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MA Thesis

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**EU's Regional Integration strategies and its implication for civil society participation
in Eastern Partnership countries: Comparing Georgia and Armenia**

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Tartu 2020

I have written this Master's thesis independently. All viewpoints of other authors, literary sources and data from elsewhere used for writing this paper have been referenced.

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Abstract

Institutional framework within the EaP introduced a tailor-made policy approach towards six Eastern Partnership countries. Meanwhile, another regional integration project, the Eurasian Economic Union, was created by Russia which challenged the EU's position in the region. This thesis tries to identify how different paths of regional integration affect the direction and the intensity of the process of Europeanization of civil society in Georgia and Armenia. The theoretical expectations are drawn from Neighborhood Europeanization through spreading 'external governance' by Lavenex and Schimmelfennig. According to them, the modes and effects of 'external governance' increases with three different factors: international legitimacy, the EU's power, also alternative poles of governance and the domestic structure of the third countries. As civil society is the least studied field under the EaP, the thesis applied a semi-structured in-depth interview method to gather more data from experts in the field. Official agreements and documents produced by the EU, as well as in-depth interviews, are analyzed through qualitative content analysis. Overall, the study finds that Georgia's regional strategy choice resulted in higher intensity and degree of the Europeanization of civil society in comparison with Armenia. However, it also identified that the selective will of domestic authorities largely influences civil society's participation in the reform process and in monitoring implementation. In addition to this, the thesis demonstrates that the conditionality offered from the EU is effective until it meets the certain expectations of the partnership countries. The study confirms the expectations of the theory.

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List of Abbreviations

European Neighborhood Policy- ENP

Eastern Partnership- EaP

Eurasian Economic Union- EaEU

Civil Society Forum- CFS

National Platform- NP

European Neighborhood Instrument- ENI

European Union- EU

Association Agreement- AA

Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement- DCFTA

Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement- CEPA

European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights- EIDHR

1.Introduction

Since the early 2000s enlargement rounds, especially the ‘Big Bang Enlargement’ in 2004, has put the security of European Union and its new neighborhood under scrutiny. The EU faced the new geopolitical reality with 16 immediate neighbors by land or sea, as having prosperous and stable countries on its borders became one of the key priorities for the EU’s foreign policy. However, the neighborhood was quite complex and unstable with its character. It was significantly important to avoid creating the new dividing lines (European Commission, n.d.). To achieve this, the EU used its traditional approach, spreading its norms and ‘European way of doing things’ in its neighborhood. In other words, Europeanization of various fields was seen as a guarantee for stability and security, as well as, a way to reinforce the EU’s position in the region. Moreover, the higher the resemblance to the EU, the more fertile ground it could be for a fruitful partnership.

In order to accomplish this the European Union introduced an overarching Neighborhood policy in 2004, and then a more tailor-made policy approach toward each specific region: Southern partnership in 2008 (European Commission, n.d.) and Eastern partnership in 2009 (EU neighbors east, n.d.). Meanwhile, another regional integration project, the Eurasian Economic Union, was created and spread its own ‘external governance’ in the Eastern neighborhood region. Additionally, the dependence on Russia by some Eastern Partnership countries on economic, military and other matters, made the scenario more complex.

The other regional actor (Russia) and its creation- the EaEU appeared as a challenger for the EU’s Neighborhood Policy and its projection of value-based ‘Normative Power’ in this region (Ademmer, Delcour and Wolzcuk, 2016). This competing regionalism has already resulted in fragmentation of the EaP and diversification of relations with the countries on the Eastern border. As a matter of consequence, three out of six countries are engaged with the EU in an Association Agreement format (Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova), while the other two have remained a step backward. Furthermore, Armenia has appeared to be a special case with a targeted-conditionality within the CEPA agreement.

This thesis addresses the impact of the decision of being part of different regional integration projects, toward the Europeanization of one of the specific policy areas — civil society, in the EaP.

Civil society in this thesis is the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, which was established within the Eastern Partnership framework in 2010. It is the only civil society organization with observer's status in the official EaP architecture. "Our mission is to ensure effective participation of civil societies of Eastern Partnership and the EU in the process of planning, monitoring and implementation of the Eastern Partnership policy in constructive dialogue with the EU and EaP decision-makers" (Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, n.d.). Its structure includes the General Assembly, Steering Committee, Secretariat and National Platforms (with its five working groups at the domestic level) of the six Eastern Partnership countries. The EU created this institution to facilitate democratic transition, reforms within the Eastern Partnership and to promote European integration in these countries. It became a mediator institution between the domestic authorities and the EU bodies. To track the progress and assess the developments, the EU holds meetings and regular consultations with the civil society, mainly with the National Platforms. During these meetings it listens to the civil society's perspectives (Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, n.d.). To fulfil its obligation, the EU provides financial support for civil society through ENI and European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights- EIDHR (European Union External Action Service, 2018).

On the one hand, civil society is one of the elements of bilateral cooperation between the EU and the Eastern Partnership countries, a tool to promote and maintain the democratic reforms (Barbé and Johansson-Nogués, 2008, pp.81-96). On the other hand, it represents the informal EU exert with a certain level of conditionality set in two different agreements: The Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with Armenia and the Association Agreement (AA) with Georgia. The fact that the EU is the provider of conditionality in these countries makes it possible to compare this specific policy dimension. In addition to this, there is non-existing conditionality insured in Armenia's accession treaty on the Eurasian Economic Union. Even though this dimension is not mentioned and is not regulated by the EaEU, the general integration path which Armenia took towards these two different regional integration projects affected the civil society's role and representation at the national level. The lack of engagement with the EU, which is the one of the biggest supporters of civil society in Armenia, could lead to decreased intensity of the EU integration

at first and accordingly, less leverage for the civil society for cooperation with the government (this field could not survive without support from foreign policy actors in Armenia. The government was not willing to strengthen the institution which could monitor their activities. The fact that it is not a state-funded dimension emphasizes this opinion). On the other hand, Georgia's foreign policy vector is clearly EU oriented with non-existing format with the EaEU.

When it comes to civil society and its role according to the Association Agreement and Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement, its participation in the reform process is an important element. In CEPA, chapter 21 in regards with civil-society cooperation (European Commission, 2017) and in the Association Agreement, chapter 20, the same, on civil society cooperation (Official Journal of the European Union, 2014). The same is highlighted and indicated in the EU roadmap for engagement with civil society in Armenia (Head of EU delegation to Armenia, 2019) and in Georgia (Head of EU delegation to Georgia, 2018). Moreover, as the civil society is granted with an important role in implementation monitoring process (Civil society as bilateral tracks of the Eastern partnership), it is crucial to understand what are the conditions to promote civil society engagement in the AA and CEPA and what is visible from target countries' implementation practices (Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, 2017, pp.56-70). The general relevance of this study is based on increased criticism from some of the key authors like Elena Korosteleva (Korosteleva, 2011, pp.243-262) and Roman Wolczuk (Wolczuk, 2011) that the EU's approach to maintain its high level of Europeanization in neighboring countries is quite vague and overarching. Meanwhile, Niemann and Wekker are pointing out that even in successful case scenarios, there is a lack of evidence of how the implementation of the norms in different fields result in society's everyday lives at the domestic level and how well is represented the civil society in this process (Niemann and de Wekker, 2010). Delcour and Wolczuk are trying to analyze Armenia's engagement with the EU, while being the full-fledged member of the EaEU, but their findings are again very general and descriptive, rather than field-specific (Declour and Wolczuk, 2015, pp.491-507). By analyzing the conditions created for this specific dimension, civil society participation, by the EU and its

implementation process, the thesis will contribute to the literature which provides an explanation of the policy relevance and changes in partner countries on their way of 'becoming more European'. As for the academic relevance of this thesis, there is existing literature which is mostly describing the EaP as a policy instrument in general terms, or which analyzes the importance of its policy in a single case-oriented manner. While treating and evaluating EaP countries in a scope of Europeanization beyond the EU borders in the neighborhood, they usually don't take into account the effect of 'competing regionalism'. How this 'competing regionalism' resulted in having different EU- partner countries cooperation framework, what are the offered conditions set in the agreements and existing degree of Europeanisation of civil society in different countries. When it comes to this specific dimension, civil society is the least studied area within this framework (while DCFTA, trade, judiciary and other dimensions of specific policies are more often in the check list of scholars). Meanwhile, as the CEPA is a relatively new agreement with targeted conditionality, we don't really have many scholarly articles which analyze the implication of this changed dialogue and the role of the civil society in this process, especially in comparison with the AA. As mentioned above, civil society participation is a highlighted aspect for delivering the democratic process in both agreements. As for social relevance, strengthening civil society participation is a precondition for successful democratization and Europeanization of other areas. This finally creates a democratic society with a strong civil society and transparent institutions.

The main research question for this thesis is: How do different paths of regional integration affect the direction and the intensity of the process of Europeanization of civil society in the countries of the EAP? Hypothesis for this thesis is: Target conditionality produces a high level of implementation and boosts the reform process, which leads us to a high degree of Europeanisation. Also, different paths of regional integration lead to different degrees of Europeanization.

As for the structure of the thesis, it is divided into several chapters. These chapters provide theoretical, methodological and empirical explanation of the topic studied under this scrutiny. The first chapter of this study will familiarize the reader with existing Europeanization debate

in the Neighborhood region. The literature is reviewed according to identified criteria. It underlines a gap and explains how this study will contribute Europeanization literature in the Neighborhood region. The next part of this study is the theoretical framework. This chapter analyzes the EU's 'Normative Power' in the neighborhood region, the process of Europeanisation beyond the EU borders through spreading its 'External Governance'. Basically, it looks at the mechanisms and tools of Europeanization outside the EU border. The final part of this thesis contains the empirical analysis, which is divided into sub-chapters. This structure helps to deal with explaining the background of Eastern Partnership format and its preliminary implications on Armenia and Georgia. The developing content and context introduced in the following chapters gives a clear picture of the EU's conditionality and implementation practices of these two countries' civil society representatives. This part will familiarize the reader with findings from official documents and also, from semi-structured expert interviews. This latter is considered as an added-value for this study. Comparative discussion together with the explanations of findings and conclusion will attempt to highlight the knowledge gathered and key findings of this study.

2. Literature review

In this study, I am going to address the Neighborhood Europeanization debate, more specifically, in the Eastern Partnership region. Europeanization it is ““Process of a) construction, b) diffusion and c) institutionalization of formal and in-formal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, ‘ways of doing things’, and shared beliefs and norms that are first defined and consolidated in the EU policy processes and then incorporated into the logic of domestic (national and subnational) discourse, political structures and public policies” (Radaelli, 2006, p.59). Europeanization as itself is part of a bigger discussion about the EU’s power projection. There is an on-going debate, what kind of power the is EU. The reason which makes it difficult to understand is its complicated character. According to one of the least arguable definitions, the EU is a ‘normative power’, the institution which spreads norms, its practice, standards through partnership and cooperation. Diez defines ‘normative power’ as “a power that is neither military not purely economic but one that works through ideas and opinions”, by power he means ‘actor’ (Diez and Manners, 2007, p.175). Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, EU-Turkey relations, EU-ENP countries relation, both in South and Eastern partnership, is an instance of normative power Europe through which the EU is imposing standards (Diez, 2005, pp.630-636). Therefore, European Neighborhood policy and especially its Eastern dimension has been a central topic for many scholars who are interested in the EU’s ‘Neighborhood Policy’ as the tool and contributor to the ‘Europeanization’ debate. This debate tries to answer the question about the influence of the EU’s conditionality, offered with different bilateral and multilateral format, for new forms of political, economic and socio-cultural cooperation.

The Academic literature on the ENP is multidisciplinary. Despite the renewed scholarly interest of the ENP and growth body of literature since 2008-2009 on this topic, there is no systematic review that could catalogue existing explanatory variables assessed by ENP scholars (Kostanyan, 2017). Nonetheless, in this literature review the authors and their findings are grouped into two broad categories: The ones whose findings and evaluation mostly claim failed Europeanization attempts in the neighborhood region and others who are presenting arguments in favor of positive Europeanization process through Neighborhood Policy, but in case or policy specific dimension.

