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**Europeanization in Eastern Partnership countries:
the “Associated Trio” and trade opportunities**

MA Thesis

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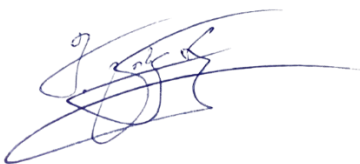
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Authorship Declaration

I have prepared this thesis independently. All the views of other authors, as well as data from literary sources and elsewhere, have been cited.

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ABSTRACT

Recent developments in Eastern Europe have been of great interest to international institutions and academia. The present study analyzes Europeanization and its influence on Eastern Neighborhood countries, main approaches towards European Integration, achievements, outcomes and perspectives. Research focuses on trade relations targeting three countries of the neighborhood: Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. Selection of these cases is determined by their higher dedication and aspirations towards European integration, highlighted in countries' political agendas and expressed in their individual applications for the EU membership.

Economic integration is one of the key parts of this ambitious agenda that is accelerated through the Association Agreement and DCFTA as the most advanced agreement ever negotiated by the EU in relation with its partners. The crises in the neighborhood have once again highlighted the need to strengthen trade relations in order to diversify trading partners and achieve economic independence. In order to study the process of integration the research suggests to go back to the theory of Europeanization which explains soft power diffusion from the EU to its surroundings as well as the countries' intentions and final outcomes.

Any level of reform progress should be positively assessed and recognized from the EU in order to be counted as successful and have positive outcomes in terms of economic integration. Therefore, research is interested in examining possible correlation between the regional cooperation and countries' individual achievements towards European integration and the influence of trilateral cooperation on the attitude of the European Union towards three eastern neighborhood countries.

Amid three countries' individual applications submitted for the EU membership it is even more relevant and interesting to examine overall progress and achievements of the countries in terms of meeting eligibility criteria for the accession.

KEYWORDS: *Associated Trio; Europeanization; Trade; DCFTA; Georgia; Ukraine; Republic of Moldova; EaP.*

List of Abbreviations

AA	Association Agreement
CEPA	Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
DCFTA	Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas
EaP	Eastern Partnership
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
EU	European Union
FDI	Foreign Direct Investments
FTA	Free Trade Agreement
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IPRs	Intellectual Property Rights
MA	Master's
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
SPS	Sanitary and phytosanitary measures
TBT	Technical Barriers to Trade
UK	United Kingdom
WTO	World Trade Organization

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INTRODUCTION

The present study analyzes Europeanization and its influence on Eastern Neighbourhood countries, main approaches towards European Integration, achievements, outcomes and perspectives. Research focuses on trade relations targeting three countries of the neighbourhood: Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. Selection of these cases is determined by their high dedication and aspirations towards European integration, highlighted in countries' political agendas and expressed in their individual applications for the European Union membership.

Along the process of the eastern enlargement the European Union (EU) had faced the danger of creating a two speed Europe with more stable and democratic states inside the union and less democratic and poorer countries outside¹. Therefore, in order to avoid possible threats the EU started working on its policy towards the Eastern neighbours². In 2014 the EU launched European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) as a basic framework for relations with its sixteen Southern and Eastern neighbour countries, in order to support and foster stability, security and prosperity in its neighbourhood³. While being mainly an implementation mechanism for bilateral policy between the EU and partner countries, ENP is complemented by various regional and multilateral cooperation initiatives.

In order to make cooperation more tailored to the regional specificity and easier for implementation the EU established the Eastern Partnership (EaP) as a joint policy initiative within the framework of the ENP aimed at deepening and strengthening relations between the EU, its member states and six eastern neighbors: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Republic of Moldova, Ukraine. This initiative is mutually beneficial for the participating parties and enables the introduction and strengthening of European values in Eastern Europe. The EU cooperation within the framework of EaP is based on geographic criterion of selecting countries. The regional approach is characterized by many shortcomings. The member states of the initiative have different goals for cooperation with the EU. The Republic of Moldova (Moldova), Georgia and Ukraine are striving for the highest level of integration within EU and its structures, while other countries of EaP do

¹ Casier, T. (2010). The European Neighbourhood Policy: Assessing the EU's Policy toward the Region.

² See 1.

³ EU Policy, EU neighbours east. <https://www.euneighbours.eu/en/policy/eastern-partnership>

not share similar plans on their political agendas. Riga Summit has declared that “it is sovereign right of each partner country freely to choose the level of ambition and the goals to which it aspires in its relations with the European Union”⁴. Therefore, partner countries are free in their decisions to define individual strategy towards possible cooperation with the EU.

In 2014 the EU signed the Association Agreements (AA) with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine in order to promote political and economic integration with these countries. The Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) is an integral part of the Agreement which regulates trade and trade related issues between the parties and constitutes highest level of accelerated trade relations. In long term perspective the DCFTA offers huge range of benefits of entering one of the largest market of the world. On the other hand, it is necessary to carry out reforms and bring the existing practices or legislative frameworks in line with EU standards and regulations in order economies to benefit from the opportunities granted by the agreement.

In May, 2021 three countries of EaP - Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine launched the “Associated Trio” project⁵. The ministries of foreign affairs of three countries negotiated and signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) aimed at enhancing trilateral cooperation on European integration. The MoU served as a basic document for future negotiations and in July the heads of three countries officially established new format for trilateral cooperation aimed at strengthening strategic cooperation and deepening integration with each other and with the EU. The tripartite format for enhanced cooperation, coordination and dialogue between these countries represents the clear desire for an even deeper cooperation with the EU and reaffirms countries’ commitments to further progress in the implementation of the Association Agreements⁶. Countries once again clearly express their aspirations towards the EU:

⁴ Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit (Riga, 21-22 May 2015)
<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/21526/riga-declaration-220515-final.pdf>

⁵ Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova have signed the Memorandum founding the “Associated Trio”, 2021, MFA Georgia. <https://mfa.gov.ge/News/%E2%80%8Bsaqartvelom,-ukrainam-da-moldovam-evrointegraciis.aspx?lang=en-US>

⁶ Batumi Summit Declaration Issued by the Heads of State of Association Trio - Georgia, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/deklaraciya-batumskogo-samitu-shvalena-glavami-derzhav-asoci-69609>

“We reiterated our determination backed by the strong will of our peoples to work towards joining the European Union. In this respect, we call on the European Union to support the sovereign choice of our states together with all the relevant steps taken by us vis-a-vis European integration and acknowledge the European perspective of Georgia, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine.”⁷

Despite the fact that Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia have Association agreements with the EU and are much more ambitious in terms of integration the “Trio” remains far from meeting the membership requirements⁸, according to which one of the criteria is following: the existence of a functioning market economy as well as the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the EU; Trade is also highlighted in Trio Strategy as one of the key areas for cooperation to be improved⁹. On the one hand, the DCFTAs engage countries in trade relations with the EU without barriers and, on the other hand, provides them with relevant guidelines for the implementation of key reforms in order to bring them closer to the EU standards and fully integrate into the European single market.

Year 2022 turned out to be quite challenging for the “Trio” countries. Especially for Ukraine, where Russian Federation had recognized independence of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts and launched military invasion¹⁰. The “Trio” countries as well as whole Europe and other parts of the world have been challenged by the Russia’s full-scale war in Ukraine that started on February 24, 2022. These events encouraged three countries to deepen their cooperation with the EU. First Ukraine applied for the fast-track EU membership that has been followed by Moldova and Georgia submitting their official applications to the EU.

In addition to the human loss and refugee crisis in the region, events in Ukraine also resulted in deep economic crisis in Ukraine and also affected Georgia’s and Moldova’s economy. Global

⁷ Joint Statement of the Associated Trio – Heads of State/Government of Georgia, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine – at the 6TH Eastern Partnership Summit.

https://www.gov.ge/print.php?gg=1&sec_id=557&info_id=81006&lang_id=ENG

⁸ Hillion, C. (2014). The Copenhagen criteria and their progeny. EU enlargement (Oxford, Hart Publishing, 2004).

⁹ Trio Strategy 2030, (2019). Lithuanian Delegation Of the EPP Group of European Parliament. <https://tsajunga.lt/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/LT-EPP-Trio-Strategy-2030.pdf>

¹⁰ European Council (2022). EU Response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eu-response-ukraine-invasion/>

campaign against Russian goods resulted in product shortages in Georgia and Moldova. The economic costs of the Russia-Ukraine conflict affected neighborhood countries and even advanced economies of the Europe, as both countries are major suppliers of basic commodity products such as wheat, corn and etc.¹¹ The fact once again highlighted economic dependence of these countries on Russian import and the need for the diversification of trading partners. Ensuring supply diversification through EU market remains one of still untapped opportunities given by the DCFTA.

The MA research targets DCFTA objectives as already given opportunity as well as proper guidance towards better integration of three countries to the EU market. Paper argues that if three countries will achieve progress towards meeting the accession criteria through cooperation and implementations of reforms emerging from DCFTA, that will influence on integration perspective for these countries. The study aims at answering the preliminary research question - to what extent have the DCFTA objectives been achieved in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine?

Whereas the EU has applied regional approach towards its neighbours and whereas three countries established Associated trio approach for fostering their efforts towards European integration and have already applied for the EU membership, study also will examine to what extent does the trio approach influenced the progress towards economic integration?

In order to test the hypothesis and answer main research questions study will employ variety of data collection and analysis. The qualitative content analysis of materials such as documents, agreements, action plans, reports, interviews, official announcements and speeches of key officials will help with analyzing current improvements and challenges towards research issues. Under the framework of the research, interviews with experts and officials directly involved in association processes will be conducted that will help us to produce new data and add value to the overall understanding of the EaP perspective and the influence of Europeanization to the EU neighborhood in general. As the paper will analyze ongoing processes it is of great importance to collect information directly from the representatives of the stakeholder agents. The analysis of selected

¹¹ Liadze, I., Macchiarelli, C., Mortimer-Lee, P., & Juanino, P. S. (2022). The economic costs of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. *NIESR Policy Paper*, 32.

cases with the help of qualitative interviews could further validate or question outcomes and presents an opportunity for further research.

The “Associated Trio” is a new initiative and mostly discussed in relation to the ENP. This issue needs further studying as there were discussions among scholars on the necessity for the more tailored approach for the cooperation with EaP countries¹². Now three countries established new platform for cooperation with each other and with the EU but it is still under the question whether this kind of format will result in further integration and accession or can we see the trilateral cooperation as unavoidable because of the lack of coherence among six member countries of the EaP. Amid the war in Ukraine and three countries’ application for the EU membership it is even more important to analyze “Trio” performance in terms of reform progress. As an ongoing process the issue needs monitoring and further analysis as it can become momentum in the history of the Associated trio development. On the other hand, it is important to measure countries’ readiness to compete other players on EU market as countries are still waiting for the decision from the EU and it will be useful to have clear view on the real chances of countries other than political decision. Moreover, it is vital economic relations to be improved, in order to get tangible benefits from DCFTAs, diversify trade relations and minimize Russian influence on countries’ trade balance and economic independence. In addition, any level of reform progress should have been positively assessed and recognized from the EU and its structures in order to be counted as successful and have positive outcomes in terms of economic integration.

The paper is divided into three parts. The first gives an overview of the theory of Europeanization and European integration as a theoretical approach to the research and describes methodological approach employed by the research. The second part describes selected cases, how does the theory apply to them and what are the practical implications of the theoretical discussion. Case analysis is followed by the final part of empirical analysis concluding the discussion and aimed at answering questions asked by the research.

¹² Kerikmalle, T. (2016). Political and legal perspectives of the EU Eastern Partnership policy. Springer.

CHAPTER 1 – THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

This Chapter is dedicated to the introduction to a theoretical framework for the research as well as literature review of previously published works in this area of research. The first part overviews different approaches towards Europeanization and its influence over non-member states of the EU. The second part provides overview of different researches and scholarly articles related to the perspective of the EaP and Associated partners of the EU.

1.1 The Europeanization Approach

In order to study the process of integration the research suggests to go back to the theory of Europeanization which explains soft power diffusion from the EU to its surroundings as well as the countries' intentions and final outcomes for the them. The theory of Europeanization is defined in two different ways by Scholars. According to Olsen Europeanisation is fashionable but contested concept¹³. He argues that the Europeanisation and European integration are two similar concepts and from the European perspective both processes serve for the final political unification¹⁴. Apart from political union, Olsen identified four other possible purposes of Europeanization: changing external boundaries, building European institutions, central penetration of national governance systems, and exporting political organization types.¹⁵ He discusses integration as simultaneous process of mutual adaptation as both EU level and domestic level institutions have constantly changing nature.

A group of scholars consider these two concepts as distinct phenomena. Ladrech defines Europeanization as incremental process of redirecting domestic politics to become part of the organizational logic¹⁶. According to Radaeli the concept of Europeanisation belongs to the ontological stage of research, Europeanisation does not mean political integration but as a concept

¹³ Olsen, J. P. (2002). The many faces of Europeanization. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 40(5), 921-952. p.921

¹⁴ Olsen, J. P. (1996). Europeanization and nation-state dynamics. Arena.

¹⁵ See 14.

¹⁶ Ladrech, R. (1994). Europeanization of domestic politics and institutions: The case of France. *J. Common Mkt. Stud.*, p 69.

does not exist without integration¹⁷. To investigate the concept of Europeanization, he suggests addressing two key questions: "what is Europeanized" and "how much change has been generated by Europeanization". This kind of approach enable us to conduct comprehensive analysis about the influence of Europeanization on domestic policy and political institutions as well as to measure the magnitude of change. In other words, answering questions asked by Radaeli helps us first, to examine possible correlation between the Europeanization and changes on domestic level and second to measure the level of change and its direction. Here four different aspects are distinguished: inertia, that refers to the lack of change because of significant difference between the EU level and country level political architecture; Second, absorption is defined as a consistent adaptation process; third, transformation is defined as a paradigmatic shift in the country level system; and fourth, retrenchment is defined as a negative form of Europeanization in which national level architecture becomes less European than it was before¹⁸.

