organized crime (Articles 12 and 17). It recognizes the significance of regional energy cooperation (Article 298), particularly in renewable energies such as hydropower, and the potential for Georgia's membership in the Energy Community Treaty.

Information and expertise exchange (Article 303) is emphasized at bilateral, regional, and international levels, with recognition of existing cooperation structures in the South Caucasus. Furthermore, the chapter on regional development and cross-border cooperation (Chapter 21) aims to align Georgia's regional development policies with EU principles, enhance inter-institutional coordination, and develop the capacity of local public authorities for cross-border cooperation. It emphasizes mutual understanding, shared financial contributions, knowledge exchange, and ongoing dialogue. The chapter encourages cross-border cooperation across various sectors, promoting deeper integration between Georgia and European regional structures.

Through a comprehensive analysis of the EU-Georgia Association Agreement, it is evident that the agreement places significant emphasis on regional cooperation, highlighting its significance for the South Caucasus within the framework of the Eastern Partnership. The provisions of the agreement underscore the importance of governance principles, foreign and security policy cooperation, regional stability, combating terrorism and organized crime, energy cooperation, information exchange, and cross-border cooperation. These elements collectively contribute to fostering regional collaboration and advancing the shared objectives of the EU and Georgia within the South Caucasus region. In conclusion, while the South Caucasus is not explicitly mentioned, the agreement's various provisions clearly indicate a commitment to fostering regional cooperation both within this specific region and more widely. This is achieved through a focus on good governance, multilateralism, conflict resolution, and sector-specific cooperation such as energy and regional development.

An integral part of the AA between the EU and Georgia is the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA), aiming to deepen economic ties and liberalize trade between Georgia and the EU (European Commission, n.d.). The DCFTA primarily focuses on bilateral relations between Georgia and the EU. The

main objectives of the DCFTA include the elimination of trade barriers, harmonization of Georgia's laws with EU standards in certain sectors, and the creation of better conditions for businesses in both Georgia and the EU. These objectives are mainly achieved through various measures, including reduction of tariffs, alignment of standards and regulations, and increased market access (Economic Policy Research Center, 2014). DCFTA is strictly bilateral and doesn't imply regional cooperation within the South Caucasus or with other neighbouring regions, though it is still possible that the establishment of a free trade area and the alignment of Georgia's standards with those of the EU could indirectly contribute to regional cooperation. For instance, neighbouring countries might also be incentivized to align their standards with EU norms to facilitate trade and economic integration, or they might engage in more extensive trade and economic cooperation with Georgia due to its improved business environment.

The EU and Armenia Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) entered into force in 2021, deepening relations in various areas while maintaining compatibility with Armenia's membership of the Eurasian Economic Union (Press and Information Team of the Delegation to Armenia, 2021). CEPA exhibits twice as many references to regional cooperation compared to the Association Agreement (AA) between the EU and Georgia (European Union & European Atomic Energy Community, 2018).

Within the preamble of the CEPA, the accord articulates a mutual commitment towards regional cooperation and acknowledges the significance of proactive engagement, constructive political discourse, adherence to international obligations, and the enhancement of cross-border and inter-regional cooperation. The principles of cooperation (Article 2) reaffirm the commitment to a multifaceted approach that includes a free-market economy, sustainable development, regional cooperation, and effective multilateralism. These principles highlight the emphasis placed on regional

collaboration in achieving shared objectives. The aims of political dialogue (Article 3) outline the goals of strengthening cooperation and dialogue on international security and crisis management. Addressing global and regional challenges, promoting regional cooperation, developing good neighbourly relations, and enhancing regional security are key objectives. The mention of promoting cross-border movement and regional trade indicates an intent to deepen regional integration, underscoring the importance of a cohesive regional environment. Foreign and security policy (Article 5) emphasizes the need for intensified dialogue and cooperation, recognizing Armenia's role in international organizations and cooperation formats. Conflict prevention, crisis management, risk reduction, cybersecurity, regional stability, and disarmament are areas of focus. The layered approach to managing security and foreign policy issues involves bilateral, international, and regional fora, including the OSCE. Regional stability and peaceful resolution of conflicts (Article 8) reinforce the commitment to joint efforts in improving conditions for regional cooperation. Promoting open borders, good neighbourly relations, and democratic development are key in contributing to stability and security, highlighting the importance of a stable regional environment. Cooperation in combating terrorism (Article 11) and the fight against organized crime and corruption (Article 16) involves bilateral, regional, and international levels. This multi-tiered approach underscores the significance of regional collaboration in addressing security challenges. The agreement also focuses on regional economic integration (Article 23) and regional transport cooperation (Article 38). The exchange of information, joint participation in regional activities, and involvement in initiatives such as the Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia (TRACECA) highlight the importance of regional cooperation in these sectors. Regional cooperation on energy (Article 42) is particularly relevant to the South Caucasus region due to its significant energy resources. Additionally, a separate chapter (N22) on regional development, cross-border, and regional-level cooperation emphasizes the role of cross-border cooperation among different levels of governance, socio-economic actors, and civil society. This chapter encourages cross-border

cooperation in various sectors, including transport, energy, environment, communication networks, culture, education, tourism, and health. The broad geographic reach, involving neighbouring and non-neighbouring countries, underscores the wider scope of cooperation and its potential international impact.

Through a content analysis of the EU-Armenia Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement, it is evident that regional cooperation plays a vital role within the Eastern Partnership framework. The agreement's provisions highlight the significance of regional collaboration in promoting political dialogue, addressing security challenges, fostering economic integration, facilitating transport cooperation, and encouraging cross-border and regional-level cooperation. This comprehensive approach underscores the importance of regional cooperation for Armenia and the wider Eastern Partnership region in achieving shared objectives. To conclude, the CEPA with Armenia highlights a mutual commitment to proactive engagement, constructive political discourse, adherence to international obligations, and the enhancement of cross-border and inter-regional cooperation.

Various aspects of the agreement demonstrate the importance attributed to regional cooperation. These include the principles of cooperation, aims of political dialogue, foreign and security policy, regional stability and peaceful conflict resolution, combating terrorism, fight against organized crime and corruption, regional economic integration, regional transport cooperation, promotion of regional cooperation on energy, and a separate chapter dedicated to cross-border and regional-level cooperation. These provisions showcase the EU's recognition of the significance of regional collaboration in addressing common challenges, promoting stability, and fostering socio-economic development in the South Caucasus region. The agreement also implies a broader geographic scope for cooperation, extending beyond immediate neighbouring countries.

To conclude, EaP's 'regional approach' aimed to foster an additional multilateral layer of interaction between the EU and EaP countries, supplementing the bilateral efforts. This strategy was characterized not by the end goals—such as deeper integration of EaP countries with the EU and the adoption of EU norms and rules—but by the method of approach. The multilateral rule was a contrast to bilateral agreements, positioning the EaP region as 'subjects'—equal, active contributors to region-building, rather than as passive 'objects' of others' region-building efforts. The EaP framework played a critical role in facilitating bilateral cooperation with the EU and nurturing multilateral collaboration, addressing shared challenges, promoting cooperation, and fostering best practices' exchange.

BSS: Analyzing the new regional cooperation initiative, *COM(2007) 160*

Black Sea Synergy (BSS) initiative was proposed by the European Commission and formally launched in Kiyev in 2008. This initiative is designed to foster regional cooperation around the Black Sea, complementing the Eastern Partnership (EaP) that promotes the countries' rapprochement to the EU (European Commission, 2010). The Black Sea Synergy forms part of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), which emphasizes regional and multilateral dimensions of the EU's external policies (Emerson, 2008). The initiative is open to all Black Sea States and aims to support the region's goals by connecting with existing schemes and organizations such as the Organisation for Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC). Importantly, the initiative also includes partners tied to the EU through accession policy (like Turkey) or a Strategic Partnership (like Russia), in addition to Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine (Yazgan, 2017).

The Black Sea Synergy is committed to bringing tangible improvements to the region through cooperative approaches, with a focus on three critical sectors: environment,

transport, and energy (EEAS Strategic Communications, 2021). To this end, the EU plans to use its grants as seed money to prepare projects and present them to institutions ready to invest in the region's infrastructure. The financing for these initiatives will primarily come from the ENPI regional envelope and the Neighbourhood Investment Fund (NIF), supplemented by contributions from other partners (European Commission, 2010). The "Black Sea Synergy" is situated within the broader scope of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), sharing its framework with other initiatives such as the "Eastern Partnership". Notably, the membership of the "Eastern Partnership" overlaps with that of the "Black Sea Synergy", with the exception of Belarus (Yazgan, 2017). The central divergence between the "Eastern Partnership" and the "Black Sea Synergy" lies in their respective relationships with the EU. While the "Eastern Partnership" strives to narrow the gap between the participating countries and the EU, the "Black Sea Synergy" primarily aims to nurture regional collaboration within the Black Sea zone.

Yet, EaP has that direction too. The 2009 EaP Declaration interestingly refers to promoting the integration of the EaP region itself, indicative of a different model of region-building (Council of the European Union, 2009). This model doesn't primarily aim for assimilation to the EU but instead boosts cooperation within the EaP region, inclusive of peaceful conflict resolution. This model positions the countries in the region as 'subjects'—equal, active contributors to regionalization, rather than as passive 'objects' of others' regionalization efforts.

Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament of 11 April 2007 - Black Sea Synergy - A new regional cooperation initiative [COM(2007) 160 final outlines the European Union's regionalization efforts within the context of the Black Sea Synergy (Commission of the European Communities, 2007). It opens with the EU's acknowledgment of the Black Sea region's strategic importance as a rich resource hub and as a bridge between Europe, Central Asia, and

the Middle East. However, the region is also acknowledged as facing challenges such as unresolved conflicts, environmental issues, insufficient border controls, and disparities in the pace of economic reforms and governance quality. The EU underlines the significance of regional responses to address these challenges for the benefit of both the region and overall European stability. The EU highlights its contributions to the region, primarily through stimulating democratic and economic reforms and projecting stability and support for development in the Black Sea area. EU's existing cooperation programs and partnerships with key countries in the region, including Turkey and Russia, are considered significant for regional development.

The document emphasizes the need for coordinated action at the regional level to address opportunities and challenges in key sectors such as energy, transport, environment, movement, and security. Enhanced regional cooperation is presented not as a solution for long-standing conflicts but as a confidence-building tool that can, over time, help eliminate some obstacles in the region. The EU outlines its proposed Black Sea Synergy as a new regional cooperation initiative. This initiative aims to augment the existing EU policies, invigorate ongoing cooperation processes, and stimulate political attention at the regional level. Black Sea Synergy's primary task would be to develop cooperation within the Black Sea region and between the region and the EU.

Furthermore, the document highlights the specific cooperation areas under the Black Sea Synergy initiative. These include promoting democracy, human rights, and good governance, improving security and border management, addressing "frozen" conflicts, developing energy policies for diversification and security, and improving transport efficiency and safety. The EU sees its role as providing support and guidance to these regional efforts, assisting with funding and information exchange, and facilitating the development of common standards and best practices. In conclusion, the document underscores the EU's increased commitment to the Black Sea region

and highlights the importance of regional cooperation for the mutual benefit of the EU and the countries in the Black Sea region. The Black Sea Synergy initiative is presented as a vital step towards a more stable, prosperous, and secure region and Europe as a whole.

“The EU is a strong proponent of regional, cooperative approaches: It is not just what we do, it is what we are. Our programmes put therefore a strong emphasis on the regional and multilateral dimensions of the EU's external policies. The regional component of the ENP is implemented through several initiatives, notably the multilateral elements of the Eastern Partnership and the Black Sea Synergy.” – reads the European Commission memo (European Commission, 2010).

In closing, the Black Sea Synergy initiative embodies the European Union's strategic approach to fostering regional cooperation in the South Caucasus and broader Black Sea region. The initiative acknowledges the strategic significance of the South Caucasus, underlining the EU's willingness to enhance engagement in critical sectors like environment, transport, and energy in this region. In essence, the Black Sea Synergy initiative serves as a platform for the EU's regionalization practices in the South Caucasus. By focusing on collective responses to shared challenges and fostering regional cooperation, the EU demonstrates its understanding that such an approach is pivotal to building confidence and resolving conflicts in the region. This underscores the EU's belief in an active regional role for the South Caucasus countries, promoting regional development strategies that are cooperative and inclusive. What is more, despite not being Black Sea states, the inclusion of Armenia and Azerbaijan in the Black Sea Synergy initiative speaks volumes about the European Union's broader regionalization practices. It reflects the EU's desire to cultivate stronger ties and foster cooperation in a strategically important region that serves as a bridge between Europe, Central Asia, and the Middle East. This approach aims to unify the countries within the South Caucasus region and Black Sea states under a cooperative framework that

transcends geographical boundaries. The EU's initiatives such as the Black Sea Synergy and the Eastern Partnership recognize the interconnected challenges and opportunities within this wider region, spanning across themes of security, economic development, energy, and more. This signifies an EU strategy that favors a holistic, region-based approach to external relations and policy, thereby positioning Armenia and Azerbaijan as key players in a multifaceted regional cooperation.

In summary, the Black Sea Synergy reflects the EU's ongoing commitment to the South Caucasus and the wider Black Sea region. It places a high premium on regional cooperation for stability and mutual benefit, serving as an essential tool for the EU's regionalization practices in the South Caucasus.

ENP Reviews, individual and EaP PPs: *Examining the EU's Regionalization Approach through Content Analysis*

The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) underwent revisions in 2011 and 2015. The Joint Communication titled "A New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood" ([COM\(2011\) 303 final](#)), outlined regional cooperation as one of its four primary objectives, and accordingly, a separate chapter was dedicated to the aim of building effective regional partnerships within the European Neighbourhood Policy (European Commission & High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 2011).

The Communication acknowledges the significance of sub-regional cooperation within the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), particularly within the Eastern Partnership region. It highlights the need to develop closer ties and specific collaborations among a smaller group of partners to address regional challenges effectively. Sub-regional cooperation aims to foster cooperation, dialogue, and joint initiatives among neighbouring countries that share geographical proximity and face

similar issues. By focusing on a sub-region, the revised ENP recognized that countries within the same geographic area often have common interests and challenges that can be better addressed through targeted cooperation. The chapter suggests that sub-regional cooperation can contribute to regional stability, economic development, and the resolution of common problems. It mentions the importance of sub-regional initiatives in areas such as transport infrastructure, energy cooperation, customs and law enforcement, rural development, employment, and social policies.

Furthermore, the chapter highlights the potential benefits of sub-regional cooperation in promoting regional solidarity and fostering a sense of shared purpose and identity among neighbouring countries. By concentrating efforts within a sub-region, it becomes easier to coordinate actions, share experiences, and establish specialized programs and projects that cater to the specific needs and priorities of the sub-regional partners. Overall, the document recognizes sub-regional cooperation as an integral part of the ENP's approach to regionalization. It acknowledges that by focusing on sub-regions, the EU and its neighbouring countries can enhance collaboration, maximize resources, and address regional challenges more effectively, ultimately leading to greater stability, prosperity, and mutual benefits within the sub-regional context.

With regards to the latest ENP review in 2015, the Chapter on the regional dimension of the "Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, and the Committee of the Regions - Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy {SWD(2015) 500 final}," highlights important considerations regarding regional cooperation and the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) (European Commission & High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 2015). The review acknowledges the significance of the regional dimension in shaping the ENP and recognizes the value of existing regional cooperation formats, while also expressing a strong interest in exploring new ways of

engaging with the neighbours of the neighbours. One of the key proposals put forth in the review is the concept of new outreach initiatives beyond the boundaries of the ENP area. By extending cooperation and dialogue beyond ENP, the EU aims to enhance its regional approach and address shared challenges more effectively.

Another notable aspect of the review is the introduction of thematic frameworks as a means to tackle common issues. These frameworks are designed to address specific challenges such as migration, energy, security, and health. By adopting a thematic approach, the EU seeks to develop targeted strategies and policies that can yield tangible results in these areas of concern. As in the 2011 Review, the 2015 Review also emphasizes the importance of reinforcing relations between neighbouring countries themselves and promoting sub-regional cooperation both in the east and south. It recognizes the potential of EU macro-regional strategies and territorial cooperation programs to facilitate cooperation between neighbouring partners, EU member states, candidate countries, and potential candidate countries, thereby harnessing their full potential.

To conclude, the review of the European Neighbourhood Policy's regional dimension, as of the year 2015, highlights the importance of regional cooperation and the need to explore new approaches in engaging with neighbouring countries and regions. The introduction of new outreach initiatives, thematic frameworks, and a continued emphasis on regional cooperation through already existing platforms demonstrate the EU's commitment to strengthening regional ties and addressing shared challenges more effectively. Overall, the 2015 ENP review showcases the EU's commitment to regional cooperation, addressing shared challenges, and promoting stability and development in its Eastern neighbours and beyond. It reflects the EU's strategic approach to engage with partner countries, enhance connectivity, and foster dialogue and collaboration on a regional level.

After the 2015 ENP review, the wide-ranging European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) Action Plans (APs) were replaced by more focused and mutually agreed upon Partnership Priorities (PPs) (Lannon, 2015). Partnership Priorities (PPs) are concise documents pinpointing a few specific areas of focus, unlike the comprehensive and detailed nature of Action Plans (APs). This makes PPs a more flexible, adaptive tool that is simpler to implement. It is also noteworthy that the EU ceased issuing 'progress reports' on the implementation of Action Plans by ENP countries (Tzidkiyahu & Brause, 2022).

The "Partnership Priorities between the European Union and Armenia" signed in 2018 (European Union External Action, 2018) aimed to fortify the EU-Armenia relationship, illustrating the EU's dedication to foster not only bilateral relations but also wider regional dynamics. The four main priorities identified are: Strengthening institutions and good governance; Economic development and market opportunities; Connectivity, energy efficiency, environment and climate action; Mobility and people-to-people contacts. The importance of regional stability was underscored in this document, with the EU and Armenia sharing a commitment to promote democracy and human rights. This suggested the EU's intention to contribute positively towards regional cooperation and stability. Furthermore, civil society was highlighted as a critical player within the Eastern Partnership context. This implies the EU's understanding of the significant role local societal institutions can have in boosting regional cooperation initiatives. The document also emphasized the mutual interest in economic cooperation towards sustainable growth. This objective suggested the EU and Armenia's intention to explore every possible opportunity to enhance the business environment, which in turn solidifies regional ties. Lastly, the document presented these priorities within the Eastern Partnership framework, hinting at the instrumental role this regional initiative plays in fulfilling the set goals.

"Partnership Priorities between the European Union and Azerbaijan" has the same structure and title for each priority area as in case of Armenia (EU-Azerbaijan Cooperation Council, 2018). Agreed upon in the context of the European Neighbourhood Policy Review, the EU and Azerbaijan focused on strengthening their mutual relationship by promoting common values, such as respect for human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. The agreement also emphasized commitment to territorial integrity, inviolability of international borders, and sovereignty, which, on a broader scale, suggest a priority for regional stability and cooperation. The participatory process by which these Partnership Priorities were defined highlights the EU's regionalization practice. The engagement of various stakeholders, including civil society, signalled a shift towards a more inclusive and cooperative regional approach. Economic diversification and sustainable growth were core priorities, with Azerbaijan seeking to diversify its economy, and the EU being a key investor.

This economic cooperation suggested an intensified regional connection, aimed at boosting regional resilience and prosperity. Transport and energy links form an integral part of the partnership, with Azerbaijan's geographical location providing a strategic advantage. This points to the EU's regional cooperation goals, aimed at strengthening regional infrastructures and connectivity. The document also underscored the importance of good governance, the rule of law, human rights, and civil society dialogue in the regional cooperation process. This indicates the EU's commitment to promoting democratic practices as part of its regionalization strategy. Moreover, the Partnership Priorities respected the '20 Deliverables for 2020' agreed at the Eastern Partnership Brussels Summit, further cementing the alignment of Azerbaijan with the broader regional cooperation goals of the EU. The document concluded by encouraging a multidisciplinary and cross-cutting approach towards achieving set priorities, emphasizing on cooperation in various areas beyond the political and economic sphere. It calls for broader societal engagement, including the

empowerment of women and youth, which again reflects the EU's holistic and inclusive regionalization approach.

In the comparative analysis of the EU's partnership priorities with Azerbaijan and Armenia, both PPs show shared focus on Connectivity, Energy Efficiency, Environment, Climate Action, and Mobility and People-to-people Contacts relevant to the objective of regional cooperation, but the specifics vary according to their unique circumstances (European Union External Action, 2018; (EU-Azerbaijan Cooperation Council, 2018). Azerbaijan's strategic location is highlighted, aiming to become a trade, logistics, and energy hub. The EU supports efficient border management and improving the sustainability of Azerbaijan's energy sector. The alignment with Azerbaijan's commitments under the Paris Agreement through environmental governance, sustainable resource management, and climate action is a key focus. For landlocked Armenia, the EU aims to enhance business opportunities, transport, and logistics while prioritizing environmental considerations in infrastructure developments. Crucial aspects include civil aviation reform, energy efficiency, increased renewable energy use, and safe decommissioning of the Medzamor Nuclear Power Plant.

In the realm of Mobility and People-to-people Contacts, both countries align with the EU's emphasis on cooperation in education, youth, culture, research, and innovation. Azerbaijan prioritizes the implementation of the Mobility Partnership and Visa Facilitation and Readmission Agreements. A future Visa Liberalisation Dialogue is mentioned conditionally. There's a marked focus on modernizing the education system and aligning skills demand with job market requirements. Armenia's approach centers on facilitating its nationals' mobility, widening people-to-people contacts, combating irregular migration, and enhancing border management. Armenia's role in accommodating Syrian refugees is acknowledged, making it eligible for support from the EU Regional Trust Fund. The partnership highlights the importance of a

comprehensive education system and vocational training to meet global market demands, particularly emphasizing research and innovation via association with the Horizon 2020 programme. In summary, while the overarching EU partnership priorities with Azerbaijan and Armenia are similar, the specific implementation strategies are tailored to the unique circumstances of each country.

The "Recovery, Resilience and Reform: Post-2020 Eastern Partnership Priorities" document outlines the partnership priorities for the collective Eastern Partnership region (European Commission & High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 2021). Building upon the key priorities in the broader "Eastern Partnership Policy Beyond 2020: Reinforcing Resilience - An Eastern Partnership that Delivers for All" (European Commission & High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 2020), the document centers on reinforcing resilience among partner nations. The partnership priorities consist of five key objectives: 1. Building Resilient, Sustainable, and Integrated Economies; 2. Fostering Accountable Institutions and Rule of Law; 3. Promoting Environmental and Climate Resilience; 4. Encouraging Resilient Digital Transformation; 5. Cultivating Resilient, Fair, and Inclusive Societies.