2.1 Positive Europeanization in specific policy fields under European Neighborhood Policy framework

On the one hand, there are lists of authors who agree with the idea that the Neighborhood policy is the positive Europeanization tool in the region. Despite the fact that, the same authors who support this idea also make an assumption, that strategic and procedural limitations are still side effects of the partnership, they pay attention to the developments in the field- specific, or case- specific direction. Moreover, they think, the fact that the EaP is still an on-going initiative is a main cornerstone of this debate. Changes can be introduced step by step with a more tailored-made approach, with more accent on joint interests and gains (Mammadova, 2017). One of the greatest importance this policy has is the contributor of the ‘democracy promotion’ in the region. However, there is a debate on limited impact and whether it can be put on the positive side of the coin or not (especially, when large amounts of literature recognize it as a failed attempt to achieve democratic objectives). But as Nilsson and Silander may argue, although the EU failed to deliver the democratic objectives the way it was considered within the ENP framework, there is a chance that their democratic trajectory could have been even worse (Nilsson and Silander, 2016). Overall, the process is positive which has direct link to the EU's regional partnership in neighborhood (in cases where the EU turned out more effective). This point leads us to Börzel and Lebanidze's definition that, “EU's democratic conditionality is effective if it is consistently applied” (Börzel and Lebanidze, 2017, pp.17-35). In this way, they pay attention to the civil society building and empowering issue, which is understood as a key element for building democratic. The same is repeated by many other authors, like Barbe and Johansson-Nogues (2008), as well as, by Boonstra and Shapovalova (2010). Thijs Rommens addresses also the same issue, challenges the pessimistic verdict towards ENP. According to this author, the EU can have more subtle impact, especially when it comes to the democratic building through civil society development (Rommens, 2014). In the meantime, there are relatively successful democracy building examples, while on the other hand we shouldn't forget about existing authoritarian regimes in the same region. As a result, there is literature which considers ENP as a positive tool for Europeanization while they provide their arguments not only policy

specific dimension, but also case specific. Democracy promotion as a positive trend is mostly understood in countries like Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia. The EU is considered as one of the key partners by Georgian authors like Korneli Kakachia, which is helping the country in democratization processes. Moreover, signing AA and DCFTA with the EU was seen as a great booster for investment, reforms in economic and social fields on a political level, as well as on social-citizens level. When we talk about positive Europeanization in Georgia and how this country perceives this is a good example, where the developments really show that it became closer to the EU, which was the main incentives and promises of the EaP of ENP (Kakachia, 2015, pp. 11-19). The same applies to Moldova which is considered a successful model, with adjustment of their national law to European law (Niemann and de Wekker, 2010). Laure Delcour is also explaining the 'Europeanization beyond accession' in case of a country- Armenia, which is rarely referred to as a successful story. She calls this country an 'unexpected partner' with a certain level of Europeanization. For her analysis, she suggests temporal interlocking of the EU, domestic and regional factors which explained the decision of this country to maintain the certain level of Europeanization by compliance with the EU demands, while at the same time the decision not to sign the association with the EU was taken by the same country they mention (Delcour and Wolczuk, 2015). All things considered, the countries which followed the partnership line as it was intended in the beginning and signed Association Agreement with the EU gain significantly from free trade agreement and demonstrate progress: "The DCFTAs recently signed by the EU include not only trade issues, but also an increasing number of provisions concerning foreign investment, competition policy, sanitary and phytosanitary standards, technical regulations, intellectual property rights, rules of origin, etc" (Gylfason, Martinez- Zarzoso, Wijkman, 2015, p.6). It gives a ground for the 'More for more' approach.

2.2 European Neighborhood Policy as a failed Europeanization attempt

On the other hand, there are authors who consider European Neighborhood Policy, and Eastern Partnership more specifically, as the failed Europeanization project. The general

evaluation of these authors is that we are dealing with limiting Europeanization which affects the EU's 'actorness' in international affairs. But their explanation includes several crucial factors (Jones and Clark, 2008). One of the most common and well-established arguments/comments is that the ambiguity of the partnership (too broad, too vague) and vagueness between conditionality and 'reward' relationship creates the fertile ground for failure to obtain a desired policy outcome. It is underlined by Kelley when she is talking about the very core of conditionality and existence of incentives, which is different from membership perspective. This was a threat even from the beginning that the ENP countries wouldn't take domestic reforms, which are quite painful and costly for them as the 'reward' is small (Kelley, 2006, pp. 29-55). The same is referred to by Casier (2010). According to the author, the Action Plans contain quite a long list of conditions which needs to be fulfilled by partner states. While on the 'carrot' side, the 'rewards' promised by the ENP are even vaguer, it says that it will lead states to 'privileged relations' between the state and the EU but what exactly 'privileged relations' means is not completely clear and gives fruitful ground for interpretation. Therefore, it finally resulted in frustrations and different expectations on bilateral and multilateral level. So, the main takeaway from these authors is that the link between conditions and rewards is unclear and does not give specific guidance which conditions inevitably lead to which specific 'reward'. In the meantime, limited conditionality, mostly introduced after 2015, made the EU's conditionality even more complicated with its lack of membership perspective towards eastern partners of the ENP (Kostayan, 2017, pp.1-6). Furthermore, according to Elena Korosteleva, the existing conceptual discrepancies related to policy perception and implementation already put the new initiative's effectiveness under question mark. To start with the very core of EaP 'shared value', the term stays still vague. It fails to explain what constitutes it with neighboring states and how these 'shared values' can be cultivated, which leaves the door open for different interpretations. In addition to this vagueness, "the absence of a clear framework for equal and participatory engagement with neighbors, results in discrepancies in both horizontal and vertical channels of the EU policy making" (Korosteleva, 2011, p.248). Kristian L. Nielsen and Maili Vilson are also questioning the real values of the EaP, while highlighting the same issues mentioned by other authors above (Nielsen and Vilson, 2013). They, as well as other key authors, are considering

the vagueness of the definition of the 'Partnership' as the core problem of the Eastern Partnership.

Another complication is the lack of differentiated attitude/approach from the EU Member states and EaP partner states towards the EaP. One of the main problems which Brussels does not take into account is that they put these six countries in the same basket without considering their readiness, experience and aspiration. It is not surprising then that "Brussels is taking a very long time to convince partner countries of the legitimacy and the potential usefulness of the new initiative" (Korosteleva, 2011, p.252). This problem is highlighted not only by Korosteleva, but also many other leading authors in the field, like Kataryna Wolczuk (2011), also, by Niemann and de Wekker when they are talking about the aspiration for partnership in case of Moldova (Niemann and de Wekker, 2010). With this notion we ended up with the situation that "general impact and relevance are limited or even negligible in a range of other countries" (Keukeleire and Delreux, 2014, pp.251-252). In addition to this, as Delcour and Kostayan may argue, "the EU has had lack of sensitivity towards partner states" domestic needs and whole context, which actually makes it difficult for them to fulfill obligations under partnership. Instead of one-size-fits-all conditionality, authors are offering diversification of its relations with countries in the neighborhood. It is needed as much as even countries from the same group: Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine which were treated the same way (AAs and DCFTAs signed with them are largely similar) have different stages of political and economic development (Delcour and Kostayan, 2014. p.8). The problem of the one-size-fits-all approach is criticized by Browning and Joenniemi when they say that it's inappropriate, especially in Eastern region, where they especially highlight the 'integration-security dilemma' and blame the EU being ineffective to Europeanize this dimension. (Browning and Joenniemi, 2007, pp.519-551). Speaking about inequality and different levels of Europeanization of EaP countries in the region, targeted countries showed a fragmented picture in their democratic performance. Thus, Kharlamova explains the successful countries like Georgia and Moldova have managed to reach a higher level of implementation with the help of the EU's higher support for these two states in the field of civil society and democratic reforms (Kharlamova, 2015).

When it comes to Eastern Partnership Europeanization, it's not only unavoidable but also crucial to consider other foreign policy actors- 'Contested Neighborhood' factor. EU's 'normative power' is challenged in this region by another regional power/actor through different regional integration projects or bilateral agreements (Haukkala, 2008). Laure Delcour is one of the key authors who is talking about the Europeanization process in the Eastern Partnership region in the context of 'contested neighborhood' (Delcour and Wolczuk, 2015). Eurasian Customs Union, Eurasian Economic Union after, led by Russia as EU's competitor in this region (Delcour and Wolczuk, 2016). Full membership of the Customs Union automatically excluded membership of the EU's DCFTA "due to incompatible tariffs with the elimination of tariffs planned under the DCFTA" (Delcour and Kostayan, 2014, pp.5-6). In this regard, Armenia and Georgia represent good case examples here, as their ties to different region projects (EU and EaEU) had played a decisive role maintaining a certain degree of dependence either one, or another (Delcour, 2019). Armenia can be called as a special case here, as it stays engaged with the EU through the latter's main projection mechanisms, socialization and conditionality, but also characterized by "fluctuating nature of mutual cooperation determined by the existence of an alternative of regional cooperation mainly driven by the security considerations" (Gaboyan, 2017, pp. 39-41). The EaEU's factor is considered crucial by Gergana Noutcheva too (2017).

Overall, both, authors who write about positive Europeanization of different fields and also about the relatively challenging, or failed Europeanization process in Neighborhood regions, commonly suggest that a more specific and tailor-made approach is needed from the EU. The relevance of this statement is higher, as we are facing the fact of increased interests from other regional players, which makes the region the playground for the process of 'Europeanization' or 'Eurasianization'.

In light of this, the study traces one specific policy dimension-Civil Society participation in order to assess what is the existing degree of Europeanization of this policy field in my case countries: in Georgia and Armenia. Civil society is one of the least studied areas, while it is also highlighted as a crucial factor on the way of becoming more 'European' and for the whole process of Europeanization there. While going deep into this specific policy dimension

and assessing its existing level of Europeanization, the study considers the competitive dimension as well (different regional projects and their influence on civil society). Overall, it aims to contribute Neighborhood Europeanization literature.

3. Theoretical framework

3.1 The EU's 'Normative Power' through the ENP

Studying the ENP turned out challenging for many scholars. The institution itself is a changing creature and includes many different dimensions, countries and fields of their political and social existence. In the last century, Europeanization studies paid more attention to EU-member states' interaction. But, together with increasing international presence, more specific theory approaches, like Europeanization beyond the EU- Neighborhood Europeanization, were developed. This latter tries to track and explain the EU's expanded scope of its rule spreading, already outside of its own borders. Having above mentioned into account, the EU's foreign policy in the neighborhood region is a part of the bigger theoretical discussion around the concept of 'Normative Power Europe' (Manners, 2010). While many IR scholars are trying to give a definition of this phenomenon, one of the key authors are Ian Manners and Thomas Diez. They mostly provide the definition and deal with the discussion about the merits and problems of normative power approach: "Normative power is neither military nor purely economic, but one that works through ideas, opinions and conscience" (Diez and Manners, 2007, pp.175). As well as, Ian Manners addresses the European Union's 'Normative Power' in the Neighborhood Policy in a narrower scope. According to him, one of the greatest values of this type of power is the specific aim to introduce the setting of standards where influence is maintained through norms and not necessarily military power or economic incentives. Even in the article 6 TEU, the normative principle of the EU is the very core set out, which includes, democracy, the rule of law, liberty and respect of human rights (Manners, 2006). To promote these norms and spread its 'Normative Power' principles, the different trade agreements and policies are an important tool applied by the EU. This is the way of engagement with the third countries, or 'diffusion mechanisms' as Börzel and Risse would call it (Börzel and Risse, 2009). Eventually, the Neighborhood Policy is one of these policies of the EU which addresses its neighborhood region. By Europeanization of different fields of neighboring countries, the EU projects itself as a special type of power and actor- 'Normative power'.

3.2 Europeanization beyond the EU- Neighborhood Europeanization

One of the widespread definitions of Europeanization is provided by Radaelli. Europeanization is ““Process of a) construction, b) diffusion and c) institutionalization of formal and in-formal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, ‘ways of doing things’, and shared beliefs and norms that are first defined and consolidated in the EU policy processes and then incorporated into the logic of domestic (national and subnational) discourse, political structures and public policies” (Radaelli, 2006, p.30). Neighborhood Europeanization is a quite new phenomenon and is the result of certain developments inside and outside of the EU in the end of the 20th century. Since 1990s European Scholars has become interested in to see the impact of the EU’s ‘external governance’ beyond the formal borders which was the consequence of the following developments: creating the single market, facing the collapse of the Soviet Union and ‘Iron Curtain’ and upcoming eastern enlargement and the EU’s desire to become the stronger actor in the region and the world (Schimmelfennig, 2010). Meanwhile, three different dimensions of Europeanization have been identified: Membership, Enlargement and Neighborhood. The Neighborhood Europeanization concept is specific and addresses the ‘outsiders’ from the neighboring region where accession perspective does not exist. However, as it's still a new dimension, there is a lack of case studies on Neighborhood Europeanization (Gawrich, Melnykovska and Schweickert, 2010).