Brözel and Risse provide the most practical explanation for Europeanization: a "top-down" perspective. According to their approach Europeanization is defined as the creation and development of separate governance structures together with legal, political and social institutions at the EU level, as well as a political problem-solving mechanism that formalizes interactions between players and policy networks that specialize in the development of authoritative rules¹⁹. The core theme of Europeanization research is "goodness of fit," a phenomena that helps in determining the requirement for adaptation²⁰. In order to discuss any political concepts of processes through the lenses of Europeanization one should have misfit between two different levels of processes²¹. In this case it is EU level processes and domestic level processes. This incompatibility triggers a process of change and adaptation that is essential for integration. If there is mismatch between European and national politics, states are required to adapt to European

¹⁷ Radaelli, C. M. (2000). Whither Europeanization? Concept stretching and substantive change. *European Integration online Papers (EIoP)*, 4(8).

¹⁸ See 17.

¹⁹ Börzel, T. A., & Risse, T. (2003). Conceptualizing the domestic impact of Europe. *The politics of Europeanization*, 57, 80.

²⁰ Börzel, Tanja A. "How the European Union interacts with its member states." (2003): 31.

²¹ See 19.

standards and therefore adaptation pressure is higher from the EU side, more complex reforms are required and states need to work more on harmonization process.

The theory of Europeanization is not limited to explain the processes only inside the union but is also useful in analyzing political changes in neighbouring countries²². An external dimension of Europeanisation represents an independent area of research. The transformation process in which states modify their legal frameworks, policies, and institutions to new practices, norms, and standards coming from the European governance structure can be used to discuss the impact of Europeanization at the national level²³.

According to Schimmelfennig the EU has a list of tools for relations with non-member countries divided into result “logic of consequences” and “logic of appropriateness”. Actors behave in a causal manner, or their decisions are impacted by the possible consequences of their actions, according to consequential logic²⁴. Actors who follow the logic of acceptability act or make decisions based on what is socially acceptable in a given situation. Under consequential logic, Schimmelfennig distinguishes four instruments that influence the behavior of these countries: conditionality, externalization, transnational stimulus, and transnational externalization. Schimmelfennig distinguishes between socialization, imitation, transnational socialization, and social imitation using the logic of acceptability²⁵. In order to explain integration process outside the EU the one should observe both direction suggested. Although as the research is mainly interested to examine the effect of the tripartite format for cooperation, it is more reasonable and result-oriented to follow the logic of consequences. Observing causal linkages between the cooperation format and integration viewpoints would be beneficial.

Rationalist conditionality model helps us understand the nature of EU conditionality in terms of Neighbourhood Policy. There are different clearly defined objectives, EU and its partner countries strive for, for example 20 deliverables²⁶. Despite the fact that the conditionality mechanism and

²² Bauer, Michael W., Christoph Knill, and Diana Pitschel. "Differential Europeanization in Eastern Europe: the impact of diverse EU regulatory governance patterns." *Journal of European Integration* 29, no. 4 (2007): 405-423.

²³ See 14.

²⁴ Schimmelfennig, Frank. "Europeanization beyond Europe." (2007).

²⁵ See 24.

²⁶ Deliverables for 2020, Consilium Europe (2020). <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/44362/20-deliverables-for-2020.pdf>

incentives provide a solid framework for partnering relationships, the ENP country's and EU's commitments are imprecise and potentially constrained.²⁷ For example, as incentives we can discuss the AAs, DCFTA and Visa-free regime. The process is reversible and every new incentive requires additional commitment from non-member countries' side. For example, the AAs are perceived as a great achievement for partner countries, although by signing the AA country takes responsibility to carry out comprehensive reforms. In order to get closer to the European standards and regulations and integrate the EU *acquis* with domestic legislation countries should foster their development through the process of harmonization with European standards.

The conditionality mechanism by the EU is an important external factor. The analysis of the political system shows that the adaptation of the conditionality element by the EU to the partner states leads to the transformation of their current institutional model. Since the EU's connections with its partners are conditional, the nations involved begin to adjust to the new requirements through various measures. Reforms typically lead to the democratic modernization of institutions. Political elites make strategic decision based on rational cost-benefit calculations regarding EU conditionality that lead them to the compliance²⁸. Studies support the idea that the accession conditionality motivates change on local level²⁹. The benefits of EU membership are well known, encouraging high level policymakers to implement a long list of legislative reforms and adapt existing systems to match EU standards and norms.

According to Kelley in case of economic criteria of the accession one of the significant variable to be assessed is reform progress. He also points out that the reform process and policy outcomes are not necessarily inextricably connected with each other. There is little doubt, however, that the DCFTA, as a very ambitious and unprecedented arrangement for economic interactions with third nations, gives associated countries a competitive advantage, first to benefit from an established free trade regime and, second, to transform their markets and converge to EU level standards, which would be a significant step toward economic integration even if they were not members or candidates. In this case, progress on reform will help partner nations not only achieve admission

²⁷ Sasse, G. (2008). The European neighbourhood policy: Conditionality revisited for the EU's Eastern neighbours. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 60(2), 295-316.

²⁸ Noutcheva, G. (2012). *European foreign policy and the challenges of Balkan accession: Conditionality, legitimacy and compliance*. Routledge.

²⁹ Kelley, J. (2004). International actors on the domestic scene: Membership conditionality and socialization by international institutions. *International organization*, 58(3), 425-457.

criteria but also get tangible economic benefits. Therefore, in this case format of the AA and DCFTA enable the Association Trio to get closer to the Copenhagen criteria through the process of economic integration and harmonization with the practices.

Sedelmeier also examines the costs of adaptation by applying Europeanization theory to non-member states³⁰. He underlines importance of factors determining adaptation costs such as the role of state governments and administrative capacity. Smooth reform-making and implementation procedures are more likely to occur in countries where governments recognize the relevance and tangible advantages of these processes. Another key component is the capacity of societal mobilization and for the effective implementation of all the responsibilities taken from the partnership agreements. Therefore, liberal reforms and integration require both governmental and civil society support.

Despite the fact that Associated Trio as a newly established initiative as well as three countries' compliance with conditionality has not been sufficiently researched by the scholars, the Accession conditionality is a broadly discussed topic among political elites and academics. In her book "European Foreign Policy and the Challenges of Balkan Accession" Noutcheva analyses the importance of the compliance with the EU accession conditionality. The author overviews several cases where the EU applied different strategies. For example, Noutcheva considers the case of Bulgaria as being classic example where the EU demands were classic Copenhagen Criteria in contrast to the case of Kosovo where imposed compliance took place³¹. The importance of conditionality as a proper tool for dealing with candidates can also be argued as a goal for Eastern European countries' democratic and economic development³².

³⁰ Sedelmeier, U. (2011). Europeanisation in new member and candidate states. *Living reviews in European governance*, 6(1).

³¹ See 30.

³² Anastasakis, O., & Bechev, D. (2003). EU conditionality in South East Europe: bringing commitment to the process. *South East European Studies Programme*, 1-20.

1.2 Europeanization of the Neighbourhood - Current status

The Associated Trio is newly established cooperation platform and is not broadly examined by scholars. Although studies have been conducted in the area of ENP and EaP either on individual country bases or collectively (Emerson, Noutcheva, Popescu, 2007; Korosteleva, 2012; European Parliamentary Research Service, 2019; Gazzola, Sepashvili, 2016; Van Der Loo, 2016; Zheltovskyy, 2021) There were discussions among scholars on the necessity for the more tailored approach for the cooperation with and between the EaP countries³³. Now three countries established new platform for cooperation with each other and with the EU but it is still under the question whether this kind of format will result in further integration and accession.

Authors have underlined similarities and contrasts between six countries' European perspectives. Despite the fact that they all face geopolitical obstacles and are still under Russian influence to some level, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine are attempting to further their integration with the EU³⁴. The EU's EaP collaboration is based on a geographic criterion for selecting partners. The regional approach is characterized by many shortcomings. The member states of the initiative have different goals for cooperation with the EU. Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine are aiming for the highest level of integration possible within the EU and its structures, while other EaP members have different political goals. Apart from structural cooperation, promoting strong strategic relationships amongst six countries with vastly differing foreign policy priorities is difficult. Therefore, as all the partner countries are free to choose their level of cooperation and aspirations towards the EU³⁵, there is no obligations to share the common goals within the framework of EaP, what makes it difficult to set realistic and result-oriented political agenda for countries with different aspirations and geopolitical strategies. Development of more tailored approach is the key towards further advancement of ENP³⁶.

³³ See 12.

³⁴ DAMEN, M., (2019). *Diversifying unity. How Eastern Partnership countries develop their economy, governance and identity in a geopolitical context*, EPRS: European Parliamentary Research Service. Retrieved from <https://policycommons.net/artifacts/1337607/diversifying-unity/1945550/>

³⁵ See 4.

³⁶ Gazzola, P., Sepashvili, E., & Lo Parco, A. (2016). EU integration for a successful eastern partnership: trade and sustainability. *on European Integration 2016*, 247.

Emerson, Noutcheva and Popescu have also made clear distinction between the perception of the EU's Eastern partner states. Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine are described by the authors as countries with a strong ambition to reach the highest level of integration and EU membership. The Armenian case has also been viewed favorably as a country's endeavor to escape from the regional isolation and join the ENP. Although economic development and cooperation is considered as the final goal for the Armenia in relation with the EU. Russia and Azerbaijan are discussed as reluctant states while leaving Belarus and all the secessionist entities excluded from the discussion³⁷.

In addition to the annual association implementation reports as joint staff working documents that provide general overview of the progress achieved within reporting period, several researches have been conducted to assess either individual or collective performance of Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine towards DCFTA implementation and economic integration (Centre for European Policy studies 2021, Policy and Management Consulting Group 2020, Belkania 2019, The Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies 2016). Results show that countries improved their legislations and continue progress through reforming key directions of their economy. Although implementation remains challenging.

Established first as an economic union, the EU represents unique model of economic integration and single market. The EU has already established free trade agreements with a number of countries around the world and is now negotiating accords with a number of additional partners³⁸. Over the last few years, the volume of economic gains received from free trade regimes has increased. The EU is taking a holistic approach to deepening tight partnerships with third countries, which includes both financial and technical help for structural reforms that will benefit both partner nations and the EU³⁹. Furthermore, trade policy is an important part of economic prosperity with a variety of non-economic implications as well. Trade is used as an instrument for the EU to build

³⁷ Emerson, M., Noutcheva, G., & Popescu, N. (2007). European Neighbourhood Policy Two years on: Time indeed for an'ENP plus'. *CEPS Policy Briefs*, (126).

³⁸ European Commission (2022). Overview of FTA and other trade negotiations https://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2006/december/tradoc_118238.pdf

³⁹ European Commission. (2015). Trade for all: Towards a more responsible trade and investment policy. Available at: http://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2015/october/tradoc_153846.pdf

strategic alliances with its partner countries. Trade is considered as a source of economic development as well as technological and societal change⁴⁰.

Opportunities given through the free trade agreements enable "Trio" countries to have an access to one of the largest and competitive market of the world. But it is not only an achievement for the countries but also a challenge. The European integration is built on the solid foundation of market integration⁴¹ where high quality of products as well as fair competition are highly protected. In order to accelerate trade the standards must be matched and the process of harmonization must be undergone to make standards and regulatory framework at least similar⁴². AAs and DCFTAs are the most ambitious forms of cooperation between Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova and the EU⁴³. Despite the clear progress towards bilateral trade relations with the EU, Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova are far from EU market competition and are not able to get tangible outcomes from free trade agreements. Therefore, this study suggests to take "trade relations" as the issue area for the study what makes measuring progress based on a specific issue area rather than the list of policy directions covered by the above-mentioned agreements easier and more result-oriented.

On December 15, 2021 the Heads of three countries met in Brussels at 6th EaP Summit where they once again highlighted the importance of joint commitment to further strengthening the political association and economic integration of three countries with the EU and expressed readiness to advance reforms to meet the Copenhagen Criteria⁴⁴. In their Joint statements parties clearly reaffirmed their aspirations towards European integration and membership of the EU:

“We acknowledged the need to enhance cooperation of the Association Trio with the EU aiming at increased coordination among them on matters of

⁴⁰ Cernat, L. (2019). Trade for You Too: Why Is Trade More Important Than You Think?. *Chief Economist Notes Series, DG TRADE*.

⁴¹ Majone, G. (2009). Dilemmas of European integration: the ambiguities and pitfalls of integration by stealth. OUP Catalogue.

⁴² Majone, G. (2003). Risk Regulation in the European Union: Between Enlargement and the Internationalization. P.11

⁴³ Speech by President Charles Michel at the Batumi International Conference, 2021.
<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/07/19/speech-by-president-charles-michel-at-the-batumi-international-conference/>

⁴⁴ See 7.

*common interest related to advancing European Integration, including recognition of the European perspective of the Association Trio by the EU”.*⁴⁵

The economic consequences of the war in Ukraine will further complicate progress not only in Ukraine but also in Georgia and Moldova. In addition to the economic consequences some scholars also see the membership perspective being premature while having Russian troops and ongoing war in Ukraine⁴⁶. Background review and all the implications of Russian aggression against Ukraine, made it clear that trade facilitation between partner countries and the EU is vital in order to decrease economic dependency of these countries on Russian market.

The research is concentrated on the change in EU attitude after the transformation of EaP into the Associated Trio, the case consists of three partner countries what enables us to conduct comparative study. The research considers three countries’ performance towards accelerating bilateral trade as well as their political rapprochement towards the EU. The Memorandum of Understanding between Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine once again clearly reaffirms countries’ aspirations and goals towards the EU:

*“The Participants agree to establish the "Association Trio" as a format of enhanced cooperation and dialogue among the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of three EU Associated Partners, as well as with the European Union on matters of common interest related to the European integration of their countries, including cooperation within the Eastern Partnership. The Participants express the aspirations of the "Association Trio" countries towards the membership of the European Union and reaffirm their commitments to further progress in the implementation of the Association Agreements with the EU, which, however, do not constitute the final goal of their relations with the EU.”*⁴⁷

⁴⁵ See 7

⁴⁶ Van Elsuwege, P., & Van der Loo, G. (2022). The EU-Ukraine Association Agreement after Ukraine's EU membership application: still fit for purpose.

