

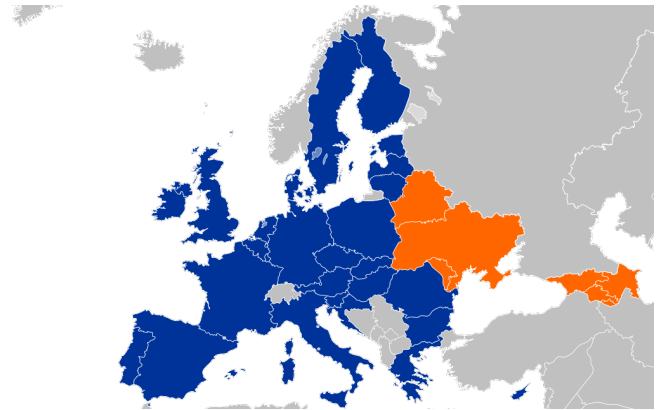
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## HOW DO DOMESTIC AND REGIONAL ACTORS INFLUENCE DEMOCRATIC REFORMS IN THE EU-RUSSIA NEIGHBOURHOOD? A STUDY OF THE QUALITY OF DEMOCRACY IN ARMENIA, GEORGIA AND MOLDOVA IN THE CONTEXT OF CHANGING INTERNATIONAL DYNAMICS

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### SUMMARY

This research explains how the interaction between foreign and domestic policy domains takes place and how it influences domestic political change. For this purpose, the cases of Armenia, Georgia and Moldova are analysed with specific focus on the external influence of Russia and the European Union. The research argues that the EU and Russia have developed more flexible approaches in the relations with their neighbours. The EU seeks a more pragmatic geopolitically-informed approach in addition to its traditional role of normative actor. On the other hand, Russia adopts Western normative policies in support of its identity-based approach towards Russian-speaking communities and in addition to its traditional geopolitical use of regional interdependencies for influencing the international choices of the shared neighbours. In addition, domestic elite groups use these new opportunities to diversify their foreign policy relations.



the EU and Russia, to further adapt their external policy approaches to the different target countries.

The main goal of this research is to explain how the interaction between foreign and domestic policy domains takes place and how it influences domestic political change, with specific focus on Armenia, Georgia, Moldova and the international policies of the European Union and Russia. Consequently, this study traces the interaction between domestic and international actors at the light of the broader regional context.

### INTRODUCTION

The recent trends of parallel external influence exerted by regional powers have the potential to deepen or weaken democratic qualities of the political regimes. The innovative features and the uncertain consequences of these international dynamics pose new theoretical and political challenges, which require in-depth analysis. The increased competition for shaping domestic policies and international alignments has led regional powers, as

For this purpose, the study combines the contributions of the literature on the Quality of Democracy, norm diffusion and post-Soviet regional context. It also emphasizes the need to contextualise the actions, preferences and identities of domestic actors in a broader historical and regional context, which acknowledges the relevance of past legacies. The analysis traces institutional reforms in the fields of Rule of Law, Interinstitutional and Electoral Accountability, taking under consideration the outcome of these institutional reforms.

## KEY FINDINGS

The analysis of the democratic reforms illustrates the importance of contextualising these processes in the deeper power struggles and social dynamics of the countries. Therefore, the research argues that a study of the relevant positions of the main social actors, domestic dynamics and cleavages is essential in order to understand the actual implications of domestic institutional change. The leading aspects in both domestic and international transformation is domestic competition and participation. For instance, the cases show how a parliamentary system can centralise power as a presidential one, based on the dynamics of political competition. The reverse relation is also valid. In the case of Moldova a Constitutional reform initiated by the President became dominated by the Parliament and eventually served its interests. For this purpose, the political culture proves to be very important.

In their competition domestic actors use strategies as the creation of parallel and alternative institutions, the lack of implementation or the adoption of legislation which invalidates the concessions of the constitutional reforms and the initiation of a reform, which has as a declared goal to weaken a specific institution. Against the background of non-transparent political deals, and façade procedures, social participation has increased its role.