Frank Schimmelfennig is one of the key authors who writes about Neighborhood Europeanization, scope and mechanisms of it. According to him, the very core idea of Europeanization beyond the EU borders is the spreading of its ‘External governance’. More specifically, the EU projects its rules and model outside its borders, across a large variety of policy areas through the Europeanization of national and international governance. ‘European Governance’ is in essence defined by regionalism, supranational integration, multilateralism, the regulatory state, and democratic constitutionalism (Schimmelfennig, 2010, p.6, *et al*). According to Schimmelfennig, one of the widespread assumptions is ‘domestic analogy’. The EU tries to pursue a similar international environment to its domestic one- ‘external projection of internal solutions’. As the author defines, having a

similar environment outside its borders, especially in a very complex neighborhood, puts the EU in a privileged position over other regional or global actors. To pursue this type of international environment which reflects the EU's institutional and policy choices, the EU communicates through different agreements or forums, including closest neighbors and distant regions. In this whole process, Europeanization is understood as a tool for the EU to maintain its own order (Sedelmeier and Schimmelfennig, 2019). Eastern Neighborhood region is a complex with its character, consisting of states which share the past with Russia and its creation- Soviet Union. After the collapse of Soviet Union some countries remained tied to Russian Federation, but others have negative and conflictual experience of relationships. For the EU it's getting even more complicated to find the common ground and set the standards which are commonly favorable for countries from both blocks of the Eastern Partnership. Additionally, to stay a challenging partner for Russian led Eurasian Economic Union (we saw the variety of decisions which were made by countries in the partnership region. Some prioritized closer relationships with the EU like Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova which was strongly influenced due to their on-going conflicts with Russia, and Armenia and Belarus on the other hand, which became full-fledged members of other regional projects). It's easier for the European Union to be only one player and rule setter for different policy fields, but when countries have alternatives, and especially when they are offered bigger incentives by another regional integration project that might decrease the EU's credibility. And this latter is one of the most important features for it when it comes to the mechanisms of achieving concrete goals. Accordingly, in the competing regionalism environment the mechanisms of Europeanization might differ from each other, as well as the effects at the domestic level.

3.3 The EU's 'External Governance' and mechanisms of Europeanization

Studies of Europeanization already extended their focus from the member states to candidate states at first and now beyond candidates for membership, namely to the ENP region countries (Lavenex and Schimmelfennig, 2009, p.794). Extension of the focus takes place

through the projection of ‘external governance’. Lavenex is the author who provides the widely used definition “the external governance takes place when parts of the *acquis communautaire* are extended to non-member states” (Lavenex, 2004, p.683). The EU's increased international presence became more urgent with the enlargement rounds in 2004 and 2007. It was the time when the EU realized the importance of addressing the neighboring countries’ interdependence, also, internal dynamics of external effects of the integration. Moreover, together with the external actions (CSFP), the EU developed external relations with the third countries. It included fields from traditional trade to democratization. As a result, the EU’s spreading ‘external governance’ marks not only various countries and regions, but also fields. It inscribes very overarching policy initiatives like ENP, as well as, very specific bilateral formats of cooperation. Schimmelfennig and Lavenex introduced three basic modes of ‘external governance’: hierarchy, network and market. According to the hierarchical mode of government, the relationship between rule maker and rule taker is vertical and mostly it takes a form of legally binding, enforceable rules. However, in case of ENP it has a different form as the third countries endure their sovereignty fully. At the same time, existence of rules, monitoring and sanctioning mechanisms, which are related with hierarchy, plays an important role for effectiveness of conditionality in this mode of government (Lavenex and Schimmelfennig, 2009, p.797, *et al*). Network mode as a ‘negotiation system’, unlikely to hierarchy, is based on a less constraining mechanism, like mutual agreements. Here decisions are not made through legally binding solutions, but through negotiation with the third countries. Network mode in the ENP comes together with the joint initiatives and declaration with the Association Council. Or, with ENP action plans, to some degree. For network mode co-ownership, or degree of interactions is an important aspect which can result in enhanced legitimacy of the rule. This is different from the size of incentive, monitoring and sanctioning conditions in hierarchical mode. The third- market mode is less relevant for this study. Moreover, literature does not concentrate on this mode as it lacks overarching structure.

The modes and effects of ‘external governance’ differ from policies and the third countries. For their theoretical expectation and explanation, Schimmelfennig and Lavenex have divided

this difference into three major categories of factors: First is institutionalist explanation, “modes and effects of external governance are shaped by internal EU institutions and rules” and effectiveness of these rules increases together with international legitimacy (Lavenex and Schimmelfennig, 2009, p.802, *et al*); second is power based explanation, which basically claims that the effectiveness depends on “EU’s power and its interdependence with the third countries and to alternative poles of governance and influence, namely the USA and Russia” (Lavenex and Schimmelfennig, 2009, p.803, *et al*). According to these two explanations, the most effective mode is hierarchical; and third explanation is domestic structure of the third countries, compatibility of external governance with these domestic structures: “third countries are more likely to easily accept the external governance which is close to their domestic analogy, there is high probability that they will take it as a normal or legitimate for them” (Lavenex and Schimmelfennig, 2009, p.804, *et al*).

In the ENP, the EU established a set of rules and institutionalized settings for association agreements but how much from these settings is adopted stays under-looked. Authors define the degree of adoption and transposition of the EU rules at the domestic level of the third countries as effectiveness. The effectiveness of external governance is evaluated through three different approaches: rule selection, rule adoption and rule application. Rule selection is an important step when the EU and third country agrees and accepts the set of rules as joint rule. This is the stage of agreements and international negotiations with the third countries. Rule adoption is a step when the rules are transposed into domestic level. And the third stage is rule application. The EU rule might be selected and adopted, but not applied on domestic premises. At this stage, the important thing is to see what are the political and administrative practices of the country. What’s more, the rule application is the deepest effect of the EU’s ‘external governance’ (Lavenex and Schimmelfennig, 2009, p.801, *et al*).

To study how Europeanization beyond borders occurs in practise, more specifically, what are the mechanisms that the EU uses to spread its ‘External Governance’ in environment, Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier introduced a two-by-two table (Sedelmeier and Schimmelfennig, 2005).

Table 1. Mechanisms and Conditions of Europeanization

	Direct	Indirect
Logic of consequences	Conditionality (side and credibility of incentives, costs of compliance)	Externalization (market size, legislation and centralization of rules)
Logic of appropriateness	Socialization	Imitation

Source: elaborated on the basis of Schimmelfennig's article (2010)

As for the scope of Europeanization, they divided EU 'External Governance' as it occurs in five different concentric circles:

Table 2. Concentric circles of 'External Governance' and Europeanization

	Contents	Mechanisms	Conditions	Impact
Quasi-members	Market regulation	Credibility and Externalization	Strong dependence	Strong, partial
Candidate countries	All	Conditionality	Strong dependence, strong incentives	Strong, general
Neighborhood countries	All	Conditionality and Socialization	Medium dependence, weak incentives	Medium partial
OECD countries	Market regulation	Externalization	Medium interdependence	Medium partial

Other regions	Regionalism	Imitation (and socialization)	Weak interdependence	Weak
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Source: elaborated on the basis of Schimmelfennig's article (2010)

The specification of these mechanisms started with March and Olsen (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2019, p.1, *et al*), who brought up two institutional logics, logic of consequences (rationalist) and appropriateness (Constructivist). According to the logic of consequences, Europeanization occurs through manipulation of incentives (cost-benefit calculation in the third country). While according to the logic of appropriateness, Europeanization is the effect of perceived authority and legitimacy of the EU. As it is evident from the tables, Europeanisation occurs through direct mechanisms, Conditionality and Socialization, in the case of the EU's Neighborhood. According to this latter mechanism, the EU projects itself as an example of the principles and rules of 'European Governance'. The external actors comply with the EU rules if they see its appropriateness and legitimacy, if their goal is to become more 'European'. When it comes to the first mechanism, setting certain conditionality for external actors is one of the most effective ways of disseminating its governance. In order to obtain reward, actors should meet certain needs. The most common and tangible 'rewards' are different types of agreements for the partner states with the EU. An important remark is, the value and size of 'reward' and the credibility of its conditionality plays a huge role here (Sedelmeier and Schimmelfennig *et.al*, 2005). If the costs are higher than the 'rewards' it is most likely that the rational target state of conditionality will not comply. Despite the fact that the conditionality in the Neighborhood Policy turned out similar to the one with EU's accession conditionality, Neighborhood conditionality appeared weaker. Following this, the most important limitation and, accordingly reason here is that the EU membership as a 'reward' is not offered. Instead of this, the EU offers a 'privileged relationship' through different agreements, which might have a positive impact at the domestic level, but this is not for sure. Neighborhood region in the Eastern Partnership is different from the one for candidate countries. It competes with the other regional players

and powerful providers of its own type of ‘external governance’ namely, Russia. To take the competing regionalism condition into account once again, we will have the EU on the one hand with its promising ‘reward’ which is not a membership but ‘privileged relationship’, and on the other hand Eurasian Economic Union, which offers full membership to countries. This is the cornerstone of the disagreement between scholars and also practitioners who study Eastern Partnership, its relevance and influence in regional context. Another limitation is that it is irreconcilable (Schimmelfennig, 2010, p.14, *et al*). Those are one of the critical points which are addressed by the authors writing on Neighborhood Europeanization, while they are discussing the effectiveness of conditionality in the third countries.

To sum up this chapter, the high degree of Europeanization is determined by various dependent and independent factors. Consequently, not only the EU’s conditionality or the target country’s willingness and readiness for cooperation, but also the geopolitical context and other regional actors play an important role to maintain an effective ‘external governance’ and a certain level of Europeanization in the Neighborhood Region.

3.4 Limitation of the study

There are several important conditions which need to be taken into account and acknowledged. Firstly, the new agreement between Armenia and the European Union (CEPA) has just recently signed and went into force in 2017, which means that the developments are still on-going there and we don’t have any background knowledge or conditions in this regard, while we can gather more information from the Association Agreement. As for theory, one of the greatest criticisms arises around Europeanization theory is that it does usually explain future developments, which sets the important limitation for this approach. Followingly, this study is basically focused on current developments and the existing level of Europeanization of the Civil Society dimension in two partner countries with different formats of cooperation, so far.

4. Methodology and Research Design

This thesis applies to Mill's method of difference. This method of comparing a few cases includes two types of systems design: Most Similar Systems Design (MSSD) and Most Different Systems Design (MDSD). More specifically, the thesis applies to the Small-N comparative method, case study approach, Most Similar Systems Design (MSSD), which "seeks to compare political systems that share a host of common features in an effort to neutralize some differences while highlighting others" (Landman and Carvalho, 2016, p.70). The method of difference, MSSD, tries to "identify the key features that are different among similar countries and which account for the observed political outcome" (Landman and Carvalho, *et al*). Two countries, Armenia and Georgia are compared according to the logic of this method in this study.

Table 3. Indicators for Georgia and Armenia

Indicators	Georgia	Armenia
Small country	+	+
Same political past	+	+
Similar geopolitical challenges	+	+
Engaged with territorial conflicts with neighbor	+	+

Similar economic transformation	+	+
Similar regional integration path	-	-

These countries have many things in common as they come from the same political past, with similar geopolitical challenges, both countries are engaged with territorial conflicts with their neighbors, their economic transformation can be described as the same phase of development. While having those indicators similar, which are preconditions for states' strategies, they revealed different geostrategic priorities reflected in their aspiration towards projects of regional integration. Both countries were involved in European Neighborhood Policy in the beginning and then the Eastern Partnership format in 2009, but then took different paths of EU integration. While Georgia continued cooperation with the Association Agreement format with the EU, Armenia became a full member of another regional project- Eurasian Economic Union. At the same time, Armenia continued its engagement with European Union with a more tailor-made format- CEPA agreement. These conditions make it possible to compare these two countries. The same is emphasized by one of the key authors, Delcour: "the two countries offer comparable cases because they are both included in the ENP and its sub-regional component (the Eastern Partnership launched in 2009), yet they differ in terms of their foreign policy orientation and economic integration choices" (Delcour, 2019, p.2, *et al*). The research design for this study is outcome-centric, as it aims to see the existing degree of Europeanisation in Armenia and Georgia through the implementation process of offered targeted conditionality in a policy specific dimension from the EU side. *Independent variable* is- different paths of regional integration. *Dependent variable* is- degree of Europeanization in specific policy dimensions- Civil society.

For operationalization of my independent variable and to assess conditionality-implementation relationship, I used original documents, agreements: AA and CEPA documents, which are the main legal foundation and provider of conditionality of the bilateral cooperation. By doing so, the background understanding and knowledge about the causes of changes in partnership format and their implications examined. Analyzing conditionality for civil society participation set in agreements gave me the direction to follow developments of implementation and regional integration path in each country and involvement of civil society in this process. The thesis's time-frame is chosen according to the crucial changes in partnership format from 2009, when the Eastern Partnership format was designed, till 2020 March and April. So, it includes the current developments as well. It is worth mentioning that the 2014-2015 period had a significant importance for both countries as well as for the EU itself. It was a time of reflection and reviewing the EaP. In this period, Georgia and Armenia made their regional integration choices and their integration phases have changed. As a matter of consequence, the EU has introduced a targeted conditionality for Armenia.