⁴⁷ Memorandum of Understanding. The Association Trio. 2021, <https://mfa.gov.ge/getattachment/News/%E2%80%8Bsaqartvelom,-ukrainam-da-moldovam-evrointegraciis/MoU-Trio.pdf.aspx>

CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The research employs variety of research techniques and establishes its methodological framework based on integrating theoretical framework and research objectives. Following chapter connects the theories discussed above to the concepts of the research and establishes proper methodology for the operationalization. The first subchapter explains case selection methods and criteria. The second one is dedicated to the conceptualization and operationalization of the research phenomena. The last part of the chapter deals with limitations presented in the research.

2.1 Case Selection:

As mentioned above the countries at the focus of this research are Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. The selection of three countries as the most similar cases for the analysis is determined by their ability to provide useful variation on the dimensions of theoretical interest⁴⁸. The research is a single case study of the “Trio”, however attempts to offer comparative analysis of three member countries’ individual perspectives. Despite the fact that selected countries have partially similar historical background and geopolitical challenges, the research also suggests to compare their performance and achievements towards European integration. As a result, the study of three countries' integration perspectives is relatively similar in some areas while being quite different in others.

First of all, these cases are chosen based on individual commitments and aspirations towards European integration, which are reflected in official documents and countries' political agendas. After gaining independence, all three countries chose its European way of development and demonstrated constant development with various successes in the direction. State governments have defined European integration as their foreign policy priority, showed a lot better performance of reformation process compared to other EaP countries. European integration is defined not only

⁴⁸ Seawright, J., & Gerring, J. (2008). Case selection techniques in case study research: A menu of qualitative and quantitative options. *Political research quarterly*, 61(2), 294-308. P.295

as a foreign policy priority but is discussed within the foreign security dimension⁴⁹. All of them represent active members of the EaP initiative and share common priorities for relation and further integration with the EU structures.

Furthermore, three countries are distinguished from other eastern neighbours by their status of being associated partners which is gained through the AAs signed with the EU. Despite the fact that AAs do not include any kind of membership perspective for the signatories, three countries are given unique opportunity of having open access to all of the benefits known as “four freedoms of the EU single market⁵⁰” such as free movement of goods, services, capital and persons. That puts three countries into unique position and enable them on the one hand to develop domestic legislation, standards and regulation based on guidelines of the AA and in line with the EU *acquis* and on the other hand get various political, economic and cultural benefits along this process. In order to strengthen trilateral cooperation and maximize individual outcomes towards European integration governments of Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine have established “Associated Trio” as a brand new initiative towards fostering bilateral and multilateral relations with each other as well as with the EU.

In addition, case selection is influenced by the recent developments in Eastern Europe that accelerated countries European integration process and resulted in the official application process for the EU membership. In the midst of the war in Ukraine and three nations' applications for the EU membership, it is even more critical to assess the "Trio's" reform progress. The issue requires further analysis and investigation since recent development might become a turning point in the evolution of the “Associated Trio”. Therefore, it is critical to examine previous trade connections of the Trio with the EU in order to gain a better understanding of their readiness to compete on the EU market in the event of a positive decision in favor of applicants and the start of the accession process. In case of negative decision by the EU, this would be also important to examine achievements and challenges of the countries in order to measure effectiveness of current and past activities carried by their governments and have a better vision of how to improve their performance.

⁴⁹ National Security Concept of Georgia.

<https://mfa.gov.ge/MainNav/ForeignPolicy/NationalSecurityConcept.aspx?lang=en-US>

⁵⁰ Kohler, W., & Müller, G. (2017). Brexit, the four freedoms and the indivisibility dogma. *LSE Brexit*.

2.2 Operationalization

The present study analyzes Europeanization and its influence on Eastern Neighborhood countries, main approaches towards European Integration, achievements and perspectives. The overall objective of the research is two-fold: the first to examine to what extent have the DCFTA objectives been achieved in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. And second, to what extent does the Trio approach influenced the progress towards economic integration.

Whereas Europeanization refers to a change on a domestic level aimed at ensuring policy convergence with the EU, the paper suggests to study the Europeanization based on analyzing domestic level changes. The paper conceptualizes Europeanization research as measuring changes in particular areas where misfit has been detected before the transportation of the EU *acquis*. As discussed in previous chapter according to Brozel and Risse “goodness of fit” as a gap between the domestic and the EU level legislation serves as a prerequisite for future change and approximation⁵¹. For that purpose, the research suggests first to examine pre-existing country level norms and regulations before the official formation of the DCFTA with the EU. In other words, in order the change to occur on a domestic level as a result of Europeanization, one should have misfit between the EU level and country level legislation in a particular area of interest. Pre-existing legislature will serve as the baseline for the comparison with the level of progress.

Second, in order to measure the change on a domestic level the research employs an implementation assessment of the DCFTA objectives. The research studies to what extent have the DCFTA objectives been achieved in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. The DCFTA serves first as the proper and detailed guidance for the countries to modernize existing regulations and norms in line with the EU *acquis*. The DCFTA as a source of changes first enable local governments to design their strategies towards reform-making process based on the provisions included in the Agreement and second, later it also makes it possible to measure domestic change based on its chapters serving as the assessment criteria. In addition, the DCFTA related questions also represent solid part of the EU membership questionnaire handed over to the applicant states. Therefore, assessment of baseline conditions and the DCFTA implementation will provide us with a clear

⁵¹ See 20.

vision on individual progress of the countries towards economic integration with the EU single market.

The research aims to analyze both the process of Europeanization and the outcome of this process. In order to search for possible correlation between the Europeanization and changes on domestic level and in order to measure the degree of reform progress towards accelerating trade relations between three countries and the EU the research develops its toolkit (*Table 2.*)based on the Radaeli's matrix related to the domains of Europeanization and types of change⁵², according to which four different extent and direction of Europeanization are distinguished: Inertia, absorption, transformation and retrenchment. Radaeli helps us first, to examine possible correlation between the Europeanization and changes on domestic level and second to measure the level of change and its direction. Here four different aspects are distinguished: inertia, that refers to the lack of change because of significant difference between the EU level and country level political architecture; Second, absorption as a process of consistent adaptation; Third, transformation as paradigmatic change in country level system and fourth, retrenchment as a negative form of Europeanization when national level architecture becomes less European than it was before⁵³.

The degree of reform progress can be operationalized through analyzing reforms implemented by three countries' governments and the statistical data of bilateral trade under the framework of DCFTA. The study will focus mainly on trade. In order to measure the level of change, first, we need to define each of four concepts. Inertia refers to the lack of changes because of significant difference between the EU level and country level political architecture, what makes it more complicated to process harmonization with the EU standards and regulations. Another aspect is absorption can be understood as the process of consistent changes and adaptation. In contrast to the absorption, transformation refers to the fundamental changes in shorter period of time that could be influenced by system change or other significantly changing events. The last of four aspects is retrenchment, that happens when Europeanization has negative influence on country's political architecture and the country becomes less European.

In order to use the Radaeli's Matrix for the analysis, the research suggests to classify above mentioned four concepts as positive or negative changes. Inertia as the lack of change does not

⁵² Annex 1

⁵³ See 18.

provide any sustainable outcomes, it can be considered as neutral condition between the positive and radically negative, when country does not improve its performance but also do not show any characteristics of backsliding. Absorption and transformation can be considered as examples of positive changes in countries' agenda with different speed. First, represents consistent reform-making and implementation process and the second one significant changes and transformation of the system architecture. Retrenchment clearly belongs to the negative classification as defined by the author and is excluded from the particular research interests.

Another part of the analysis is dedicated to the examination of regional approaches and their influence on countries individual perspectives towards better integration within the EU. Following consequential logic suggested by Schimmelfennig, the study examples the EU conditionality based on analysis of the selected cases – “Trio” as a brand-new regional approach, transition from the EaP to the Trio and the role of regional cooperation towards European Integration. Rationalist conditionality model helps us understand the nature of EU conditionality in terms of Neighbourhood Policy in general. In particular case, trade opportunities given to Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine can be discussed as incentives, although the DCFTA directives can be conceptualized as objectives of this conditionality. This kind of categorization follows the EU logic – “more for more” as well and is suitable to the research aims.

2.3 Timeline and data collection

The research is a single case study of the “Associated Trio”, however attempts to offer comparative analysis of three member countries' individual achievements and perspectives. Main methodological approach for the research is qualitative analysis employing variety of research techniques and data collection of primary and secondary sources. At first the study conducted desk research and literature overview consisted of two main parts: the first, overview of the various theoretical approaches towards the Europeanization and its influence on non-member states of the Union as well as review of scholarly sources and various researches conducted in this area of research interest in order to establish baseline for further research.

Empirical analysis employs variety of sources. At first place, qualitative content analysis of the written documents and key official statements are conducted. Analysis covers various sources such as comprehensive analysis of the AAs and DCFTAs, respective annual reports and different expert assessments that contributes towards better understanding of the cooperation framework established by the key agreements as well as helps in assessing level of change occurred through the implementation of the DCFTA objectives. Research uses association implementation reports as the official document used for the reporting and evaluation of countries' progress. Official annual reports as a reliable source of data on the implementation of the Association agenda are accordingly utilized. Together with official statistics and various supporting data, the annual reports are main sources enabling the research to analyze individual progress of the countries towards implementing various objectives of the DCFTA.

In addition, research employs analysis of the official statements of the local government representatives as well as speeches of the EU officials. As the EU primarily focuses on the results of its efforts, the financial and technical support it has provided to the countries, it is important to collect and analyze official Brussels' view on the outcomes and future perspective of the Trio member countries and the acceleration of trade relations with them.

Despite the fact that study neither uses quantitative methodology nor produce quantitative results, it employs quantitative data such as official statistics and economic indicators. Quantitative data as statistics on trade indicators is used in support of the study. Official statistics as a reliable source of quantitative data will help us to explore the benefits and challenges of free trade, policy reforms and implications. The research will analyze official trade statistics of the countries, before and after the removing barriers. Data collected enables study to analyze effects of the DCFTA and different regional cooperation platforms on the trade statistics.

Under the framework of the research, interviews with experts and officials directly involved in association processes will be conducted that will help us to produce new data and add value to the overall understanding of the EaP perspective and the influence of Europeanization to the EU neighborhood in general. As the process in the focus of the research is ongoing during the time of conducting research, the research phenomenon is not sufficiently analyzed. In other words, "Associated Trio" is a new initiative that is not broadly examined by scholars. In addition, the EU membership application process is also in progress and events are changing on a daily basis.

Therefore, it is of great importance to collect information directly from the key informants affiliated to the EU structures and/or directly involved in association processes. Data extracted from the semi-structured qualitative interviews will enrich research perspective. The analysis of selected cases with the help of qualitative interviews could further validate or question outcomes and presents an opportunity for further research.

2.4 Limitations

The research is limited in selection of the cooperation area between the EU and its associated partners. The process of Europeanisation covers almost every area of cooperation such as economic, political, cultural and other dimensions. Copenhagen Criteria of accession also include components other than economic requirements, such as political criterion and administrative capacity to effectively implement the EU acquis⁵⁴. The thesis is concentrated on trade relations between the EU and its Eastern neighbours and therefore does not include analysis of political, cultural or any other variables. That does not minimize or exclude the significance of other criteria, but enable research to conduct proper examinations and provide comprehensive analysis of research phenomena.

CHAPTER 3: Overview of countries' individual progress towards Economic integration with the European Union

The purpose of this chapter is to provide overview of individual developments of three countries in their economic relations with the EU, achievements and challenges as well as trade indicators. Every country has come a long way in this direction. Hence before examining the effectiveness and perspective of the collective approach, it is important to review the individual progress of three countries.

⁵⁴ Accession criteria, European Commission https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/enlargement-policy/glossary/accession-criteria_en

3.1. Georgia

After gaining independence, Georgia chose its European way of development. Bilateral cooperation between the EU and Georgia has covered various areas over the years starting from humanitarian aid and technical assistance to different frameworks of economic and political cooperation. The first Agreement under which parties took commitments towards mutual cooperation was been signed in 1996⁵⁵. According to the Article 43 of the Agreement, Georgia has undertaken responsibility to gradually approximate its legislation to that of the European Union⁵⁶. Since then Georgia is in the process of harmonization and legal approximation with the European standards and values. Georgia's European aspirations are declared in official documents⁵⁷ and highlighted in country's political agenda. In addition, pro-European development is supported by the strong will of Georgian people⁵⁸ to join the EU as a full-fledged member of the European community.

Georgia later moved to the ENP format, which was one of the steps towards closer rapprochement and cooperation and soon also joined the EU cooperation within the framework of EaP based on regional principle. Despite the fact that the member states of the initiative have different goals for cooperation this initiative was aimed at accelerating cooperation between the region countries. On 27 June 2014, Georgia signed the AA with the EU. Since 2017 as a result of the visa liberalization dialogue visa-free regime between the EU and Georgia entered into force. Acknowledging European aspirations of the country the EU with the objective to promote political association and economic integration between signatory parties, enabled Georgia to have an access to four fundamental freedoms of the Union such as: free movement of goods, services, capital and people.

It has to be mentioned that before signing the AA and DCFTA with the EU, Georgia had already started developing liberal trade policy. Georgia has been a member of the World Trade

⁵⁵ EU-Georgia Partnership History. <https://old.infocenter.gov.ge/eng-euinfo-georgia-history/#1>

⁵⁶ PCA - Protocol on mutual assistance between authorities in customs matters - Final Act - Joint Declarations - Exchange of Letters in relation to the establishment of companies - Declaration of the French Government <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX%3A21999A0804%2801%29>

⁵⁷ Constitution of Georgia, 2018. Article 78. <https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/30346?publication=36>

⁵⁸ NDI (2017), Public attitudes in Georgia Results https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI_April_2017_political%20Presentation_ENG_version%20final.pdf

Organization (WTO) since 2000⁵⁹ and had implemented different actions towards improving its regulations and business environment. For instance Georgia was occupying 15th position on the Ease of Doing Business Ranking⁶⁰ which is quite important highlight of country profiles in terms of the foreign direct investments (FDI) and free movement of capital. Although, concluding agreement with the EU did not bring economic benefits for granted. Georgia had to undergo significant reforms and the process of harmonizing its legislative framework, standards and regulations with the EU level standards and practices.