The analysis of international dynamics show that the geopolitical competition has intensified. However, it does not involve the need of an exclusive choice that it did in the 2000s. The EU has adopted a normative discourse towards the shared neighbourhood, which was initiated by a liberal peace perspective and gradually evolved towards principled pragmatism after 2015. Consequently, the initial pretensions for geopolitical ordering have been complemented by a more realist and geopolitical perspective, which prioritises security and stability as preconditions for democracy. Democracy support is defined in a flexible and versatile way, which allows a range of international actions.

However, the EU's expertise and institutional development has focused mainly on the development of sectorial acquis communautaire and less so on the practical strengthening of democracy as a value, which counts with the expertise of other international organisations as the Council of Europe. Furthermore, the EU support in the field of democracy has been defined by a clear prioritisation of institution-building and the Association Agreement and

Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement recurs to conditionality in support of democratic transformation.

On the other hand, Russia's normative positions have evolved from neo-revisionism towards nationalist and neo-conservative approach, which has also reinforced the geopolitical interpretations of the regional context and of the EU actions. Sovereignty and the right of independent choice of development path are central in Russian discourse. The evolution from 'sovereign democracy' to civilizational approach constitutes a step towards a more conservative, nationalistic and restrictive perspective on democracy and human rights, which contrasts with the emphasis on individual rights which is essential for the EU.

Therefore, the EU's specialization in norm-development has evolved towards a definition of EU values in relation to an institutional framework which guarantees citizens' rights. On the other side, Russia has recurred to different historic civilizational discourse, which reinforces the role of state norms in defence of its national identity and collective rights. Russia's neo-conservative discourse is supported by a number of traditional actors and ideas.

In contrast to the EU, Russia has proved its capacity and willingness to use imposition in order to change the path of action of its neighbours. This has led to reduced control of the state territory, to long-term frozen conflicts and pockets of autocracy in its neighbours. Besides, Russia counts with strong leverage instruments due to its capitalisation of historical interdependencies. In terms of socialization it has developed a broad network of cooperation between public and private organisations that support the traditional values of the Russian World. In this aspect, it also counts with important cultural, religious and language prevalence as it benefits from links developed over centuries. Consequently, Russia use a broad array of instruments for external influence, which not always seem to target democracy as such, but more or less directly affect democracy.

In conclusion, the EU and Russia have represented a mutual challenge to each other's international identities, which has led the EU to adopt a more realist stance, while Russia recurred to traditional conservative discourse, while imitating certain policies of democracy promotion. This discursive and policy innovation in the last years frames the domestic dynamics in the neighbourhood, and more specifically in Armenia, Georgia and Moldova.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Development of more specific policy instruments for the conditionality in Rule of Law, electoral and other political reforms. These indicators should include the implementation of the laws, beyond their adoption or institutional development.
- Continue adapting a flexible approach towards civil society in order to reflect the specific features and needs of civil society in the Eastern Partnership, beyond the big civil society organisations that are based in the main cities.
- Develop different approach towards actors that identify with more traditional and/or conservative perspectives in specific social aspects and in state-society relations. The creation of bridges between these different organisations, the EU and the entities funded by the EU will contribute for the reduction of the current levels of polarisation and politicization of the relationships between civil society and state institutions.
- Develop instruments for people-to-people contacts that would allow better understanding of the culture, history and society in the Eastern Partnership and in the EU. This engagement should target groups that do not have knowledge of the EU and vice versa. This implies the need to approach actors beyond the Western-oriented individuals and involve different groups from the rural environment.
- Make more accessible the funding instruments for small organisations that belong to different environments and to different social groups in the countries.
- The EU Delegations and the project grantees of the EU could work in order to increase the presence and the interaction with domestic media. This will contribute for the better understanding in the society of the EU contribution to domestic development.

## SUGGESTED READING

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