In order to examine the dimension in time and development, I used commission progress reports on each country, the latest one from 2019. Also, reports from the Civil Society Forum and its National Platforms, which is prepared by fifty experts from six partnership countries. The latest available on the internet was from 2019. These documents are publicly accessible and helped to track the content and to analyze the country's commitments to different regional integration projects. Also, it made possible to make a sense of the developments in each country, to understand the conditions for their regional integration choices and the format of continued dialogue with the EU. As it is evident and once again stressed from these documents, the civil society dimension is the least studied area (we have more information about security and especially trade dimension of the agreements). Despite the fact that existing data gives a general sense of the implementation process, summarizes briefly the role and involvement of civil society, still it is not clearly described and explained how much space is given to civil society in this process, how well they are represented in official documents and what are the implications of their participation. Also, what are the conditions

which help them fulfill their role, is it targeted conditionality, domestic political environment, or other circumstances. This knowledge is not provided.

To answer the main research question and to explain the dependent and independent variable relationship qualitative research methods are used in this thesis. Moreover, I applied content analysis for analyzing existing official agreements and to detect the type of conditionality for each country under each agreement. In order to measure the degree of Europeanization, I conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Interviews, as primary sources, have long been a data collection strategy mostly for filling the gap in the existing knowledge, to collect primary data, to learn about processes which did not receive enough attention in the literature. Positivists using this method to record facts that mirror an external reality. While it generates new understandings by hearing insiders' perspectives, people who work in the field, it enriches or even contrasts the existing knowledge. In this way, a semi-structured in-depth interview format was suitable for the research objectives of this study. In semi-structured interviews, researchers can prepare a list of some questions, but leave a space for free discussion, using probing techniques to unfold and gather more information on replies, which are significant for the research question. However, this type of interview requires more attention from the interviewer to control the flow of discussion and keep it in line with objectives. When it comes to obtaining interviews with experts, it often relies on networking. Hence, I used a strategy of snowballing- asked each interviewee and people I knew in the field to recommend and introduce the expert who could help identify additional potential interviewees (Puyvelde, 2018, pp. 375-391). Consequently, the list of potential interviewees was created by considering the positions, duties and experience, as well as, their knowledge/qualification at the country's integration process. Accordingly, representatives of EU delegations and Civil Society Forums' member organizations (working groups' coordinators) and experts in the EU integration issues in Georgia and Armenia were chosen - twelve respondents in total. The number of interviewees is equally distributed per country, six for each: one representative from the EU delegation, two experts in EU Studies, three representatives of the Civil Society Forum's National Platform. The selection of interviewees is justified with following factors: firstly, the European Union Delegation officially

represents this institution in Georgia and Armenia and has the status of diplomatic mission. Its mandate includes: monitoring implementation of cooperation agreements, awareness raising activities, promoting relations between the EU and partner countries (Delegation of the European Union to Georgia, 2016). Representatives of this institution have a deep understanding of the general course of the country's progress in different policy dimensions; secondly, experts in European Union Studies are giving a very deep analysis about the on-going integration processes, their significance for society and the country's integration path in general; and thirdly, experts from civil society organizations have field-specific knowledge about the civil society's role, their engagement practice and effectiveness of existing format. They are the ones who receive conditionality and budget from the EU and whose participation in reform's process is expected at the national level. In total, sixteen interviews were considered in the preliminary list. However, due to limited time and also the Coronavirus pandemic (which was an unplanned circumstance), it became difficult to approach people and get their confirmation for an interview in an online regime (even though sending interview requests via e-mail is a common practice). Some interviewees who confirmed face to face interviews in the beginning, refused to take part in changed format in online space, due to different personal and professional reasons. On the whole, twelve respondents confirmed their participation. This number of interviews is suitable for the size of my inquiry, as the data which I have collected gives quite relevant perspective and understanding of the issue in Armenia and Georgia. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews in general are an added value and represent external validity of this thesis.

Interviews are analyzed with qualitative coding. The data which I have selected is quite big and broad, so I needed a technique of analysis which would reduce my data and make it more specific to study from a certain angle. Narrative analysis is broader and is not angle specific in comparison with QCA. This is the main reason why I decided to use the latter as a technique for analyzing my data. Moreover, I used an advanced software package-MAXQDA in qualitative data analysis. Coding divided my interview data into categories and sub-categories, which helped me to connect to the context. I applied a data-driven, inductive coding frame as these codes emerge from the raw data. Data-driven codes include five steps:

reduce raw information, identify subsample themes, compare themes across subsamples, create codes and determine reliability of codes (DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall and McCulloch, 2011, pp.141-145). Complementing documents and interviews is an additional input to measure my DV.

The major ethical aspects are considered and addressed in this study. The interview request form was developed and sent, where information about the objectives of the research and all necessary aspects were included, consent form was shared and explained to the respondents before the interview. These details and issues of anonymity were addressed and oral consent was gained from the interviewee at the beginning of the interview, once again. (Puyvelde, *et al*).

When it comes to the interviewing process, the semi-structured format of the interview gave me and my respondents freedom to choose which questions they wanted to elaborate more and which were sensitive for them. There were some interviewees who avoided giving specific descriptions about the issues related to the Velvet Revolution in Armenia, and issues related to cooperation with field-specific and policy-specific dimensions in Georgia.

As for the reliability, the materials which are used in this study is quite reliable as most of the official documents are prepared by the Commission, which is known for its highest expertise. While annual implementation reports provided by Civil Society Forum's national platforms are also trustworthy as their reputation is well-known. They are often used in the EU's official reports, as well. When it comes to in- depth interviews, I have gathered primary data from the representatives of the EU delegation, who expressed the official position of the EU as they are the face of this institution. As for the expert interviews, there is a validity factor considered as these people represent their own country and there might be an issue of bias, which needs to be taken into consideration.

5. Empirical analysis

5.1 Civil Society- monitoring instrument for European Integration in EaP countries

The Eastern Partnership introduced a tailor-made policy approach towards six partner countries, with targeted conditionality. It was a refreshment for the neighborhood region, after overarching Neighborhood Policy. Together with many aspects, the EaP brought multilateral track of cooperation and civil society as separate dimensions, with specific roles. For deeper engagement with civil society and social partners, the European Commission has introduced Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forums in 2010: “CSF has the objectives to promote the development of Civil Society Organizations, cooperation among them, their dialogue with public authorities and the achievement of Eastern Partnership goals in the six partner countries” (Institute for Development of Freedom of Information, 2014). The institution not only sets the guidelines and gives suggestions for four thematic platforms, which were the main flagship objectives for the EaP itself, it’s also supposed to play the role of facilitator between different domestic authorities and the EU institutions. EaP Civil Society Forum has become a large umbrella institution for around 1000 organizations from six partner countries (Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, n.d, *et al*). To fulfil its role and facilitate the transformation in the region “the Forum operates as a self-standing independent actor via different entities” (Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, n.d, *et al*). The highest decision-making body is the General Assembly, it is mostly the provider of a platform to debate about the achievements and challenges, while the Steering Committee is responsible for strategies for future cooperation and also, it is guiding the general activities. Another chain in this circle is National Platforms (NPs). While the specific conditionality was assigned to this institution, National Platform and its member organizations became responsible for facilitating reforms process and implementation of agreements: “NPs are valuable tools facilitating the achievement of the goals of the Eastern Partnership policies in each of the EaP countries” (Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, *et al*). “The linkage between the Steering Committee and the National Platforms is ensured by the country’s facilitators, who are elected to this function for a period of two years by the delegation of the

respective country” (Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, *et al*). To track the developments in the region, the Civil Society Forum is issuing annual reports on countries' progress. Later on, these reports are used by national governments and also by the Commission to prepare their opinion about the character of the partnership in their progress reports.

Last year, countries and the EU celebrated 10 years of reforms and developments under the Eastern Partnership. Reports showed the very different trends of developments in the different EaP states. It is worth mentioning that the division within partner countries and their achievements towards Europeanization in different fields is also true in the case of civil society participation. Despite the fact that some countries showed more positive developments when it comes to the Europeanization of civil society than others, they all face different obstacles in all six countries. In Azerbaijan civil activism is the target of political repression, while in Georgia they face major human rights issues and on- going investigation. In Moldova, a major issue is the legal obstacles created by the government for civil society's activities. In the case of Armenia, there are some positive changes, as it experienced governmental change alongside peaceful protests and high civil activism. But civil society's voice is heard only on certain occasions here, too. And finally, Ukraine anti-corruption activism is facing the major administrative obstacles and stays one of the challenging fields of bilateral cooperation (Eastern Partnership Civil Society conference, 2017). In spite of being ineffective in some dimensions, significant progress was made in many directions including: new bilateral economic agreements, supporting SMEs, rehabilitation of roads, visa free regime in three countries, developed public services for citizens and research and education (Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forums, n.d.).

To take all above mentioned into consideration, the tools provided by the EU for civil society stays an important condition for engagement on the national level (Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, n.d.).

5.2 Regional integration paths of Georgia and Armenia

Together with five other partners Georgia joined the Eastern Partnership (EaP) initiative in 2009. This year was important for the country, as it was trying to recover from the loss which the war with Russia has brought. This conflict significantly helped in strengthening the EU's CFSP and also, reshaping its strategic view towards the Southern Caucasus region. Before 2008 August EU's policy towards Georgia was relatively passive, since this war Georgia-EU relations had renewed. Tbilisi became the main regional platform for spreading democratic values. On the other hand, Georgian government started to use this platform "the government at the time began to pay more attention to the need to meet its commitments in terms of legislative and institutional reform" (Gogolashvili, 2017, p.12). Comparative dimension of regionalism in this case was less relevant as Russia is considered as a main enemy and occupier of 20% of the country's territory (Ministry of Defense of Georgia, n.d.). As a result of this geopolitical context, Georgia's foreign policy vector was mainly towards Euro-Atlantic integration. Furthermore, it became a 'frontrunner' with its aspiration towards the EU together with Ukraine and Moldova. It has signed the Association Agreement in 2014, which went into force in 2016. And followingly, Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement, "these Agreements build a foundation for far-reaching Georgian political and economic integration with the EU" (European Union External Action Service, 2018).

On the other hand, Armenia became an example of the implications of a 'contested neighborhood'. It started active cooperation with the EU since the partnership has launched. It was meant to be one of the countries with the Association Agreement, alongside other three countries. But instead, it refused to sign AA with the EU in 2013 and became a member of Eurasian Economic Union in 2015. Nevertheless, Armenia continued its European Integration path but with different objectives and also with different formats. It was the only one case for the EU within the EaP format that the country stayed politically engaged with the EU despite being part of another regional project (Belarus is part of the EaEU too, but it does not have any tailor-made cooperation format with the EU), which is considered basically the challenging power for the EU (Vieira and Vasilyan, 2018, pp. 471-489). The EU did not leave these developments without response and introduced a new, tailor-made format for

Armenia- Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement in 2016, which went into force in 2017 (European Commission, n.d.).

Despite having these features different, the EU has a similar approach towards Europeanization of civil society, including targeted-conditionality for this specific dimension. Civil society's performance in both countries is occurring within the Civil Society Forum and in National Platforms at the domestic level, within the framework of Eastern Partnership. What's more interesting is that, despite having different tailor-made formats with Georgia and with Armenia, it turned out that the conditionality which was offered for these two countries through AA and CEPA for their civil society development, is mostly similar. The both agreements set out the similar areas of cooperation linked with political dialogue. The major difference comes with the depth of the trade links, which is regulated by the EaEU in Armenia and with DCFTA in Georgia (Hakobyan, 2019, P.87). When it comes to the conditionality for civil society, the major difference is that civil society platforms are supposed to make recommendations to the Association Council in Georgian case, while in Armenian case Partnership Council fulfils this obligation.

5.3 Type of conditionality for Civil society participation in Georgia under Association Agreement

Association Agreements are international agreements between the EU and the third countries. It has long been a framework to conduct bilateral relations. However, the context and finality might be different and depends on the partner country and region (European Union External Action Service, 2011). Association Agreement in the case of the Eastern Partnership aims to bolster reforms in Eastern neighborhood countries, strengthen economic cooperation and collaboration in different sectors. Georgia signed the Association Agreement in 2014, which entered into force in 2016, "The AA institutional framework establishes bodies such as the Association Council to oversee its application, with the Association Agenda defining priorities necessary for its implementation" (European Union External Action Service, 2018,

et al). Alongside with this, Georgia signed DCFTA too with the EU. This latter is a far-reaching agreement with a farther economic and political relationship.

Article 370 in AA is exactly repeating the same text like Article 103 in CEPA. It gives the Civil society power and obligation, Countries responsibility in civil society's involvement in reforms and implementation process. This latter comes as a bridge between the EU and partner country, which seeks to create transparent, regular dialogues between representatives of these two institutions, while taking care of participation in decision-making. For the EU civil society with its participation in processes creates ground for better understanding the social, cultural and historical context of the country. While giving some obligations to fulfill, it also gives the freedom as article 412.3 would suggest, "The Civil Society Platform shall establish its own rules of procedure" (Official Journal of the European Union, 2014, *et al*).