Concluding DCFTA with the EU had caused indirect positive effects as well. Georgia has become more attractive for other trading partners. In 2017 Georgia became the first country of the region to sign the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with China in order to strengthen their economic partnership and accelerate bilateral trade⁶¹. In 2018 Georgia signed FTA also with Hong Kong which was quite comprehensive by nature covering different areas of cooperation such as trade in goods and service, investments and etc.⁶² Furthermore, in 2019 Georgia signed Strategic Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with the United Kingdom (UK) aimed at fostering a broad strategic partnership in security, economic, cultural and other dimensions⁶³

The key priorities for actions were defined by the Association Agenda 2017-2020. According to the document trade and trade related matters were one of the main cooperation area, where several directions were distinguished such as: trade in goods, technical regulations, sanitary and phytosanitary measures (SPS), competition and etc. With the DCFTA, Georgia and the EU now enjoy almost completely tariff-free trade. Remaining trade restrictions are on the EU side, with many reservations restricting access to its service markets. In the agro-food sector the most

⁵⁹ WTO, 2022. Georgia and the WTO. https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/countries_e/georgia_e.htm

⁶⁰ World Bank, Doing Business Annual Report, 2016.

<https://www.doingbusiness.org/content/dam/doingBusiness/media/Annual-Reports/English/DB16-Full-Report.pdf>

⁶¹ Free Trade Agreement Between the Government of Georgia and the Government of the People's Republic of China, 2017. Preamble. Retrieved from:

http://www.economy.ge/uploads/files/2017/foreign_trade/tavisufali_vachrobis_shetanxmeba_georgia_china/she_tankhmeba_2018/page_0_60_145_179_china_georgia_fta_for_georgia_.pdf

⁶² Georgia-Hong Kong, China Free Trade Agreement, 2018. Retrieved from:

http://www.economy.ge/uploads/files/2017/foreign_trade/georgia_hong_kong/eng_1/georgia_hong_kong_china_free_trade_agreement_main_agreement.pdf

⁶³ Strategic Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Georgia, 2019. Preamble. Retrieved from:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/844167/CS_Georgia_1.2019_UK_Georgia_Strategic_Partnership_and_Cooperation_Agreement.pdf

important limitations to trade lie in the EU's sanitary and SPS regulations, but Georgia has embarked on a comprehensive strategy to align with EU practice. This requires costly investments in institutional infrastructure and farming practices that will take still several years to complete, which Georgia is following the gradual schedule for implementation of EU/international industrial product standards.

Table 1. Trade between Georgia and EU countries (\$ million) 2014-2021

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Total turnover	11,463	9,508	9,459	10,803	12,742	13,318	11,396	14,346
Growth (%)		-17%	-1%	14%	18%	5%	-14%	26%
Turnover EU-GE	2,877	2,614	2,635	2,768	3,166	3,110	2,547	3,031
Growth (%)		-9%	1%	5%	14%	-2%	-18%	19%
Share (%)	25%	27%	28%	26%	25%	23%	22%	21%
Total exports	2,861	2,204	2,117	2,746	3,380	3,798	3,343	4,242
Exports to EU	599	623	550	642	713	806	697	717
Growth (%)		-23%	-4%	30%	23%	12%	-12%	27%
Share (%)	21%	28%	26%	23%	21%	21%	21%	17%
Total imports	8,602	7,304	7,342	8,057	9,362	9,519	8,053	10,104
Imports from EU	2,277	1,991	2,084	2,126	2,453	2,304	1,850	2,314
Growth (%)		-13%	5%	2%	15%	-6%	-20%	25%
Share (%)	26%	27%	28%	26%	26%	24%	23%	23%
Balance with the EU	-1,678	-1,368	-1,534	-1,484	-1,740	-1,499	-1,153	-1,597

Table 1. Authors own compilation. Source: geostat

There was considerable growth over the last several years, before the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2020 the EU was the number one export market for Georgia with about 21% and also sourced about 23% of its import from there. In 2020, Georgia's total foreign trade decreased by 15% compared to the same period of the previous year. In this period, overall trade turnover between the EU and Georgia decreased by 21%, export by 15% and import by 23%.

The commodity structure of Georgia's trade with the EU has seen food and beverages remaining an important sector for its exports, but the biggest growth has been in industrial supplies (mainly minerals). Imports from the EU have been dominated by petroleum products, medicaments and motor cars and other machinery. Since the application of the DCFTA in 2014, several new products (kiwi, dried lemon, persimmon, blueberry, quince, fruit jams, honey, pet furniture, and glass bottles) have been exported to the EU market, but in limited quantities. At this stage many Georgian food products cannot satisfy EU food safety requirements. Georgia needs to approximate EU legislation on sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures in order to receive the necessary recognition of its products by EU authorities. Georgia has already prepared and agreed a legislative approximation list in the SPS field with the European Commission, which envisaged gradual approximation over the period until 2027⁶⁴.

The positive effects of the DCFTA are likely to grow significantly over the long term, with "diagonal cumulation" of rules of origin with Turkey and progressive approximation of EU legislation on SPS measures and technical barriers to trade (TBT)⁶⁵. The new developments related to activation of the diagonal cumulation with Turkey, Ukraine and Moldova, as well as recently signed and to be signed free trade agreements will further increase Georgia's attractiveness as a trade and investment hub connected to the European market.

3.2 Republic of Moldova

Moldova expressed its interest to join the EU since late 1990's. After Romania's accession to the EU, Moldova got closer to the EU in terms of sharing border. On the one hand Moldova

⁶⁴ Association Implementation Report on Georgia 2021, European Commission
https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2021_association_implementation_report_in_georgia.pdf

⁶⁵ Preferential Trade, 2020, European Commission
https://ec.europa.eu/taxation_customs/system/files/2020-06/01_2019_guidance_preferential_origin.pdf

represented good example of being tied with the EU through sharing the history with Romania and on the other hand Moldova was closely linked to the Soviet Union and its successor Russian Federation as a post-soviet country similar to Georgia and Ukraine. Despite its difficult geopolitical location, Moldova has declared its rapprochement with the EU in official documents⁶⁶. At that time Moldova was dependent on its international partners and attempting to raise awareness on its newly gained independence and getting international recognition. The EU had acknowledged Moldova's⁶⁷ sovereignty within borders of its full territory including Separatist Republic of Transnistria. In addition Moldova was striving for balancing Russian influence on its territory and in the region⁶⁸.

Economic cooperation and trade relations with the EU were included in Moldova's political agenda. The first treaty between the country and the EU was signed on November 28, 1994 and defined framework for the relationship between parties. Since then the EU has started promoting Democracy and Free market through political, economic and cultural cooperation, investments and trade relations. Calus and Kosienkowski distinguish factors behind the choice of Moldovan people and government towards EU. Addition to the political decision to minimize Russian pressure on country politics, the access to the market and trade facilitation between the EU and Moldova is one of the main reasons. Economic cooperation is discussed in close relation to the faster development and progress. Therefore, better access to the largest European market that accounts for almost half of Moldova's external trade are one of the main drivers towards the pro-European development⁶⁹.

External trade plays crucial role in Moldova's economy and gross domestic products (GDP). For decades, the Russia has been Moldova's most important trading partner, including the amount of re-exported commodities. Trade partnership with Russia is characterized by fluctuating nature. For example, number of sanctions such as bans on products and import duties had affected number of exports from Moldova to Russia in 2014⁷⁰. Another aspect that had significant impact on

⁶⁶ Foreign Policy Concept of the Republic of Moldova, 1995.

https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=60504&lang=ru

⁶⁷ Wróbel, J. (2004). The European Union and Moldova. *EuroJournal. org-Journal of Foreign Policy of Moldova*, (08).

⁶⁸ Całus, K., & Kosienkowski, M. (2018). Relations between Moldova and the European Union. In *The European Union and its eastern neighbourhood* (pp. 99-113). Manchester University Press.

⁶⁹ See 69.

⁷⁰ Popa, A. (2015). Moldova and Russia: between trade relations and economic dependence. *Chișinău: Expert-Grup*.

Moldavian exports to Russia was Agreement between the EU and Moldova. The highest achievement for Moldova towards EU integration was signing the AA in order to accelerate political and economic relations and integrate Moldova into the EU Market. AA includes DCFTA that is aimed at providing far-reaching regulatory approximation and market access liberalization⁷¹. The Agreement provides transitional periods from three to ten years for asymmetric trade liberalization. In addition, AA together with visa liberalization had been accompanied by the technical and financial assistance that would process EU conditionality. Despite of the liberalization of Moldova's trade policy and its history of trading with Europe, the country should undertake the list of reforms in order to have an access to the advantages given through the DCFTA such as improving quality of products and raise its competitiveness on the EU market.

The main tool of AA implementation for the countries is Association Agenda that is negotiated together with the European Commission and defines key directions of implementation for a given period of time. According to the Agenda 2017 one of the key priority areas to be improved is Trade related reforms such as technical regulations, standardization, customs and trade facilitation⁷². The document serves as proper guidance, defining short, medium and long-term priorities for further development. The Agenda once again highlights the importance of DCFTA implementation: “ It is therefore expected that implementation of this part of the Agreement, will be granted a level of priority commensurate with its importance in the overall context of the AA and in the framework of EU-Republic of Moldova relations”⁷³.

⁷¹ EU-Moldova Association Agreement, Article 1. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv%3AOJ.L_.2014.260.01.0004.01.ENG

⁷² Association Agenda between the European Union and the Republic of Moldova, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:22017D1489&from=RO>.

⁷³ Association Agenda between the European Union and the Republic of Moldova, article 2.5. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:22017D1489&from=RO>

3.3 Ukraine

“Ukraine is a priority partner for the EU”.⁷⁴ Strategic partnership is mutually beneficial for both parties. First of all, the EU and Ukraine have common border. Ukraine has the largest economy and is the EU's major trading partner out of the Trio countries, as well as the rest of the EaP nations.⁷⁵ Similar to the other two countries the EU started strategic cooperation with Ukraine through cooperation framework PCA in 1994 that has been changed by the AA that entered into force in September, 2017 as “the most advanced agreement ever negotiated by the EU”.⁷⁶ It has to be mentioned that the implementation of the Agreement had been postponed because of Russian pressure for a year. In addition to the free trade regime established through the DCFTA – Article IV of the AA between the EU and Ukraine, country also enjoys visa liberalization benefits. Despite the fact that it does not have a legally binding character, the Preamble of the AA once again highlights Ukraine’s European aspirations and underlines recognition of the country by the EU as a member of the European society:

“The parties RECOGNISING that Ukraine as a European country shares a common history and common values with the Member States of the European Union (EU) and is committed to promoting those values;

CONFIRMING that the European Union acknowledges the European aspirations of Ukraine and welcomes its European choice, including its commitment to building a deep and sustainable democracy and a market economy.”⁷⁷

The DCFTA is distinguished from any other trade agreements because it is aimed at gradually integrate countries with the EU internal market. The EU-Ukraine FTA is comprehensive by its nature as it is consisted of fifteen chapters and covers all the areas of bilateral trade. Overall

⁷⁴ Factsheet. EU-Ukraine relations: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/44402/685-annex-5-f-ukraine-factsheet.pdf>

⁷⁵ Spiliopoulos, O. (2014). The EU-Ukraine association agreement as a framework of integration between the two parties. *Procedia Economics and Finance*, 9, 256-263.

⁷⁶ European Council, Press Remarks by H. Van Rompuy, President of the European Council, following the EU-Ukraine Summit, Brussels, 25 February 2013, EUCO 48/13. Available at: , accessed 30.06.2014.

⁷⁷ The EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, 2014. Preamble: https://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2016/november/tradoc_155103.pdf

assessment of the DCFTA impact on bilateral trade between the EU and Ukraine is positive. The EU is the largest trading partner of Ukraine and Ukraine ranks seventeenth in the list of EU trading partners. Despite various improvements, Ukraine also needs to undertake significant reforms. Another key feature of the agreement is its dynamic nature that enable parties to revise annexes of the document. Ukraine's economy has been hit by several crises over the last decade. This feature is of high importance in post-war period and enable signatories to adjust the agreement to the new economic reality and moderate guidance towards further advancement of bilateral trade relations⁷⁸.

Both exports and imports between the EU and Ukraine fell in 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In June 2020, imports were at a minimum of € 1.2 billion increased to € 2.3 billion by December 2021. In April 2020, exports decreased to a minimum of € 1.5 billion and later increased to € 2.6 billion by the end of 2021 year.

Figure 1. Trade Balance Between the EU and Ukraine (€ billion) 2011-2021

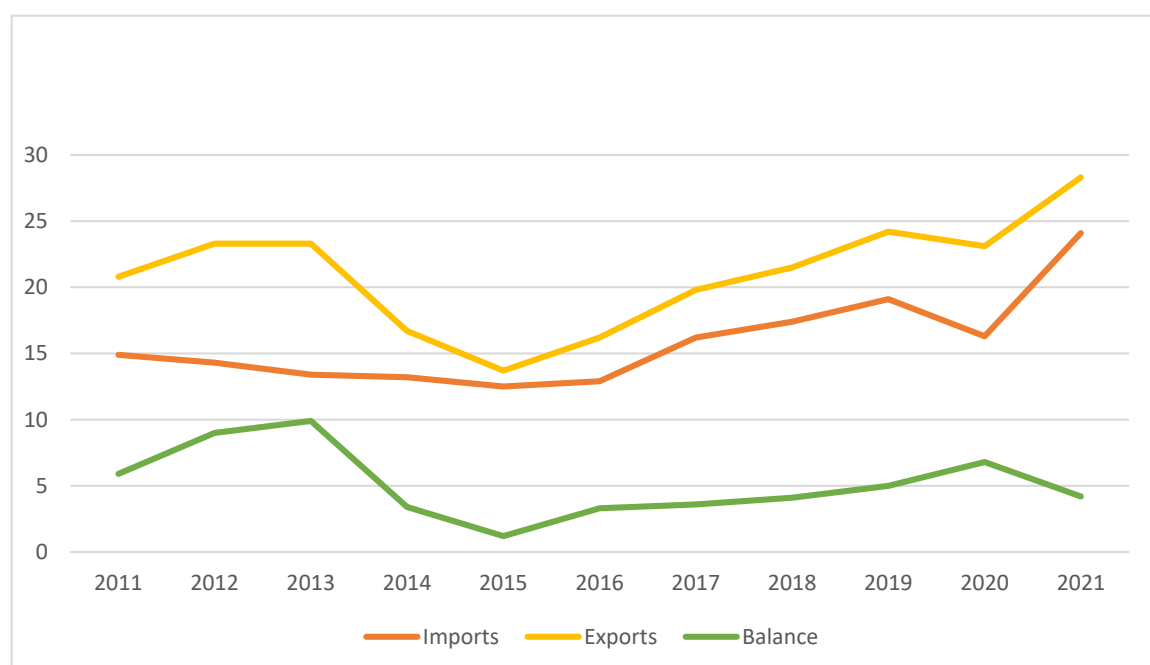


Figure 1. Trade Balance Between the EU and Ukraine, 2011-2021. Source: eurostat⁷⁹

Recent developments in Eastern Europe have significantly changed the reality not only for Ukraine but for the region countries and the EU. On February 24 Russian Federation has launched full-

⁷⁸ See 46.