The first partnership priority, Building Resilient, Sustainable, and Integrated Economies, aims to develop economically prosperous and sustainable nations. It indirectly fosters regional cooperation by encouraging robust regional trade and investment. The second partnership priority, Fostering Accountable Institutions and Rule of Law, provides a foundation for a stable environment that facilitates cross-border collaborations and regional stability. This priority enhances mutual understanding and trust among nations, thereby strengthening regional cooperation. The third partnership priority, Promoting Environmental and Climate Resilience, targets shared environmental challenges. Through collaboration on issues such as climate change, pollution, and renewable energy, this priority unites nations against common problems, fostering regional cooperation. The fourth partnership priority,

Encouraging Resilient Digital Transformation, urges nations to cooperate on shared digital infrastructure, e-governance, and cybersecurity initiatives. This priority aids in integrating the region digitally and contributes to regional cooperation. The final partnership priority, Cultivating Resilient, Fair, and Inclusive Societies, aims to mitigate regional tensions and promote cultural exchanges. This priority fosters regional cooperation indirectly by nurturing shared societal values and mutual understanding.

In conclusion, the "Recovery, Resilience and Reform: Post-2020 Eastern Partnership Priorities" document lays out a detailed blueprint for enhancing resilience across the Eastern Partnership region. The strategic partnership priorities outlined in this document emphasize economic stability, governance, environmental and digital resilience, and social inclusivity. Interestingly, the term "regional cooperation" is not explicitly mentioned in the document. Instead, it employs phrases like "regional format" or "level," and occasionally, "cross-border connectivity and cooperation," which suggests a modest tone in articulating the collaborative intent. Nevertheless, through these varied terminologies, the document implicitly signifies the importance of mutual cooperation and interconnectedness among the member nations. By tackling shared challenges and capitalizing on collective strengths, these countries can drive sustainable regional growth and stability. In essence, the framework provided in the document offers a future-focused approach to developing a resilient, integrated, and inclusive Eastern Partnership region, promising a future of enriched cooperation and shared prosperity, subtly communicated through its strategic priorities.

(c) Political Dialogues

In her book, "European Union Foreign Policy in a Changing World," Karen Smith (2003) illuminates the EU's strategy of engaging in diverse political dialogues to foster cooperation among regional groups. She affirms that these dialogues, which vary in frequency and format, play a crucial role in encouraging collaboration, promoting mutual understanding, and facilitating regional integration. To illustrate, she cites the EU's initiation of structured dialogues with the Visegrad Group and the Baltic republics in 1992, leading to routine council meetings. Additionally, Smith refers to the Euromed dialogue as an example of how the EU uses dialogue to stimulate regional cooperation. In essence, these dialogues serve as a strategic tool for the EU to promote the creation of regional alliances. Translating Smith's framework to a specific regional context, the chapter delves into the application of this strategy in the South Caucasus.

A comprehensive content analysis was carried out on numerous regulatory and policy documents with the objective of discerning the application of the political dialogue framework, aimed at fostering regional cooperation in the South Caucasus from PCAs to the current AA/CEPA/Partnership Priorities. The main focus is on the political dialogue under the EaP framework, as an embodiment of comprehensive and quite exhaustive institutionalized and ongoing political dialogue formats.

The European Union's external relations with its neighboring countries have witnessed a significant evolution in political dialogue structures and mechanisms, designed to foster cooperation and strengthen ties. This development can be observed from the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs) to the Eastern Partnership (EaP) initiative, Association Agreements, and the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA).

In the early stages of the post-Soviet era, the TACIS program focused on technical assistance and economic cooperation, with limited emphasis on political dialogue. However, as the EU's relations with its neighbors progressed, the PCAs were established, introducing political dialogue as an official component of cooperation. Ministerial meetings, cooperation councils, and parliamentary cooperation committees became prominent structures, providing platforms for regular consultations on political issues, governance, human rights, and regional cooperation.

With the 2004 ENP Strategy Paper, the EU embraced a more comprehensive approach to its neighbors. Key principles, including differentiation, conditionality, and ownership, shaped the political dialogue and cooperation frameworks. ENP Action Plans further operationalized the ENP's objectives, outlining specific policy goals, reforms, and cooperation opportunities in various sectors, deepening political dialogue and engagement. The Eastern Partnership (EaP) initiative, launched in 2009, represented a milestone in the political dialogue between the EU and Eastern European partner countries. Thematic platforms were established, covering areas such as democracy, good governance, economic integration, and environment. These platforms provided opportunities for regular consultations and exchanges, promoting mutual understanding and collaboration. Civil society engagement gained prominence within the ENP and EaP frameworks, recognizing the pivotal role of civil society organizations in the political dialogue process. The Civil Society Forum became an essential platform for representatives from the EU and partner countries to voice their perspectives and participate in joint initiatives.

Association Agreements, such as the one with Georgia, introduced the Association Council as a key political dialogue platform. The Council oversees the agreement's implementation, serving as a forum for high-level political dialogue between the EU and the partner country. Similarly, the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with Armenia further strengthened political association and

cooperation. Sectoral dialogues on justice, security, energy, environment, and trade became important platforms for technical discussions and policy coordination. Throughout this evolution, high-level meetings and summits have been periodically held between the EU and partner countries, addressing broader strategic issues and reinforcing political ties.

Most importantly for the South Caucasus states, as highlighted in the chapter, the EU, under its Eastern Partnership initiative, has developed an intricate architecture of structures to foster a systemic political dialogue, each serving unique purposes and facilitating multifaceted discussions within the partnership as detailed in the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council - Eastern Partnership (European Commission, 2008).

Central to this framework are biannual summits, where the leaders from the EU and Eastern partner countries converge to strategize on various matters. Key among these are Association Agreements and visa dialogues. In a yearly cycle, meetings involving foreign affairs ministers from both the EU and Eastern partners are orchestrated. These are timed to align with either a General Affairs or an External Relations Council session. Additionally, the EaP hosts sector-specific Ministerial Meetings annually. These meetings complement the EaP's core thematic platforms: democracy and stability, economic integration with EU policies, energy security, and fostering people-to-people contacts. At these meetings, the EaP foreign ministers review the progress achieved based on the reports of the four multilateral (thematic) platforms and decide on future policy priorities. Each of these platforms is bolstered by three subsidiary panels, which delve into specific areas within the overarching theme of their respective platform. The panels bring together officials at different levels to discuss areas such as legislative harmonization, institutional development, and economic cooperation (ibid.). Further strengthening this infrastructure are the biannual Senior Officials Meetings (SOMs). These gatherings promote regular

discussions and policy coordination among high-ranking officials from the EU, Eastern Partnership countries, and key EU bodies like the European External Action Service and the European Commission.

Flagship Initiatives take on the mandate to carry out extensive joint projects reflecting the strategic objectives of the EaP. The Eastern Partnership's six flagship initiatives include: 1. Integrated Border Management: Improving border strategies and practices in areas such as trade, customs, and security.; 2. SME Facility: Enhancing the business environment for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises with advice, funding, and regulatory support.; 3. Regional Electricity Markets, Energy Efficiency, and Renewable Energy: Integrating EU and EaP energy markets to increase energy efficiency and security.; 4. Diversification of Energy Supply: Securing alternative energy sources and transit routes to prevent future energy crises.; 5. Disaster Prevention, Preparedness, and Response: Strengthening disaster management capacities at all levels and enhancing cooperation.; 6. Environmental Governance: Promoting environmental protection and addressing climate change through a mixture of international, regional, and domestic actions.

The Euronest Parliamentary Assembly stands as a significant component within the EaP's structures, tasked with consultation, supervision, and monitoring roles. This assembly bridges the European Parliament and national parliaments of EaP countries, fostering closer political and economic relations with the EU (European Parliament, 2021). The Civil Society Forum (CSF), adds a unique layer to the EaP's dialogue structures. It grants civil societies an opportunity to express their demands, participate in thematic platform meetings, and submit recommendations (Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, n.d.). The Conference of Regional and Local Authorities for the Eastern Partnership (CORLEAP) serves as a platform for local and regional authorities from the EU and Eastern Partnership countries, linking with the European Committee

of the Regions (European Committee of the Regions, n.d.). Finally, The Eastern Partnership (EaP) Business Forum is a platform that fosters economic activity and enhances business connections between the European Union and the Eastern Partnership countries. It brings together businesses, policymakers, and civil society to discuss key economic issues, trade and investment opportunities, and regulatory environment. The Forum also focuses on the development of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), with sector-specific discussions based on the focus of each forum. Beyond dialogue, it serves as a significant networking platform, enabling businesses from the EU and EaP countries to establish contacts and explore partnerships. It is typically held annually, coinciding with other major EaP events (Delcour, 2011).

Overall, these structures aim to ensure that the EaP is based on a broad and inclusive dialogue involving not only governments, but also parliaments, local and regional authorities, civil society, and the business community. Collectively, they enhance and enrich the political dialogue within the EaP's framework, each contributing in their distinctive ways.

In conclusion, the EU's Regionalization practices towards South Caucasus have witnessed a continuous development of political dialogue structures and institutes. From the initial stages of TACIS and PCAs to the establishment of the Eastern Partnership, and under its umbrella-Association Agreements, and CEPA, these structures have played a crucial role in deepening cooperation, promoting mutual understanding, and advancing shared objectives with the EU's neighboring countries. The ongoing political dialogue continues to shape the EU's neighborhood policy, fostering stability, prosperity, and cooperation in the region as much as it can.

From TACIS to PCAs: The Evolution of the EU-South Caucasus Political Dialogue – *Content Analysis of the Political Dialogue Chapters of the PCAs*

Political dialogue with the countries of the South Caucasus found its origins in Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs) ([EUR-Lex, 2020](#)). However, the TACIS program discussed above, set a pivotal backdrop. This program offered critical financial support and technical assistance to twelve nations within Eastern Europe and Central Asia, a collection that includes South Caucasus countries. Though TACIS did not have the specific political dialogue structure as found in the PCAs, it presented an essential framework for fostering dialogue and cooperation through a variety of projects and programs.

TACIS ventures often promoted a synergy of ideas and best practices between EU experts and their counterparts in beneficiary countries. Consequently, this built relationships that proved beneficial for a broader dialogue. The spectrum of the program was extensive, addressing areas such as legal, administrative, and economic reforms, development of social protection, health and education systems, infrastructure and environmental protection improvement, private sector support, and economic development aid, including nuclear safety (Frenz, 2008). Even if it didn't explicitly define a "political dialogue," the program's collaborative nature deepened the ties between the EU and its eastern neighbour's, facilitating mutual understanding.

The PCAs, serving as legal frameworks, articulated the nature of relationships between the EU and its partner countries, encompassing those in Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus. These agreements illuminated the principles of cooperation, identified the spheres of activity, and outlined the institutional framework for bilateral relations European Communities & Republic of Armenia, 1999; European Communities & Republic of Azerbaijan, 1999; European Communities & Georgia,

1999). An examination of the Political Dialogue chapter in the PCAs of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia has revealed an identical structure and wording for political dialogue, only differentiated by the names of countries and article references. However, these minor differences aside, the PCAs all center around an overarching dialogue between the EU community and the respective countries. This dialogue, as per PCAs, aimed to solidify relations, assist political and economic shifts, and lay the groundwork for new collaboration forms.

The PCAs illustrated a well-defined, multi-tiered communication system that stretched across varying governmental levels. A key aspect of these agreements involved regular meetings at the ministerial level. The ministers responsible for various sectors — from trade and economics to justice and home affairs — would engage in detailed discussions within the framework of the Cooperation Council and at other mutually agreed upon occasions. The objective was to deepen understanding of specific topics, thereby ensuring a smooth implementation of the PCA. In addition to the ministerial meetings, the PCAs also initiated Parliamentary Cooperation Committees. These forums provided a platform for parliamentarians from both the EU and partner countries to engage in dialogue focused on mutual interests. These committees would play a pivotal role in promoting the exchange of information, thereby bolstering inter-parliamentary relations. To further ensure successful PCA implementation, Cooperation Councils were established. Comprising representatives from both parties, these councils would meet regularly. Their purpose involved facilitating dialogue, monitoring the progress of PCA implementation, and resolving any emerging disputes. In essence, the PCAs created a robust, multi-layered framework for political dialogue. This comprehensive structure allowed for a continuous exchange of views, coordinated efforts on shared interests, and fostered joint decision-making on PCA-related issues. As a result, the PCAs would facilitate a resilient and dynamic platform for cooperation and mutual understanding between the EU and its partner countries.

Overall, the establishment of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs) by the EU with Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia laid a foundation for political dialogue that would go beyond bilateral ties and have far-reaching implications for regional cooperation. This dialogue, through its different levels and mechanisms, would play a pivotal role in promoting stability, peace, and economic integration across the region. One of the ways it would contribute to regional cooperation would be through fostering peace and stability. By enabling regular and structured dialogue, the EU and its partner countries could collaboratively address regional conflicts and tensions. This dialogue would give them a platform to discuss and implement initiatives related to conflict prevention, crisis management, and peacebuilding. Economic integration and development would also be at the heart of these discussions. Through ministerial meetings focusing on trade, economics, and development, the PCAs would lay the groundwork for greater regional economic cooperation. This could lead to the identification and execution of cross-border infrastructure projects, regional trade agreements, or coordinated economic policies, contributing to regional prosperity. The dialogues would also provide a platform for sharing best practices. The Parliamentary Cooperation Committees, for example, would allow parliamentarians to exchange information and learn from each other's experiences, ultimately fostering improved governance across the region. Furthermore, the PCAs, by strengthening ties between the EU and its partner countries, would nurture a shared regional identity. This would instil a sense of unity and cooperation among countries in the region, facilitating collective action to tackle common challenges. Lastly, the emphasis on human rights and democracy within these dialogues would promote these values across the region. By upholding these principles, the EU and its partner countries would collectively create a regional environment that respects human rights and democratic governance.

In summation, the PCAs' political dialogue structures would encourage a comprehensive, multi-level dialogue with the respective countries, promoting closer relationships, democratic principles, human rights, enhanced security and stability, and solutions to regional issues.

Political Dialogue within the ENP: *A Review of the 2004 SP, APs, the SCPI as a model Institution and Baku Initiative as an exemplary structure*

This chapter offers a comprehensive exploration of political dialogue mechanisms as exemplified in the 2004 European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) Strategy Paper and Action Plans, with a special focus on the South Caucasus Parliamentary Initiative as a noteworthy example of structured political dialogue, as well as Baku Initiative.

The European Neighbourhood Policy Strategy Paper (2004) from the Commission presents a multifaceted structure for political dialogue (European Commission, 2004). It aims to strengthen this dialogue to make it more effective, covering broad policy issues such as foreign and security, regional and international matters, conflict prevention and crisis management, and addressing common security threats like terrorism, and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Emphasizing the role of multilateralism, the Commission's strategy paper underscores the need for collective action to strengthen global governance, enhance coordination in combating security threats, and tackle related developmental issues. There's a strong call for improving coordination within the established political dialogue formats. This suggests an aspiration to optimize the use of existing diplomatic channels, and to explore new methods of communication to enhance the efficacy of the dialogues. The strategy paper also leaves room for the involvement of partner countries in aspects of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP). This involvement, according to the strategy paper may include the exchange of information, joint training and exercises, and possible participation in EU-led crisis management operations, indicating an inclination towards a more

integrated approach to foreign policy and defence matters. Finally, the Commission's strategy paper highlights the need for shared responsibility between the EU and its partner countries for maintaining security and stability in the neighbourhood region. This reflects a belief in a collective approach to ensuring the safety and stability of the region, suggesting a commitment to deeper cooperation and mutual accountability. In essence, the European Neighbourhood Policy Strategy Paper from the Commission sets forth a cooperative, inclusive, and action-oriented structure for political dialogue, emphasizing shared responsibility, better coordination, and the use of established mechanisms. What is more, the strategy paper highlights the development of Action Plans identifying specific areas for enhanced dialogue with each partner country. These Action Plans would act as a strategic blueprint, specifying the direction and areas of focus for political dialogue with each respective country.

Indeed, in the ENP Action Plans for Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, dedicated chapters are included to address political dialogue and reform (European Union, 2006a; European Union, 2006b; European Union, 2006c). The chapter from the ENP AP between the EU and Armenia elucidates the EU's strategy for promoting regional cooperation via political dialogue (European Union, 2006a). This strategy rests on several pillars: Firstly, it focuses on strengthening democratic institutions within Armenia. The EU aims to improve local self-governance, fostering cooperation between Armenian and EU political parties and legislative bodies. This encourages democratic norms and principles of regional cooperation to flourish within Armenia. Secondly, the EU prioritizes judicial and civil service reforms. The objective is to align Armenia's judiciary and civil services with European standards, promoting professionalism and transparency. This, in turn, is expected to cultivate better legal and administrative cooperation within the region. Thirdly, the EU emphasizes the need for rigorous anti-corruption measures in Armenia. By pushing for alignment with international standards, the EU aims to enhance transparency and trust. This approach is expected to remove potential hurdles to regional cooperation. The fourth

area of focus is cooperation on foreign and security policy. The EU's strategy is to encourage Armenia to align its positions with those of the EU on regional and international issues. A dialogue on these matters is suggested to influence regional cooperation strategies positively. Lastly, the EU champions regional cooperation initiatives within the Southern Caucasus. The EU encourages Armenia to partake in regional initiatives such as the South Caucasus Parliamentary Initiative. The proposal of a Euroregion cooperation model in the Southern Caucasus signifies a move towards a more formal regional cooperation framework. In essence, through its political dialogue with Armenia, the EU is fostering regional cooperation by advocating for national reforms, pushing for alignment with EU and international standards, and supporting direct engagement in regional initiatives.

In the case of Azerbaijan, the pillars of political dialogue are the same (European Union, 2006b). The first section underlines the need for strengthening democratic institutions, ensuring respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and implementing necessary reforms within the judiciary. It suggests using political dialogue to promote alignment of Azerbaijani policies with European standards, particularly on human rights issues, judicial cooperation, and anti-corruption measures. No specific formats are mentioned, but the policy implies a robust ongoing dialogue, potentially encompassing consultations, shared resources, and training programs. The second section deals with cooperation on foreign and security policy. Here, the text encourages continuing EU-Azerbaijan political dialogue through various international platforms such as the Council of Europe, OSCE, NATO, and the UN. It also calls for alignment on regional and international issues on a case-by-case basis, suggesting that Azerbaijan may be invited to align with EU positions. Moreover, there's a proposition for consultations on sanctions, including arms embargoes, and an exchange of information and assistance on security sector reforms. Here, the promotion of regional cooperation is explicit and revolves around shared security concerns. The third section focuses on regional cooperation as such. The language is

somewhat vague, calling for the enhancement and development of new areas of regional cooperation, mentioning environmental concerns, education, border management, and parliamentary initiatives as potential sectors. The only concrete format mentioned here is the "South Caucasus Parliamentary Initiative," indicating an interest in fostering cooperation at a parliamentary level. In general, the EU's approach to promoting regional cooperation through political dialogue, similarly to the case of Armenia, is focused on aligning Azerbaijani policies with European standards, engaging in ongoing dialogue about regional and international issues, and encouraging Azerbaijan to participate in regional initiatives. The document, however, does not provide explicit details about the exact formats these dialogues would take, and leaves room for flexibility and adaptation depending on the area of cooperation and the progress of the dialogue.

Regarding the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) Action Plan with Georgia, the document is the backbone of a structured political dialogue between the EU and Georgia (European Union, 2006c). The overarching objective of this dialogue is to foster a stable, democratic, and prosperous Georgia, facilitating its active involvement in South Caucasus regional cooperation. The action plan underscores the need for democratic governance reinforcement, emphasizing institutional stability, legal reforms, public service improvement, and stringent anti-corruption actions. It posits that a robust and accountable state apparatus is essential for Georgia's stability and its prospects as a dependable partner in regional cooperation projects. Human rights feature prominently in the document as well. The EU encourages Georgia to make progress in areas such as media freedom, better treatment of detainees, minority rights protection, and gender equality promotion. These steps are viewed as critical for the rule of law enhancement, thereby improving Georgia's domestic stability and its credibility as a trustworthy partner in global and regional matters. When it comes to foreign and security policy, the ENP Action Plan advises for a robust political dialogue and a closer alignment between the EU and Georgia. Collaboration on international

sanctions, tackling international crime, and active contribution to the European Security Strategy are part of the plan.

The Partnership Priorities act as a guiding document for implementing the cooperation between EU and Armenia, especially in the context of CEPA. It emphasizes strengthening the ties between the EU and Armenia, furthering mutual interests, and enhancing engagement. These priorities take into account both the EU's and Armenia's international commitments. One significant area of interest is Armenia's engagement in economic and political reforms, as well as regional cooperation, particularly in the context of the Eastern Partnership. This indicates a focus on not just bilateral relations but also broader regional dynamics, potentially encompassing other countries in the Eastern Partnership. The document highlights the use of the Partnership Priorities as a roadmap for regular political dialogue meetings and sectoral dialogues as defined in the new Agreement. This emphasis on dialogue and communication is a key aspect of enhancing the political relationship between the EU and Armenia. Moreover, the Partnership Priorities are seen as the basis for EU-Armenia financial cooperation and programming.

In conclusion, the document presents the Partnership Priorities as a framework for strengthening EU-Armenia relations, encouraging Armenia's political and economic reforms, facilitating regional cooperation, and guiding future financial cooperation and programming. The underlying theme of regional cooperation and political dialogue is reflected in the commitment to regular meetings, sectoral dialogues, and the inclusion of regional cooperation as a shared area of interest.

The relationship between the European Union (EU) and Azerbaijan takes shape within various institutional frameworks such as the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, and it also builds upon the mutual interests defined in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) initiative. "The Partnership Priorities" document in this case acts as a guiding framework to bolster cooperation between the EU and Azerbaijan, outlining

the areas of mutual interest and ways to strengthen their engagement (EU-Azerbaijan Cooperation Council, 2018). These priorities incorporate both EU's and Azerbaijan's international commitments and aim to facilitate comprehensive and balanced growth, not only domestically but also in the wider region. Political dialogue is a significant pillar of these priorities, with a focus on supporting the reform of public administration, judiciary, law enforcement, and other key institutions in Azerbaijan. The fight against corruption is emphasized as a critical aspect of this reform, and there's a focus on improving regulatory frameworks based on international best practices. With regards to the regional cooperation, Azerbaijan is seen as a strategic link due to its geopolitical location. Efforts are channelled to bolster Azerbaijan's role as a trade, logistics, and transport hub. Cooperation is also extended to enhance the country's capacity as a significant energy supplier and transit country, contributing to regional energy security. The Partnership Priorities serve as a roadmap for routine political dialogues and sectoral dialogues as defined in the new Agreement, enhancing the political relationship between the EU and Azerbaijan. Moreover, they form the basis for the financial cooperation and programming between the EU and Azerbaijan.

In conclusion, the Partnership Priorities document acts as a compass directing the EU-Azerbaijan relations, encouraging political and economic reforms in Azerbaijan, fostering regional cooperation, and steering future financial cooperation and programming. The recurring theme of regional cooperation and political dialogue is manifested in the commitment to frequent dialogues, sectoral meetings, and the recognition of regional cooperation as a shared interest.

Equivalent to the Partnership Priorities set up with Armenia and Azerbaijan would be the priorities identified in its Association Agenda within the broader framework of the Association Agreement. Association Agenda between the European Union and Georgia (2021–2027) recognizes that political dialogue and cooperation are essential for advancing common interests and addressing regional challenges (The EU-Georgia

Association Council, 2022). The dialogue focuses on conflict prevention, crisis management, regional stability, arms control, disarmament, non-proliferation, cyber security, and hybrid threats. It aims to increase policy coherence and effectiveness by utilizing bilateral, multilateral, and regional fora. The agenda also highlights the commitment to respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, and inviolability of borders, which are fundamental principles for regional cooperation. Through political dialogue, the EU and Georgia work together to maintain effective cooperation, coordination, and peaceful conflict resolution. The agenda acknowledges that peaceful conflict resolution is a central subject in the political dialogue between the parties and in discussions with other relevant international actors. This highlights the commitment to address conflicts in the region through dialogue and regional cooperation initiatives, contributing to long-term stability and peace in the South Caucasus.