5.4 Type of conditionality for civil society participation in Armenia under Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement

While three partnership countries were involved in the process of negotiations with the EU to sign the Association Agreement, Armenia's president Serzh Sargsyan announced that the country might become a member of Eurasian Economic Zone. And it happened, in 2015 it signed an agreement with Russia and became the full-member of the Eurasian Economic Union and followingly, refused to be alongside Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova (Asryan, 2020). Surprisingly and interestingly, it continued engagement with the EU. European Union needed a more specific partnership framework with Armenia, as it was a special case in the Eastern Partnership. Hence, the more flexible, tailor-made format has developed through Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement.

The new agreement committed to strengthen the country's political, socio and institution building process through the development of civil society. According to Chapter 21 of CEPA, article 102 (European Commission, 2017, *et al*) all parties should establish a dialogue on civil society cooperation. Civil society has given a special role with specific objectives: to

ensure the exchange of information and experience between all sectors: civil society, European Union and Republic of Armenia. At the same time civil society was assigned with power to monitor the implementation of the agreement itself. For monitoring and for regular meeting of civil society representatives Civil Society Platforms were established. As article 366 defines: “The Civil Society Platform may make recommendations to the Partnership Council, the Partnership Committee and Parliamentary Partnership Committee”, meanwhile, “The Partnership Committee and Parliamentary Partnership Committee shall organize regular contacts with representatives of the Civil Society Platform in order to obtain their views on the attainment of the objectives of this Agreement” (European Commission, 2017, *et al*).

5.5 Different phases of integration in case of Armenia

Armenian civil society was granted with limited financial support and space for development by the previous government. Stronger and financially more independent civil society had never been a political priority for this regime. The main explanation of this attitude was the fact that they would prefer not to have any institution, which could be a provider of alternative information, unless different was asked by the international actors. As a result, the budget and the scope of the responsibilities of these organizations was largely dependent on contributions from these international donors (Resp. 9, pos.2). One of these foreign actors, who actively contributed to the improved environment for civil society’s performance at the domestic level, was the European Union. The EU realized that a mediator institution was important while engaging with partner countries. They could serve as facilitators at the national level, which would lead to productive cooperation. Hence, the Civil Society Forum and National Platforms could mediate and fulfil this obligation. Nowadays, the European Union is one of the largest donors for Armenian civil society (Country Roadmap for Engagement with Civil Society 2018-2020, 2019).

Armenia is a country which experienced many domestic and foreign policy changes in the last decades. Consequently, relations between Armenia and the European Union is one of the most non-dynamic. The same statement is true in the case of Armenian civil society, its role and involvement in Armenian political life. In this regard, there are three main phases of cooperation with the EU: initial, when Armenia joined the EaP till 2013 crisis; refreshing phase when it needed to digest the result of membership in the EaEU and figure out the future steps with the EU integration; and third phase, which includes consultations and implementation of CEPA agreement (Hovhannisyan, 2019, p.84). Initial phase has started together with the newly established format and multilateral track of cooperation within the Eastern Partnership. It was a quite challenging stage for all parties: for the European Union because of lack of knowledge and not having a clear perspective of domestic political conditions for creating fruitful ground for future cooperation; and for government and civil society in Armenia, mainly due to lack of existing knowledge about the EU and understanding how the integration works, “together with the optimism in the initial phase it’s also about familiarization phase, learning phase” (resp.8, pos.2). In this period, civil society served as the main source of information for the EU and the national government. At the same time, the platform which was provided by the EU had significant importance for civil society itself, because there was a gap between decision-makers from the old regime and the civil society representatives (resp.12, pos.10). Through this tool, this latter could advocate for some democratic reforms on behalf of the EU and use European authorities for reference with Armenian authorities “we often use the format of eastern partnership to advocate for some reforms, changes to our authorities, but we use European officials as mediator, facilitator to reach out Armenian officials” (resp.8, pos.2). Next stage was negotiations on the Association Agreement. Armenian civil society became one of the most important elements in this process. The dialogue had a trilateral format, which allowed the civil society to contribute in content-related aspects (resp.9, pos.2). They gave their suggestions related to conditionality, preferable dates and desirable deliverables. As a result, their recommendations were taken into account. When it comes to the Armenian government, in spite of showing their active engagement with the process of European Integration, their primary interest was to maintain their regime as stable as possible. They were following

everything the EU would say and ask intentionally. Thus, there were many obligations to fulfill, from which many were left without any attention. In this way, they were ensuring room for maneuver and were avoiding any ground-breaking reforms. As a result, deliverables related to democratization were delayed, which was not clearly on the political agenda for this government (resp.9, pos.18).

Table 4. First phase of integration of Armenia

The main results	Significance
Eastern Partnership has launched (It has introduced a multilateral track of cooperation).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The EaP itself offered lots of tools and programmes which were implemented in the framework of multinational platforms. -Ministerial platforms established (civil society invited to participate in and to be observers). -Exchanging the knowledge and increased understanding of the partnership.
Creating the Platform for advocating the reforms and democratization.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Civil society is empowered and its role has increased in the process of negotiation. -Increased depth of understanding how the integration works, knowledge about the EU and its structure. -Civil society became the facilitator of the relationship between the EU and Armenian government (learning phase).
Negotiations on Association Agreement started.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Creating the agenda (Which was used for CEPA negotiations later), providing tools and programmes.

Second phase is characterized by the rapture of the relationship. It started in 2013 when Armenia was expected to sign the Association Agreement, but all of a sudden, the president of Armenia refused to sign the AA with the EU. Instead, he signed the accession treaty with another regional integration project- the EaEU. But despite this drastic change, Armenia decided to stay engaged with the EU alongside being a full member of another challenging power, in the region. The most favorable goal was further political integration with the EU, at the same time, to fulfill its membership obligation with the EaEU. Armenian civil society needed to act jointly and urgently to find another format of cooperation with the EU. They knew that without it there would not be any guarantee for their rights. The previous Armenian regime would not provide them with any alternative platform. Also, the EaEU did not include any conditionality and it was only the EU that was providing conditionality and platform for this specific dimension (resp.8, pos4). One more important aspect which made the national platform's decision easier was that this specific policy dimension was not mentioned in the accession treaty with the Eurasian Economic Union (resp.12, pos.6). Actually, the first phase created the fruitful ground in continuing the dialogue with the EU. The Civil Society representatives were actively involved in communication with the EU representatives to continue the cooperation in any possible format, as they realized that not signing AA was a missed opportunity not only for democratization of Armenia, also for their representation in the country's reforms process. In this way, one of the biggest challenges was understanding the future direction so that it would not be in confrontation with the EaEU. However, the existing format with Eurasian Economic Union somehow drew red lines and gave the integration process with the EU specific direction (resp.8, pos.2).

Table 5. Second phase of integration of Armenia

The main results	Significance
Armenia refused to sign AA and became a member of the EAEU.	-Draw red lines for possible engagement format with the EU.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Changed the intensity of integration with the EU (Slower the process, fundamentally changed the direction related to the trade). -The role of civil society has changed, from facilitator to initiator. -Emphasized comparative regionalism.
Armenia stayed engaged with the EU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Understanding possible integration and future cooperation format with the EU. -Mutual benefit from two different integration projects. -Increased role of civil society representatives in initiating and shaping the future format with the EU. -Civil society divided inside Armenia. One group believed the possibility of continued dialogue with the EU and being the member of the EaEU at the same time. Others would argue that it was impossible and a waste of time. -Risky, but also beneficial to understand how to gain maximum from both formats.
Civil society stayed actively engaged with the EU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Finding solutions for possible future cooperation. -Understanding possible integration and future cooperation format with the EU. Also, the role for civil society.

Meanwhile, the EU stayed forward-looking for the possible future cooperation. As a result, CEPA negotiations started already on 12 October 2015. Followingly, the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement was signed on 24 November 2017. The EU allocation is 40 million euros annually for reforms agenda and developments in Armenia (EU Neighbors, 2019). With these events, the third phase of partnership has started. An interesting coincidence occurred alongside negotiations on CEPA agreement. We have witnessed one of the largest peaceful protests in the last decade, in the region. As all interviewees claimed, the Velvet Revolution became the catalyst of democratic changes and reforms in Armenia, in 2018. The civil society was catalyst together with other factors for this drastic change. It was not only involved in the revolution, but also many of the representatives of the National Platform took part in organization of the protest (resp.9, pos.14). The revolution was unique with many aspects: firstly, it showed the highest activism of Armenian society, which was coordinated by the civil society organizations; secondly, apart from the domestic, it was largely influenced by foreign factors too. There was a strong message from the EU, the USA and even from Russia that they would not support using any type of power against protesters and Serzh Sargsyan's government considered this condition (resp.9, pos.16). The European Union saw this protest as the decisive determinant for the future of the partnership and region as well. To support peaceful protests and the involvement of civil society representation in Armenia, the EU stepped up and increased the country's annual allocation by 65 million euros grants in 2019 (European Union External Action Service, 2020). All these domestic and foreign factors resulted in regime change in the country. Therefore, the Velvet Revolution brought the new era in the country's political life. After sweeping out the old political elites, Armenia elected the new government. Many leaders from civil society organizations became the members of the new parliament and the new CEPA has become the political priority of this government (resp.7, pos.5). The CEPA agreement is based on the tools and format which was introduced in earlier stages of the European integration. The most important changes that became the added-value for this format of cooperation is that the role and degree of involvement of the Armenian National Platform in the process of reforms is more specified

than it was in previous phases (resp.9, pos.2). Since the agreement went into force, participation of the civil society representatives became visible. To emphasize the role of this partnership format the European Union, through its delegation to Armenia, organizes meetings, invites the civil society representatives and listens to their opinion about the specific policy and directions of implementation of the CEPA (resp.7, pos.7-9). However, it's still difficult to figure out what is the level of consideration of civil society's suggestions by Armenian decision-makers. Even though the new government has a positive attitude towards this institution in general, there are fields where civil society faces challenges on their way of fulfilling their obligation (resp.12, pos.10; resp.9, pos.22). There are areas, mainly related to the judiciary system, anti-corruption reform and human rights, in which the civil society is significantly represented and the results reflect this positive cooperation too (resp.7, pos.5). For example, they have developed anti-corruption and judiciary strategies which were positively assessed by the Venice Commission and by the EU officials. In addition to this, there is an on-going constitutional change in Armenia. This was one of the most challenging issues, as the old constitution was transformed many times to meet the demands of the old ruling elite (resp.8, pos.12). Thus, fundamental change appeared inevitable, especially now, when the country has specific obligations taken from different formats of cooperation with different international actors and the old constitution causes confusion on its way of implementation. The government with the involvement of the EU delegation organized several meetings and invited civil society representatives from the National Platform to hear their suggestions and concerns, "now there is this committee which is dealing with these changes. Here the civil society's engagement is very significant" (resp.8, pos. 14). But the meetings were postponed and the referendum was delayed due to the Coronavirus pandemic (resp.7, pos.5). In general, the country moves forward in a positive direction. In spite of these positive trends in Armenia, the new government is not as active as it was expected in the beginning of Armenia's transition. There are still major complications when it comes to the government- civil society cooperation. Even though the current format is much flexible and tailored, the very core problem is still fundamental 'vagueness' of the EU language towards the partner states and specific institutions, which again leaves the door open for interpretation (resp.8, pos.8). As a consequence of this

circumstance, there are fields like, military, security, and police where the attitude towards civil society participation is still cold and has not changed much since CEPA went into force. There is an interesting fact about the new Armenian authorities that, the involvement of civil society in the reforms process depends on the specific Ministry's kind will and openness for cooperation (resp.12, pos.10).

5.5.1 Relations with Russia and the EaEU

Neither the Velvet Revolution nor the CEPA agreement did not have a decisive effect on Armenia's general foreign policy direction towards Europe and Russia. It is not surprising considering its geopolitical location in a quite hostile region and neighborhood. Its general foreign policy strategy remained the same, which means staying closely engaged with Georgia and Iran and to use the EaEU to access the larger market. At the same time the EU is still considered as the largest and most important provider of capacities for institutional building, key reform partner and financial supporter for reforms on Armenia's way of achieving greater strategic balance. As a result, Armenia is the only country in the EaP region, which stays actively engaged with Russia and the EU, at the same time (Giragosian, 2019). Although we have not witnessed any vectoral changes, becoming a member of the EaEU delayed the Europeanization of civil society (resp.9, pos.24; resp.8, pos.16). Moreover, it affected the intensity of the integration as it has slowed down the whole process: "Russian Union factor can be understood as a significant factor for Armenia's intensity towards EU integration, for civil society as well" (resp.8, pos.16). It does not necessarily mean that without Eurasian Economic Union's factor Armenia would sign DCFTA with the EU, but it definitely would be more actively engaged with the EU (resp.8, pos.17).