⁷⁹ Eurostat, Imports, Exports and Trade balance between the EU and Ukraine, 2011-2021
[https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Ukraine-EU - international trade in goods statistics](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Ukraine-EU_-_international_trade_in_goods_statistics)

scale war on Ukraine's territory⁸⁰. On February 28, in order to increase defense capabilities⁸¹ Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky officially submitted application for the EU membership:

"We call on the European societies and states that have demonstrated unity with the people of Ukraine during Russia's ongoing war not only against Ukraine but also against the entire civilized world to show solidarity with Ukraine and support its membership of the European Union.

*We call on the European Union to immediately start the formal procedure which will lead to the civil granting to Ukraine of status as a candidate for membership of the European Union"*⁸².

CHAPTER 4: EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

The chapter is divided into three parts. The first part is dedicated to the analysis of the DCFTA objectives. The subchapter is aimed at providing better understanding of the DCFTA requirements as well as demonstrating countries' progress towards implementing various reforms emerging from the Agreement objectives. The chapter measures level of change in domestic legislation based on the overview of the Agreement and respective analysis made based on annual reports. The analysis draws on a variety of sources, including comprehensive examination of the AAs and DCFTAs, annual reports, and expert assessments. Annual Association Reports prepared jointly by the European Commission and the European External Action Service outline implementation of reforms under the AA and is used as a main source of information when evaluating a country's progress toward achieving the DCFTA goals. Analysis also employ various bilateral trade statistics and enables assessing overall dynamics of trade relations.

⁸⁰ Russia's Invasion to Ukraine, February 24, 2022. DW <https://www.dw.com/en/russias-invasion-of-ukraine/t-60931789>

⁸¹ Ukraine applies for EU membership, EU hesitant, February 28, 2022, the Brussels Times <https://www.brusselstimes.com/208765/ukraine-applies-for-eu-membership-eu-hesitant>

⁸² Ukraine's application for membership of the European Union.
<https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/CM-2003-2022-INIT/en/pdf>

The second part analyzes the role of regional cooperation platforms in the process of Europeanization and correlation between the Trio approach and integration perspectives. Data extracted from the interviews enable research to outline key findings and distinguish key challenges that avoid Trio countries from the better implementation of the EU *acquis*. Any level of reform progress should be positively assessed and recognized from the EU in order to be counted as successful and have positive outcomes in terms of economic integration. Therefore, in the final part of the chapter the research demonstrates to what extent have the trio approach influenced three countries economic integration within the EU.

4.1 Achieving the DCFTA Objectives – level of change and its direction

Opening the EU single market and increasing trade opportunities for Agreement signatories through removing trade barriers is a great opportunity for countries and also the greatest achievement in their history of integration process. Although as the AAs entail legally binding commitments towards reform-making process and transformation of regulatory frameworks in various fields, the need to carry out reforms is an important part of the agenda set by the Republic of Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine after the signing of the Agreement with the EU. The AAs serve as the guidance and action plans for countries' rapprochement with the EU, aimed at bringing the regulatory frameworks and enforcement mechanisms in these countries into line with the EU regulations and standards in order them to have an access to the benefits of AAs and DCFTAs, and also to create additional opportunities for the residents of these countries as the primary beneficiaries of the overall progress. But taking full advantage out of the DCFTA remains challenging for the countries.

The DCFTA require such a high level of harmonization and legal approximation to the EU and its legislation that its effective implementation will make the process of Europeanization of signatory countries irreversible. It is worth mentioning that the reform-making process requires considerable effort from both the legislative and government bodies as well as civil society representatives. Public Private Dialogue is also important, especially when it comes to the economic reforms. The DCFTAs as an integral part of the AAs consisted of fifteen chapters each are comprehensive by

nature and cover all of the areas of bilateral trade. The most of the clauses impose legally binding obligations while the rest of provisions require only soft commitment from the signatories.

National Treatment and Market Access for Goods

The WTO defines a market access for goods as following: “the conditions, tariff and non-tariff measures, agreed by members for the entry of specific goods into their markets”⁸³. Abolishing tariff barriers such as import duties is one of the significant benefits of the DCFTA. In contrast to the Agreement signed with Georgia, the DCFTA’s introduced to Ukraine and Moldova include transitional periods of 10 years. Within this period, countries should gradually establish free trade areas and modernize their trade relations through opening markets, removing custom barriers such as tariffs and quotas, harmonizing legislative frameworks in various trade-related sectors. The DCFTAs provide direct economic benefits through giving access to the European single market. Furthermore, the agreement objectives encourage creation of secure environment for foreign investments and improve business climate in signatory countries.

Trade dynamics have been affected several times over the past few years as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia’s War in Ukraine. According the latest statistics the EU remains the most important partner for the Ukraine, as bilateral trade accounted more than 40% of Ukraine’s total trade in goods and 1.2% of the EU trade in 2021⁸⁴. The EU is also main trade partner for Georgia by accounting around 24% of total trade⁸⁵. In case of Moldova, the EU is the biggest trade partner accounting more than 54% of Moldova’s total trade. It has to be mentioned that Moldova exports about 64% of total exports to the EU Market⁸⁶.

⁸³ WTO, Market Access for Goods. https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/markacc_e/markacc_e.htm

⁸⁴ WOLFGANG, I., & Lorenz, K. R. A. M. E. R. (2022). EU-Ukraine trade and investment relations and the impact of Russia’s war.

⁸⁵ EU-Georgia Trade Relations. European Commission, 2021. from: https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/countries-and-regions/georgia_en

⁸⁶ EU-Moldova Trade Relations. European Commission, 2021. https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/countries-and-regions/moldova_en

Figure 2. EU-Georgia Trade in goods € billions

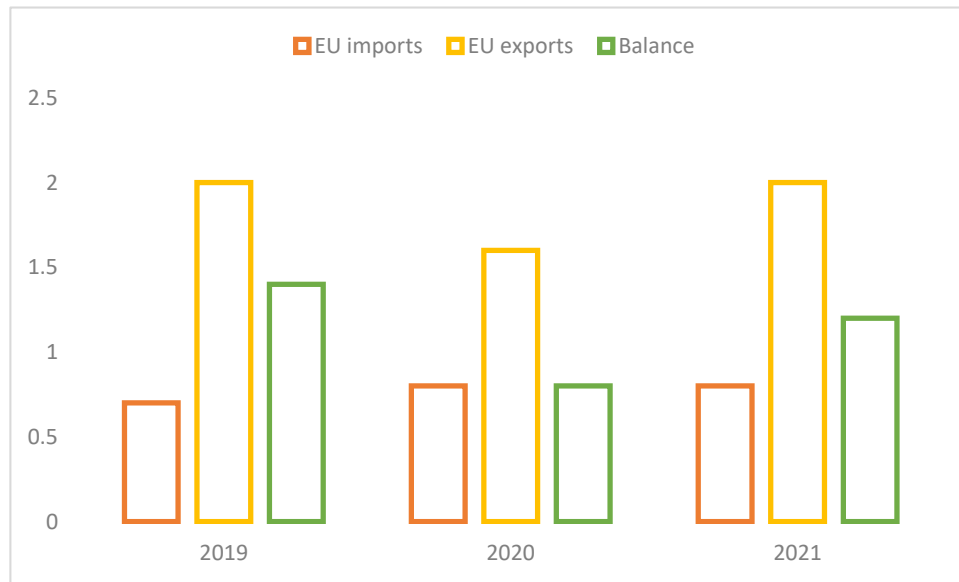


Figure 2. EU-Georgia Trade in goods € billions. Source: European Commission⁸⁷

Figure 3. EU-Moldova Trade in goods € billions

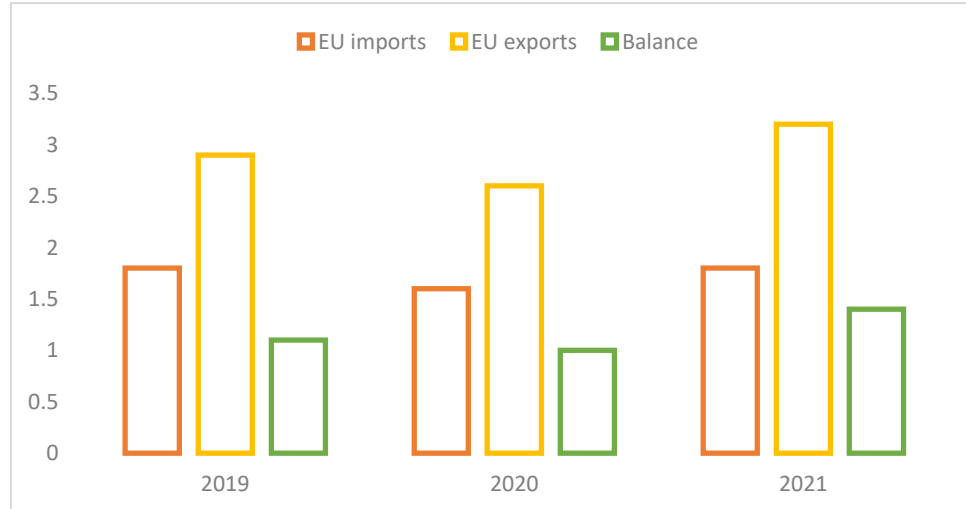


Figure 3. EU-Moldova Trade in goods € billions. Source: European Commission⁸⁸

⁸⁷ European Commission 2021, Georgia, EU trade relations Georgia. Facts, figures and latest developments. retrievable https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/countries-and-regions/georgia_en

⁸⁸ European Commission (2021), Moldova, EU trade relations with Moldova. Facts, figures and latest developments. https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/countries-and-regions/moldova_en

Figure 4. EU-Ukraine Trade in goods € billion

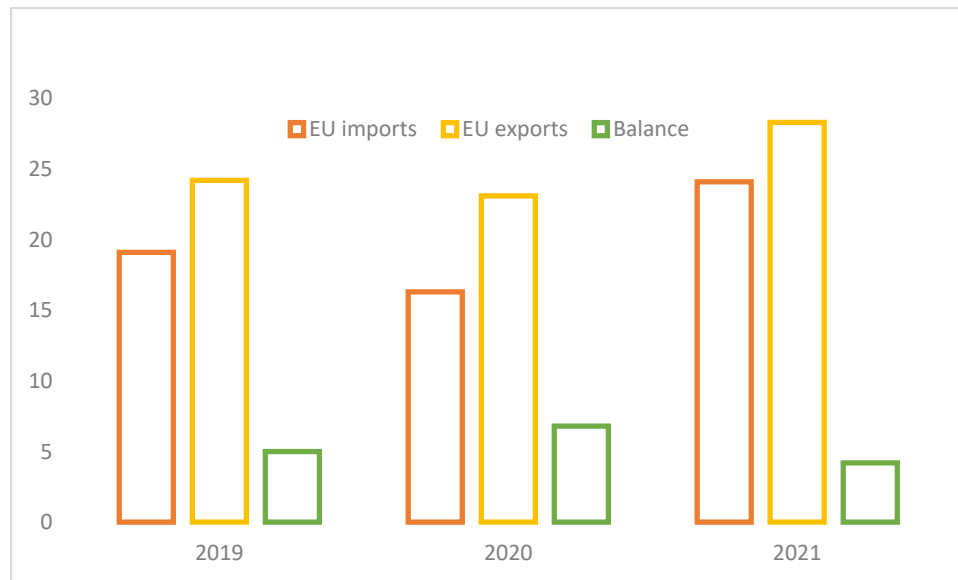


Figure 4. EU-Ukraine Trade in goods € billions. Source: European Commission⁸⁹

Trade Remedies

This chapter applies to the actions taken towards strengthening trade defence measures. Safeguard measures cover both bilateral and global trade and is also included in WTO agreement on safeguard measures. As already mentioned three countries are members of the WTO (Georgia has joined the organization in 2000 year; Moldova in 2001 and Ukraine – in 2008), therefore have already implemented different actions towards improving its regulations and business environment including defence measures on trade. Despite the fact that integration within EU single market requires specific standards and include defence measures, three countries had already demonstrated some improvements towards liberalizing their trade strategy including defence measures and access to the preferential trade regimes for example with CIS countries. Therefore, the gap between the country level and the EU level legislation related to market liberalization and trade remedies was relatively smaller than in other area.

⁸⁹ European Commission (2021), Ukraine, EU trade relations with Ukraine. Facts, figures and latest developments. https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/countries-and-regions/ukraine_en

Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT)

Three countries showed continuous progress towards removing tariff-barriers and liberalization. Although elimination of non-tariff barriers remains challenging. The Chapter 3 on TBT applies to the adoption of EU level standards and regulations, metrology, accreditation and conformity assessment. Countries take responsibility to carry out institutional and administrative reforms, in order to incorporate the EU acquis into domestic legislation and achieve conformity with the Union's technical standards and regulations⁹⁰. Technical barriers impose one of the biggest challenge for state governments as well as private sector representatives as it requires comprehensive changes of quality and standards of the traded goods and service. The DCFTA foresees adoption of 25 000 standards and relevant implementation mechanisms covering almost every area of bilateral trade relations. State governments are in charge of process gradual approximation with above mentioned standards. Although TBT remains one of the biggest challenge that avoids private sector representatives to have open access to the largest market of the world.

Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures

Another challenging area for all three countries is included in the Agreement as SPS measures. The chapters on SPS measures are included in all three DCFTAs and apply to all sanitary and phytosanitary measures that has direct or indirect effect on bilateral trade. In addition to the legislative changes and implementation, the certification for exporting goods remains as issue. Georgia has approximated 169 out of 272 SPS standards and finalized 6 years National Plan for the Agriculture and Rural Development⁹¹. In addition, country improved its strategy towards authorization of Georgian products. For instance, country got the permission to export animal-by products for pet food to the EU⁹². Moldova received the authorization for exporting dairy products and also accreditation for diagnostics of animal health monitoring. Although some additional

⁹⁰ EU-Georgia Association Agreement. Articles 44-46

⁹¹ Georgia Association Implementation Report 2021. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/2021-association-implementation-report-georgia_en

⁹² Association Implementation Report 2021. Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia, 2021: <https://mepa.gov.ge/En/News/Details/20226>

reforms should be undertaken in this area⁹³. The SPS strategy of Ukraine has been slowed down several times but continue the process of legal approximation with the EU standards. In addition, Ukraine is working on sectoral cooperation. Already received several certificates to export eggs and poultry products to the EU and is working on additional authorizations⁹⁴. Achievements are clear but only on a basis of sectoral cooperation and does not refer to the overall progress towards improving SPS measures.

Customs and Trade Facilitation

Customs and trade facilitation is one of the key parts of the DCFTA aimed at reinforcing cooperation through “fulfilling the objectives of effective control and support facilitation of legitimate trade as a matter of principle”⁹⁵. The abolition of customs barriers is important issue towards facilitating bilateral trade. Parties take responsibilities to ensure non-discriminatory, stable and transparent customs legislation. Ukraine has implemented some reforms and adopted secondary regulations to meet the agreement requirements⁹⁶. Georgia has established additional transit procedures and regulations, as well as joining the Common Transit Convention, which sets a common transit protocol for all signatory countries⁹⁷. Moldova has not joined the Convention yet but has adopted new customs code and made some progress in this area following COVID-19 financial assistance.

Establishment, Trade in Services and Electronic Commerce

This Chapter deals with three key areas of cooperation: establishment, cross-border supply of services and temporary presence of natural persons for business purposes. The importance of the electronic commerce in line with the digitalization of economy and finances became significant during the pandemic, that accelerated commitments and interests towards constantly increasing and developing area such as electronic commerce and digital trade. Trade in services is the unique

⁹³ Moldova Association Implementation Report 2021.

https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/swd_2021_295_f1_joint_staff_working_paper_en_v2_p1_1535649.pdf

⁹⁴ Ukraine Association Implementation Report 2020.

https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2020_ukraine_association_implementation_report_final.pdf

⁹⁵ EU-Georgia Association Agreement, Article 66.

⁹⁶ See 95.

⁹⁷ European Commission. Union and Common Transit. https://ec.europa.eu/taxation_customs/business/customs-procedures-import-and-export/what-customs-transit/union-and-common-transit_en

area where three countries assessment shows contrasting results (*figure 5-7*). Trade in services is less utilized opportunity than trade in goods also is currently emerging and developing. Three countries are in charge of defining their strategy towards accelerating bilateral trade in this area as well as digitalize domestic economies.

Figure 5. EU-Georgia Trade in services € billions.

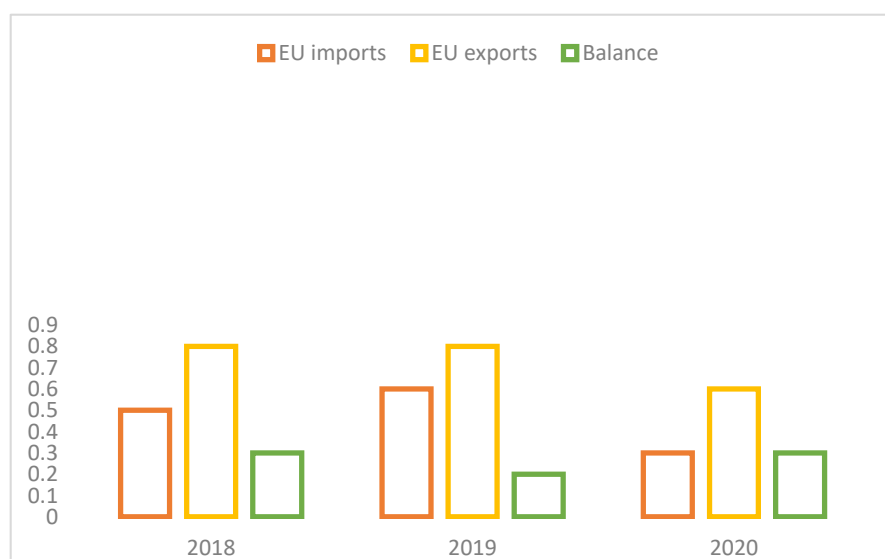


Figure 5. EU-Georgia Trade in services € billions. Source European Commission

Figure 6. EU-Moldova Trade in services € billions.

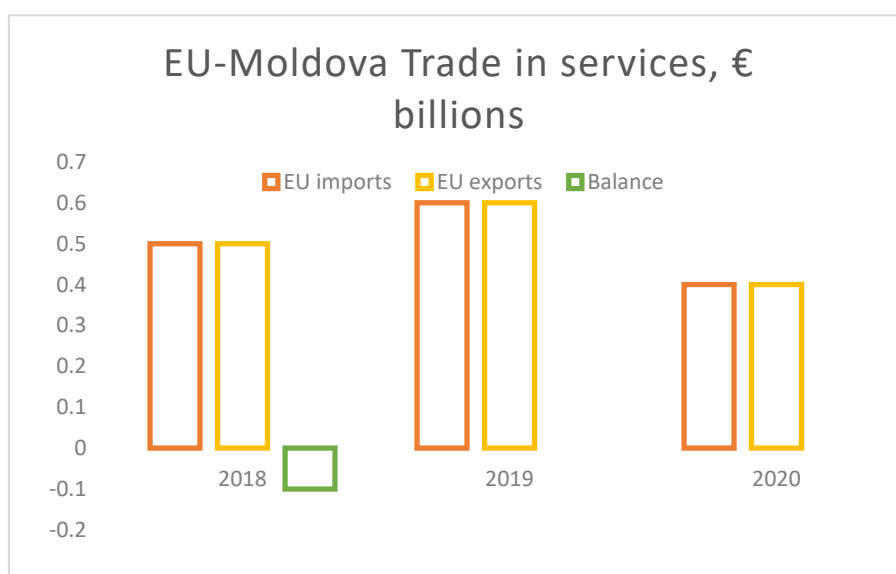


Figure 6. EU-Moldova Trade in services € billions. Source: European Commission

Figure 7. EU-Ukraine Trade in services € billions

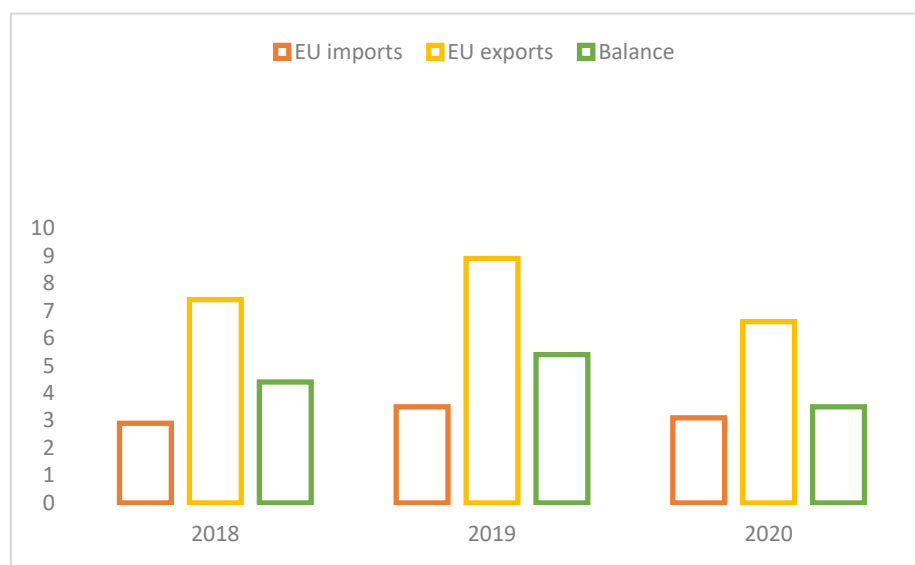


Figure 7. EU-Ukraine Trade in services € billions. Source: European Commission

Current Payments and Movement of Capital

Free movement of capital is one of the freedoms of the EU and covers not only its single market but also capital movement between the EU and its trade partners globally. The objective of this Chapter is to ensure free movement of the capital and convertibility of the currencies in accordance with the regulations established by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Countries took commitments in order to improve structural and regulatory framework and establish necessary preconditions for joining the EU capital market. Although, financial stability and business climate also have direct effect on capital movement and FDI inflow. Over the last few years Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine have undertaken significant economic reforms resulting in impressive growth rates and improved business climate. According to the Ease of Doing Business 2019 Georgia is ranked 7 among world economies, Moldova - 48 and Ukraine - 64⁹⁸. Nevertheless, a

⁹⁸ Ease of Doing Business Ranking: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IC.BUS.EASE.XQ>

range of critical constraints such as low productivity and export rates, low adherence to international standards still impede economic growth.

Figure 8. EU-Georgia FDI, € billions (year 2020) source: European Commission



Figure 8. EU-Georgia FDI, € billions (year 2020) source: European Commission

Figure 9. EU-Moldova FDI, € billions (year 2020) source: European Commission

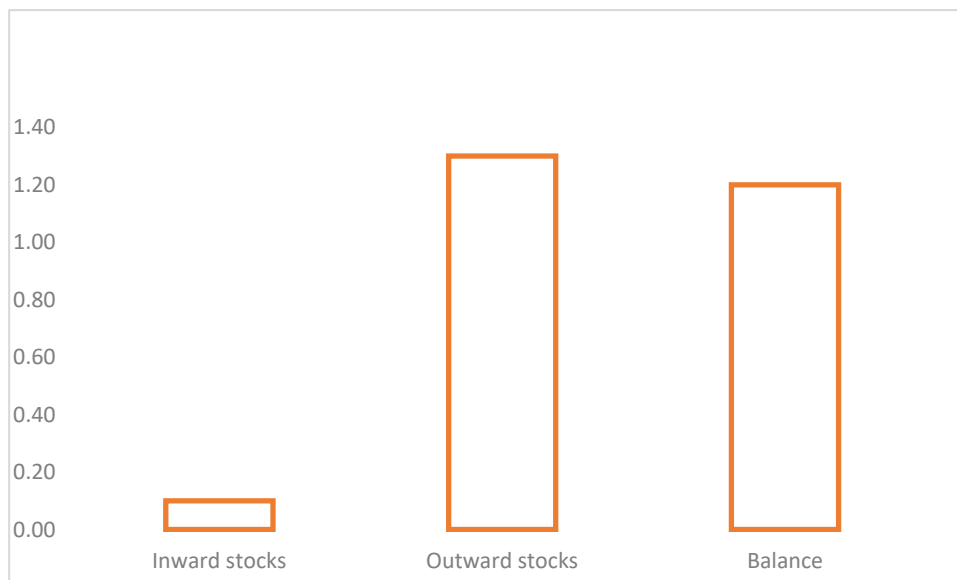


Figure 9. EU-Moldova FDI, € billions (year 2020) source: European Commission

Figure 10. EU-Ukraine FDI, € billions (year 2020)

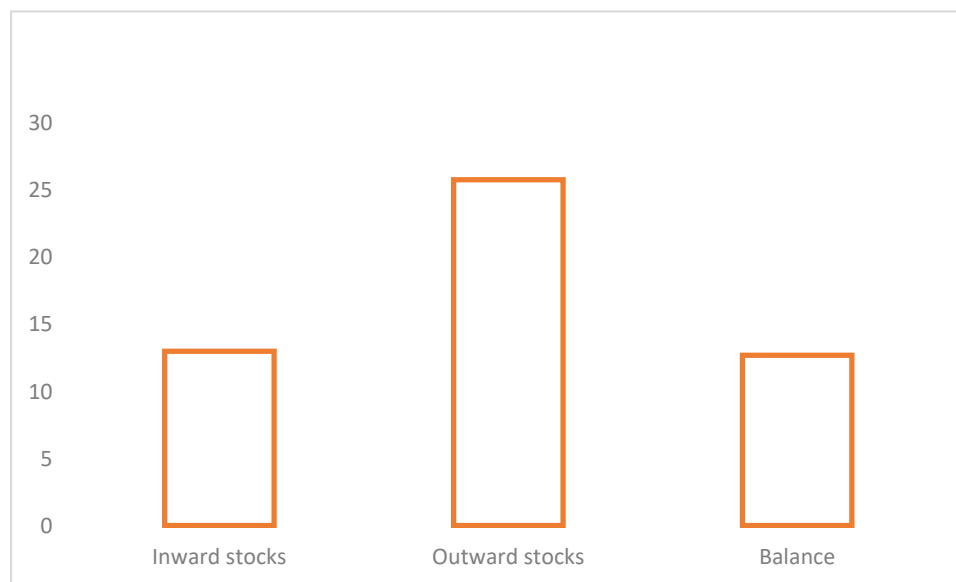


Figure 10. EU-Ukraine FDI, € billions (year 2020) source: European Commission

Public Procurement

Public procurement is of great economic importance for Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, especially considering EU integration. Public procurement accounts for around 14% of GDP in the EU⁹⁹ and offers an enormous potential market for private companies. Georgia has completed the first phase of the Public Procurement Roadmap but needs to undertake various amendments in order to approximate its legislation to the EU acquis¹⁰⁰. Ukraine and Moldova also require further amendment to their legislations. Ensuring transparency and efficiency of public procurement system remain challenging for all three countries.