In the context of the Association Agreement between the European Union and Georgia, the political dialogue is a fundamental instrument meant to enhance mutual cooperation, stability, and convergence on various fronts (European Union & European Atomic Energy Community, 2014). This dialogue covers all areas of shared interest, encompassing foreign and security matters, domestic reforms, and crucially, regional cooperation. Deepening political association and increasing policy convergence and effectiveness in security matters stand as key aims of the political dialogue. There is an emphasis on fostering a sense of togetherness and unity, an ambitious and innovative strengthening of relations between the EU and Georgia. Another pivotal aspect is the promotion of the principles of territorial integrity, inviolability of internationally recognised borders, sovereignty, and independence. These are principles that both parties agree to champion, guided by crucial international agreements like the Charter of the United Nations and the Helsinki Final Act of 1975.

When focusing on regional dimensions, political dialogue takes on a crucial role in promoting regional cooperation in various formats. The dialogue seeks to strengthen cooperation and dialogue on international security and crisis management, particularly to address global and regional challenges and threats. The parties aim to create a stable, secure, and democratic region, working towards the peaceful resolution of unresolved conflicts, and building on common principles of maintaining international peace and security. As a part of this ambition, the political dialogue strives to foster result-oriented and practical cooperation, aiming to achieve peace, security, and stability on the European continent. By leveraging this dialogue, both the EU and Georgia are keen on deepening their cooperation in the field of security and defence, ensuring a more integrated, safer region. Lastly, the political dialogue serves to enhance respect for democratic principles, rule of law, good governance, and human rights and freedoms, including the rights of minorities. It aims to contribute to the consolidation of domestic political reforms and to ensure all the benefits of a closer political association, including increased security policy convergence, are extended to all citizens of Georgia within its internationally recognised borders.

EaP Institutionalized Dialogue Structures: *Content Analysis of the CSF, EURONEST and CORLEAP regulatory framework*

CSF “Strategy 2022-2030; EURONEST Constituent Act and Inaugural Ceremony Discourse; and CORLEAP action plans and political inaugural discourse.

The Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF) is a unique regional platform that encourages the active participation of civil society organizations (CSOs) in Eastern Partnership activities. Launched at the Prague Summit in 2009, the Forum's mission is to enable civil society to spur democratic transformation and propel reforms

in the six Eastern Partnership, which include the South Caucasus nations of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia (Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, n.d.).

The principles and operations of the EaP CSF are governed by the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum Concept Paper (EaPCSF Steering Committee, 2012). The Concept Paper underscores the critical role civil society plays in driving ongoing reforms in the Eastern Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) partner countries. As stated in the Concept Paper, "ongoing reforms [in ENP East partner countries] require a stronger participation of civil society to enhance oversight of public services and to strengthen public confidence in them." This necessity gave rise to the EaP CSF, a platform that promotes dialogue and interaction between CSOs and public authorities.

The EaP CSF convenes a diverse array of participants, including CSOs from Eastern Partners, the EU, and third countries. Additionally, representatives from the European Commission, the European Economic and Social Committee, and various international organizations partake in these exchanges. These interactions foster political dialogue, promote collaboration, and indirectly support regional integration.

The Forum's work is grounded in the 'Articles of Association of the Secretariat of the Steering Committee of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum,' which was established in 2012. The Secretariat, registered under Belgian law as an International Non-Profit Association (AISBL), represents the Forum legally. This document provides a comprehensive set of rules and procedures intended to guide the Forum's activities. All members, delegates, and decision-making bodies must adhere to this framework. Committed to supporting the objectives of the Eastern Partnership, the Forum integrates the civil society perspective into governance processes, strengthens the capacity of CSOs, establishes thematic working groups in line with the Partnership's priorities, offers advice, shares experiences, monitors activities, and organizes annual plenary sessions or conferences (Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, n.d.).

The 'Strategy for 2022 – 2030' serves as a central guiding document for the EaP CSF (Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, 2022). A content analysis of this strategy reveals a significant emphasis on regional cooperation. Drafted during a challenging period for the Eastern Partnership countries, the strategy casts the EaP CSF as a catalyst for promoting European integration and democratic transformations. The strategy encourages collaboration and mutual understanding among regional groupings. It actively facilitates interaction between EU and civil society organizations and advocates for strengthened regional cooperation through regional projects, collaboration, and information exchange. Moreover, the strategy outlines the Forum's role in enhancing the multilateral cooperation potential of the Eastern Partnership. By setting clear goals, tracking outcomes, and planning to use a results framework with measurable, gender-sensitive indicators at national and regional levels, the strategy monitors its implementation. In essence, as revealed by content analysis, the EaP CSF Strategy for 2022-2030 provides a comprehensive blueprint for the EU's regionalization practices towards the South Caucasus. The strategy aims to strengthen civil society, promote democratic transformations, enhance European integration in the region, and foster regional cooperation, dialogue, and joint projects.

In conclusion, the EaP CSF stands as a testament to the EU's commitment to enhancing regional integration, cooperation, and political dialogue in the South Caucasus region.

The Euronest Parliamentary Assembly (EURONEST), established officially on May 3rd, 2011, via the Constituent Act (2011/C 198/06), stands as the parliamentary component of the Eastern Partnership (European Parliament, 2011). It's a forum that aims to foster political association and deepen economic integration between the European Union and its Eastern European partners, including South Caucasus region countries like Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia (Constituent Act, Article 1, 2011).

The Assembly comprises a 60-member delegation from the European Parliament and delegations of 10 representatives each from the Eastern European Partners involved

in the Eastern Partnership initiative. The partnership strives to intensify cooperation in democratic values, socio-economic reforms, energy security, and cultural exchanges, indicating the shared commitment between the EU and its Eastern neighbours (Constituent Act, Article 2, 2011). The Assembly's powers are outlined in the Constituent Act ("Constituent Act", Article 6, 2011). These include facilitating parliamentary debate and review regarding the Eastern Partnership, ensuring adherence to the partnership's objectives, delivering opinions and recommendations, and assisting in harmonizing national legislation of the Eastern European Partners with EU legislation. The Assembly's activities are funded by the European Parliament and the Parliaments of the Eastern European Partners ("Constituent Act", Article 7, 2011).

Within the Assembly's foundational principles, the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly is characterized by shared ownership, responsibility, and mutual interests, with an emphasis on differentiation. Each Eastern European Partner's relationship with the EU is recognized as unique, taking into account individual interests and objectives. The principle of participation is both voluntary and geared towards integration and openness ("Constituent Act", Article 1, 2011). Jerzy Buzek, then President of the European Parliament, emphasized these principles in his inaugural address: *"Stable countries can only be democratic countries; democracy is the only way to stability. If we want more cooperation and more integration, we have to start with parliamentary cooperation because it represents contacts between people"* (Commonspace.eu Editorial Staff, 2011).

Regarding membership, to participate in the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly's work, a parliament must be part of the constitutional system of one of the Eastern Partnership countries, have democratic election processes in accordance with OSCE commitments and other international standards, and commit to the protection and promotion of human rights, fundamental freedoms, pluralistic democracy, and the rule of law ("Constituent Act", Article 3, 2011). The Assembly comprises members

from the European Parliament and members from the Parliaments of the Eastern European Partners, organized into a Plenary, Bureau, Committees, and Secretariat ("Constituent Act", Articles 4 & 5, 2011). The Assembly typically meets once a year, alternating between an Eastern European Partner country and European Parliament premises ("Constituent Act", Article 8, 2011).

In conclusion, the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly, as outlined in its Constituent Act, is a pivotal inter-parliamentary platform that facilitates the EU's regionalization strategy towards the Eastern European Partners, particularly those in the South Caucasus. Its efficacy and legitimacy lie in promoting political dialogue, legislative cooperation, and the promotion of democratic values in the region, all grounded in its solid legal base.

Interestingly, in the most recent Euronest Parliamentary Assembly held in Chisinau in February 2023, a resolution was adopted to begin EU accession negotiations with Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia. Recognizing these countries' dedication to a European future and their contribution to regional stability, the Assembly called for all parties to uphold these nations' sovereignty and territorial integrity and counteract Russian aggression (Euronest Parliamentary Assembly, 2023). The Assembly commended the reform efforts of these countries, encouraging continued focus on areas such as judicial independence, battling corruption, good governance, rule of law, and parliamentary oversight. It prompted the European Commission to help guide these countries transition from EU Association Neighbours to EU accession status, proposing the creation of roadmaps for their gradual integration into the EU internal market

CORLEAP (Conference of the Regional and Local Authorities for the Eastern Partnership) was established in September 2011 in Poznań, Poland, by the decision of the European Committee of the Regions (CoR). During the inaugural session held in Poznan, Poland, CORLEAP set in motion an Action Plan spanning 2012-2013 (the EU's Assembly of Regional and Local Representatives, 2012). The plan underscored

the importance of including clauses in forthcoming agreements between the EU and partnering nations to enhance the power and autonomy of local and regional governments. Furthermore, it advocated for a boost in funds dedicated to projects that fortify local democratic processes, uphold human rights at local and regional scales, and foster citizen engagement. In his speech addressing the session, the then-European Commissioner Štefan Füle highlighted the importance of regional cooperation and involvement of local and regional authorities in shaping the European Union's policies. “*The Eastern Partnership was never conceived as only an intergovernmental initiative. From the beginning, participants to the Prague Summit in 2009 agreed that we need a policy that reaches out to, and involves, all interested stakeholders - governments, parliaments, regional and local authorities and civil society*” – he emphasized (Füle, 2011). Commissioner Füle mentioned the EU Member States' long record of cooperation between local authorities and civil society organizations, which has benefited local communities. He expressed his belief that this approach could be extended to the Eastern Partnership countries (ibid.). Overall, the speech highlights the growing EU interest in cooperation with the partner countries at the local and regional levels. The expertise of regional and local authorities, as represented by CORLEAP, is seen as a valuable asset that can contribute to the success of the Eastern Partnership.

The aim of CORLEAP is to bring a regional and local dimension into the EU's Eastern Partnership initiative. It serves as the political forum for discussing the role of cities and regions in the development of the Eastern Partnership. Through CORLEAP, local and regional authorities from the South Caucasus region have the opportunity to engage with their EU counterparts, exchange views, and contribute to the development of Eastern Partnership policies. The platform allows for the sharing of experiences, best practices, and expertise in areas such as local democracy, fiscal decentralization, and autonomy (European Union Committee of the Regions, 2016). CORLEAP's activities and initiatives focus on strengthening local and regional self-government in partner countries, which aligns with the broader objective of

regionalization. By promoting dialogue and cooperation at the local and regional levels, CORLEAP contributes to the EU's efforts to enhance regional integration, cooperation, and political dialogue in the South Caucasus region. Furthermore, CORLEAP collaborates with other relevant actors involved in the Eastern Partnership, such as the Civil Society Forum (CSF) and the EURONEST Parliamentary Assembly (European Committee of the Regions, 2017). This multi-stakeholder engagement reinforces the regionalization practices by fostering inclusive and participatory approaches to governance and decision-making processes.

Regional cooperation is an important aspect within the strategic priorities for the period 2021-2024 of the CORLEAP (European Committee of the Regions, 2017). The document emphasizes the need for territorial cooperation between EU and Eastern Partnership (EaP) local and regional authorities in areas of common interest. It highlights the promotion of specific projects and the exchange of experience through peer-to-peer cooperation between local and regional authorities of the EaP partner countries and EU members. This regional cooperation aims to strengthen ties, enhance governance, and foster sustainable development within the EaP region.

Overall, CORLEAP's role in facilitating dialogue and cooperation among local and regional authorities in the South Caucasus aligns with the EU's regionalization practices by promoting regional integration, strengthening local democracy, and enhancing the involvement of sub-national actors in the Eastern Partnership initiative.

(d) Conditionality

Evaluating Regional Cooperation as a pre-Condition for European Integration

In her 2008 work, "European Union Foreign Policy in a Changing World," Karen Smith (2003) delves into the role conditionality plays in the European Union's (EU) pursuit of strengthening regional cooperation. She explains that while the EU doesn't usually require regional collaboration for its aid or agreements, it shows active encouragement towards regional alliances. According to Smith, the EU prefers interacting positively with established regional groups, often taking cues from successful instances such as ASEAN or Mercosur. Nevertheless, Smith also reveals situations where the EU utilizes conditionality as a tool of influence. An instance of this was when the EU mandated the establishment of a customs union by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) as a prerequisite for a free-trade agreement. Similarly, in Southeastern Europe, the EU has used conditionality to discourage potential conflicts by requiring regional cooperation for certain advantages. Consequently, Smith argues that conditionality serves as a strategic device for the EU to encourage regional cooperation and promote stability within its foreign policy.

When focusing on the EU's relationship with the South Caucasus, it's crucial to recognize that conditionality has been an integral part of this connection since the beginning. Various policies, economic support and cooperation agreements, including TACIS, ENPI, ENI, PCAs, ENP with its APs, EaP with the Association Agreement and its AA with Georgia, as well as CEPA with Armenia or the partnership priorities with Armenia and Azerbaijan, have all utilized conditionality, either implicitly or explicitly.

In the early years of the EU's relationship with the South Caucasus, as exemplified by the TACIS program and the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs), the EU

applied conditionality predominantly in the form of negative conditionality. Aid and benefits were linked directly to countries' adherence to democratic norms, respect for human rights, and transition towards market economies. Although not explicitly framed as "less for less", these early policies employed a similar logic, where failure to meet certain conditions could result in a reduction or suspension of assistance.

With the advent of the ENP and the ENPI, the EU began to embody a more positive conditionality approach. Countries making more substantial progress in their reforms were offered closer relationships and additional benefits. Conversely, those not making adequate progress or regressing could face a reduction in benefits. This approach was formally articulated as the "more for more" and "less for less" principles with the revision of the ENP in 2011.

These principles were carried forward into the Eastern Partnership (EaP) initiative launched in 2009, which offered greater rewards for countries making significant reforms, but also kept the possibility of reduced benefits for countries falling short of their reform commitments.

However, in more recent agreements, such as the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with Armenia and the partnership priorities with Armenia and Azerbaijan, there has been a discernible shift in the EU's conditionality approach. While the "more for more" principle continues to underpin these agreements, the EU has shown a gradual movement away from the "less for less" principle. Recognizing the complexities of the South Caucasus region, these agreements reflect the EU's sensitivity to the unique dynamics and geopolitical considerations within each partner country, with a greater emphasis on positive engagement and encouragement of reform rather than punitive measures

Against this background, an intriguing aspect to consider is how regionalization factors into this conditionality. A more thorough examination of this interplay will be undertaken through the content analysis in the ensuing sections of this chapter.

TACIS, ENPI and ENI: *Conditionality Implementation via EU's financial instruments*

Conditionality within TACIS:

In examining the economic support tools chronologically, this sub-chapter first turns attention to the Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States (TACIS) program as an early embodiment of conditionality. TACIS, as discussed earlier, was an EU initiative that extended technical and financial aid to countries in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) region (including Georgia). The conditionality clause within TACIS enabled the EU to correlate the provision of assistance with the recipient country's adherence to specific conditions.

In the three regulations representing the legal base of TACIS, namely No 2053/93, No 1279/96, and No 99/2000, conditionality is articulated in the preamble (Council of the European Communities, 1993; Council of the European Communities, 1996; Council of the European Union, 2000). As an example, Council Regulation (EC, Euratom) No 99/2000 of 29 December 1999 concerning the provision of assistance to partner States in Eastern Europe and Central Asia stipulates, "Such assistance will be fully effective only in the context of progress towards free and open democratic societies that respect human rights, minority rights and the rights of indigenous people, and towards market-oriented economic systems" (Council of the European Union, 2000). Consequently, if a partner country within the TACIS program was found contravening these foundational elements of cooperation, the EU possessed the authority to either suspend or adjust the assistance rendered to that nation. This

conditionality mechanism functioned as a conduit for the EU to endorse and enforce democratic values and human rights norms within the region. "When an essential element for the continuation of cooperation through assistance is missing, in particular in cases of violation of democratic principles and human rights, the Council may, on a proposal from the Commission, acting by a qualified majority, decide upon appropriate measures concerning assistance to a partner State." - the 10th clause of Article 2 stipulates (*ibid.*). These measures could be employed as a last resort in cases of severe infringement of the obligations set out in and represent a form of negative conditionality.

While TACIS explicitly employs negative conditionality, its application to regionalization remains somewhat ambiguous. Although TACIS promotes regional cooperation, it doesn't explicitly state that such cooperation is a necessary precondition or requirement. Violations of democratic principles and human rights are singled out in Clause 10 as potential grounds for re-evaluating cooperation, with no direct mention of regional cooperation. While Clause 9 clearly advocates for regional cooperation as part of the assistance program, Clause 10 doesn't categorically specify that a deficiency in regional cooperation could result in a re-examination or potential suspension of assistance. The principle of regional cooperation, outlined as an objective in Clause 9, could potentially be considered by the Council when assessing the effectiveness and suitability of the assistance program. Nevertheless, the absence of explicit reference to regional cooperation in the conditionality clause of Article 10 makes this interpretation more conjectural. Without clear language connecting regional cooperation to the conditionality, the degree to which TACIS mandates regional cooperation is less definitive compared to its clear stance on democracy and human rights. Therefore, it can be concluded that TACIS only implicitly recognizes regional cooperation as a conditional element in its assistance program, contrasting its explicit emphasis on democracy and human rights.

Conditionality within ENPI:

The financial instrument that succeeded TACIS was the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) discussed before. This new framework introduced a dual approach to conditionality. It encompassed both positive conditionality, where additional funding allocations were contingent upon demonstrated progress in reforms, and negative conditionality, which included a suspension clause, allowing for a cessation or adjustment of funding in response to non-compliance or insufficient progress. This nuanced approach allowed the ENPI to incentivize reform while also maintaining accountability and standards. Specifically, Article 28 of "Regulation (EC) No 1638/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 October 2006 laying down general provisions establishing a European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument" introduced a negative conditional aspect, i.e. a possibility of suspending Community assistance under certain circumstances (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2006). According to Section 1, if a partner country failed to observe the principles referred to in Article 1 (which included liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law), the Council, on a proposal from the Commission, could take appropriate steps in respect of any Community assistance granted to the partner country under this Regulation. This implied that adherence to these principles was a condition for receiving Community assistance and failure to uphold these principles could result in suspension of aid. Section 2 further elaborated on the nature of this conditionality. Even if Community assistance was suspended due to a breach of these principles, the assistance could still be used to support non-state actors for measures aimed at promoting human rights, fundamental freedoms, and the democratization process in partner countries. This suggested that even in the event of a suspension, the commitment to promoting human rights and democratic principles persisted. At the same time, looking for elements of positive conditionality, Article 7 Paragraph 2 states that in establishing country or multi-country programmes, the Commission should consider "progress towards implementing agreed objectives, including on governance

and on reform" (ibid.). This could be seen as a type of positive conditionality, because it implies that countries demonstrating progress towards implementing the agreed objectives would be more likely to receive funding allocations.

However, the relevance of positive or negative conditionality proposed by ENPI to regional cooperation is not that straightforward. The document does not explicitly state "regional cooperation" as a condition in the traditional sense of "positive" and "negative" conditionality. It outlines certain obligations and expectations from partner countries in terms of regional cooperation, but it doesn't explicitly say that assistance will be provided or withdrawn based on compliance or non-compliance with regional cooperation objectives. Still, the document implies that regional cooperation is a key expectation and component of the outlined initiatives. It consistently references cross-border cooperation, promoting political dialogue and reform, regional development, and regional integration as areas where Community assistance will be used and promoted. These elements all fall under the broader umbrella of regionalization. Therefore, while it may not be outrightly stated as an explicit condition for receiving or withholding aid (as is typically understood under positive and negative conditionality), it's fair to say that a commitment to regional cooperation is implicitly expected and encouraged in the document. Thus, performance in regional cooperation could influence decisions on assistance, even if it isn't explicitly labelled as such.

Conditionality within ENI:

The European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI), which succeeded the ENPI, applied a principle of conditionality with a notable emphasis on the 'more for more' principle, which had become a pivotal component of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) since its introduction as part of a revision of the ENP in 2011. This principle exemplified an incentive-based approach wherein the EU rewarded partners that showed a commitment to building democratic societies and undertaking reforms. This

aspect of the policy was designed to ensure that the EU's support was directed in a manner that most effectively promoted its fundamental values. "More for more" principle was first outlined in the Communication "A New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood" (COM(2011) 303) (European Commission & High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 2011) and was later revised in the framework of the ENP review in 2015, spelled out in the "Joint communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy {SWD(2015) 500 final}" (European Commission & High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 2015).

Within the context of the ENI, as detailed in the Regulation (EU) No 232/2014, the 'more for more' principle shaped the allocation of funds and determined the provision of different types of support (European Parliament & Council of the European Union, 2014a). It served as a guiding principle in decisions about which initiatives to back, which reforms to support, and how the EU interacted with each of its neighboring partners. According to Regulation (EU) No 232/2014, the support provided to each partner country was designed to be incentive-based and differentiated. This support was determined based on various factors including the partner country's needs, commitment to reform, and progress in building a sustainable democracy. This Regulation stipulated that the resources offered to partner countries were to be primarily adjusted according to their progress in democracy building and the implementation of agreed reforms. This aligned with an incentive-based approach. In instances of serious or persistent regression, the Regulation allowed for support to be reconsidered, suggesting negative conditionality as well. However, it was clearly stated in the Regulation that the incentive-based approach did not apply to support in specific areas such as civil society, human rights improvement, or crisis-related support measures. In cases of serious or persistent regression, this type of support could be increased.

With regards to the regionalization element in the application of conditionality, in Regulation (EU) No 232/2014, regional cooperation is not explicitly stated as a condition for funding, but it is stressed as an important aspect of the relationships the Union seeks to build and maintain with its neighbouring countries. The regulation does highlight the importance of regional cooperation in achieving its objectives, but it does not necessarily make the funding strictly conditional on this. For instance, in Article 2(2)(f), it is stated that Union support under this regulation should aim at "enhancing sub-regional, regional and European Neighbourhood-wide collaboration as well as cross-border cooperation". This suggests that while the Union encourages and promotes regional cooperation, and it is one of the specific objectives of Union support, the regulation does not explicitly state that funding is conditional on regional cooperation.

In the case of multi-country programs that address challenges common to all or a number of partner countries (as mentioned in Article 6(1)(b)), the support might be conditional on the cooperation and coordinated efforts among those countries. In other words, countries may be expected to work together and to contribute their share to the collective effort. While the text does not provide explicit examples of conditionality linked specifically to regional cooperation, conditionality principles would generally apply in the sense that countries are expected to uphold certain standards, demonstrate commitment to shared goals, and maintain effective collaboration in order to receive and retain support. That said, it can be only inferred that a demonstrated commitment to regional cooperation may enhance a country's eligibility or the level of support it may receive under this instrument.