Table 6. Third phase of integration of Armenia

The main results	Significance
The Velvet Revolution.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Regime was changed. -Civil society activeness reached the peak. -Increased financial support from the EU. -Civil society representatives took high positions in the new government.
Signing the CEPA agreement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Improved conditions for civil society. This latter was explicitly mentioned in the agreement. -Brought Armenia politically closer to the EU. -Armenia started to achieve its strategic balance, while using different formats with different actors.
Implementation of the CEPA agreement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Improved some policy dimensions, where the civil society's involvement was quite high. Positive direction: Constitutional changes, judiciary and anti-corruption strategy. -Civil society became involved in political processes in the country more than before.

Facing some challenges in the fields like: police, security and military.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Less progressive areas, major problems with human rights and transparency. -Mindset of people, still a challenging aspect. It will take more time to change it.
Two different formats with two different regional powers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Slowing down the European Integration. -The same vector of integration, different intensity. -Low degree of engagement with the European Union than it could occur without the EaEU membership.

5.6 Different phases of integration in case of Georgia

Georgia is the country which is considered as “frontrunner” together with Moldova and Ukraine which managed to sign the AA and DCFTA with the EU (Lebanidze, 2017). Due to domestic political and geopolitical context, the integration with the EU became the number one political priority of the country. After the Georgia-Russia war in 2008, it was hard to imagine that Georgia would follow Eurasian integration path, “Georgia is already quite clearly an EU oriented country, also, I would say NATO oriented country. It has clearly taken the course to be as close to the EU as the partnership framework will give it a chance and possibility” (resp.1, pos.2). There were several influential factors, which practically came hand in hand and created the fruitful ground for civil society-government cooperation in general and their involvement in reform’s process in the country’s EU integration course, more specifically. Firstly, with the creation of the Civil Society Forum the European Union emphasized multilateral track of cooperation and the civil society and national platform’s

role within it. Countries started to develop their national platforms already in 2010. While doing so, the EU provided all tools and platforms, which appeared to be an invaluable help for further integration in this specific field. Secondly, signing the cooperation agreement with Georgian government, which has obligatory character. Luckily, there were governmental changes in Georgia in 2013 and all these agreements were signed exactly in the period of 2013-2014 years. While they were still new, authorities were willing for cooperation and changes, “As a result of these cooperation agreements, the government cannot bring in the new law without consultations with the EU Integration committee” (resp.6, pos.14). The Committee has an obligation to send the proposal to civil society and wait for its opinion on it. In the reform process the same applies to sectoral meetings. Third condition was already signing the AA agreement and DCFTA with the EU. This agreement took cooperation to another level.

The importance of civil society started to increase since the very beginning of the Eastern Partnership. The EU was the biggest initiator and supporter of this process as it realized that they needed some allies, except the government. This ally could become the instrument for foreign policy, as well as, monitoring mechanism on the implementation process. In “Western Democracies” the parliament is responsible for monitoring, but in countries like Georgia (where the government and parliament are almost the same) a third party is needed. To take another step into integration, having more knowledge and information was important for the EU and for national government too. In this phase there was not that intensive talks about the Association Agreement yet and the most important platform for multilateral cooperation was provided by the Eastern Partnership framework itself (resp.2, pos.7). It was preparation for further integration- the Association Agreement. This is the reason why we can call it a learning phase. Neither the EU, nor the government and civil society itself have information about each other, how to use existing platforms to establish suitable practices which would be used later on. They were exchanging the information and civil society played a crucial role here (resp.5, pos.1). Another important aspect was that this was still new for Georgia, for civil society and for the EU itself. The previous formats did not really give such a deep knowledge to start directly groundbreaking changes. Accordingly, there was a need

to have a depth in understanding and only then to plan the further integration. Because of this reason after the ENP, the Eastern Partnership was a new power in the relationship, because the previous format did not include and meet the expectations of Georgia (resp.4, pos.3). The new format brought the new expectations and opened up the new incentives: In Warsaw Summit it was declared that if countries manage and fulfill their obligation in their border migration field, they could be granted visa-free travel in the Schengen area. This was the most significant ‘carrot’ in the history of Georgia’s European Integration. Furthermore, the negotiations on the Association Agreement started (resp.3, pos.10).

Table 7. First phase of integration of Georgia

The main result	significance
Signing the EaP	<p>Took the EU integration to another level.</p> <p>Introduced new platforms and tools for civil society for cooperation with the EU and with the government.</p> <p>Strengthened the EU’s position in the region.</p> <p>Introduced multilateral track of cooperation.</p>
Formation of CSF’s National Platform	<p>Provided some tools and mechanisms for multilateral track of cooperation of the EaP.</p> <p>Mobilized the civil society and created the platform for their performance.</p>
Change of the government	<p>It brought new energy in cooperation, and the new government was motivated to be</p>

	<p>working alongside civil society.</p> <p>They started domestic reforms. While not having negative experience, they were more flexible in cooperation.</p> <p>They signed the cooperation agreements in the 2013-2014 period, which was enhanced with the AA conditionality later on.</p>
Negotiations on the Association Agreement	<p>Representatives of civil society were involved in negotiations.</p> <p>AA became an incentive, something desirable and tangible, which kept the degree of integration quite high.</p>

The Association Agreement, together with DCFTA, took three partner countries (Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine) to another, more intense level of cooperation. This was emphasized with a partnership framework and increased budget support from the EU side. The process itself was very complicated for Georgian government as they needed to consider many circumstances during negotiation, signing the agreement and then the implementation process. Meanwhile, working on the AA agreement was an additional instrument for Georgian civil society to be represented in this process (resp.6, pos.6). Civil society served as facilitator, mediator (as it was assigned to it) for the government and for the EU in all phases of the AA agreement. By working on the AA, their connection with the European institution strengthened. Besides, cooperation with the government strengthened while working on new documents. As a result, functions increased inside and outside of the country (resp.4, pos.7). On the one hand, the Association Agreement created the additional instruments for cooperation, one of them was creating the Association Council, which is the highest formal institution and which was established to supervise the implementation process

under the EU-Georgia association. Civil society has a direct link to this Council and the National Platform can give recommendations to this Council. In practice, Georgian National Platform actively uses this opportunity to express its opinion, concerns and raise some specific questions. As a result, the Council helps the government and civil society to follow the sections of the AA and DCFTA in detail (resp.6, pos.4).

On the other hand, with the changes that were introduced, the AA agreement stressed once again that civil society is one of the steps for maintaining a better degree of EU integration. With this agreement the EU's demand became more categorical and more importantly, certain conditionality was applied. Additionally, creating the National Platform was another step in this way as a budget and separate dimension was created for civil society. This notion from the EU was reflected in certain changes of the attitudes on national level and was taken into consideration in the politics of different Ministries (resp.2, pos.17). Even though, in the beginning the government was less willing to involve civil society in reforms or other processes, the mindset is changing gradually, "I can't identify concrete moments, when they have started to understand each other better, but now we feel civil society's presence in different fields at the domestic level" (resp.1, pos.3).

The period with the highest intensity of cooperation was between 2013 and 2017. There were several domestic and foreign factors which explained the effective existence of trilateral partnership in Georgia. Civil society was ready for further integration to fulfill its role (The EaP format in the previous phase has already developed some platforms, the National Platform, at the domestic level). Besides, the governmental change and new authorities brought new energy and motivation, which increased the speed of cooperation. When it comes to the EU side, they made it clear what Georgia would get as a 'reward' if they could manage to meet the requirements. Civil society, government and citizens of Georgia shared the same motivation and all agreed that they wanted to sign the AA and DCFTA, and after that active partnership about visa-liberalization issues (resp.6, pos.20). This became the turning point for many important reforms, which resulted in a very positive scenario: citizens of Georgia can travel without visa for ninety days, in the Schengen area from March 2017. This was one of the most tangible results achieved in this partnership initiative. It was the

period when not only the partnership was kept on the highest level, but also the credibility of the EU (resp.3, pos.10).

When it comes to the implementation process in Georgia and civil society's involvement in it, we have a very fragmented picture in different policy areas. On the one hand, there are fields which have successful practice, such as human rights (resp.1, pos.3). There are many civil society representatives specialized in this field and their lobby helps to improve this dimension, "in human rights, rule of law and also, judiciary they are well represented, also energy fields too. Also, they are engaged with media freedom, so it's quite visible in this dimension too" (resp.2, pos.7). Despite this advocacy, these fields stay the most challenging and slowly changing, which is mostly caused due to the attitudes of responsible Ministries (resp.3, pos.2). They don't want to have further reforms in this dimension, because it might cost their position at the domestic level, none of them wants to have absolute transparency and to lose control over the situation (resp.6, pos.16). The EU delegation to Georgia is organizing some meetings and programmes with civil society to increase the level of their representation and give them a chance to get more experience. Other fields with positive trends of cooperation are: economics, trade, education- which are mostly influenced by, or connected with the DCFTA.

It is important to highlight the government- civil society cooperation aspect in this phase. All experts, interviewed for this thesis, stated that the degree of partnership can be evaluated as average (resp.6, pos.12). The main format of cooperation is a high-level conference, which takes place every year. It is the platform for civil society, government leaders and other political figures to come together and to listen to each other's position about different topics. Another important format is cooperation with parliament. It sends the document/new initiative to civil society, then during bureau meetings the civil society organizations' representatives can attend and give their opinion (resp.4, pos.5). What's more, within the framework of the AA and agreements signed with the government, parliament can't bring in the new law without consultation with the civil society platform. So, it's more compulsory for them. They send the proposal, give them some time for preparing their opinion and after that they listen to their suggestions. However, we can see that sometimes the advice given by

civil society is not considered by authorities, because it contradicts their goal. There are less leverages for pushing government in that case, because civil society's expertise is low and also, they don't have strong support and image among Georgian society. They trust and listen to their authorities more than their civil society. Moreover, they don't have better tools from the EU (resp.2, pos.17). The authorities are aware of these circumstances and sometimes they use it for their own benefit. Occasionally, they make some important decisions without consultation with civil society. There has been a situation when they changed the dates for approximation of certain directive of the Association Agreement from 2020 to 2022 and civil society figured it out post factum. Or they sent their proposals to civil society representatives too late, which made it impossible to familiarize with the text and prepare adequate opinion for this latter (resp.3, pos.8). Not much can be done in here, because in fact the obligation is fulfilled. They mention in the official document that the opinion and suggestion of civil society was heard. But of course, the quality of this latter's involvement is much lower than one might guess after reading the document. The situation is getting tougher at the municipal level. There is an absence of leverage to cooperate with municipalities to increase the involvement of these regional civil society organizations. Due to this issue, there is a lack of involvement of regional civil society organizations, which creates the disbalance inside the country. As a consequence, there is a gap between the level of expertise of civil society in regions and in Tbilisi. The representatives from Tbilisi are more experienced, skillful and they have a higher degree of engagement than regional ones (resp.1, pos.3).

Table 8. Second phase of integration of Georgia

The main results	significance
Signing the Association Agreement	Conditionality was applied for civil society. It emphasized the EU's position towards the role of civil society in implementation and reform's process. It introduced new tools for civil society,

	<p>which was additional input for an already existing platform.</p> <p>The government started to have obligations towards the NP and its members.</p> <p>Before the AA there was less motivation and will to include civil society into the reforms process, together with AA it gradually became more willing.</p> <p>Creating Association Council.</p>
2013-2017 period with high intensity of cooperation	<p>Cooperation agreements with the government of Georgia started functioning.</p> <p>Civil society forum was established, organizations and its representatives were better aware of the situation from the first phase of cooperation and they were ready to take further steps of integration.</p> <p>The became clearer with rewards of some reforms and fundamental changes.</p>
Visa liberalization	<p>Specific incentive.</p> <p>Institutional changes, reforms and new regulations in Georgia.</p> <p>Since March 2017 citizens of Georgia enjoy visa-free travel in the Schengen area for ninety days.</p> <p>Shared positive attitude among the government, civil society and citizens.</p>

	The credibility of the EU increased.
Implementation	<p>Selective political will of cooperation with civil society.</p> <p>Difference between the civil society's representatives in Tbilisi and in regions of Georgia.</p> <p>Division between the successful and less successful fields of cooperation.</p>
Expertise of civil society	<p>Lack of expertise in the fields connected with DCFTA.</p> <p>More expertise concentrated in the field of human rights, but good governance still a problematic issue.</p>
Gap in cooperation	The Government of Georgia is becoming less willing to involve civil society in important decision-making processes, like changing the dates for adoption of EU directives.