Intellectual Property

Countries have shown some progress in the field of Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs). This part obliges countries to approximate their legislation in two directions: protection and enforcement

⁹⁹ European Commission. Public Procurement. https://ec.europa.eu/growth/single-market/public-procurement_en

¹⁰⁰ See 66.

systems. IPRs have complex nature. In addition to the relevant legislative framework, awareness raising and cooperation among different stakeholders are required. All three countries have advancements in this field. Although Moldova has faced challenges related to the low cooperation among the stakeholders as well as lack of competent authority responsible for enforcement of intellectual property rights¹⁰¹. Key parts of the IPRs such as copyrights and quality control of Geographical indicators and remain challenging also for Georgia and Ukraine.

Competition

One of the conditions “to which any country wishing to become a member of the EU must conform is a functioning market economy and the ability to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the EU”¹⁰². Competition clause is consisted of two main parts: mergers and antitrust and state aid. The chapters on competition are almost similar to the EU legislature. Therefore, improving legislative framework and establish effective implementation tools for competition policy directly lead countries towards better integration into the EU market and bring them closer to the EU in terms of already engaging into the fair competition on of the largest market. Georgian government successfully implemented DCFTA provisions on competition law and modified procedural mechanisms for better implementation together with different domestic regulatory structures¹⁰³. Ukraine and Moldova have also improved their domestic competition legislations, although facing challenges towards implementation in terms of ensuring impartiality of the relevant authority responsible for fair competition on the market¹⁰⁴.

Trade-Related Energy

The Chapter on Trade-Related Energy deals with the free trade provisions to the energy goods: crude oil, natural gas and electrical energy. Countries take responsibility to abolish custom duties and quantitative restrictions on energy. Chapter also includes provisions on cooperation on energy infrastructure and determination of prices based on market prices¹⁰⁵. All three countries are

¹⁰¹ See 94.

¹⁰² Copenhagen Criteria. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=LEGISSUM:accession_criteria_copenhagen

¹⁰³ See 66.

¹⁰⁴ See 94.

¹⁰⁵ European Commission, (2021), Ex-post Evaluation of the DCFTA between the EU, Georgia and Moldova. https://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2021/may/tradoc_159581.pdf

contracting parties of the Energy Community Treaty according to which the Contracting Parties made legally binding commitments to adopt core EU energy legislation, the so-called "acquis communautaire"¹⁰⁶. The treaty defines basic requirements for signatories and helps them to keep pace with EU advancements while harmonizing their domestic rules with EU regulations.

Transparency

Transparency component is included by almost every cooperation area covered by AAs. Although, the aim of the Chapter on Transparency of the DCFTA oblige countries to establish predictable regulatory framework based on proportionality and legal certainty. Parties should cooperate through exchange of the best practice in order to promote transparency and the principles of good administration. Countries actively cooperate towards this area through different cooperation platforms and technical assistance programs.

Trade and Sustainable Development

Ensuring sustainability is one of the key objectives of the EU in every area of cooperation with its Eastern Neighbours. The chapter establishes three fundamental and reinforcing pillars for future development such as economic development, social development and environmental protection. Despite the fact that parties are free in determining their individual environmental policies and sustainable development strategy, all three countries promote best practice in relevance to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and strongly encourage putting sustainability component in a various area of economic development and bilateral trade.

Dispute Settlement

DCFTAs include Chapters on Dispute Settlement aimed at establishing effective dispute settlement mechanisms in order to avoid any kind of disputes between signatory parties related to the implementation and interpretation of DCFTA. In addition to the Chapter on Dispute Settlement, DCFTA between the EU and Ukraine also include separate chapter on Mediation Mechanism which applies to any measures affecting bilateral trade. The objective of the Chapter on alternative dispute resolution mechanisms is to encourage settlement of any kind of disputes

¹⁰⁶ Energy Community Treaty <https://www.energy-community.org/legal/acquis.html>

related to the interpretation of the DCFTA using consultations or if necessary through mediation and arbitration.

General Provisions on Approximation

According to this Chapter parties should regularly discuss progress on approximation in trade-related areas. Each and every improvement towards the DCFTA objectives should be notified to the relevant Associated committee and subcommittees in Trade configuration.

Table 2. Level of change and its direction - TOOLKIT

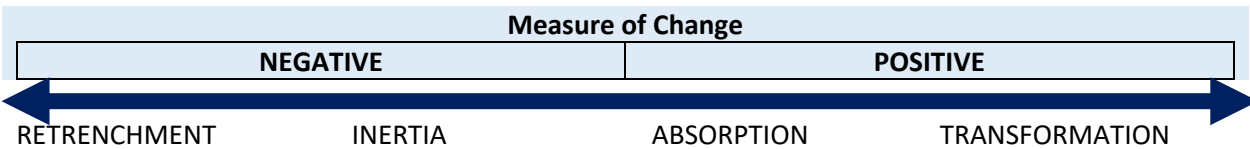


Table 2. Level of change and its direction. Authors own compilation. Source:

Overview of the DCFTA objectives underlined individual improvements of Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. Although countries are still far from fully integrate the EU *acquis* into domestic legislation. Diverse nature of the DCFTA objectives enables research to identify cooperation areas where the changes in domestic legislature and therefore the reform-progress can be measured. Measurement toolkit proposed by Radaeli helps in determining the level of change and its direction.

Trade liberalization is one of the component which should be clearly excluded from discussion as desk research and analysis of reports clearly prove that Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine had started modernization of their strategies based on liberal principles of trade. As mentioned above all three countries of the initiative were members of the WTO and had undertaken the list actions towards market and trade liberalization. In addition, they were already enjoying preferential trade regimes with CIS countries. Therefore, all three easily adjusted trade relations in respect of the DCFTA requirements and demonstrated fast and continuous progress towards removing tariff-barriers and liberalization.

A major part of the discussion goes under the category of absorption as a consistent change and adaptation. Countries demonstrate commitments towards implementing directives given through the agreement. All of them have taken at least initial steps towards developing trade-related standards and regulations in various areas. Although changes in domestic legislation neither concludes the process of approximation nor bring tangible economic benefits for the countries. Every state has its own legislative framework, the comprehensive change of which involves different times and capabilities, it is difficult to develop the universal mechanism and timeframe. Therefore, every step towards implementation of EU directives within the logical framework given to the countries on an individually bases should be counted as positive.

The DCFTAs were one of the most important economic achievements of Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine in the recent years. However, after almost eight years from the signing the DCFTA between the EU and partner countries, its benefits are not fully utilized and a question among businesses in this countries - whether it is a „gain“ or a „pain“ still abounds. Despite the remarkable progress with the reforms taken by local governments, businesses still prefer to sell to more traditional markets, despite the underlying political risks associated with the lack of diversification. Part of the reason for this could be lack of awareness and interest of the businesses in these countries, about the virtue of the EU market. Some of the direct impacts of the DCFTA such as the instant access to the EU markets is clear. Other indirect impacts come along with the associated reforms in the economic sector, making business environment more competitive and favoring more competitive growth and development. These benefits are more long-term, ambiguous, and hence perceived as less relevant.

Since the official creation of the Associated format three countries faced couple of crises such as pandemic and Russian war in Ukraine. COVID 19 pandemic triggered extraordinary measures such as border closures and state of emergency that affected economies in almost every country of the world. The EU remained major trade partner for Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine and in order to ensure sustainable and inclusive recovery provided financial assistance. Georgia represents good example of unilateral liberalization and has formed strategic partnerships not only with the EU but also other trade partners such as China, UK and etc. Ukraine and Moldova have also developed market liberalization strategy in line with the Association agenda and are negotiating trade agreements with different countries, though in order to achieve positive outcomes all three

countries require time and profound changes. Although former CIS countries still remain traditional trade partners for Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine as countries have preferential trade regimes with them as well and despite the fact that this market is very unstable in terms of trade sanctions as a result of changing political circumstances, the most of small and medium sized enterprises still decide to trade with former CIS countries.

4.2 The role of regional cooperation – from the EaP to the “Associated Trio”

The EaP policy has evolved over the time. At the beginning of its development all of six countries were considered to be on the same track towards European integration. There was expectation that there would be general alignment in terms of steps towards the AA and DCFTA with all the EaP countries except Belarus which has never been a part of this negotiations and has been excluded from the last EaP declaration¹⁰⁷. But several years down the line, it became clear that countries have completely different aspirations. In addition to the significant differences between the countries’ geopolitical aspirations, cooperation between six countries under the framework of EaP initiative is avoided by various challenges such as territorial dispute between Armenia and Azerbaijan and full-scale war where Belarus which has withdrawn its membership from the EaP¹⁰⁸ is engaged against Ukraine (*Maksak, online interview*). As well as lack of trilateral cooperation. Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine have never cooperated on a sectoral or universal bases towards accelerated trade with each other (*Gogolashvili, personal correspondence*). Cooperation had place mostly on a civil society level or at the conferences and summits organized by the EU structures.

Despite the attempts to strengthen cooperation under this framework, recent developments in the Eastern neighbourhood make it complicated to update common EaP Policy agenda. In other words, the EaP has reached its highest possible point of development. After that, it became difficult to use it as an effective mechanism for coordinated relations with six neighbors. Despite recognition of individual aspirations of the EaP states, the EU was trying to keep progress with Armenia and

¹⁰⁷ Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit (Brussels, 15 December 2021)
<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/53527/20211215-eap-joint-declaration-en.pdf>

¹⁰⁸ Ghazanchyan S. 2021. Belarus Suspends Participation in Eastern Partnership Initiative
<https://en.armradio.am/2021/06/28/belarus-suspends-participation-in-eastern-partnership-initiative/>

Azerbaijan as well. Joint declaration of Brussels Summit held in December, 2021 once again reaffirms parties' commitments towards strategic cooperation under the framework of the EaP¹⁰⁹. Ahead of the Summit, on March 1, 2021 the EU signed Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with Armenia¹¹⁰. The CEPA does not provide benefits similar to the AA, although serves for the same objective – to approximate Armenian legislative framework to the EU norms and standards in various areas. Despite negotiations for enhanced cooperation the EU has not yet concluded similar agreement with Azerbaijan. In addition to the bilateral relations with Armenia and Azerbaijan, it is extremely difficult to ensure regional cooperation between these countries through different platforms.

Original concept of the EaP was consisted of two key components for cooperation: multilateral cooperation between the parties as well as bilateral relationships between the partner countries and the EU. In other words, regional cooperation platform does not exclude or minimize the role of bilateral cooperation. This was an added value of the EaP that enabled countries to set individual goals towards integration, depending on the level of their ambition and geopolitical strategy. Possibility for bilateral cooperation became catalyst in three countries decision to establish separate platform for better cooperation (*Gogolashvili, personal correspondence*). Moreover, three countries were cooperating with each other in various areas even before the official initiation of the “Trio”. Despite the fact that the “Associated Trio” is a newly established initiative, that enable us to discuss overall achievements of the “Trio” towards the Economic integration within the EU Market. Georgia Moldova and Ukraine have always had European integration on their political agendas and in response to their commitments were given the opportunity to sign agreements such as AA and DCFTA with the EU. Therefore, through offering access to all of its four freedoms the EU has automatically distinguished these three countries and encouraged creation of more tailor-made approach for them (*Paul, online interview*).

The AAs serve as the guidance and action plans for countries' rapprochement with the EU, aimed at bringing the regulatory frameworks and enforcement mechanisms in these countries into line with the EU regulations and standards. Neither AA nor the DCFTA include any kind of accession perspective although it is very important tool for preparing country towards integration with EU

¹⁰⁹ See 108.

¹¹⁰ Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement between the European Union and Armenia, 2021 [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:22018A0126\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:22018A0126(01))

internal market (*Papenheim, online interview*). The reforms that need to be undertaken under the DCFTA and criteria that need to be met are extremely close. All the commitments to be delivered through reform-making and implementation process of the DCFTA objectives are very much in line with economic requirements of accession. Therefore, following the DCFTA as the guideline towards economic integration is the right way to approximate countries to the EU legal ecosystem. The fact that the DCFTA paves the way to the gradual accession to the EU single market has been once again highlighted by the membership questionnaire handed out to three countries which is a collection of questions measuring implementation of the objectives similar to the AA guidelines.

Although Ukraine referred to the fast-track procedure of accession, in fact there is no written record in European legislature related to this kind of exemption from the EU accession rules. Ukraine as well as Georgia and Moldova had to fill the questionnaire aimed at assessing state of play in order to give an opinion on the country's readiness to start the process of accession with the EU and the extent of meeting Copenhagen Criteria. The questionnaire is the basic tool assessing the extent of compliance with the EU legislature in all policy areas of the EU *acquis*¹¹¹. After the questionnaires are submitted it is up to the commission to prepare its opinion and deliver to the council which will take political decision on countries' European future.

Recent developments in Eastern Europe have significantly changed the reality for countries. Since February 24, 2022 when Russia started "special military operation" on the Ukrainian territory, attention of the international society has shifted to Ukraine. The specific wind of opportunities caused by the Russian war in Ukraine created momentum for all three countries to apply for the EU membership (*Maksak, online interview*). On February 28 Ukraine applied for the EU membership followed by Georgia and Moldova. Countries founded their applications on the basis of the Article 49 on the European Union:

"Any European State which respects the values referred to in Article 2 and is committed to promoting them may apply to become a member of the Union. The European Parliament and national Parliaments shall be notified of this application. The applicant State shall address its application to the Council, which shall act unanimously after consulting the Commission and after

¹¹¹ FROM EU MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION TO ACCESSION NEGOTIATIONS: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/system/files/2016-12/20160209_faq.pdf

receiving the consent of the European Parliament, which shall act by a majority of its component members. The conditions of eligibility agreed upon by the European Council shall be taken into account”¹¹².