More on 'More for more': *Evolution of Conditionality application alongside two ENP reviews*

ENP revision of 2011 brought about the 'more for more' principle, which predicates that the more a country progresses in democratic reforms, the more support it receives from the EU. This principle found its operational manifestation in two significant programmes: the Support for Partnership, Reform and Inclusive Growth (SPRING) for Southern neighbours, and the Eastern Partnership Integration and Cooperation (EaPIC) for Eastern neighbours (European Commission Directorate General Development and Cooperation - EuropeAid, 2014). Both these programmes incentivize democratic reforms in partner countries by rewarding tangible progress, a practical application of the conditionality principle. As a key part of the 2014-2020 European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI), a major EU funding instrument for implementing the ENP, these programmes stressed the necessity of accurate assessment of democratic advancement. Such evaluations help ensure that the allocation of EU aid aligns with each country's performance and progress. EaPIC, in particular, is pivotal in the conditionality context. It serves as a practical mechanism that enacts the 'more for more' principle for Eastern partners. This programme channels additional funding to those Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries that show meaningful progress in deep democratic reforms and respect for human rights. Thus, the additional aid distributed via EaPIC directly correlates with each country's advancement towards democratic standards, embodying the conditionality principle in action.

More specifically, the communication "A New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood" (COM(2011) 303 final) stipulated that all partner countries would benefit from activities designed to bolster the "partnership with societies". However, the allocation of funding under the remaining components would rely on the "more for more" principle, based on mutual accountability. The EU's enhanced support would be contingent upon the progress a country made in establishing and solidifying democracy and upholding the rule of law (European Commission & High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 2011).

“The more and the faster a country progresses in its internal reforms, the more support it will get from the EU. This enhanced support will come in various forms, including increased funding for social and economic development, larger programmes for comprehensive institution-building (CIB), greater market access, increased EIB financing in support of investments; and greater facilitation of mobility. These preferential commitments will be tailored to the needs of each country and to the regional context. They will recognise that meaningful reform comes with significant upfront costs.” – reads the document. Contrary to that, for countries that didn't embark on reform, the EU would reconsider or potentially decrease its funding. The phrase *“For countries where reform has not taken place, the EU would reconsider or even reduce funding”* encapsulates the idea of the 'less for less' principle (ibid.).

Table 2 illustrates the allocation of assistance from the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) during its two distinct phases: 2007-2010 and 2011-2013. In the first phase, the distribution of resources among recipient countries—Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan—was relatively homogeneous. However, during the second phase, following the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) review in 2011, the allocation of aid became noticeably more differentiated.

Each of the recipient countries—Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan—received significant support, but the disparities in allocated amounts are evident. Georgia, for example, received the most significant allocation, followed by Armenia, with Azerbaijan receiving the smallest share. Interestingly, in the case of Georgia, and to a lesser extent Armenia, the EU exceeded the originally programmed assistance, while in the case of Azerbaijan, the final commitment was less than planned.

These variations are consistent with the 'more for more' principle, a fundamental policy adopted after the 2011 review of the ENP. This principle suggests that countries making more substantial strides in democratic reforms and showing deeper

commitment in their contractual relations with the EU would be rewarded with increased support. Therefore, the higher allocations to Georgia and Armenia likely reflect their substantial progress in democratic reforms and their stronger engagement with the EU. Conversely, the reduced allocation to Azerbaijan could indicate slower democratic reform progress or weaker EU relations.

In essence, these allocations highlight the EU's dedication to promoting democratic reforms and bolstering its ties with neighboring countries, using aid as a strategic tool to incentivize and reward progress. This approach further underscores the impact of the 'more for more' principle in guiding the EU's partnership and cooperation strategies in the neighbourhood.

2007-2010	2011-2013	Grand Total 2007-2013
National Indicative Programme (NIP) Armenia		
Programmed		
EUR 98.4M	EUR 157.3M	EUR 255.7M
Committed		
EUR 97.4M	EUR 144.1M	EUR 281.5M
National Indicative Programme (NIP) Azerbaijan		
Programmed		
EUR 92M	EUR 122.5M	EUR 214.5M
Committed		
EUR 68M	EUR 75M	EUR 143.5M
National Indicative Programme (NIP) Georgia		
Programmed		
EUR 120.4M	EUR 180.3M	EUR 300.7M
Committed		
EUR 117.4M + Special Measures for IDPS 2008-2009 - EUR 105M	EUR 180.7 M	EUR 403.1M

Table 3. ENPI Allocations to Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. Source: Author, based on European Commission Directorate General Development and Cooperation - EuropeAid, 2014.

With the latest ENP review in 2015, the EU recognized that the application of conditionality had not been as effective as hoped in encouraging reforms and stability in the region. Instead, the review placed a stronger emphasis on differentiation and

mutual ownership, with the EU aiming to develop a more tailored approach to its relationships with each of its neighbours. The aim was to move towards a more partnership-based approach, in which both the EU and each partner country shared ownership of the process and agreed on priorities for cooperation. The 2015 review did not abandon the idea of conditionality entirely, but aimed to make it more flexible and focused on mutually agreed commitments. While the "more for more" principle remained central to the EU's approach, "Joint communication (European Commission & High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 2015) suggested a need to navigate its application more flexibly and creatively, especially in scenarios where the political will for reform might be weak, thus strictly shifting away from the "less for less" principle. The document further underlined the necessity of differentiating and customizing the EU's partnerships with neighbouring countries according to their unique aspirations and circumstances.

The conditionality in the revised ENP shifted towards a more tailored approach, focusing on a country-by-country basis rather than a broad regional perspective. This differentiation principle suggested that relations with each partner would depend more on its interests, ambitions, readiness to promote shared values, and its commitment to the jointly agreed-upon reform agenda. The revised conditionality did not abandon the principle that the depth of EU's economic integration and political cooperation would depend on partner countries' progress in implementing democratic, economic, and institutional reforms, but it sought to be more flexible and incentive-based ("more for more") rather than punitive ("less for less"). By the same token, ENP review was also a shift away from standard regionalization approached discussed before. The 2015 ENP review did underscore the importance of regional cooperation but emphasized the need of a more nuanced, individual approach to each partner country, tailoring the level of ambition of the EU's relations to the partner's capacities and interests.

It must be noted here that the concepts of differentiation and regionalization in the context of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) are not necessarily opposing. Rather, they represent different dimensions of the EU's approach to its external relations. Differentiation implies acknowledging the distinct aspirations, needs, and circumstances of individual countries within the EU's neighbourhood. It means tailoring the EU's approach to the specific conditions and aspirations of each partner, rather than applying a 'one size fits all' policy. This can involve different levels of integration, types of agreements, or areas of cooperation depending on the country in question. On the other hand, regionalization refers to the process of grouping neighbouring countries together to address shared challenges and opportunities. This can mean cooperation on issues such as trade, energy, migration, or security, which are often cross-border in nature and therefore require a regional approach. These two concepts can be complementary. While differentiation allows the EU to address the unique aspects of its relationship with each individual country, regionalization allows it to facilitate cooperation among countries in a region to address shared concerns. In practice, this means that while the EU may pursue different types of relationships with individual countries, it can still encourage cooperation among those countries on shared issues. For instance, the EU may have different Association Agreements with Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine due to differentiation, but it still works with all three countries through the Eastern Partnership, an example of regionalization, to address shared concerns in areas like trade, energy, and security.

In sum, while differentiation and regionalization represent different approaches, they are not inherently contradictory and can be used in tandem to build more effective and nuanced relationships with the EU's neighbours.

**PCAs, ENP APs, EaP AA/CEPA: *Conditionality embodied in Cooperation
Agreements and respective policies***

Conditionality in PCAs:

In the context of European Union (EU) relationships with the South Caucasus, conditionality became more explicitly articulated and systematically applied within the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs) European Communities & Republic of Armenia, 1999; European Communities & Republic of Azerbaijan, 1999; European Communities & Georgia, 1999). In the General Provisions section of the PCAs established with Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, one can discern the presence of conditionality in each of the three articles included. These articles collectively introduce a form of negative conditionality. This implies that the failure to uphold democracy, international law, human rights, principles of a market economy, cooperation among newly independent states, or the successful progress of economic reforms, as defined by the agreements, could lead to a review, re-evaluation, or potential suspension of these agreements, underscoring the significance of these conditions in preserving the established partnerships. The conditionality is grounded in the respect for democracy, principles of international law, and human rights, as well as the principles of a market economy.

The Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs) with Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, feature the same fundamental principles of democracy, international law, human rights, and market economy, highlighting the shared values that underpin these partnerships with the European Union (EU). The conditionality clauses within these agreements can be discerned in two main areas: 1.) Respect for democratic principles, international law, and human rights (Article 2): The EU stresses the importance of these values, making them a critical condition for the partnership. Adherence to these principles is a non-negotiable condition for EU cooperation and support. 2.) Economic reforms (Article 4): The PCAs imply conditionality related to the implementation of market-oriented economic reforms. The EU, through the Cooperation Council, is expected to review the economic conditions and reforms in the respective countries, making recommendations that may lead to changes in the agreement. In terms of regionalization and regional cooperation promotion, the 3rd

article is particularly relevant. It encourages cooperation among the newly independent states that emerged from the Soviet Union, reflecting the EU's preference for regional cooperation as a stabilizing and prosperity-enhancing factor. This emphasis aligns with the EU's broader regionalization strategy, which promotes mutual cooperation and good neighbourly relations among countries in the same region. PCAs suggest a standardization of EU's approach towards these countries, treating them within a similar strategic framework based on the overarching regional approach to the South Caucasus. In summary, while the PCAs incorporate elements of conditionality, these are primarily tied to respect for democratic values, principles of international law, human rights, and market economy reforms. Meanwhile, the agreements underscore the EU's practices of promoting regional cooperation, a cornerstone of its foreign policy approach towards the region.

Conditionality within ENP APs:

Progressing to the next stage in policy development, it's worth examining the role of conditionality in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). The European Commission's Communication from March 2003, "Wider Europe - Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours," presents the concept of conditionality (Commission of the European Communities, 2003). This important document sets the ENP's strategic objectives, highlighting conditionality as a crucial tool for encouraging and aiding reforms in partner countries. The document's introduction states that upon demonstrating shared values and implementing effective political, economic, and institutional reforms, the EU's neighbourhood could look forward to closer economic integration with the EU. Conditionality has since become an integral part of the ENP, shaping the relations between the EU and its partner nations. Its primary objective is to promote political, economic, and social transformation in partner countries, bringing them closer to EU values and standards. In essence, conditionality provides trade and aid to partner countries based on specific political and economic reforms. The EU uses a range of tools for influence, including

the ability to suspend bilateral agreements, withhold assistance, and impose political sanctions. On the other hand, positive conditionality offers incentives for progress, like enhanced integration into the Internal Market and alignment with regulatory frameworks.

Diving into specific cooperation agreements within the ENP, conditionality is ingrained in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) Action Plans. These plans are bilateral agreements between the EU and each partner country, defining priority areas for cooperation and the particular reforms expected from the partner country (European Union, 2006a; European Union, 2006b; European Union, 2006c). Both the EU and partner countries work together to set priorities and objectives within the ENP, expressed through these Action Plans. Although these plans aren't legally binding, they form a framework for joint monitoring and political dialogue, creating the foundation for continuous engagement. Successful execution of the outlined obligations can lead to improved cooperation, such as removal of trade barriers or visa requirement simplifications. While these Action Plans don't include explicit negative conditionality, they underline the need to uphold common values as per the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs). For regulatory approximation, market opening, and preferential trade relations, the Commission considers the alignment of objectives and benchmarks with commitments in the PCAs. If there is satisfactory progress in the Action Plans, the Commission may propose extending Community policies, programmes, and instruments.

As quoted in the ENP Action Plans, "In light of the fulfilment of the objectives of this Action Plan and of the overall evolution of EU-Armenia/Azerbaijan/Georgia relations, consideration will be given in due time to the possibility of a new enhanced contractual relationship" (European Union, 2006a; European Union, 2006b; European Union, 2006c). This signifies that the EU's intention to deepen ties with Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia and explore new cooperation forms is contingent on the

successful execution of the Action Plan and these countries' progress in fulfilling their commitments. It represents a conditional approach where the EU evaluates a partner's performance before contemplating further advancements in the relationship. The monitoring clauses imply that Action Plan implementation will be closely scrutinized, and specific recommendations may be made if needed. The Commission, collaborating with other organizations, would generate reports on the Action Plans' implementation at regular intervals. The Action Plan can be frequently revised and updated to reflect progress, suggesting a conditional approach where adjustments are made based on the achieved results.

The EU Action Plans for Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia under the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) offer unique perspectives of partnership, but commonalities that outline EU's approach to these South Caucasus nations are evident. Nevertheless, the emphasis on regional cooperation and applied conditionality differs. For instance, the EU-Armenia Action Plan, similar to the Azerbaijan plan, doesn't explicitly stress regional cooperation but highlights the EU's dedication to conflict resolution, specifically in Nagorno-Karabakh. In contrast, the EU-Georgia Action Plan more strongly emphasizes regional cooperation, with explicit references to enhancing bilateral and multilateral cooperation in the Black Sea area, including bolstering regional economic cooperation. As for conditionality, all three Action Plans follow a similar template where the EU's commitment, including financial aid and deeper cooperation, hinges on each country's progress in executing the Action Plan's objectives. The possibility of future contractual relationships relies on achieving the Action Plan's objectives and the general evolution of each country's ties with the EU. To sum up, although all three Action Plans aim to strengthen cooperation and integration, the focus on regional cooperation is most apparent in the EU-Georgia Action Plan. Conditionality remains a constant feature across all three, linking benefits and stronger ties to each country's commitment to EU standards and their respective Action Plan's implementation.

Conditionality in AA with Georgia:

Within the scope of the Association Agreement with Georgia, the concept of conditionality establishes a relationship between Georgia's achievements and the enhancement of its integration with the European Union (European Union & European Atomic Energy Community, 2014). The recently formed bilateral accord between the EU and Georgia instituted a legally binding framework encompassing both common value and market access conditionality within numerous provisions. The Association Agreement facilitates potential future progression of EU-Georgia relations, as emphasized in its preamble. The market access conditionality is particularly critical, signifying the link between Georgia's economic integration and legislative harmonization. Although the preamble, goals, and general principles of the Association Agreement lack explicit conditionality clauses in their traditional sense, several points establish the groundwork for the agreement and the relationship between the EU and Georgia. The shared values upon which Georgia and the EU are founded, such as democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, are echoed throughout the agreement. This can be viewed as an implicit conditionality: the continuous development and intensification of EU-Georgia relations hinge on adherence to these shared values. Georgia's commitment to democratic and market economy reforms that facilitate its participation in EU policies is another inferred condition. EU support for Georgia and further integration are dependent on Georgia's commitment to these reforms. The commitment to peaceful conflict resolution, particularly in the context of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, can also be seen as an implicit conditionality clause. Ongoing EU-Georgia cooperation hinges on Georgia's commitment to a peaceful resolution in these contexts. Another instance is Georgia's commitment to align its legislation with EU laws. The agreement's success hinges on Georgia's efforts to align its laws and regulations with the EU. Georgia's progress towards a visa-free regime with the EU is also conditional on secure and well-managed mobility conditions. Although this document lacks traditional

conditionality clauses, the future of the EU-Georgia relationship and the success of this agreement are indeed dependent on several key commitments. This aligns with the EU's regionalization approach, which typically involves promoting certain shared values and principles (such as human rights, the rule of law, democracy) as a basis for closer ties, with the understanding that future cooperation and integration depend on these commitments being maintained.

Significantly, as part of the General and Final Provisions, Article 419 discusses the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of progress in implementing and enforcing measures covered by the Agreement. This includes EU assessments of Georgian law approximation to EU law and other relevant implementation and enforcement aspects. The assessments could be carried out by the EU alone or jointly with Georgia. This process inherently contains a form of conditionality. The monitoring process serves as a form of ongoing evaluation where positive results or approximation progress could lead to further integration with the EU, as per Articles 417 and 418. The presence of monitoring can motivate Georgia to adhere to the agreement and implement necessary reforms. Conversely, if the monitoring process reveals unsatisfactory progress by Georgia, this could lead to adverse outcomes. Although the text does not explicitly define punishments or repercussions, they could resemble the "appropriate measures" described in Article 422.

Focusing on regionalization as a condition, Title I Article 2 highlights the general principles forming the agreement's basis. The principles listed include respect for democratic principles, human rights and fundamental freedoms, a free market economy, sustainable development, effective multilateralism, and the rule of law and good governance. While regional cooperation is not explicitly stated as a principle, some of the outlined principles indirectly imply it. For example, the commitment to "effective multilateralism" and to contributing "to regional peace and stability" suggests a degree of regional cooperation. After all, preserving peace and stability in a

region usually requires diplomatic cooperation among the countries within that region. However, this does not explicitly state regional cooperation as a condition in the same sense as respect for democratic principles, human rights, or the rule of law. The conditionality in this article revolves around these mentioned principles. Failure to uphold them could jeopardize the benefits received from the agreement. In conclusion, while regional cooperation can be inferred from the commitment to multilateralism and regional peace, it is not explicitly stated as a condition within this specific article. Nonetheless, considering the broader context of the Agreement (as shown in the previous excerpts you've shared), the promotion of regional cooperation is indeed a significant objective that could have conditional implications.

Conditionality in CEPA with Armenia:

As for the bilateral cooperation agreement between the European Union and Armenia, namely the “Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community and their Member States, of the one part, and the Republic of Armenia, of the other part” (CEPA), several examples of weak, or even implicit conditionality can be identified (European Commission & High Representative, 2017). Based on the preamble, EU's sustained support, including technical, financial, and economic assistance, is contingent on, or conditional upon, Armenia's commitment and actions to undertake the reforms. The phrase “reflecting the pace of the reforms and economic needs of the Republic of Armenia” further implies that the level or extent of the EU's support could vary depending on the progress and pace of Armenia's reforms and its economic needs, which adds another level of conditionality. Further, In the Objectives (Article 1), the aims are contingent upon the cooperation and active participation of both Parties. For instance, enhanced political and economic partnerships (1a), strengthening of the framework for political dialogue (1b), and enhancing cooperation in areas like freedom, security, and justice (1e) require active engagement from both Parties; Objectives such as contributing to the strengthening of democracy and

political stability in the Armenia (1c) are contingent on Armenia's willingness to engage in democratic reforms, respect human rights, and foster economic stability; The establishment of enhanced trade cooperation (1h) is contingent upon compliance with the obligations arising from WTO membership. According to the General Principles of the agreement, respect for democratic principles, human rights, and fundamental freedoms "shall form the basis of the domestic and external policies of the Parties and constitute an essential element of this Agreement" (Article 2.1). Armenia's active participation in regional formats is seen as essential, indicating that continued and enhanced cooperation could be dependent on Armenia's adherence to these commitments, though suggesting that CEPA includes a conditionality clause to push for regionalization would be a speculation. The conditionality stipulated in this agreement appears even weaker than previous agreements examined in this chapter (European Commission & High Representative, 2017).

At the same time, it is important to consider the specific political backdrop in which this agreement was crafted. The Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) was originally intended to serve as a watered-down version of the Association Agreement, reflecting a more flexible approach to integration and cooperation. This dilution of terms and obligations is consistent with the intention to craft an agreement that would be politically feasible and responsive to the unique context and dynamics at play. Thus, while the conditionality may seem comparatively relaxed, it aligns with the spirit and strategic objective of the EU's relations with Armenia.

SECTION 3

FINDINGS: An ambitious attempt of generating a conceptual framework for understanding the EU's practices of Regionalization

Chapter Introduction

The comprehensive analysis of the European Union's (EU) regionalization strategies towards the South Caucasus, conducted with the application of Karen E. Smith's (2003) conceptual framework, has revealed a duality in the nature of the EU's foreign policy practices in the region. It has also brought to light the intricate interplay between economic assistance, cooperative agreements, political dialogue, and conditionality as strategic instruments of the EU's regionalization practices towards the South Caucasus. This analysis has allowed for drawing conclusions regarding the prominence and dominance of the usage of each of these instruments in the EU's policy practices of regionalization towards the South Caucasus. Moreover, the examination has led to the identification of five critical patterns that, as argued in this thesis, define the EU's approach of regionalization towards the South Caucasus through the mentioned instruments.

The subsequent chapter delves into these dual practices of regionalization and the identified patterns, providing a detailed exploration of their meanings and substance in the context of each instrument - economic assistance, cooperation agreements, political dialogue, and conditionality.

The extensive analysis conducted in this study not only highlights the EU's regionalization strategies in the South Caucasus but also identifies key patterns and dual practices that shape these strategies across various foreign policy instruments. By elucidating these findings in this concluding chapter, the research culminates in a comprehensive and well-supported thesis statement that offers valuable insights into the complexities and substance of the EU's regionalization approach in the region.

(a) Twofold application of Regionalization practices through economic support instruments

This thesis puts forth that the policy practices of Regionalization in the South Caucasus through economic support and cooperation agreements follow a dual practice and objective.

Primarily, the first aspect of this Regionalization is pragmatic, aimed at uniting nations of similar geopolitical significance to the EU, within a cohesive institutional framework. Such an arrangement allows for standardization, simplifying EU-to-region interactions and reducing transaction costs.

In contrast, the second dimension of Regionalization goes beyond procedural aspects, focusing on a strategic objective - promoting regional cooperation. This serves as an effective tool for addressing shared challenges, as perceived by the EU, and advancing broader EU foreign policy objectives, specifically, the promotion of stability and prosperity.

**I Dimension (a) – Grouping together and standardizing
(through economic assistance)**

- **TACIS:** Illustrating the first dimension of regionalization as a policy practice, TACIS served as a distinctive tool for the EU in grouping together countries based on their geopolitical relevance and post-Soviet status. The program's introduction was a direct response to address the challenges of post-Soviet states, particularly those considered non-candidate newly independent nations. In contrast, the EU extended the PHARE program to post-Soviet nations like the Baltic States, identified as potential candidates for

membership. Consequently, TACIS encompassed countries such as Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia in the South Caucasus, among others, while PHARE targeted potential candidates. By making this differentiation, the EU effectively tailored its policy responses according to the unique trajectories and geopolitical statuses of the non-candidate post-Soviet states under TACIS, compared to the potential candidates under PHARE. TACIS, in essence, formed a collective entity based on shared geopolitical history and geographical proximity for those non-candidate post-Soviet states, distinct from the grouping of potential candidates under PHARE.