After 2017, the intensity of integration decreased in comparison with previous years (resp.2, pos.3). Accordingly, the motivation from the government, as well as from civil society, has decreased. In addition to this, there was not some large-scale deliverable, or 'reward' ahead which could unite them again (resp.3, pos.10). It is not clear what they should expect from the EU for the future, except the recognition of the changes and reforms that they have done or are currently doing (resp.6, pos.2). In general, association gave more freedom and time to civil society for working on documents, preparing their opinion. If before the government was sending one week earlier to analyze the entire text of the new initiative, now representatives of the National Platform have more time to work on it and give more

recommendations. Implementation of the Association Agreement was the most important task for all parties at that stage (resp.4, pos.3). However, there were some decisions which did not help to smooth transition and democratization and reforms. One of them was the decision made by the government of Georgia, when they dissolved the State Ministry for Euro-Atlantic Integration of Georgia in 2017, which was directly coordinating the reforms process and implementation of agreements. This was assessed as a mistake and brought only negative results, as it directly contradicted the effective coordination of reforms and implementation of agreement. Now, this role is fulfilled by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, but it's impossible to be responsible for planning the reforms and then coordinating the implementation process of these reforms. Neither human resources, nor technically this institution has a lack of power for implementation of the Association Agreement (resp.3, pos.4). Except inefficiently planning the controlling institution at the governmental level, National Platform is facing major problems on its own level, as well as while engaging with the government (resp.5, pos.2). The very core challenge for the platform is its own structure. There are five different thematic working groups. These working groups have coordinators, but at the same time many organizations are involved in each working group. It is always challenging to mobilize all organizations, especially ones who need to attend from different regions of Georgia. Most resources and time is spent to get these organizations together, while the quality of the work done is lower: "When we started collaboration in the beginning we were taking decisions with 50% and plus format, now it is impossible, because it's already a challenge to have at least half of the organizations presented at the meeting" (resp.4, pos, 9-10). Another problem is the expertise (resp.2, pos.19). We face disbalance in this dimension. Some organizations have more experience, some less. This condition makes it even more difficult to come and work together. There is not much help received from the European Union to fight against inequality inside the Platform. Moreover, the financing mechanism which the EU established created an unfair environment and encouraged unfair distribution of resources. There are always the same organizations receiving the grants from the EU, even though they might not be specialized in the field. As a result, we have organizations which are doing a lot for supporting the implementation process, or which are working in a field specific dimension, but they don't

receive anything from the EU due to existing financing practice (resp.6, pos.10). Another difficulty the platform is facing is the fact that organization works on a voluntary basis (resp.3, pos.2). Finally, it can be said that the National Platform fulfills its role as much as it has limited power and it's empty from innovative ideas (resp.3, pos.22). Empowering this institution, giving more tools and support to increase its expertise in some problematic fields would lead to better representation.

There is an interesting on-going process, which has started on civil society level, but also the same notion was shared by the government later. Since the beginning of the Eastern Partnership, it was always the EU who was initiating. The whole Eastern Partnership initiative was the EU creature, where partner states were always policy-takers (top-down Europeanization). After signing the Association Agreement, the format of three countries (Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia) has activated. The civil society, which is ready to take more responsibilities, together with the government asks for further engagement. Visa-liberalization and conclusion of agreements with the EU was a huge challenge for them, which they achieved and now they are prone to 'more than association'. As respondent six recalls, when these three countries revealed this intention for the first time, the EU representatives were a little bit confused and they even said that, "you were swimming in the ocean with the same boat and now you want to abandon this boat" (resp.6, pos.4). As a response to this statement, the respondent highlighted the need of the new energy to avoid the sinking of this boat. This is the moment when partner countries take the position of the policy initiators.

Table 9. Third phase of integration of Georgia

The main results	Significance
Post Visa liberalization/ AA phase	Stable integration but with low intensity; Non-existing clear incentive for further engagement;

	Motivation has decreased among civil society representatives;
Improved conditions for civil society	<p>Civil society appeared to be more represented in domestic processes;</p> <p>Their function has increased within the cooperation formats with the government;</p> <p>They have more time to prepare their opinion and suggestions on new initiative from the government;</p>
The governments' mistakes	<p>They dissolved the State Ministry for Euro-Atlantic Integration of Georgia in 2017. This role has been fulfilled by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs since then. This was a tactical mistake as it does not complement the process of implementation. Quite the opposite;</p>
Difficulties the National Platform faces	<p>The organization works on a voluntary basis;</p> <p>There are many partner organizations and it's difficult to mobilize all of them;</p> <p>Motivation among organizations has decreased;</p> <p>More instruments are needed for better cooperation;</p>
New Phase- Initiating	Civil society started and the government

	of three association agreement states shared the same notion. They started to initiate; ‘More than Association’;
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5.7 Comparative discussion and explanation of the findings

To recall the research question for this study, the regional strategies and choices that Armenia and Georgia made significantly determined their degree of Europeanization of civil society. The European Union is considered as one of the most important actors who provides space, financial support and tools with a certain level of conditionality for civil society in both countries. The aim is to increase their engagement in political processes. Even though Armenia became a member of the EaEU, this alternative regional power did not provide any additional platform for this specific policy dimension in Armenia. The only framework of cooperation remained within the EU. Accordingly, the decision which Armenian government made, not directly but still affected the intensity of civil society’s Europeanization. While in Georgia there was no additional foreign policy factor which could restrict the civil society’s performance at the domestic level. The European Union had the common approach towards two countries within the EaP. In the beginning of the cooperation they were provided with tools and platforms of cooperation, a budget was assigned for civil society and this latter appeared as an additional, alone standing dimension in the partnership framework (resp.9, pos.4; resp.6, pos.4; resp.5, pos.1; resp.3, pos.10). While talking with respondents, it was important to see that civil society in Armenia and in Georgia faced similar problems in the very first phase of cooperation. Also, their role was more or less similar. There was a lack of understating what is the EU, how it works and what are the benefits and requirements for the partnership framework offered by this specific regional actor. Civil society became facilitator and moderator in this process. It was a platform which provided alternative information to

the EU on domestic issues and expert advice to the government while working on new political documents. One of the most important conditions at that stage was that civil society was not a state-funding institution and the National Platform was mostly receiving grants and budget from the EU (resp.8, pos.2; resp.9, pos.2). Second important condition was that in both cases the destination point was signing the Association Agreement and DCFTA, for both government and civil society. Primarily, the civil society's degree of Europeanization was largely influenced with the foreign political choices of these countries. In addition to the regional path they chose, there was another important precondition which was reflected on the direction and intensity of civil society's involvement in domestic affairs. It was the government itself- domestic political elites. Civil society experienced a different attitude from their own government at different stages of the cooperation. In the initial phase, there were great political changes in Georgia. The old government was changed with "Georgian Dream" in 2013. The new government created a better ground of cooperation for civil society. They were more enthusiastic towards the role of this institution at the domestic level. They signed the cooperation agreements in the 2013-2014 period which were obligatory to fulfill for them (resp.6, pos.14). Meaning, that the government needed to consult with civil society before making important decisions and announcing the new initiatives. This decision played a huge role for civil society's representation in the following phases. On the other hand, Armenia did not experience governmental changes and the same ruling elite remained in this initial phase. They gave a space to civil society for suggestions within the cooperation format with the EU. As a result, Armenian civil society was actively involved in the working process of the Association Agreement with the EU together with the government. Despite this, the head of the government, the president, decided not to sign the AA and to join another regional integration project, led by Russia. This decision was made without any consultation with the civil society (resp.12, pos.8). Accordingly, it was a missed opportunity for civil society, because PCA agreement with the EU was quite old, not relevant for Armenian context any more. The government would not give them any space for expressing their concerns and opinions without having international actors providing a platform for that (resp.8, pos.4). This was the situation of these two countries in the beginning of the second phase of their integration.

With their geopolitical choice, countries turned out in very different positions. Civil society and their cooperation with their government was occurring with different intensity. In Georgia it was mostly the Association Agreement, which introduced conditionality for civil society (resp.4, pos.7; resp.2, pos.17). The course which the country chose was the most stable among all other visions and it followed the requirements set by the EU (resp.2, pos.3). The government had an obligation to involve this institution in the process of implementation of the Association Agenda. They needed to mention in their reports that civil society was familiarized with the initiative and their recommendations and concerns were expressed and included. The Association Council had an obligation to check the implementation process in the country and civil society had direct connection with this council. In addition to this, cooperation agreements signed with the new government in the previous phase boosted this process and took it to another level as respondents highlighted in the interviews. The speed of cooperation and intensity was highest ever in the EU-Georgia relations (resp.6, pos.12). Together with above mentioned aspects, there was an important precondition which united Georgian civil society, the government and the EU- it was the Association Agreement and DCFTA in the beginning and already on Warsaw Summit it was mentioned that the EU would start the “visa liberalization dialogues” with three Eastern Partnership states. Meaning that after certain reforms, citizens of Georgia could travel in the Schengen area without visa for ninety days. This was the clearest incentive from the EU ever and Georgia followed the path and requirements set for this incentive. As a result, visa liberalization came into effect in March 2017. Meanwhile, Armenian civil society was working together with the EU representatives to find common solutions for continued engagement. The EaEU membership changed the agenda for the country, “vectoral changes did not take place, but qualitative definitely did” (resp.8, resp.16). This somehow set red lines for future possible framework with the EU. Armenian civil society worked to get maximum gain from the cooperation, but also not to overlap obligations and fields with another Union. The government accepted the offer from civil society about continued dialogue as it was an additional financial resource primarily. Overall, this phase was reflection on Armenian government’s decisions, of being a full member of another regional integration project, for civil society and for the EU itself. This was a challenge for the European Union to show its resilience towards Eastern

Partnership and to approve a tailor-made approach, which was achieved through Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement with Armenia.

The new agreement brought the new spirit on the bilateral track of cooperation, also, on multilateral one. Civil society representatives underlined that they value this agreement because they worked on it and their recommendations were heard by the EU (resp.8, pos.4). Additionally, it brought conditionality for civil society at the domestic level (resp.8, pos.8). Alongside these changes introduced from foreign actors on Armenian level, ground-breaking changes started to occur. The Velvet Revolution which was the biggest civic protests in the last decades in Armenia caused serious changes in the country. The government changed, which gave a great hope to civil society and the EU for the future improvements of the speed and quality of reforms and integration. This was the moment when all conditions came hand in hand for civil society in Armenia. The same thing that happened to Georgia earlier, in 2013. There are fields where civil society is fairly represented like judiciary, anti-corruption and constitutional change. Both the EU delegation representative and experts from the National Platforms, highlighted that civil society was involved in the negotiations process, they even gave suggestions. However, as it turned out, the quality of involvement depends on the selective will of Ministries and their attitude towards this institution. There are fields like military, security, human rights which have major problems with transparency. The major problems are visible in Georgia too. After achieving visa-liberalization in Georgia, the civil society and the government lost their motivation for further cooperation. This is already a third phase- decreased interest phase. There were not any other promising clear incentives from the EU, the institution which was supervising the implementation process was dissolved and this function was fulfilled by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The government of Georgia became less willing to include civil society in an important decision- making processes, there is the similar selective political will, like in Armenia. Civil society does not have a strong leverage to push the government in this case, neither the EU provides with more tools or mechanisms, which could be effectively used and applied. Just recently the Eastern Partnership countries with association agreement started to initiate their own solutions for future cooperation. This happened for the first time, because it was always the EU who was

initiating for them (resp.6, pos.4). Now with no clear incentive, Georgia with two other partner states lacks the more specific approach- ‘more than association’, because the EaP does not give any promise for future membership. Countries going through many reforms and implementation, but they don’t know what will be the exact result except financial support from the EU and ambiguous ‘privileged relationship’ (resp.6, pos.20). So, the resilience of the EaP is again under question mark in Georgia.

Another biggest value of the EaP, which was highlighted by respondents from Georgia and also, Armenia, is its multilateral dimension (resp.10, pos.2). By creating the CSF and the National Platforms, the EU emphasized the importance of region building. This can be understood as an awareness rising initiative. After the Soviet Union dissolved these countries did not have much information about their domestic developments. Now through different projects, meetings in the framework of working groups, they exchange information, learn more about each other’s practice at the domestic level (resp.2, pos.23; resp. 9, pos.12; resp.8, pos.22). This cooperation occurs within the framework of these Platforms. The EU gives re-granting opportunities to them. Twenty projects are financed by this re-granting project each year. The main criteria to ensure regional cooperation is that it should be a common project and at least three countries’ civil society representatives should be involved in it. As a result of this approach, if before organizations were acting individually, now they apply as a team because of funding opportunity (resp.12, pos.2). Sometimes it happens that there are even four, five countries working together (resp.2, pos.23). Federica Mogherini was always mentioning that the EaP is not a geopolitical project, but as some respondents claimed (resp.2, pos.23), it has geopolitical implications, “If Russia tries to divide these countries, the EU and EaP tries to create fruitful ground for effective partnership. As a result, this partnership has geopolitical value too. It became the bridge in the region building project” (resp.2, pos.23). People to people contact is an important aspect and has certain implications too. There were some common declarations when civil society addressed human rights issues in Belarus and in Azerbaijan. This declaration was about the famous case of political prisoners and major human rights issues in these countries (resp.8, pos.4; resp.2, pos.23). When it comes to the Southern Caucasus region, the regional cooperation strengthened between Armenia and

Georgia after the CEPA agreement. Since then, several mutual projects took place which aims to share experience and best practice (resp.5, pos.3; resp.7, pos.7). One of these projects is between “Multinational Georgia” and “Alic media” in Armenia. Also, they had a common project to study Georgian experience of reforms in different fields. For this, they organized several study trips to Georgia “with involvement of the National Assembly of Armenia, government and civil society” (resp.8, pos.10; resp.4, pos.12-14). What Armenian civil society is doing is that they follow Georgian civil society’s experience. They are learning from Georgian civil society sectoral reforms and implementation of the Association Agreement practice and trying to understand how to use this knowledge in case of the CEPA implementation in Armenia (resp.8, pos.8-10-19). Exactly this agreement united the governmental and civil society circles for cooperation (resp.4, pos.12). There is another interesting aspect, which worth to be included in this analysis: Armenia and Georgia productively used existing geopolitical reality and developed their economic relations. They started to produce common production and sell it on the EU market within the framework of DCFTA from Georgia and within the framework of the EAEU from Armenia (resp.6, pos.18; resp.8, pos.19). As a result, it boosted economic cooperation between these two countries.