On the one hand Ukraine’s individual application for the EU membership was clear expression of country’s ambition to upgrade its status from the associated country up to the candidacy. At that time Ukraine was no more associated with other countries of the Neighbourhood but demonstrated its desire to be judged on its own merits. This step directly removed Ukraine from the trilateral unity and can be considered as the end of “Associated Trio” initiative. Furthermore, it was quite unique position for Ukraine as country was getting huge financial aids and assistance from the international donors and financial institutions without any barriers that led to the unprecedented trade liberalization between the EU and Ukraine. The Union has prioritized financial support for Ukraine in order for the country to win the war and also minimize economic loss caused by military activities on its territory¹¹³. This kind of unprecedented support put the country in a more beneficial position in terms of trade with the EU than it could be possible under the framework of the DCFTA. Therefore, this could lead to the possible destruction of the “Trio”.

On the other hand, above mentioned specific environment created possibility for all three countries not to allow the process of destroying their Association but to synchronize their steps towards the EU (*Paul, online interview*). Being associated not only with the EU but with each other created solid foundation for Georgia and Moldova to follow Ukraine and justify their applications for the membership using “Trio” reasoning.

4.3 The EU attitude towards Associated Trio

The EU is in charge of assessing its partners progress towards integration based on annual reports, detailed questionnaires and supporting monitoring mechanisms. Any progress in terms of legal approximation, reform-making process or implementation should be positively assessed and

¹¹² Article 49 of the TEU <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A12016M049>

¹¹³ European Commission Executive Vice-President and Commissioner for Trade Valdis Dombrovskis, April 27, 2022 https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_22_2671

recognized by the EU in order to be counted as an achievement and have positive outcomes in terms of economic integration and membership perspective. Regional approach of grouping partner countries also makes it easier for the EU to develop coordinated policy towards its neighbours. If we look at the previous enlargements, we will notice that the regional principle is quite visible here as well. The EU is treating its Neighbours by applying “more for more” principle according to which benefits of cooperation with the EU is proportional to the country commitments¹¹⁴. In this regard preferential trade regimes are negotiated based on assessment of the countries’ progress. The EU has decided to liberalize trade relations with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, what also refers to a certain level of recognition from the EU.

Furthermore, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine are recognized by the Official Brussels as Associated partners of the Union. Although three countries were not given any accession perspective through newly established platform of the “Associated Trio”, mentioning them as Associated partners once again underlines recognition from the EU side:

“Our meeting here with you, the leaders of Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, is an important milestone. It highlights the special ties that connect the EU with its Associated partners. We welcome the two-year initiative to foster coordination between the Associated partners and Brussels. This can lead to the sharing of best practices on reforms, on implementation and on a broader agenda for the future”¹¹⁵.

According to the President von der Leyen of the European Commission, the AA is considered as close alignment of the signatory countries with the EU¹¹⁶. Three countries have agreed on creating separate platform for trilateral cooperation in order to achieve more in terms of relations with the EU in various areas. At the same time, it was clear attempt to maximize their chances towards

¹¹⁴ European Commission, (2013). ENP Factsheet

https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/MEMO_13_236

¹¹⁵ Charles Mitchel Speech at Batumi Conference <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/07/19/speech-by-president-charles-michel-at-the-batumi-international-conference/>

¹¹⁶ Statement by President von der Leyen with Ukrainian President Zelenskyy at the occasion of the President's visit to Kyiv, April 8, 2022. https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/news/statement-president-von-der-leyen-ukrainian-president-zelenskyy-occasion-presidents-visit-kyiv-2022-04-08_en

accession with the EU as full-fledged members. The basic value of the “Trio” was to route the path towards European perspective. Despite the fact that in a short period of time starting from its creation till the countries’ application for the membership the “Trio” has not shown any comprehensive cooperation strategy or trilateral coordination initiatives, it served as the clear affirmation of three countries’ European aspirations and somehow prepared solid foundation for the countries to submit their membership applications together as a response of the Russian war on one of the “Trio” member states’ territory.

In addition to the recognition it has to be mentioned that the creation of trilateral cooperation platform was European-driven approach at some point. Amid the absence of membership perspective for these countries there have already been discussions in the European Parliament on a similar initiative, a year before the trio signed. Moreover, the concept of the “Associated Trio” itself was first used by the Lithuanian Member of the European Parliament Andrius Kubilius¹¹⁷. Officials from three countries were clearly expressing their frustrations towards the lack of ambitious agenda on the EU’s eastern enlargement. The gap between the EaP countries’ common geopolitical agendas towards the EU, encouraged Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine to establish more tailor-made approach based their individual interests (*Paul, online interview*). While the perspective of the EaP became vague countries started seeking another approach in order to maximize their integration chance and membership perspective within the EU.

Three countries application for the EU membership can become momentum for their integration with the EU (*Lavrelashvili, online interview*). This kind of possibility is created by various determinants such as consequences of the Russian war in Ukraine that shifted global attention to the region and had alarming effect for decision-makers to prioritize Eastern Neighbourhood and strengthen defense capabilities of associated countries including economic security. In addition it is very first time in the History of Moldova when all the branches of the state governance clearly demonstrate pro-European aspirations (*Gornostali, online interview*) and fully support country’s European integration.

¹¹⁷ Gogolashvili, K. 2021, Associated Trio is on its way for creating a real regional cooperation <https://www.strategeast.org/associated-trio-is-on-its-way-for-creating-a-real-regional-cooperation/>

Despite the role of regional principle, integration and accession remain a matter of individual decision that includes strong political components. In support of this argument, according to which despite the importance of regional cooperation, the integration perspectives are given based on individual assessment of country's own merits, study points out that the DCFTAs as integral part of AAs signed by the EU with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine have similar structure but different objectives defined for three countries. All three countries are being assessed based on individually submitted applications and accession questionnaires. There is a need for stronger political will to accelerate this process under post-soviet economies with lots of shortcomings. In addition to the role of politics, internal dispositions play important role on EU decision making to define future perspective for the applicant states. Founding members of the EU are afraid of possible changes in the existing ecosystem that might led to the disorder inside the union, while newly joined countries of the EU such as Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, the Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia clearly support Eastern enlargement¹¹⁸.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this thesis was to research Europeanization and its influence on Eastern Neighborhood countries, main approaches towards European Integration, achievements and perspectives. The research was focused on trade relations targeting three countries of the neighborhood: Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. Selection of these cases was determined by three countries' dedication and aspirations towards European integration, highlighted in national political agendas and expressed in their individual applications for the EU membership. In particular research was aimed at exploring implementation level of the DCFTA objectives in three countries and examining to what extent does the trio approach influenced the progress towards economic integration.

In the pursuit of the answer research questions, different theoretical approaches were discussed. This first chapter presented introduction to a theoretical foundations of Europeanization as well as literature overview of previously published works in the area of research. Review and analysis of

¹¹⁸ Support of Ukraine's swift candidacy to the EU. <https://www.president.pl/news/open-letter-by-presidents-in-support-of-ukraines-swift-candidacy-to-the-european-union,49584>

the theoretical approaches enabled research to develop its research strategy aimed at measuring implementation process of the DCFTA directives. In addition, brief review of previously conducted studies as a baseline for further examinations enabled research for better orientation and planning. The research developed its measurement toolkit (*Table 2.*) based on Radaeli's matrix related to the domains of Europeanization and types of change, that enabled first, to examine possible correlation between the Europeanization and changes on domestic level and second to measure the level of change and its direction.

The second chapter was dedicated to the research design, conceptualization and operationalization mechanisms. As a result of connecting the theories discussed to the main concepts, the research developed proper methodology for the operationalization. Research methods were selected based on the purpose of the research: first to measure the domestic change through assessing reform-making process in three countries and also to examine the role of regional approach in economic integration. The research employed variety of research techniques and data gathering such as content analysis of agreements, reports, assessments, scholarly articles, official documents, expert opinions as well as official statements and speeches. In order to enrich present understanding of the research phenomena, semi-structured qualitative interviews were also conducted within the framework of the research.

The third chapter of the thesis examined the history of three countries' economic connections with the EU, as well as their accomplishments and obstacles, and trade statistics. Overview of the DCFTA objectives underlined individual improvements of Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. Every country has demonstrated significant progress in this area. Although they are still far from fully integrating the EU *acquis* into domestic legislation. Since the formation of the Associated format, three countries have experienced a number of problems, including a pandemic that prompted drastic measures such as border restrictions and declarations of emergency in practically every country of the world. And later the Russian war in Ukraine which not only caused unprecedented human and economic loss but also significantly changed circumstances in the Eastern Neighbourhood. The EU remained a significant economic partner for Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine, and provided financial aid to promote a sustained and inclusive recovery.

The research once again reaffirmed that AAs serve as a roadmap and action plan for countries' seeking to improve their relations with the EU by aligning their regulatory frameworks and

enforcement mechanisms with EU norms and standards. Although it is a crucial tool for preparing countries for inclusion with the EU internal market, neither the AA nor the DCFTA have any form of accession perspective. The improvements that must be implemented and the requirements that must be met under the DCFTA are extremely close. All of the DCFTA objectives' obligations to be met through the reform-making and implementation process are very much in line with the economic prerequisites of admission. As a result, using the DCFTA as a framework for economic integration is the best method to bring countries closer to the EU.

Overall assessment of the DCFTA implementation in three countries was quite positive. The research positively evaluated implementation of the DCFTA directives using measurement toolkit according to which most of the parts have been included by the absorption category of the measurement. Changes on a domestic level were also in line with the logical framework and relevant timeline defined by the AA. Although the positive assessment of the reform-making process did not exclude remaining challenges on the side of the implementation, technical regulations and requirements. The research provided key findings on challenges that avoid countries from having full access to the DCFTA benefits and accelerate bilateral trade with the EU.

Despite the clear progress with the reforms taken by local governments, businesses and in particular small and medium sized enterprises still prefer to export its product to more traditional markets, despite of the political risks associated with the lack of diversification. Part of the reason for this could be lack of awareness and interest of the businesses in these countries, about the virtue of the EU market. In addition to the this, private sector representatives in most cases are afraid of spending additional resources on modernizing their capabilities in relevance to the EU requirements as it is related to the amount of resources and seems to be costly decision in short term perspective.

The research demonstrated transition process of the regional approaches towards European integration from the EaP to the “Associated Trio”. Despite efforts to deepen collaboration within this framework, recent events in the Eastern neighborhood made it less possible updating the common EaP Policy agenda. The EaP has achieved its highest possible level of development. Being distinguished by the status of the “associated partners” encouraged countries officially to

establish separate platform with original idea to maximize their individual chances towards the EU membership based on the close and more-tailored regional cooperation.

The challenges were identified on the “Associated Trio” level as well. First of all, the level of integration among three is very limited. The creation of the “Trio” platform should act as a driver for enhanced cooperation first between its members and then with the EU, therefore countries should advocate their common goals and interests. But lack of structural cooperation makes it complicated to strengthen advocacy tools and enhance strategic partnership. The biggest achievement is on a civil society level that is mainly encouraged as a consequence of increased mobility after the visa liberalization between the partners.

The reality for countries in Eastern Europe has changed dramatically as a result of recent events. There was a discussion according to which Ukraine's individual application for the EU membership directly removed the country from Trio agenda. Submitting accession request was a clear declaration of the country's desire of getting candidate status. Therefore, Ukraine proved its willingness to be assessed on its own merits without any association with other countries. Following this logic Ukraine would be excluded from the trilateral partnership what would result in the unavoidable closure of the "Associated Trio" format. But as long as Georgia and Moldova also applied for the EU membership and all three countries already submitted accession questionnaires the research considered it as a momentum for their European integration that has been created independently by the circumstances of the war.

The research also provided some interesting findings in relation to the importance of regional cooperation towards Europeanization of states and further economic integration within the EU. Despite the significance of the DCFTA objectives and preparation for the meeting accession criteria, the eastern enlargement is a matter of political will from both the EU side and its partners. There have been call for “new momentum” and more ambitious agenda from the EU. In response, three countries established new platform for better cooperation with each other as well as the EU, which has not been backed by any kind of practical initiatives for cooperation other than high level meeting and summits organized by the EU.

The results of the present study contribute to the debate on the future of the “Associated trio”, its trade opportunities and readiness of meeting the economic criteria of accession with the EU. The

research provided overall assessment of the regional cooperation platforms through the lenses of the Europeanization perspective.

POTENTIAL AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Taking into the consideration all the limitations described, the research once again underlines the importance of the political decision when discussing future of any kind bilateral or multilateral cooperation. Further research in this area could be conducted later after the final decision will be made by the EU on the individual applications for the accession submitted by Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. As research mainly focuses on economic context, considering importance of the political context, it is also significant in terms of further research could enrich arguments with political explanations.

Appendix 1.: Interview Matrix

Interviewee	Affiliations
Dominik Papenheim	Thematic Coordinator for Economic Development and Market opportunities, Delegation of the European Union to Georgia
Kakha Gogolashvili	Director of the Centre for EU Studies, Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies; Chairman of EU-Georgia Civil Society Platform
Alexandra Gornostali	DCFTA Expert, the EU StratCom Moldova
Teona Lavrelashvili	Project Manager, European Party Monitor; Former Policy Officer at the European Commission's DG Near
Hennadiy Maksak	Foreign Policy Council "Ukrainian Prism" Executive Director
Amanda Paul	Senior Policy Analyst, European Policy Center

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- Dominik Papenheim, Thematic Coordinator for Economic Development and Market opportunities, Delegation of the European Union to Georgia, Online Interview via Zoom Platform, Tbilisi, Georgia. Online Interview via Zoom Platform, April 29, 2022
- Teona Lavrelashvili, Project Manager, European Party Monitor; Former Policy Officer at the European Commission's DG Near, Brussels, Belgium. Online Interview via Zoom Platform, May 7, 2022
- Amanda Paul, Senior Policy Analyst, European Policy Center, Brussels, Online Interview via Zoom Platform, May 10, 2022
- Hennadiy Maksak, Foreign Policy Council "Ukrainian Prism" Executive Director, Kyiv, Ukraine. Online Interview via Zoom Platform, May 10, 2022
- Alexandra Gornostali, DCFTA Expert, the EU StratCom Moldova, Kischinyev, Moldova. Online Interview via Zoom Platform, May 11, 2022

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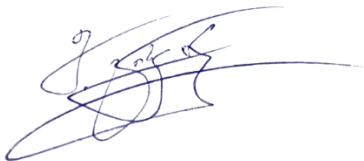
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