- **TRACECA:** Encompassing a diverse range of member states across the South Caucasus, Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and extending to countries such as Iran and Turkmenistan, TRACECA exemplifies the EU's standardized approach to managing relationships with this array of nations through a unified policy framework. This approach not only simplifies the engagement process but also effectively reduces the transaction costs associated with bilateral relations. A pivotal example of this harmonized approach lies in the Basic Multilateral Agreement (MLA) signed under TRACECA, which serves as a unifying element, binding these diverse nations together under a single cooperative goal. Moreover, the institutional structure within TRACECA further underscores the EU's commitment to a uniform approach. The formation of entities such as the Intergovernmental Commission (IGC) and the Permanent Secretariat (PS) within the framework ensures the facilitation of consistent policy implementation across the disparate political landscapes of TRACECA's member countries.
- **INOGATE:** INOGATE serves as a compelling showcase of the EU's regionalization as a policy practice, manifesting in several distinct ways. The program effectively aggregated countries from Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia - regions of vital significance in ensuring Europe's energy security. Operating with a uniform approach to cooperation and common

goals, INOGATE streamlined movement of energy commodities, reduced transaction costs, and enhanced efficiency in political dialogue. A key exemplification of this regionalization strategy lies in the creation and implementation of the Umbrella Agreement and the Astana Declaration. Both initiatives underscore a shared language of cooperation and mutual objectives, reinforcing the centrality of regionalization as a policy practice within the program. Notably, the Umbrella Agreement significantly solidified a comprehensive institutional system across all participating countries, minimizing investment risks and maximizing commercial efficiency.

- **ENPI:** Through the strategic categorization of countries into the Eastern Europe, Caucasus, Mediterranean, and North Africa regions, the EU effectively facilitated targeted assistance under ENPI and promoted collaboration among neighboring nations. Notably, the South Caucasus countries were grouped under the ENP East region, enabling more tailored support aligned with the National Indicative Programmes (NIPs) and Regional Indicative Programmes (RIPs). These well-defined programs outlined specific priority sectors and cooperation objectives, ensuring efficient allocation of financial aid to address unique regional needs and priorities. The ENPI's regionalization approach empowered the EU to address challenges and opportunities within each group more effectively, fostering cooperation and mutual development goals. A concrete manifestation of the EU's dedication to regional integration was evident in the development of the Eastern Partnership Integration and Cooperation (EaPIC) program within ENPI. This initiative underscored the EU's commitment to providing additional financial assistance to bolster integration efforts and democratic reforms in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries.
- **ENI:** ENI established technical groupings of countries through the allocation of funds and the setting of financial priorities. The allocation of certain proportions of its budget to distinct program categories - bilateral, multi-

country, and cross-border cooperation - resulted in a systematic grouping of countries based on these categories. In the case of bilateral programs, the EU focused on individual nations and tailored its approach to address their specific needs, fostering a sense of differentiation in its engagement. Conversely, multi-country programs deliberately grouped nations together based on shared challenges or opportunities, highlighting the EU's recognition of commonality among these countries and its commitment to stimulating regional cooperation. Furthermore, the use of cross-border cooperation programs allowed the ENI to technically group countries together, particularly those that shared borders with the EU. This strategic grouping of countries based on geographic proximity and shared interests influenced the distribution of financial aid, enabling the EU to effectively target its resources and foster efficient collaboration. In essence, the ENI's multifaceted assistance mechanisms served as an instrumental tool for technically grouping countries together, providing a structured framework for categorizing nations and facilitating the EU's nuanced and targeted pursuit of foreign policy objectives. By fostering regional cooperation and integration within the European Neighbourhood, the ENI bolstered the EU's commitment to advancing its strategic interests in the region.

- **NDICI- Global Europe:** Within the NDICI framework, the EU deliberately groups together countries based on their geographic proximity and relevance to its foreign policy interests under geographical pillar. Notably, the South Caucasus region is included in the Neighbourhood allocation, emphasizing its significance in the instrument's geographical pillar. The allocation of funds to these regions not only aligns with geographic proximity but also reflects the EU's strategic priorities and interests in the area. Through this regionalized approach, the EU aims to achieve operational efficiency and consistency in policy dialogue and cooperation with these countries. By focusing on regions with shared geographic and geopolitical characteristics, the EU seeks to

strengthen its engagement and effectiveness in addressing regional challenges and opportunities.

II Dimension (a) – Promoting regional cooperation (through economic assistance)

- **TACIS:** The second dimension of the EU's regionalization strategy, as manifested through TACIS, reveals a transformative process that extends beyond mere technical grouping. Instead, it aims to foster regional cooperation, economic interdependence, and democratic transformation among partner nations. This dimension is distinctly evident in the evolution of TACIS from a demand-driven to a dialogue-driven approach, wherein the EU sought policy reform commitments from its partners. Through the implementation of National Indicative Programmes, Action Programmes, and Regional Programmes, the EU endeavored to promote cohesion, connectivity, and collective action, striking a delicate balance between national independence and regional integration. Notably, specific initiatives such as TRACECA and INOGATE serve as prime examples of this dimension in action, focusing on critical sectors like transport and energy to stimulate and facilitate regional cooperation. In essence, this dimension exemplifies the EU's proactive role in shaping the transition of its partners towards market economies, democratic societies, and regional integration. By encouraging regional cooperation, fostering economic interdependence, and promoting democratic transformation, TACIS demonstrated the EU's commitment to facilitating a collaborative and integrated approach among partner nations.
- **TRACECA:** TRACECA serves as a compelling illustration of how the EU strategically employs regionalization as a mechanism for fostering and promoting regional cooperation. This initiative, spanning from Europe through the South Caucasus to Asia, is designed to enhance economic ties,

trade, and transportation across a vast geographic landscape. The goals of the Multilateral Agreement (MLA), as revealed in the content analysis, are deeply rooted in the principles of regional cooperation. By advocating for harmonized transport policies, granting access to global markets, ensuring traffic safety, cargo security, and environmental protection among participating nations, the EU actively nurtures an environment that fosters economic growth and encourages collaborative efforts. Moreover, TRACECA's alignment with core EU principles such as traffic safety, security of goods, and environmental protection underscores the EU's commitment to disseminating these values across the participant nations. Such aspirations are closely aligned with the EU's overarching objectives of promoting peace, prosperity, and democracy within the region. In essence, TRACECA's focus on fostering regional cooperation by strengthening economic ties, trade, and transportation across Europe, the South Caucasus, and Asia exemplifies the EU's strategic use of regionalization to advance collective progress. Through the promotion of harmonized policies and shared values, TRACECA symbolizes the EU's concerted effort to create a framework for prosperity and cooperation among the participating nations.

- **INOGATE:** The INOGATE program also exemplifies the European Union's utilization of regionalization as a means to enhance regional cooperation. Its main aim is to inspire countries within the region to unite over shared energy ambitions and strategies, thus promoting regional unity and a shared identity. The harmonization of regional energy markets, following the guidelines of the EU's internal energy market, the reinforcement of energy security, the support for sustainable energy development, and the stimulation of investment into joint regional energy projects reflect this. The Baku Initiative and the Astana Declaration serve as excellent examples of these efforts, as they define the priority sectors for energy cooperation and provide a strategic plan for realizing shared energy goals. This effectively expands the EU's influence,

strengthens security, and readies potential member states for integration. Essentially, through INOGATE, the EU applies regionalization as a tool to foster cooperation that propels peace, economic progress, and democracy. Therefore, it's about nurturing regional cooperation by merging oil and gas pipeline systems, boosting Europe's energy security, and rendering the region appealing to private investors. Additionally, the program indirectly aids infrastructure projects by establishing conducive policy environments.

- **ENPI:** The European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) also works towards fostering regional cooperation. Regulation (EC) No 1638/2006 acts as the cornerstone for the European Union's devotion to regional partnership and cooperation, underscoring the importance of cross-border collaboration as a key method to spur regional development and integration. This regulation provides the overall ethos and direction for the EU's regionalization strategy. Derived directly from the framework set up by Regulation (EC) No 1638/2006, the subsequent Regional Strategy Paper for the ENPI Eastern Region (2007-2013) establishes its objectives and priorities. As a directive document, the Strategy Paper details specific focus areas, including transport and energy networks, environmental conservation, border management, and interpersonal activities, which align with the principles of regional cooperation and integration set by the regulation. The Strategy Paper functions as an operational implementation plan, converting the broader objectives of the regulation into specific actions and initiatives for the Eastern Neighbourhood. The Regional Programme - East, through the practical implementation of the goals set out in the Regional Strategy Paper, is intended to effectively push forward the priorities identified in the Strategy Paper. This program, through a variety of initiatives and platforms, encourages collaboration to tackle shared problems, bolsters the involvement of civil society, and fortifies regional connections, hence aiding regional integration and sustainable development. The program thus serves as the practical conduit

to realize the strategic goals outlined by both Regulation (EC) No 1638/2006 and the Regional Strategy Paper. In essence, Regulation (EC) No 1638/2006 lays the groundwork for the EU's commitment to regional partnership and cooperation, the Regional Strategy Paper details specific cooperation areas based on the regulation's priorities, and the Regional Programme - East actualizes the goals of the Strategy Paper into tangible initiatives to solidify regional bonds and address shared issues. Collectively, these components embody the EU's pledge to regional cooperation and its strategic and effective execution in its neighborhood initiatives.

- **ENI:** The European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) also represents the secondary aspect of the European Union's regionalization strategy, leveraging regionalization as a catalyst to bolster regional cooperation with the aim of encouraging peace, economic expansion, and democracy. The objective of the ENI, which is to establish an area of mutual prosperity and amicable relations between EU Member States and partner countries, distinctly exemplifies this. By actively integrating citizens of partner countries in EU internal initiatives like Horizon 2020 and Erasmus+, and advocating for citizens' organizations and local authorities to participate in the planning, implementation, and assessment of EU aid, the EU demonstrates its commitment to promoting regional cooperation. This commitment is reflected in Regulation (EU) No 232/2014 and the Regional East Strategy Paper 2014-2020, which both underscore cross-border cooperation, sustainable regional development, and mutual responsibility. These tools are not only crafted to address common challenges, but also to align regionalization efforts with broader EU macro-regional strategies. The EU, through its use of the ENI, aims to cultivate a regional collaborative identity, inspiring nations to join forces towards shared objectives and, in doing so, expand EU influence, security, and potential for integration.

- **NDICI-Global Europe:** The EU's focus on cross-regional collaboration, partnership agreements, and macro-regional strategies emphasizes the significance it attaches to regional synergy. By advancing regional cooperation using a wide array of tools and mechanisms, the EU motivates countries to work together on diverse matters, encompassing conflict resolution, economic growth, and democratic governance. This approach aligns with the secondary aspect of regionalization, which is the cultivation of regional cooperation. It facilitates regional cooperation through an all-encompassing assortment of instruments and mechanisms, urging countries to join forces on a variety of concerns, from settling conflicts to fostering economic development and democratic rule.

**(b) Twofold application of Regionalization practices through cooperation agreements
(and respective policy frameworks)**

I Dimension (b) – Grouping together and standardizing

- **PCAs** – The first aspect of the EU's regionalization strategy can be viewed as geopolitical consolidation, wherein regionalization is viewed as a policy approach to group together countries that are geographically close or have shared geopolitical significance. This dimension is noticeable from the lack of specific distinction related to the individual nations involved in the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs). By utilizing a consistent approach, suggesting comparable agreements, and applying similar language, the EU aimed to improve its foreign policy effectiveness by minimizing transaction costs and streamlining political discourse. These actions imply the EU's perception of the South Caucasus countries as a collective unit, assembled based on their geographical proximity and common regional characteristics. As a result, the regionalization strategy can be interpreted as a practical

response to the geopolitical realities of the South Caucasus region and the EU's interests in this region.

- **ENP (& APs)** – The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) has acted as a collective term for countries bordering Europe that have become increasingly relevant to the EU's own security and interests, especially in the context of eastern expansion. The ENP can be perceived as a regionalization tactic geared towards grouping these neighbouring countries based on their geographical closeness to Europe, and these are countries which the EU did not view as potential members. This approach of grouping by distinction echoes the earlier discussed TACIS program, which distinguished between the South Caucasus countries and the Baltic states that were included in PHARE as potential members. The fact that the EU extended the invitation to join the ENP not only to Georgia, whose Rose Revolution was crucial in attracting the EU's attention, but also to Armenia and Azerbaijan, underscores the EU's tendency to group the South Caucasus countries together under the ENP framework, treating them collectively as neighbouring partners. The EU's drive for standardization in its approach can further be seen in the development of ENP Action Plans (ENP APs). These plans were proposed to all South Caucasus countries, underlining shared priorities and common challenges. The ENP APs for Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, though more differentiated than in the time of PCAs, still exhibited a high level of similarity in their wording and priorities. Moreover, the appointment of a European Union Special Representative (EUSR) for the South Caucasus with a regional mandate, coupled with the use of the European Commission's delegation in Tbilisi as a regional hub for the South Caucasus trio in 2005, further highlight this approach.
- **ENP (& PPs)** – The strategic leverage of region-specific commonalities leads to enhanced cooperation, decreased conflicts, and the nurturing of shared interests. As demonstrated in the ENP and EaP initiatives, the EU has steadily

implemented this regionalization strategy to foster economic growth, political stability, and societal progress within its surrounding regions. The consistent use of language is a significant feature of the EU's regionalization strategy. EU's documents, such as the Partnership Priorities, employ standardized language and structure, thereby further simplifying dialogue and comprehension between the EU and its partner countries. Despite specific differences among countries, the core objectives of fortifying institutions and governance, promoting economic growth, enhancing connectivity, increasing energy efficiency, taking climate action, and facilitating people-to-people contacts remain consistent. This approach showcases the EU's commitment to addressing shared regional issues and the mutual responsibility of both the EU and its neighbouring countries in these areas. This consistency not only assists in conveying the EU's policy objectives but also bolsters the EU's position as a guide and enabler in these regional partnerships.

- **EaP (& AA/DCFTA; CEPA; SPA)-** The Eastern Partnership (EaP), a distinct instance of sub-regionalization within the broader European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), groups together Eastern European nations with close geographical proximity and geopolitical significance to the EU. Despite its unified and standardized approach, the EU acknowledged the necessity for differentiated dealings with its partner countries, which varied in their responses to the proposed association agreements. The primary aim of the EU was to foster collaboration, amplify political dialogue, and advocate for political and socioeconomic reforms in these partner nations, equipping them for potential future integration into the EU, without necessarily implying imminent membership. Despite the complexities, the EU sought to deal with the South Caucasian countries uniformly, offering alternative agreements to further their relations with the EU. For example, acknowledging the restrictions faced by Armenia, the EU enacted the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA), aimed at deepening relations in

various sectors while ensuring compatibility with Armenia's membership in the Eurasian Economic Union. Concurrently, the EU maintained its existing Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with Azerbaijan and initiated negotiations on the Strategic Partnership Agreement to establish a more balanced relationship within the region, taking into account the country's geopolitical context and aspirations. The adoption of Partnership Priorities by Armenia and Azerbaijan illustrates further the EU's efforts to nurture a more harmonious South Caucasus region.

- **BSS** - Through BSS initiative, the EU categorizes nations based on their geographical closeness to the Black Sea and their strategic significance to EU foreign policy goals, regardless of whether they directly border the sea. This approach includes South Caucasus nations like Armenia and Azerbaijan, even though they are not sea-bordering states. By adopting this regional approach, the EU strives to establish a unified and consistent policy framework, thereby reducing transaction costs, minimizing the resources required for individual negotiations, and streamlining political discourse for more efficient policy implementation. This method allows the EU to collectively and coordinately address common regional issues such as energy security, environmental preservation, and transport efficiency, demonstrating the EU's pragmatic approach to optimize the effectiveness and efficiency of its external relations. The Black Sea Synergy initiative categorizes nations by their geographical nearness to the Black Sea and their strategic value to the EU, including non-coastal states such as Armenia and Azerbaijan, showcasing the EU's pragmatic approach to regionalization.

II Dimension (b) – Promoting regional cooperation

- **PCAs** – The second aspect of the EU's regionalization strategy is focused on facilitating cooperation. It treats regionalization as a tool for cultivating regional collaboration with the objective of fostering peace, stability, economic growth, and the promotion of democratic values. This perspective is evident in the emphasis placed on boosting regional cooperation, building mutual trust amongst South Caucasus countries and their neighboring states, and initiating regular political dialogue within the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs). The EU's strategy motivates nations within this region to collaborate, with the goal of broadening the EU's influence, fortifying regional security, and potentially preparing member countries for integration into the EU. Furthermore, the scope of cooperation extends beyond solely economic considerations to include political dialogue and potential conflict resolution, demonstrating the EU's comprehensive approach to stimulating intra-regional collaboration. This aspect of the EU's strategy represents its enduring aspirations for a world that is peaceful, prosperous, and democratic, and highlights its dedication to promoting these values through mechanisms for regional cooperation. As such, the PCAs facilitate regional cooperation, mutual trust, and political dialogue among South Caucasus countries and their neighbors. The strategy seeks to expand the EU's influence, improve regional security, and possibly lay the groundwork for the integration of member countries, showcasing the EU's commitment to fostering peace, prosperity, and democratic governance.
- **ENP (& APs)** – The European Union (EU) has prioritized nurturing regional cooperation in the South Caucasus through diverse agreements under the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). Beginning with the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs), the EU signaled its political commitment to fostering cooperation. Following this, the ENP Action Plans for each South Caucasus nation detailed specific collaboration areas, focusing on intra-regional relationships, measures to build confidence, and cooperation

across sectors such as education, environment, and transport. The ENP Reviews in 2011 and 2015 reinforced the significance of regional cooperation. The review in 2011 introduced the idea of sub-regional cooperation, acknowledging that neighbouring countries often have shared interests and challenges that are best addressed through specialized collaboration. The 2015 review launched thematic frameworks to handle specific issues like migration, energy, security, and health, to encourage regional unity and mutual advantages.

- **ENP (& PPs)** – The EU's focus on regional cooperation and stability in these agreements underscores its strategic commitment to maintaining a peaceful and prosperous neighbourhood. By prioritizing key areas such as the rule of law, human rights, and democratic governance, the EU seeks to cultivate a common value system and mutual trust among its neighboring countries, thereby bolstering regional stability. Moreover, the EU places great emphasis on societal participation, recognizing the vital roles of civil society, women, and youth in its comprehensive approach to regional development. This approach acknowledges that sustainable regional cooperation and stability require more than just top-down initiatives; they necessitate active engagement and involvement from all segments of society. Through the agreements under ENP, the EU prioritizes regional cooperation, stability, and the promotion of rule of law, human rights, and democratic governance, all aimed at fostering a peaceful and prosperous neighborhood. The EU's commitment to societal participation and engagement at all levels underscores its belief that regional cooperation and stability go beyond mere top-down approaches.
- **EaP (& AA/DCFTA; CEPA; SPA)** – The European Union has played a crucial role in fostering regional cooperation in the South Caucasus through the Eastern Partnership (EaP) framework. The Prague EaP Summit Joint Declaration was a pivotal moment that set the tone for the EaP's regional

approach, emphasizing multilateral dialogue, shared decision-making, and active participation from all parties involved. This shift in paradigm aimed at building a common area where democracy, prosperity, stability, and increased cooperation could flourish, aligning with the EU's vision of a more integrated Eastern Europe. The regional approach of the EaP is unique in its combination of bilateral and multilateral strategies of regionalization, creating a balanced power dynamic and an equitable forum for collaboration. The multilateral framework complements bilateral agreements, allowing Eastern Partnership countries to be active contributors to the region's development rather than passive recipients of EU influence. Under the EaP umbrella, various agreements, such as the EU-Georgia Association Agreement and the EU-Armenia Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement, incorporate principles of good governance, conflict resolution, and sector-specific cooperation. These provisions cultivate a shared commitment to regional stability and prosperity. Despite maintaining their bilateral nature, these agreements actively promote regional cooperation by addressing shared challenges, facilitating cross-border collaboration, and aligning political and economic policies.

- **BSS** - Moving to the second dimension, the European Union places considerable emphasis on promoting regional cooperation. Under initiatives like the Black Sea Synergy, the EU brings nations together and encourages collaborative, coordinated efforts while providing vital support in strategically significant areas. Through this initiative, the EU facilitates cooperation among countries in the South Caucasus and the broader Black Sea region, with a strong focus on shared goals, multilateral dialogues, and mutual benefits. The Black Sea Synergy serves as a mechanism to stimulate democratic and economic reforms, projecting stability, and providing essential backing for regional development. Within this framework, the EU prioritizes key sectors such as environment, transport, and energy, recognizing their critical

importance for regional prosperity and stability. The EU's efforts not only foster cooperation among the Black Sea states but also actively involve countries connected through the EU accession policy and strategic partnerships, including Turkey and Russia. To bolster these endeavors, the EU employs a comprehensive strategy that includes financial instruments like the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) and the Neighbourhood Investment Fund (NIF). By providing seed funding for project preparation and attracting further investments in regional infrastructure development, the EU strengthens its commitment to regional cooperation.

Having revisited and elucidated the twofold regionalization practices in this conclusive chapter, based on the findings of the previously conducted content analysis and process tracing of the economic support and cooperation agreements as instruments of the EU's regionalization practices towards the South Caucasus, the focus now shifts to further exploring the patterns of their application. These patterns, also revealed through the content analysis and process tracing undertaken in the main research part of the thesis, indicate the presence of adaptive attitude, a multi-faceted approach, inclusive differentiation, alignment with EU's core values, and integration of global considerations within the EU's policy practices of regionalization towards the South Caucasus.

5 Dominant Patterns of the EU's Regionalization Practices in the South Caucasus

1. Adaptive attitude

Adaptive regionalization, as applied in the context of this analysis, refers to the dynamic and responsive approach that the European Union (EU) takes towards its engagement with the South Caucasus. This strategic principle, based on contextual understanding and proactive adjustments, allows the EU to customize its policies and initiatives in response to the unique geopolitical, economic, and social circumstances of the region. Its application ensures that the EU's regionalization efforts are flexible, relevant, and effective in meeting the evolving needs and realities of the South Caucasus. This responsive and nuanced approach to regional cooperation and integration highlights the EU's commitment to fostering meaningful and sustainable relationships with countries in this strategically important region.

1(a) Economic assistance

- **TACIS** - As an example, TACIS initiative, while initially focused on supporting the newly independent states after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, adapted to promote regional cooperation among the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) nations and Georgia. It recognized the need for inter-country collaboration and regional integration while providing technical assistance and support.
- **ENPI** – The EU policy, as outlined in Regulation (EC) No 1638/2006, emphasized regional cooperation and integration to promote stability and development. It recognized the need for adaptive and responsive regionalization to address diverse country-specific needs and cross-border issues, making this approach flexible and customized to the region's particular context. It also promoted cross-border cooperation as a tool for territorial integration.
- **ENI** – The European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) was structured to adapt to the specific needs and circumstances of individual partner countries. This

approach provided targeted assistance through bilateral programs, multi-country programs, and cross-border cooperation initiatives, enabling a more focused and personalized response to each country's unique challenges and opportunities.

- **NDICI-Global Europe**- NDICI recognizes the importance of adapting its strategies to the specific needs, opportunities, and dynamics of different regions. This is demonstrated by the significant budget allocations to different regions. The 'geographisation' strategy offers enhanced adaptability in regional and multi-country collaboration, thus displaying adaptability in its regionalization approach.