Having this development into consideration, there is more space for future improvements for Armenia and Georgia. Conditionality works in general, as they know that “if they don’t do enough, they won’t get much from the EU” (resp.1, pos.4 and resp.7, pos.11). Effective engagement in Armenian case depends on two major factors on the national level: first, strategic communication between authorities and civil society and second, civil society’s ability to reflect its own role in a long time perspective, because in a country like Armenia civil society has a huge potential (resp.8, pos.21). At the EU level, it depends on its involvement and further support for changes in Armenia (resp.9, pos.28). Armenian national platform needs more resources (resp.12, pos.18), financial support and expertise to be able to handle the situation and stay engaged in the future too (resp.9, pos.10). In addition to this, Russia's presence in Armenia should not be neglected (resp.12, pos.16; resp.9, pos.28).

In more general terms, the regional integration choice that each country made significantly influenced the intensity of Europeanization of their civil society. As the respondents

highlighted, the EU is an important provider of budget, tools and space for civil society representation. On the one hand, Georgian National Platform has an experience with using the instruments provided by the EU within the AA framework, which is recognized by the EU and other EaP countries. On the other hand, Armenia represents an example of a partner state which refused the AA but with the continued dialogue with the EU managed to benefit from the targeted- conditionality within the CEPA format. Despite being a full-fledged member of another Economic Union, civil society together with the government managed to find a common ground for further political integration to the EU. This example emphasized two important aspects: first, the EU turned out resilient towards the challenges in the contested neighborhood region; and second, Armenia became an example of finding the balance between two regional powers, to benefit as much as it is possible with existing framework. Although, an important limitation needs to be considered and addressed here. The CEPA agreement is still new and novel for the EaP and it will take more time to assess the real implication of this format and to generalize this experience.

6. Conclusion

The Eastern Partnership (EaP) initiative introduced a tailor-made approach with targeted conditionality for six Eastern neighbors. To ensure smooth transition of these countries on their way of Europeanization and to facilitate the reforms process, it created the Civil Society Forum within the EaP in 2010. Meanwhile, another regional integration project- the Eurasian Economic Union was created by Russia. While the EU's promised 'reward' and 'privileged relations' was quite vague, the EaEU offered a full-fledged membership to the countries in the common neighborhood. This competitive regionalism undermined the EU's status in the region and made the scenario even more fragmented. The fragmentation was reflected on the regional integration choices Armenia and Georgia made. Armenia became a special case in the EaP, as it became a member of the EaEU, but at the same time continued its political integration with the European Union (there was no space for DCFTA as this dimension was regulated by another regional project). Keeping a possible format of cooperation with the EU was especially important for the existence of free civil society in Armenia. Domestic elites would not support this dimension without demand from international actors like the EU. Meanwhile, Georgia has a clearly EU-oriented regional path since the beginning of the EaP initiative. This Georgia's European way has never been under question mark as it was weakly tied to Russia and its creation- the EaEU.

When it comes to the EaEU membership and its implication in Armenia, not directly but it affected the general intensity of Europeanization of civil society in Armenia. While they were trying to reflect and to find some solutions to create a new format which could provide some level of conditionality with the EU, Georgian civil society was working on implementation of Association Agreement with the national government. As the study demonstrated, there were other factors together with a regional integration path which created some special conditions in this process. The cooperation and involvement were highest in both countries with two important conditions: when the government was still newly elected and when the requirement for civil society participation was coming and controlled from the EU itself.

Therefore, several conclusions can be drawn from this study: First, Georgia's regional strategy choice resulted in higher intensity of the Europeanization of civil society in comparison with Armenia. The fact that Armenian National Platform is learning from the experience of Georgian colleagues underpins this position. Second, conditionality offered from the EU is effective only till the certain stage. While there is an incentive in Armenian case with the newly signed CEPA agreement, Georgian National Platform, as well as the government, are experiencing a phase of decreased interests. Nowadays, it is unclear where the country is going as the 'membership perspective' is not a matter of discussion. This created frustration among all layers of the society and they started to ask for 'more than association'. If Georgia continues improving all segments, achieving standards set by the EU, 'membership perspective' will not be as important incentive as it is now (resp.6 pos.20). Third, providing tailor-made alternatives for the countries like Armenia- the CEPA agreement, can be assessed as the flexibility and resilience of the EU's Eastern Partnership initiative and Neighborhood Policy (Kostayan and Giragosian, 2017).

As for the overall implications and contributions to the research field, this study illustrates that civil society plays an important role when it comes to the region-building, strengthening the contacts among the EaP member states. The EU's conditionality, financial support and tools actually emphasized the importance of this field and changed the mind of domestic authorities. Nonetheless, the National Platforms are facing many problems while cooperating with their national governments in both countries. The origins of these problems are diverse. However, there is a huge space for improvement as well (resp.3, pos.16). With some changes and continued support from the EU, civil society has a huge potential for the future engagement in these countries. In addition to this, 'contested neighborhood' factor was highlighted and addressed in this thesis. The EU needs to be a challenging actor and power in the neighborhood region. It needs to meet the expectations of these countries, otherwise its credibility as a regional actor will decrease. As a matter of consequence, it will prepare a fertile ground for another regional integration project, to take an advantage of the situation and spread its influence in the region.

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Appendix 1

Interview questions for the EU delegation to Armenia and Georgia:

- 1) How would you evaluate the current course and direction of the country when it comes to European Integration?
- 2) What are the main achievements that you can highlight as a result of bilateral and also multilateral track of cooperation? (If respondent mentions civil society dimension, I will ask to elaborate this part more, if not I will introduce it in following questions)
- 3) What is your position about the role of civil society and their participation in Georgia's/Armenia's reforms process and implementation of partnership agreements?
- 4) What are the positive developments in this policy dimension (civil society representation) since AA/CEPA went in force? How many changes were introduced with these agreements?
- 5) How would you assess the importance/effectiveness of conditionality through agreements from the EU side when it comes to civil society participation?
- 6) Is there anything that the EU should do differently for future integration, strengthening civil society and their participation?
- 7) How much space is there left for changes for the future?

Interview questions for experts in Armenia (Including civil society National Platforms' representatives):

- 1) How would you assess the general dimension and progress of the country when it comes to its European integration?
- 2) How would you estimate the role of civil society during three different periods of Armenia's European Integration?
- 3) What has changed after signing the CEPA agreement for civil society?
- 4) How would you evaluate the EU's support to Armenian civil society representatives? Is conditionality offered through CEPA sufficient for real progress?
- 5) How would you evaluate the government-civil society relationship?

- 6) What is the degree of civil society's participation in implementation of CEPA?
- 7) What are the most challenging areas for implementation nowadays?
- 8) What are the areas where the civil society stays most influential?
- 9) What are the multilateral effects of the partnership format?
- 10) How much space is there left for changes for the future?

Interview questions for experts in Georgia (Including civil society National Platforms' representatives):

- 1) How would you assess the general dimension and progress of the country when it comes to its European integration?
- 2) How would you estimate the role of civil society during three different periods of Georgia's European Integration?
- 3) What has changed after signing the AA agreement for civil society?
- 4) How would you evaluate the EU's support to Georgian civil society representatives? Is conditionality offered through AA sufficient for real progress?
- 5) How would you evaluate the government-civil society relationship?
- 6) What is the degree of civil society's participation in implementation of AA?
- 7) What are the most challenging areas for implementation nowadays?
- 8) What are the areas where the civil society stays most influential?
- 9) What are the multilateral effects of the partnership format?
- 10) How much space is there left for changes for the future?

Appendix 2

Interview request template (Templated provided under the framework of Qualitative and interpretive research methods' classes was used):

Dear Mr/Ms,

Please allow me to introduce myself. I'm Mariam Tlashadze and I am in a Master's Programme: European Union-Russia Studies, at the University of Tartu's Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies.

As part of my Master's Thesis, I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to interview you, given your positions, perspective and your experience in the field. I am well aware of your heavy workload and of the fact that you may receive many questions from different researchers or institutions. Nevertheless, I can assure you that this interview will be short and would be of invaluable help for my research.

It would be perfect if we could talk by the end of March considering the fact that I am taking my flight from Estonia to Georgia and Armenia by that time and have planned interviews.

If a face to face interview is not convenient for you, I am available to speak over Skype, Gmail, or other social media sources, which will work most for you.

If you would like to know anything more about me and/or my research, please do not hesitate to ask and I would be happy to let you know more. In addition to this, if there is any need of confirmation of my status at the University of Tartu, my supervisor, which is also my programme's director, is ready to confirm it. Anonymity is always an option for the interview, if it's absolutely necessary.

Your answers will be great added value and contribution to my thesis.

With best regards,

Mariam

Appendix 3

Respondents information

Respondent 1

Date of the interview	25th of March
Interview duration	49:00 min
Organization	EU delegation to Georgia
Occupation	Deputy head of one of the sections
Country	Georgia

Respondent 2

Date of the interview	24th of March
Interview duration	45:00 min
Organization	Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies
Occupation	CSF member of Steering Committee

Country	Georgia
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Respondent 3

Date of the interview	7th of April
Interview duration	42:45 min
Organization	Open Society Georgia Foundation
Occupation	EU integration program manager
Country	Georgia

Respondent 4

Date of the interview	2nd of April
Interview duration	35:31 min
Organization	“Youth Alternative”
Occupation	CSF National Platform
Country	Georgia

Respondent 5

Date of the interview	10th of April
Interview duration	38:00 min
Organization	Liberal Academy Tbilisi
Occupation	CSF National Platform
Country	Georgia

Respondent 6

Date of the interview	12th of April
Interview duration	35:00 min
Organization	CSF National Platform,
Occupation	Coordinator
Country	Georgia

Respondent 7

Date of the interview	23rd of March
Interview duration	35:20 min
Organization	EU delegation to Armenia

Occupation	Political officer
Country	Armenia

Respondent 8

Date of the interview	25rd of March
Interview duration	50:00 min
Organization	Eurasia Partnership Foundation
Occupation	CSF National Platform
Country	Armenia

Respondent 9

Date of the interview	1st of April
Interview duration	45:00 min
Organization	Free Citizen Civic Initiatives Support Center
Occupation	Member

Country	Armenia
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Respondent 10

Date of the interview	17th of April
Interview duration	40:00 min
Organization	Research center “Alternative”
Occupation	CSF National Platform
Country	Armenia

Respondent 11

Date of the interview	24th of April
Interview duration	35:00 min
Organization	Center for European Studies (CES)
Occupation	Lecturer
Country	Armenia

Respondent 12

Date of the interview	24th of April
Interview duration	45:58 min
Organization	Youth Cooperation Center of Dilijan
Occupation	CSF National Platform
Country	Armenia

Appendix 4

CONSENT FORM

This consent has developed within the master's thesis project "EU's Regional Integration strategies and its implication for civil society participation in Eastern Partnership countries: Comparing Georgia and Armenia". The aim of this project and interview method is to hear the expert's view, who are working in the field. More specifically, to figure out their insight and perspective.

I am aware of the purpose and topic of the interview, and agree on the condition of the interview. I understand that I am not required to answer any of the questions and I can withdraw from the interview at any time.

I understand that any attributed quotes from the interview will only be used for the purposes of published academic work. If I have agreed to conduct the interview anonymously, I understand that quotes will be attributed to 'a party source familiar with the situation'.

I agree to participate in this interview.

Name _____

Signature _____

Date _____

Appendix 5

Please, see the Codebook and coded segments (retrieved from MAXQDA) here:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1GDTlGVm0006062bLiCLmCNtOjqT8FmaK?usp=sharing>

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1h4JP2SaXMkANBnKazze7yvy7Gzw5Xr7M?usp=sharing>

I, Mariam Tlashadze,

(49507160054),

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Done at Tartu 18.05.2020

Mariam Tlashadze