1(b) Cooperation Agreements (and respective policy frameworks)

- **PCAs** – The PCAs themselves reflect the EU's adaptability in regionalization. These agreements represented a new strategy in the EU's approach to the South Caucasus region, highlighting an ability to innovate and modify its approaches based on the circumstances at the time. The EU signed these agreements with Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia in response to the new geopolitical landscape that emerged following the dissolution of the Soviet Union.
- **ENP (& APs)** – The European Union (EU) demonstrated a consistent, responsive approach to the changing dynamics in the South Caucasus region. Initially, the region wasn't included in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) framework, but its inclusion in 2004 showed an adaptability to evolving geopolitical circumstances. This continued with the regular reviews of the ENP in 2011 and 2015, highlighting the EU's willingness to adapt its regional strategies in response to new developments and challenges. For instance, the 2015 review introduced new outreach initiatives beyond the boundaries of the ENP area and proposed thematic frameworks to address specific issues.

- **ENP (& PPs)** – Post-2015, the shift from ENP Action Plans to Partnership Priorities, better adapted to each partner's specific context, illustrates this adaptive regionalization. The regional focus further extends in the "Recovery, Resilience and Reform: Post-2020 Eastern Partnership Priorities," which establishes broad objectives but allows for adaptation according to each country's unique context.
- **EaP (& AA/DCFTA; CEPA)**– This trend is evident in the way the Eastern Partnership (EaP) has been tailored to suit the different needs and geopolitical situations of the six post-Soviet states involved: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, and Belarus. This strategy is particularly reflected in the Association Agreements, with Georgia firmly aligning with the EU and Armenia choosing a different path due to Russia's influence. Each country's unique circumstances and the varying levels of cooperation in areas such as political dialogue, economic integration, and security reflect a flexible and adaptive approach to regionalization.
- **BSS** – The Black Sea Synergy initiative is an excellent example of adaptive regionalization. It demonstrates the European Union's (EU) strategic approach to enhancing cooperation in the South Caucasus and the wider Black Sea region. Despite not all being Black Sea states, countries like Armenia and Azerbaijan are included in this initiative, which shows the EU's adaptive and flexible approach to regionalization based on strategic considerations rather than only on geographical location.

1(c) Political Dialogue

- **Political Dialogue in PCAs:** The adaptive regionalization theme is evident in the EU's strategic shift from initial engagement through TACIS to the more formalized political dialogue within the Partnership and Cooperation

Agreements (PCAs). Here, the TACIS program functioned as a preliminary conduit for dialogue, paving the way for the PCAs' more targeted, strategic political dialogue.

- **ENP political dialogue objectives and structures²:** The ENP framework manifests the principle of adaptive regionalization in its customized approach to political dialogues. Informed by the unique socio-political and economic landscapes of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, the ENP's Action Plans and dialogue structures are designed to be distinct, country-specific, and flexible. In the political dialogue forums, whether bilateral meetings, formal assemblies, or regional initiatives, it's noticeable that the modes of conversation can be adjusted according to each country's progress and the prevailing regional circumstances. Hence, the ENP's political dialogue platform effectively champions an adaptive form of regionalization.
- **EaP political dialogue objectives³:** The political dialogue structures within the Partnership Priorities with Armenia, Azerbaijan, and the Association Agreement with Georgia demonstrate an adaptive approach to regionalization. They offer flexible frameworks that consider broader regional dynamics, fostering cooperation, and addressing evolving challenges and opportunities within the respective contexts of the Eastern Partnership and the South Caucasus region.
- **EaP Political dialogue structures⁴:** All three platforms - EaP CSF, EURONEST, and CORLEAP - demonstrate an adaptive approach to regionalization. They are designed to respond to evolving challenges and opportunities within the Eastern Partnership. The EaP CSF, as a platform for civil society engagement, fosters dialogue between CSOs and public authorities to address ongoing reforms and enhance public confidence. EURONEST, as the parliamentary

² ENP Political Dialogue objectives as per 2004 Strategy Paper, APs; and structured political dialogue through SCPI, Baku Initiative. The EaP, being complex, is discussed separately with its own political dialogue objectives and structures

³ EaP political dialogue objectives as per PPs and AA

⁴ EaP institutionalized political dialogue structures - CSF, EURONEST, CORLEAP

assembly, facilitates political association and economic integration, while CORLEAP brings a regional and local dimension into the Eastern Partnership, acknowledging the importance of sub-national actors in governance processes. The flexibility of these platforms reflects the EU's commitment to adjusting its regionalization strategies to suit the unique needs of the partner countries.

1(d) Conditionality

- **TACIS, ENPI, ENI (economic support)** - Conditionality in the EU's financial instruments has evolved, demonstrating an increasing adaptation towards promoting democratic norms and human rights. In the 2011 revision of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), the 'more for more' principle was introduced, linking increased support to countries demonstrating substantial progress in democratic reforms. This principle found practical application in two key programmes: the Support for Partnership, Reform and Inclusive Growth (SPRING) for Southern neighbours, and the Eastern Partnership Integration and Cooperation (EaPIC) for Eastern neighbours, both under the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) 2014-2020. These programmes served as pivotal conduits for the 'more for more' principle, incentivizing and rewarding reforms through additional funding for countries demonstrating significant advancement in democratic norms and respect for human rights.
- **PCAs, ENP APs, AA, CEPA (cooperation agreements)** - The application of conditionality in the EU's various agreements reflects its adaptability in response to the unique circumstances of each partner country. It's not just a matter of scaling the scope and intensity of the conditions but adapting them to the specific political, economic, and social contexts of each partner. For instance, PCAs apply conditionality to drive dialogue and economic transformation, aligned with the stage of partnership these countries share with the EU. The AA with Georgia applies more explicit and extensive

conditions to support its deeper integration aspiration, covering a wide spectrum of political, economic, and legal harmonization. In the CEPA with Armenia, conditionality is applied subtly, reflecting the specific political dynamics and feasibility issues in the EU-Armenia relations. The adaptability is about customizing the application of conditionality to the nuanced requirements of each relationship, considering not only the reform objectives but also the local realities and constraints.

2. Multi-faceted approach

In the realm of regionalization efforts in the South Caucasus, the European Union (EU) adopts a multi-faceted approach that extends beyond the conventional framework. It recognizes that regional integration is not a one-dimensional task confined to a single domain, but a complex, intertwined endeavor requiring attention across multiple sectors. From trade and investment to justice, home affairs, and conflict resolution, the EU's strategy demonstrates a comprehensive approach towards regionalization. This approach is not limited to economic and political factors but includes significant social, infrastructural, environmental, and security aspects. The EU's vision of regionalization is, therefore, a multi-pronged, inclusive process that encapsulates diverse aspects, each contributing to a cohesive and harmonious region, aligned with a broader framework of European values and standards.

2(a) Economic Support

- **TACIS** – Tacis took a comprehensive approach to support the transition of the CIS nations and Georgia towards market economies and democratic societies. It incorporated policy advice, institutional development, legal and regulatory framework design, and technical assistance, addressing various aspects of reform.

- **ENPI** – The ENPI used a multi-faceted approach to achieve its goals, including policy dialogue, civil society engagement, flagship initiatives, regional programs, environmental initiatives, transport collaboration, energy cooperation, and youth support. ENPI recognized the need for a broad, encompassing approach to tackle the various challenges facing the region.
- **ENI** – The ENI employs a multi-faceted approach to support its regionalization strategy. It encompasses a wide range of areas and objectives, including human rights, good governance, economic development, social sectors, sustainable resource management, education, mobility, and migration management, and conflict prevention. Various financial instruments and internal EU programs are coordinated and utilized to maximize the impact of EU cooperation in the region.
- **NDICI-Global Europe**– The NDICI-Global Europe regulation outlines a multi-faceted approach, combining the three strategic pillars of geographic, thematic, and rapid response. Each pillar has a distinct focus, with the geographic pillar focusing on dialogue, cooperation, and partnerships with third countries and regions, the thematic pillar addressing global challenges, human rights, and democracy, and the rapid response pillar enabling swift action in crisis situations.

2(b) Cooperation Agreements (and respective policy frameworks)

- **PCAs** – The EU's multi-faceted approach to regional development is manifested in the extensive array of sectors covered by the PCAs, ranging from trade and investment to justice and home affairs. This broad coverage illustrates the EU's comprehensive approach, which extends beyond economic spheres to include political dialogue and potentially conflict resolution.

- **ENP (& APs)** – The EU's approach to development in the South Caucasus region under the ENP encompasses numerous areas. This includes strengthening democracy, upholding the rule of law, ensuring respect for human rights, and advancing progress towards a market economy. Specific sectors such as energy, transportation, education, environment, and border management are also emphasized. In addition, efforts to facilitate conflict resolution and cultivate harmonious relations among neighboring states reflect a holistic strategy towards development. The existence of numerous cooperation agreements and regional initiatives under the ENP framework further elucidate this trend.
- **ENP (& PPs)** – The EU's approach to development in its neighbouring countries is multi-faceted. It involves different sectors, including economic development, infrastructure, energy cooperation, law enforcement, and social policies. From the Partnership Priorities with Armenia and Azerbaijan to the Post-2020 Eastern Partnership priorities, the EU considers various sectors including economic growth, governance, climate change, digital transformation, and societal resilience.
- **EaP (& AA/DCFTA; CEPA)**- The agreements encourage multifaceted development by tackling multiple areas simultaneously, including economic integration, good governance, energy security, cross-border cooperation, and security policy. The EU-Georgia AA and DCFTA, for example, address political, legal, and economic dimensions, aiming for broad legislative alignment, trade liberalization, and good governance. Similarly, CEPA outlines goals related to international security, crisis management, economic integration, and regional stability.
- **BSS** - The EU's approach towards the Black Sea region doesn't only focus on economic development. It also targets different sectors such as environment, transport, energy, democracy, human rights, and good governance. The initiative also addresses "frozen" conflicts, security, and border management.

The inclusion of multiple sectors and diverse focus areas demonstrates the EU's comprehensive and multi-faceted approach to development.

2(c) Political Dialogue

- **Political Dialogue in PCAs:** The political dialogue facilitated by the EU incorporates a multi-faceted approach to development. It covers a broad range of sectors, reflecting in the diverse thematic areas of ministerial meetings, Parliamentary Cooperation Committees, and Cooperation Councils. These varied platforms for dialogue reflect a comprehensive, multi-layered strategy for political engagement that recognizes the complex, multi-dimensional nature of development.
- **ENP political dialogue objectives and structures ⁵:** The ENP framework adopts a comprehensive and multi-dimensional approach to regionalization, as seen in the Action Plans and the 2004 Strategy Paper. The EU addresses a wide array of issues, from democracy, human rights, and rule of law to foreign and security policies, regional cooperation, and socio-economic development. Furthermore, the South Caucasus Parliamentary Initiative represents an institutional approach to regionalization, emphasizing the importance of parliamentary diplomacy in fostering inter-regional dialogue and cooperation.
- **EaP political dialogue objectives⁶:** The Partnership Priorities with Armenia, Azerbaijan, and the Association Agreement with Georgia adopt a multi-faceted approach to regionalization. These dialogues cover various areas of cooperation, encompassing political, economic, and regional aspects, thereby

⁵ ENP Political Dialogue objectives as per 2004 Strategy Paper, APs; and structured political dialogue through SCPI, Baku Initiative. The EaP, being complex, is discussed separately with its own political dialogue objectives and structures

⁶ EaP political dialogue objectives as per PPs and AA

promoting comprehensive partnerships that address diverse interests and issues.

- **EaP Political dialogue structures⁷:** EaP CSF, EURONEST, and CORLEAP take a multi-faceted approach to regionalization. They cover a wide range of issues and areas of cooperation, addressing various aspects of governance, democracy, human rights, sustainable development, and regional integration. By involving diverse participants, including CSOs, parliamentarians, and local authorities, these platforms promote comprehensive partnerships that encompass different interests and priorities, fostering a holistic approach to regionalization.

2(d) Conditionality

- **TACIS, ENPI, ENI (economic support)**- The EU's application of conditionality is indeed multidimensional, reflecting different thematic areas across various financial instruments. Under TACIS, the EU focused mainly on areas like democracy and rule of law, market and institutional reforms, and nuclear safety. The ENPI, while still valuing these areas, shifted towards a broader cooperation framework covering a wide array of sectors, from human rights and democracy to sustainable development and poverty reduction. The ENI continued this trend, albeit with a greater emphasis on shared ownership and mutual accountability. It should be noted that while the 'more for more' principle was utilized in ENI, it was not exclusively tied to any specific thematic areas, but was instead a general principle rewarding those countries making more significant strides in reforms.
- **PCAs, ENP APs, AA, CEPA (cooperation agreements)** - The EU's regionalization strategy utilizes conditionality in a richly diversified manner, underlining its multi-dimensional character. Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs) primarily enforce conditionality to reinforce universal

⁷ EaP institutionalized political dialogue structures - CSF, EURONEST, CORLEAP

values, such as human rights and democratic principles, forming a fundamental basis for further interactions. Alternatively, the European Neighbourhood Policy Action Plans (ENP APs) introduce a more tailored application of conditionality, meticulously adapted to meet the unique reform needs across various sectors in each partner country. The Association Agreement with Georgia embodies a comprehensive manifestation of conditionality, covering a vast spectrum of political, economic, legislative, and conflict resolution areas. Conversely, the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with Armenia embodies a subtle form of conditionality that simultaneously spans across multiple areas of cooperation yet remains attuned to Armenia's distinctive geopolitical context and strategic requirements. This diversified approach to conditionality allows the EU to adeptly navigate and respond to the wide array of regional challenges and opportunities.

3. Inclusivity combined with differentiation

In its regionalization endeavors within the South Caucasus, the European Union (EU) skillfully blends inclusivity with differentiation. This approach is characterized by a comprehensive and inclusive engagement strategy that recognizes the collective and regional implications of policy actions, yet simultaneously respects the unique circumstances, needs, and contexts of individual states. The EU's regionalization strategy treats every state as a distinct entity with its specific conditions and requirements, promoting tailor-made, context-specific solutions. This mix of broad inclusion, where collective action and mutual understanding are prioritized, combined with strategic differentiation, acknowledges the region's diversity and ensures a more balanced, resilient, and effective regionalization process.

3(a) Economic Support

- **TACIS** – Tacis recognized the individuality and sovereignty of the newly independent states while acknowledging the value of regional cooperation. It aimed to balance national independence with coordinated regional action, considering the shared challenges that required collective solutions.
- **ENPI** – The ENPI shows inclusivity by taking into account the unique political, governance, economic, and social reform agendas of its partner countries. It also demonstrates differentiation by addressing specific local issues in different countries, like justice and economic reforms in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia.
- **ENI** – The ENI shows inclusivity by involving citizens' organizations and local authorities in the design, execution, and evaluation of EU assistance. It also recognizes the crucial role of civil society as a change agent, encouraging active participation in policy formulation and decision-making. Differentiation is evident in the flexible and diverse nature of the ENI's programs, allowing the EU to tailor its assistance to the specific needs of each partner country or region.
- **NDCI-Global Europe**– The regulation outlines a comprehensive and geographically inclusive approach that recognizes the specific needs and opportunities within different regions. This reflects a trend of inclusivity and differentiation, where the EU aims to include all regions in its strategy while also differentiating its approach based on the specific characteristics and needs of each region.

3(b) Cooperation Agreements

(and respective policy frameworks)

- **PCAs** – Despite the agreements not distinctly differentiating the individual countries involved, the focus on regional cooperation, development of independent states, and fostering mutual confidence suggests a balance of inclusivity and differentiation. This signifies that while the agreements aim to

foster regional cooperation, they also consider the unique needs and contexts of individual states.

- **ENP (& APs)** – The EU demonstrated inclusivity by extending the ENP to the South Caucasus countries, and by considering a 'Black Sea Synergy' for fostering regional dialogue. At the same time, the ENP Action Plans (ENP APs) for Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia recognize the specific needs and circumstances of each country, illustrating differentiation. Additionally, the 2015 review proposes new ways of engaging with the neighbours of the neighbours, extending inclusivity beyond the immediate neighbourhood, while the introduction of thematic frameworks allows for differentiated strategies based on the nature of the challenges faced.
- **ENP (& PPs)** – The EU's approach in the ENP and subsequent partnership priorities is characterized by inclusivity and differentiation. This is evident in the way it engages with various stakeholders, including civil society, and in the differential focus in the Partnership Priorities for Armenia and Azerbaijan. While the overarching themes of these priorities are similar, the specific strategies are tailored to the unique circumstances of each country.
- **EaP (& AA/DCFTA; CEPA)** - All six Eastern Partnership countries are included in the program, emphasizing collective interactions. However, the agreements also account for each country's unique situation, highlighting differentiation. For instance, Georgia pursued an AA while Armenia opted for CEPA compatible with its EAEU membership. These partnerships are tailored to each country's specific circumstances and needs, reflecting the trend of inclusivity combined with differentiation. Moreover, each agreement covers a range of sectors and involves various actors, including civil societies and private sectors, demonstrating inclusivity at multiple levels.
- **BSS** - This trend is seen in the fact that the initiative is open to all Black Sea states and involves collaboration with multiple organizations. The differentiation aspect is visible in how the EU tailors its approach to different countries, such as those

with Strategic Partnerships (like Russia), those tied through accession policy (like Turkey), and those that are part of the Eastern Partnership (like Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine).

3(c) Political Dialogue

- **Political Dialogue in PCAs:** The inclusive yet differentiated nature of the EU's approach is reflected in the PCAs' political dialogue structure. Although each PCA generally follows the same structure, providing a common platform for all South Caucasus countries, the dialogue within each agreement is tailored to the specific political, economic, and social contexts of each individual country.
- **ENP political dialogue objectives and structures ⁸:** The political dialogue structures within the ENP framework are inclusive, encouraging participation from all partner countries, but they also allow for differentiation based on each country's specific context. This is evident in the different Action Plans for Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, each addressing different issues and tailored to each country's unique context. At the same time, initiatives like the Baku Initiative ensure broad inclusivity by inviting participation from a wide range of countries in the region. So while the overarching themes of political dialogue—like democracy, human rights, rule of law—are consistent across the Action Plans, the specific focus areas, intensity, and details of these discussions differ based on the specific political, social, and economic contexts of each country.
- **EaP political dialogue objectives⁹:** In the political dialogues of the Partnership Priorities with Armenia, Azerbaijan, and the Association Agreement with Georgia, inclusivity is combined with differentiation to accommodate the

⁸ ENP Political Dialogue objectives as per 2004 Strategy Paper, APs; and structured political dialogue through SCPI, Baku Initiative. The EaP, being complex, is discussed separately with its own political dialogue objectives and structures

⁹ EaP political dialogue objectives as per PPs and AA

unique interests and needs of each partner. While recognizing the individuality of their circumstances, these dialogues also promote broader regional cooperation, such as within the Eastern Partnership framework.

- **EaP Political dialogue structures¹⁰:** The EU's regionalization approaches towards the South Caucasus emphasize inclusivity while recognizing the unique interests and circumstances of each partner. The EaP CSF convenes CSOs from Eastern Partners, the EU, and third countries, promoting broader regional cooperation while respecting individuality. EURONEST and CORLEAP emphasize shared ownership, responsibility, and mutual interests, fostering voluntary and integrated participation of Eastern Partnership countries, local and regional authorities, and civil society.

3(d) Conditionality

- **TACIS, ENPI, ENI (economic support)** - The EU's financial instruments, namely TACIS, ENPI, and ENI, have shown a combination of inclusivity and differentiation in their application of conditionality. These instruments have been utilized across a wide array of countries, with the application of conditionality tailored to each partner's specific circumstances. This involves taking into account the partner's commitment to shared values, their progress in reforms, and their unique needs and capacities. This differentiated approach was especially highlighted in the ENI, where the extent of financial support provided was influenced not just by a partner's progress in implementing diverse thematic reforms, but also by their individual needs and their capacity to carry out these reforms.
- **PCAs, ENP APs, AA, CEPA (cooperation agreements):** This aspect focuses on the balance between inclusivity and differentiation in the EU's regionalization approach. The EU pursues a policy of engagement with all its neighbors, but it

¹⁰ EaP institutionalized political dialogue structures - CSF, EURONEST, CORLEAP

acknowledges and respects their individual paths and speeds of integration. The inclusivity lies in offering every neighbor a framework for dialogue and cooperation, irrespective of their levels of alignment with EU values or their integration ambition. The differentiation is about tailoring the specific commitments, benefits, and conditions to the individual realities and capabilities of each partner. For example, while all neighbors are offered cooperation frameworks, the depth and breadth of commitments, reflected in agreements like ENP APs, AAs, or CEPA, are differentiated based on each country's reform ambitions, capabilities, and geopolitical choices. The inclusivity ensures every neighbor is a part of the EU's regionalization, while differentiation ensures each relationship remains feasible, sustainable, and respectful of individual trajectories.

4. Alignment with EU's core values

As part of its regionalization endeavors within the South Caucasus, the European Union (EU) prioritizes the alignment of its engagements with its intrinsic core values. This consistent orientation signifies the EU's objective of gradually steering the South Caucasus states towards a comprehensive assimilation of shared principles such as respect for human rights, the rule of law, commitment to democratic principles, and endorsement of a market economy. By ensuring that these core values, which form the cornerstone of the EU's ideological framework, guide their policies and partnerships, the EU aims to instill these principles within the fabric of the region's socio-political structures. This alignment underscores the EU's intent to harmonize regional dynamics within the larger sphere of European cooperation, hence fostering a unified, value-based approach to regional development and stability.

4(a) Economic Support

- **TACIS** – Tacis was in line with the EU's broader foreign policy objectives. It sought to support economic reform, democratic societies, human rights, and market-oriented economic systems while promoting regional cooperation and integration.
- **ENPI** – The ENPI RSP aimed to align its initiatives with the broader goals of the EU, such as promoting shared values, stability, prosperity, cooperation, and economic integration. The goals set out in the RSP are chosen for their strategic importance, the EC's comparative donor advantage, their complementarity with other strategies, and coherence with other EU core policies.
- **ENI** – The ENI aligns with the EU's broader goals of promoting human rights, nurturing sustainable democracy, and maintaining legal standards. This is reflected in the ENI's focus on democratic reform, good governance, economic development, social sectors, sustainable resource management, education, mobility and migration management, and conflict prevention.
- **NDICI-Global Europe**– The EU's broader goals of peace, conflict prevention, promotion of free elections and human rights, and commitment to sustainability are all strongly emphasized within the NDICI-Global Europe. These goals are reflected in the Thematic Pillar and 30% of the funding dedicated to supporting climate and environment objectives.

4(b) Cooperation Agreements (and respective policy frameworks)

- **PCAs** – The PCAs underscore shared values such as respect for human rights, commitment to democratic principles, and endorsement of a market economy. These values align with the EU's core values, demonstrating the EU's intent to bring the South Caucasus states into closer alignment with the wider area of cooperation in Europe.

- **ENP (& APs)** – Throughout the ENP, there is a consistent emphasis on the principles of democracy, rule of law, human rights, and market economy. These core values guide the EU's actions, as seen in the ENP's objectives to facilitate conflict resolution, promote democratic governance, and further the implementation of Partnership and Cooperation Agreements.
- **ENP (& PPs)** – Throughout the ENP and the partnership priorities, there is an emphasis on alignment with EU's core values. These include respect for human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. The focus on accountable institutions and rule of law in the post-2020 Eastern Partnership priorities also underscores this alignment.
- **EaP (& AA/DCFTA; CEPA)** - The chapter shows that the EaP and the Association Agreements are designed to align the member states with the EU's core values. These include the rule of law, human rights, democracy, market economy, and sustainable development. The agreements also seek to enhance political association, increase political dialogue, and deepen cooperation on justice and security issues. The DCFTA and CEPA, for example, focus on aligning Georgia and Armenia's laws with EU standards and promoting better governance, reflecting the trend of alignment with the EU's core values.
- **BSS** - The Black Sea Synergy seeks to promote the EU's core values such as democracy, human rights, good governance, and peace in the region. The EU emphasizes that these values are not only critical for the countries in the region but are also crucial for European stability and prosperity as a whole.

4(c) Political Dialogue

- **Political Dialogue in PCAs:** The political dialogue as embodied in the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs) suggests a clear alignment and working around the European Union's core values. The PCAs' explicit emphasis on democratic principles, human rights, and peace signal a commitment to the EU's fundamental values, reflecting them in the substance

of the dialogue with the South Caucasus countries. Moreover, regular and structured dialogues at various levels of government provide opportunities to discuss these principles and values, foster mutual understanding, and encourage their uptake in the South Caucasus region.

- **ENP political dialogue objectives and structures¹¹:** The ENP framework's alignment with EU's core values is palpable in its political dialogue structures. As a part of its strategy, the EU motivates partner nations to align their local practices with its standards and principles. The EU's political dialogues with ENP partners revolve around fortifying democratic establishments, advocating for human rights, and instituting effective anti-corruption strategies. These themes echo EU's foundational values and principles. Hence, it is evident that the EU's regionalization process is rooted in a steadfast commitment to promote and uphold these fundamental tenets.
- **EaP political dialogue objectives¹²:** The Partnership Priorities with Armenia and Azerbaijan, along with the Association Agreement with Georgia, prioritize the alignment of regionalization objectives with the EU's core values. These dialogues emphasize universal values, democracy, human rights, rule of law, and sustainable economic growth, fostering a shared commitment to these principles.
- **EaP Political dialogue structures¹³:** All three platforms align their regionalization objectives with the EU's core values. The EaP CSF seeks to spur democratic transformation and reforms, reflecting the EU's commitment to democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. EURONEST's focus on democratic values, socio-economic reforms, and energy security showcases the EU's dedication to promoting these principles in the region. CORLEAP's

¹¹ ENP Political Dialogue objectives as per 2004 Strategy Paper, APs; and structured political dialogue through SCPI, Baku Initiative. The EaP, being complex, is discussed separately with its own political dialogue objectives and structures

¹² EaP political dialogue objectives as per PPs and AA

¹³ EaP institutionalized political dialogue structures - CSF, EURONEST, CORLEAP

commitment to local democracy, human rights, and sustainable development further reinforces the alignment of objectives with the EU's core values.

4(d) Conditionality

- **TACIS, ENPI, ENI (economic support):** The application of conditionality within the EU's financial instruments, including TACIS, ENPI, and ENI, is aligned with its core values. By linking financial and technical assistance to the recipient country's commitment to democratic norms and respect for human rights, the EU has reinforced these foundational values through its regionalization objectives. The 'more for more' principle, prominent in both the ENPI and ENI, further underpins this alignment. This principle provides more aid for more progress in democratic reforms, thereby incentivizing a robust commitment to these changes
- **PCAs, ENP APs, AA, CEPA (cooperation agreements):** Notably, the EU aligns its application of conditionality with its core values. Across all types of agreements, from PCAs to CEPAs, the EU consistently ties conditionality to the adherence to democratic principles, human rights, and the rule of law. Through this alignment, the EU ensures that the regionalization process is not only shaped by these core values but also promotes them, contributing to the creation of a neighborhood that aligns more closely with EU standards and norms.

5. Integration of global considerations

The European Union's (EU) regionalization efforts in the South Caucasus incorporate a breadth of global considerations, mirroring a comprehensive approach that transcends the geographical bounds of the region itself. This integration of global dynamics signifies the EU's broader vision that extends beyond regional issues, encompassing transnational implications of their strategic undertakings. The EU's

strategy underscores a profound understanding of the global interconnectivity of challenges and the necessity to account for broader geopolitical contexts. Whether it pertains to issues of energy production, climate change, digital transformation, or conflict resolution, the EU is consistently aware of the global implications of their regional strategy. This approach demonstrates not only the EU's commitment to tackle immediate regional concerns but also its strategic intent to contribute to a wider landscape of global stability and development.

5(a) Economic Support

- **TACIS** - While the primary focus of TACIS was on the South Caucasus region, initiatives like TRACECA and INOGATE demonstrate how the program considered global considerations, such as energy security and European-Asian market linkages, within the context of regional development.
- **ENPI** – The ENPI's strategies, while primarily focused on regional cooperation, also account for global challenges and trends. This shift is evident in the emphasis on issues like climate change and industrial pollution, which require a global perspective. Moreover, the EU's approach involves a broader network for regional integration, including international organizations, financial institutions, and non-European Union entities. The revision of the ENP following the Arab Spring also signals the EU's recognition of broader global events and trends.
- **ENI** – The EU uses the ENI to respond to the changing dynamics of its neighbourhood and to better support its political objectives. This may be seen as a shift towards considering global dynamics and implications in regional cooperation strategies. For instance, the focus on regional stability, economic integration, and the resolution of protracted conflicts can be seen as a response to global issues. The inclusivity of countries like Russia in cross-border

cooperation programs also indicates a consideration of wider international relations.

- **NDCI-Global Europe**– The NDICI-Global Europe marks a significant transformation in the EU's approach to external cooperation, with a clear shift towards global considerations. This is demonstrated by the integration of ten previous external financial instruments, the adoption of strategic pillars, the significant investment in a rapid response pillar for swift action in crises and the promotion of flexibility and responsiveness, all aimed at enhancing the EU's global positioning and effectively addressing emerging global challenges.

5(b) Cooperation Agreements (and respective policy frameworks)

- **PCAs** – The PCA's extend their scope beyond the geographical confines of the South Caucasus, considering broader trans-regional context. This indicates an integration of global considerations, emphasizing that the regional cooperation strategy is not isolated but is part of broader global dynamics and challenges.
- **ENP (& APs)** – The EU integrates broader global considerations within its regional strategy for the South Caucasus. This is evidenced by the attention given to energy production and transit, given the region's global importance in this domain. Moreover, the 2015 ENP review explores the idea of new outreach initiatives beyond the boundaries of the ENP, further integrating global considerations into the policy framework. Lastly, the EU's proposed cooperation with the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organisation (BSEC) also reflects its consideration of wider geopolitical contexts and strategic interests.
- **ENP (& PPs)** – This is particularly evident in the focus on climate change and environmental sustainability in the ENP, partnership priorities, and post-2020 Eastern Partnership priorities. The emphasis on digital transformation also shows an awareness of global trends and challenges. Moreover, the EU's exploration of

new ways of engaging with neighbours of neighbours reflects an understanding of the interconnectedness of global challenges and the need for broader engagement beyond its immediate neighbourhood.

- **EaP (& AA/DCFTA; CEPA)** - The agreements acknowledge the need to address global and regional challenges, highlighting the importance of effective multilateralism. This is demonstrated through commitments to conflict prevention, crisis management, combatting terrorism and organized crime, and regional stability, all of which have global implications. The inclusion of broader regional cooperation, such as the Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia (TRACECA) in CEPA, also reflects an understanding of the broader global context. The agreements also outline efforts to promote stability, security, and democratic development in international and regional fora, demonstrating the integration of global considerations.
- **BSS** - The Black Sea region is seen as a strategic bridge between Europe, Central Asia, and the Middle East, reflecting the EU's recognition of the region's global significance. The initiative's goals such as improving security, addressing "frozen" conflicts, developing energy policies, improving transport efficiency, and more, demonstrate a broader, global scope of considerations. These goals not only address the region's immediate needs but also contribute to global stability and development, indicating an integration of global considerations in the EU's approach.

5(c) Political Dialogue

- **Political Dialogue in PCAs:** The PCAs' political dialogue demonstrates an evident integration of global considerations. The dialogues entail discussions on broad geopolitical dynamics, such as conflict prevention, crisis management, and peacebuilding, which are critical global issues. Further, the

discourse on regional economic cooperation, including cross-border infrastructure projects and coordinated economic policies, engages with larger questions of economic globalization. Thus, the political dialogue within the PCAs allows the EU and the South Caucasus countries to address, respond to, and navigate broader global challenges and trends.

- **ENP political dialogue objectives and structures¹⁴:** This trend is seen in the way the ENP's political dialogue structure incorporates global issues such as energy cooperation and security threats like terrorism. The Baku Initiative, for example, serves as a platform for political dialogue on energy cooperation between the EU and the Black Sea and Caspian Basin countries. Similarly, discussions on international crime, counter-terrorism initiatives, and cooperation on international sanctions are integrated into the political dialogue. These global considerations underline the interconnectedness of the regional and global landscapes, emphasizing that effective regionalization requires the incorporation of wider, international issues.
- **EaP political dialogue objectives¹⁵:** The political dialogue structures within the Partnership Priorities with Armenia, Azerbaijan, and the Association Agreement with Georgia integrate global considerations to address international challenges. These dialogues encompass conflict prevention, regional stability, arms control, cyber security, and non-proliferation, reflecting a commitment to addressing global issues within a regional context.
- **EaP Political dialogue structures¹⁶:** The EU's regionalization approaches towards the South Caucasus integrate global considerations through emphasizing regional cooperation, promoting European integration, and addressing broader global challenges. Platforms like the EaP CSF, Euronest Parliamentary Assembly, and CORLEAP engage civil society, parliamentary

¹⁴ ENP Political Dialogue objectives as per 2004 Strategy Paper, APs; and structured political dialogue through SCPI, Baku Initiative. The EaP, being complex, is discussed separately with its own political dialogue objectives and structures

¹⁵ EaP political dialogue objectives as per PPs and AA

¹⁶ EaP institutionalized political dialogue structures - CSF, EURONEST, CORLEAP

cooperation, and sub-national actors to foster inclusive governance and support global goals like sustainable development and human rights protection. These efforts demonstrate the EU's commitment to enhancing regional integration, political dialogue, and cooperation in the region while addressing global issues.

5(d) Conditionality

- **TACIS, ENPI, ENI (economic support)** - The EU integrates global considerations into the conditionality applied via its financial instruments, such as TACIS, ENPI, and ENI, across various thematic areas. These instruments emphasize the promotion of democratic principles, human rights, environmental sustainability, cross-border cooperation, and other issues relevant to global challenges. This emphasis reflects the EU's commitment to globally accepted norms, its recognition of the necessity for international cooperation in addressing global challenges, and its strong support for multilateralism. These instruments thus serve to extend the EU's influence in promoting a rules-based global order.
- **PCAs, ENP APs, AA, CEPA (cooperation agreements)** - Integration of Global Considerations within Regionalization: The EU's regionalization strategy, exemplified through the application of conditionality in agreements like PCAs, ENP APs, AA, and CEPA, consistently highlights its engagement with globally accepted norms. The EU's commitment to principles such as effective multilateralism and sustainable development is often embedded within these agreements, promoting adherence to these universal norms amongst its partners. Although specific conditionality clauses are not explicitly tied to these global considerations, they remain fundamental to the spirit and objectives of these agreements. The EU strategically utilizes its regional agreements as conduits for reinforcing global norms, spanning areas from

climate change to trade liberalization. Such integration of global considerations within the realm of conditionality underscores the EU's dual-faceted regionalization strategy – one that is both inwardly focused yet simultaneously responsive to wider global trends and challenges.

Having identified the five primary patterns - *adaptive attitude, multi-faceted approach, inclusive differentiation, alignment with EU's core values, and integration of global considerations* - in the EU's regionalization practices towards the South Caucasus via instruments like - *economic assistance, cooperation agreements, political dialogue, and conditionality*, - the thesis proceeds to answering the last sub-question of this PhD thesis' comprehensive research query, which concerns the prominence and dominance of the application of the EU's regionalization instruments in the South Caucasus.

Prominence and dominance of the EU's instruments of Regionalization towards the South Caucasus

The content analysis and process tracing undertaken in this PhD thesis allow for the conclusion on the comparative prominence and dominance of four principal instruments—economic assistance, cooperation agreements, political dialogue, and conditionality—used by the European Union (EU) in its regionalization policy towards the South Caucasus.

Economic assistance, without a doubt, emerges as a dominant tool. From the onset of EU engagement with the region, economic assistance was the instrument of choice, most notably seen through the implementation of the Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States (TACIS) program, which marked the EU's first engagement in the South Caucasus region. In this embryonic phase of EU-South Caucasus relations, formal cooperation agreements were absent, and the EU utilized economic assistance as an essential strategy. Economic assistance has remained a dominant instrument for regionalizing the South Caucasus ever since.

Political dialogue, introduced later with the coming into force of Partnership and Cooperation agreements in 1999, has also played a crucial role in shaping the EU's regionalization approach towards the South Caucasus and has remained prominent since then. However, it was less pronounced under the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), mainly ENP APs, and it became dominant again under the Eastern Partnership (EaP) multilateral framework, within the Partnership Priorities signed with Armenia and Azerbaijan, and most dominantly in the AA/DCFTA with Georgia and CEPA with Armenia.





Bilateral cooperation agreements, though initially absent, have over time established their place within the EU's approach. The PCAs curiously appear to be the most important starting point, featuring regional cooperation stronger than subsequent agreements such as the ENP APs, PPs, AA/DCFTA, and CEPA. The regional cooperation theme has kept its prominence, but it is difficult to argue about the dominance of this instrument based on the process tracing and content analysis undertaken.

Conditionality is notably a constant feature in the EU's South Caucasus policy. From the start, it was incorporated into TACIS, albeit with a negative undertone. Yet, it must be noted that no explicit references to regional cooperation being a precondition

to more European integration have been identified in any of the regulations, agreements, or any other related relevant official document from the EU. Instead, conditionality, even if dominant feature in EU's policies towards the South Caucasus, has been linked to the respect for democratic values, human rights, and market economy reforms in all agreements.

In conclusion, among the four instruments, economic assistance has been the most dominant one in the EU's regionalization practices towards the South Caucasus from the very beginning, followed by political dialogue and then by cooperation agreements prominently but less dominantly featuring the regionalization theme. Lastly, conditionality, which although maintaining consistent prominence and dominance generally speaking in the EU's policy practices towards the South Caucasus, in terms of regionalization objectives, it has never been explicit. Thus, it is given the least priority in this analysis of the findings of the content analysis and process tracing previously undertaken.

A detailed representation of these findings is provided in the table below.

EU's Instruments of Regionalization in the South Caucasus				
Milestones	Economic Assistance	Cooperation Agreements	Political Dialogue	Conditionality
TACIS 1991-2006	✓ Dominant			 Implicit
PCAs 1996; 1999	✓	✓ Dominant	✓ Dominant	 ✓ Implicit
ENPI 2007-2013	✓ Dominant	✓	✓	 ✓ Implicit
ENP AP 2006	✓	✓ Prominent	✓ Prominent	 ✓ Implicit





ENI (EaP) 2014- 2020	✓ Dominant	✓	✓	 ✓ Implicit
ENP PPs 2018	✓	✓ Prominent	✓ Dominant	 ✓ Implicit
AA/DCFTA 2014	✓	✓ Prominent	✓ Dominant	 ✓ Implicit
CEPA 2017	✓	✓ Prominent	✓ Dominant	 ✓ Implicit

Table 4. Prominence and Dominance of EU's Instruments of Regionalization in the South Caucasus

Chapter Conclusion: The Final Stand

After conducting a thorough and comprehensive content analysis and process tracing, the in-depth scrutiny of the findings has culminated in the formulation of a concise and encompassing thesis statement that encapsulates all the elements studied. In response to the research question - *In what ways has the application of the regionalization strategy in the EU's foreign policy towards the South Caucasus been demonstrated in policy practices, which foreign policy instruments have come to the forefront, and what overarching patterns can be discerned in their implementation over time?* – this thesis asserts that the *EU's regionalization strategy in its foreign policy towards the South Caucasus has been demonstrated through two major facets. Firstly, it's manifested in the instigation of policies, programs, and initiatives that group countries together for the sake of standardization and efficiency. Secondly, it's demonstrated in the advocacy for fostering regional cooperation among Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia using predominant instruments such as economic aid and political dialogue. The implementation of these instruments has exhibited five overarching patterns over time, specifically: : 1. **adaptive attitude** - that reflects a dynamic, responsive strategy; 2. **multi-faceted approach** - acknowledging regionalization as a multi-sector endeavour; 3. **inclusive differentiation** -*

*demonstrating a commitment to embrace all states within the region while acknowledging their unique circumstances and needs for customized initiatives; 4. **an alignment with the EU's core values** - promoting shared principles such as respect for human rights, rule of law, and endorsement of a market economy; and 5. **integration of global considerations** - accounting for broader geopolitical contexts in the regional strategy.*

Having identified the two discernible strategies utilized in the application of the EU's regionalization practices, along with five overarching behavioural patterns, this research ambitiously recommends applying and testing these findings as a conceptual framework for understanding the EU's foreign policy practices of regionalization towards other regions in similar settings, i.e. regions, where geopolitical situation is not conducive to cooperation, and/or which only exist in the context of their relationship with the EU.

SECTION 4

CONCEPTUALIZING AND THEORIZING

Introducing the Theoretical and Conceptual Framework for Analyzing the Findings

First and foremost, it is essential to acknowledge that the regionalism literature, as explored earlier in this thesis, particularly the sub-field of inter-regionalism in which this research is situated, serves as a valuable conceptual lens rather than an

independent theory. This lens facilitates the understanding of intricate processes and dynamic interactions that take place between two or more distinct regions. These interactions encompass a wide array of collaborative and integrative endeavours, ranging from economic partnerships and political discourse to cultural exchanges and security alliances.

Nevertheless, to comprehensively dissect and comprehend the complexities of these regional interactions that underpin global politics and economics, scholars often combine Inter-regionalism with other principal theories of International Relations. The well-established theories, such as Realism (See, e.g., Morgenthau, 1978; Waltz, 1979), Liberalism (See, e.g. Keohane and Nye, 2012;) Institutionalism (See, e.g. Kratochwil and Ruggie, 1986; Keohane & Martin, 1995), and Constructivism (See, e.g. Wendt, 1992; 1999) , each provide a unique perspective for analyzing the mechanics and underlying rationales of diverse interregional interactions. By integrating these theories, researchers gain a more comprehensive and multifaceted understanding of the intricate dynamics shaping interregional relationships in today's interconnected world.

For example, Realism offers an interpretation of inter-regional dialogues or cooperative frameworks as instruments of power balancing. According to this perspective, regions primarily engage in these platforms to counterbalance other powerful actors, safeguard their interests, and maintain stability in the international system. Realists tend to view regional and interregional institutions with a degree of skepticism. In the realm of comparative regionalism, realists would likely emphasize how states utilize regional institutions to pursue their own national interests rather than promoting shared regional objectives. They may also examine how power dynamics within a region, such as the influence of a regional hegemon, impact the behaviors and policies of regional institutions. When analyzing inter-regionalism, realists might focus on power competition between different regions or regional

institutions. Furthermore, they might explore how interregional interactions can be leveraged by states to balance against perceived threats or to bolster their own relative power (see, e.g., Farrell, 2005).

Conversely, Liberalism perceives these dialogues and cooperative frameworks as facilitators of mutual cooperation and generators of shared benefits. Liberal theorists argue that such platforms enable regions to coordinate actions, negotiate agreements, and address common challenges, emphasizing the vital role of international institutions, norms, and rules in facilitating these collaborative interactions. When adopting a liberal approach to comparative regionalism and inter-regionalism, the focus would center on the influence of institutions and norms. This perspective would highlight how regional and interregional institutions, such as the European Union (EU), play a significant role in promoting cooperation, prosperity, and peace among member states. Moreover, liberal theorists may place emphasis on the impact of non-state actors, such as multinational corporations or non-governmental organizations, in shaping regional and interregional dynamics. In the context of comparative regionalism, a liberal perspective might analyze how different regional institutions advance democratic principles, human rights, and economic cooperation among their member states. Additionally, the exploration may extend to how these institutions foster a sense of shared identity or community among member states. Concerning inter-regionalism, a liberal lens would likely focus on how interregional institutions or agreements foster cooperation and mutual benefits among diverse regions.

Institutionalism treats these dialogues as catalysts within global multilateral forums, arguing that they play a key role in establishing and fortifying institutions within the burgeoning system of global governance. This perspective maintains that these structures bring order to international politics and contribute to a more predictable international system. Institutionalism holds that while states may be self-interested, they can realize that long-term mutual benefits can be achieved through cooperation

and adherence to international norms and rules, which are often embodied in international institutions. Institutions, according to this perspective, can provide a framework for states to consistently cooperate, even in an anarchic international system. Applying this lens to comparative regionalism, institutionalists would study the role, design, and effectiveness of regional institutions in promoting cooperation and managing conflict among their member states. They might analyze the structure of these institutions, their decision-making processes, and the rules and norms they promote to understand how they facilitate cooperation and maintain stability in the region. When studying inter-regionalism, institutionalists would be interested in the interactions between different regional institutions and the creation of interregional frameworks. They would focus on how these institutions can work together to address issues that span beyond the scope of a single region, such as trade regulations, environmental policies, or security concerns (See, e.g, Kraphol, 2008; Gomez Arana, 2017).

On the other hand, Constructivism interprets inter-regional forums as spaces for identity creation. According to constructivists, the significance of shared norms, beliefs, and values plays a crucial role in shaping regional identities and influencing their international policies and actions. In the context of comparative regionalism, a constructivist approach would be intrigued by the process of regional identity construction and its impact on state behaviour. Analysing how regional institutions promote certain norms and values, and how these shared norms and values influence the actions of states within the region would be a focal point. Turning to inter-regionalism, constructivists might delve into how interregional interactions contribute to the formation of identities and norms within the involved regions. This exploration could encompass investigating how these interactions facilitate the diffusion of norms and ideas from one region to another or how interregional cooperation influences the identities of states and regions. For constructivists, the emphasis lies on understanding how shared beliefs and values shape the perceptions

and actions of states and regions in both comparative regionalism and interregionalism. By shedding light on the role of identity and norm diffusion, constructivism offers a unique lens to comprehend the underlying dynamics governing inter-regional dialogues and cooperative frameworks (See, e.g, Regilme, 2013; Grant, Issa and Yusuf, 2020; Acharya, 2005).

These theoretical perspectives thus yield profound insights into the motivations behind the regionalization practices of entities like the EU. Such actions could be driven by strategic interests (Realism), mutual interests (Liberalism), the operational effectiveness and autonomy of European institutions (Institutionalism), or shared normative and cognitive frameworks among respective elites (Constructivism).

To comprehensively grasp the nuances of the EU's regionalization practices towards the South Caucasus, a profound synthesis of Constructivist and Institutional perspectives becomes imperative, particularly in their intersection within Tobias Lenz's (2008) conceptual framework offered in his paper "Problematizing the EU's Model Export to MERCOSUR: Strategies and Motivations". Lenz's (2008) model, centered on the external promotion of the European integration model, unfolds crucial insights by delineating between direct and indirect promotions and highlighting the pivotal dichotomy between routinized and strategic actor behaviour.

Incorporating Constructivist thinking into Lenz's (2008) framework unveils the significance of social constructs, shared ideas, and norms in shaping the EU's engagement with the South Caucasus region. The Constructivist lens brings to the fore the exploration of the EU's identity construction as a promoter of its integration model, elucidating how this identity manifests in the distinction between indirect (passive) and direct (active) promotion of the European model. By examining the interplay of norms, roles, and identities, Constructivism accentuates the profound link between the EU's self-perception and its regionalization strategies.

Concurrently, Institutionalism's inclusion within Lenz's (2008) framework highlights the instrumental role played by international institutions in facilitating cooperation. Lenz's (2008) analysis integrates elements of Institutionalism, particularly evident in his examination of the EU's strategic goals. Here, rational cost-benefit analysis, a hallmark of Institutionalist thought, comes to the forefront, underscoring the operational effectiveness and autonomy of European institutions in guiding regional integration efforts.

The harmonious fusion of Constructivist and Institutionalist perspectives within Lenz's (2008) framework enables a holistic understanding of the EU's regionalization practices. The research findings indicate that the EU deftly incorporates both the logic of consequences (aligned with Institutionalism) and the logic of appropriateness (inherent in Constructivism) in shaping its regional engagement.

Lenz's (2008) work adeptly captures this interplay, wherein possession goals, primarily driven by the logic of consequences, align with rational decision-making based on costs and benefits, while milieu goals lean towards the logic of appropriateness, emphasizing normative adherence and identity construction.

In conclusion, the amalgamation of Constructivist and Institutionalist thinking within Lenz's (2008) conceptual framework provides a comprehensive lens for unraveling the intricacies of the EU's regionalization practices in the South Caucasus. By delving into the motivations and dynamics guiding the EU's actions, this integrative approach enhances our understanding of the EU's role as both a promoter and an actor in shaping regional integration processes. The synthesis of these theoretical perspectives enriches the scholarly discourse on the EU's foreign policy practices and illuminates the broader implications of its regionalization strategies, paving the way for further investigations and interpretations in the field of international relations.

THEORIZING THE FINDINGS (through Lenz's Conceptual Framework)

This chapter undertakes an in-depth theoretical interpretation of the findings derived from the present PhD research, employing Lenz's (2008) conceptual framework, which intricately integrates institutionalist and constructivist perspectives, thus offering a comprehensive and nuanced analysis.

Lenz's (2008) framework proves to be a highly insightful and sophisticated analytical instrument, rendering the EU as not only an exemplar of regional integration but also an active proponent shaping the integration process. It astutely discerns between the EU's institutionalized routines and deliberate strategic maneuvers, thereby facilitating a profound comprehension of the complex dynamics governing its actions.

A salient aspect of Lenz's (2008) framework lies in its dichotomous classification of the EU's pursued objectives into possession goals and milieu goals. This categorization illuminates the multifaceted nature of the EU's ambitions, affording a comprehensive exploration of their implications and underlying rationales.

By adeptly aligning Lenz's (2008) perspicacious framework with the empirical findings of this PhD thesis, a striking confluence emerges, thereby reinforcing the credibility and robustness of this research endeavor. This theoretical convergence substantially amplifies the generalizability of the conclusions of this PhD thesis and augments the broader significance of this scholarly contribution.

Routinized vs. Strategic Actor Behavior

Lenz's (2008) conceptual framework provides a nuanced perspective on the EU's behavior, offering a dichotomy that encompasses both routinized and strategic

actions. Routinized behavior, as elucidated by Lenz (2008), emerges as a result of bureaucratic inertia, wherein the EU's practices gradually become habitual over time. This bureaucratic inertia may be attributed to a variety of factors, such as established protocols, standardized procedures, and a preference for familiar practices. As per this PhD thesis, the EU's reliance on routinized behavior in its regionalization strategy towards the South Caucasus is evidenced by its initiation of policies, programs, and initiatives aimed at standardization. The primary objective here is to minimize transaction costs, maintain bureaucratic consistency, and uphold operational efficiency.

Conversely, the strategic behavior aspect of Lenz's (2008) framework delves into the EU's proactive and thoughtful policy design. Strategic behavior showcases the EU's capacity for adaptability and responsiveness to specific contextual factors. This dynamic approach emphasizes the EU's ability to act flexibly and dynamically in its foreign policy practices, a crucial aspect that is often overlooked in the realm of international politics. The EU's commitment to foster regional cooperation among Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia exemplifies strategic behavior, as it demonstrates a keen awareness of the unique geopolitical, economic, and social conditions of the South Caucasus. The EU's endeavor to promote regional cooperation necessitates a strategic orientation, where policy design is tailored to meet the specific needs and challenges of the region.

In the context of the South Caucasus, this PhD research not only confirms the presence of this dualism within the EU's approach but also sheds light on how these two modes of behavior converge and complement each other in the pursuit of its regionalization strategy. The interplay between routinized and strategic behavior allows the EU to strike a delicate balance between stability and adaptability, ensuring that its policies are grounded in familiarity while remaining responsive to the evolving dynamics of the region.

By interpreting the EU's regionalization strategy in the South Caucasus through Lenz's conceptual framework, this research elucidates the intricate decision-making processes at play. It underscores how the EU, as a regional actor, navigates its actions strategically, ensuring operational efficiency through routinized practices, while simultaneously displaying agility and flexibility in fostering regional cooperation.

EU as a Model vs EU as an Actor

Lenz's (2008) conceptual framework provides a comprehensive understanding of the EU's dual roles as both a model and an actor in regional integration. The findings of this research strongly align with this perspective, shedding light on the intricate interplay between these two dimensions.

The EU's firm adherence to its foundational core values in its foreign policy towards the South Caucasus is a clear manifestation of its role as a model. As espoused by Lenz (2008), the EU serves as a benchmark for regional integration, setting rigorous standards and normative principles that inspire and guide other countries in their own integration efforts. By aligning its policies with core values such as human rights, rule of law, democratic principles, and market economy endorsement, the EU not only showcases its commitment to upholding these principles within its own region but also seeks to encourage their adoption and implementation in the South Caucasus.

Simultaneously, the EU's active promotion of regional cooperation through instrumental foreign policy measures such as economic aid and political dialogue predominantly, underscores its dynamic role as an actor. This facet of the EU's regionalization strategy serves as concrete evidence of its proactive engagement and genuine commitment to fostering regional cooperation in the South Caucasus. By engaging in group-to-group dialogues, providing financial and technical assistance for

regional institutions, and negotiating preferential trade agreements, the EU actively advocates for regional integration, extending its influence and impact beyond its own borders.

The harmonious coexistence of these two roles highlights the EU's comprehensive approach towards regional integration in the South Caucasus. As a model, the EU offers a set of principles and practices that have proven successful within its own region, encouraging other countries to follow suit and adopt similar approaches. As an actor, the EU takes active steps to facilitate and promote regional cooperation, leveraging its economic and political influence to support the convergence of interests among the South Caucasus countries. The seamless integration of these roles underscores the EU's nuanced and multifaceted approach towards regionalization, further underscoring the compatibility of the research findings with Lenz's (2008) conceptual framework.

Possession vs Milieu Goals

Lenz's (2008) conceptual framework further enriches our understanding of the EU's regionalization strategy by delineating its goals into two distinct categories: possession goals and milieu goals. The interplay of these goals adds depth to the complexity of the EU's actions and sheds light on the motivations behind its regional integration efforts in the South Caucasus.

The findings of this research unmistakably demonstrate a clear alignment with Lenz's (2008) constructs. The EU's pursuit of economic and geopolitical interests in the South Caucasus resonates strongly with Lenz's (2008) possession goals. As uncovered in this study, the EU's regionalization strategy is not only driven by normative aspirations but also pragmatic considerations. By promoting regional cooperation among Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, the EU seeks to create a favourable economic and

political environment that advances its strategic interests. This is evident in the EU's efforts to enhance market access for European goods and services in the South Caucasus and foster economic growth that benefits European businesses and investors. Also, the EU's engagement in the region serves its geopolitical interests by promoting stability and security, essential for safeguarding its broader international position.

Concurrently, the EU's unwavering commitment to aligning its regional strategy with its core values and incorporating global considerations into its policies impeccably mirrors Lenz's (2008) milieu goals. This approach goes beyond narrow self-interest and reflects the EU's dedication to creating an international environment that aligns with its principles and values. By promoting regional cooperation and fostering dialogue in the South Caucasus, the EU aims to contribute to the broader goal of peaceful and cooperative regional dynamics. The EU's emphasis on human rights, democracy, and the rule of law, combined with its efforts to integrate global considerations into regional policies, exemplifies its commitment to shaping a cooperative and normatively-driven international system.

Chapter Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has presented a comprehensive interpretation of the research findings on the EU's regionalization strategy in the South Caucasus, utilizing Lenz's (2008) theoretical framework as a powerful analytical lens. The insights derived from this analysis provide a profound understanding of the intricacies and nuances of the EU's strategic behavior in the region, shedding light on its dual approach of routinized and strategic actor behavior.

Through Lenz's (2008) conceptual framework, the EU's actions in the South Caucasus are characterized as a delicate balance between habitual routines and purposeful strategic endeavors. The EU's initiation of policies, programs, and initiatives for standardization illustrates its routinized behavior, driven by a desire to streamline processes, minimize transaction costs, and maintain bureaucratic consistency. Simultaneously, the EU's commitment to fostering regional cooperation showcases strategic behavior, emphasizing adaptability and flexibility to address the unique geopolitical, economic, and social circumstances of the South Caucasus.

The framework's portrayal of the EU as both a model and an actor resonates strongly with the research findings. The EU's alignment with its core values in its foreign policy towards the South Caucasus reaffirms its role as a model, inspiring countries to adhere to normative standards and principles. Moreover, the EU's active promotion of regional cooperation through various foreign policy instruments validates its position as an influential actor in the region, actively advocating for its model of regional integration.

Lenz's (2008) conceptualization of possession and milieu goals further enhances our understanding of the EU's regionalization strategy. The EU's pursuit of economic and geopolitical interests aligns with possession goals, emphasizing pragmatic objectives aimed at securing tangible advantages for the EU in its external relations. Simultaneously, the EU's commitment to integrating global considerations and aligning regional policies with its core values embodies milieu goals, reflecting its broader aim to shape an international environment that fosters cooperation, peace, and adherence to shared norms.

The remarkable alignment between the research findings and Lenz's (2008) framework suggests that the discovered patterns are not only valid and of value but also potentially generalizable. This strengthens the credibility of the research and

underscores the broader implications of the EU's regionalization practices for regional integration dynamics. This understanding is crucial in comprehending the multifaceted nature of the EU's strategic behavior and its implications for the South Caucasus region and beyond. Furthermore, this chapter highlights the potential utility of Lenz's (2008) theoretical framework as a versatile analytical tool for future research endeavors. By employing this framework, scholars can explore the intricacies of the EU's foreign policy in different geopolitical contexts, providing deeper insights into the EU's role as a model and an actor in shaping regional integration processes.

In sum, the thesis sets the stage for further investigations and interpretations of the EU's regionalization practices. The nuanced understanding gained from this analysis enriches the scholarly discourse on EU foreign policy and opens avenues for future explorations into the dynamic interplay of possession and milieu goals in the realm of inter-regionalism. As the EU's regionalization efforts continue to evolve, Lenz's (2008) framework remains a valuable instrument for comprehending the complexities of the EU's strategic behavior and its lasting impact on regional integration dynamics, but potentially, so does the framework suggested in this thesis.

CONCLUSIONS

The research embarked on an intellectual journey aimed at addressing an intriguing lacuna within academic discourse, specifically, the limited representation of the European Union (EU) as a regionalizing actor.

Although external regionalization has been embraced by the EU as part of its “mission civilisatrice” and has gained significant traction in its foreign policy since the 1990s (though its roots can be traced back to the 1960s), the scholarly literature exploring

this subject remains notably sparse. More specifically, two distinct gaps were identified within this already understudied area.

The first one pertains to the EU's engagement with non-traditional regions - regions lacking a firmly established identity beyond the context of their relations with the EU, - characteristic that applies to the South Caucasus case.

The South Caucasus embodies a complex predicament. Its regional identity is often a subject of debate within scholarly circles and even among the South Caucasian nations themselves. The label 'region' is frequently perceived as an externally imposed categorization that doesn't sufficiently encapsulate the intricate internal dynamics of the area, thereby hinting at a degree of 'region-ness' that may not inherently exist beyond geographical proximity.

Intriguingly, the South Caucasus emerges primarily as a region in relation to its interactions with the EU. This presents a unique instance of EU-to-region relations, where the concept of a 'region' deviates from conventional understanding and is instead constructed by the EU through its political rhetoric and policy interventions. This aspect is vividly illustrated by the Eastern Partnership, an artificially generated region by the EU, a sub-region of which the South Caucasus represents.

The second gap highlighted is the EU's regionalization endeavors in regions where geopolitical realities render cooperation challenging. In regions characterized by volatile internal and external factors inhibiting harmonious cooperation, traditional regionalization approaches encounter significant hurdles.

This aspect, interconnected with the first, is also particularly resonant in the South Caucasus, a region marred by both inter and intra-state conflicts, where two out of the three nations do not maintain diplomatic relations due to the contentious political climate.

Having identified the lacuna in scholarship and having justified the case selection, the study embarked upon the endeavor of filling these intellectual gaps with the ultimate aim of addressing a comprehensive research inquiry - *In what ways has the application of the regionalization strategy in the EU's foreign policy towards the South Caucasus been demonstrated in policy practices, which foreign policy instruments have come to the forefront, and what overarching patterns can be discerned in their implementation over time?*

The thesis began with a literature review, which has accomplished its dual mission of positioning the study theoretically and practically within the existing body of scholarship. It offered a thorough overview of the conceptual progression of the regionalization phenomenon and meticulously evaluated the current state of scholarship on the EU's Regionalization Policy towards the South Caucasus, specifically.

The study's theoretical placement began by dissecting the evolution of regionalism literature, traced through two separate chapters. These chapters presented a comprehensive account of the EU as a model of regional integration and as a regionalizing actor, which allowed for an enriching exploration of the comparative regionalism and inter-regionalism literatures. Furthermore, the thesis adeptly positioned the specific subject of investigation, the EU's Policy Practices of Regionalization in the South Caucasus, within this broader discourse. I.e. the underexplored field of inter-regionalism, concentrating on the unique practice of the EU forming relations with 'blocs' of its own creation.

The empirical part of the literature review embarked upon a thorough evaluation of literature assessing the EU's regionalization policy in the South Caucasus. This segment transcended theoretical discourse and dove into the analysis of eight

carefully selected works. These encompassed books, book chapters, peer-reviewed articles, research papers, and policy papers authored by a diverse array of scholars, namely Vasilyan (2020), Babayan (2012), German (2012), Boonstra and Delcour (2015), Delcour and Duhot (2011), Simao (2013), Van den Boom (2017), and Ohanyan (2015).

The choice of literature was intentional, aiming to represent a broad spectrum of perspectives, including assessments, critiques, informative pieces, and studies of policy perceptions from the South Caucasus region or analyses of policy successes and failures. This selection successfully painted a comprehensive picture of the current scholarship, highlighting the form and content of the available publications. It also aptly positioned them within the academic discourse in relation to the thesis, hence accomplishing the mission set out at the beginning.

The literature review identified the overriding theme of assessment, and mainly critique of the successes and failures EU's policy practices towards the South Caucasus. Instead, the thesis positioned itself as deviating from this trend in favour of a comprehensive understanding of the nature, evolution, and common patterns in the deployment of EU's regionalization tools, rather than being concerned with the assessment of their effectiveness.

What is more, aware of the limitations in the literature, particularly the tendency for some publications to be speculative in their judgement, this doctoral research emphasized the application of rigorous methodology, based primary on the study of primary sources to gain factual insights and promote an unbiased understanding of the EU's regionalization practices towards the South Caucasus.

This thesis adopted a dual-pronged methodological strategy to dissect the research question's intricacies, grounded in the conceptual model established by Karen E.

Smith (2003) in her pivotal work, “European Union Foreign Policy in a Changing World”. Smith argues that the European Union (EU) propels regional cooperation through a diversified strategy, featuring tools like economic aid, collaboration agreements, political interactions, and conditionality.

Guided by Smith's framework, the study initiated an exhaustive investigation of the EU's strategic maneuvers for regionalization in the South Caucasus. The actual research involved process tracing, a tool used to chronicle the EU's policy practices' evolution and alteration. This method revealed major transitions, brought forth inherent trends, and offered vital context to the temporal dynamics of EU's strategies for regional collaboration.

Simultaneously, content analysis was utilized to delve into the range of policy tools wielded by the EU. This investigative method facilitated a thorough decoding of both overt and concealed indicators of the regionalization strategy in the selected primary sources, thereby enriching our comprehension of the EU's strategy implementation. By anchoring the exploration in original documents, the analysis was safeguarded from potential distortions by secondary interpretations.

An array of primary sources, including regulations, agreements, declarations, strategic papers, action plans, and communications from the European Commission, laid the foundation for this study. An in-depth investigation of each economic support instrument and cooperation agreement, along with the tracing of EU's regionalization strategies since the Soviet Union's disintegration to the present, was undertaken.

By successfully applying Smith's framework to a detailed investigation of the EU's strategic regionalization maneuvers towards the South Caucasus, the thesis has effectively completed its mission. The comprehensive analysis of an extensive range

of documents testifies to the substantial magnitude of the research carried out, demonstrating the significant academic contribution made by the study.

Undertaking this comprehensive research, three critical components within the main research question were successfully navigated: the execution of the EU's regionalization strategy in relation to the South Caucasus; the primary policy instruments driving this strategy; and the predominant patterns that have characterized the implementation of these instruments over time. A meticulous investigation led to several illuminating conclusions:

Regarding the first component, the research successfully revealed the existence of two principal methods employed in the EU's regionalization strategy. A pragmatic method sought to amalgamate Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia within a unified institutional structure, aiming to streamline the EU's interactions with the region. Simultaneously, a strategic method was deployed to foster regional cooperation as a potent solution for addressing mutual challenges and advancing broader EU foreign policy objectives. These dual methods were extensively scrutinized, primarily through the evaluation of economic support mechanisms and cooperation agreements, as detailed in the 'Findings' chapter.

Focusing on the second component, the comparative importance and prevalence of four key instruments used by the EU - economic assistance, cooperation agreements, political dialogue, and conditionality - were thoroughly analyzed. The content analysis and process tracing demonstrated that economic assistance emerged as the most dominant instrument, beginning with the TACIS initiative and remaining significant thereafter. Political dialogue, introduced at a later stage, had a substantial impact on shaping the EU's regionalization strategy. Bilateral cooperation agreements, although initially absent, earned their place over time. Conditionality, while consistently present, did not explicitly concern regional cooperation; instead, it

pertained to the observance of democratic values, human rights, and market economy reforms. The importance and prevalence of these instruments were vividly illustrated in Table 4.

Lastly, the research successfully identified five dominant patterns integral to the EU's regionalization strategy:

- 1) Adaptive Attitude: This pattern underscored the EU's dynamic and responsive approach, adapting its policies to the unique geopolitical, economic, and social conditions of the South Caucasus;
- 2) Multi-Faceted Approach: This demonstrated the EU's comprehensive strategy, encompassing multiple sectors beyond conventional economic and political aspects, to include social, infrastructural, environmental, and security facets;
- 3) Inclusivity paired with Differentiation: This depicted the EU's broad inclusion strategy combined with strategic differentiation, acknowledging collective policy implications while respecting individual states' unique circumstances;
- 4) Alignment with EU's Core Values: This affirmed the EU's commitment to ensuring their policies and partnerships were guided by their core values, with an aim to nudge South Caucasus states towards shared principles such as human rights, rule of law, democratic norms, and market economy endorsement;
- 5) Integration of Global Considerations: This pointed towards the EU's broader vision that extended beyond regional issues, incorporating transnational implications of strategic initiatives and considering broader geopolitical contexts.

Detailed explanations of each pattern were provided in the Findings section of this thesis. The accumulation of these findings led to the formulation of the following thesis statement:

The EU's regionalization strategy in its foreign policy towards the South Caucasus has been demonstrated through two major facets. Firstly, it's manifested in the instigation of policies, programs, and initiatives that group countries together for the sake of standardization and efficiency. Secondly, it's demonstrated in the advocacy for fostering regional cooperation among Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia using predominant instruments such as economic aid and political dialogue. The implementation of these instruments has exhibited five overarching patterns over time, specifically: 1. adaptive attitude - that reflects a dynamic, responsive strategy; 2. multi-faceted approach - acknowledging regionalization as a multi-sector endeavor; 3. inclusive differentiation - demonstrating a commitment to embrace all states within the region while acknowledging their unique circumstances and needs for customized initiatives; 4. an alignment with the EU's core values - promoting shared principles such as respect for human rights, rule of law, and endorsement of a market economy; and 5. integration of global considerations - accounting for broader geopolitical contexts in the regional strategy.

Unveiling two distinct strategies in the deployment of the EU's regionalization practices and identifying five principal behavioral patterns, this PhD thesis successfully constructed a conceptual framework to understand the EU's regionalization practices in its foreign policy towards regions where the geopolitical context may not be conducive to cooperation and/or which primarily exist in their relationship with the EU.

This doctoral dissertation utilized Lenz's (2008) conceptual framework as an interpretive compass to examine the findings regarding the EU's regionalization approach towards the South Caucasus. Drawing from the theories of constructivism and institutionalism, this framework, as detailed in his paper "Problematizing the EU's Model Export to MERCOSUR: Strategies and Motivations", offered a nuanced perspective to analyse the research findings.

As delineated in Lenz's framework, the research findings reaffirmed the EU's double-edged role as both an actor and model in its foreign policy directed towards the South Caucasus. The EU's adherence to its founding core values embodied its role as a model, while its active engagement in promoting regional cooperation underlined its dynamic actor role.

Lenz's categories, as applied to the study's findings, slot the EU's adaptive approach towards the South Caucasus within the contours of strategic actor behaviour. In contrast, the EU's deployment of standard policies, initiatives, and programs to foster regional cooperation is indicative of routinized behaviour.

Lenz's conceptual dichotomy of possession and milieu goals also resonated deeply with the findings of this study in the context of the EU's - South Caucasus relations. The EU's quest for economic and geopolitical gains corresponds with possession goals, while its drive to harmonize regional strategies with core values and broader global contexts aligns with milieu goals.

The close alignment of Lenz's (2008) conceptual framework with the PhD research outcomes accentuates the robustness of the study and lends additional credence to its findings. This alignment underscores the potential for broader applicability of the conclusions drawn in this thesis and emphasizes its scholarly contributions.

Having identified the two discernible strategies utilized in the application of the EU's regionalization practices, along with five overarching behavioural patterns, this research ambitiously recommends applying and testing the findings as a conceptual framework for understanding the EU's foreign policy practices of regionalization towards other regions in similar settings, i.e. regions, where geopolitical situation is

not conducive to cooperation, and/or which only exist in the context of their relationship with the EU.

Therefore, the research findings could offer valuable insights for other studies within the similar inter-regional contexts or even beyond, thereby increasing the potential for generalizability of the outcomes. Significantly, this thesis carries ambitiously asserts that it has crafted a conceptual framework which is readily applicable for those who might harbor interest in the topic.

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